

My Favorite 5 Northern Utah Drives

There is more to see and discover than at first meets the eye in a desert mountain climate.

The Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City of 2002 showcased the beauties of mountain regions where the world converged on historic events. More people became aware of the thriving lifestyle available here where the desert has blossomed as the rose. The Salt Lake and Utah valleys and surrounding communities continue to swell with new residents. But there are still many open areas to travel along and see if I-15 is filled with too many cars for your liking. Take a peaceful Sunday drive along one of my favorites:

One: Mirror Lake Scenic Byway

Utah currently has more National Forest than any state in the country. The Uinta Forest covers the northern region of the state. A byway is a lesser traveled secondary option. The scenic byway is meant for taking in the scenery. Don't get me wrong, it is a well-paved highway but it is a peaceful 42 mile stretch of road with gorgeous scenery and views to take your time on and enjoy. A trip to Mirror Lake is a nice jaunt that goes by quickly with its serene views. The Mirror Lake Scenic Byway (http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1318672/mirror_lake_hiking_and_camping.html?cat=16) takes you from fields into hills, and then aspen trees and evergreens. Before long you will hardly recognize that you are in a desert at all. Winter lasts much longer up here and the route is often closed by snow, but once Spring and Summer take over green is the result. Fall has the most spectacular colors you will find in Utah along this Byway. It takes you up through several camping, hiking, and overview areas, including a great view of the most impressive waterfall you will find on the upper Provo River. Then you get into the lake region, such as Mirror Lake. But that's not the only body of water. You will be utterly amazed by the amount of ponds and lakes, within the hills, mountains, and trees of this Northern Utah hideaway. It reminded me of a coastal drive along highway one in California—minus the beach—for how it peacefully winds around majestic views. Maybe better described it is a combination of areas such as traveling through Washington or Oregon with it's hills and trees, or a Minnesota landscape with so many lakes hidden in those hills and trees, and mountain ranges similar in size and appearance to the Eastern United States. I literally feel like I am in a whole new beautiful region when traveling along the scenic byway. If you can't tell I am sold on the scenic byway. If you go nowhere else in Utah, make the scenic byway trip once. You will love it. Return for the fishing, canoeing, camping, ATV trails, and much more to relax with and discover.

Two: Alpine Loop

A shorter drive sits as a connection between the American Fork Canyon and Provo Canyon. Driving over a mountain to get between the two is certainly the long way to go but time well spent when looking for a good drive. If you are a mountain man who wants to be just close enough to the action of city life and you have enough money then you would probably find the same lure that Robert Redford found in residing along the Alpine Loop. He owns much of the mountainside from the southern entrance. You've probably

heard of the Sundance film festival in Park City, Utah, which is well out of the way from the Alpine Loop, but perhaps you have also heard of Redford's Sundance Ski Resort. Anyway, this is the beginning of the Alpine loop if you entered it from Provo Canyon. Redford's home can even be seen on one of the mountain faces. You may even see him skiing at the resort as my brothers and I did one day. But one thing you will see for sure is a great mountainous drive. Pack your Dramamine if you get car sick. The drive is well paved but a car that can make steeper climbs is recommended. Be careful and don't drive off of any cliffs up and over this winding pass. There are a few great points to stop off at along the way if you'd like, where you can get to Stewart Falls (http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2767794/top_5_utah_county_day_hikes.html?cat=16), see Cascade Springs (http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2767794/top_5_utah_county_day_hikes.html?cat=16), or continue further for a turn off overlooking a lake, and a turn off to campgrounds. Some other turnoffs will require four wheel drive or an ATV (http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/913011/a_guide_to_four_wheeling_and_atvs_in.html?cat=8) (. It's a great ride starting in Provo Canyon and ending in Alpine at 34-miles or about one hour.

Three: Mount Nebo Scenic Byway

The Nebo loop from Nephi to Payson or vice versa has great diversity. The trip stretching along this portion of the Wasatch Range extends along vast areas of the highest mountain in Utah, Mount Nebo. The road itself is not overly winding or steep but rather a well-paved highway through the mountains. There is camping and hiking up in this region but unless you want to get away for a good while, the closest best option along this byway for family camping and such is off the beaten path a little where you can find Payson Lakes. Otherwise this is mostly a road trip haven. The Nebo Loop is an out of the way 37 miles, but it has a little of everything to see in a Utah drive and is well worth the trip, at least once, especially with good company.

Four: Salt Flats

Driving along the Salt Flats is a straight stretch of road with a surreal view. White sands cover miles and miles of flat terrain. As you look off in the distance at the mountains an optical illusion across this great area of white plains creates an effect that makes it look like the mountains are floating. The impression of a separation between the ends of the mountains at the edges of your view and the sand below them makes it look as though you can see underneath the mountain or at least that it is among the clouds. As you travel along the road you can picture how it could and does provide a great landscape for land speed records. The few rocks that stand out in the oblivion of salt and sand flats have probably been toyed with by other passersby where you will see messages along the road and other formations of these rocks meant to stand out to travelers. These continue for miles. If you want to contribute you may need to bring your own rocks.

Five: Pick a Canyon

There's no way to pick just one great canyon drive in Northern Utah. Salt Lake City has great canyons around its ski areas in the *Big Cottonwood* and *Little Cottonwood* Canyons. Again, there is wonderful hiking, camping, fishing, and other things to be found in these areas to explore. Get off the roadway for a while and picnic or something in these canyons. After a nice Sunday drive to any of the aforementioned areas you are bound to find a place you want to return to. Check out the *Park City* area taking the Kimball Junction through the canyons of *Deer Valley*. You will find the Olympic Park filled with skiing variety. The mountains are exceptional encompassing nice lodges and a quaint tourist town. Even the celebrities flock here during the Sundance Film Festival.

Another great area off of Salt Lake is the Heber Valley. For the best ambiance take the train. The Heber Valley railroad is a memorable way to tour the area. For the best viewing *Heber Valley Canyons* are best enjoyed with an exploratory road trip. Grab a map and plan your own route.

In Utah County you may have wet your appetite by entering the state into *Provo Canyon* (http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2767794/top_5_utah_county_day_hikes.html?cat=16) a breathtaking drive especially if you come from the Midwest and have never seen mountains before. Be sure to drive through *Spanish Fork Canyon* for a good highway drive next. When you want to just want to visit the mountains, *American Fork Canyon* is close by.

The last drive that receives honorable mention is *Logan Canyon*. If you ever have reason to go as far North as the to be in the lazy canyons of Cache Valley, other than the pretty drive in, you need to make it a point to visit Logan Canyon. There is no better canyon in Utah for fall colors with the many varied trees there. Beautiful!

Happy Driving!

Northern Utah continues to grow with more people and more modern conveniences, but its main attraction will always be in its open spaces nestled in the mountains, four seasons of beauty, and its great outdoor recreation. There will always be great areas to view along its roadways. Plus, it will continue to inspire adventure seekers as well as inspire activity for me to write about like what is found on my website about writing and recreation at www.writcreate.com.

Also keep your option open for road trips in Southern Utah. Zion's National Park Scenic Byway ranks among the best drives in the United States with its unique red sand desert arches and landscape.

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2767794/top_5_utah_county_day_hikes.html?cat=16 (top 5 hiking in Utah article)