Headline: Arizona canyons grand in different ways

Deckhead: Adventures permeate from wondrous destinations

The Grand Canyon is a pit of seemingly bottomless beauty. It’s a masterful work of ecological art that needed millions of years to be completed.

It’s nearly 277 miles long and 18 miles wide and is more than a mile deep. Unparalleled measurables, no doubt, and it can overwhelm sightseers and naturalists.

The Grand Canyon epitomizes Arizona. It symbolizes greatness and could lead you to believe it’s the state’s only massive gorge.

That’s hardly the case.

Thirty-two canyons can be found in Arizona. They range in size and depth, and many are worth a visit. Other popular ones include Aravaipa Canyon, Madera Canyon, Oak Creek Canyon, Paria Canyon and Salt Lake Canyon.

Aravaipa Canyon hugs the northwest border of the Galiuro Mountain Range in southern Arizona and is 11 miles in length. Backpackers and hikers revel in its topography. Hike through Aravaipa Creek, a seasonal home to hundreds of bird species. Explore side canyons and witness desert wildlife. See bighorn sheep, coyote, coatimundi, Gila monsters and javelina.

Twenty-five miles southeast of Tucson rests Madera Canyon – a part of the Coronado National Forest. Campsites, picnic areas and miles of hiking trails grab your attention. Desert surroundings add to the ambiance, making it a jewel.

Northern Arizona houses Oak Creek Canyon – a 12-mile-long gorge that spans from Flagstaff to Sedona and is considered one of the state’s most scenic. It offers many activities, including hiking, backpacking and fishing. It ranges in width from 0.8 to 2.5 miles and reaches depths from 800 to 2,000 feet. Its association with Sedona makes it second to the Grand Canyon in most popular tourist destinations in the state.

Paria Canyon is nestled in Northern Arizona. Known as a premier hiking and backpacking destination, Paria Canyon is a 112,500-acre wilderness area that hugs Utah’s southern border. The Wave is a massive sandstone rock formation and the canyon’s most-visited destination. White House Ruins and Lee’s Ferry are popular backpacking routes that pass through Buckskin Gulch – the longest slot canyon in the world. Hikers should expect to be wet anywhere from ankle deep to waist high and do research before hiking the canyon. Flash flooding is common.

Salt River Canyon’s wilderness, meanwhile, is comprised of nearly 32,100 acres in the Tonto National Forest, east of the Phoenix Metro Area. Its elevations range from 2,200 feet at the canyon’s lower end to 4,200 feet. The hiking trails aren’t maintained and most exploration happens by raft or kayak during Spring River-running season. The upper Salt River can be run from March through May, with rapids that range from Class II to IV. Permits are required when running the river between March 1 and May 15.

This is a snapshot of what Arizona offers and proof that not everything has to be grand to be considered great.

Cutline: GORGE-OUS – Salt River Canyon comprises more than 32,000 acres of Tonto National Forest. Image: Teressa L. Jackson. Adobe Stock.