Nature's "Hindu Temples" On View at Grand Canyon
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Watch out for the sun glare heading west out of Flagstaff," cautioned Rev. Jim Wade, blue-jeaned minister of a small non-Christian metaphysical church. Inside, the church radiated a piercingly high spiritual frequency. Not surprising. It's nestled in what is considered one of the most sacred and starkly beautiful spots in the United States: Sedona, Arizona.

Rev. Wade was talking to two swamis from Hawaii's Saivite Hindu monastery. They had dropped in on their way to the Grand Canyon at the northern edge of Arizona. Carved by nature devas into the Canyon's breathtaking buttes were "Shiva," "Vishnu" and "Brahma" temples, along with a "Vishnu Schist" and a "Hindu Amphitheatre." Going to the Canyon is a pilgrimage across immense stretches of time and rapturous landscape unlike any other on the planet. It's a geological phenomenon that reduces your physical body importance to zero while stretching your psychic awareness to God-like infinity. Every Hindu should pilgrimage to this fantastic nature temple. And indeed many do.

Rev. Wade unsuccessfully tried to talk the swamis into a taped interview for his radio program - not a believer in coincidence, he felt the meeting with two Hindu monks out in the Southwestern desert was a cosmic crossway, a karmic pattern that snapped into place. "We've got sort of a war here in Sedona," Wade said sadly. "The Christian churches are getting more and more aggressive towards the New Age and metaphysical institutions which are, of course, more Eastern than Western. Our roots are in Hinduism. My talks are often drawn from Hindu scripture."

But it was mid-afternoon and they had three more hours of driving in a truck that rode like a mule.

Sedona was for thousands of years sacred Indian land, its rust-red rock columns jutting up like a Greek moon temple against an endless backdrop of vaulting, striated cliffs. The Indian medicine men are still there, creating their "medicine wheels" that function like yantras in enchanting and very secret glens. They're initiating sincere "white men" into the "Red Path," as its called. Two decades ago it became a spiritual gateway for every variety of Truth seeker and New Age institution - including an old Hindu couple from India who danced bharata natyam for the silver-screen Hollywood studios and now run an antique shop. Most recently Sedona erupted as a tourist/resort boomtown with real estate developers paving asphalt around the little islands of meditation, psychic development, self-discovery, metaphysic, wholistic health/ayurvedic clinics and astrology/palmistry centers.

Cruising west down the highway out of high-altitude Flagstaff was like driving into a liquid sun. This is northern, plateau Arizona, a monolithic slice of desert thrust upward so high that pinion, Utah and Ponderosa pine trees dominate the flora. The Grand Canyon is a reverse mountain in this plateau, a negative Himalayas that stretches 105 miles and cuts knifelike 3-6,000 feet down. It was patiently sculptured into a Mars landscape (indeed Mars has a canyon thousands of times bigger than the Grand) by the muscular Colorado River seen as a muddy ribbon from the Canyon's rim.

The Canyon is physically and mystically overwhelming, a gift of awe from God that can transport the most ego-centered human into his own soulness. In the summer the sunsets blast out of a cobalt blue sky sweeping across the pyramid buttes with transluscent reds, oranges and ending with a cone of pure violet that actually has a clear white at its center. The ceaseless dance of cloud shadows on the gourge is spectacular. The winter season enshrouds the Canyon rim and walls in cloud and snow, a magical spectacle that chills the mystical presence even deeper. It's an open-eyes meditation.

When the two swamis arrived at the Canyon rim, it was about 4:30 p.m. After scrambling and failing by one room to get a reservation at the Canyon's timber hotels (Be sure to reserve rooms or camping space well in advance), they headed for Yavapai Point, 7040 feet high on the rim. While walking to the lockout point, they spotted several Hindu families trekking along the rim walkway. Kids will love it here during the summer. There are hiking and mule trips down into the Canyon, guided walking tours along the rim. It's also possible to find a sunset nitch down the face of the canyon where you alone can inwardly soar as eagles glide by.

From Yavapai, the Hindu temple buttes spread out across 12 miles enveloped in sun and shadow. Contoured maps inside the Yavapai outlook make them easy to spot. Major Clarence E. Dutton, explorer, geologist, mystic orientalist, named the buttes in 1880, seeing in them characteristics of the Hindu Deities. Are they really ancient Hindu temples? No. They were named as such. "Shiva Temple" is the largest. Dutton described it as "the grandest of all the buttes, and the most majestic in aspect." He records, "All around it are side gorges sunk to a depth nearly as profound as that of the main channel. It stands in the midst of a great throng of cluster-like buttes. In such a stupendous scene of wreck, it seemed as if the fabled 'Destroyer' might find an abode not wholly uncongenial." The "Brahma Temple" and "Vishnu Temple" stand perched more like real temples on their exposed buttes. Vishnu especially has temple-like lines from certain vantages. Dutton named a host of other temple buttes after the East: Isis, Osiris, Buddha Temple. "Vishnu Schist" is the oldest geological formation exposed at the Canyon's bottom. "Hindu Amphitheatre" is seen by hiking into the gorge. It reminded Dutton of a "profusion and richness which suggests an oriental character."

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