

■ THE WAVE, ARIZONA

A sturdy pair of hiking boots – and a good deal of luck – is essential if you want to see The Wave. It takes a three-hour hike to reach this part of the Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness park, and only 20 people are given permits to enter the area each day – in advance, through a lottery system (see below). The ground is rarely level in this spectacular stretch of undulating sandstone, curving and swirling up to 30m high in places. Shaped by centuries of water run-off, the two-square-kilometre phenomenon is streaked with iron-rich ribbons of yellow, pink, red and white. Aim to arrive at midday, when the sun's amber rays highlight the striations and formations, and you'll really feel as if you've won the jackpot.

Abercrombie & Kent (0845 618 2102, www.abercrombiekent.co.uk/usa) has a 10-night Arizona and Utah national park trip from £3,255pp, room only, including flights and car hire. The lottery for The Wave (the Coyote Buttes North lottery; www.blm.gov/az/st/en/arolrsmain/paria/coyote_buttes/permits.html) opens four months in advance (24 hours ahead for walk-ins) and costs £5. Permits for most other parts of Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness, where similar cascades of stone can be found, can be bought on the day.

WORDS: LEO BEAR PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN RUEGNA/GETTY