Weather in Chaco Canyon

Chaco Canyon, at an elevation of 6175 feet, is located in a high desert environment that receives 8.74 inches of rainfall annually. The weather in Chaco is changeable and unpredictable. Temperatures can fluctuate wildly in a twenty-four hour period. Come prepared for all conditions and you'll have a great experience.

Summer
Approximately 1/3 of all precipitation falls in July, August and September during the "monsoon season" when unstable tropical air from the Gulf of Mexico moves into the Southwest. This moist air produces cumulus clouds and dramatic thunderstorms, bringing moisture to the high desert. Precipitation may be very localized; one end of the canyon may experience a downpour while the sun may shine on the other end of the canyon. Flash floods result from intense storms dropping large amounts of rain within a brief period and can occur with little or no warning. They can reach full peak in only a few minutes and Chaco Wash may quickly fill. Flash floods often subside in a matter of hours.

Fall
September and October are two of the best months to visit the canyon, with warm days and cool nights.

Winter
During winter months, Pacific and Arctic airstreams dominate Chaco's weather. These systems bring cool temperatures and occasional snow storms. Snow usually only lasts a few days and melts off when the weather warms.

Spring
Spring months are the most unpredictable at Chaco, and strong winds are typical. You may experience warm spring temperatures or cold temperatures with rain or snow storms.

Precautions
If you are traveling from a low elevation, you may experience mild altitude sickness with symptoms of headaches, lethargy, shortness of breath with exertion, poor appetite, and/or nausea. The best thing to do is take it easy, don't exert, drink plenty of water, eat carbohydrates, avoid alcohols, and do not overexert in your hikes and activities.

Be prepared for unpredictable changes in the weather while visiting Chaco. If you are hiking, be prepared for heat, rain, strong spring wind, and unexpected changes in temperature. Carry extra water, food, and a rain jacket, and wear sunscreen and a wide-brimmed hat. If you are going to be out for any length of time, take a jacket or sweater.

During the monsoon season, rainfall frequently falls outside of the park and reaches the canyon 10-12 hours later. Hikers on the Peñasco Blanco Trail may cross a dry Chaco Wash in the morning and get trapped on the other side after the high water finally reaches the canyon. Check at the visitor center and do not cross the wash if rainfall is present in the area. Be aware of flash floods and never drive a vehicle through rising water. Wait for the water to subside.

Weather Statistics

During any typical summer, spring, fall, or winter day, a visitor to Chaco might experience a 50ºF (28ºC) temperature swing from the chilled moments before sunrises to the heat of late afternoon. But during the course of the year, from arctic-like winters to sweltering summers, temperatures can vary as much as 144º (80ºC). Chaco's record high temperature of 106ºF (41ºC) occurred on July, 13, 1942 and the record low temperature of -38ºF (-39ºC) was recorded on December 12, 1961. Average annual precipitation in the canyon is 8.74 inches (22.20cm). The amount of precipitation we can expect in a single year has varied in the past from 15.12 inches (38.0cm) to 3.35 inches (8.51 cm). Chaco's record single-day precipitation event produced 2.80 inches of rain on September 12th 1982.

Maximum Temperature In Degrees °F	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Monthly average	42.9	48.6	56.8	66.6	76.2	86.6	90.6	87.7	80.9	69.3	54.6	44.2
Record high daily	70	70	87	86	97	103	106	102	102	98	77	74
Days warmer than 90°	0	0	0	0	0.5	10.1	19.2	11.6	2.2	0	0	0
Minimum Temperature In Degrees °F	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Average monthly	12.8	18.4	22.9	29.6	38	46.9	55.1	53.5	44.6	32.5	21	13.6
Record low daily	-37	-26	-17	1	10	25	33	28	19	7	-35	-38
Days colder that 32°	29.8	26.5	26.8	18.5	7.3	0.9	0	0	1.8	15.2	26.6	29.6
Precipitation in Inches	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Average monthly	0.46	0.54	0.54	0.49	0.6	0.4	1.14	1.32	1.16	0.93	0.61	0.55
Record total monthly	1.87	2.34	3.17	2.49	3.03	2.19	3.99	2.95	4.15	5.88	3.29	3.9

Climate data summary for 1912-2004 provided by Utah Climate Center http://climate.usu.edu

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