

Golden Canyon, Gower Gulch, & Badlands

Death Valley National Park
California / Nevada



Search & Rescue Hotspot: Avoid hiking during summer and beware of unofficial trails up ridges. Climbing up is easier than down.

Difficulty: Easy to moderate. Rock scrambling over 3ft (1mi) high is required.

Location: Golden Canyon trailhead is located on Badwater Road, 2mi (3.2km) south of CA 190. Zabriskie Point trailhead is located on CA 190, 3.5mi (5.6km) east of Badwater Rd.

Before You Go: There is no cellular coverage in the area. Check the weather and road conditions prior to your trip. Carry water and a map at all times. Bring a compass and GPS device to assist with navigation. Get GPS files for your device: nps.gov/deva/planyourvisit/hiking.htm

Golden Canyon Trail: Golden Canyon is indisputably the most popular hike in Death Valley. The classic one mile (1.6km) each way route from the parking lot to the intersection of the Red Cathedral spur immediately rewards hikers with a narrow passageway between high colorful hills later intersected by numerous side canyons.

Red Cathedral: Beyond Golden Canyon, this rocky 0.5mi (0.8km) each way spur trail is more strenuous than the main canyon. Hikers will need to squeeze between and crawl over or under large boulders in order to reach the base of the vertically fluted walls beneath the famous amphitheater. Return via same route.

Golden Canyon/Gower Gulch Loop:

This classic 4.3mi (6.9km) don't miss loop hike follows the Golden Canyon trail to the Red Cathedral junction where hikers turn right (southeast) following the brown trail markers toward Gower Gulch. The route climbs steeply uphill beneath iconic Manly Beacon before ascending into the heart of the golden colored badlands where you find the trail cutoff to Gower Gulch. To complete the loop, turn right (southwest) and hike another 0.3mi (0.5km) to the final signed junction in Gower Gulch where you then turn right again (west) following the steep canyon down the gulch into the polished narrows before its abrupt exit at a 25ft (7.6m) high fall into the valley below. The fall is avoided by following a clear bypass to the right where it's an easy walk back to Golden Canyon trailhead.

Complete Circuit: Don't miss a thing with this loop trail. The 7.8mi (12.6km) loop begins at either Golden Canyon or Zabriskie Point, but includes the spur trail to Red Cathedral and walk up to Zabriskie Point overlook. The most popular direction of travel is up Golden Canyon to Red Cathedral junction. After completing the Red Cathedral spur, weave through the badlands to Zabriskie Point for a well deserved break and unforgettable views. Afterwards, it's all downhill through Gower Gulch following the signs to Golden Canyon.

Badlands Loop: For those looking for a shorter loop, this 2.7mi (4.3km) popular route starts from Zabriskie Point parking area and follows a path north of the overlook down to Zabriskie Point Junction just below the viewpoint. From there choose to either follow the path counterclockwise toward Golden Canyon up into the badlands for great views, turning left at the next two junctions. Or, for the clockwise route down into Gower Gulch, turn right at the next two junctions for a safe return back to Zabriskie Point Junction.