Mosaic Canyon

Death Valley National Park
California / Nevada

Length: The end of the first narrows is only 0.5mi (0.8km) each way. The classic 2mi (3.2km) each way hike is a don't miss.

Difficulty: Easy to moderate with over 1200 feet (366m) in elevation gain. Scrambling over 3ft to 6ft (1m to 2.4m) dryfalls required, but 20ft (6m) fall has an easy bypass. No signs.

Location: The route begins at the canyon mouth located near the parking area at the end of the Mosaic Canyon Road, 0.25mi (0.4km) west of Stovepipe Wells Village. The 2.5mi (4km) gravel access road is generally passable to a sedan.

Highlights: Canyon narrows composed of beautifully polished marble walls and colorful mosaics. A kid favorite!

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

Route Description: From the parking area, proceed up the rocky wash and into the canyon. Within the first 0.25mi (0.4km), the canyon abruptly narrows as the smooth marble walls of Noonday Dolomite take shape around you. The passing of grit-laden flash floods have scoured the narrow canyon and polished the smooth marble walls to a beautiful finish. Use caution hiking on the smooth slippery surfaces.

As you proceed up the canyon, look for outcroppings of the canyon's namesake formation; Mosaic Canyon Breccia. It's composed of tiny angular fragments of various types of parent rock locked within a natural cement. Approximately 1.3mi (2km) into the canyon, a seemingly impassable boulder jam marks the end of the hike for many visitors. Adventurous hikers may choose to crawl between the boulders on the left (east) side of the jam in order to gain access to the hidden bypass route and the second set of uniquely carved narrows. The smooth surfaces composed of colorful breccia chutes and dryfalls hidden within tight canyon bends are welcome surprises.

Just beyond the second set of narrows (0.2mi/0.3km), the route appears to end once again at a 20ft (6m) high slanted dryfall pinned deep between vertical canyon walls. Climbing is not recommended, instead backtrack down the canyon approximately 180ft (55m) and look for a faint footpath up the western wall. Those with a fear of heights may want to turn around here. This informal route is gradual enough to simply walk up the rocky slope where a well-defined bypass trail is revealed 40ft (12m) above the canyon floor leading you up the canyon and then back down into the main drainage above the dryfall.

To reach the 3rd set of narrows continue for 0.3mi (0.5km) to a shallow, but narrow passageway filled with contorted, polished surfaces that keep the hike challenging as you reach the end of the route. Continue deeper into the canyon around one last bend between towering walls before ending at a 25ft (7.6m) vertical dryfall in a dramatic amphitheater. Avoid the ridge trails, instead return cautiously via the same 2mi (3.2km) route.