

# Montana Magic







## Some of the most wondrous parts of the West lie between Yellowstone and Glacier.



In Yellowstone, unhurried bison roam past shooting geysers. Wolves hunt in the dawn light and a massive lake stretches to the horizon. Five hundred miles north, on the Canadian border, lush forests give way to alpine lakes with colorful rocks making up their shores in Glacier National Park. Grizzly bears roam underneath ancient glaciers while towering peaks guard stunning valleys.

These two incredible parks might be what originally draws you to Montana, but you'll find the real magic lies in the

small towns, fascinating history, amazing trails and famous big skies in between.

Start in Bozeman, a vibrant, outdoorsy town with a great local food and beverage scene. As you drive south to Yellowstone, you'll get the chance to experience some of the best rivers in the West whether you choose to float them, tackle their rapids or soak in hot springs along their banks. Enter the park through Gardiner and the North Entrance, before continuing your journey in West Yellowstone. Lone Peak stands watch over the town of Big Sky, which you might know as a ski destination. The secret is that it's equally worth visiting in the summer.

You'll discover a deep rooted history that laid the foundations for the thriving communities you see today in southwestern Montana towns like Virginia City, Anaconda and Philipsburg where you can watch vaudeville plays and unearth sapphires.

See herds of magnificent creatures roaming at the CSKT Bison Range, which saw management restored to the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes in 2022. Farther north lies Missoula, a fun university town with its own flavor. As you drive over Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier, mist hugs waterfalls cascading down mountain faces.

Make your way south through central Montana where you can walk in Lewis and Clark's footprints in Great Falls, hit the trails in the state's capital, and find towns like White Sulphur Springs which showcase a surprising side of rural America.

Along the way you'll discover jaw dropping views, friendly and inspiring locals and a landscape that seems brushed with magic at every seam. This is Montana.

PHOTOS: Swiftcurrent Falls in Glacier National Park (Getty Images), Roosevelt Arch in Gardiner, Montana (NPS/Jacob W. Frank), Rounding up horses during sunrise in Paradise Valley (Yellowstone Productions, courtesy of Yellowstone Country Montana)



# 3 Stunning Scenic Drives

Spend some time on the road for proof that the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem's epic scenery, amazing geology and outstanding wildlife extend beyond the national park boundary. These are three of our favorite scenic drives.

By Kristen Arendt

## Paradise Valley: Livingston to Gardiner

Hemmed in by the Absaroka Mountains to the east and the Gallatin Range to the west, Paradise Valley follows a meandering stretch of the Yellowstone River through a stunning valley. The route on Highway 89 runs about 50 miles from the town of Livingston in the north to the town of Gardiner in the south.

Located on the north end of the valley, Livingston is a vibrant town with a lively art scene and lots of good eateries. Add an overnight stop at the historic Murray Hotel where you can stay in a Victorian era room with a Western spin.

From Livingston, it's easy to get out and explore Paradise Valley. Don't forget to pack your bathing suit—stop by Chico Hot Springs and Yellowstone Hot Springs (pg. 58) for a relaxing soak along the way.

On the south side of the valley, the charming town of Gardiner (pg. 59) is home to the iconic Roosevelt Arch at the North Entrance to Yellowstone. Thanks to its location and year round access to the park, Gardiner makes a great jumping off point for guided wildlife watching tours if you're eager to see Yellowstone's animal inhabitants.

## Beartooth Highway: Red Lodge to Cooke City-Silver Gate

Billed as one of the most beautiful drives in America, the Beartooth Highway winds through some truly breathtaking scenery.



Pilot and Index Peaks in the Absaroka Range (Merv Coleman, courtesy of Yellowstone Country)

The road tops out at 10,947-foot Beartooth Pass. Along the route, you'll be treated to views of pristine glacial lakes, high alpine tundra and towering, 12,000-plus foot peaks.

The road is open seasonally for about four months from Memorial Day to mid-October. In late June and early July, wildflowers dot the meadows, and you'll often spot wildlife, like mountain goats, along the drive. Located in a scenic and secluded mountain valley on the east side of the pass, Red Lodge (pg. 98) has a storied mining past and lots of charm. Stay a night at the historic Pollard Hotel located right downtown.

On the western side of the Beartooth Highway, you'll come to the quaint towns of Cooke City and Silver Gate. Here you are minutes from the Northeast Entrance to Yellowstone and the famed Lamar Valley. Swing by the Cooke City General Store for groceries, fishing licenses and anything else you need to outfit yourself for a trip to the park. In Silver Gate, Stop the Car Trading Post is the spot to go for local intel on the latest wildlife sightings or to get recommendations on things to do in the area.

## Rivers to Mountains: Big Timber to Red Lodge

From Western ranching communities to pristine wilderness areas, the drive from

Big Timber to Red Lodge, via Columbus and Absarokee, promises a varied and unforgettable tour of Yellowstone Country's iconic landscape.

With the backdrop of the Crazy Mountains and the Yellowstone River wrapping the town, Big Timber has a rich ranching and homesteading history that's reflected in the town's summer events like the weekly farmers market, as well as its cuisine. You're almost guaranteed to find locally raised lamb and beef on the menu.

Just 40 miles from Big Timber, the Stillwater River joins the Yellowstone River at Columbus. The town sits at the foothills of the Beartooth Mountains, offering plentiful opportunities for fishing, floating and paddling adventures.

From Columbus, take the scenic route on Montana Highway 78 to Absarokee, a small community that's a great launching place for adventures in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness and on the Stillwater River. Looking for a real working ranch experience? Paintbrush Adventures will give you a taste of authentic cowboy living at the Barron Ranch. Try your hand at a cattle drive, help with the calving and lambing in the spring, or saddle up for a pack trip deep into the wilderness.


Learn more at [VisitYellowstoneCountry.com](http://VisitYellowstoneCountry.com).





# THE **PEAK** OF **Winter**

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# Drink Local

Visit Bozeman Spirits Distillery to taste Montana-made vodka, whiskey, gin and rum.

By Tori Peglar

**T**here may be no better locally concocted cocktail than Bozeman Spirits Distillery's Montana Huckleberry Lemon Drop. Made with huckleberry flavored vodka, it's served in the saloon-inspired tasting room on Main Street in downtown Bozeman. Stop in from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday through Saturday, or noon to 8 p.m., on Sundays. You can order a lemon drop, or one of the other seasonally rotating cocktails at the tasting room, along with samples of the locally made spirits.

Book a tour in advance to go in the back and get a detailed rundown of the

distilling process. You'll get an inside look on how the spirits are made before heading back up front to the tasting room to sample.

Co-founders Jim and Mary Pat Harris are strongly supportive of local agriculture, with a farm south of town where they grow some of the grains (along with grains from Montana Milling) that go into their bourbon, vodka, whiskey, gin and agave spirits, which are all distilled and bottled on site.

If you like what you're sipping, bring a taste of Montana home with you.

Purchase a bottle at the tasting room, with aluminum options perfect for checked luggage, or throughout Montana, Wyoming, Idaho and North Dakota. The distillery also ships via an online store, so you can order from home.

Bozeman Distillery sits on one end of the town's vibrant Main Street. Start or end your stroll here and don't miss checking out the other shops, restaurants and boutique hotels. Steve Rinella's MeatEater flagship store is just a few doors down and worth a stop in.

*Learn more at [BozemanSpirits.com](http://BozemanSpirits.com).*



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## Float, Paddle, Zip

With several locations across the region, Montana Whitewater is the perfect choice to add some adventure to your trip, whether you're basecamped in Gardiner or Big Sky.

By Tori Peglar

**F**loating down a peaceful river in a gorgeous setting may be one of the most memorable experiences you have on your vacation. Offering everything from a leisurely float on a tube to half-day and full-day rafting trips, plus ziplining courses, Montana Whitewater is the place to go for outdoor adventures. Family owned and operated since 1992, you know you're getting a great experience.

Watch the rolling mountains pass by as you lounge on an inflatable tube on the sparkling waters of the Madison River on a peaceful excursion. Montana Whitewater staff will meet you at the Madison River put-in or you can meet at the shop in Bozeman. They provide all the gear you'll need, including inflatable coolers and lines to rope your group of family or friends together. After your float, they'll assist in shuttling you back to your car or the shop, depending on which trip you choose. If you've never rafted before or are looking for a family friendly experience, choose the Yellowstone River trip where the put-in is in Gardiner.

Adrenaline seekers will find their hearts pumping through the infamous Mad Mile of continuous class IV rapids along the Gallatin River in between Big Sky and Bozeman. It was on the Gallatin and the upper Yellowstone River that the 1992 movie *A River Runs Through It* was filmed.

And if you want a full-day wilderness experience down the remote Bear Trap Canyon, opt for the Madison River trip where only one other company has a permit to run the stretch. It's a wild and peaceful experience.

Create a full day of adventure by booking a zipline tour through Montana Whitewater. These tours let you spend half your day rafting and the other flying through the big sky via zipline. Plus, you'll save 10% on each additional activity you book. Otherwise, stay high and dry and ride a zipline over the Gallatin River or above a historic Montana ranch.

Learn more at [MontanaWhitewater.com](http://MontanaWhitewater.com).

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# Winter Wanderland

When the snow starts to fall, Yellowstone transforms into an uncrowded and magical place. Here's how to plan a trip in what just might be the park's best season.

By Mikaela Ruland

## Top Snowy Adventures

### ■ Cross Country Ski to Lonestar Geyser

Rent skis at Old Faithful Snow Lodge and embark on a 9-mile roundtrip cross-country ski to Lone Star Geyser. Before you set out, check with the staff at the Visitor Education Center on when the next predicted eruption is. It usually erupts every three hours. From Snow Lodge, take the Kepler Cascades Trail to the Lone Star Geyser Trail, which follows a relatively flat service road through a picturesque winter forest along the Firehole River. The trail is partially machine groomed.

### ■ Take a Snowcoach Tour

When snow blankets the park, snowcoaches—shuttles on giant tires or tracks—become the park's primary form of transportation. Book a scenic

tour out of West Yellowstone, Gardiner or Jackson where a knowledgeable guide will reveal the wonders of the park in winter. Tours generally go to Old Faithful or Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone with stops along the way at spots like Grand Prismatic. Snowcoach tours are an excellent way to spot wildlife like bison, river otters and foxes.

### ■ Go Snowmobiling

Many outfitters offer snowmobile tours on the park's roads in the winter. While you aren't as likely to see wildlife on the back of a noisy machine, exploring in the cold is an exhilarating experience and you'll spot erupting geysers and scenery galore. Tours depart from the West, North, South and East entrances.

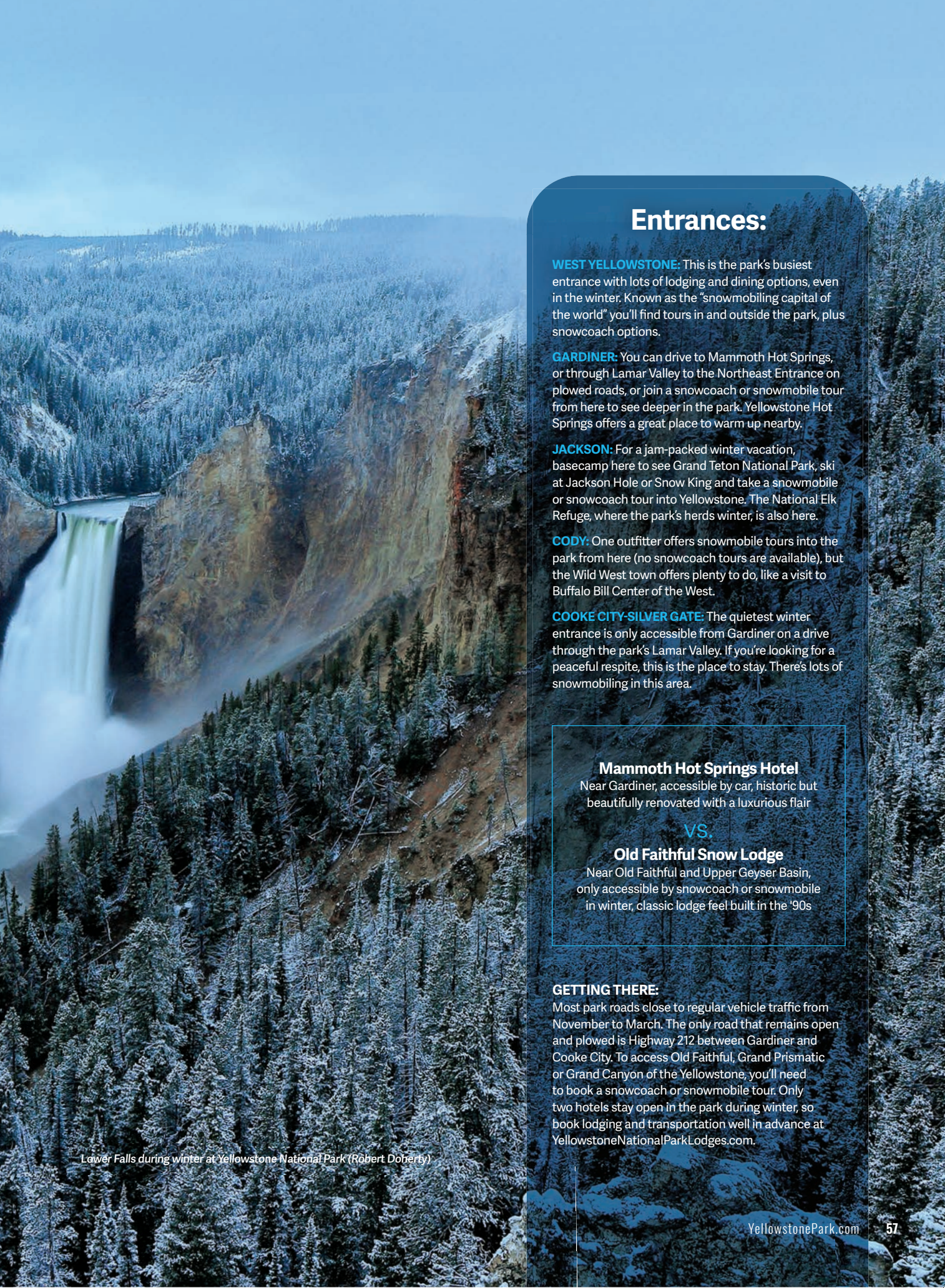
### ■ Ice Skate at Old Faithful Snow Lodge

If you're staying at Old Faithful, borrow a pair of skates for free and take a whirl on the ice rink in front of the Snow Lodge. Colorful lights are frozen into the ice, making for a fun and festive evening activity. Ice skating is free for hotel guests and while the ice isn't particularly well groomed, it's still a charming experience.

### ■ Watch Wolves

Winter is an excellent time to spot Yellowstone's wolves. Go on a self-guided tour of Lamar Valley, one of the few areas of the park accessible by car in the winter, and keep your eyes peeled for wolves or others with spotting scopes. Or, book a tour with a local guide company for your best luck at spotting these elusive creatures.





Lower Falls during winter at Yellowstone National Park (Robert Doherty)

## Entrances:

**WEST YELLOWSTONE:** This is the park's busiest entrance with lots of lodging and dining options, even in the winter. Known as the "snowmobiling capital of the world" you'll find tours in and outside the park, plus snowcoach options.

**GARDINER:** You can drive to Mammoth Hot Springs, or through Lamar Valley to the Northeast Entrance on plowed roads, or join a snowcoach or snowmobile tour from here to see deeper in the park. Yellowstone Hot Springs offers a great place to warm up nearby.

**JACKSON:** For a jam-packed winter vacation, basecamp here to see Grand Teton National Park, ski at Jackson Hole or Snow King and take a snowmobile or snowcoach tour into Yellowstone. The National Elk Refuge, where the park's herds winter, is also here.

**CODY:** One outfitter offers snowmobile tours into the park from here (no snowcoach tours are available), but the Wild West town offers plenty to do, like a visit to Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

**COOKE CITY-SILVER GATE:** The quietest winter entrance is only accessible from Gardiner on a drive through the park's Lamar Valley. If you're looking for a peaceful respite, this is the place to stay. There's lots of snowmobiling in this area.

### Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel

Near Gardiner, accessible by car, historic but beautifully renovated with a luxurious flair

VS.

### Old Faithful Snow Lodge

Near Old Faithful and Upper Geyser Basin, only accessible by snowcoach or snowmobile in winter, classic lodge feel built in the '90s

## GETTING THERE:

Most park roads close to regular vehicle traffic from November to March. The only road that remains open and plowed is Highway 212 between Gardiner and Cooke City. To access Old Faithful, Grand Prismatic or Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, you'll need to book a snowcoach or snowmobile tour. Only two hotels stay open in the park during winter, so book lodging and transportation well in advance at [YellowstoneNationalParkLodges.com](http://YellowstoneNationalParkLodges.com).



# A Serene Soak

Relax in naturally-fed hot springs after hitting Yellowstone's trails.

By Mikaela Ruland

Soaking in the peaceful pools of Yellowstone Hot Springs Resort, you'd never know you were just eight miles from Yellowstone's North Entrance in Gardiner. Opened in 2019, the hot springs are tucked off the highway just 100 feet from the Yellowstone River. Here you'll feel worlds away from the hustle and bustle of the park. One-hundred-and-fifty-degree water is pumped a mile and a half from the hot springs to feed five pools: a 105° F hot plunge, a 98° F warm pool, a 68° F cold plunge and two Kneipp pools to rejuvenate the whole body.

Kneipp pools, while popular in Europe, are rarely found in the U.S. Two parallel,

shallow pools—one hot and one cold—are lined with river rocks. When you walk through the pools, the rocks and the 40-degree temperature differences can invoke feelings of rejuvenation.

One of the things that sets Yellowstone Hot Springs apart is its commitment to a chemical-free and eco-friendly experience. The hot springs' flow-through system moves 70,000 gallons of water through the pools every eight hours, keeping them sparkling clean.

"You could soak in the early afternoon and then come back after dinner and be immersed in totally different water," says

general manager Erin Kennedy. "It's an invitation to savor the diverse therapeutic qualities of the resort's pools, a testament to the dynamic nature of this natural oasis."

You can also stay on property. Camp across the street in an RV friendly campground that can accommodate rigs up to 40 feet in length in certain sites with hookups. Or, check-in to one of four cabins or two-bedroom units with full kitchens, fireplaces and air conditioning. Getting hungry? Grab a bite to eat at East Gate Cafe on site serving breakfast, sandwiches, salads and coffee.

For more see [YellowstoneHotSpringsMT.com](http://YellowstoneHotSpringsMT.com).



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# Where the Wild Things Are

Locals in Gardiner, like to say Yellowstone's north gate, just five miles down the road, is 'nature's favorite entrance.'

By Mikaela Ruland

While we can't speak for the wildlife, it seems an apt statement. Elk wander the streets in summer and bison amble through town, in search of lower elevations as winter sets in. This small but mighty town is also a favorite of visitors of the human variety who choose to stay in Gardiner for their Yellowstone vacation.

One of the main reasons is the town's close proximity to incredible outdoor recreation. With the Yellowstone River running through, getting out on the water is a must. Go on a whitewater rafting or float trip with local vendors like Flying Pig Adventures or Montana Whitewater. Or, enjoy the serenity of the river on its banks as you soak in Yellowstone Hot Springs. You can combine rafting with horseback riding through the gorgeous landscape with several companies on a Paddle and Saddle adventure. If you want to explore the park itself via saddle, book a tour with Yellowstone Rough Riders.

In June 2022, historic floods in Yellowstone and the surrounding communities made national news. Gardiner, and the park itself, are open and back to normal, but months without tourism was hard on the town's economy. The best way you can help? By spending your vacation dollars with

local businesses. That's easy to do as there aren't many box stores or restaurants in Gardiner. When you shop at stores like Paradise Adventure Company for made in Montana goods, you're supporting local families.

When it's time for dinner, scan the QR codes posted around town to get the hours of local restaurants. Snag a table at the Iron Horse Bar & Grill for local fare like elk meatloaf and pan-fried rainbow trout. If you're looking for a quicker option, head to Red's Blue Goose Saloon. This former Gardiner staple burned down in 2020, but the lot has been re-imagined into a food truck park anchored by the outdoor bar. Order a Huckleberry Vodka Lemonade and grab a bite to eat from Justine's Chicago Hot Dogs, or one of several food trucks. Expect live music all summer long throughout Gardiner.

Learn more at [VisitGardinerMT.com](https://VisitGardinerMT.com).

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Rafting (Courtesy of Wild West Rafting)

## Whatever Floats Your Boat

Go rafting for an unforgettable outdoor adventure.

By Tori Peglar

**Y**ou can't see all of Yellowstone by car in one day, so we have a tip for you: don't try.

Plan to spend at least a half day out of your car rafting the Yellowstone River with Wild West Rafting or Flying Pig Rafting next to Yellowstone's North Entrance. Both companies share the same owners and offer half-day, full-day and overnight trips, plus excursions that offer a horseback riding and rafting combination.

"There's no better way to experience the beauty of the area and the beauty of Montana than in a raft," says Thomas Davis, co-owner of Wild West Rafting based in Gardiner, noting the Yellowstone River is the largest undammed river in the Lower 48.

Plus, you'll be floating along the border of Yellowstone National Park for the first four miles of all trips, catching sight of wildlife like elk and bison, depending on the day. Since you can't legally raft in the park, it's the closest you'll get to rafting in Yellowstone.

For whitewater trips, choose between a half-day, full-day or overnight rafting adventure.

Scenic float trips that avoid whitewater are just a half day. And if you're interested in doing a trail ride on a horse as well as rafting, sign up for a Paddle & Saddle trip where you trail ride for two hours through the Gallatin National Forest before breaking for lunch and then hopping on a raft for eight miles of whitewater. You can also experience the river by fly fishing with Flying Pig.

For those who have rafting experience and are looking for the ultimate thrill ride, Wild West Rafting offers a class III and class IV rapid experience on its Small Boat Big Water trip. It's a five-mile stretch only offered in May and June.

Wild West Rafting also has a 21-mile overnight rafting trip down the Yellowstone River. You'll sleep on comfortable cots in cool teepees situated in a meadow along the river. Meals are a steak dinner by lantern light and a cowboy style breakfast in the morning prepared by your guide.

*Learn more at [WildWestRafting.com](http://WildWestRafting.com) and [FlyingPigRafting.com](http://FlyingPigRafting.com).*

## Roosevelt Arch

By Courtney Holden

Access Yellowstone from the North Entrance and you'll get a chance to see the iconic Roosevelt Arch. Completed on August 15, 1903, the massive stone structure offers a glimpse into the park's early years.

Before 1903, trains brought passengers up to Cinnabar, Montana, where people would then get into horse-drawn carriages to enter the park's sweeping landscape. That year, however, with the Northern Pacific Railway's extension to Gardiner, visitors would get easier access.

The arch was in part a measure to satisfy park administrators concerned that Yellowstone's entrance lacked the visual flair expected of America's first national park. It also provided a great location for a train depot.

During the commemoration, President Theodore Roosevelt, on a two-week holiday to the park, offered a speech praising it as "something absolutely unique in the world." He went on to say, "Nowhere else in any civilized country is there to be found such a tract of veritable wonderland made accessible to all visitors, where at the same time not only the scenery of the wilderness, but the wild creatures of the park are scrupulously preserved, as they were the only change being that these same wild creatures have been so carefully protected as to show a literally astonishing tameness. The creation and preservation of such a great national playground in the interests of our people as a whole is a credit to the nation; but above all a credit to Montana, Wyoming and Idaho."

Designed by famous Yellowstone architect Robert Reamer, the arch stands 50 feet high, its two towers each 12 feet across at their base. The opening creates a space 30 feet high by 25 feet wide, more than enough room to allow the passage of horse-drawn coaches, as it was originally designed to do. An inscription at the top reads "For the Benefit and Enjoyment of the People."





# Head West

This may be the park's most popular entrance, but there's more to discover outside Yellowstone's boundaries.

By Tori Peglar

**T**he town of West Yellowstone sits at the West Entrance to the park. Along with easy access to Yellowstone and plenty of lodging options to choose from, there are fun activities right in town. Missed seeing a grizzly in Lamar Valley? You're guaranteed to see one at the Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center, a non-profit wildlife education and research facility minutes from the park.

The seven resident bears arrived in West Yellowstone after becoming nuisance animals where they lived by either damaging property in search of food or becoming aggressive toward people. Rather than be killed, the bears at the center were rescued and serve as

ambassadors for grizzlies in the wild. Don't miss seeing the center's seven wolves, and then North American river otters in an exhibit which offers a great deep dive into Yellowstone's riparian habitat, revealing the interconnectedness of everything that lives within it.

Afterwards, head to the Yellowstone Giant Screen to discover the park in a totally different way with the movie *Yellowstone* projected on a six-story-high screen.

Check out one of the West's long lived traditions at Wild West Yellowstone Rodeo. During the summer, there are between four to six rodeos a week,

beginning at 8 p.m. Tickets are available online and at the gate. If you want to do a trail ride before the rodeo, Creekside Trail Rides offers one-hour horseback excursions and 30-minute wagon rides at the rodeo grounds.

Finally, lasso the fun at Parade Rest Guest Ranch 10 miles from Yellowstone's West Entrance for an evening under the stars. You'll ride in a hay wagon, on horseback or in a van (depending on availability) to the outdoor cookout area where you'll eat a classic Western dinner including baked beans, grilled chicken and coleslaw.

*Learn more at [DestinationYellowstone.com](http://DestinationYellowstone.com).*

## ROOM TO ROAM

Get outside and experience the wide open space that West Yellowstone, Montana has to offer.



[destinationyellowstone.com](http://destinationyellowstone.com)





# Rustic & Refined

Big Sky is Montana at its best for the whole family.

By Lindsey Falkenburg



During the winter Big Sky, home of the second largest ski resort in the United States, is bustling with snow sports enthusiasts. But after the powder melts, the town still has a lot to offer. We've picked must-see outdoor spots, the best ways to explore the area, trendy restaurants for delicious food and comfy places to stay for the whole family.

Big Sky is an epicenter for hiking, mountain biking, river rafting, rock climbing, fly fishing and horseback riding. For something easy, check out the 1.6-mile [Ousel Falls Trail](#), which is relatively flat and dog friendly. It ends at the base of a lush, 100-foot waterfall. [Uplands Trail](#) is a moderately difficult, 2-mile climb that rewards you with an incredible view of the Big Sky area and the exposed Huckleberry Ridge Tuff, rocky evidence of a Yellowstone caldera eruption that took place 2.1 million years ago. Make your hike a little harder and tack on the [Hummocks Trail](#), 3 miles of amazing views.

If mountain biking is more your speed, look no further. At [Big Sky Resort](#) you can rent bikes and take the lift service to the mountain top for a day of downhill fun. The resort also has scenic lift rides, making it possible for people of all abilities to enjoy the scenery.



[Canyon Adventures](#) offers guided horseback riding, four-wheeling and, in the winter, snowmobiling. Their horseback riding trips are particularly popular. Pick from one to three-hour adventures through the foothills of Custer Gallatin National Forest. [Montana Whitewater](#) is your go-to choice for scenic floats or something more challenging on the Gallatin River. Finish your day with an exhilarating ride on their zip line.

[Big Sky's Town Center](#) has a plethora of restaurants and shops to enjoy. [Blindside Burger](#) offers a mouthwatering smash burger and old fashioned shakes. [Block 3](#), the town's premier steakhouse, has Wagyu beef on the menu, as well a variety of Montana game like elk, bison and venison. For a truly unique dining experience, visit [Montana Dinner Yurt](#) offered through Montana Backcountry Adventures. End the night at [Big Sky Scoops](#) with an ice cream.

Grab a souvenir at the recently expanded [JP Woolies](#) with gifts, books, toys and jewelry.

Visit [Big Sky Artist Collective](#) to celebrate local artists. And if you forgot to pack something for your outdoor adventures stop by [Gallatin Alpine Sports](#). It has all the gear needed to explore the surrounding areas, as well as rentals.

From hotels to guest ranches to vacation rentals, Big Sky has options. Stay at [The Wilson](#) and live like a local, just steps away from shops, restaurants and bars. Or book rooms at [Rainbow Ranch Lodge](#), a stunning spot that combines world class resort services with the rustic beauty of Montana. If you're traveling with your family consider staying at a guest ranch for the full Old West experience. [320 Guest Ranch](#), [Elkhorn Ranch](#) and [Lone Mountain Ranch](#) all offer guests a taste of an authentic western lifestyle and a chance to learn about local heritage and traditions.

Learn more at [VisitBigSky.com](#).

Downtown Big Sky, Ousel Falls, Big Sky Resort  
(All images courtesy of Visit Big Sky)



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# Go Southwest

Visit this corner of Montana for history, guided tours, local festivals, small town charm, hot springs and outdoor activities. Here are six of our favorite things to do.

By Lindsey Falkenburg

## Take a Tour

This part of the state is a treasure trove of history. Hear the stories of Native Americans, fur trappers, miners, cowboys and homesteaders. Wander the streets of Virginia City and Nevada City, well preserved ghost towns that allow visitors to step back in time to the 1800s. Visit the Grant Kohrs Ranch, a national historic site that offers ranch tours and living history demonstrations. And for a more somber look at the area's history stop by the Big Hole Battlefield, where U.S. settlers murdered 90 Nez Pierce men, women and children in 1877.

## Experience Small Town Montana

Explore some of the cutest towns in the West, packed to the brim with charm and friendly faces in Southwest Montana. Visit Ennis, Anaconda and Dillon to stroll mom and pop shops, learn more about each town's unique history and attend their local rodeo. In Phillipsburg (pg. 68), an old mining town with amazing restaurants and boutiques, you can try your hand at mining for sapphires. And don't miss the Augusta American Legion Rodeo at the end of June, considered one of the top tourism attractions in the state.

## Attend Festivals Galore

With small towns come charming local events. Check out the Old Salt Festival in June in Helmville, Montana, to celebrate the Mannix family's long-term conservation stewardship of their ranch and the surrounding area, with music, food and dancing. Or attend the Montana Folk Festival, a free music event that takes place mid-July in Butte. Ennis hosts the annual Madison Valley Arts festival in early August which is in its 20th year.

## Embark on Outdoor Adventures

Hiking, mountain biking, ATV/UTVing, fishing and skiing are all popular throughout the region. Explore the



Nevada City ghost town  
(Courtesy of Visit Southwest Montana)

South Hills Trail System in the Prickly Pear Land Trust outside of Helena or tackle the 8-mile Arrastra Creek Trail near Lincoln, which promises shady forest scenery and meadows full of wildflowers in the summer. The Continental Divide Trail, loved by both bikers and hikers, runs through the area. If planning your own outdoor adventure intimidates you, hire a guide. There are outfitters throughout the area who are knowledgeable and can ensure you have a safe, fun trip. For some guided sightseeing, book a bus tour to Our Lady of the Rockies, a giant statue located on the Continental Divide outside of Butte. Or hop on a narrated boat tour to explore Gates of the Mountain, a striking canyon on the Missouri River near Helena, aptly named by Lewis and Clark on their expedition.

## Soak in Hot Springs

Look no further for family friendly hot springs—there are eight different spots

in this region where you can soak. Slip down a slide at Fairmont Hot Springs Resort or soak in a historic wooden pool before enjoying a meal at Norris Hot Springs' 50 Mile Grill and Snack Bar where most ingredients are sourced from within 50 miles.

## Bring the Whole Family

Traveling with kids? Don't miss two water parks, Last Chance Splash Waterpark and Pool in Helena and Ridge Waters Water Park in Butte, where you can cool off. Swing by Ringing Rocks, a unique geological formation located outside of Butte where the rocks chime when gently tapped with a hammer (pick up a hammer at the local ACE Hardware in Butte). In Virginia City, take a historic firetruck ride or board the Alder Gulch Short Line Railroad.

Learn more at [SouthwestMT.com](http://SouthwestMT.com).



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## Boom Town

By Mikaela Ruland

Anaconda, Montana is a great spot for those looking to connect with the West's boom-and-bust history. The town was founded on smelting, the process of extracting metal from ore, and a retired 585-foot smokestack can still be seen from town today.

On weekdays throughout the summer, learn more about Anaconda's history by boarding a vintage Glacier National Park red tour bus at the Discover Anaconda Visitor Center. The volunteer run tour will bring you past historic sites and buildings where you'll learn more about the city's early smelting days.

Anaconda's founder, Marcus Daly, was an Irish immigrant who started from nothing and became one of the west's "Copper Kings." His rags-to-riches story

drew many Irish immigrants to work for him, and the town still has a strong Irish heritage today. Experience it by sampling Cornish pasties. This dish, which is like a turnover filled with beef and vegetables, was a staple lunch for miners. Try them at Peppermint Patty's.

Once you learn about the history of the town, dive into the great outdoors at Georgetown Lake, the perfect place to cool off in the summer. Rent a kayak or stand-up paddleboard at Moose Marina.

In winter, enjoy downhill skiing at Discovery Ski Area, snowshoeing, cross-country and snowmobiling in the nearby National Forest, or ice skating downtown.

Learn more at  
[DiscoverAnaconda.com](http://DiscoverAnaconda.com)

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Downtown Philipsburg (Courtesy of Philipsburg Chamber of Commerce)

## Phenomenal Philipsburg

Uncover treasures in one of Montana's sweetest towns.

By Tori Peglar

**W**ith overflowing flower baskets and gorgeously restored historic buildings lining its main street, Philipsburg is one of Montana's most magical locales.

Once a booming mining town, it's the kind of place that makes you want to sit on one of its sidewalk benches and watch the

world go by. But first, explore the town's enormous handmade candy store, The Sweet Palace, which is a destination in its own right. Amid the Victorian era decor, you'll find 50 kinds of fudge, 20 types of caramel and incredible treats like the best peanut brittle you'll ever eat.

Next door is The Sapphire Gallery where you can literally sift through dirt to find sapphires. When you buy a bag of gravel containing local sapphires, staff will screen your gravel to uncover the gems on site. Afterwards, the gallery can heat treat your sapphires to enhance their color or even fashion them into earrings, necklaces and more.

"Everyone loves finding treasure," says co-owner Shirley Beck who is credited

with helping lead the revival of historic Philipsburg. "The sapphires have been waiting for them in the ground for a long time—about 50 million years."

But Philipsburg itself is a treasure, and that's all the more reason to tread lightly on this town that's growing in popularity. Most folks here follow the "Cowboy Code of the West," which includes reminders like "Talk less but say more," and "Remember some things are not for sale." When it's time to leave, it may feel like saying goodbye to an old friend.

"Philipsburg has activities and shops, eateries and photo opportunities, but at the end of your visit we just make you feel good. It's magic," Beck says.

*Learn more at [PhilipsburgMT.com](http://PhilipsburgMT.com).*

## 3 STOPS

### The Philipsburg Theatre

Established in 1891, this is the oldest operating theater in Montana. If there's a movie, play or performance happening when you are in town, get tickets. The interior is full of charm that harks back more than 100 years.

### Philipsburg Brewing Co.

Founded in 2012, this brewery is housed in a historic bank building built in 1888. Referred to as The Vault, this popular watering hole with award winning beers uses Montana malt and local spring water in its brews. Stop for a pint and chat with locals and other travelers.

### Granite Ghost Town State Park

This state park was home to what was known as the "richest silver mine on Earth." Opened in 1872, the mine yielded \$40,000,000 and housed 3,000 miners before the price of silver crashed. The Granite Mine Superintendent's House is still there, along with ruins of Union Hall. The narrow and steep road from Philipsburg gains 1,280 feet in elevation.



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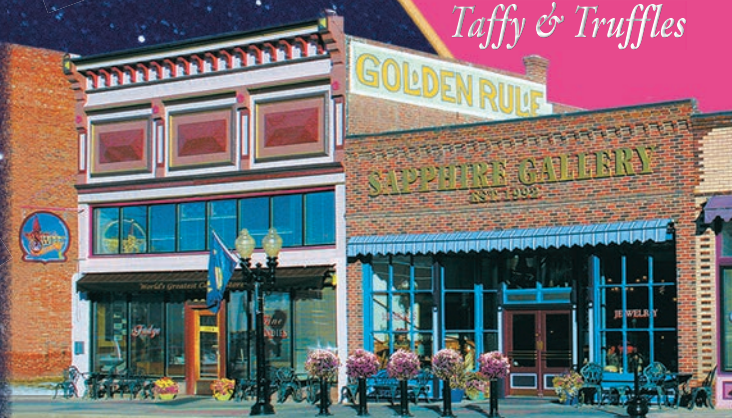
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# M is for Missoula

Unique, cool, serene, welcoming and replete with natural beauty, this is Montana's coolest university town.

By Tori Peglar

**N**estled in the Northern Rockies, surrounded by seven wilderness areas and at the confluence of three rivers, it's also an outdoor enthusiast's dream.

Head to the Clark Fork River next to Caras Park where you can watch river surfers, kayakers and the occasional brave tubers tackle Brennan's Wave, a human made water feature. Or, head to the University of Montana to go on a hike that offers spectacular Missoula views. The popular "M" trail is 0.75 miles one way and leads up 10-plus switchbacks 620 feet above town. Walk a mile farther to reach the top of Mount

Sentinel. You can access the trailhead behind the stadium.

Discover a variety of art galleries and eclectic public art to be found throughout the city. The Missoula Art Museum offers free admission, and the Montana Museum of Art and Culture can be found on campus. Perhaps one of the most beautiful pieces of public art you can enjoy are the hand carved ponies at A Carousel for Missoula located in Caras Park. The 38 ponies and two chariots were carved by volunteers who put in more than 100,000 hours before the carousel opened in 1995.

Fourteen breweries and tap houses are scattered across Missoula, making it the perfect place for craft brew enthusiasts. If you're feeling adventurous, sample beers on flatwater sections of the Blackfoot or Clark Fork rivers with River City Brews.

When it's time for dinner, the town has everything from food trucks in the park to extravagant dining experiences, with many restaurants like Brasserie Porte Rouge sourcing their ingredients from local farmers and ranchers. At the end of the day, it's easy to find live music in Missoula. Check out the lineup at the breathtaking KettleHouse Amphitheater on the banks of the Blackfoot River which offers a stunning concert location that was named one of the best amphitheaters in the world by Pollstar. Or cruise downtown in search of local shows in breweries, cafés and Caras Park.

Learn more at [DestinationMissoula.org/YJ](http://DestinationMissoula.org/YJ).

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# The Road to Glacier

From Missoula to Glacier National Park, discover incredible towns and sights, most of which aren't apparent if you never leave the highway.

By Tori Peglar

**T**o start, visit the farmers market in Missoula. Afterward, check out the town's burgeoning art scene at Montana Museum of Art and Culture, Radius Gallery and Allez!.

In Moiese, you'll find the CSKT Bison Range on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Roughly 350 bison live on the range, along with elk, bears, abundant birds and more. You'll find a nature trail as well as two wildlife drives here. Prairie Drive is a short, year round excursion while Red Sleep Mountain Drive travels through the heart of the reserve and is open seasonally.

Continue north on Highway 93 for another 30 minutes until you reach Ninepipes Lodge in Charlo where you can dine at Allentown Restaurant on the property. Along with serving great breakfasts, lunches and dinners, this lovely restaurant with huge windows gives mesmerizing views of Mount Calawahcan and the Mission Mountains.

One of the cutest towns along Flathead Lake is Bigfork. As you stroll the charming and walkable downtown, stop in its galleries like Brett Thuma's, featuring realistic Montana landscapes, wildlife and fly fishing. Then get lunch at The Sitting Duck.

For an outdoor activity, rent a paddleboard at Base Camp Bigfork and head to Wayfarers State Park on the northeast shore of Flathead Lake. Afterward, drive to Flathead Lake Brewing Co. Pubhouse, which offers fantastic views of the water and locally made beers like Beardance Juicy IPA and Sunshower Blood Orange Wheat.

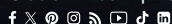
Then head north away from the lake toward Glacier for a classic menu in a historic setting at Mercantile Steak. This special spot is located in Kalispell's KM building with original Tiffany style lamps, copper-tinned ceilings and a menu featuring top grade steaks, chops and fresh fish. On Thursdays throughout the summer check out the Columbia Falls Community Market with live music, fresh produce and locally made goods. Stay at the boutique Dancing Spirit Ranch near Glacier for a dose of wellness.

*Learn more at [GlacierMT.com](http://GlacierMT.com).*

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# Glacier's Top 6

Here are some of our favorite  
things to do from hiking to  
exploring the park's  
most iconic treasures.

By Tori Peglar





1

### Eat at Lake McDonald Lodge

Start the day with a delicious breakfast in Russell's Fireside Dining Room at this historic lodge on the west side.



2

### Stop at the Cedar Tree Gift Shop

Shop at the park's largest gift store in Apgar for souvenirs or ice cream. Old-growth cedar trees grow through the floor and ceiling. The trees existed long before the store, so the builders let some stay.



3

### Hike on Logan Pass

At 6,646 feet, Logan Pass is the inspiring high point of Going-to-the-Sun Road. Both Hidden Lake Overlook Trail and the Highline Trail leave from here, offering breathtaking opportunities to spot wildlife.



4

### Ride on a Historic Boat

Take the oldest wooden boat in Glacier Park Boat Co.'s fleet across Two Medicine Lake and learn about the area's Blackfoot Indian history. When the boat docks on the upper west shore, disembark and hike with a naturalist or on your own to Twin Falls. Catch a different return boat or hike back.



5

### Take a Red Bus Tour

Ride in the world's oldest touring fleet of vehicles. Depart from the east or west sides of the park in these 1930s-era vintage buses with roll-back tops. They accommodate 17 people. Tours last between 2.5 to 8 hours.



6

### Dine at Many Glacier Hotel

Head to the historic first-come, first-served Ptarmigan Dining Room. Chefs use locally sourced ingredients whenever possible.

**ACCESS:** In 2025 timed-entry reservations are required to drive Going-to-the-Sun Road west to east and to enter the North Fork Area of the park June 13 to September 28. Due to construction, the Many Glacier area is accessible only by shuttle July 1 to September 21.

PHOTOS: Two Medicine Lake (Bethany Kamman), Lake McDonald Lodge, Ice cream (Flickr/flare), Logan Pass view of Avalanche Lake, Many Glacier Hotel (NPS/Jacob W. Frank), Red Bus Tour (NPS/Tim Rains), The Sinopah on Upper Two Medicine Lake (NPS/Bill Hayden).





# Montana's Heart

You'll discover a sprinkling of small towns that are chock full of fascinating history, but also filled with modern vibrancy in the form of boutique hotels, cool breweries and amazing outdoor recreation.

By Mikaela Ruland

**F**ort Benton is the birthplace of Montana and its historic downtown still holds onto its charm. Check out its shops and eateries lining the Missouri River like the gorgeous Grand Union Hotel. Nearby, experience the breathtaking White Cliffs of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument on a three-day canoe trip with a local outfitter.

In Great Falls, head to the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center to learn about the famous duo who helped chart the west for white settlers. Then, check out the C.M. Russell Museum where you'll learn about the iconic cowboy artist. Afterwards, stop by The Station, a newly opened food hall.

Come to soak in White Sulphur Springs'

namesake hot springs pools, stay for the hip local businesses. Visit The Jawbone, a women-owned, speakeasy-themed restaurant. The signature cocktails like the Huckleberry Lemon Drop Martini are the way to go. The town is a haven for women-owned businesses and Showdown Ski Resort just up the road is no exception. This little mountain is Montana's first and only women-owned ski area and worth a visit in either winter for snow sports, or summer for great hiking and biking trails. Stay at the Edith, a former motel totally renovated with a fantastic eye for design.

In Lewistown, don't miss the Montana Cowboy Poetry Gathering and Western Music Rendezvous every August. Or, get a dose of pioneer entertainment on the

Charlie Russell Chew Choo, a dinner train complete with local entertainment and staged hold-ups. Have dinner and a beer at Central Feed Grilling Company. This historic building also houses Big Springs Brewing. The upscale restaurant features Montana ingredients on a menu filled with steaks, burgers and sandwiches.

2025 is the 20th anniversary of Montana's Dinosaur Trail. The tiny town of Bynum may have more dinosaur residents than it does humans. Stop into the Montana Dinosaur Center to learn about the region's ancient inhabitants. Visiting in the summer? Reserve your spot on a dig where you'll get to work with paleontologists.

*Learn more at [CentralMontana.com](https://CentralMontana.com).*



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# Hometown Helena

Hike right out of downtown, grab a beer on your way back, and learn about local history in this welcoming Montana town. Vacation like a local with these tips.

By Lindsey Falkenburg

The area around Helena has always had a rich history, from the early roots of many Indigenous peoples, to its frontier days and beyond. Downtown is built around Last Chance Gulch, the exact spot where, in 1864, four lucky prospectors tried one last time to find gold in the area before moving on. They struck it big and the town of Helena was established shortly after.

Download the Open Audio Tours app to take a guided tour at your own pace. The app will even ping you as you drive by historical markers, making it easy to find hidden gems. Foundation for Montana History also offers four daily guided tours, both walking and seated, each summer. No matter which route you go there are some spots you shouldn't miss, like Reeder's Alley. Located in the southwest corner of downtown, Reeder's Alley was constructed in the 1870s and is the oldest, intact piece of Helena history, complete with an original pioneer cabin that has been meticulously restored. Stop in at Cotton Top Pastries (one of the many stores in the restored buildings) for a muffin and coffee.

Let your feet (or wheels) carry you out of town and back again, all in an easy day trip. Because of Helena's convenient location at the bottom of Mount Helena, you can literally walk or ride right off the end of a street and onto a trail. The town boasts access to more than 100 miles of hiking and biking paths. For a short, easy hike check out the 0.8-mile Daisy Hill Trail. If you want something longer consider setting out on the 7.6-mile Tubbs Trail which will connect you to the Mount Helena Ridge Trail and beyond.

The best part about going on an adventure from Helena? The booming craft beer scene makes it easy to stop for a pint back into town. Try Ten Mile Creek Brewing, a hometown favorite. It not only brews some good beer, but is also an epicenter for live shows and fun summer events. Located on Last Chance Gulch, which is primarily a walking mall with no cars, you can grab a beer and lounge anywhere in the square, taking in the vibrant culture of downtown. Speaking of culture, don't miss Helena's arts scene, from small boutiques scattered across town to the Holter Museum, a modern art spot with plenty of interactive fun for the kids. And all this adventuring and art-appreciating is bound to make you hungry. Enjoy a special meal out at The Union, a James Beard Award nominated restaurant that bases its menu around sustainable farming and features a different cut of locally raised meat each night.

*Learn more at [HelenaMT.com](https://www.helenamt.com)*



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