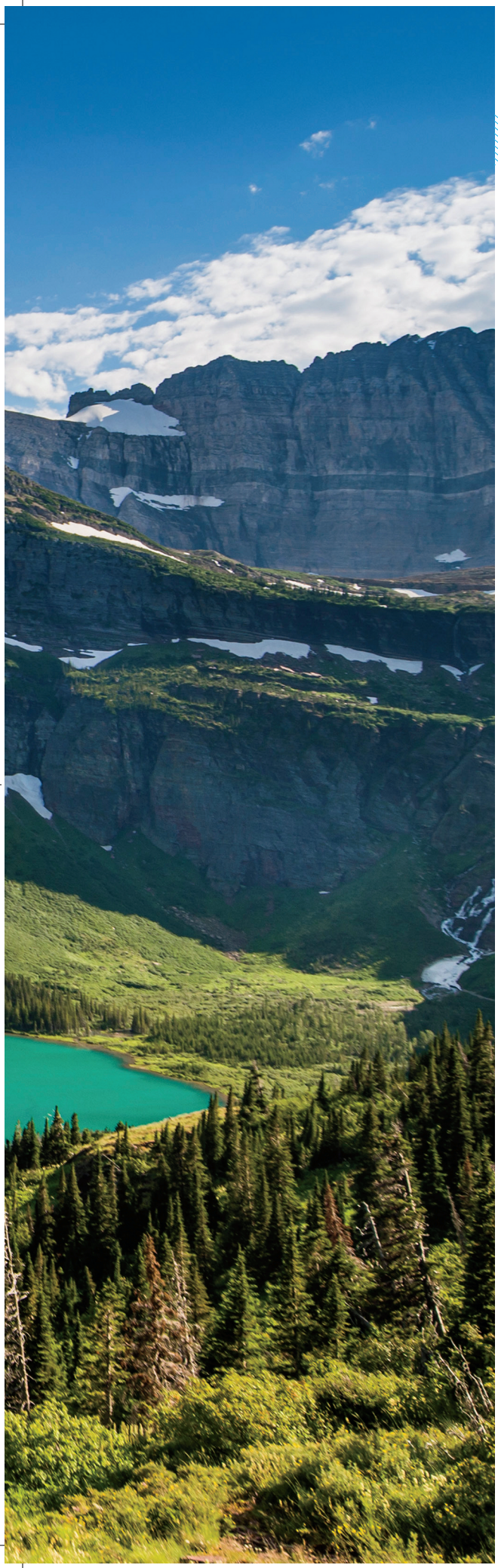
Montana Magic



Morning Lake in Glacier National Park (Abhik Mondal)



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.



Map by Peter Sucheski

These two incredible parks might be what originally draw 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, get a peek at the geothermal wonderland to come when you soak in a hot springs resort just outside the North Entrance. Enter the park through Gardiner and discover a case for visiting in the winter 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 find a deep rooted history that laid the foundations for the thriving communities you see today in southwestern Montana towns like Virginia City, Anaconda, Butte 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. And if you time your visit just right, you might find ripe huckleberries.

Make your way south through central Montana where you can walk in Lewis and Clark's footprints in Great Falls 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.



Secret Season

Hit the road from Bozeman to experience winter in Montana's Yellowstone Country.

By Mikaela Ruland





Last year more than 4.7 million people visited America's first national park. But the majority of those visitors missed out on what locals consider Yellowstone's best season: winter. Only 3% of tourists travel to the park between December and March. It's an uncrowded and stunning time of year, full of steaming geysers, abundant wildlife sightings and new opportunities for outdoor recreation like cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. Outside the park, the surrounding Montana landscape also transforms into a winter wonderland. If you're looking for a unique experience, this itinerary from Bozeman to Yellowstone will convince you that winter is what you're searching for.

Direct flights from major airports across the country into **Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport** make it easy to access southern Montana all season long. Spend your day soaking in the soothing waters of **Bozeman Hot Springs** before heading downtown for an exceptional arts and dining scene. Local shops like **Head West** offer cowboy hats and fun vintage finds. Whether you're traveling with kids or adults, the Smithsonian affiliated **Museum of the Rockies** is another great way to spend the day, learning more about the natural and cultural history of this region. For dinner, head to the up-and-coming Cannery District where you can tuck into dinner at James Beard nominated **Shan**, a Chinese and Thai fusion spot with a funky wine list. Bozeman is known for its brewery scene with spots like **MAP Brewing Company** and **Mountains Walking** showcasing Montana craft beer.

After dinner, check in to the **Kimpton Armory Hotel** where you can take in the beauty of the surrounding landscape, including the Bridger Range, from the rooftop **Sky Shed** bar. Step outside to enjoy the fresh, winter air around firepits or from the heated saltwater pool. For a casual, boutique stay, reserve a room at **The Lark**.

Take a pretty winter drive through Gallatin Canyon to reach the town of **Big Sky**. Home to IKON pass destination **Big Sky Resort**, it's a winter paradise whether you're an adrenaline junky or prefer to enjoy the snow at a more leisurely pace. Skiers and boarders will find nearly 6,000 acres of terrain ranging from mellow beginner runs to burly chutes. Sightseers can buy lift tickets for the **Lone Peak Tram**, accessed by the Explorer Gondola, to reach the two-story glass observation deck perched at 11,166 feet to take in exquisite views of the surrounding Rockies.

Off resort, travel through the landscape by sled. **Spirit of the North** offers dog sledding where participants can drive a team of Alaskan huskies, while **Lone Mountain Ranch** delights visitors on horse-drawn sleigh rides. Opt for the dinner excursion which transports you via sleigh to a secluded cabin for a prime rib dinner accompanied by serenading cowboys. After dark, enjoy a walk through the **Enchanted Forest** where 10,000 lights illuminate the trees. Access is via Big Sky Resort's Ramcharger 8 chairlift with heated seats. When it's time for bed, head to **Rainbow Ranch Lodge** just outside of Big Sky and relax in the hot tub complex.

West Yellowstone serves as the western gateway to the national park and is an ideal basecamp for a winter excursion. From this side of Yellowstone, the only motorized park access is by guided snowcoach or snowmobile tours (see pg. 58), so be sure to plan ahead. There's also so much to do outside of park boundaries. Start your morning at **Mountain Mama's Cafe** for a hot drink and breakfast sandwiches to take on the go. It's almost overwhelming how many snowmobile trails there are in this region of Montana. Book a trip with **Easy Tours Yellowstone** and enjoy a small group outing perfect for beginners either in or outside the park. If you want to explore on two feet, rent cross-country skis at **Freeheel and Wheel**, a fun outdoor store in downtown West Yellowstone. Then, explore the groomed (and free!) **Rendezvous Ski Trails**. Or, take the **Riverside Ski Trail** into the park from town along the Madison River where you're likely to spot bison and elk.

If you're looking for a break from the snow, check out the **Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center**. You're guaranteed a grizzly bear sighting (even in winter since these bears don't hibernate) at this education center. At night, tuck into the **Explorer Cabins** with firepits perfect for roasting s'mores while you gaze at the clear night skies.

Learn more at VisitYellowstoneCountry.com.

PHOTOS: Aerial view of Bozeman, sleigh ride at Lone Mountain Ranch, Rendezvous Ski Trails (Images courtesy of Yellowstone Country).

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MONTANA'S YELLOWSTONE COUNTRY



Drink Local

By Tori Peglar

There 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. 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 get an inside look on how the spirits are made followed by a tasting.

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, all distilled and bottled on site. Bozeman Spirits sits on one end of the town's vibrant Main Street. Start or finish your stroll here and don't miss checking out the other shops, restaurants and boutique hotels.

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 the region. The distillery also ships via an online store.

Learn more at BozemanSpirits.com.

Roosevelt Arch

Discover the story behind Yellowstone's North Entrance architecture.

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' concern 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 Theordore 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."

A Serene Soak

Relax in naturally fed hot springs after hitting the 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. Renovated in 2025, 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. Super hot 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 soak, a 68° F cold plunge and two Kneipp pools. While popular in Europe, they're 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 soak. The hot springs' flow-through system moves 70,000 gallons of water through the pools every eight hours, keeping them sparkling clean. The freshly resurfaced pool and new waterfall feature add to the pristine experience.

"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. A drive-thru allows access easy for guests on their way to the park.

See YellowstoneHotSpringsMT.com.



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 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

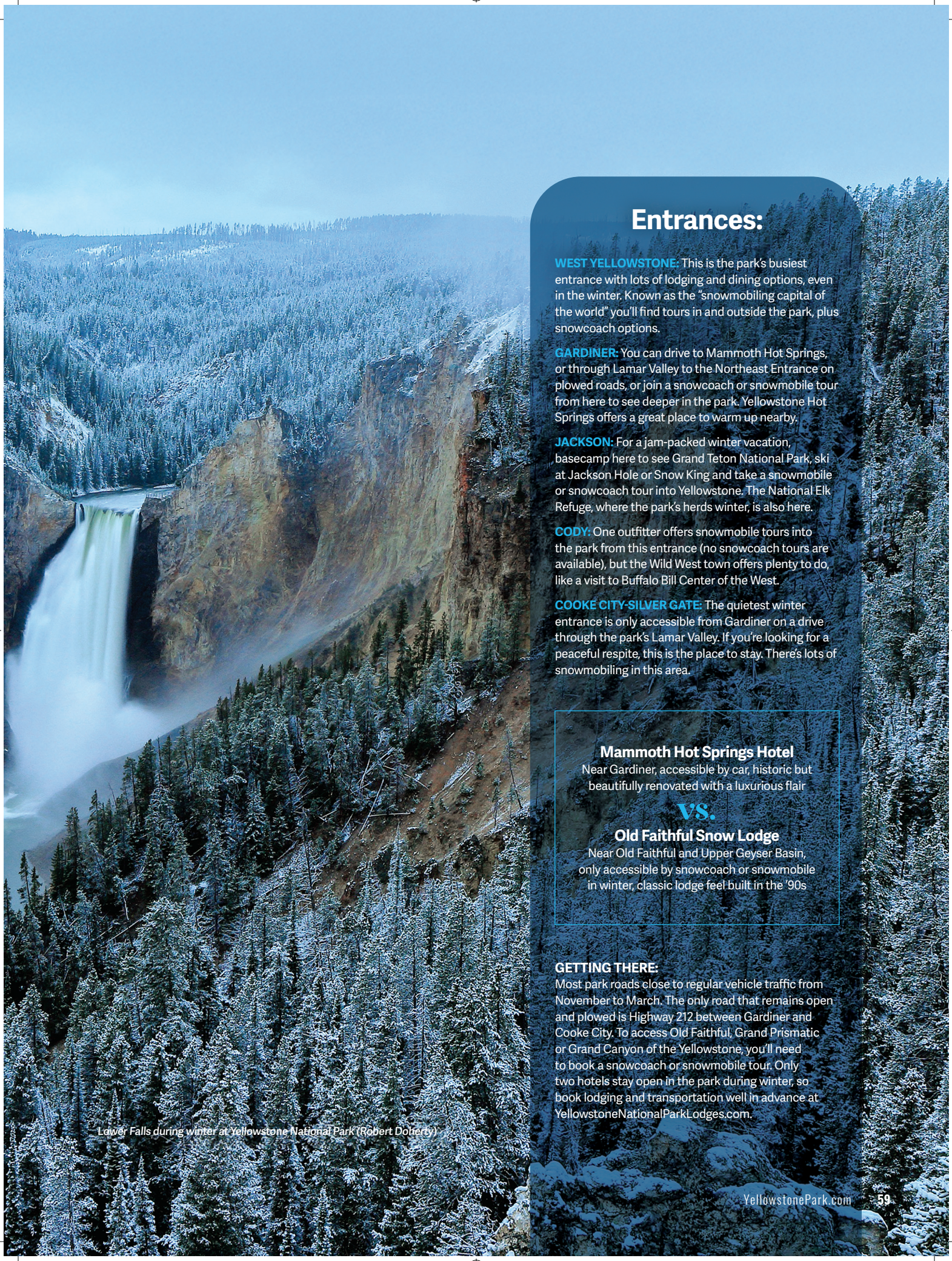
Many outfitters offer snowmobile tours on the park's roads in the winter. While you aren't as likely to see wildlife on the back of a noisy machine, exploring in the cold is an exhilarating experience and you'll spot erupting geysers and scenery galore. Tours depart from the West, North, South and East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

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 operators like Flying Pig Adventures or Montana Whitewater. Or, enjoy the serenity of the river on its banks as you soak in Yellowstone Hot Springs (pg. 57). 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.

Outdoor recreation isn't limited to summer here. As the only entrance open to motorized vehicles from outside the park in winter, Gardiner is the perfect place to plan a snowy adventure. Rent cross-country skis from Park's Fly Shop and head to nearby National Forest trails, or do a ski tour of Mammoth Hot Springs or Tower Fall. Winter is the ideal time to spot wildlife like wolves in Yellowstone's Lamar Valley on a pretty scenic drive from Gardiner. And several nearby hot springs, or Mammoth Hotel's Dining Room, provide the perfect warm up.

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 one of several food trucks. Expect live music all summer long throughout Gardiner.

Learn more at VisitGardinerMT.com.



Head West

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

By Tori Peglar

The 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 six 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 six 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.

Afterward, 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 7 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.



Rustic & Refined

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

By Lindsey Falkenburg







During the winter Big Sky is bustling with snow sports enthusiasts chasing turns and snowy trails (pg. 54). 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 easy 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. **Big Sky Resort** is the second largest ski area in the United States, but in summer 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, side-by-side tours 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 gourmet 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 **Gravity Haus,** a modern property right downtown with fitness amenities like cold plunge and sauna included in your stay, plus curated activities and coworking space. Or book rooms at **Rainbow Ranch Lodge**, a stunning spot that combines world class resort services with the rustic beauty of Montana. For a luxurious stay, **One&Only Moonlight Basin** has direct access to Big Sky's slopes via a gondola. Stay in a private cabin or home tucked into the mountain landscape.

Learn more at VisitBigSky.com.

Horseback riding, whitewater rafting, hiking
(All images courtesy of Visit Big Sky)

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VISITBIGSKY.COM





Boot display at Atomic 79 (Courtesy of Tempest Technologies/Visit Southwest Montana)

Wild, Weird & Wonderful

Sure, you'll find wide open skies and rugged beauty, but from paranormal encounters to gem hunting, dare to discover something new in towns like Helena, Deer Lodge and Dillon. Here are five of our favorite activities.

By Amelia Arvesen

1 Tour the new Montana Heritage Center

More than 20 years in the making, the renovated and expanded Montana Heritage Center is officially open in the state capital of Helena. Explore Montana's history from its earliest beginnings to today through exhibits highlighting Native American history and battles, the "boom and bust" of the mining eras and rich ranching and farming heritage. Wander through three museum galleries housing all kinds of artifacts, a library and archives research center, and the cafe and gift shop. Admission is free for all visitors.

2 Discover the State's Spooky Side

Nearly every community in the region offers some sort of paranormal experience, linked to the region's rough-and-tumble 19th century mining history, which was fraught with infamous characters and unresolved tragic events. In Deer Lodge, the Old Montana Prison & Auto Museum Complex hosts overnight ghost tours and investigations. In Butte, stay at the haunted and historic Myra Brothel and Hotel, and join Spooks and Spirits Haunted Tours for a two-hour trip through historically verified hauntings. And don't miss Anaconda's Gunslinger Gulch, a 1800s-era ghost town turned guest ranch. Listen for footsteps, shutting doors and other spooky happenings—if you're brave enough to go.

3 Indulge in the Arts

From live bands at breweries to large-scale productions in historic theaters, Southwest Montana embraces drama all year long but particularly in the summer. Plan a night out at one of the following: The Opera House Theatre in Philipsburg hosts three different plays every season, while Montana Shakespeare in the Parks travels through the state's small towns. Catch a flick from the comfort of your car or a lawn chair at Butte's Silver Bow Drive-In, or settle into the seats with popcorn at the art-deco Washoe Theatre in Anaconda. Over in Virginia City, burlesque-cabaret musical skits produce belly laughs at Brewery Follies.

4 Shop for Made-in-Montana Western Wear

This region is ripe with artisans, if you couldn't tell from all the art galleries. Take something special home from your visit. In Dillon, the western gear store Atomic 79 is home to Schwarz Custom Boots, where you can design and order a one-of-a-kind pair made by hand using age-old techniques. And in Jackson, Buffalo Gal Hat Company is housed in an old church and crafts custom felt cowboy hats to your liking.

5 Try Rockhounding

More than a century ago, prospectors combed this land in search of gold, then copper, earning Butte the nickname of "the Richest Hill on Earth." More recently, Philipsburg has become known for sapphires big enough to cut and place into settings. Just off the Pioneer Scenic Byway south of Wise River, Crystal Park is one of Montana's most popular rockhounding hotspots, open from Memorial Day to Labor Day with a $5 entry fee per vehicle. Bring your own shovel and sifter, and dig to your heart's delight.

Learn more at SouthwestMT.com.

– LET –

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The Richest Hill on Earth

Discover the legacy left behind by copper mining in this fascinating town.

By Mikaela Ruland

Driving along Interstate 90, a curious sight comes into view. Tucked among the rolling Montana hills, a scene plucked straight from the turn of the century appears. Red brick buildings line the streets, a sign reading "Hotel Finlen" peeks over the roofs and a wooden mining headframe is still visible. But this isn't a movie set. It's one of the country's largest National Historic Districts: Butte Montana, a.k.a., "the Richest Hill on Earth."

Head to the Butte Chamber of Commerce where you can board a trolley to learn more about this fascinating town. Once the largest city between Chicago and San Francisco, Butte's historic district encompasses 6,000 grand and fascinating buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. This town housed 60,000 people at its peak and was the center of a booming copper mining industry.

On the 90-minute trolley tour your guide will share the area's thrilling past as you tour the historic district. Then, you'll learn about the mining itself. The trolley tour grants free admission to the Berkeley Pit Viewing Stand where you can look out at a relic of America's mining industry. In the 1950s, Butte's mining moved above ground to utilize a new technology known as open pit mining. After the mile-long Berkeley open pit mine was closed in 1982, groundwater began to fill in the hole. Butte looks a little different today, with $1 billion invested in restoring the surrounding environment. The trolley passes the Word Museum of Mining, but it's worth a stop on its own. Explore a replica 1890s mine town and check out the real Orphan Girl Mine, including a journey 100 feet down the original shaft. Underground you can see the Orphan Girl vein.

When you inevitably get hungry, you must try a Cornish pasty. A lunch favored by Irish miners thanks to its portability, these hand-held savory pies have stuck around and are a favorite of Butte residents today. Try them at Joe's Pasty Shop. Most locals skip smothering it in chili, but there's a big divide on whether to order with gravy or ketchup.

While you'll find all sorts of lodging options in Butte, its most intriguing stays are its historic ones. Lucky visitors who plan in advance can check in to William Clark's Copper King Mansion, now a bed and breakfast. The Finlen Hotel is another fun spot, built in the style of New York's Waldorf Astoria in 1924.

Learn more at VisitButte.com.





Boom Town

Connect with an iconic rags-to-riches past in Anaconda.

By Mikaela Ruland

Anaconda was built on smelting, the process of extracting metal from ore, and still holds its mining roots close today. In 1883 mining magnet Marcus Daly founded the town to process copper ore from the mines in nearby Butte. While the smelter was shut down in 1980 and cleanup efforts began, the original 585-foot smokestack remains standing and is the tallest freestanding masonry structure in the world. The stack, which is taller than the Washington Monument, sits in Montana's smallest state park, Stack State Park. The stack can only be viewed from a distance, except for one day a year on Smelterman's Day. In August, the town celebrates its heritage with live music, a brew fest, a parade and fun run, an art walk and more.

On this day, the public can take a tour with a ranger to the stack and see it up-close.

On weekdays throughout the summer at 10 a.m., you can learn more about the town's history by boarding a vintage 1936 tour bus that used to carry tourists in Glacier National Park 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.

Once you learn about the history of the town, it's time to focus on the present and that's the incredible outdoor opportunities that await you. Take Highway 1, 20 minutes northwest to Georgetown Lake, a reservoir that sits higher in elevation than town making it the perfect place to cool off in the summer. Rent a kayak or stand-up paddleboard at Moose Marina or enjoy a picnic along the shores of the lake.

Get a taste of the Continental Divide Trail by hiking the 13-mile out-and-back section to Upper Seymour Lake. Start at the trailhead just past Lower Seymour Lake Campground and hike to the stunningly clear alpine lake framed by craggy peaks. For a mellower hike right in town, hit Anaconda's trail system at the end of Cedar Street near the Visitor Center. You'll reach a junction at 0.4 miles where you can head east to see the site of the Old Works Smelter.

If you're camping, Lost Creek State Park is one of the area's best kept secrets. Forested campsites with views of picturesque cliff bands await. Don't miss the short hike to Lost Creek Falls, where a 50-foot waterfall cascades down the mountain.

Or, for a unique perspective on the surrounding Montana wilderness, experience it from the air. Book an adventure with Montana Zipline Adventures just outside of Anaconda where you'll soar through the air at the state's longest zipline course.

Learn more at DiscoverAnaconda.com.





Downtown Philipsburg (Courtesy of Philipsburg Chamber of Commerce)

Phenomenal Philipsburg

Uncover treasures in one of Montana's sweetest towns.

By Tori Peglar

With 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. Afterward, 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.

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 million 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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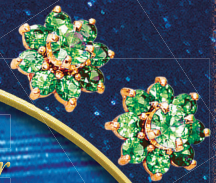

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M is for Missoula

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

By Tori Peglar

Nestled 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.



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

To 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 visitor center 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.

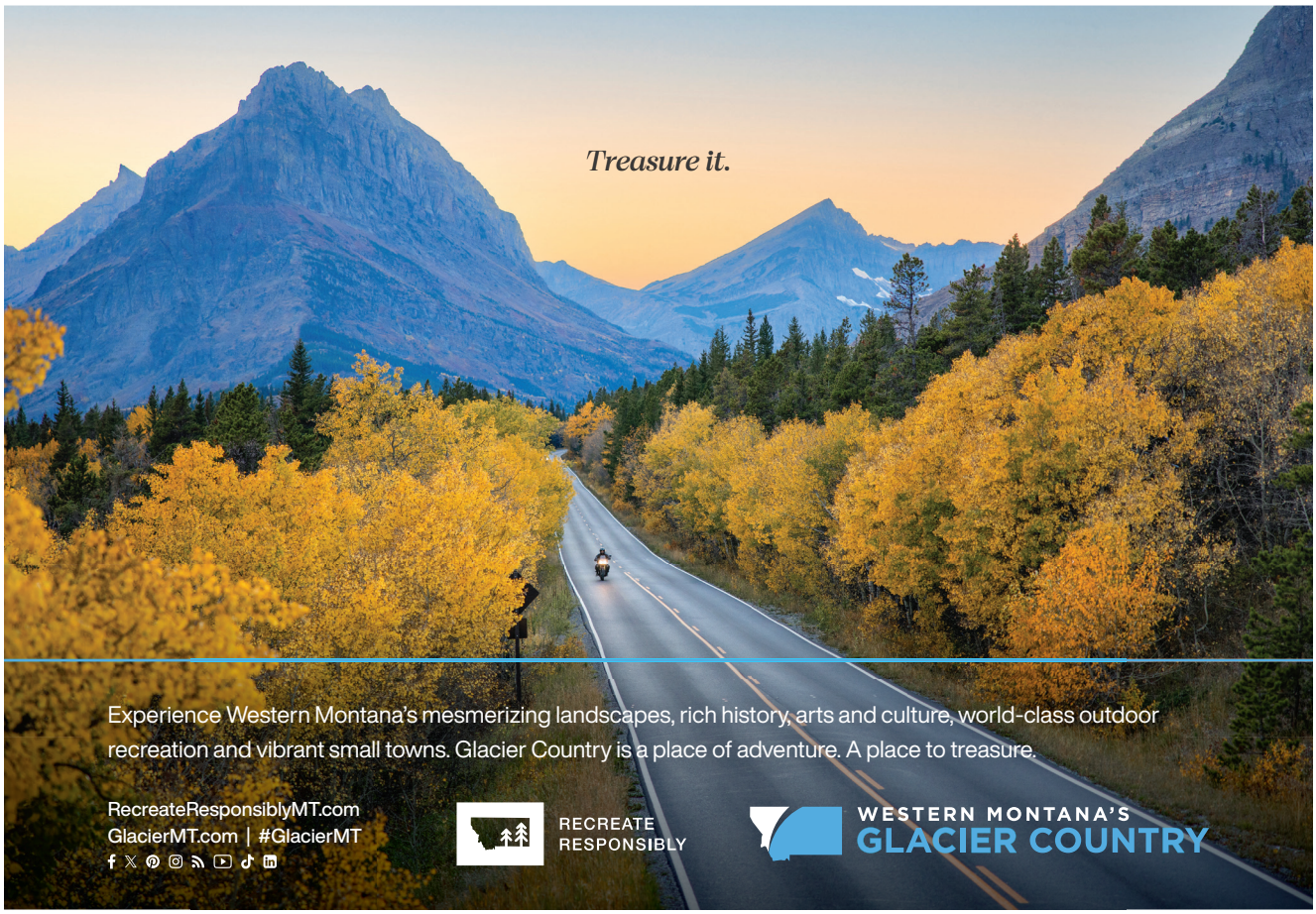
Continue north on Highway 93 for another 30 minutes until you reach Ninepipes Lodge in Charlo where you can dine at Allentown Restaurant on the property. Along with serving great breakfasts, lunches and dinners, this lovely restaurant with huge windows gives mesmerizing views of Mount Calowahcan and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





Bowman Lake (Bethany Kamman)

North Fork

The Crown of the Continent has become justifiably popular in recent years, with more than 3 million visitors in 2025. Thanks to a very short summer season, crowds are commonplace in most of Glacier National Park in July and August, lodging is hard to find and parking lots are packed. But there's a secret part of the park few visitors frequent.

North Fork feels like a step back in time, where you're just as likely to hear the call of a loon as you are screaming children and honking horns. Located on the northwest side of the park, access is via North Fork Road from Whitefish, the majority of which is a tedious, washboarded dirt road. It's not a technical drive when dry, but it does take patience and self sufficiency. There isn't much in the way of services or cell reception up here, besides the Polebridge Ranger Station and the Polebridge Mercantile where you should absolutely stop for a huckleberry bear claw.

Continue into the park to beautiful Bowman or Kintla lakes and you'll be rewarded with utter peace and quiet and the breathtaking mountain views the park is known for. Four campgrounds, picnic areas and many trails dot the area. Try the Bowman Lake Trail, which extends all the way to Upper Waterton Lake, connecting to Canada via a ferry. Hike as long as you like before turning around, keeping your eyes peeled for thimbleberries in the summer.

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"The Nublet is a short climb above Magog Lake, and we made it our goal on a thru-hike of Mount Assiniboine Provincial Park. The view stretched from the jagged summit of Assiniboine to the glowing larch trees below."
- Outside's Sierra Ducatt

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Montana's Heart

Discover a sprinkling of small towns that are chock full of fascinating history, but also alive with modern vibrancy in the form of boutique hotels, cool breweries and amazing outdoor recreation in Central Montana.

By Mikaela Ruland

Fort 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. Afterward, 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. Enjoy dinner and drinks at Central Feed Grilling Company. Named after the grain elevator the restaurant resides in, the building also houses Big Springs Brewing. The upscale restaurant features Montana ingredients on a menu filled with steaks, burgers and sandwiches.

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.



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