

TAKE YOUR TIME AND EXPLORE WHAT FOLKS IN MONTANA ALREADY KNOW.

Growing up in Montana, I never took for granted the spectacular wide-open spaces that make our state one of the last truly unspoiled places on Earth. Montana is still a place where you can walk for miles and see more elk, bear and trout than people. Our world-class rivers, majestic mountains and rolling plains are where I hunt, fish and hike with my family. We hope your travels will give you the same special memories we have from growing up here. On behalf of the people of Montana, we invite you to join us in exploring the “Last Best Place.”



Steve Bullock, Governor of Montana



Governor Steve Bullock and family



Star trails over Lake McDonald in Glacier National Park

MONTANA

It's time.

Most people don't even know places like this exist.

But here it is, waiting for you to find it—mountains and valleys, bears and bison, waterfalls and trout streams.

The sky feels bigger here. The locals on downtown streets and well-worn bar stools are friendlier. And every once in a while, a herd of elk crossing the road causes a traffic jam.

You're probably flipping through this guide because Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks are on your bucket list. And if you haven't been yet, by all means, get to planning—they're spectacular beyond words. But don't stop there, because between them lies a world of nature, history and recreation worthy of a lifetime of exploration.

You've been dreaming of locking eyes with a bison. Of cresting the Continental Divide thousands of feet above the valley floor. Of skiing without lift lines. Of finally visiting a place like this.

Permission granted.

Montana. It's time.



Hiker near Cracker Lake in Glacier National Park



Grizzly bear cubs in Yellowstone National Park



Fly fishing on the Yellowstone River



Mount Oberlin in Glacier National Park

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

Glacier National Park is the center of a vast collection of wilderness and natural wonders known as the Crown of the Continent. It spreads north into Canada's Waterton Lakes National Park, south into the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and east into the plains of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

No matter how long your visit to Glacier, you'll wish you could extend it. Those who have made the area their home will tell you they're still exploring, crossing places and events off their bucket lists. Below, you'll find a few things to add to yours.



Glacier Park Boat Company at Many Glacier in Glacier National Park

CAN'T-MISS OPPORTUNITIES

The easiest and most popular way to see Glacier in the summer is by driving the **Going-to-the-Sun Road**. Completed in 1932, it is a true engineering marvel that climbs over the Continental Divide, connecting the west entrance at West Glacier to the east entrance at St. Mary. Even those visitors who never venture outside their vehicles are treated to views of turquoise glacial lakes, massive mountains and the park's iconic wildlife.

Better than driving yourself, though, is a guided tour, either in a vintage 1930s convertible **Red Jammer bus** or with **Sun Tours**, which offers a Native American perspective.

Glacier's scenery can also be explored on the water. **Glacier Park Boat Company** offers guided tours on five of the park's glacial lakes

in vintage wooden boats. These tours include views you won't find anywhere else, as well as interesting stories about the park and the boats themselves.

Perhaps the most rewarding way to see Glacier National Park is on foot. **Hiking the park's 700+ miles of trails** not only provides an opportunity to more closely connect with nature, but is also the only way to access the vast majority of Glacier's more than one million acres.

Trails range in difficulty and remoteness from the wheelchair-accessible Trail of the Cedars boardwalk to the harrowing Garden Wall traverse to a myriad of multiday backpacking routes. Several of the trails in the park can also be explored on **guided horseback trips**.



Guided tours at Many Glacier Hotel



North Fork of the Flathead River

DIGGING DEEPER

Several outfitters offer scenic floats and whitewater rafting trips on the rivers that form the southern and western borders of Glacier National Park—the Middle Fork and the North Fork of the Flathead River, respectively.

Both of these rivers also boast excellent fishing. If you've got a day to spend with a guide learning the ins and outs, Glacier can be one of the best places in the world to get bitten by the fly fishing bug.

Venturing out onto the park's western border river comes with an added benefit—you're likely to discover the remote town of Polebridge hiding near the end of the unpaved

North Fork Road. This off-the-grid community is home to the famous Polebridge Mercantile and its selection of baked goods, a rustic eatery and access to Glacier's northwest entrance. From here you can drive to the stunning shore of Bowman Lake, but it's all hiking from there.

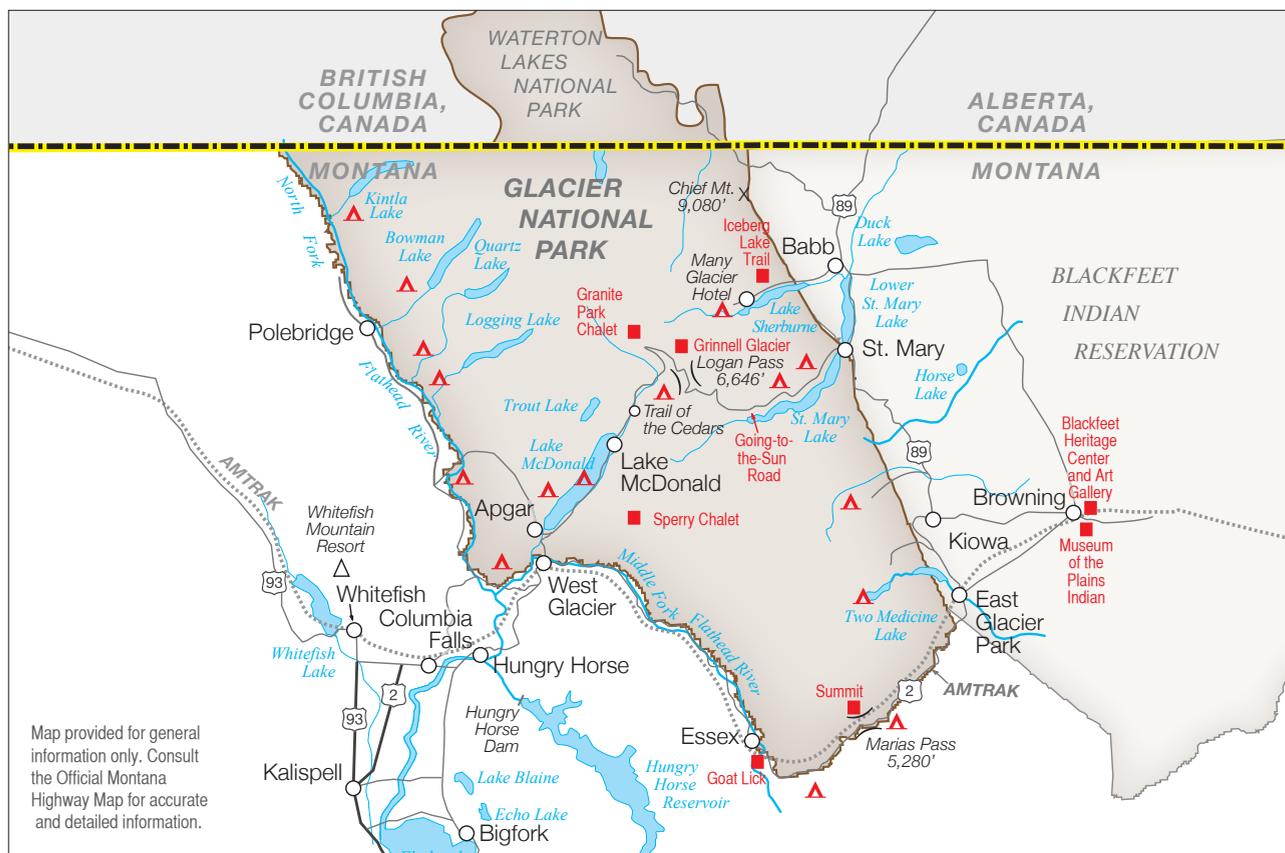
See or stay in at least one of the park's three main historic log-construction lodges—Lake McDonald Lodge, Many Glacier Hotel and Glacier Park Lodge. If you're a bit more adventurous, the Sperry Chalet and Granite Park Chalet are unique hike-in lodging options.



View from the Going-to-the-Sun Road



Mountain goat in Glacier National Park



EXPLORING THE AREA

There are several **charming small towns** in and around the park—Whitefish with its picturesque downtown, Bigfork on the north end of Flathead Lake, Browning on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation and many others.

Also worth considering are the Hungry Horse Dam and the reservoir of the same name, the **Bob Marshall Wilderness Area** and a string of roadside stands featuring an endless array of delicious huckleberry products along US 2 between West Glacier and Columbia Falls.

Each of these and many places in between offer opportunities to find your unique Montana moment. For more detailed information, turn to the Glacier Country section on page 24.

FURTHER EXPLORATION: For more on Glacier National Park and what the surrounding area has to offer, check out visitmt.com, nps.gov/glac and crownofthecontinent.net.



Old Faithful near West Yellowstone, Gateway to Yellowstone National Park

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

The world's first national park is one of the planet's most unique collections of geography, geothermal activity and wildlife. Bison, grizzly bears and wolves live here among other large species just as they did in 1872, and thousands of geysers provide a backdrop for the historic lodges, mountains, rivers and canyons that make this one of the most spectacular places in America.

Yellowstone is enormous—more than two million acres—and fortunately, much of the park is accessible by car or RV. But to get the most out of your Yellowstone visit, you'll want to stretch your legs on a hike or two, and make time to visit the charming small towns at the park's three Montana entrances.



Bison near Tower Junction in Yellowstone National Park

CAN'T-MISS OPPORTUNITIES

The roads in Yellowstone National Park form a large “lower loop” in the center, with arms reaching out to the park's five entrances to make **seeing Yellowstone by car** easy no matter where you begin.

Geothermal activity defines Yellowstone in many ways, and dependable features like the **Old Faithful geyser** are rightly some of its most popular attractions. The Old Faithful complex includes a fantastic visitor center and makes a good first or second stop when driving the lower loop.

Many of the most interesting geothermal features can be found elsewhere along the lower loop, however. **Norris Geyser Basin** is north of Old Faithful and includes the rarely

erupting but spectacular Steamboat Geyser. And Midway Geyser Basin includes **Grand Prismatic Spring**—stunningly colored by bacteria that feed on its boiling water and the subject of some of the park's most iconic photographs.

The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone is well worth the trip on its own, and can be explored several different ways. We recommend a short hike to one of the lookouts with a view of the Lower Falls.

Large animals are often seen from roads throughout the park, but the **Lamar Valley** is one of the most common places for successful **wildlife viewing**.



View of the Absaroka Mountains from Livingston

DIGGING DEEPER

We've only scratched the surface so far, but when you slow down, extend your stay and venture off the beaten path in Yellowstone, you can find some truly memorable experiences.

The family-style dining at the **Roosevelt Lodge Cabins** is a good start. Finding a secluded spring-fed river bend to test your fly fishing prowess is the next step, followed by a much deeper exploration of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone and the area south of Grant Village.

Boat tours are available on Yellowstone Lake, where you'll find that even a large body of water cannot quell the geothermal energy brewing beneath the Earth's thin crust.

But it's only when you begin to explore the more than **1,100 miles of hiking trails in Yellowstone** that you unlock the true power of this primordial place.



Pronghorn in Paradise Valley



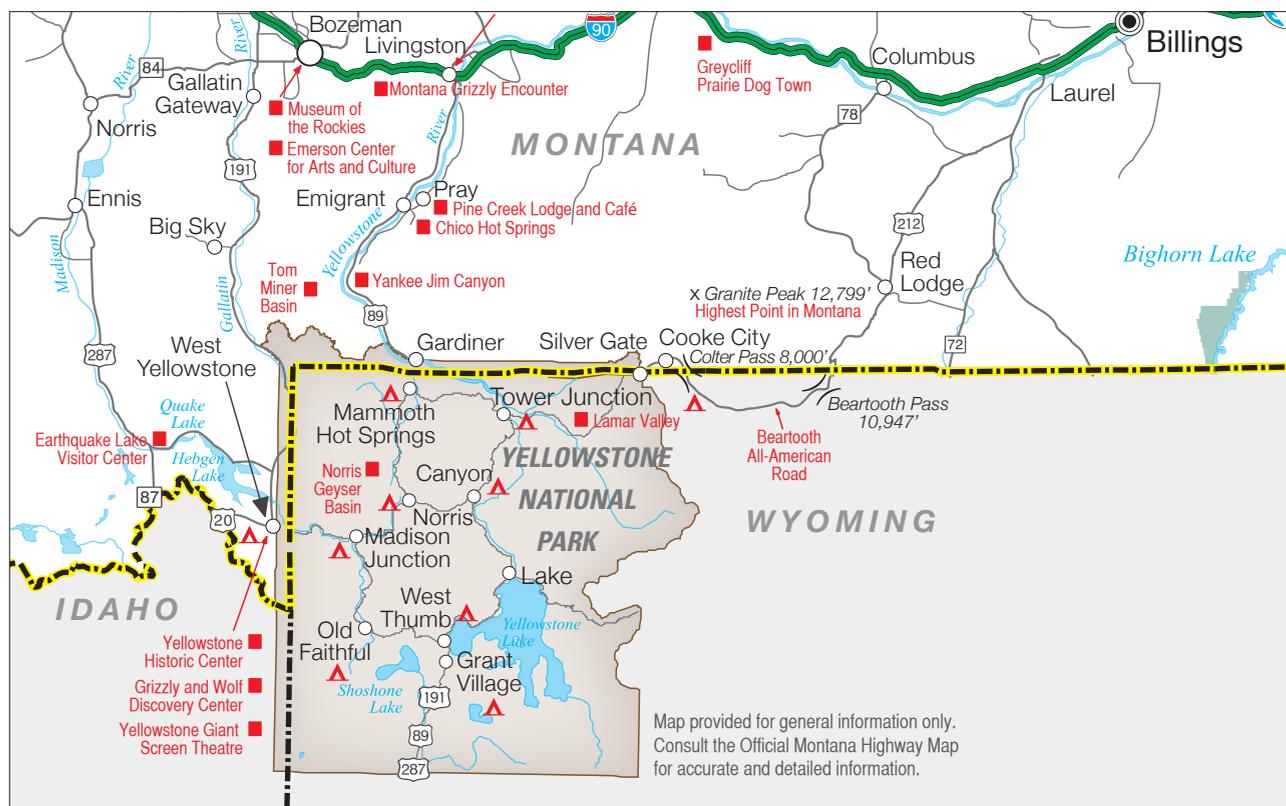
Grand Prismatic Spring near West Yellowstone



Mammoth Terraces near Gardiner



Bison near Gardiner, Gateway to Yellowstone National Park



EXPLORING THE AREA

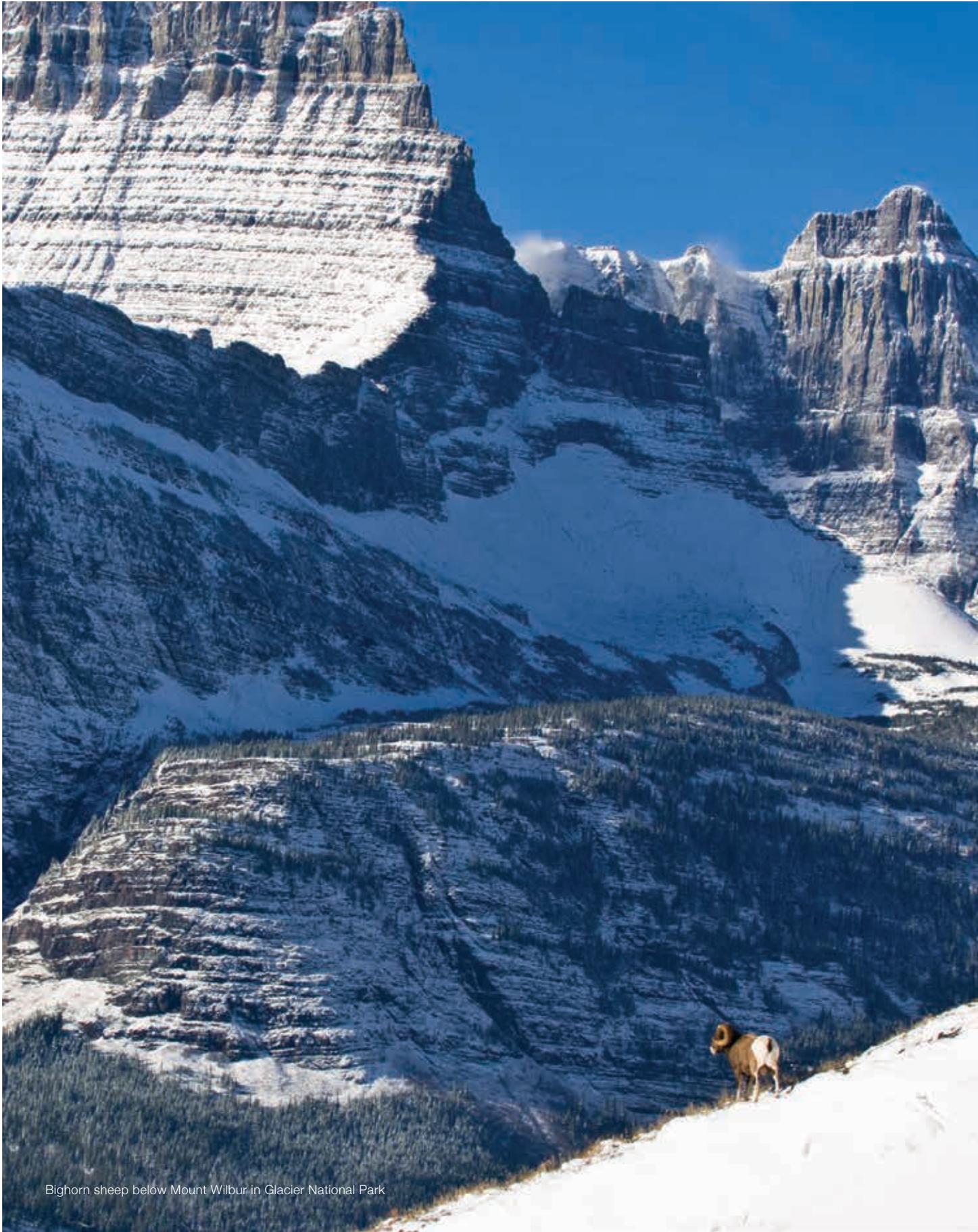
It may take a little longer, but there is nothing in the world like the drive from downtown Red Lodge, over the **shockingly beautiful Beartooth Highway** and into rustic Cooke City and through Yellowstone's northeast entrance.

West Yellowstone, at the park's west entrance, is only a little way from Big Sky Resort, and from there it's an easy drive to Bozeman, one of Montana's cultural hubs and a good base camp for a Yellowstone trip.

The north entrance, including **the original Roosevelt Arch**, is in Gardiner, Montana. From there, a scenic drive north through the aptly named Paradise Valley and past Chico Hot Springs leads to Livingston, the original Montana railroad stop for Yellowstone visitors.

Much like the rest of Montana, Yellowstone is too big and full of surprises for you to just show up and lounge about—it's a destination built for constant exploration. And between these mountains, prairies and rivers is your perfect Montana experience. For more detailed information on the area, turn to page 56.

FURTHER EXPLORATION: For more on Yellowstone National Park and what the surrounding area has to offer, check out visitmt.com, nps.gov/yell and yellowstonegeotourism.org.



Bighorn sheep below Mount Wilbur in Glacier National Park

WINTER IN MONTANA

When the snow flies (and fly it does), Montana is transformed. The majesty and solitude of our two national parks are often much easier to find under a blanket of snow. Our 15 ski areas are drastically less crowded than what you're likely to find in other states. And the wildlife we're famous for is sometimes even easier to encounter than in other seasons.

We've got mountains to ski or snowboard, ice to climb, hot springs to discover and trails to explore on Nordic skis, snowshoes, dogsled or snowmobile. Here are a few ideas to get you started.



Whitefish Mountain Resort in Whitefish

CAN'T-MISS OPPORTUNITIES

In Montana, four inches of snow might turn into the deepest day you've ever had on the slopes. Why? Because it also snowed six inches yesterday and four the day before that, lift lines are almost unheard of, and there just aren't enough people on the slopes to ski everything off before noon.

Whether you're gazing into Glacier National Park as you ascend **Whitefish Mountain Resort's** Big Mountain Express, driving up to encounter Lone Peak towering above Big Sky for the first time or just finding that your legs get a workout more quickly than you're used to, Montana takes skiing to another level.

Montana's 15 ski areas fall into three categories: mom-and-pop hills with serious character and low-priced lift tickets, day areas with terrain to rival anything in the country without the trappings of a full resort and some of the biggest, best resorts in the country. And that doesn't even include the endless backcountry ski terrain throughout the state.

All three categories have a secret weapon: they're in Montana. Which means that after a day at **Bridger Bowl** or **Big Sky**, a snowmobile ride or a snowcoach tour to **Old Faithful in Yellowstone** is definitely on the menu. And don't forget après-ski refreshment options as well. Montana ranks third in the nation for breweries per capita, meaning one of our **53 taprooms** is certainly never far.



Snowmobiling near West Yellowstone



Sleigh ride dinner at Lone Mountain Ranch near Big Sky



Downtown Whitefish

DIGGING DEEPER

Cross-country skiing in Montana is the real deal, with hundreds of miles of groomed trails across the state. The **Izaak Walton Inn** in Essex is a quick drive from Whitefish and makes it easy to unplug as you explore its network of trails without TV or cell service. For cross-country skiing near Big Sky Resort, **Lone Mountain Ranch** offers miles of groomed trails, as well as sleigh-ride dinners as a perfect cap to the day.

Just inside Yellowstone National Park between Gardiner and Mammoth Hot Springs is an unmarked parking lot. From there, a half-mile walk along the Gardner River leads to the **Boiling River**, a spot where a natural hot

spring mixes with cold river water to form perfectly heated pools for soaking along the river's edge. Hot spring pools and resorts abound across the state as well. **Chico Hot Springs** to the north of Yellowstone and **Fairmont Hot Springs** northwest of Butte are both popular family-friendly destinations that will take the chill off.

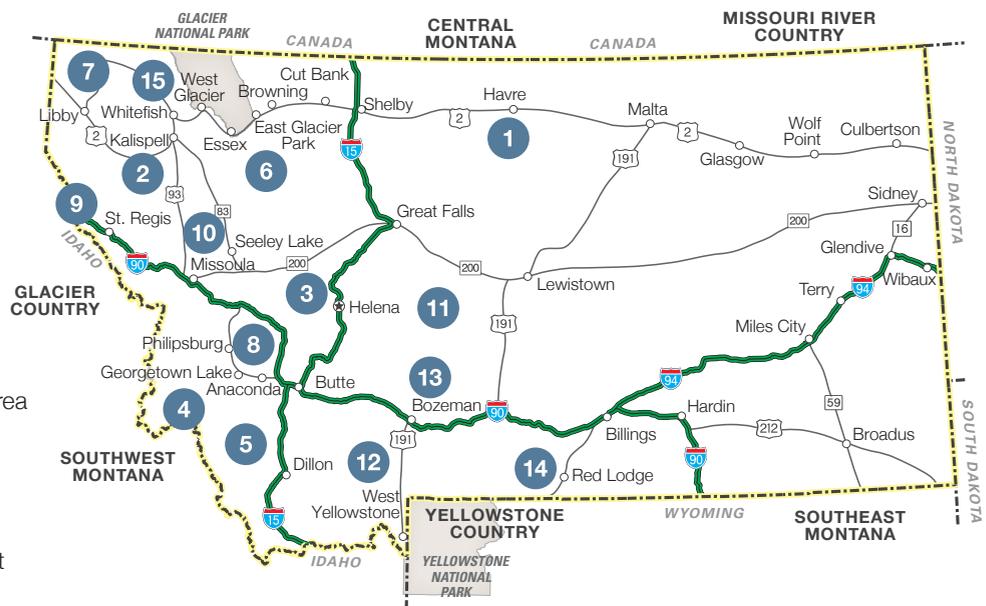
In Glacier National Park, guided **snowshoe tours** and **cross-country trails** give new perspective to views routinely seen by car or on foot in summer. In Yellowstone, snowcoaches offer tours to passengers along the park's lower loop, to and from the still-open Old Faithful complex. And in both parks, animals can be easier to track and spot against the fields of pure white snow.



Cross-country skiing near Whitefish

15 UNDISCOVERED SKI AREAS

1. Bear Paw Ski Bowl
2. Blacktail Mountain Ski Area
3. Great Divide
4. Lost Trail Powder Mountain
5. Maverick Mountain
6. Teton Pass
7. Turner Mountain
8. Discovery Ski Area
9. Lookout Pass Ski and Rec Area
10. Montana Snowbowl
11. Showdown Montana
12. Big Sky Resort
13. Bridger Bowl
14. Red Lodge Mountain Resort
15. Whitefish Mountain Resort



Both West Yellowstone and Cooke City transform into **snowmobile meccas** during winter, leaving a layer of snow on the streets to facilitate easy transport by sled to and from Yellowstone's entrances, your dinner and hotel.

If you're looking to try **winter camping**, yurt rentals, available at a variety of scenic locations, combine the adventure of sleeping in wild country with creature comforts like a bed and wood stove. Throughout Montana, the northern tradition of traveling via dog power lives on with **guided dogsled tours**. Hold on to your hat—they move faster than you might think.

In Montana, snow is more than just something we have to shovel from our driveways—it's a whole other season of opportunity to find the moments that make life interesting.

FURTHER EXPLORATION: For more on winter in Montana, check out visitmt.com.

OUTDOORS & ADVENTURE

It's time. To experience Montana's vast outdoor playground. Whether rivers, lakes, mountains or prairies are more your style, getting outside is one of the best ways to recharge your spirit. With more than 3.4 million acres spread between 15 distinct wilderness areas, you're surrounded by opportunities to bike, hike, camp, boat, fish, sightsee and more.



North Fork of the Flathead River

CAN'T-MISS OPPORTUNITIES

There are more than 3,223 named lakes and reservoirs in Montana. **Flathead Lake**, in northwest Montana, is the largest natural freshwater lake west of the Mississippi. It boasts quaint lakeside towns and water-based activities, as well as a healthy sailing community that throws the occasional regatta. To the east, **Fort Peck Lake** is a vast oasis in the prairie, with fantastic walleye and northern pike fishing, winter ice fishing and more total shoreline than the entire state of California.

Montana's rivers have inspired generations of fishermen, and more recently, whitewater enthusiasts. In western Montana, the **Flathead River** offers equal parts trout habitat and whitewater on the boundary of Glacier National Park. The city of Missoula has engineered a feature on the Clark Fork River called **Brennan's Wave** that lets kayakers "surf" in one spot and practice tricks.

The Yellowstone, America's longest undammed river, follows I-90 across much of the state and also provides whitewater rafting, canoeing, fishing opportunities and more.

Hiking in Montana is endless, as you might imagine. For destination hikes to waterfalls in south-central Montana, **Natural Bridge Falls** and **Palisades Falls** are great options; in the northwest, don't miss **Kootenai Falls**. For longer journeys on foot, the **Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness** and the **Bob Marshall Wilderness** are both places where you could trek for days without seeing another person. Horse pack trips via area outfitters make these vast wild areas even more accessible.



Mountain biking near Bozeman



Camping in Southeast Montana

DIGGING DEEPER

One of the less populated areas of Montana is home to some amazing, unique geologic formations. **Makoshika State Park** near Glendive is filled with scenic badlands and is also Montana's largest state park, while **Medicine Rocks State Park** campground might be one of the most uniquely scenic places to pitch a tent in the state. When you're in the area, visit the Terry Badlands Wilderness Study Area. There you'll find the **Calypso Trail**, which features amazing spires and natural bridges.

For sublime beauty in central Montana near Great Falls, **Sluice Boxes State Park** is another place to bring your camera as you hike, fish, picnic or raft through the remains of old mines, a railroad and historic cabins lining the dramatic Belt Creek Canyon.

To see what was once called one of the most scenic stretches of railroad in the country, you'll need a bike.

Montana is the gateway to the **Route of the Hiawatha Trail**, which starts at Lookout Pass, alongside I-90 west of Missoula, and crosses into Idaho. The non-motorized route takes cyclists through open tunnels and over high trestles.

To see the biggest trees in Montana, head north near Libby, to the **Ross Creek Cedars Scenic Area**. These 500-year-old behemoths grow to 12 feet in diameter and 175 feet tall. A paved nature trail and extended day hike trail allow one to really experience the impressive canopy of an old-growth forest.

The best-kept secret in Montana might just be the **Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area**, which straddles the border between Montana and Wyoming a couple hours south of Billings. Canyon walls more than 1,000 feet high contain the long, narrow Bighorn Lake, where boating, fishing and kayaking are all popular.



Near Polson south of Flathead Lake

HISTORY & CULTURE

Long before the name Montana defined this place back in 1889, there were animals and people who called these mountains, valleys and plains their home. The stories of early inhabitants are examples of innovation and toughness shaped by necessity and survival, and ignite the history lover in all of us. Dinosaurs, Native American culture, Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery, mining's heyday and the settling of the West—they all happened right here.



Digging for fossils at Makoshika State Park near Glendive



Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Crow Agency

CAN'T-MISS OPPORTUNITIES

The Montana Dinosaur Trail is a collaborative of 14 dinosaur-themed museums and state parks. Bozeman's **Museum of the Rockies** hosts one of the largest collections of dinosaur fossils in the world, and farther east you'll find gems like the **Fort Peck Interpretive Center and Museum** and the **Makoshika Dinosaur Museum**.

Much of Montana's landscape remains unchanged since the Lewis and Clark Expedition's historic journey across the West more than 200 years ago, and today it's easy to fill your bucket list with monuments and interpretive centers built in their honor. Near Billings you'll find the only remaining physical evidence of the corps on the trail at **Pompeys Pillar National Monument**.

In Three Forks visit the **Headwaters Heritage Museum**, and in Great Falls the **Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center**.

Of course, the history of the West wasn't lived by just one group of people. The **Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument**, southeast of Billings off I-90, memorializes the U.S. Army's 7th Cavalry and the Sioux and Cheyenne in one of the Native Americans' last armed efforts to preserve their way of life. Both interpretive tours and self-guided audio tours are available. Farther west, near Wisdom, the **Big Hole National Battlefield** tells the story of the largest battle fought between the Nez Perce and the U.S. government.



Annual Crow Fair and Rodeo, Crow Agency

DIGGING DEEPER

For those wanting to literally dig deeper, Montana is one of those rare places where you can join in on real paleontology in action. The **Two Medicine Dinosaur Museum** in Central Montana, as well as several others on the Montana Dinosaur Trail, allow visitors to dig for fossils alongside working field paleontologists.

The first major gold discovery in Montana happened in Bannack in 1862. Now a ghost town, **Bannack State Park's** preserved buildings allow you to relive the gold rush of the American West. **Nevada and Virginia City** operate as living ghost towns, offering hands-on family-friendly activities like panning for gold and stagecoach rides. Of course, some ghost towns have not been refurbished and require imagination as they stand the test of time—and those can be just as interesting.

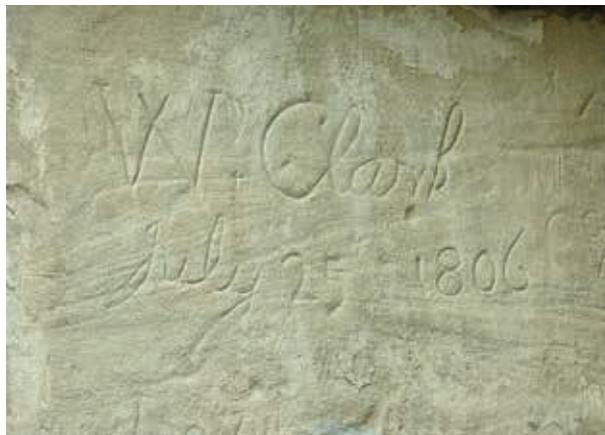
Granite Ghost Town State Park outside Philipsburg and **Marysville** outside Helena are two of the best to get you started on a ghost-hunting expedition.

Montana's ghost towns aren't the only cities with history worth exploring. Butte, one of the largest cities west of the Mississippi in the late 19th century, was built on top of a gigantic copper deposit that produced most of the wire used to first bring electricity to the United States. The once booming Uptown Butte has a hilly, charismatic flair, but don't miss a **hidden underground tour** with Old Butte Historical Adventures. For an underground mine tour, you'll want to check out the **World Museum of Mining**.

FURTHER EXPLORATION: Learn more about these destinations and other interesting historic places across Montana at visitmt.com.



Bannack State Park near Dillon



William Clark's signature at Pompeys Pillar National Monument



Prairie sunset in eastern Montana

LAST BEST PLACES

THE SIX REGIONS OF MONTANA



Montana is a big place—filled to the brim with natural wonders, charming small towns and breathtaking experiences, each different from the next. In fact, it's so big and diverse that your breadth of travel options can feel a bit overwhelming.

To help you begin planning your visit, we've split Montana into six distinct regions. You should not feel restricted by their borders, but instead take inspiration from the way Montana's geography has led to six unique collections of scenery, history, people and activities.

In the following sections, you can explore each of these regions in detail, creating an itinerary that matches your personal interests.

Montana is a special place, and one that we're all still exploring. We hope you'll join us here soon.