

GUIDEBOOK

MONTANA

Unforgettable road trips in the Big Sky state

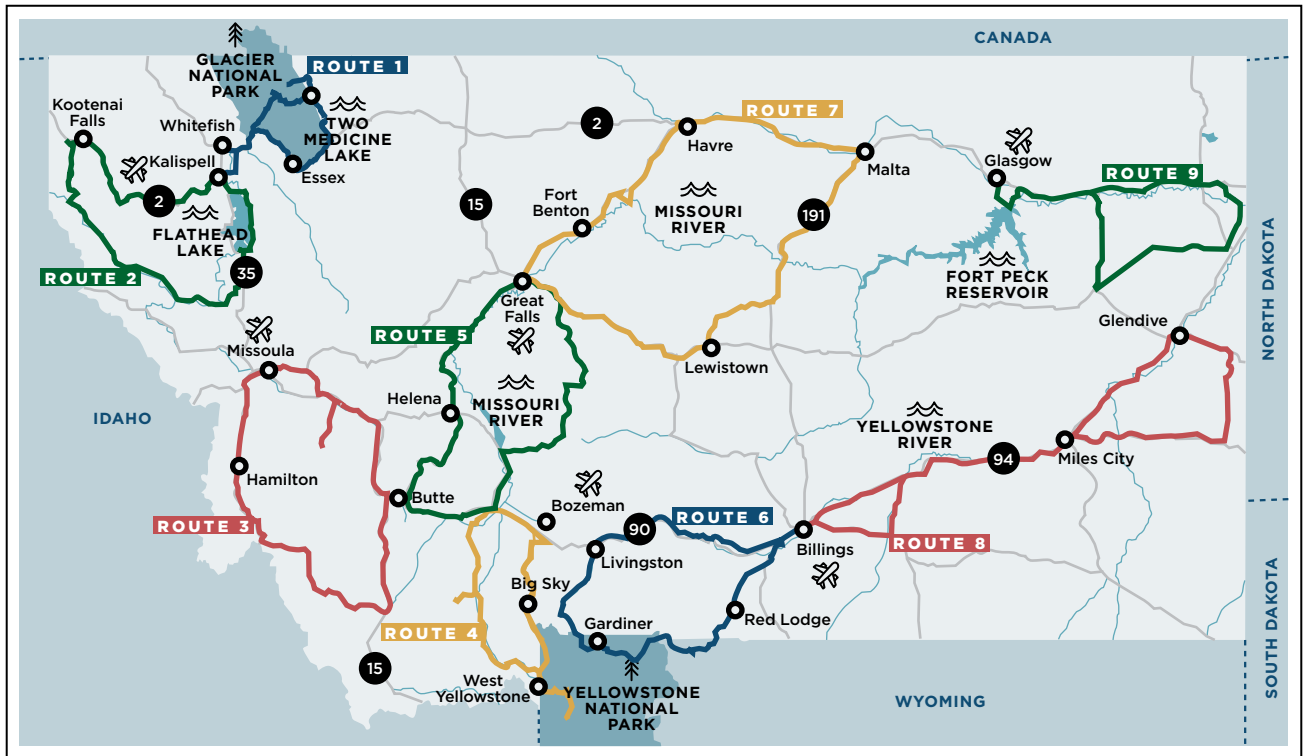
Discover your
#MONTANAMOMENT

BROUGHT TO YOU BY **TRAVEL+
LEISURE** WITH VISIT MONTANA

A scenic photograph of two people kayaking on a rocky shore of a lake. The kayakers are in bright orange kayaks, and the water is clear and greenish. The background shows a vast lake and distant mountains under a clear blue sky. The text 'BIG SKY COUNTRY BECKONS' is overlaid in white, serif font in the lower half of the image.

BIG SKY COUNTRY BECKONS

FLATHEAD
LAKE
NORTHWEST
MONTANA



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ON THE COVER
 The Milky Way glitters
 in the night sky above
 a hiker in the rugged
 Bitterroot Mountains.

**MONTANA DELIVERS
 ON ITS NICKNAME,**

with vast overhead expanses framing dramatic landscapes, including two spectacular national parks—Yellowstone and Glacier. To help you explore this epic state, Visit Montana and *Travel+Leisure* have partnered to spotlight unforgettable journeys that deliver like-no-other experiences and the best of the American West.

Here, you'll ply sparkling glacial lakes and climb rocky mountain faces. Walk where dinosaurs once roamed and legendary battles were waged. Watch cowboys kick up clouds of dust. Lift glistening trout from teeming streams. Raft down mighty rivers. And gaze upon night skies that suggest the entire universe is within reach.

On the following pages, find nine itineraries plus a winter guide to help you make your own Montana moments—the kind that linger long after the trip is over.

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NORTHWEST MONTANA

PEAK TO PEAK GLACIER VIEWS

The thrilling Going-to-the-Sun Road twists through the heart of Glacier National Park, where a million acres hold rewards for explorers of every kind. Bookend your visit to the park with stays in two mountain towns: Kalispell and Whitefish.

LAKE
JOSEPHINE

KICK THINGS OFF IN KALISPELL, THE TRAVEL HUB

for Glacier National Park and Montana's Flathead Valley. This culturally vibrant city has a secret stash of engaging museums. Spend a few hours eyeing distinctively Montana art at the **Hockaday Museum of Art**, housed in a 1904 Carnegie Library building. Galleries showcase Winold Reiss' vivid Blackfeet Indian portraits and Charles M. Russell's dime-novel cowboys and trappers, as well as works by contemporary Montana artists.

Then visit the palatial **Conrad Mansion Museum**, built in the early 1890s by architect Kirtland Cutter, mastermind of Glacier's Lake McDonald Lodge. This 26-room manor (sandstone fireplaces, Italian onyx drinking fountains, leaded glass windows) was owned by Kalispell founder Charles Conrad, who may be largely responsible for saving America's wild bison. When only about 100 remained on the continent, Conrad corralled his private herd on Kalispell's Buffalo Hill, and the animals later repopulated the National Bison Range in Moiese.

Before leaving town, nab a seat at **DeSoto Grill** and sample beef brisket and elk sausage. Then cruise northeast on U.S. 2 to Apgar, where Lake McDonald glimmers at the base of glacier-carved peaks.

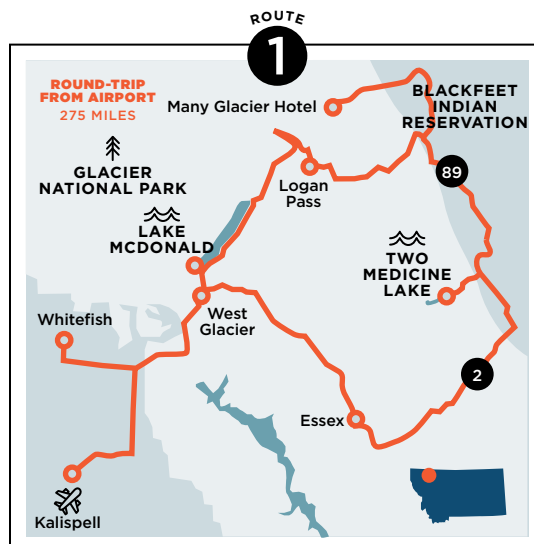
☉ **TURN TO THE SUN** Check in at seasonally open **Lake McDonald Lodge**, its massive timbers held up by historic integrity. In classic 1913 style, rooms are cozy except for the luxurious Cobb Suites. No matter—you'll want to spend the evening in the Great Room beneath glowing Indian-motif chandeliers and a menagerie of trophy animal heads. Even in summer, flames flicker in the tea-party-size rock fireplace. Daylight hours will draw you to the veranda, where Lake McDonald's 10-mile-long expanse spreads toward the horizon. Rent a kayak at the dock or take a sunset cruise on the historic wooden vessel *DeSmet*, which has plied these waters since 1930.

In the morning, grab a 7 a.m. espresso for a head start on the soul-shaking splendor of the **Going-to-the-Sun Road**. The 50-mile route begins in ancient cedar forest, then gradually climbs out of the conifers to deliver some of the West's most magnificent asphalt driving. Going-to-the-Sun's narrow ribbon—an engineering marvel dedicated in 1933—passes a string of vistas as it carves along the Garden Wall's escarpment. Snake up The Loop's sole curlicue switchback and slip underneath the Weeping Wall's showering cataract (free car wash) on the way up to **Logan Pass**, a climactic 6,646-foot summit on the Continental Divide's crest. It's easy to see why the Blackfeet Indians, whose **Blackfeet Indian Reservation** sits just east of Glacier, called this The Backbone of the World.

Park the car and visit the **Logan Pass Visitor Center**, then walk to **Hidden Lake Overlook** amid a banquet of snaggletooth peaks and

EXTEND YOUR STAY

Drive the scenic 90-mile Seeley-Swan Highway (MT-83) connecting the Flathead and Blackfoot valleys to Seeley Lake. Along the way, explore Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge. In Seeley Lake, 16-ounce steak dinners await at **Lindey's Prime Steak House**. Settle into a lakefront cabin at **Tamaracks Resort**, which dates to the early 1900s.



fragile alpine wildflowers. Furry white mountain goats nibble tundra grasses alongside the trail, unfazed by your presence.

From the summit, Going-to-the-Sun Road descends through pine and aspen groves. Stop at **Jackson Glacier Overlook** to view one of the park's 26 remaining glaciers, reduced from 150 nearly a century ago. The road swoops down to St. Mary Lake, passing one trailhead after another, each an intriguing question mark—what lies down that path? Glacier's 700-plus miles of trails lead to waterfalls, lakes, meadows and vistas—plus blue-ribbon angling, boating and camping.

☉ **LAKE VIEWS FOR DAYS** Check in at the imposing **Many Glacier Hotel** on Swiftcurrent Lake; book a year ahead to score a lake-view balcony. From the hotel's veranda, marvel at **Grinnell Point** towering over the lake's emerald depths. Place yourself in the middle of this postcard by gliding across the lake on the *Chief Two Guns* boat, then board a second boat that traverses **Lake Josephine**. You can stroll back to the hotel or follow the path to **Grinnell Lake**, its glacial-melt waters a stunning milky teal.

Drive south from Many Glacier about 55 miles to **Two Medicine Lake**, a region of rugged grandeur. Take a short ramble to Running Eagle Falls before arriving at the glacier-gouged lake, then hop on the boat taxi to shave a couple miles off the trek to electric-blue **Cobalt Lake**. Watch for bighorn sheep as you ascend past Rockwell Falls. This is Glacier's wild interior, where megafauna outnumber people.

Cross over Marias Pass, then head into Essex for a meal at the atmospheric **Izaak Walton Inn**, set at waving distance from passing Amtrak trains. Built in 1939 to house workers tending the Great Northern Railway's far-flung lines, the inn rents refurbished cabooses for overnight stays. Wander its tranquil grounds, then hit up **The Dining Car** restaurant for elk meatballs and huckleberry cobbler.

☉ **ELEVATED EATS AND SIPS** Follow the Middle Fork Flathead River back to West Glacier, then swing southwest to Whitefish. On Big Mountain, **Whitefish Mountain Resort** offers some of Montana's best winter skiing, but summer has its own thrills—30-plus miles of mountain bike trails and an exhilarating zipline. To get out on the water, rent a kayak or paddleboard from **Paddlefish Sports** on City Beach to explore Whitefish Lake. Downtown's walkable enclave is saturated with galleries, including **Sunti World Art Gallery**, home to acclaimed sculptor Sunti Pichetchaiyakul. Then choose your spot for sophisticated dining. **Abruzzo Italian Kitchen** attracts a chic crowd with artisan cocktails, from-scratch pasta and shared plates. **Bonsai Brewing Project's** critically acclaimed beers include Lil Blond Honey—made with Montana honey, of course. This might just be the perfect drink to toast the end of your Glacier road trip.

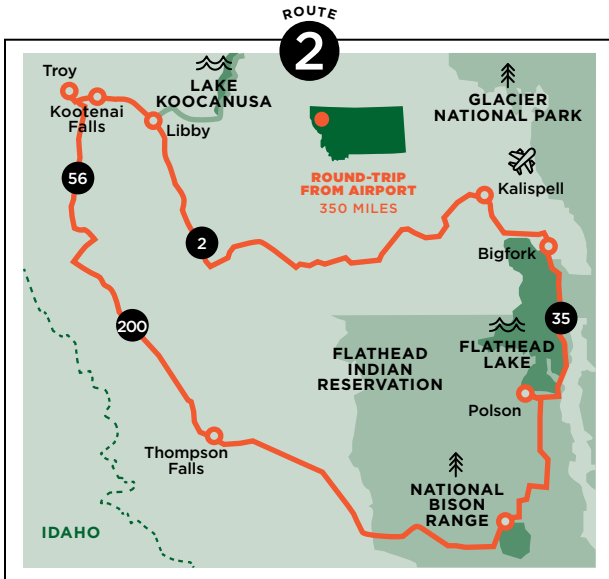
NORTHWEST MONTANA

LAND OF LAKES AND MOUNTAINS

The vast expanse of Flathead Lake, cradled by sky-high peaks, is one of northwest Montana's most iconic features. Families dot the beaches and boaters skim the water. On this road trip, join the watery fun or stay dry and savor Bigfork's well-heeled culture, then cruise through rugged Clark Fork Valley to the rushing waters of Kootenai Falls.



LAKE
KOOCANUSA



THE ARTSY, WATERFRONT ENCLAVE OF BIGFORK

serves as your gateway to Flathead Lake, the West's

largest freshwater lake with an astonishing 188 miles of shoreline.

Getting there is a breeze. After only a 30-minute drive from Kalispell, you'll be at downtown's **Pocketstone Café**, strategizing your trip over a cappuccino and eggs Benedict. Start by choosing from a summer's worth of outdoor activities—kayaking, swimming, fishing, rafting, hiking—then add in fine dining, gallery hopping and boutique shopping on **Electric Avenue**. Devote at least one evening to a Broadway-style performance at the 400-seat **Bigfork Summer Playhouse**, where the curtain has been raised every summer since 1959. Or attend a Sunday night Riverbend Concert in **Everit L. Sliter Memorial Park**, where the Swan River curves toward Bigfork Bay.

Since it's hard to turn away from the mellifluous river, book a stay in the woody-chic **Bridge Street Cottages**, steps from the water and a short walk from downtown. When evening falls, drop in to **Whistling Andy Distillery** to taste small-batch pear gin and distilled bourbon made with locally sourced ingredients.

📍 **BACK TO NATURE** The next morning, work up an appetite by walking the **Swan River Nature Trail** and watching kayakers play in the river's "Wild Mile." Hit up **Echo Lake Cafe** for fresh-squeezed orange juice and big-as-your-plate buckwheat pancakes, then do what Flathead Lake visitors have always done: get out on the water. Rent a kayak. Book a sailboat cruise. Raft the Flathead River's whitewater. Catch a sunset from the shore at **Wayfarers State Park**.

If you're more of a landlubber, the **Jewel Basin's** 35 miles of hiking trails lead to wildflower-filled meadows and trout-filled lakes. To the southeast, **Swan Lake** and adjacent **Swan River National Wildlife Refuge** offer birding opportunities—the refuge is an important nesting area for bald eagles and blue herons and a wintering spot for whistling swans. Don't forget your binoculars.

When it's time to leave Bigfork, make your way south along Flathead Lake's eastern shore, passing dozens of roadside cherry stands on MT-35. The region's cherry trees are heavy with masses of rosy white blossoms in May. By July, those flowers have transformed into luscious wine-colored fruits.

The drive along the lakefront brings you to Polson, where the **Polson-Flathead Historical Museum** is filled with Montana icons like Calamity Jane's saddle (donated after she retired from performing as a saucy sharpshooter in Wild West shows) and a mounted 181-pound

sturgeon—7½ feet long—reeled in from Flathead Lake in 1955. Since Polson is cherry country and proud of it, **Cherries BBQ Pit** serves fall-off-the-bones ribs smoked over cherry wood. Nearby, **Mrs. Wonderful's Café** bakes gorgeous organic breads and fruit galettes.

A few miles south, stop in Pablo at **The People's Center** tribal museum or in Charlo at **Ninepipes Museum of Early Montana** to see a fascinating array of Native American artifacts and exhibits. The surrounding land and the southern half of Flathead Lake are part of the **Flathead Indian Reservation**. Gift shops sell locally made beadwork, moccasins and jewelry. The **National Bison Range**, established in 1908, helps preserve the majestic American bison; the animals were hunted nearly to extinction in the late 1800s. Drive through the reserve to spot the herd of almost 300.

📍 **GO FOR THE RUSH** Head west on MT-200 to Thompson Falls. In a valley along the Clark Fork River, this old logging town has reinvented itself as a visitor destination while keeping close to its heritage. Walk across the Gallatin Street footbridge to **Island Park's** rocky shores, then marvel at the fish ladder, where bull trout make their way over Clark Fork's dam. **Thompson Falls High Bridge** gives an eagle's-eye view of the rushing river, while **Thompson Falls State Park** offers a family fishing pond plus bird-watching, hiking, swimming, canoeing and fishing. Grab a bite on the riverside patio at **Big Eddy's**, then push on to the luxurious **Lodge at Trout Creek**, set on 90 tranquil acres—an ideal spot for a solid night's rest.

On your last day, drive an hour north on MT-56 toward Troy, with a quick detour to **Ross Creek Cedars Scenic Area** to stretch your legs among gargantuan 1,000-year-old cedar trees. Between Troy and Libby, the Kootenai River gains momentum, funneling its churning froth through a narrow gorge. Take an exhilarating walk across the **Swinging Bridge**, suspended across the river downstream from **Kootenai Falls**. The bridge does swing—enough to make your heart beat faster—but it's safely tethered by steel cables.

As you head eastward back to Kalispell, stop in Libby for a farewell boating or fishing trip on **Lake Kootenusa**. Have a Sasquatch burger at the **Venture Inn**, then wave a wistful good-bye to northwest Montana's land of lakes and mountains.

EXTEND YOUR STAY

Book a week at a classic dude ranch, such as **Rich's Montana Guest Ranch** in Seeley Lake.

TOWN AND COUNTRY

Travel from Missoula, western Montana's forward-thinking college town filled with bookstores, museums and global cuisine, to deserted mining enclaves, the Bitterroot Valley's open rangeland and history-rich hamlets. Finish your trip with a relaxing soak in natural hot springs.

HIKE 13 SWITCHBACKS TO THE "M" ON MOUNT SENTINEL for a quick overview of the natural and cultural sweep of Missoula: the University of Montana, the valley and the Clark Fork River. In 1908, students lugged stones up the mountain to form the first "M." Today's concrete letter remains a beloved reminder that this is a college town.

While many come to Missoula just for trout fishing—and outfitters like Front Street's **Grizzly Hackle Fly Shop** will gladly set you up with gear, guides and advice—the university sets the tone for a city that's also rich in arts and culture. Book junkies, for instance, will love indie bookstores like **Fact & Fiction** and **The Book Exchange**. Plus, the 30-year-strong **Montana Book Festival** attracts A-list writers like Jane Smiley and William Kittredge. The city's lively music scene includes the 15-member **String Orchestra of the Rockies** and performances at venues like **Top Hat Lounge**. Art-lovers will want to visit the contemporary American Indian art collection at the **Missoula Art Museum**. The on-campus **Montana Museum of Art and Culture** houses nearly 11,000 treasures, including Salvador Dalí prints.

Make time to enjoy Missoula's natural appeal too. The Clark Fork River runs through Missoula's historic district—yes, a river really does run through it—and the **Riverfront Trail** makes pleasant strolling. Wander over to the whitewater kayaking park at **Brennan's Wave**, then head into **Caras Park** to see the enchanting **Carousel for Missoula**. Carved by a local cabinetmaker with the help of volunteers, the carousel has 38 ponies, no two alike—plus 14 gargoyles.

Missoula's brewing scene is thriving, and locally sourced spirits are having a moment. Try cherry vodka at **The Montana Distillery**, aquavit made from regionally grown wheat at **Montgomery Distillery** or a gingersnap whiskey sour at **Rattlesnake Creek Distillers**. **Big Sky Brewing Company Taproom** serves brews like a huckleberry blonde ale. For dinner, try **The Pearl Café** for French-inspired fare served on white tablecloths, or pop into fast-casual **Five on Black** to build your own Brazilian meal-in-a-bowl. At day's end, relax on the wraparound porch at **Goldsmith's Inn Bed and Breakfast**, a 1911 riverside mansion built for the University of Montana's president.

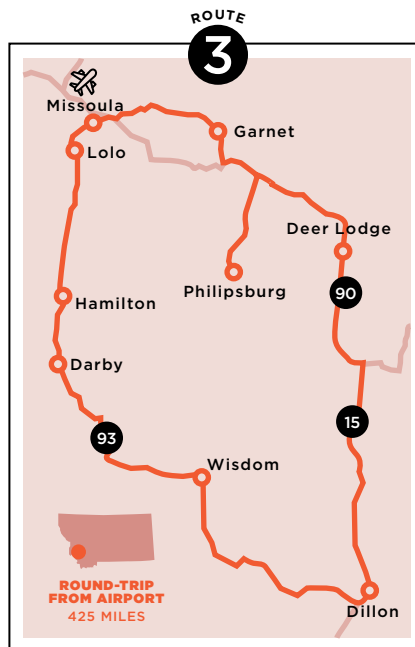
📍 **ROAD TO RICHES** When you're ready to leave Missoula, head out to explore Montana's ghost towns. Only 35 miles from Missoula, **Garnet** was populated by 1,000 gold-seekers in 1898, but the boom soon turned to bust. Getting to Garnet is an adventure—the **Garnet Back Country Byway**, made of dirt and gravel, twists and turns 12 miles and 2,000 feet up into the Garnet Mountains. Trace the ghosts of the town's glory days as you walk self-guided trails past 30 well-preserved structures—cabins, a saloon, an old hotel.

Gold wasn't the only ore in town. Silver was plentiful too. High on a hill along the Pintler Scenic Route lies **Granite Ghost Town State Park**, once one of the world's richest silver districts. Walk among the remains of the miners' union hall, superintendent's house and other historic structures. Then drive down the winding grade into neighboring Philipsburg, its downtown graced with colorful gingerbread Victorians. Take a peek at the **1891 Opera House Theatre** and swing by **The Sweet Palace** for 1,100 varieties of sugary pleasure. 📍 **HISTORY ON DISPLAY** Make your way via MT-1 back to I-90 and the town of Deer Lodge, where you can view the shiny chrome on display at the **Montana Auto Museum** and peek through the bars at the **Old Prison Museum**. Then drive south about 1.5 hours to Dillon's **Beaverhead County Museum**, where a mounted 1,200-pound Kodiak bear looms near the entrance and the historic train depot holds an astonishing display of stuffed and mounted Montana birds, from tiny hummingbirds to large snow geese. Spend the night in Dillon so you can sample artisan ales like rich, dark Pioneer Porter at **Beaverhead Brewing Company**, housed in a century-old brick building.

Start your next day at **Bannack State Park**, where you can explore 60 structures from gold-mining days: houses, an assay office, jail, gallows, hotel and more. Check for activities such as gold-panning, living-history demonstrations and guided hikes. Then drive an hour northwest just past Wisdom to recall the sobering events at **Big Hole National Battlefield**, where, in August 1877, U.S. troops attacked a Nez Perce camp. Guided tours and ranger talks shed light on the battle.

📍 **SMALL-TOWN CHARM** Now head toward U.S. 93 and the Bitterroot Valley, a land of green hills and crystalline rivers. In the historic logging town of Darby, browse the 10-gallon hats at **Double H Custom Hat Company** or admire hand-tied flies at **Bitterroot Fly Company**. You can fish at nearby **Lake Como**—or swim, boat, hike and bike. In Hamilton, tour the 25-bedroom **Daly Mansion**, a testament to the mind-boggling wealth of copper magnate Marcus Daly.

Stevensville, the first permanent settlement in Montana, boasts several historic buildings, including **St. Mary's Mission**, established in 1841. Its rustic exterior belies what's inside—a chapel resembling a miniature Italian Renaissance cathedral, with a crucifix made from a shepherd's crook. Your last stop is Lolo, home to **Travelers' Rest State Park**, where Lewis and Clark camped on their sojourn to the Pacific. End your journey with a huckleberry cocktail at **Lolo Creek Distillery** or a dip in thermally heated water at **Lolo Hot Springs**.

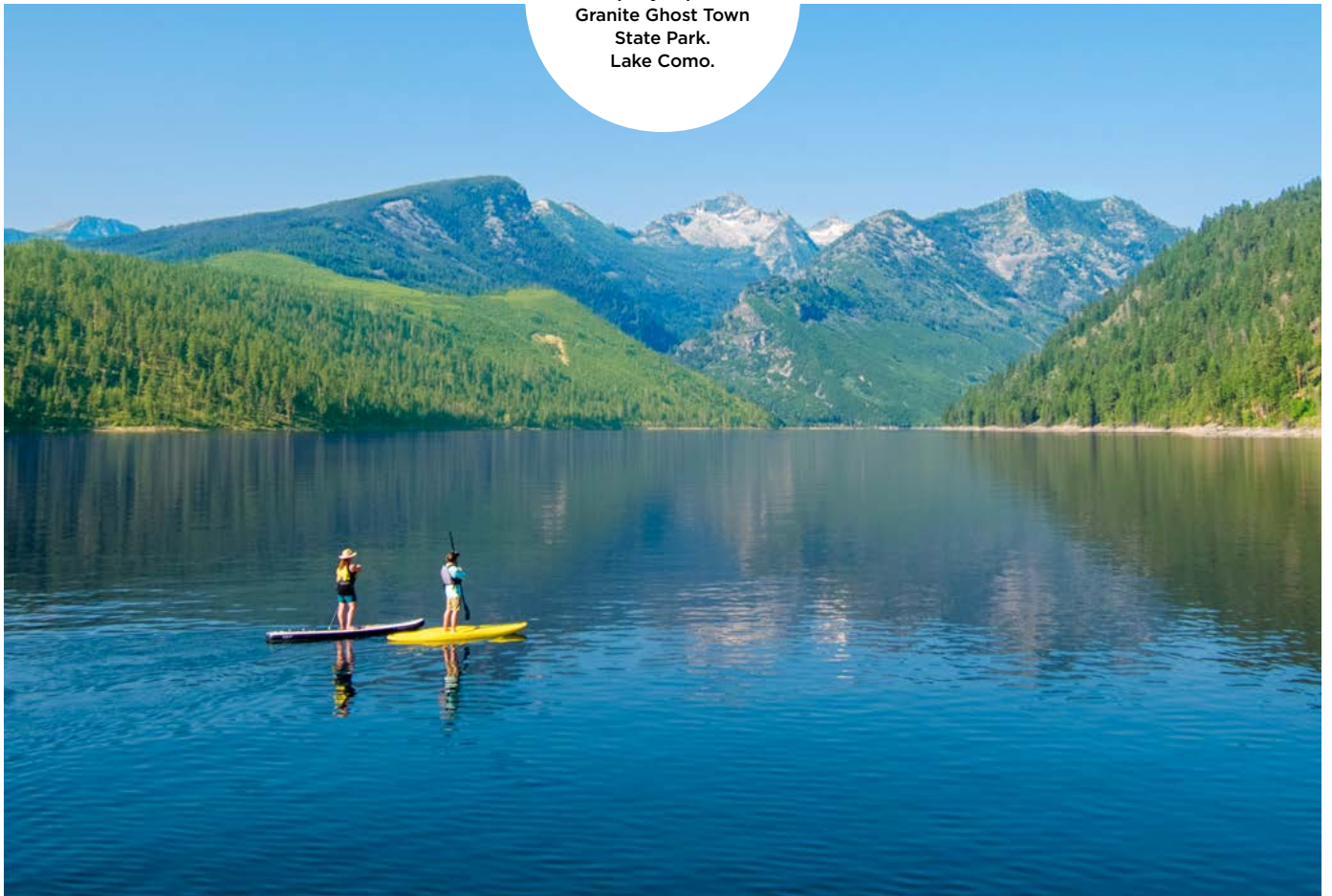


EXTEND YOUR STAY

Take a few days off the grid at **The Ranch at Rock Creek** in Philipsburg or **Triple Creek Ranch** near Darby for a luxury getaway with activities such as fly-fishing, horseback riding, sapphire panning and archery.



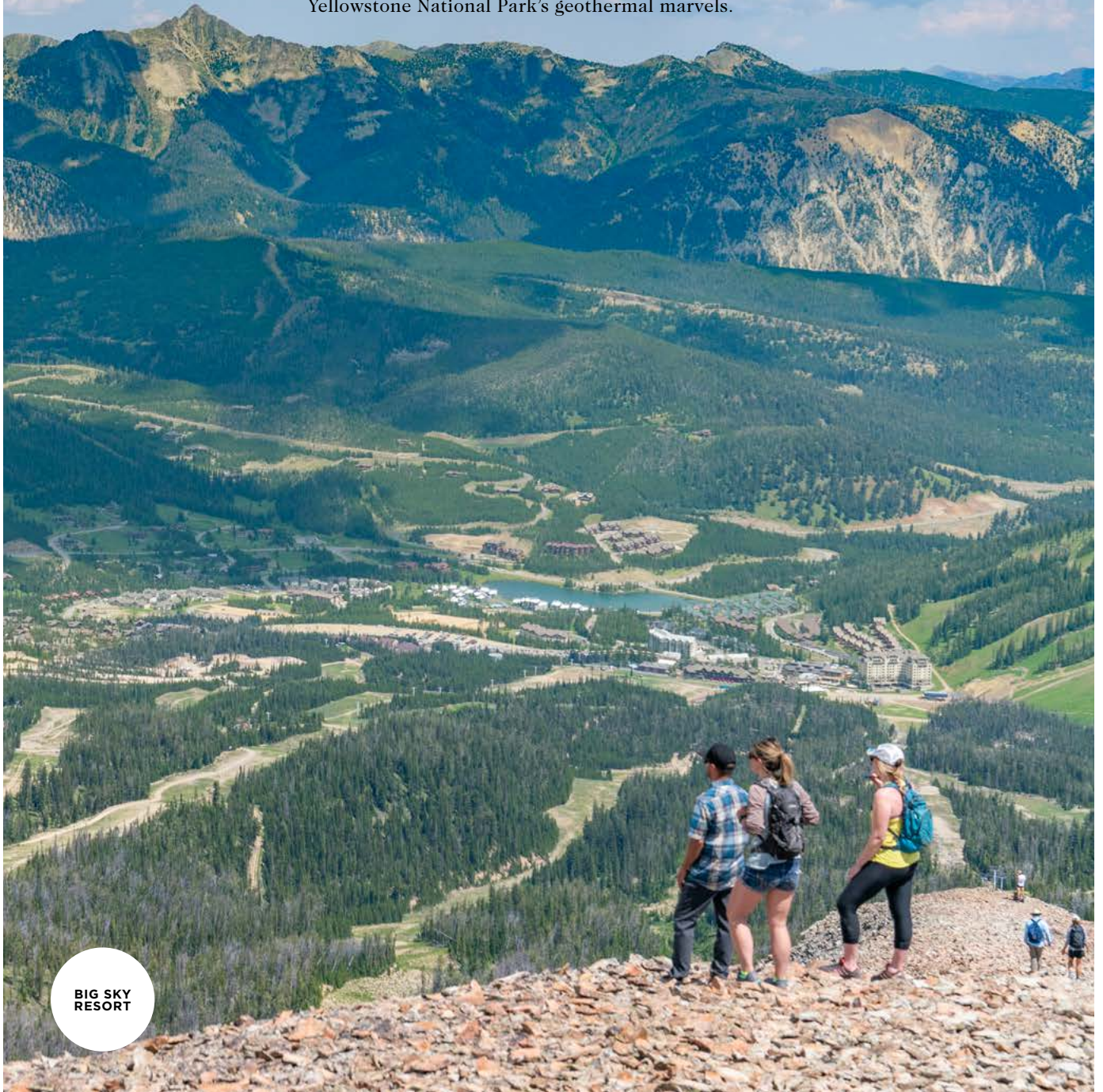
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Big Sky Brewing
Company Taproom.
Granite Ghost Town
State Park.
Lake Como.



SOUTH CENTRAL MONTANA

BIG SKY EXPLORATION

Consider this route a Montana sampler. Stay in one of the state's fastest-growing cities, learn about geology, go ziplining or fly-fishing, check out ghost towns and see Yellowstone National Park's geothermal marvels.



BOZEMAN HAS ELEVATION WITH BENEFITS.

The city's postcard-perfect views of the Bridger, Madison and Gallatin ranges are true Montana, while downtown beats with an edgy pulse. Historic buildings house hip bars, beguiling art galleries and cutting-edge restaurants. This city's expanding population demands—and receives—a mountain-air lifestyle mixed with cosmopolitan perks.

Montana State University contributes to the city's energy. On the MSU campus, the Smithsonian affiliate **Museum of the Rockies** holds a world-famous trove of dinosaur bones, including 26-foot-long Big Al, one of the most complete *Allosaurus* skeletons ever found, as well as an outstanding collection of dinosaur eggs. One mile away, the **American Computer and Robotics Museum** might seem like it's just for tech geeks, but its displays strike a universal chord. Learn about our collective journey from the abacus to the smartphone, and look for your first PC among the computers, calculators and mainframes.

On Grand Avenue, the **Emerson Center** is the nexus of Bozeman's burgeoning art scene, housing nearly 30 art studios and galleries packed with made-in-Montana sculptures, pottery, paintings and glasswork. Nearby is **Jam!**, where the corned beef hash has legions of fans, but the reason to put your name on the waiting list is the pancake flight. At dinnertime, nab a spot on **Saffron Table's** outdoor patio and sample addictive garlic naan and fried paneer. The kitchen elevates elements of standard Indian dishes with locally sourced ingredients—try the wild-caught fish with hara masala.

When it's time to unwind, the Instagram-worthy **RSVP Motel** caters to trend-conscious guests with boldly colorful rooms, oversize throw pillows and a playful vibe. In 2020, **The ELM** concert venue will open next door. More traditional B&B travelers stay at **The Lindley House**, its artfully renovated rooms decked out in restful neutrals.

📍 **MOUNTAIN MARVELS** In the morning, drive an hour south to Montana's largest ski resort, **Big Sky Resort**. Winter is all about powder, but summer has its own fun, like bungee jumping, mountain biking and soaring across the zipline. Or lace up your hiking boots—the Beehive Basin Trail ascends through meadows to a glacial cirque ringed by 10,000-foot peaks. Refuel with lunch at **Olive B's Big Sky Bistro**, or drive south on U.S. 191 to the **Gallatin Riverhouse Grill** for barbecue, honky-tonk music and a river-and-mountain view.

Keep heading south on U.S. 191 with the Gallatin River tumbling alongside you. West Yellowstone puts you within an easy drive of **Yellowstone National Park's** geysers, hot springs and geothermal wonders. Check in at **Elkhorn Cabins and Inn** or sister property **Evergreen Motel**, where freshly renovated rooms have comfy beds and woody decor, then get up early and beeline to Yellowstone. Head straight for **Norris Geyser Basin**, a spectacular and ever-changing thermal area. Wander the Porcelain Basin Trail among terraced hot springs and geysers or the Back Basin Trail past Steamboat Geyser, famous for its 300-foot-high eruptions. At **Midway Geyser Basin**, marvel at photogenic Grand Prismatic Spring—a surreal rainbow of orange, yellow and green surrounding a vast cobalt pool. Nearby Great Fountain Geyser erupts on a fairly dependable schedule. If you can't wait for the showery spectacle, go see Clepsydra, which erupts almost constantly. Back in West Yellowstone, learn more about the area's wildlife at the **Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center**, which is opening a new river exhibit featuring playful otters.

📍 **BIRTH OF A LAKE** Leave the park through West Yellowstone and drive north along Hebgen Lake's shoreline to the **Earthquake Lake Visitor Center**, stopping to read the interpretive signs along the way and see ruins of cabins. Tour the site where a 1959 earthquake—registering a whopping 7.5 on the Richter scale—caused a devastating landslide. Earthquake Lake was created when several million tons of rock formed a natural dam.

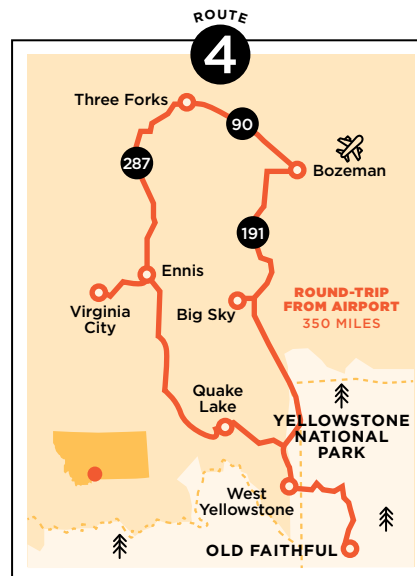
The Madison River Valley's fertile ranchland spreads out on either side of U.S. 287 as you head north to Ennis. Originally a supply town



for Virginia City's miners, this ranching community is now better known as the epicenter for the Madison River's famous "50-mile riffle," considered the most trout-rich water in Montana. Outfitters like **Trout Stalkers** can get you into the middle of the action.

📍 **LEGENDARY GHOST TOWNS** Virginia City was Montana Territory's capital during the 1860s gold-fever days, when the town prospered with 1,200 buildings and 10,000 residents. When the gold ran out, so did most of the people. But several businesses still operate in this National Historic Landmark, including Montana's oldest functioning county courthouse. Walk the town's wood-plank sidewalks, catch a vaudeville show at the **Opera House** or belly up to the bar in the old Wells Fargo building. The narrow-gauge **Alder Gulch Short Line Railroad** chugs 1.5 miles to Nevada City, another gold boomtown. Fourteen of the town's original buildings remain, including an 1863 structure housing **Star Bakery**, purveyor of fried pickles and biscuits. The **Nevada City Music Hall** shows off Wurlitzer band organs, arcade-style music-makers and nickelodeons.

Your trip's final stop is Three Forks, at the confluence of the Madison, Jefferson and Gallatin rivers. The three waterways join to become the mighty Missouri River, a merger celebrated at **Missouri Headwaters State Park**, where Lewis and Clark camped in 1805. Hike, bike, fish or canoe. End your trip on a posh note at **Sacajawea Hotel**, its white-pillared veranda beckoning travelers since 1910.



EXTEND YOUR STAY
Take a guided tour of the limestone caverns at **Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park** on the way back to Bozeman. If you have an SUV, consider a detour to the **Ringling Rocks** outside Whitehall.

CENTRAL MONTANA

HEART OF MONTANA DISCOVERIES

Central Montana promises adventures both above ground and below. Straddling the line between the Rocky Mountain Front and the Central Plains, this culturally important region offers a compelling look into Montana's past, from ancient Native American buffalo jumps to Prohibition speakeasies.

GIANT
SPRINGS
STATE PARK

GREAT FALLS' MOST DEFINING GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURE IS THE MIGHTY MISSOURI RIVER.

The falls themselves are now mostly submerged by hydroelectric dams, but their crashing energy was the impetus for the city's founding. In 1880, entrepreneur Paris Gibson imagined building "a new Minneapolis" on the boisterous river's banks. Start your visit at the **Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center**, perched on a river bluff. Meriwether Lewis called this boulder-choked stretch "the grandest sight I ever beheld," but the center's two-story-high diorama tells of the explorers' arduous 18-mile-long portage. Expedition members had to winch their canoes and gear up and over precipitous cliffs and waterfalls.

Do your own Missouri River reconnaissance by rambling along the **River's Edge Trail** from the interpretive center. Less than a mile east is **Giant Springs State Park**, where gushing water emerges from an underground aquifer at an astonishing 156 million gallons per day.

Head downtown to tour the **C.M. Russell Museum**, which holds the world's largest collection of Russell's paintings, artifacts and bronze sculptures—bucking horses, buffalo hunts and tribes—plus the belongings and letters of "America's Cowboy Artist." Don't miss the American bison exhibit with more than 1,000 Northern Plains Indian artifacts. Clothing, tools, regalia and art reveal Native Americans' reliance on the bison.

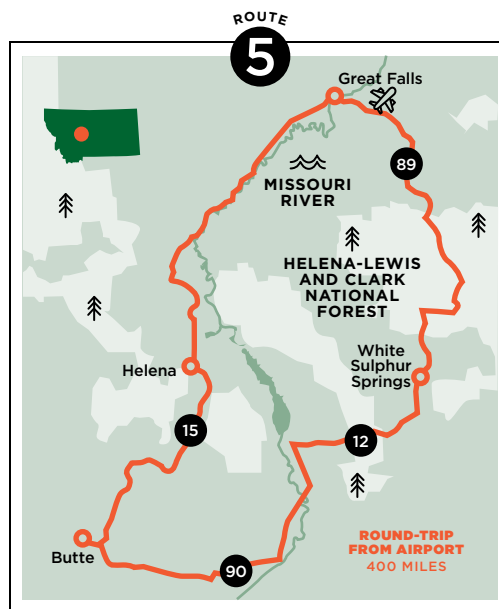
Fuel up on calories in town before exploring farther afield. At the log-house **Roadhouse Diner**, feast on celebrity-grade diner chow, like Montana-grown beef or black bean burgers on scratch-made buns. The **Celtic Cowboy Pub** dishes up hearty shepherd's pie and Irish fare in an 1890s livery stable, Great Falls' oldest commercial building.

Fifteen miles west of Great Falls, visit the archaeological site at **First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park**. More than a thousand years before Lewis and Clark, prehistoric Native Americans drove herds of bison off a mile-long, 30-foot-high bluff, then slaughtered the animals for hides and food. Tour the fascinating interpretive center or take a guided hike to see ancient teepee rings, petroglyphs and pictographs. **WATERWAYS** From Great Falls, cruise south to White Sulphur Springs along U.S. 89, known as the **Kings Hill Scenic Byway**, as it traverses **Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest** and the **Little Belt Mountains**. This area is rich with options for adventurers: hiking, biking, fishing and floating. In White Sulphur Springs, tour the hilltop **Castle Museum and Carriage House**, an 1892 stone mansion built by rancher Byron Roger Sherman. The **Spa Hot Springs Motel** doles out liquid nirvana—three hot springs pools of varying temperatures.

If you're hungry, make a pit stop at **Bar 47** for modern riffs on comfort food—sea salt caramel fries, "adult" milkshakes, fried green beans and pulled pork mac 'n' cheese. Then hop back in the car and swing southwest to Butte. Unlike most rough-and-tumble mining towns in Montana, Butte's underground riches never went completely bust. The city lies on top of what was called The Richest Hill on Earth, an unparalleled bounty of mineral deposits, especially silver and copper. See the wealth that Butte created at the 1888 **Copper King Mansion**, a 34-room Victorian brick palace graced by frescoed ceilings and Tiffany stained-glass windows. Its owner was one of the

EXTEND YOUR STAY

Drive north from Helena to Choteau to see the **Old Trail Museum**, or book with Choteau-based **Dropstone Outfitting** for guided day hikes and stock-supported multiday trips in the **Bob Marshall Wilderness**.



world's richest men. Butte's mining heritage lives on at **Montana Tech**, a college specializing in mineral science, and at the **World Museum of Mining**, where you can don a hard hat and headlamp and descend 100 feet underground to peek inside the Orphan Girl Mine and learn about miners' lives.

Go underground a second time at the **Rookwood Speakeasy Museum**, below a Main Street sidewalk. The spot dates to Prohibition, when hooch was illegal but not terribly hard to obtain. Hidden behind secret doors in the Rookwood Hotel's basement, this scofflaw watering hole was one of Butte's estimated 150 Prohibition-era speakeasies. See its elaborately carved mahogany bar and poker table covered with chips on a tour with **Old Butte Historical Adventures**.

If you prefer your bars operational, head to the new **51 Below** in the **Miner's Hotel** basement and sip an artisan cocktail inside a 1913 fur storage vault, where ladies' mink coats waited out the hot summer. Upstairs, 12 rooms and suites offer a boutique overnight stay. For bites in Butte, steak-lovers head to **Casagrande's Steakhouse** for Rocky Mountain beef cut by hand. Longtime favorite **Gamer's Cafe** serves unpretentious chili and local gossip. Butte native and motorcycle daredevil Evel Knievel frequented the **Freeway Tavern** for its pork chop sandwich, a nod to the Cornish miners who once populated this town. In uptown Butte, **Park 217** caters to discriminating palates at its below-street-level wine bar and bistro.

RICH HISTORY An hour northeast of Butte lies Helena, Montana's capital. Helena's founding happened with a gold strike—followed by a silver strike, then a lead strike—but it also became an important trade center. Merchants struck it rich, and to prove it, they built mansions. One is now **The Sanders**, a luxurious painted-lady bed-and-breakfast with elegant period furnishings and ornate woodwork.

See more of the city's architectural legacy by riding the **Last Chance Tour Train**, an open-air wheeled trolley that meanders past the **Cathedral of St. Helena's** ornate 230-foot-tall spires and the elegant **Montana State Capitol** building. Tour the copper-domed structure to see C.M. Russell's mural *Lewis and Clark Meeting Indians at Ross' Hole* and more iconic Montana art.

Just outside Helena is one of the Missouri River's most remarkable canyons, bounded by 1,200-foot limestone cliffs and guarded by bighorn sheep and mountain goats. Lewis and Clark named this river stretch **Gates of the Mountains**. Don't leave Helena without taking a two-hour boat tour to see it and learn the origin of the name.

SOUTH CENTRAL MONTANA

WONDERS OF YELLOWSTONE COUNTRY

The Beartooth Highway, winding from Red Lodge to Cooke City, offers so much rugged grandeur that you won't be in a rush to reach Yellowstone National Park. But once you enter the park's northeast gate, geothermal features, boisterous waterfalls and abundant wildlife notch up the awe factor.

A person wearing a red long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans stands on a rocky outcrop, looking out over a vast, rugged mountain landscape. In the foreground, there are large, dark grey and brown rocks. A turquoise lake is nestled in the valley below, surrounded by green and brown vegetation. The background features rolling mountains under a cloudy sky.

BEARTOOTH
HIGHWAY

SCENIC RED LODGE IS THE ANCHOR FOR ROAD-TRIPPING

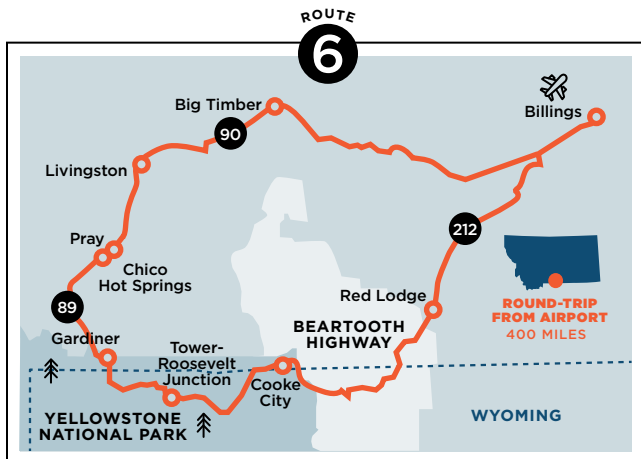
the Beartooth Highway. After just a 60-mile drive from the Billings Logan International Airport, it's easy to kick back in this no-pressure mountain town, where the annual three-day rodeo and Western Victorian architecture aren't manufactured kitsch. In 1897, the Sundance Kid tried to rob a bank here. Buffalo Bill Cody and Calamity Jane slept at **The Pollard Hotel**. Red Lodge, and especially its main drag, Broadway Avenue, has a nearly mythic Old West aura.

You could spend a fine day just eating. **Montana Candy Emporium**, filled with antique bicycles and vintage signs, peddles chocolate truffles and old-fashioned sweets. **Piccola Cucina at Ox Pasture** serves classy Italian farm-to-table cuisine. On the banks of Rock Creek, the **Red Box Car** blends slurp-worthy shakes in an actual 1903 railway boxcar. **Prerogative Kitchen** delivers epicurean fast-casual fare. In between nosing, tour **Yellowstone Wildlife Sanctuary**, home to wolves, black bears, bison, elk and falcons that are unable to return to the wild. End the day in a wood-paneled room at **Alpine Lodge**, or sleep in bed-and-breakfast style at the gracious **Inn on the Beartooth**.

📍 **DESTINATION DRIVE** In the morning, grab a breakfast burrito at art-filled **Honey's**, then point your wheels toward the **Beartooth Highway** (U.S. 212). Many have called it one of America's most beautiful drives, and with good reason. The road ascends 5,000 feet as it travels past majestic granite, cobalt lakes and grand alpine landscapes encompassing 20 peaks higher than 12,000 feet. But the byway's season is brief; snowfall typically closes it from mid-October until Memorial Day weekend. Opened in 1936, the 68-mile-long engineering marvel winds through switchbacks to 10,947 feet at Beartooth Pass. Your reward: top-of-the-world scenery, an astonishing panorama of glacially carved cirques and lingering snowfields.

EXTEND YOUR STAY

At the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area near the Crow Indian Reservation south of Billings, stop by the Bighorn Canyon Visitor Center or Yellowtail Dam Visitor Center for an introduction to area activities. Eat, sleep and fish at destinations such as **Bighorn River Lodge** and **Forrester's Bighorn River Resort**.



You'll need at least three hours for driving with stops at scenic overlooks, but if you can afford more time, get out of the car and hike. Drive to the trailhead at **Island Lake** and trek out-and-back to other high-country lakes; or, as the road nears Cooke City, take the short Flume Trail at **Clarks Fork** to see ruins of an early 1900s hydroelectric plant and gaze at cascading waterfalls.

📍 **PREP FOR YELLOWSTONE** When the Beartooth Highway delivers you to Cooke City, stop by the **Cooke City Montana Museum** for local history exhibits, then grab a few supplies in town—**Bearclaw Bakery's** pecan sticky buns have devoted fans. Make your way to **Yellowstone National Park's** northeast entrance and the wildlife-rich **Lamar Valley**, where you may spot bison, elk and coyotes. To increase your chance of wildlife sightings, join a Day Adventures session with the nonprofit **Yellowstone Forever Institute**.

At the Tower-Roosevelt junction, head south to see **Tower Fall**, framed by imposing volcanic pinnacles, as its waters plummet 132 feet. Two miles away at **Roosevelt Lodge**, ride in a covered wagon to a barbecue cookout. Continue on to Gardiner, just outside the park's north entrance with its grand 1903 **Roosevelt Arch**, to set up your basecamp for Yellowstone area exploration. The rustic-chic **Wonderland Cafe and Lodge** gives you space to spread out in its mountain-view rooms decked out in reclaimed wood—plus the first-floor restaurant tempts with perfect steaming lattes in the morning and dishes like elk chili at night.

See as much of Yellowstone as you can. The steaming travertine terraces of **Mammoth Hot Springs** lie just 5 miles south of Gardiner. Farther into the park, loop down to highlights like the trails near **Canyon Village**, with spectacular views of the upper and lower falls of the Yellowstone River; the **West Thumb Geyser Basin**; and **Old Faithful**, with its walking paths to **Geyser Hill**.

📍 **WILD AND WET** North of the park, go rafting on the Yellowstone River. **Montana Whitewater** offers mellow Class II runs perfect for first-timers, plus combined rafting and zipline tours. **Wild West Rafting** offers overnight river trips; float during the day and spend the night in a riverside teepee.

When it's time to put Gardiner in your rear-view, head north on U.S. 89, stopping in Pray for a soak at **Chico Hot Springs** or to sleep in style at riverfront **Sage Lodge**. Then move on to the aptly named Paradise Valley and stylish Livingston. Explore Main Street's high-end art galleries, including the **Livingston Center for Art and Culture**. At **Mustang Fresh Food**, chef Carole Sullivan's new frontier cooking has satisfied the appetites of President Barack Obama and Martha Stewart. **Faye's Cafe** entices diners with eclectic food served in a colorful old schoolhouse. Trust in Faye and order the chef's special, whatever it is. The historic **Murray Hotel** makes a cozy, convenient overnight in walking distance of the **Yellowstone Gateway Museum**, **Livingston Depot Center** and two dozen restaurants.

On your final day, stop at **Big Timber**, located where the prairies meet the curiously named Crazy Mountains. (There are many theories, but nobody knows exactly how these peaks got their title.) Step back in time at the **Crazy Mountain Museum**, a shrine to Sweet Grass County's past with a vintage dentist chair, Model T Ford and Stetson chaps. At the 1890 **Grand Hotel**, order an elk sausage sandwich and savor this trip's last meal. Then make your way back to Billings and dream of driving this circuit all over again, in reverse.

HOME ON THE PLAINS

This Great Plains road trip travels near the Missouri River's badlands, where paleontologists have discovered a wealth of dinosaur fossils. There's also human history to explore at one of Montana's oldest settlements, along the quiet backwaters of the Upper Missouri River, in Havre's underground city and throughout the Hi-Line's horizon of undulating prairie.

A HISTORY-FILLED ADVENTURE BEGINS IN FORT BENTON,

set in a tree-shaded spot along the Missouri River. One of Montana's oldest settlements, it was founded as a fur-trading post in 1846, linking steamboat-traveling traders from Montana, Washington and Canada. Today, most of the original Fort Benton is a National Historic Landmark, and the city's museums contain a wealth of history. At the **Museum of the Northern Great Plains**, get schooled on the hardships endured by homesteading families, who came with golden dreams of settling the vast shortgrass prairie. **Historic Old Fort Benton** displays buffalo robes, beads and furs that the Blackfeet Indians traded for guns, cookware and blankets. View exhibits on Fort Benton's heyday as an inland port at the **Museum of the Upper Missouri**, and learn about the river's natural and human history at the **Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center**.

Since Fort Benton's beating heart is the "Mighty Mo," get out and paddle with **Missouri River Outfitters**. Do-it-yourselfers can rent canoes and kayaks, or you can join a professionally guided trip. For a luxe overnight, book a room at the **Grand Union Hotel**, an 1882 showstopper that's still classy by modern standards. Dine on the deck of the hotel's **Union Grille** while overlooking the Missouri River. **📍 PRAIRIE POST** The next morning, drive northeast on U.S. 87 through the Upper Missouri River Valley's waving prairies. The tiny riverside enclave of Virgelle, settled by homesteaders in 1912, entices solitude-seekers. The **Virgelle Mercantile** (or just the Merc) is the town's only business, with antiques for sale, renovated bed-and-breakfast rooms and six original homesteader cabins for rent, complete with kerosene lamps and wood-burning stoves. The **Virgelle Ferry** has been crossing the river here since 1913, and it's free.

From Virgelle, head northeast to a region known as the Hi-Line. Running adjacent to U.S. 2 less than 100 miles south of Canada, this land of wind-sculpted prairies and wheat fields seems to extend forever. Havre, the Hi-Line's biggest city, was founded as a railroad hub in 1879 and eventually developed a split personality, one at the street level and one below. The upper city was staid and respectable. When a 1904 fire destroyed the city, businesses moved to their basements to continue operating. The underground district—built into hollowed-out tunnels that connected the basements—grew to house a brothel, gambling houses and opium dens. Hear this fascinating below-the-sidewalk history on a **Havre Beneath the Streets** tour.

More history can be seen at the **H. Earl Clack Museum**, where you'll find a great display of dinosaur eggs, plus amazingly informed guides who can walk you through the neighboring **Wahkpa Chu'gn Buffalo Jump Archaeological Site**. At this 2,000-year-old site, see where and

how stone tools were used, learn how to throw an atlatl and marvel at a wall of buffalo bones that's 20 feet deep.

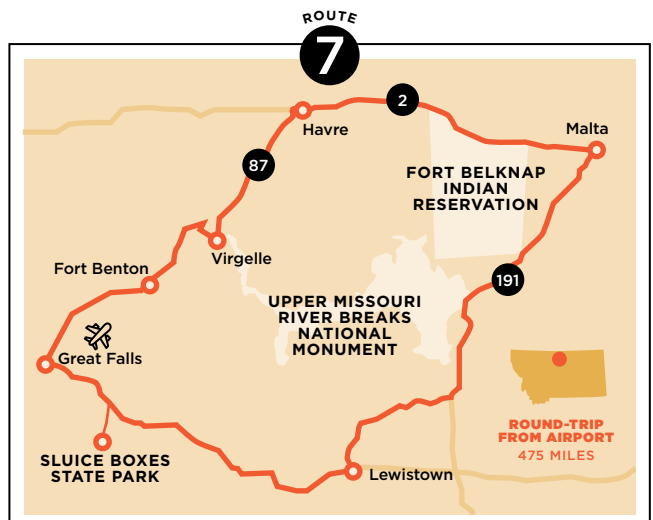
Before leaving Havre, fill up on soup and sandwiches at **Havre Grateful Bread**, then make your way east along the Hi-Line. At **Bear Paw Battlefield**, a Nez Perce National Historical Park site, take a ranger- or self-guided tour of the area that saw the final battle of the Nez Perce Flight of 1877. More history awaits at the **Fort Belknap Indian Reservation**; book a visit with **Aaniih Nakoda Tours** to learn about the Assiniboine (Nakoda) and Gros Ventre (Aaniiih) tribes. **📍 SEE CREATURES** Quaint Malta is a key stop on the **Montana Dinosaur Trail**, with 14 locations statewide that highlight prehistoric finds. At the **Phillips County Museum**, you'll get to know Elvis on a first-name basis—he's a 33-foot-long *Brachylophosaurus* skeleton. Then stop at **Great Plains Dinosaur Museum**, where your kids can take part in an active dig. If you'd rather visit creatures that still roam the earth, drive 15 miles east to the **Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge**. An auto tour through the marsh provides the chance to spot white pelicans (more than 1,400 pairs nest here) and white-faced ibises.

From Malta, take U.S. 191 southwest toward Lewistown. Plan ahead for a guided tour at **Bear Gulch**, a private property with well-preserved pictographs and petroglyphs on canyon walls. Then continue on to Lewistown, Montana's exact geographic center. The town's biggest event is the **Montana Cowboy Poetry Gathering**, where poets come from all over the western U.S. and Canada to read their rhymes. Lewistown cherishes its early 20th-century architecture, with three neighborhoods listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Spend the night in a sleek room at **The Calvert Hotel**, constructed in 1917 as a high school dormitory, now luxuriously renovated. The **Charlie Russell Chew Choo** historic dinner train features prime rib and sunsets over the prairie.

📍 COOL WATERS Seven miles southeast of Lewistown, **Big Spring** is one of the world's largest freshwater springs, spouting more than 50,000 gallons of water per minute. Go swimming or tubing on **Big Spring Creek**, or fish for rainbow or brown trout. You'll find bites of a different kind at **Rising Trout Cafe and Bookstore**. Explore more around the city by hiking or biking the 20-mile **Lewistown Trail System**. If you're traveling from Lewistown to the Great Falls International Airport, continue your nature exploration by detouring off U.S. 87 to hike or fish at **Sluice Boxes State Park**, a geologic gem of limestone cliffs, steep canyons and amazingly clear water.

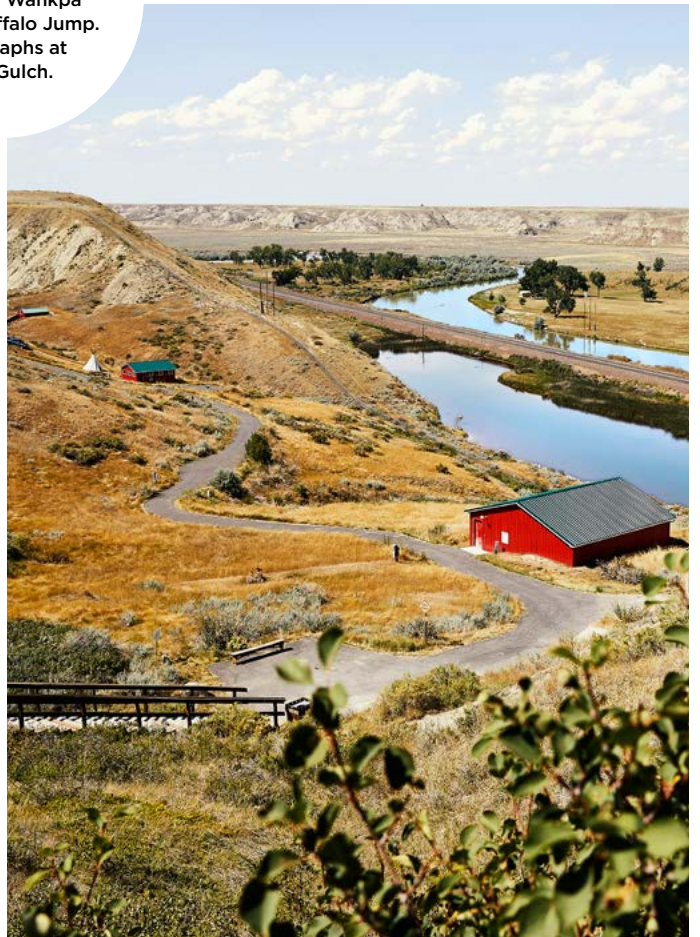
EXTEND YOUR STAY

Northwest of Great Falls, Shelby offers attractions like the **Marias Museum of History and Art**, packed with artifacts and memorabilia from the area, and the new **Carousel Rest Area of Shelby**, with a restored 1936 merry-go-round.





CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP
Great Plains Dinosaur
Museum. Wahkpa
Chu'gn Buffalo Jump.
Pictographs at
Bear Gulch.



SOUTHEAST MONTANA

ECHOES OF HISTORY

The frontier spirit thrives in southeastern Montana's high plains. Hardworking Billings is the region's cosmopolitan center, but in the east, turn back the clock as you tour Little Bighorn Battlefield, visit badlands filled with dinosaur bones and wander the streets of rodeo-wrangling Miles City.

FOUR DANCES
RECREATION
AREA

ONLY A FEW AMERICAN AIRPORTS CAN DAZZLE YOUR EYES THROUGH AN AIRCRAFT WINDOW,

and you'll find one in Billings. Perched high on the Rimrocks' river-carved cliffs, Billings Logan International Airport surprises first-time visitors with blazes of gold sandstone and broad vistas of the Yellowstone River Valley.

You can practically hike from the tarmac—the Rimrocks are graced with multiple parks and trails. Follow Black Otter Trail to inspiring views of Billings and five mountain ranges. In **Swords Park**, visit the memorial to Luther Sage “Yellowstone” Kelly, a frontiersman, trapper and scout who roamed the northern Plains in the late 1800s. You'll get more great views of the Rimrocks from **Four Dances Recreation Area**. A journey through the Rims also leads to **Pictograph Cave State Park**, where faded pictographs hint at the stories of humans who inhabited Pictograph Cave and neighboring caves as long as 2,000 years ago.

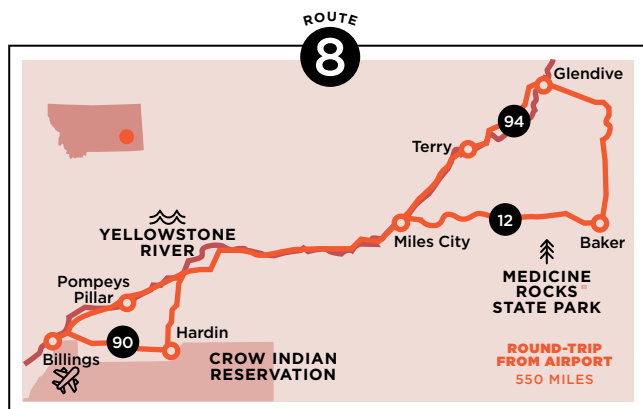
Billings itself lies in the Rimrocks' embrace. Start exploring at the **Yellowstone County Museum**, set in a historic log cabin by the airport. Exhibits feature Native American beadwork, wildlife mounts, elaborately tooled saddles, pioneer wagons and more. Then tour the 1903 **Moss Mansion**, designed by Henry J. Hardenbergh, architect of New York City's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. The fabulous three-story mansion was built for Preston Boyd Moss, a bank president and entrepreneur who helped to develop Billings.

The **Yellowstone Art Museum** houses Western art in the renovated and expanded former county jail. Look for iconic Western photographs from the late 1800s by Laton Alton Huffman—portraits of Native Americans, scenes from buffalo hunts and cowboys riding the open range—and paintings by Will James and Charles Russell. At dinnertime, nab a table at the **Last Chance Pub and Cider Mill** to feast on Montana Wagyu beef, smoked trout tacos and locally made hard cider in a lofty, brick-lined space. Then lay your head on a luxurious pillow at **Northern Hotel**, a chic historic property downtown.

📍 **HISTORY LESSONS** The next morning, go east on I-90 to the plains town of Hardin adjacent to the **Crow Indian Reservation**. Get a dose of homesteader lore at the **Big Horn County Historical Museum**, with more than two dozen buildings, including a 1917 Lutheran church and farmhouse, then push on to Crow Agency. Each August, the **Crow Fair Celebration Powwow and Rodeo** transforms these rolling grasslands into the Teepee Capital of the World—nearly 1,800 teepees are erected for the week-long cultural celebration.

At **Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument**, the mood is more somber. In the 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn, Lt. Col. George Custer and his 7th Cavalry were outwitted by thousands of Lakota Sioux and Northern Cheyenne warriors led by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. Visit the Indian Memorial and the 7th Cavalry Monument on Last Stand Hill, explore the visitors center, and listen to a cell phone audio tour. Crow Indian guides from **Apsáalooke Tours** lead one-hour journeys, offering their perspective on the battle and the events that led to it.

Across from the monument's entrance, browse modern Crow and Northern Cheyenne art, jewelry and beadwork at the **Custer Battlefield Trading Post and Cafe**, and sample buffalo burgers. Then hop back in the car for a two-hour jaunt northeast to Miles City, set at the confluence of the Tongue and Yellowstone rivers. Farmers and ranchers populate this town year-round, but their numbers swell in May for the annual **Bucking Horse Sale**. A tradition since 1951, the event includes a bustling auction of untamed horses as well as Western barbecues, horse races and street dances.



The **Range Riders Museum** commemorates the era of the open range with its trove of rare firearms, Native American artifacts and 13 authentic Old West buildings. View Western art inside the water-holding tanks at the **WaterWorks Art Museum**, then mosey over to **Black Iron Grill** for “cowboy candy”—locally ranched beef tips. Rest overnight in remodeled rooms at **Miles City Hotel and Suites**.

📍 **BADLANDS FINDS** When day breaks, steer east to Baker for a quick stop at the **O’Fallon Historical Museum**, home of the world’s largest steer, stuffed and on display. Then head to Glendive, where the Yellowstone River turns mellow as it flows through prairies dotted with rugged badlands. The **Frontier Gateway Museum** displays dinosaur fossils and a skeleton cast of a long-legged *Struthiomimus*.

On the town’s outskirts, eroded buttes are lined with dinosaur fossils and translucent agates. More than 10 species of dinosaurs have been unearthed in 11,000-acre **Makoshika State Park**, Montana’s largest state park and a photogenic spot to view badlands’ geology. Explore geology exhibits in the visitors center, then hike to badlands overlooks. If you want to search for fossils to keep, visit nearby **Baisch’s Dinosaur Digs**, located on a private ranch.

At the prairie-front enclave of Terry, drop in to the **Prairie County Museum** to see items like the only steam-heated outhouse west of the Mississippi. The neighboring **Cameron Gallery** displays riveting photographs by Evelyn Cameron, a wealthy British woman who left her privileged life to settle the gritty Montana prairie. North of town, the **Terry Badlands** offers a slice of the landscape Cameron adored. Multicolor hoodoos and spires sculpted by wind, water and time extend all the way to the horizon.

On your return to Billings, stop at **Pompeys Pillar National Monument** to view the only remaining physical evidence of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. A short but steep walk up a series of boardwalks leads to the spot where Captain William Clark carved his name in the 150-foot-high pillar, which towers over the prairie. His looping longhand from July 1806 is still clearly visible in sandstone.

EXTEND YOUR STAY

South of Baker, drive to Ekalaka to see the striking formations of **Medicine Rocks State Park** and visit the state’s first dinosaur museum, the **Carter County Museum**.

NORTHEAST MONTANA

WILD AND SCENIC GREAT PLAINS

Take a modern-day pioneer journey through northeast Montana's Missouri River Country, where the vast prairies of the Great Plains spread out to the horizon. Deer and pronghorn roam, agates line the riverbanks and a sea of stars spans the sky.

FORT PECK
LAKE

THE ART DECO BUILDINGS OF DOWNTOWN GLASGOW,

northeastern Montana's largest city, reflect the area's place in history. Glasgow boomed right after the Great Depression, when Franklin D. Roosevelt's largest and most ambitious New Deal project took place nearby: the 3.9-mile-long **Fort Peck Dam**, named for a 19th-century trading post in the area.

The dam, completed in 1940, impounds the grand Missouri River, creating one of the world's largest reservoirs, with 1,520 miles of shoreline—almost twice the length of California's Pacific coast. Campgrounds and parks dot **Fort Peck Lake's** edges, providing many recreation options for boating, fishing, hiking and camping. Spanning west from the dam, the **Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge** preserves 1.1 million acres for elk, mule deer, pronghorn, bald eagles and other wildlife in habitats like native prairie and "breaks" badlands.

The massive dam and jumbo dinosaurs share the limelight at **Fort Peck Interpretive Center**. A 62-million-year-old *T. rex* known as Peck's Rex was found near Fort Peck in 1997. A cast of the dinosaur stands alongside Montana's largest fish tank, filled with 8,500 gallons of water and fish from Fort Peck Lake Reservoir. Displays also educate visitors about the history of the dam, and tours of the power house can be arranged from the interpretive center.

📍 **DARK-SKY MAGIC** Some of America's darkest skies are found in this region, so you don't want to miss the star show. Check in at **Cottonwood Inn and Suites** in Glasgow, where an indoor pool and hot tub make it easy to relax. After a Montana ribeye at **Durum Restaurant** or pizza at **Eugene's**, stay up late for a star-studded evening. Lay out a blanket on the grass at **Hell Creek State Park** or **The Pines Recreation Area** at Fort Peck Lake, and you'll be wowed by 360-degree views of the Milky Way.

Shows of another kind sparkle at the Swiss-chalet-style **Fort Peck Theatre**, home to a five-decade-old summer theater company. The theater is part of the town of Fort Peck, created to support the dam's construction. For another peek into history, pop in to the **Valley County Pioneer Museum**, a trove of vintage tractors, moonshine exhibits, Assiniboine Indian artifacts and a 1940s radio station.

Drive U.S. 2 east through **Fort Peck Indian Reservation** to Wolf Point, where the **Wolf Point Wild Horse Stampede**, held in July, is one of Montana's oldest and best rodeos. At **Wolf Point Area Museum**, see saddles, guns, old Victrolas, an Edison phonograph, beaded moccasins and tools from homestead life. If you're in the mood for



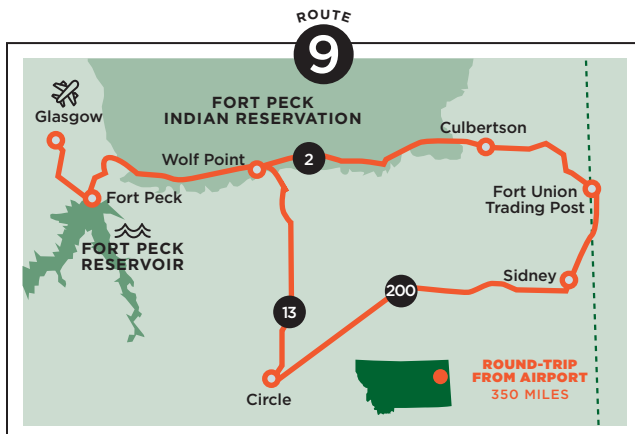
a microbrew or a nonalcoholic root beer, stop in **Missouri Breaks Brewing** (also known as Doc'Z—it's owned by a local physician).

An hour east on U.S. 2 is Culbertson, a grain-producing hamlet. Brush up on homesteader history at the **Culbertson Museum**, or make a detour 25 miles north to the **Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge**. Before the last ice ages, the Missouri River flowed through these rolling plains and left behind shallow lakes and wetlands. Binoculars will help you see ducks, white pelicans, cranes and herons. Pronghorn and deer roam the prairies.

Culbertson's cozy **Wild West Diner** has been serving breakfast and lunch since 1957, and even if you're not hungry, swing by to stock up on local raw honey and jams before making a run for the state border. Straddling the line between Montana and North Dakota, **Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site** commemorates Montana's largest fur-trading post, which stood here on the banks of the Missouri River from 1828 until 1867, east of the present-day **Fort Peck Indian Reservation**. The trading post served both the Euro-Americans and the Native Americans—the Assiniboine and six other Northern Plains tribes—in a peaceful state of coexistence. The Indians exchanged buffalo hides and beaver pelts for guns, blankets and cloth.

📍 **LAZY FLOATS AND FISHING** From Fort Union, head 25 miles south to Sidney, where the mellow Lower Yellowstone River is ideal for lazy river floating in inflatable rafts or kayaks and fishing for warm-water species: pike, walleye and smallmouth bass. Rockhounds hunt for translucent agates along the riverbanks, and photographers seek out the subtle beauty of sagebrush-covered plains, cottonwood groves and the prairie's vast sweep. **MonDak Heritage Center** is the region's arts and cultural hub, offering art classes and exhibits plus displays of eastern Montana artifacts. Drop in at **Meadowlark Public House** to sample top-shelf craft brews or nosh on bison meatloaf, then rest up at the **Best Western Golden Prairie Inn and Suites**.

To finish the trip, veer southwest on MT-200 to the agricultural community of Circle—named for a local ranch brand—and savor your final miles through the countryside. As you drive north on the scenic **Big Sky Back Country Byway** (MT-13) heading to Wolf Point, you're more likely to see a cow or a mule deer than a human. In the belly of the prairie, animals outnumber people by a ratio of hundreds to one, and that may just be the region's most alluring feature.



EXTEND YOUR STAY

Explore early 1900s life at 35 historic buildings in **Scobey's Daniels County Museum and Pioneer Town**, an hour north of Wolf Point.

WINTER ACROSS MONTANA

COOLEST SEASON ADVENTURES

With epic powder conditions, endless miles of skiable terrain, snow-frosted national parks and cozy snowbound lodges, Montana offers a winter escape with big rewards.



BIG SKY
RESORT

MONTANA'S SLOPES DELIVER PEAK-TO-PEAK

panoramas and bottomless powder without hype or hassle. With more than a dozen alpine ski areas, pick one that fits your style.

📍 **ADRENALINE RUSH:** You're a weekend warrior who loves a challenge.

Montana's largest ski resort and one of America's 10 biggest, **Big Sky Resort** serves up some of the West's most hard-charging inbounds skiing, with the longest of its white-knuckle descents a 4,350-foot vertical drop. Big Sky Resort also boasts North America's first eight-person chairlift. Plus, it's an IKON Pass destination, one of 41 iconic ski areas worldwide that share pass privileges.

Montana Snowbowl, Missoula's home mountain, has huge vertical descents and challenging backcountry terrain. Open runs, glades, gullies, chutes and deep powder-filled bowls cater to every level.

📍 **POWDER POWER:** You're a purist who cares more about snow than après-ski.

An easy drive from Missoula, Butte and Helena, **Discovery Ski Area** lays claim to some of the steepest lift-served terrain in the state, plus sweeping powder bowls and experts-only double-black-diamond runs. Near Bozeman, 2,000-acre **Bridger Bowl Ski Area** is revered for its "cold smoke" snow, the fluffiest and driest powder. Experts make a beeline for "the ridge," a mecca of steep chutes and rock cliffs. Perched atop the Continental Divide on the border of Montana and Idaho, **Lost Trail Powder Mountain** has no lodging or restaurants, but offers some of the state's most abundant snowfall and a challenging array of glades, chutes and cliffs.

📍 **TRUE BLUE:** You find your happy place in smooth blue corduroy runs.

If you ski only for bluebird-day views and swoopy cruises, **Blacktail Mountain** near Flathead Lake is your spot. It's the only Montana ski resort where you drive your car to the top. With lake views and wide-angle vistas of the Swan Mountains, the drive up is almost as enjoyable as the ski down.

📍 **BUDGET-MINDED PARENTS:** You want a good deal on lessons and lift tickets.

High atop the Continental Divide and close to Helena, **Great Divide** bills itself as having Montana's longest and sunniest ski season. Family-friendly options include the Sno-Kids program, which lets preschoolers try out skiing for only 10 bucks. Straddling Montana and Idaho, **Lookout Pass Ski and Recreation Area** offers a free ski school for kids and value-priced lift tickets for everybody else.

📍 **SOLITUDE SEEKERS:** You want the mountain all to yourself.

In southwest Montana, **Maverick Mountain** exudes an old-school ski vibe with one chairlift, 24 trails and a lack of crowds. Or



head to **Showdown Montana** in the Little Belt Mountains. With only four lifts and 650 acres of skiable terrain, this 1936 resort—Montana's oldest continually operated—is known for untrampled snow. In northwest Montana, you can even rent all of volunteer-run **Turner Mountain** for you and your guests.

📍 **SKI AND PLAY:** You want to ski, but you also want nightlife and off-snow fun.

Whitefish Mountain Resort's 3,000 skiable acres in northwest Montana are only part of the action. There's also lighted night skiing on weekends and holidays from late December to early March, and plenty of lively options in the base village. Or kick off your ski boots in downtown Whitefish's watering holes, like The Great Northern Brewing Company. If you're near Billings, **Red Lodge Mountain** beckons with big mountain terrain and fast-paced tree skiing. The artsy 19th-century town of Red Lodge supplies many nonskiing options, such as Old-West-style saloons and Montana's oldest movie theater.

MONTANA'S CELEBRATED NATIONAL PARKS

provide one-of-a-kind experiences in winter. In **Glacier National Park**, make tracks on cross-country skis along the shores of Lake McDonald, or join a ranger-led snowshoe tour in the Apgar area. Glacier's hotels and most roads close in winter, but permit camping is available. At **Yellowstone National Park**, only the Gardiner entrance is open for autos year-round; explore the glistening white landscape by snowcoach, snowmobile, skis or snowshoes. Cozy up at Old Faithful Snow Lodge and Cabins, ride in a snowcoach van to the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone River to see frozen Lower Falls, or snowshoe to explore Upper Geyser Basin's steamy springs.

MORE SNOW FUN

Not a skier? Try these powder-play adventures.

SOAK UP THE WARMTH at three historic hot springs resorts—Quinn's, Chico and Elkhorn—and plan to spend a night at each. After a bask in mineral-rich hot water, you won't feel like driving.

RIDE IN A HEATED SNOWCAT at Big Sky Resort to the backcountry Montana Dinner Yurt, then savor filet mignon and French onion soup served by candlelight. After dessert, sled on a torch-lit run and see the Milky Way.

GLIDE ACROSS THE SNOW IN A SLEIGH pulled by majestic horses at Double Arrow Lodge

in Seeley Lake, Bar W Guest Ranch in Whitefish or Black Diamond Guest Ranch in De Borgia.

TAKE A DOGSLEDDING TOUR with outfitters like Base Camp Bigfork in Bigfork, or Dog Sled Adventures or Winter Woods Dog Sled Tours, both in Whitefish.

RIDE A SNOWMOBILE on a guided Flathead Valley tour with Swan Mountain Snowmobiling, or book a tour at Rich's Montana Guest Ranch in the Swan Mountains.

PEDAL ON A FAT-TIRE BIKE on the snow. Whitefish Bike Retreat offers lodging, rentals and winter trail access to a 16-mile track in the Beaver Lakes Recreation Area.

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TRAVEL RESOURCES

[VISITMT.COM/PLAN-YOUR-TRIP](https://www.visitmt.com/plan-your-trip)

ROAD CONDITIONS (STATEWIDE)

Dial 511 or visit [MDT511.com](https://www.mdt511.com)

TRAVEL INFO MOBILE APP

[MDT.MT.GOV/TRAVINFO](https://www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo)

NATIONAL PARKS

Glacier National Park 406.888.7800

Yellowstone National Park 307.344.7381

REGION INFO 1.800.847.4868

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