MONTANA
10 ULTIMATE ROAD TRIPS
THE BEST
OF BIG SKY
COUNTRY
PLANNING
YOUR TRIP
TRAVEL GUIDE FROM THE MONTANA OFFICE OF TOURISM AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
Hike to the top of Lower Yellowstone Falls.
Cover: Peer into majestic Bighorn Canyon.
WELCOME TO BIG SKY COUNTRY

Montana is like no place else on Earth. Dinosaurs once roamed here, and majestic bison, elk, and grizzly bears still do. Montana is a gateway to Glacier and Yellowstone—two crown jewels of the national park system—and is home to glistening glacial lakes, snowcapped mountain peaks, blue-ribbon trout streams, and the mighty Missouri, Yellowstone, and Flathead Rivers.

Vast, unspoiled, and wild, “Big Sky Country” represents the very best of the American West. Rugged cowboys still saddle up to ride at ranches and wow crowds at rodeos. Ghost towns, state parks, and a one-of-a-kind Dinosaur Trail preserve a dazzling array of historical treasures—and offer opportunities to hunt for fossils and gems. Seven Indian Nations celebrate the state’s rich American Indian heritage and traditions. Scenic train, float, and driving trips retrace the routes forged by explorers Lewis and Clark. And backcountry trails lead to wild, secluded spaces where it is still possible to be utterly alone.
1. Yellowstone Country

**The Route:** Livingston > I-90 to Columbus > MT-78 to Red Lodge > U.S. 212 to Yellowstone National Park entrance > U.S. 212 > Grand Loop Road > U.S. 89 to Gardiner > Exit Wyoming to Montana > U.S. 89 > MT-540 through Paradise Valley > U.S. 89 to Livingston

**Total Distance:** approximately 360 miles

**Gateway Airport:** Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport, Bozeman

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE and spectacular scenery abound on this five-day scenic loop through southern Montana and into Yellowstone National Park. Hike on a wilderness plateau. Raft the Stillwater River. Horseback ride in Paradise Valley. Along the way, make a stop to soak in a hot springs-fed pool.

**ON THE FLY** Begin in Livingston with a pilgrimage to Dan Bailey’s, the all-things-angler shop founded in 1938 by the father of Montana fly-fishing. Buy hand-tied flies, hire a local fishing guide, or get tips on where the trout are biting that day. **Eat & Stay:** Livingston Bar and Grille and Yellowstone Valley Lodge, Livingston.

**RIDE OR RAFT** Trade your car for a horse and hit the trail. Paintbrush Adventures in Absarokee leads rides into Montana’s highest mountains. Bear Paw Outfitters in Paradise Valley offers trips to places like Yellowstone and Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Or, take a pulse-pounding rafting trip down the Stillwater River with Absaroka River Adventures. **Eat & Stay:** Café Regis and The Pollard, Red Lodge.

**PEAK PERFORMANCE** Soak in the scenery on the Beartooth Highway (U.S. 212), an All-American Road connecting Red Lodge to the northeast entrance of Yellowstone National Park. The highway (late May to mid-October) leads past 20 peaks of more than 12,000 feet and over the 10,900-plus-foot Beartooth Plateau. **Eat & Stay:** Beartooth Café, Cooke City (late May to late September), and Silver Gate Lodging, Silver Gate.

**WIDE-EYED WONDERS** Prepare to be amazed as you follow the Grand Loop Road south through Yellowstone National Park. Highlights include the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone; the bubbling Mud Volcano area; and the Mammoth Hot Springs, a hotbed of geothermal formations. **Eat & Stay:** Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel and Cabins (late April to early October and mid-December to March), Yellowstone National Park.
ROAD LESS TRAVELED Turn onto scenic U.S. 89 in Livingston to take the Paradise Valley Scenic Drive. Paralleling the Upper Yellowstone River between the Absaroka and Gallatin mountain ranges, the drive passes through pasturelands of the lower valley, and delivers pure Montana mountain and river vistas. Eat & Stay: K-Bar Pizza, Gardiner, and Chico Hot Springs Resort and Day Spa, Pray.

2. Great Plains Adventures

The Route: Fort Benton > U.S. 87 > Havre > U.S. 2 > Malta > U.S. 191 > Lewistown > MT-3 > MT-80 > Fort Benton Total Distance: approximately 400 miles Gateway Airport: Great Falls International Airport

FOR MONTANA’S American Indian people, bison, or buffalo, are revered symbols of strength and unity. Celebrate the bison, see them roam, and discover how the mighty bison helped create the state on this six-day drive across Big Sky badlands and prairies.

BIRTHPLACE OF MONTANA Start where the state began in Fort Benton, once the world’s largest inland port. At the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, buy a two-day admission to the Interpretive Center, Old Fort Benton, the Museum of the Upper Missouri, and the Museum of the Northern Great Plains. Eat & Stay: Union Grille and Grand Union Hotel, Fort Benton.

SADDLE UP The next day, go antiquing at the Virgelle Mercantile. Try horseback riding at Sky View Guest Ranch (reservations required), and see the “buffalo rock” used as a bison scratching post. Eat & Stay: Navlivka’s Original Pizza Kitchen and Best Western Plus Havre Inn and Suites, Havre.

ALL ABOUT THE BISON Stop at Wahkpa Chu’gn Archaeological Site (June to Labor Day) to see a buffalo jump with an excavated wall of archaeological deposits, including compacted buffalo bones and skulls. See wild bison on a guided tour of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation’s buffalo reserve. (Call 406 353 4350 or 406 945 0014 for reservations.) Eat & Stay: (Detour east to Malta on U.S. 2) Great Northern Hotel and Steakhouse, Malta.

DINOSAURS & DETOURS Play paleontologist at the Great Plains Dinosaur Museum and Phillips County Museum in Malta. Take a side trip to either Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge (follow Old U.S. 2 east) or Sleeping Buffalo Hot Springs Resort (via U.S. 2.
3. Small Towns and Ghost Towns

The Route: Butte > MT-41 > MT-287 through Virginia City to Ennis > U.S. 287 > MT-2 through Cardwell to Butte
Shortcut: Take I-90 from Cardwell to Butte for a faster drive. Total Distance: approximately 300 miles Gateway Airport: Bert Mooney Airport, Butte

Wander through authentic 1800s ghost towns on this rambling four-day route over mountains, across the Continental Divide, and along blue-ribbon trout streams. Butte (population 33,854) is the “big city” on the drive. Legend has it some of the smaller towns harbor gold-rush-era ghosts.

Dig in Begin in Butte, once known as the “richest hill on Earth” thanks to a multi-billion-dollar mining industry. Take an underground tour at the World Museum of Mining, located on the former site of the Orphan Girl silver and zinc mine. Continue this theme at Headframe Spirits, makers of Orphan Girl Bourbon Cream Liqueur. In the distillery’s tasting room, try an Orphan Girl Chocolate Drift (mixed with vodka and chocolate syrup). Eat & Stay: Joe’s Pasty Shop and Finlen Hotel and Motor Inn, Butte.

Field Trip Consider detouring at Wise River (west on MT-43 past Wisdom) to Big Hole National Battlefield. This sacred site of the Nez Perce people is part of the multistate Nez Perce National Historical Park. At Wise River, slow down and enjoy the scenery along the 49-mile-long Pioneer Mountains Scenic Byway. In summer, visit the ghost town of Coolidge. Eat & Stay: Jackson Hot Springs Lodge, Jackson.

Go Ghostbusters Stop in the route’s three best-preserved ghost towns: Bannack State Park, Nevada City, and Virginia City (which remains a living town with about 190 full-time residents). The latter two towns house a collection of 19th-century buildings and Americana, including more than a hundred arcade and music machines. If visiting in summer, reserve tickets for Virginia City’s bawdy Brewery Follies or family-friendly Virginia City Players shows. Eat & Stay: Bale of Hay Saloon (May to September), Virginia City, and Nevada City Hotel and Cabins, Nevada City.

Catch & Release Spend the day fishing (or learning to fly-fish) in the tiny town of Ennis with such fly-fishing outfitters as the Tackle Shop, Madison River Fishing Company, and Trout stalkers. Buy or rent outdoor gear, book a guided fly-fishing trip (April to November 1), or get angling tips. Continue on to Norris Hot Springs (open year round), known locally as “water of the gods.” While soaking, watch for deer and antelope. Eat & Stay: Banditos, Ennis, and Norris Hot Springs Campground (May to September), Norris.

4. Backbone of the Rockies

The Route: Kalispell > U.S. 93 > Whitefish > MT-40 > U.S. 2E > Glacier Route 1 Going-to-the-Sun Road > St. Mary > U.S. 89 toward Babb > Many Glacier Road to Many Glacier > backtrack on Many Glacier Road to U.S. 89 and back to St. Mary > MT-49 > Two Medicine Road to Two Medicine Lake > backtrack to MT-49 > East Glacier > U.S. 2W > MT-206 > MT-35 > Kalispell
Total Distance: approximately 265 miles Gateway Airport: Glacier Park International Airport, Kalispell

Rugged, wild, and incredibly scenic, this five-day trip is filled with only-in-Montana experiences. Travel Glacier National Park’s legendary Going-to-the-Sun Road. Take a ranger-led tour to see the park’s namesake glaciers. Raft or fish untamed waters. And chew down on a hearty steak supper or sleep in a restored railroad car.

Go Wild Pre-register for a wildlife photography workshop at Kalispell’s Triple “D” Game Farm, a safe place to capture images of wolves, grizzly bears, mountain lions, and other native Montana animals. Or, hike in Lone Pine State Park for far-as-the-eye-can-see views of Kalispell, the Flathead River and Flathead Lake, and the Swan Mountain range. Eat & Stay: Western Barbecue Dinner Ride at Artemis Acres Paint Horse Guest Ranch and Kalispell Grand Hotel, Kalispell.

Take a Hike There’s so much to see in Glacier National Park that you’ll need to spend at least two days there. Begin by hiking the Highline Trail (for alpine views and possible wildlife sightings) or the Iceberg Lake Trail, which leads to a teal-blue lake holding small icebergs most of the summer. Eat & Stay: Base Camp Café, Columbia Falls, and Belton Chalet, West Glacier.

**DONNIE SEXTON** /parenleft.caseGLACIER/parenright.case

**CROWN OF THE CONTINENT** On your second Glacier day, drive the epic Going-to-the-Sun Road (partially closed mid-September through early June) through the heart of the park and over 6,646-foot Logan Pass. **Eat & Stay:** St. Mary Lodge and Snowgoose Grille, St. Mary.

**OFF THE BEATEN PATH** On the eastern side of the park, take a detour to Browning and the Museum of the Plains Indian. Watch American Indian artists demonstrate authentic crafts, including weaving with porcupine quills. **Eat & Stay:** Johnson’s of St. Mary (mid-May through September), St. Mary, and Izzy Walton Inn (railroad car room), Essex.

**SEE & SKI** Whitefish Mountain Resort is an all-season destination for adventure. Ride the lifts to the summit in winter to ski and year round for views of Glacier National Park, the Flathead Valley, the Canadian Rockies, and more. **Eat & Stay:** Loula’s and The Lodge at Whitefish Lake, Whitefish.

**EPIC ENDINGS** Extend your stay with a side trip from Kalispell west on MT-2 to Kootenai Falls, one of the largest free-flowing waterfalls in the northwest. View the 30-foot-high main falls from a swinging bridge. From Libby, take off with Kootenai Aviation for an aerial tour of the Cabinet Mountains. Or, watch for wildlife and visit Libby Dam along the Lake Koocanusa Scenic Byway. In winter, deep-powder Turner Mountain Ski Area is a must-ski for experts—60 percent of the runs are black diamond. **Eat & Stay:** Libby Cafe, Libby, and Double J Bed and Breakfast, Troy.

**5. From Flathead to Philipsburg**

**The Route:** Missoula > U.S. 93 > MT-35 to Bigfork > MT-83 > MT-200 > MT-141 > MT-271 > Frontage Road East > Front Street through Drummond > MT-1 through Philipsburg to Porters Corner > MT-38 over Skalkaho Pass > U.S. 93 to Missoula

**Total Distance:** approximately 380 miles

**Gateway Airport:** Missoula International Airport, Missoula

**WILDLIFE WATCH** Spend the morning at the National Bison Range in Moiese. Bring binoculars to look for bison, bighorn sheep, elk, deer, and black bears. From the range visitor’s center, it’s about ten miles to Charlo and the Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge. Drive the back roads to see the kettle ponds where waterfowl—including tundra swans, white pelicans, and Canada geese—congregate. While in genuine Montana sapphires. And, if you dare, take the steep and winding portion of MT-38 over 7,257-foot Skalkaho Pass.

**PEDAL POWER** Slow down to enjoy the scenery in Missoula, a gold-level Bicycle Friendly Community. Rent a bike and ride the Riverfront Trail to the hand-carved Carousel for Missoula. Pedal around the University of Montana campus or along the Missoula Microbrew Tour trail. Park the bike long enough to hike the M, the city’s signature hiking trail, and go surfing Montana-style at Brennan’s Wave, a man-made white-water venue on the Clark Fork River. **Eat & Stay:** Biga Pizza and Gibson Mansion Bed and Breakfast, Missoula.

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Charlo, go horseback riding (reservations required) at Cheff Guest Ranch. Eat & Stay: The Raven and Mountain Lake Lodge, Bigfork.

**LAKE LIFE** Plan ahead to play in, on, or around a lake. Base Camp Bigfork offers all-season Flathead Lake activities including summer stand-up paddleboarding (SUP), kayak rentals, and winter Dogsled Adventures. In Seeley Lake, rent a Wave Runner, boat, or bike in summer and a snowmobile, snowshoes, or cross-country skis in winter. Save time to mine for Montana sapphires in Philipsburg. Eat & Stay: Lindley’s Prime Steak House, Seeley Lake, and Ranch at Rock Creek, Philipsburg.

**PASS OR PLAY** Choose your route back to Missoula. The best views are from Skalkaho Pass; however, getting there requires driving 54 miles of the narrow Skalkaho Road portion of MT-38. The dirt-and-gravel route is closed in winter. An easier option is backtracking to I-90 near Drummond. In Missoula, take a serene, scenic float trip; wild, white-water rafting excursion; or exhilarating river boarding ride. Eat & Stay: Red Bird, Missoula and the Running Horse Inn Bed and Breakfast, Huson.

### 6. Main Street Adventures

**The Route:** Great Falls > U.S. 87 > U.S. 89 to White Sulphur Springs > U.S. 89 > U.S. 12 to Townsend > backtrack to MT 284 to Helena > I-15 > U.S. 287 > U.S. 89 to Great Falls

**Total Distance:** approximately 380 miles

**Gateway Airport:** Great Falls International, Great Falls

This five-day loop through central and southwest Montana travels in and on the edge of the Rockies. Celebrate Western art, explore state parks and the state capital, soak in hot springs, and take a magical boat ride down the Missouri River.

**ECLECTIC COWBOY** Begin in Great Falls, home to the C.M. Russell Museum, a tribute to legendary Western artist Charlie Russell. Before leaving town, see mermaids swimming at the Sip ‘n Dip Lounge. In Ulm, visit the First Peoples Buffalo Jump, a sandstone cliff with nearly 18 feet of compacted bison remains below. Eat & Stay: Celtic Cowboy Pub and Restaurant and Hotel Arvon, Great Falls.

**MOUNTAIN MAJESTY** Southeast of Great Falls, hop on the Kings Hill Scenic Byway. The 71-mile drive crosses the highest pass in Montana that’s open all year and runs through the Lewis and Clark National Forest. See the Big Belt Mountains to the west and the Castle Mountains to the east, and stop to hike the easy Memorial Falls Trail. Eat & Stay: Branding Iron Cafe and Spa and Hot Springs Motel, White Sulphur Springs.

**TINY TOWN** Detour to Martinsdale (population 92), about 72 miles round-trip from White Sulphur Springs. Tour the Bar Museum here to see Edward Curtis photographs, and original Charlie Russell and Joseph Henry Sharp paintings, among other items. Buy an original glass piece at Goose Bay Handblown Glass in Townsend. Eat & Stay: Highlander Bar and Grill, Canyon Ferry, and Hellgate Campground and Group Use Shelter Area, located east of Helena on the banks of the Canyon Ferry Reservoir, between the Big Belt and Elkhorn Mountains.

**MIKE & BIKE** Spend the day exploring the state capital, Helena, on foot or by bike. The city is known for its network of classic single-track mountain biking trails and its self-guided walking tours. Or, use your phone or rent a GPS to see the sights on one of Helena’s 38 geocaching tours. Eat & Stay: Lucca’s and Sanders B and B, Helena.

**OPTICAL ILLUSION** Book a two-hour boat tour down the Missouri through the Gates of the Mountains. The route appears to be blocked by 1,200-foot-tall cliffs. Only those making the journey can see the “gates” magically open up to reveal a path down the river. Eat & Stay: Log Cabin, Choteau, and Missouri River Ranch, Craig.
7. On the Loose in Big Sky

The Route: Bozeman > U.S. 191 > West Yellowstone > U.S. 191 > Bozeman

Total Distance: approximately 180 miles

Gateway Airport: Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport, Bozeman

It’s possible to make this drive from Bozeman to Yellowstone National Park and back in only a day. But why would you want to? Take it slow. Set aside six days to savor the incredible scenery and—in the snow in winter and on the hiking and biking trails the rest of the year.

On the Rocks Begin in Bozeman, the adventure capital of the Northern Rockies. In winter, learn to ice climb in Hyalite Canyon or hit the slopes at the laid-back Bridger Bowl. No snow? No problem. Take a guided outdoor rock-climbing trip with Spire Climbing Center. Eat & Stay: Nova Caffé and The Lark, Bozeman.

Dig in Spend the morning viewing the amazing array of paleontology exhibits in the Seibell Dinosaur Complex, located at Bozeman’s Museum of the Rockies. Gear up for the adventures ahead at Schnee’s, makers of handcrafted, rubber sole pac boots designed to handle any Montana weather. Eat & Stay: Montana Ale Works and Gallatin River Lodge, Bozeman.

Big Fun Drive south to Big Sky Resort, an all-season playground with four mountains. If there’s snow, ski, snowboard, sled, snowshoe, or skate. In warmer weather, go ziplining, hike Lone Mountain, jump on the bungee trampoline, or scale the climbing wall. Eat & Stay: Buck’s T-4 and Huntley Lodge, Big Sky.

Yellowstone Make West Yellowstone your base for any adventure in and around Yellowstone National Park. See wildlife at the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center. Hike and bike. Go fly-fishing in a blue-ribbon trout stream. Mid-December through mid-March take a snow coach to the Old Faithful area. Eat & Stay: Madison Crossing Lounge and Three Bear Lodge, West Yellowstone.

Play Day Spend another day in West Yellowstone or the national park. Or, head back to Big Sky Resort to try activities—including dog sledding in winter and the high ropes course in summer—that you couldn’t fit in earlier. Eat & Stay: Woodside Bakery, West Yellowstone, and Lone Mountain Ranch, Big Sky.

Shop & Skate Back in Bozeman, browse the historic downtown shops and shop for original pieces at the Emerson Center for the Arts and Culture. From Christmas Day through the end of February, rent skates and glide across the ice at one of the city’s
free outdoor rinks. Eat & Stay: The Western Café and Element, Bozeman.

8. Bighorn and Beyond

The Route: Billings > I-94 to Miles City > backtrack west on I-94 to exit 72 > MT-384 to Hardin > I-90 to Crow Agency > Crow St. Xavier Road > MT-313 > Pryor St. Xavier cut-across to Pryor > MT-418 > MT-416 to Billings

Total Distance: approximately 400 miles

Gateway Airport: Billings Logan International Airport, Billings

Learn More About Montana’s rich Native American heritage and cowboy culture on this four-day drive through Little Bighorn Country. The history-packed route crosses Indian nations, the state’s biggest city, and the path taken by the Lew- is and Clark Corps of Discovery expedition.

PICTOGRAPHS & PILLARS

From Billings, head south to Pictograph Cave State Park, home to over a hundred rock paintings and artifacts left by prehistoric hunters. Forge on to Pompeys Pillar National Monument, a rock formation rising 150 feet above the Yellowstone River. Look for the spot where William Clark (of Lewis and Clark fame) carved his name and date into the pillar. Eat & Stay: The Burger Dive and the Northern Hotel, Billings.

BRONCS & BADLANDS

The next destination is Miles City, best known for its annual Bucking Horse Sale weekend each May. Learn about the town’s Old West roots at the Range Riders Museum before sampling the latest vintages at Tongue River Winery. Detour east to the town of Terry to shop for Made in Montana goods at Prairie Unique. If you’re driving a high-clearance vehicle, explore the Terry Badlands Wilderness Study Area. Eat & Stay: Montana Bar and Steakhouse and The Horton House B and B, Miles City.

SACRED GROUND

In Crow Agency, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument preserves the memory of the American Indian warriors and U.S. Cavalry soldiers (led by George Custer) lost in the epic conflict here in 1876. See the site with Apsaalooke Tours, which employs mostly Crow Indians as guides. The one-hour tour includes stops at Reno-Benteen Battlefield (where the Battle of Little Bighorn began) and Last Stand Hill. Eat & Stay: Lariat Country Kitchen, Hardin, and 7th Ranch RV Camp and Historical Tours, Garryowen.

GRANDEST CANYON

On the way back to Billings, detour south to the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, aptly billed as “the grandest canyon in the Northern Rockies.” Spend the morning hiking, fishing, boating, or watching for wildlife—including bighorn sheep and mule deer—before heading back to the road trip route. Outside of Pryor, visit Chief Plenty Coups State Park, one of only three U.S. state parks located on an American Indian reservation. Eat & Stay: Lilac and Dude Rancher Lodge, Billings.

9. Footsteps of Lewis & Clark


Total Distance: approximately 450 miles

Gateway Airport: Glasgow International, Glasgow

Retrace the Path of Lewis and Clark, and parallel two mighty rivers—the Missouri and the Yellowstone—on a five-day loop around the state’s northeastern badlands and spacious plains. This route-less-traveled crosses the Fort Peck Indian Reservation and passes through...
lands where dinosaurs once roamed.

**WIDE-OPEN SPACES** Head east from Glasgow to Wolf Point, home of July’s annual Wild Horse Stampede. Detour up MT-13 for a back-in-time visit to Scobey, home of the Daniels County Museum and Pioneer Town. Or, head north on MT-16 to look for white pelicans at the Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Eat & Stay: Berge’s Café & Gifts, Nashua, and Microtel Inn, Sidney.

**BORDER CROSSING** View Western art and pioneer artifacts at The MontDak Heritage Center in Sidney (closed Sundays and Mondays). From here, take a side trip to the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, once the fur-trading hub of the Upper Missouri. The site straddles the Montana-North Dakota border. Eat & Stay: Montana-North Dakota border.

**PLAY PALEONTOLOGIST** In Glendive, pre-book a fossil hunt with Baisch’s Dinosaur Digs (April to October). See a Triceratops horridus skull and hike through the badlands at Makoshika State Park, one of two Glendive stops (Frontier Gateway Museum is the other) on the Montana Dinosaur Trail. Eat & Stay: Beclid Pizza and Astoria Hotel & Suites, Glendive.

**BACK COUNTRY** Head west to hook up with the Big Sky Byway, a 105-mile scenic route following a section of the historic Regina-Yellowstone (R-Y) Trail. Stop at the Byway kiosk in Terry to learn more about the drive. At the northern end of the route, visit the Fort Peck Interpretive Center and Museum to see “Peck’s Rex,”™ one of the world’s most complete Tyrannosaurus rex skeletons. Eat & Stay: Gateway Club and Fort Peck Hotel, Fort Peck (May to November).

**HYDRO POWER** Before driving back to Glasgow, explore any of the six recreation areas surrounding Fort Peck Lake. See Fort Peck Dam and take a free tour of the Fort Peck Power Plant Museum (Memorial Day to Labor Day). Downstream from the dam, hike the Beaver Creek Nature Trail and look for elk and bison on the Leo B. Coleman Wildlife Exhibit driving route. Eat & Stay: Sam’s Supper Club and Cottonwood Inn, Glasgow.

**10. Bitterroot Valley**

The Route: Missoula > U.S. 93 > Lost Trail Pass > MT-43 > Big Hole National Battlefield > MT-43 > U.S. 93 > MT-269 > St. Mary’s Mission & Museum Total Distance: approximately 230 miles Gateway Airport: Missoula International Airport, Missoula

**DIG DEEP** into Montana’s roots on a four-day drive through the history-rich Bitterroot Valley. The down-and-back route crosses the Nez Perce and Lewis and Clark National Historic Trails, as well as the Continental Divide. Along the way, bunk in a hand-hewn log cabin and camp under the stars. Watch for moose, elk, and deer. Soak in natural hot springs. And, depending on the season, go skiing, skating, hiking, or horseback riding.

**ICE AGE** At Missoula’s Montana Natural History Center, get a free driving map of the proposed Ice Age Floods National Geologic Trail, and visit some local Glacier Lake Missoula landmarks. Walk in the footsteps of explorers near Lolo at Travelers’ Rest State Park, the only site on the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail with a confirmed expedition campsite.

**EXPLORE MORE ONLINE** Get additional road trip information—including interactive maps, special events, and more must-see stops—at nationalgeographic.com/montana/roadtrips.

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**Eat & Stay:**
- **Lolo Hot Springs, Lolo:**
- **Fort Peck Power Plant Museum:**
- **Montana Dinosaur Trail:**
- **Fort Peck Interpretive Center and Museum:**

**WHERE MONTANA BEGAN** On the return trip to Missoula, stop in Stevensville to tour (April 15 to October 15) the historic St. Mary’s Mission & Museum. The complex, established in 1841, includes a Salish encampment and American Indian artifacts. Visit nearby Fort Owen State Park, site of the first permanent white settlement in Montana. Eat & Stay: Bitter Root Brewery, Hamilton, and The Stevensville Hotel, Stevensville.

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**Bottom left to right:** Try a homemade donut at Windmill Village Bakery, Ravalli. Take a soak at Norris Hot Springs. Hunt for morels, a fungus native to Montana, at many of the local farmers’ markets.
Paddle along the path of Lewis and Clark on an Upper Missouri River canoe trip.
Montana’s rich history can be felt at many of the Powwow events across the state, including on the Fort Peck Reservation.
HISTORY & HERITAGE

In Montana, the past is always present. Wherever your travels take you, you’ll find museums, monuments, and cultural centers with hands-on opportunities to learn about the state’s amazingly rich history. Dig into our dinosaur roots by hunting for fossils. Tour a ghost town or travel underground to learn about mining. Celebrate the tribal culture and traditions of our seven Indian Nations at annual events like the Crow Fair, held annually since 1918. Retrace the paths of pioneers and explorers, including Lewis and Clark’s Corps of Discovery expedition. Experience what it means to be Montanan by discovering the remarkable forces that shaped this land and the rugged individuals who call it home.

MONTANA DINOSAUR TRAIL

Montana is the home of dinosaurs. The first Tyrannosaurus rex found in the world came from the state in 1902, and the first dinosaur fossils identified in North America were discovered here in the 1840s. Follow the 14-stop Montana Dinosaur Trail to uncover the state’s prehistoric past, and visit the mostly rural communities located on the 1,300-mile route. Three stops—Two Medicine Dinosaur Center, Great Plains Dinosaur Museum, and Makoshika Dinosaur Museum—have field dig programs. Two communities—Glendive and Malta—each have two Dinosaur Trail locations. And one of the world’s largest collections of dinosaur fossils is housed in Bozeman’s Museum of the Rockies.

LEWIS AND CLARK SIGNATURE SITES

Follow the route of discovery forged by the Lewis and Clark expedition more than 200 years ago. Monuments, interpretive centers, caverns, and state parks honor the explorers and tell their story of adventure and survival. Near Billings you’ll find the only remaining physical evidence of the Corps of Discovery on the trail at Pompeys Pillar National Monument. Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park in Whitehall offers guided tours (May 2 to September 30) of one of the most impressive caves in the United States (though the expedition never passed through there). At the Headwaters Heritage Museum in Three Forks, see a collection of Lewis and Clark memorabilia. And, in Great Falls, test your strength pulling a boat against the mighty Missouri’s current at the state-of-the-art Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center.

INDIAN NATIONS

Long before Montana became known as the “last best place,” this land was “the first best place” for several tribal nations. Today, the state remains a sacred place to the American Indians who live within reserved homelands—seven federally recognized Indian reservations—and in cities and towns throughout Montana. At the Museum of the Plains Indians in Browning, learn the stories of the Blackfeet, Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Sioux, Assiniboine, Arapaho, Shoshone, Nez Perce, Flathead, Chippewa, and Cree tribes. Visit some of the many sacred American Indian sites, including First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park in Ulm and the Big Hole National Battlefield in Wisdom, part of Nez Perce National Historical Park. And, at Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in Crow Agency, walk the site where chiefs Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull orchestrated the Plains Indian War’s most decisive American Indian victory. An 1881 obelisk memorializes the U.S. Army dead, including George Custer. “The Peace Through Unity” Indian Memorial, added in 2003, honors the American Indians who died here.
ONTANA BOASTS MILLIONS of unspoiled acres set aside for national and state parks. These vast wilderness wonders are home to a diverse collection of wildlife and a dizzying array of recreation options. Camp under the stars, backpack to glacial lakes, join a ranger-led program, or seek solitude in the remote backcountry in one of Montana’s wild and wide-open natural spaces.

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

Straddling the Continental Divide and covering an astounding 1,583 square miles, majestic Glacier is known as the “Crown of the Continent.” Drive the iconic Going-to-the-Sun Road, a twisting and turning route through the heart of the park and over 6,646-foot Logan Pass. Go for a hike on a few of the 700 miles of easy-to-challenging trails. Or, sit back and enjoy the unobstructed views while riding in one of the park’s ubiquitous red tour buses or in one of the wooden boats, which ply the bigger glacial lakes.

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

Yellowstone is the classic national park, featuring iconic sites such as Old Faithful and the planet’s biggest concentration of geysers. Established in 1872 as the U.S.’s first national park, Yellowstone also is where you’ll find the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone and the Mammoth Hot Springs Area, a hotbed of constantly changing geothermal formations. The park also is beloved for its abundant wildlife, including grizzly bears, bison, elk, and wolves. From Montana, there are three “front doors” to Yellowstone: the north entrance through Gardiner, where the iconic Roosevelt Arch stands; the entrance from West Yellowstone; and the northeast entrance near Cooke City and Silver Gate. For a scenic 68-mile drive to the latter, start in Red Lodge and follow the Beartooth Highway, designated as one of the nation’s best-of-the-best scenic drives. The route takes you past 20 peaks of more than 12,000 feet and over the Beartooth Plateau.

EXPLORE MORE

Besides Glacier and Yellowstone, Montana features seven other sites managed by the National Park Service. These range from Big Hole Battlefield, which honors 90 members of the Nez Perce tribe and 31 soldiers and volunteers killed in an attack in early August 1877, to Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, covering 120,000 acres of wilderness and celebrating its 50th year as a park in 2016. Or, visit the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, which spans Montana and North Dakota, the place where American Indians traded buffalo robes and other furs for goods such as guns, blankets, clothing, and beads. The Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site, at one time the center of a 10-million acre cattle operation, is the place to learn about the lives of cowboys and cattlemen in the Old West. The Lewis and Clark Historic Trail traces the route of the famous Corps of Discovery through 11 states, including Montana. The Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument is the site of “Custer’s Last Stand,” and the Nez Perce National Historical Park—spanning four states and 38 sites—tells the story of the native Nez Perce people’s struggle to preserve their land and culture.

STATE PARKS

Montana has more than 50 state parks offering fun and family-friendly activities. Whatever you want to do, there’s a park out here for you. Hike, bike, picnic, paddle, pitch a tent, or discover a chapter of Montana history. At Makoshika State Park in Glendive, ramble through the badlands to see fossilized remains or Tyrannosaurus rex, Triceratops, and other dinosaurs. Travel back in time at Bannack State Park, home to a non-commercialized ghost town dating from the gold rush era. In the Flathead Lake area, there are several state parks to choose from including off-the-beaten-path Lake Mary Ronan State Park, known for its terrific fishing and crystal clear waters. At West Shore State Park, stand on the rock outcrops carved by glaciers to savor spectacular views of Flathead Lake and the Mission Mountains and Swan Range.
Above: Strap on a pair of snowshoes and head out on the Mystic Lake Trail near the tiny community of Nye to access Montana's amazing backcountry.

Below: A few miles from the town of West Yellowstone is the fabled Two Top Mountain with sweeping views of Yellowstone National Park.
WINTER WONDERLAND

In Montana, frosty temps and falling snow usher in an action-packed season of wintry fun and adventure. Ski or snowboard at one of the state’s 15 ski areas. A downhill skier? No problem. With snowmobiling, snowshoeing, dog sledding, cross-country skiing, ice climbing, and more, there’s something for everyone who wants to play in the snow. And, since snow can arrive as early as October and linger through May, Montana offers one of the longest winter seasons in the lower 48 states to skate, schuss, glide, and soar.

IT’S ALL DOWNHILL

There’s no better skiing or snowboarding in the world than in Montana. With miles of groomed trails and deep-powder backcountry runs to choose from, you’ll never feel crowded or rushed. Big Sky Resort, the state’s largest ski area, boasts four mountains connected by chairlifts and the most room to roam (about two acres per skier). For the ultimate Big Sky experience, try First Tracks and get on the mountain before the lifts open to the public. Ski Whitefish Mountain Resort for 360-degree views of Glacier National Park. Take the lift to the top of Big Mountain for a variety of terrain and spectacular views.

MAKE TRACKS

Cross-country or nordic skiing and snowshoeing get you out of the hustle and bustle and back into the woods (where you’re more likely to spot wildlife). One of North America’s top nordic ski resorts is Big Sky’s Lone Mountain Ranch. Rent cross-country skis or snowshoes to explore the groomed trails. On Kings Hill Scenic Byway (U.S. 89) near Great Falls, hit the Silver Crest Trails. The top-notch network features nearly ten miles of groomed trails plus challenging backcountry ones. The Red Lodge Nordic Center on MT-78 has classic tracks and skate skiing lanes plus children’s programs and ski clinics.

ONLY-IN-MONTANA ADVENTURES

Montana is the place to go for off-the-beaten path winter experiences. Learn how to ice climb on a frozen waterfall in world-famous Hyalite Canyon near Bozeman. At Base Camp Bigfork, harness and mush your own team of Inuit sled dogs. Or, hold on tight and try Montana-style skijoring (sort of like water skiing, only on snow and pulled by a horse or mule instead of a boat) at the World Skijoring Championships in Whitefish. The wild, wacky, and always thrilling skijoring races are the fan favorite of January’s Whitefish Winter Carnival. This annual celebration of all things ice and snow includes a torchlight ski parade, Penguin Plunge in Whitefish Lake, ski races, hockey tournament, ice sculpting, and more.

SNOW-COVERED GLACIER AND YELLOWSTONE

Winter is one of the most magical times of the year in Montana’s most popular national parks—Glacier to the north and Yellowstone to the south. Fewer tourists venture into the parks this season, making it easier to spot wildlife, find solitude, and explore at your own pace. In Glacier, snowshoe through the snow-covered woods on a ranger-led walk. In Yellowstone, take a guided snowcoach or snowmobile tour with an authorized park concessionaire. Weather permitting, tours are available December 15 through March 15. Book the full-day Old Faithful Tour to see Firehole Falls, Fountain Paint Pots, Midway and Biscuit Geyser Basins, and Old Faithful.

MONTANA SKI AREAS

1. Bear Paw Ski Bowl
2. Blacktail Mountain
3. Great Divide
4. Lost Trail Powder Mountain
5. Maverick Mountain
6. Teton Pass
7. Turner Mountain
8. Teton Pass
9. Teton Pass
10. Teton Pass
11. Turner Mountain
12. Bear Paw Ski Bowl
13. Blacktail Mountain
14. Great Divide
15. Lost Trail Powder Mountain
16. Maverick Mountain
17. Teton Pass
18. Teton Pass
19. Turner Mountain

DAY AREAS WITH LIFT TICKETS UNDER $50

1. Bear Paw Ski Bowl
2. Blacktail Mountain
3. Great Divide
4. Lost Trail Powder Mountain
5. Maverick Mountain
6. Teton Pass
7. Turner Mountain

HIDDEN GEMS FOR A WEEKEND GETAWAY

8. Discovery Ski Area
9. Lookout Pass Ski & Recreation Area
10. Montana Snowbowl
11. Showdown Montana

DESTINATION RESORTS

12. Big Sky Resort
13. Bridger Bowl Ski Area
14. Red Lodge Mountain
15. Whitefish Mountain
FOOD & DRINK

Classical Cowboy Fare—including hearty steaks, tender prime rib, and steaming bowls of chili—remains a Montana staple. But that’s only the beginning of the flavor experiences available today in Big Sky Country. From chocolatiers to cheesemakers, and from craft brewers to foodie-favorite young chefs, Montanans are creating new taste sensations rooted in the state’s rich agricultural and ranching traditions.

EATS

Farm-to-table fresh is the hallmark of Montana cuisine. Across the state, you’ll find classic Mom-and-Pop joints—including Butte’s legendary Matt’s Place (try the “nut burger” topped with a chopped peanut and mayonnaise spread)—serving homemade ice cream, hand-cut fries, and fresh-baked breads and pies. And the daily menus at fine-dining establishments—such as Café Khandahar in Whitefish and Open Range in Bozeman—regularly feature locally raised bison, elk, and pork, as well as seasonally fresh fruits and vegetables, and wild-caught fish.

Homegrown

Pull off at local farmers’ markets and roadside stands to sample the best of Montana’s seasonal bounty. From wild, handpicked huckleberries (and huckleberry jam, jelly, syrup, ice cream, and more) to Flathead cherries and local apiary honey, there are homegrown and artisanal foods and products available around most every bend in the road.

Libations

Montana-grown malted grain and glacial fresh water fuel the state’s vibrant farm-to-tap brewing culture. Montana is home to over 50 independent craft breweries, ranging from small-batch Bandit Brewing Company in Darby to statewide distributor Big Sky Brewing Company in Missoula. And the number of small-batch distilleries—such as Glacier Distilling in Coram and Trailhead Spirits in Billings—continues to grow. Look for Made in Montana whiskies and fine spirits, including Glacier’s Huckleberry Gin infused with local spruce tips.

Above clockwise: Enjoy flatbread and fresh air at the Emerson Grill, Bozeman. See what’s on tap at the Great Northern Brewing Company, Whitefish. Save room for a lemon-blueberry tart at Kafe Utza, Miles City. Right: Experience the farm-to-table movement in Montana.
CAN’T MISS EVENTS

Montana is an all-season celebration destination. Whenever and wherever you visit, there’s sure to be a festival or fair happening nearby. Here’s a seasonal sampling of Big Sky country’s best and brightest annual events. For a complete listing and specific dates, go to visitmt.com.

**SPRING** (March to May)
- Western Art Week, Great Falls, March (www.westernartweek.com)
- Bucking Horse Sale, Miles City, May (www.buckinghorsesale.com)

**SUMMER** (June to August)
- Strawberry Festival, Billings, June (www.downtownbillings.com/events/strawberry-festival)
- Little Bighorn Days, Hardin, June
- Lewis and Clark Festival, Great Falls, June (www.lewissandclarkfoundation.org)
- Fort Benton Summer Celebration, Fort Benton, June (www.fortbenton.com/sumcel)
- Montana Folk Festival, Butte, July (www.montanafolkfestival.com)
- Livingston Roundup Rodeo, Livingston, July (www.livingstonmontana.org/visiting/livingston_roundup.html)
- Bannack Days, Bannack State Park, July (www.bannack.org/bannack_days.htm)
- Montana State Fair, Great Falls, July (www.montanastatefair.com)
- Evel Knievel Days, Butte, July (evelknievedays.org)
- Crow Fair Powwow Celebration, Crow Agency, August (http://www.crow-nsn.gov/)
- Montana Fair, Billings, August (www.montanafair.com)
- Montana Cowboy Poetry Gathering and Western Music Rendezvous, Lewistown, August (www.montanacowboypoetrygathering.com)
- Western Montana Fair, Missoula, August (www.missoulafairgrounds.com/western-montana-fair)

**FALL** (September to November)
- Great Montana Sheep Drive, Reed Point, September (www.chamber-event-galleries/reed-point-sheep-drive)
- Great Northwest Oktoberfest, Whitefish, September and October (www.whitefishoktoberfest.com)
- Ennis Hunters Feed, Ennis, October (www.ennischamber.com/calendar.asp)
- Tamarack Festival & Brewfest, Seeley Lake, October (www.brvshsmuseum.org)
- Montana Fair, Billings, August (www.montanafair.com)
- Montana Cowboy Poetry Gathering and Western Music Rendezvous, Lewistown, August (www.montanacowboypoetrygathering.com)
- Western Montana Fair, Missoula, August (www.missoulafairgrounds.com/western-montana-fair)

**WINTER** (December to February)
- Montana Winter Fair, Lewistown, January (www.montanawinterfair.com)
- Wild West Winterfest, Bozeman, February (www.bozeman.net/events/wild_west_winterfest.php)
PLANNING YOUR TRIP

If you aren’t already driving to Montana, rental vehicles are available once you arrive. For those adventures on back roads and gravel, a four-wheel-drive vehicle is recommended. Direct flights are available from several U.S. cities, and Amtrak’s Empire Builder (www.amtrak.com) runs between Chicago and Seattle, through the northern half of the state. For a list of airports and carriers, go to visitmt.com/airports

TRAVEL RESOURCES
Visit www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/ to download MDT’s Travel Info mobile app.

WEATHER REPORTS
Western Montana 406.721.3939
Central Montana 406.453.5469
Northeast Montana 406.228.9625
Southeast Montana 406.652.1916

24-HOUR ROAD CONDITIONS
Available Statewide 511
www.mdt511.com
Emergency phone service available statewide 911

LEARN MORE
VISITMT.COM/TRAVELER-RESOURCES

NATIONAL PARKS
Glacier National Park 406.888.7800
Yellowstone National Park 307.344.7381

SOCIAL MEDIA
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There’s no love button, so you’ll have to settle for “liking” Montana.
www.facebook.com/visitmontana

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While we’re usually distracted by another kind of twitter (bird watching, anyone?) we keep our virtual tidbits updated, too.
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INSTAGRAM
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www.montanamoment.tumblr.com

ONLINE RESOURCES
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