

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



NORTHWEST NATIONAL PARKS

By Andrea Berninger

Turn in your ear to a day or a two-day drive to the East and you can almost hear it. The chuckle of water streaming over granite, the wind's soft whir through mountain treetops, the sound of an eagle's wings as it hunts for dinner in a crystal lake. Glacier, Yellowstone and Grand Teton Parks, part of the National Park Service (NPS), epitomize the spirit of the West. Each park is worth a visit in its own right, or you can follow an extended, lasso-shaped road trip through the Inland Northwest's natural sanctuaries.

Above: The Grand Teton Range

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

One of the most glittering, chiseled jewels in the so-called Crown of the Continent Ecosystem region, Glacier National Park in Montana's northwest corner beckons two million visitors each year to its resplendent kingdom. Known as one of the most pristine natural settings left in North America, conservation efforts have preserved the park to appear much as it did when its namesake glaciers began receding 10,000 years ago.

That appearance? Almost unbelievably stunning panoramas of water, carved cliffs and forest encircle visitors. Wildflowers sprinkle the meadows during the spring and summer, their varieties changing through the park's different altitudes and climate zones.

More than 700 miles of trails link dozens and dozens of lakes, streams and valleys.

You'll want to keep your eyes sharp for wildlife; almost anywhere in the park, visitors may encounter the park's four-footed residents—moose, elk, deer, bear, bighorn sheep and mountain goats.

Many park guests steer their way along Going-to-the-Sun Highway, the part road, part engineering feat leading to and over Logan Pass. The section spanning the pass took 11 years to construct and



earns its reputation as one of the most scenic roads in North America. Outside the car, an outdoor lover's paradise awaits with opportunities for backcountry hiking, rafting, biking, fishing, rock climbing,

paddling, boating and horseback riding.

The Glacier area offers familiar hotel-type lodging and camping, but for a more unique

experience hikers will want to reserve spots in one of the historic trek-in chalets nestled in the park.

Much of Glacier National Park closes from mid-October until late May, but the Apgar Visitor Center remains open year-round (weekends only from November through March).

Go Deeper: Enroll at the Glacier Institute

Anyone can come back from a trip with a screen-printed T-shirt. How about bringing back newly acquired skills in survival, sea kayaking, or just sketching? The Glacier Institute, an environmental education center based in nearby Kalispell, Montana, turns learning into an adventure and the area's wilderness into a bountiful classroom.

The institute provides field-based experiences for ages 6 through adult, each designed to give participants a deeper understanding and appreciation of the environment. A staff of naturalists and professional guides brings students into contact with wildflowers, wild rivers, grizzly bears, forest fire sites and much more. Anyone who wants to peer into Glacier's past or its artsy side can take a class in subjects such as folklore, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, weaving, photography and creative writing.

Class formats at the institute vary from one-day workshops to six-day youth camps. To keep class sizes small, the institute requires advance registration by phone, Internet or mail. Some courses offer academic credit, but many are simply designed to enrich a visit to Glacier. Most classes are offered several times per year and school's in session year-round.



YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

Yellowstone is the oldest and arguably the most overachieving of the United States' national parks. This NPS All-Star boasts 60 percent of the world's geysers, the largest concentration of petrified trees in the world, the largest high-elevation lake on the continent, abundant wildlife such as bear and bison and its very own Grand Canyon.

An apocalyptic volcano blast sculpted the area of Montana and Wyoming now known as Yellowstone and its lingering effects still sizzle more than 600,000 years later. The park's former reputation as "the place where hell bubbles up" did nothing to discourage today's tourists, who make this one of the most-visited national parks each year.



High on most visitors' "must do" lists are the park's geothermal wonders, especially Old Faithful. Though experts observe that the famous geyser is growing less dependable with increasing age, on average it spouts up to 184 feet high every 76 minutes.

North of Old Faithful, Yellowstone's Mammoth District beckons. This is one of the most exciting areas of the park because the colorful, carved limestone springs change size and location every day. Taking a dip is prohibited within Yellowstone, but bathers can submerge at the Boiling River section of the Gardner River two miles north on the North Entrance Road.

Near the park's northeast entrance, Specimen Ridge displays the largest concentration of petrified trees in the world. Visitors can see time suspended in the trunks and preserved in thousands of fossils nearby.



These and many more geographic accomplishments mean virtually every breed of outdoor enthusiast can partake of his or her passion at Yellowstone. Some of the most popular activities include hiking, cross-country skiing, cycling, boating and even scuba diving.

It would be impossible to see even a small part of Yellowstone's features in a day, so travelers should stay awhile. This expansive, remote park's accommodations include lodges, cabins and campgrounds. Reservations are a must during summer months and can be made through <http://travel.yellowstone.com>. Yellowstone's five entrances are open from late April/early May through November. Motorists can access the park year-round through its north entrance near Gardiner, Montana.

Go Deeper: Learn Fly-Fishing

The Yellowstone area's wild rivers are synonymous with fly-fishing, luring anglers from all over the planet. Those in the "know" call Yellowstone and its bordering swatches of Montana, Wyoming and Idaho, "The Golden Ring" for catching wild, sizeable trout. The nickname sounds like something dreamed up by J.R.R. Tolkien and to fishing enthusiasts the area is just as magical as Middle Earth. Wizardry is not required; a rod and trusty pair of waders become passports to this land of blue-ribbon rivers.

Newcomers to the Zen-like pastime may want guidance from a good fly-fishing course, such as the one offered through Hubbards Fly-Fishing School, just outside Yellowstone between Emigrant and Gardiner. A three- to six-day course covers equipment, casting, knots, reading water, lake fishing, large- and small-river fishing and spring creek fishing. Classes are customized to students' interests and experience, with anglers fly-fishing Merrell Lake, Tom Miner Creek, floating the Yellowstone River and fishing Yellowstone National Park.



GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

Yellowstone's next-door neighbor to the southwest, Wyoming's Grand Teton National Park and the adjacent Jackson Hole Valley present visitors with a happy dilemma—to take the high road or the low road? Opt for the best of both worlds by planning excursions at both altitudes.

Grand Teton's namesake 40-mile mountain range stretches like a spine, framing hundreds of clear alpine lakes, wildflower-speckled meadows, winding Snake River, rocky canyons and conifer forests in its foreground. The range includes eight peaks spanning 12,000 feet, culminating with the Grand Teton at 13,770 feet. More than 7,000 feet down, Jackson Hole burrows for 55 miles. The town of Jackson Hole, a popular outpost with a casual attitude, is located at the southern end of the valley.

From the park's scenic drives or its 230 miles of trails, visitors will want to watch for elk, moose, pronghorn, mule deer, bison and more than 300 species of birds. Summer or winter, Grand Teton and Jackson Hole inspire people to get out and get moving. Warmer months are perfect for hiking, rafting, paddling and horseback riding. In winter, the Grand Teton vicinity's three ski resorts entice snow-lovers with some of the best snowshoeing, skiing and snowmobiling anywhere.

In-park lodging includes cabins, lodges, ranches and campgrounds. Drive in through one of three entrance

stations located at the Granite Canyon, Moose and Moran regions. To get oriented inside Grand Teton, stop at one of the visitor centers located at Moose (open all year), Colter Bay, Jenny Lake or Flagg Ranch.

Go Deeper: Soak Up Local Flora at a Spa

Feeling the pain from playing too hard in the mountains? The Body Sage Day Spa in Jackson Hole specializes in relieving hikers' aching legs and soothing skin chafed by days on the slopes. The acclaimed spa's treatments draw from the philosophy that local ingredients provide the best remedy for local conditions. Menu items feature local honey to calm skin or local arnica, an herb known for its anti-inflammatory effects on muscles. The Body Sage Day Spa specializes in rose treatments, including a warm rose oil massage, rose water facial and rose salt glow scrub. A large selection of traditional massages, wraps, skin treatments and packages are available as well. The Body Sage Day Spa makes its home under the wing of the Rusty Parrot Lodge, a small luxury hotel.



INTRIGUED?

If you'd like to explore any of these destinations in more depth, these Web sites can serve as portals.

Glacier National Park
www.nps.gov/glac/index.htm
www.glaciermt.com

Glacier Institute
www.glacierinstitute.org

Yellowstone National Park
www.nps.gov/yell/home.htm
<http://yellowstone.visitmt.com>

Hubbards Fly-Fishing School
www.hubbards-school.com

Grand Teton National Park
 & Jackson Hole, Wyoming
www.nps.gov/grte
www.jacksonhole.com

The Body Sage Day Spa
www.bodysage.com