

# YELLOWSTONE & GRAND TETON

NATIONAL PARK TRIP PLANNER

Tips To  
Plan Your  
Winter  
Vacation

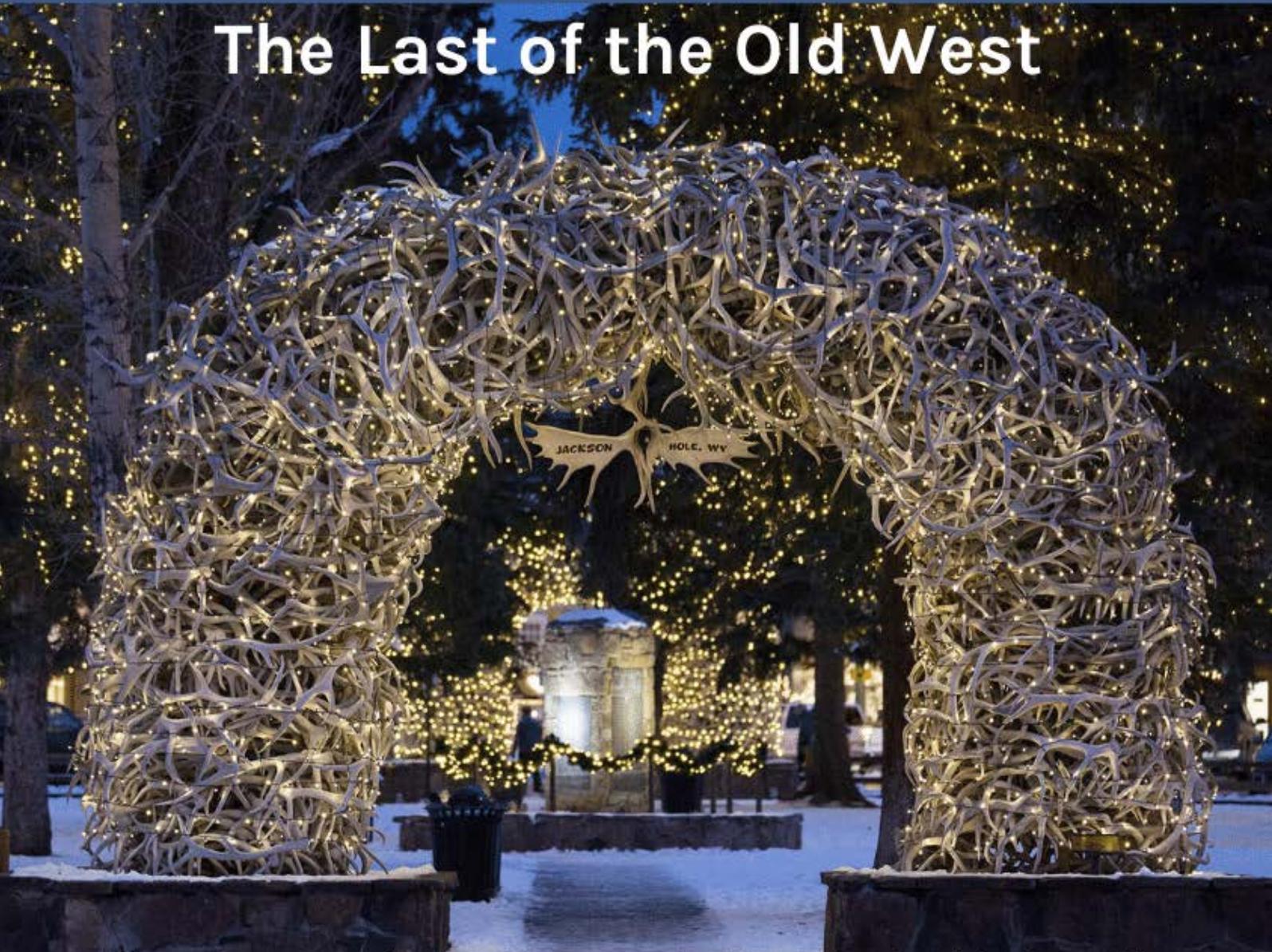


Park  
Maps



National Park Trips

# Howdy Stranger, Yonder is Jackson Hole The Last of the Old West



JACKSON HOLE, WY

Where pioneers sought new adventures, the first national park in the world

- **Yellowstone** - was born & French fur trappers named **Grand Teton National Park's** mountains. Today's travelers can explore on skis, **horse-drawn sleighs**, snowshoes,

snowmobiles & more, all while observing some of the world's most spectacular animals - **moose, elk & if you're lucky, wolves**. And indulge in our exquisite cuisine, world-renowned art and unique shopping.

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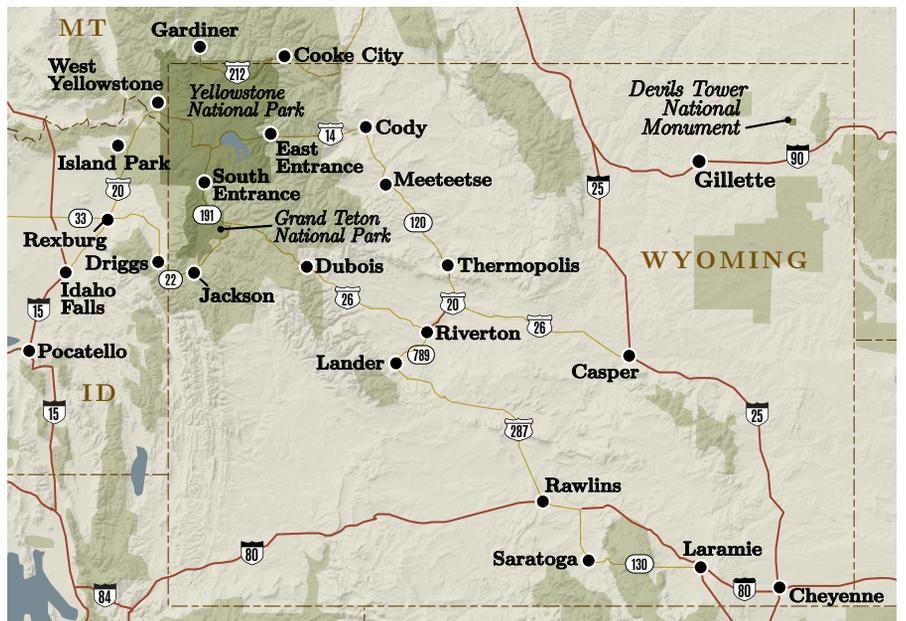
# OVERVIEW

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See a different side of Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks when the snow starts to fall.



When snow begins to blanket Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks, it creates a winter wonderland of new opportunities for those who venture there. Despite the bears hibernating, you'll spot all sorts of wildlife like bison, elk, moose and trumpeter swans roaming the valleys in search of food. In Yellowstone, you'll find a buzz of activity from snowcoach, snowmobile and cross-country ski tours. With far fewer snowmobiles around, Grand Teton is much quieter than Yellowstone, making it a cross-country skiing and snowshoeing paradise. Snowmobiles are only allowed in the park on the frozen surface of Jackson Lake for ice fishing or on Grassy Lake Road on the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway.



# GETTING THERE: YELLOWSTONE

Here's everything you need to know about Yellowstone National Park from which park entrances are open in winter to how to get there.

**M**ost of Yellowstone National Park's entrances close for the winter season. In fact, the North Entrance is the only entrance that enables you to access the one park road open to cars. That road connects Yellowstone's North Entrance in Gardiner, Mont., to Cooke City, Mont.

But several entrances enable you to access the park by snowmobile and/or snowcoach (a park-authorized vehicle with huge tires that drives travelers to various areas in the park) to enjoy the park's incredible winter activities: the North Entrance in Gardiner, Montana, the West Entrance in West Yellowstone, Montana, the South Entrance 57 miles north of Jackson, Wyoming, and the East Entrance, 58 miles west of Cody, Wyoming.

## NORTH ENTRANCE

Say a big hello to Yellowstone's winter wonderland hub. The North Entrance is about an 80-mile drive from the Bozeman-Yellowstone International Airport. It's open year round and enables you to drive right to Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel & Cabins. To get to Mammoth, rent a car at the airport. From Mammoth, drive the northern park road east to Cooke City, Montana in search of wolves, bison and other wildlife. You also can arrange for guided snowmobile and snowcoach tours in the park, which is highly recommended.

Or avoid airport rental car fees and the stress of driving on unfamiliar winter roads. Take a shuttle from a

couple of companies that offer shuttle services. Yellowstone National Park Lodges has a winter season shuttle that will take you from the Bozeman-Yellowstone International Airport to and from Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel & Cabins in the park. Reserve your spot on the shuttle when you make your Yellowstone lodging reservations. Your return shuttle will stop at the airport and the Best Western Plus GranTree Inn for guests spending the night in Bozeman. Amazing Taxi also offers an airport shuttle service from the Bozeman-Yellowstone International Airport to Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel & Cabins.

## WEST ENTRANCE

You'll find a snowmobiling haven in West Yellowstone, Mont., which leans up against the park's West Entrance. While you cannot drive private vehicles through the West Entrance, you can choose from a number of park-authorized concessionaires to sign up for a guided snowcoach or snowmobile tour that will bring you from West Yellowstone, Montana into the park. In West Yellowstone itself, there are 400 miles of groomed snowmobile trails.

To get to West Yellowstone from Bozeman, you'll drive 124 miles on Hwy. 287. It's a long, lonely road with sparsely populated towns, so be sure you are comfortable with winter mountain driving conditions (drive equipped with a shovel, blanket and supplies) before you decide to rent a car. The alternative is to reserve a spot on the Amazing



Taxi to shuttle you from the Bozeman-Yellowstone International Airport to West Yellowstone. You can reach the staff at 406-223-5344, or email [amazingtaxi@yahoo.com](mailto:amazingtaxi@yahoo.com).

## SOUTH ENTRANCE

The South Entrance is a great place to enter the park on a guided snowmobile or snowcoach tour if you plan on basing out of Jackson, Wyoming. It's 57 miles from Jackson to Yellowstone's South Entrance, and the entrance is closed to private vehicle traffic. Staying in Jackson is a different experience than rolling out of bed at Old Faithful Snow Lodge & Cabins in the heart of Yellowstone.

There are three authorized park concessionaires that offer snowmobile or snowcoach tours. Once in the park, you can snowmobile to Old Faithful and other Yellowstone sights, looking for wildlife along the way.

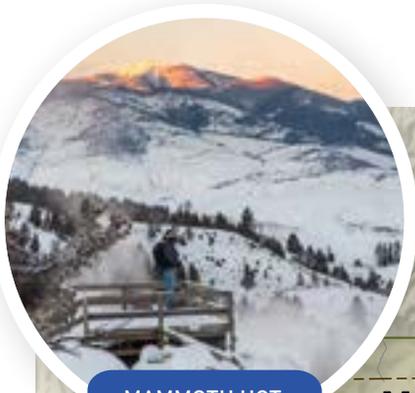
You can fly into the Jackson Hole Airport, which is seven miles from town and located in Grand Teton

National Park. It's serviced by American, Delta and United. Rent a car on site, take a taxi, Lyft, Uber or the Jackson Hole Shuttle.

## EAST ENTRANCE

Fifty-three miles from Cody, Wyoming is the East Entrance, but the entrance is closed to private vehicle traffic in the winter, so you cannot drive into the park. Because most of the activity in Yellowstone takes place on the west side of the park, there's only one authorized snowmobile concessionaire to bring you snowmobiling in the park here. There's no guided snowcoach option. From here go on a guided wonderland tour up and over Sylvan Pass, past Yellowstone Lake, to Old Faithful, the Lower Geyser Basin and back.

Fly into Cody via the Yellowstone Regional Airport. It's serviced by United Express through Denver in the winter.



**MAMMOTH HOT SPRINGS TERRACES**



PHOTOS: Mammoth Hot Springs Terraces, Snowmobiling in Biscuit Basin, Cross-Country skiing in North Rim Drive (Courtesy of NPS / Jacob W. Frank)



**SNOWMOBILING IN BISCUIT BASIN**



**CROSS COUNTRY SKIING IN NORTH RIM DRIVE**

**NOTE:** In winter, the only road open to public vehicular traffic is the one from the North Entrance to the Northeast Entrance.

Map by Peter Sucheski



# GETTING THERE: GRAND TETON

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Here's everything you need to know from which Grand Teton National Park entrances are open in winter to how to get there.

**M**any of Grand Teton National Park's roads and services close in the winter, creating a wonderful sense of solitude you will not find in the summer season. However, the park's main roads Hwy 89/191 and Hwy. 26/287 are plowed all winter and are open to cars from Jackson, Wyoming, north to Flagg Ranch, which is just two miles south of Yellowstone National Park's South Entrance. A bonus to winter time in Grand Teton? There's a park entrance fee discount. It's just \$15 to enter the park.

To get there, fly into the Jackson Hole Airport, which is seven miles from town and located in Grand Teton National Park. It's the only airport in the country completely located in a national park. It's serviced by American, Delta and United. You can rent a car on site or take a taxi, Lyft or Uber or the Jackson Hole Shuttle.

## GRANITE CANYON ENTRANCE

This entrance is accessed by Moose-Wilson Road in Wilson, Wyoming, which passes the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort before reaching the park. The Moose-Wilson Road is closed to vehicular traffic beyond Granite Canyon Trailhead in winter, so if you want to snowshoe or ski, park at Granite Canyon Trailhead or at the junction to Death Canyon Road.

## MOOSE ENTRANCE

The Moose Entrance is open to vehicular traffic only to the Taggart Lake Trailhead. From Taggart Lake trailhead, you can skate ski, cross-country ski or snowshoe a gorgeous 15-mile snow-packed surface that is intermittently groomed all the way to Signal Mountain Lodge. With the majestic Tetons towering above, skiing or snowshoeing here will be one of the most memorable experiences in your life.

## MORAN ENTRANCE

Thirty miles north of Jackson you'll find the Moran Entrance. It's less popular than the Moose Entrance because it's farther from Jackson but offers opportunities for winter enthusiasts to snowshoe or cross-country ski. You can access the Teton Park Road groomed trail by snowshoe or skis from here.



# How far is Yellowstone from Idaho Falls?

(It's closer than you think)

In under two hours, you can be right at the gates of two beloved national parks; Yellowstone and Grand Teton! But don't be surprised if Idaho Falls draws you in and keeps you a little longer than expected!

Stroll the falls along the Greenbelt, visit the zoo or aquarium, or maybe take in a hockey or baseball game! ( Idaho Falls has a pretty robust arts, culture, and dining scene too! ) Visit [YellowstoneTeton.org](http://YellowstoneTeton.org) for more information and inspiration!



# Hunting for your next vacation?

## free to explore

Eastern Idaho's abundant wildlife, stunning landscapes, and miles of outdoor recreation, make for great adventures in any season, without breaking the bank!

For itineraries, maps, and a Free Travel Planner, visit [YellowstoneTeton.org](http://YellowstoneTeton.org)





# WHERE TO STAY

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Here are the lodges in and near the parks that turn up the heat and keep logs burning in their fireplaces all winter.

## GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

In Grand Teton, all's quiet on the western front, except one unique lodging operation that comes alive when the snow starts to fall.

### TRIANGLE X RANCH

You won't be able to experience a dude ranch like Triangle X anywhere else in the United States. Why? It's the last dude ranch concession operating in the nation's National Park Service system.

Located 26 miles north of Jackson on Hwy. 89, the ranch sits on the eastern edge of the park closer to the Moran Entrance than the Moose Entrance. It's just 30 miles from Yellowstone. Since 1926, five generations of the Turner family have managed the ranch that has 20 cabins and a four-star restaurant. All built in the Jackson area, the cabins were relocated and have anywhere from one to four bedrooms, plus bathrooms with tubs and showers. They also have a small refrigerator and a porch. The ranch has

cross-country skis and snowshoes for guests to use.

### OUTSIDE THE PARK

The closest towns to Grand Teton National Park are Jackson, its smaller sister town, Wilson, and Teton Village where Jackson Hole Mountain Resort is located. All three are minutes from park entrances. For details on lodging, visit Jackson Hole Central Reservations at [jacksonholewy.com](http://jacksonholewy.com) or Jackson Hole Mountain Resort at [jacksonhole.com](http://jacksonhole.com).

## YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

In Yellowstone, all lodging closes for the winter season, except two hotels that keep their doors open for winter enthusiasts.

### MAMMOTH HOT SPRINGS HOTEL & CABINS

The only park hotel you can access with your car, Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel & Cabins sits on the

northwestern boundary of Yellowstone, a several minutes drive from the town of Gardiner, Mont. Built in 1883, the hotel was the first high-class hotel built in the park to serve those who arrived by train and featured 141 rooms. This grand hotel finished a major renovation in 2019. It offers hotel rooms with private bathrooms.

In winter, there are several different types of rooms available. Three renovated suites are equipped with two queen beds, a sitting room with a couch and a wet bar. Otherwise, opt for a hot tub cabin.

### OLD FAITHFUL SNOW LODGE & CABINS

The only way to get here is via snowcoach. Stay here and have Yellowstone's Upper Geyser Basin out your door. Home to Old Faithful and other amazing geysers, this majestic area provides endless opportunities to explore via snowshoes, ski or snowcoach.

At the lodge, which sits at 7,300 feet, choose between lodge rooms with western-style furnishings or cabins with varying amenities. To clarify,

this is not the Old Faithful Inn, a historic inn completed in 1904 that closes for the winter.

### OUTSIDE THE PARK

There is lodging located near all four park entrances open in the winter, although only the North Entrance is open to vehicle traffic, which limits your options if you're planning on driving into the park. To access Yellowstone from the East, West and South entrances, you will have to leave your car behind and make reservations with a park-approved guide. Keep in mind it's 57 miles from Yellowstone's South Entrance to Jackson, Wyoming. It's 52 miles from the East Entrance to Cody, Wyoming.

The North Entrance sits right in Gardiner, Montana, so it's just a few minutes from Mammoth Hot Springs to town. West Yellowstone, Montana has a number of lodging options and is just minutes from the West Entrance, which makes getting into the park relatively quick and easy with a park-approved tour guide.

# WINTER'S TOP SIX

Here are some of our favorite things to do from skiing to exploring some of Grand Teton and Yellowstone's most iconic treasures.



1

## SNOWSHOE WITH A PARK RANGER

Go on a ranger-led snowshoe tour in Grand Teton National Park. Two-hour tours are offered three days per week December 26 through mid-March, snow conditions permitting. Reservations are required at 307-739-3399.



2

## SLEIGH RIDE IN NATIONAL ELK REFUGE

When was the last time you rode a sleigh to see between 6,000-7,000 elk up-close and safely? Located just five minutes from downtown Jackson, the refuge offers rides mid-December through early April.



3

## SKI UNDER THE GRAND

Beautifully groomed Nordic trails beneath the Tetons set the bar high for any skiing you do later. Teton Park Road from Taggart Lake to Signal Mountain Lodge is intermittently groomed for classic and skate skiing.



4

### GO ON A WILDLIFE SAFARI

Wake up in Yellowstone and head out on the Lamar Valley Wildlife Tour. From the heated snowcoach, you'll look for magnificent bison, wolves and eagles in Yellowstone's winter wonderland.



5

### SKATE AT A PARK RINK

Yellowstone has a small ice skating rink at the Old Faithful Snow Lodge, and ice skates are free to rent. Start practicing those figure eights.



6

### EXPLORE BY SKI, SNOWSHOE OR SNOWMOBILE

Yellowstone's trails and roads provide you with a magical winter experience with or without a guide.

PHOTOS: Grand Teton National Park (Depositphotos), Snowshoeing (James Fenwick/Flickr), Sleigh Ride in National Elk Refuge, Snowcoach tour, Snowmobiling (NPS / Jacob W. Frank), Cross country skiing (Clark Weber/Flickr), Ice skating next to Old Faithful Snow Lodge (Susie Weber)

# WILDLIFE AT YELLOWSTONE

Discover where to see the park's spectacular animals.

Compiled by Jade Lang



## MOOSE

Moose have long snouts, bulbous noses and dewlaps under their throats, which set them apart from other hoofed animals. Look for them in areas full of willows.

**SEE THEM:** In Yellowstone, look for moose in Willow Park, Yellowstone Lake, Fishing Bridge, West Thumb and Hayden Valley. In Grand Teton, see them along Oxbow Bend, Blacktail Ponds, Mormon Row and Antelope Flats Road.



## BLACK BEAR

These omnivores can weigh up to 400 pounds and stretch from two to four feet tall. They can be black, blond or brown, which can lead visitors to misidentify them as grizzlies. Throughout summer and fall, they retreat to higher elevations, chasing berries and trout. They hibernate in winter and mate in summer.

**SEE THEM:** You won't see these creatures in the winter months, as they'll be hibernating until late February.



## GRIZZLY BEAR

Grizzlies, also known as "brown bears," have a distinctive hump between their shoulders, blonde-tipped fur, a long snout and smaller ears than black bears. Their front claws are between 2-4 inches, while black bears' claws are 1-2 inches. About 700 live in the Yellowstone region.

**SEE THEM:** You won't see grizzlies in the winter, as they hibernate until mid-to-late March.



## BISON

In 1916, America's wild bison, which once numbered 60 million, had dwindled to 23 animals. Yellowstone's bison today, which number 5,500, are descendants of those survivors. Bison can weigh up to 2,000 pounds. While they may seem docile, they are unpredictable and have injured visitors who approach them.

**SEE THEM:** In Yellowstone, go to the Lamar, Hayden and Pelican valleys. In Grand Teton, go to the Snake River from Jackson Lake Dam south to Moose, Wyo.



## ELK

In summer about 10,000-20,000 elk live in Yellowstone. The population drops to 5,000 in winter. Many elk winter in the National Elk Refuge in Jackson, Wyo. Adult bull elk weigh up to 700 pounds, while adult females may weigh up to 500 pounds.

**SEE THEM:** In Yellowstone go to Mammoth Hot Springs, Lamar Valley, Norris Junction, Gibbon River and Madison Junction. In Grand Teton, go to Teton Park Road, Willow Flats and Two Ocean and Emma Mathilde lakes.



## WOLF

About 80 wolves roam in 10 packs in and around Yellowstone, with about 450 wolves in the greater Yellowstone area. Highly social, they hunt elk, deer and bison. In 1995, the first 14 wolves from Canada were reintroduced.

**SEE THEM:** In Yellowstone, wolf packs roam the Lamar Valley, Hayden Valley, Canyon area and Blacktail Deer Plateau. Dawn and dusk are the best times to look. In Grand Teton, see them in Willow Flats.

# INSIDER'S TIPS

From what to pack to entrance fees, here's the scoop.



## ONLINE

Visit [MyYellowstonePark.com](http://MyYellowstonePark.com) to find out where to stay and what to do during your vacation. Interested in exploring other national parks? Check us out at [nationalparktrips.com](http://nationalparktrips.com).



## WORKSHOPS

Join us for our online Night Skies National Park Photography Workshop. With Tamron's professional photographers, we offer instruction on how to take night skies, sunset and sunrise photos. Learn more at [NationalParkTrips.com/workshops](http://NationalParkTrips.com/workshops).

## PACKING LIST

- Refillable insulated water bottle
- Binoculars
- Warm clothing layers to accommodate temperature fluctuations of 30-40 degrees in one day.
- A sun hat, sunglasses and sunscreen
- Down jacket, mittens and winter hat
- Sturdy hiking boots or snow boots
- Daypack and hand warmers



Learn more at [MyYellowstonePark.com/park/what-to-pack](http://MyYellowstonePark.com/park/what-to-pack).

## YELLOWSTONE WINTER ENTRANCE FEES\*

Buy your pass at a park entrance station, purchase a digital pass at [recreation.gov](http://recreation.gov) or order a card online at [REI.com](http://REI.com) (with no shipping costs).

### \$15

one-day fee for cars and skiers in Grand Teton. Dec. 15 to April 30

### \$20

seven-day fee for Yellowstone skiers

### \$30

seven-day fee for Yellowstone snowmobiles

### \$35

seven-day fee for private vehicles in Yellowstone or Grand Teton

### \$70

Yellowstone or Grand Teton annual pass

### \$80

America the Beautiful annual all-park pass

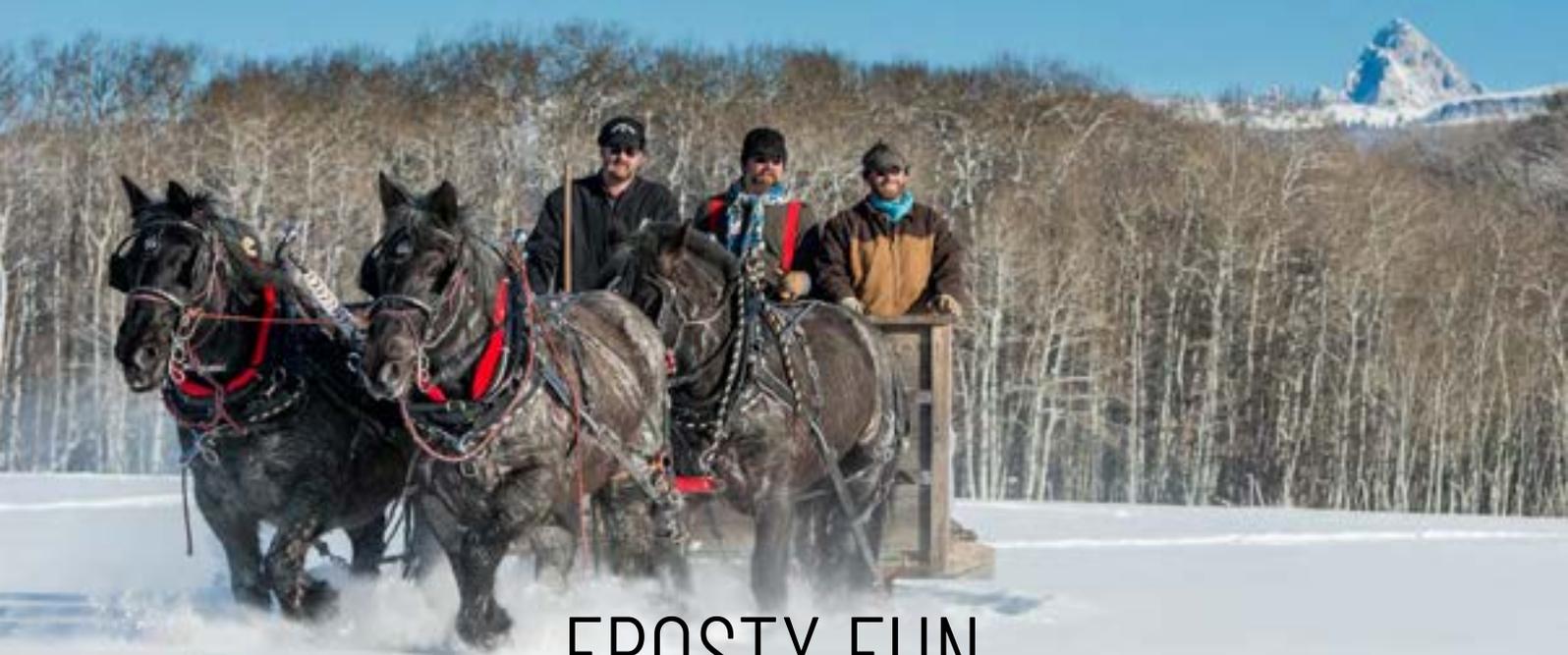
\*Fees subject to change

## SOCIAL

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# FROSTY FUN

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Just west of Grand Teton National Park lies a string of snowflake-filled towns in Idaho that offer world-class, and often free, winter experiences.

By *Tori Peglar*

## ISLAND PARK AREA

Looking for a snowmobiler's paradise? Twenty-eight miles southwest of Yellowstone sits Island Park where more than 500 miles of snow-glistening, groomed trails await you. Suit up and rev your engines on your own snowmobile or go on a guided tour with High Mountain Adventures, a longtime outfit that rents stellar sleds and gear.

Then switch gears, literally, by trading your snowmobile for skis. Look for moose, bald eagles, porcupines and ermines on a solitude-fueled cross-country ski in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest to Mesa Falls, two waterfalls, stretching 110 feet and 65 feet. Just 12 miles from Ashton, the Bear Gulch-Mesa Falls trailhead offers a 3.8-mile loop, a 5.8-mile loop or a 9-mile excursion that includes both loops, plus a spur.

Then nestle in for a starry night in a Harriman State Park yurt that sleeps six and stays toasty with a wood stove. Outside your door, 25 miles of groomed ski trails beckon, offering you a rush of adrenaline and the opportunity to see coyotes and moose traipsing through the forest, as well as trumpeter swans floating in the Henrys Fork. Afterwards, drive to Lakeside Lodge through its festive light-covered ranch entrance and past its trees awash in twinkling lights to feast on rib-eye steak and other house specialties.

## TETON VALLEY

The best-kept secret of Grand Teton National Park is its towering granite peaks look even more gorgeous from the western side of the range. Get intimate views of the Grand Teton and its sister peaks when you downhill ski at Grand Targhee Ski Resort or hit the cross-country trails in Teton Canyon near Driggs. In Teton Canyon, every glide you take along this groomed, nearly flat 10-mile, out-and-back route gives you breathtaking views. Nearby, strap on your cross-country skis for an 8-mile, out-and-back, hilly route along the Darby Creek trail. It's not groomed, making you feel as though you entered a private winter wonderland.

In the evening, swing by West Side Yard in Victor for a pint of one of its 60 beers and to throw an axe. Yes, you read that correctly. Patrons can throw axes — think darts but more lethal — at round, log-filled targets. For Kansas-style BBQ and live music, swing by the Knotty Pine Supper Club. But if you're in the mood for drunken brie or a salmon salad, dine at Forage Bistro & Lounge. Don't leave Driggs without taking a Grand Teton Distillery tour and purchasing a bottle of Grand Teton Huckleberry-flavored Vodka. Its award-winning potato vodka owes part of its success to a key ingredient: the 500-plus inches of pristine snow that falls on the Tetons and turns into snowmelt.

## IDAHO FALLS AREA

Immerse yourself into a winter wonderland in four really exhilarating ways. Just west of Idaho Falls sit two ranches and a ski area that offer everything from snow tubing to fat biking. Head to 7-N Ranch Resort to cross-country ski for free or rent a snow tube, ride a tow lift up a hill and coast down on your glide tube.

To downhill ski, snowshoe, cross-country ski or fat bike, head to Kelly Canyon Ski Resort. You can get a special \$10 pass for Shred Trails, Kelly Canyon's area for snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and fat biking.

Break for lunch and warm up by the fire at Heise Pizza Parlour, known around the region for its quality. Afterwards, head down the street and hop in the 104-degree waters at Heise Hot Springs. If you're with young kids, a second pool is shallower and cooler at 92 degrees.

In the evening, take a sleigh ride pulled by horses across snowy fields to a scrumptious dinner of prime rib or pork loin at Mountain River Ranch in Ririe, Idaho. After dessert, enjoy a lively musical variety show, a longtime favorite of locals and travelers alike. This family-owned ranch sits along the legendary Snake River and is just 18 miles from Idaho Falls. Make reservations in advance as this fun evening often sells out.

Learn more about eastern Idaho that includes towns like Island Park, Victor, Driggs, Heise and Idaho Falls at [yellowstoneteton.org](http://yellowstoneteton.org).

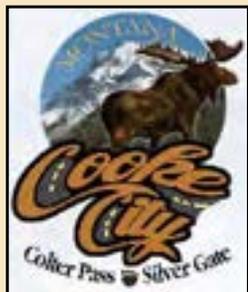
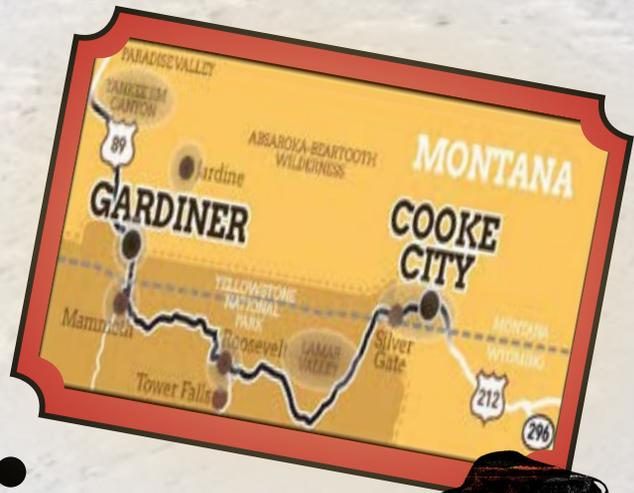


**YELLOWSTONE'S  
NORTHERN RANGE**



# YELLOWSTONE, ALL YEAR LONG.

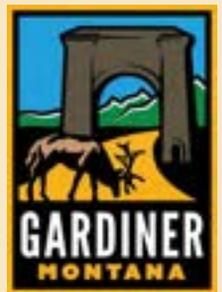
*Gardiner to Cooke City, Montana*



Discover Yellowstone's only year-round access at:

**YELLOWSTONENORTHERNRANGE.COM**

Colter Pass/Cooke City/Silvergate Chamber of Commerce  
Gardiner Chamber of Commerce





# YELLOWSTONE'S BEST SIDE IN WINTER

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Here are all the reasons why a Montana winter vacation in Gardiner and Cooke City is one of the most magical you'll ever take.

*By Tori Peglar*

**L**ocal Jill Warren says the winters are so quiet in Silver Gate, Mont., located at the Northeast Entrance of Yellowstone National Park, that you can hear the snow fall.

And she's not exaggerating. It's the only time of the year where you just may feel like you're one of the early explorers of Yellowstone in the 1800s. In nearby Lamar Valley in Yellowstone, you'll spot wolves and bison with ease since they stand out against the snowy landscape. In Mammoth Hot Springs to the west, the steam erupting through the cold air provides a more dramatic show than in summer. And you may only see one other car on the road.

Part of the reason why it's so quiet is because the North Entrance, which sits in Gardiner, Mont., is the only park entrance open to cars in the winter. And once you drive in, the only road open to cars is the ribbon of road that unravels across the Blacktail Plateau and Lamar Valley to the village of Silver Gate and the charming town of Cooke City. For those interested in reaching other areas of the park, you must leave your car behind and pay to ride a snowcoach— a van with huge snow tires — run by Yellowstone National Park Lodges, Yellowstone Vacation Tours or Yellowstone Year Round Safaris from Mammoth Hot Springs.

While the park is covered with a heavy blanket of snow, there is no shortage of fun things to do and explore. From cross-country skiing, solitude-fueled scenic drives, wildlife-viewing, snowmobiling and hot springs dips, your biggest decision each morning will be narrowing down your list of daily adventures.

"You have the complete array of sports from snowshoeing in a quiet and serene setting to pursuing speed and ultimate power with snowmobiles," says Donna Rowland, executive director of Colter Pass, Cooke City, Silver Gate Chamber of Commerce.

The biggest bonus to exploring the northern edge of the park? It's renowned for its wildlife, many of which dwell in the famed Lamar Valley. Plus there are two classic Montana towns that sit at the two northern entrances to the park, filled with people who make you feel part of the family: Gardiner and Cooke City.

"If you ask almost anyone in Gardiner what their favorite time of year is, they'll say 'winter,'" says Neala Siegle, executive director at the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce. "It's a really special time — wildlife like bison and elk are right in town. I once saw wolves with binoculars from my office window. Plus, it's just more relaxed in winter. Guests feel like family."



## RELISH AMAZING WILDLIFE-WATCHING

As Siegle points out, you don't have to go far to see Yellowstone's famed animals. You may find several elk loitering in downtown Gardiner or bison in Cooke City. But driving or skiing into the park to see wildlife is an experience you won't want to miss. If you don't want to drive, hire a wildlife expert guide in Gardiner who knows where to spot the animals.

For an incredible 1.5-hour (without stops) scenic drive, head out of Gardiner east on the Grand Loop Road through the Lamar Valley to Cooke City. Along the way, you'll spot herds of bison fanning out along the gentle hillsides, their ancient-looking faces frosted with glistening ice crystals. Keep your eyes peeled for wolves.

"Winter is absolutely the best time to see wildlife in Yellowstone," says Warren who owns Creekside at Yellowstone in Silver Gate, a small Montana enclave between the park and Cooke City. "We were in the Lamar Valley yesterday and saw a wolf pack. Most of the wolves were black. The pups were tackling each other. In winter they really stand out."

The Lamar Valley is known as America's Serengeti because of the extraordinary number of wildlife living there. After wildlife-watching, enjoy a burger or hand-tossed pizza at the Miners Saloon in Cooke City.

## EXPLORE ON CROSS-COUNTRY SKIS

A fantastic way to explore the Yellowstone area is by skis or snowshoes. From Gardiner, drive a few minutes into the park and ski or snowshoe the Upper Terrace Loop Trail, a 1.5-mile groomed trail that's easy for snowshoers and involves one downhill that's a little tricky for inexperienced skiers. You'll pass steaming thermal features and the upper part of Mammoth Hot Springs.

Farther east in the park is Tower Fall Ski Trail at Tower-Roosevelt Junction. Park on the side of the road near the Roosevelt Horse Corral for a five-mile round-trip easy ski or snowshoe. You'll pass a beautiful overlook of the frigid Yellowstone River as you move uphill, eventually reaching Tower Fall, a 132-foot frozen waterfall. There are picnic tables under the Tower General Store porch overhang here, so eat your packed lunch before returning to your car. The general store is closed in winter.

For a longer, more challenging ski or snowshoe, take the Blacktail Plateau Ski Trail, an easiest-to-more-difficult 8-mile, one-way trail. You'll go through open meadows and forests on this outing.

If you're in Cooke City, take the Bannock Ski Trail to Silver Gate and into Yellowstone. The trail between Cooke City and Silver Gate is three miles and the Warm Creek Trail into Yellowstone is an additional three miles.

The Barronette Ski Trail is an easy 3.5-mile, one-way route down the Old Cooke City road that cuts through the heart of a conifer forest. For seasoned backcountry skiers or snowshoers, try Pebble Creek Ski Trail, a 13-mile, rated by the park service as a "most difficult" tour.

You won't find REI or the like in Gardiner or Cooke City, aside from premium apparel for snowmobiling, so pack everything you need with you before you arrive in Yellowstone.

## RIDE A SNOWMOBILE

You know snowmobiling is popular in the Cooke City area when in winter you can only reach three of its lodges via snowmobile: Skyline Guest Ranch, Big Moose Resort and Big Bear Lodge.

You can rent snowmobiles at Cooke City Motorsports, Bearclaw Sales and Services and Cooke City Exxon. All three sell technical riding gear and accessories. Ride on the 60-plus miles of groomed trails outside the park or on the Beartooth Highway, which closes to vehicle traffic in the winter. For trail tips, call the chamber at 406-838-2495 or stop in a snowmobile shops.

## SOAK IN HOT SPRINGS

With most of Yellowstone's thermal features too dangerously hot to soak in, there are, thankfully, several hot springs venues where you can warm up. One is in the park. The Boiling River near Yellowstone's Mammoth Hot Springs Campground offers travelers an opportunity to soak in a river heated by hot springs. It's a quarter mile walk to the soaking access area, so dress warmly. Check in at the Albright Visitor Center in Mammoth Hot Springs for closure or safety precautions before you go.

But to swim in hot springs pools, head to Yellowstone Hot Springs in Corwin Springs, Mont., 6 miles north of Gardiner off Hwy. 89. It offers 400 square feet of pools in a natural setting. Fresh mineral water is constantly flowing into the pools, so the water is always fresh and clean.

"The focus is on soaking, wellness and taking in the natural scenery," Siegle says.

Thirty-five miles north of Gardiner is Chico Hot Springs Resort and Spa in Pray, Mont. With two open-air mineral pools, plus incredible fine dining in the resort's Dining Room, Chico makes for a great outing. It's known for having one of the region's best wine lists.

Learn more by stopping in the Gardiner visitor center at 216 Park St. or going to [visitgardinermt.com](http://visitgardinermt.com). Learn more about Colter Pass/Cooke City/Silver Gate at the visitor center in Cooke City or at [cookecitychamber.org](http://cookecitychamber.org).

## SKI TIPS

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Need ski or snowshoeing equipment?

Rent cross-country touring skis, snowshoes, wax, gloves and mittens at Parks' Fly Shop in Gardiner or at Bear Den Gift Shop in Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel in Yellowstone.

Choose between one-day and multi-day ski touring packages that include skis, boots, poles and gaiters.

The Bear Den Gift Shop also serves as a repair shop to fix ski bindings or wax skis. It's open Dec. 15, 2019- March 1, 2020, from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Interested in taking a lesson? Inquire at the Bear Den where you can choose between a group lesson (two-person minimum) or a private lesson (reservations required).

Learn more at [YellowstoneNationalParkLodges.com](http://YellowstoneNationalParkLodges.com).

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# WINTER PARADISE

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West Yellowstone, Montana, sits at the West Entrance to Yellowstone, the closest entrance to Old Faithful.

Find out why this town is a great basecamp for winter fun in and out of the park.

By Tori Peglar

## CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING AND SNOWSHOEING

You'll feel as though you've discovered the ultimate skinny skis paradise when you hit the cross-country trails here. Groomed nightly for skate and classic skiing, the Rendezvous Ski Trails offer more than 30 kilometers of rolling terrain that ranges from easy to most difficult. The trails leave from the intersection of Geyser Street and Obsidian Avenue. You can't miss the giant ranch-style trail sign. Snowshoers can hike alongside the groomed area. For a dog friendly trail, hit Boundary Ski and Snowshoe Trail, an out-and-back 7-mile stretch along Yellowstone's boundary. Ski into the park on the Riverside Ski Trail that follows the Madison River and look for trumpeter swans, as well as bison and elk. For the ultimate skinny ski fest, attend the fabulous Yellowstone Ski Festival that has taken place during Thanksgiving week for more than 20 years. Clinics, an indoor expo, races and more await for the whole family.

## SNOWMOBILING

There's a reason why so many people flock to West Yellowstone, Montana, to snowmobile. With 400 miles of groomed trails accessible from town, you could spend a week snowmobiling in the national forest here and barely scratch the surface. Every night, crews head out to groom the trails, so those perfect corduroy lines etched in the snow are ready for you the following morning.

There are trails for everyone from beginners to experts, so stop in one of the snowmobile rental companies in town to find the trail that fits your ability. Otherwise, skip the guesswork and logistics and hire a West Yellowstone snowmobile guide. You'll benefit from their insider knowledge of the terrain.

Interested in snowmobiling in Yellowstone? Unless you go on a guided tour, you'll need a permit to get in. Apply for a permit in August through a park lottery system at [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) or 877-444-6777. Otherwise, go with a guide.

## SEE GRIZZLIES AND A MOVIE

Guess what? You can see a grizzly bear in West Yellowstone in the winter, despite the fact that all of Yellowstone's grizzlies are hibernating. Head to the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center, a nonprofit wildlife educational and research park at 201 S. Canyon St., in West Yellowstone. The seven resident bears arrived in West Yellowstone after becoming nuisance bears where they lived by damaging property in search of food or becoming aggressive toward people. Rather than be killed, the bears were brought to the center to serve as ambassadors for grizzlies in the wild. You can also see five wolves, all of whom were born in captivity and moved to the center after the facility in which they were born could not house them.

When you get back to town, head to the Yellowstone Giant Screen where you can see the movie *Yellowstone* or another feature film projected on a six-story high screen.

## RIDE A SNOWCOACH

The only way into Yellowstone National Park through the West Entrance in winter is by snowcoach, snowmobile, skis or snowshoes. No private vehicles are allowed. Don't miss the magical opportunity to explore the park via snowcoach.

Outfitted with super large tires that float on the unplowed roads, snowcoaches allow you to see Yellowstone's wildlife and natural beauty up-close. The only traffic you'll experience may be a bison jam or passing snowmobiles. Vehicles are comfortable, outfitted with large windows and seat between 8-12 passengers. You can sign up for a variety of tours that can last up to seven hours. See Old Faithful, Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone or work with a guide to create a custom tour. Bring your own sack lunch, snacks and hydrating drinks to enjoy as you tour.

For a family winter sample back in West Yellowstone, check out the Kids 'N'Snow weekend events.

Learn more by stopping in at the West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce, 30 Yellowstone Ave, or by visiting [destinationyellowstone.com](http://destinationyellowstone.com).

# SNOWY SIDE OF YELLOWSTONE COUNTRY

Fly into Bozeman, Montana for a fantastic ski and snow-fueled vacation including Yellowstone excursions.

By *Tori Peglar*

**W**ant to see Yellowstone in winter? Here's our advice. Explore the park, but plan on spending time in Montana's charming, authentic towns and ski areas that surround the park. The easiest way to do this is to fly into one of the West's coolest cities — Bozeman — and build your itinerary from there. Here are three itineraries.

## BEST OF THE BOZEMAN AREA

Just a 20-minute drive from downtown Bozeman, Bridger Bowl is where the locals go to ski. This means you're not stepping into a resort layered with shops when you arrive— it's just a good old-fashioned ski hill. With 75 uncrowded trails on 2,000 acres, it offers everything from beginner slopes to extreme terrain. It's also an affordable place to ski since it's a locally owned non-profit. Head to Snowsports on the hill to rent your skis and/or sign up for lessons. You can get warm in the Snowflake Warming Hut on the mountain and break for lunch at the Jim Bridger Lodge.

Take a day off from skiing to explore Bozeman, one of the West's most charming towns. It's home to a number of really great shops, restaurants and breweries. Warm up from the cold by spending time soaking in Bozeman Hot Springs on the southwest side of town. And then escape the outdoors for a couple hours and head to The Museum of the Rockies, a Smithsonian affiliate, that offers something for everyone.

The museum boasts the largest collection of dinosaur remains in the nation, including the largest Tyrannosaurus skull ever discovered. It's also home to the Martin Children's Discovery Center, which provides a fascinating look at Yellowstone. Geared toward infants through 8-year-olds, it is a great spot for families. You'll walk through a stone-like archway that bears a striking resemblance to the stone archway at the North Entrance to the park in Gardiner, Mont. Kids can pump up a geyser, look through binoculars on a fire tower and fish at a miniature version of Yellowstone's iconic Fishing Bridge.

Yellowstone Winter Trip Planner

## ON THE WAY TO YELLOWSTONE'S NORTH ENTRANCE

To visit Yellowstone's North Entrance, which is open all year, fill your gas tank in Bozeman and head east first to Livingston, a charming historic town with a vibrant community. Stop at Faye's Cafe inside the Shane Lalani Center for the Arts for a creative and delicious breakfast or lunch served all day. Then continue toward Yellowstone National Park where a string of fantastic hot springs locales await along the way. See page 15 for details on Chico Hot Springs in Pray, Montana, and Yellowstone Hot Springs just north of Gardiner, along the Boiling River in the park.

The North Entrance is the only park entrance open to vehicle traffic in the winter. Once inside the park, you'll be able to take Hwy. 212 past Tower Junction through the Lamar Valley to Cooke City and Silver Gate. For details on what to do in this wildlife-filled area of the park, see pages 14-15.

## ON THE WAY TO YELLOWSTONE'S WEST ENTRANCE

For ski enthusiasts, Big Sky Resort is arguably the closest you can get to heaven on Earth and it's about an hour's drive from Bozeman. With 5,850 skiable acres and 36 lifts, including North America's first 8-person lift, you can spend days at Big Sky and not ski it all.

"It's world-class skiing without the world," says Colin Bonnicksen, a Montana local.

Its most iconic peak is Lone Peak, a towering snow-capped mountain that stretches 11,167 feet into the Montana sky. If you're an advanced skier, take the Lone Peak Tram to the top and ski down the black diamond Liberty Bowl for an exhilarating run. Otherwise, just enjoy the incredible views and board the tram to go back down.

For a day off, try dog sledding with Yellowstone Dog Sled Adventures or Spirit of the North. At night, enjoy dinner at Mountain Village, but be

sure you head to Lone Mountain Ranch one evening to take a horse-drawn sleigh to an elegant prime-rib dinner in a snow-covered cabin in the forest. The ranch also has 80-plus miles of Nordic ski trails that are open to the public— just buy a day pass for \$25.

Farther south down 191, you'll reach West Yellowstone, Mont., which sits on the edge of Yellowstone National Park. It's known for its incredible Nordic trails — the Rendezvous Ski Trails — as well as its vast and diverse snowmobiling terrain. You also can go dog sledding here with Klondike Dreams Sled Dog Rides.

## NORTH OF THE PARK

If you're dreaming of staying in a cozy historic ski town, head to Red Lodge, Montana. Red Lodge Mountain is affordable and uncrowded with 1,600-plus acres. You can eat lunch at Midway Chalet and stay for après ski at Bierstube, a local favorite where there's 10 beers on tap and live music, along with pub food. At night, stroll Broadway, the town's vibrant main street, and eat at one of its great snow-lined restaurants. For incredible steak and ambiance, hit the Carbon County Steakhouse.

On your return route from Red Lodge to Bozeman, stop in Columbus to visit New Atlas Bar, which opened its doors in 1906 and is on the National Registry of Historic Places. It's affectionately known among Montana locals as the "horniest bar in Montana." Don't let that scare you, though. It earned its name from all the 60-plus mounts that hang from its walls, including 15 elk mounts. Above the gorgeous historic wooden piano, there's a glass case of a white albino fawn and elsewhere you'll see a brown wolf and a two-headed calf. As the story goes, the calf was born in 1961 and lived for three weeks.

Learn more at [www.visityellowstonecountry.com](http://www.visityellowstonecountry.com).

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