

# Fodor's Choice Wyoming

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From the vast northern plains to the majestic Rocky Mountains, Wyoming is the place to go when you want to get outdoors. Here where the buffalo still roam and the cowboy endures, the main question is, what kind of adventure are you looking for?

Between the natural wonders of Yellowstone National Park in one corner of the state and the Frontier Days of Cheyenne in the other, you've got lots of choices. The national parks, Yellowstone and Grand Teton, give you unparalleled scenery and extensive facilities. You can rough it a little or a lot on dude ranches, mountain-biking trails, white-water rivers, and America's finest trout-fishing streams. If you really want to get away from it all, pack your tent and head into the backcountry to experience nature in its purest form. Come winter, the place to be is on a pair of skis, whether you're schussing down the slopes of Jackson Hole or following a trail through Shoshone National Forest.

## REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

### The National Parks and the Northwest

Northwest Wyoming is mountain country, where high peaks—some of which remain snowcapped year-round—tower above deep, glacier-carved valleys. In addition to the tallest, most spectacular peaks in the state, there's a diverse wildlife population that includes wolves, grizzly bears, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, and antelope. Here you can hike through mountain meadows, challenge white water, explore Native American culture, and trace the history of westbound 19th-century emigrants.

Yellowstone National Park is the number-one attraction, though it has lots of competition. The park has been a rich part of the American experience for five generations. Despite its remote location, it attracts some three million visitors year after year with an incomparable combination of natural beauty,

rugged wilderness, geological wonders, and abundant wildlife.

### Fodor's Recommends

**Old Faithful.** Almost every visitor makes the world's most famous geyser part of a visit to Yellowstone.

**Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone.** This stunning 23-mile-long canyon is highlighted by the Upper and Lower Falls.

**Jenny Lake Scenic Drive, Grand Teton National Park.** This 4-mile loop provides the park's best roadside close-ups of the Tetons as it winds south through open meadows and groves of lodgepole pine.

**National Elk Refuge.** Wildlife abounds on this 25,000-acre refuge at the foot of Sleeping Indian Mountain near Jackson.

**South Pass City State Historic Site.** Take a step back in time by visiting the well-preserved remains of this 19th-century gold-mining town at the southern end of the Wind River Range.

### The North, from the Black Hills to the Big Horn Basin

Pine-carpeted hillsides and snowy mountain summits give way to windswept prairies and clean-flowing rivers where the Great Plains meet the mighty Rocky Mountains. Northern Wyoming's epic landscape is replete with symbols of the American frontier: the ranch, the rodeo, and the cowboy.

Take the time to appreciate the wide-open spaces. Much of this territory is just as empty as it was when the first white people arrived two centuries ago. A surprising number of those who lived here have been history makers; this part of Wyoming has a rich and

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## TOP 10 TIPS FOR VISITING YELLOWSTONE

From Park Ranger Mary Wilson:

1. Before your trip, go online to get information from the park's official Web site, [www.nps.gov/yell](http://www.nps.gov/yell).
2. Upon arrival at the park, stop at the nearest visitor center for information and updates.
3. Pack for all types of weather no matter what time of year.
4. Avoid the crowds by getting an early start to your day.
5. Stay at least 75 feet away from wildlife (300 feet for bears).
6. Stay on geyser-basin boardwalks to prevent serious thermal burns.
7. Drive defensively, and allow more time than you think you need.
8. Try to be at your destination before dark to avoid hitting wildlife on park roads.
9. Take a friend when you go hiking; it's safer and a lot more fun!
10. Don't try to see and do everything. You need two to three days just to visit the park highlights.



storied past that encompasses gunslingers, gamblers, miners, mule skinnners, and warriors.

If you're headed into Wyoming from the east along I-90, be sure to stop at Sundance and Devils Tower National Monument. The towns of Gillette, Buffalo, and Sheridan are also worth your time and are ideal places to spend the night. You have your choice of guest ranches and mountain lodges here, and you can take the opportunity to explore both the Wyoming plains and the foothills of the Big Horns.

### Fodor's Recommends

**Devils Tower National Monument.** Teddy Roosevelt made this rocky, grooved butte jutting 1,280 feet above the plain of the Belle Fourche River America's first national monument.

**The Sheridan Inn.** Modeled after a hunting lodge in Scotland, this 1893 building sports 69 gables in a show of architectural splendor not common in these parts.

**Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody.** This complex is one of the finest cultural institutions of the West, with five major museums related to Plains Indians, Western art, firearms, natural history, and, of course, Buffalo Bill.

**Medicine Wheel National Historic Landmark.** A ring of rocks 75 feet in diameter, this ancient site in the Big Horn Mountains is the best preserved of nearly 150 Native American stone wheels in the western U.S. and Canada.

### The South, from Cheyenne to the Red Desert

A journey across southern Wyoming takes you through a wonderfully diverse landscape, from the wheat fields of the southeast to the mountains of the Snowy Range to the stark and sometimes hauntingly beautiful Red Desert, where wild horses still roam freely.

Cheyenne, the largest city in Wyoming and the state capital, is the cornerstone community at the eastern edge of the state and host to the annual Cheyenne Frontier Days rodeo. Evanston, a town settled by railroad workers in 1869, anchors the western edge of the state. In between are Laramie, Rock Springs, and Green River, all of which owe their origin to the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad. In towns across the region you can travel back in time by attending re-creations of mountain-man rendezvous, cowboy gatherings, and other historical events.

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## EATING WELL, WESTERN STYLE

You're in the land of the unrepentant carnivore here: fine dining first and foremost means steaks grilled to perfection. It's also prime hunting and fishing territory. Antelope, elk, venison, and grouse make regular appearances on menus, and you often have a choice of rainbow trout, salmon, and bass pulled from someone's favorite fishing spot. You can find adventurous chefs doing creative things in the kitchen, but nothing that smacks of "highfalutin." No matter where you go, your server is likely to greet you with a smile, and blue jeans are always okay.

Microbreweries are another noteworthy phenomenon—you'll find local operations all over. And the fruits are exceptional: huckleberries are used in everything from muffins to ice cream, and apples, peaches, and pears from roadside stands are full of tree-ripened goodness.



Left: jumpjehmet, member fodor's.com; Right: caroly, member fodor's.com

Once covered by an ocean and now rich in fossils, southwest Wyoming's Red Desert, or Little Colorado Desert, draws people in search of pioneer trails (there are more miles of 19th-century overland emigrant trails here than anywhere else in the country) and recreation ranging from wildlife-watching to fishing and boating on Flaming Gorge Reservoir, south of the town of Green River.

### Fodor's Recommends

**Cheyenne Frontier Days.** One of the premier events in the Cowboy State, "The Daddy of 'Em All" started as a rodeo and now includes parades, carnivals, and concerts. It takes over the city for nine days at the end of July.

**Grand Encampment Museum.** Beyond doubt the best small-town museum in Wyoming, this volunteer-run pioneer town has relics from the mining, ranching, and timbering heritage of the area, including everything from a stage station to a two-story outhouse.

**Fort Laramie National Historic Site.** Fort Laramie is one of the most important historic sites in Wyoming, in part because its original buildings are extremely well preserved, but also because it played a role in several significant periods in Western history.

**Saratoga.** Tucked away in a valley formed by the Snowy Range and Sierra Madre mountains, Saratoga is an often-overlooked treasure, with fine dining and lodging, a landscape that's ideal for outdoor activities, and mineral waters flowing freely through its Hobo Pool Hot Springs.

## WYOMING'S OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

### Hiking

Hiking is easily the least expensive and most accessible recreational pursuit. All that's really essential are sturdy shoes, water, and the desire to see the landscape under your own power.

There are literally thousands of miles of hiking trails in Wyoming. The national parks have particularly well-marked and well-maintained trails, and admission to all trails is free. In fact, hiking is the only way to get close to certain highlights on protected land. For safety, overnight hikers are usually expected to register with park or forest rangers. Also keep in mind that run-ins with bears and mountain lions are increasingly common.

Hiking in the Rockies is a three-season sport that basically lasts as long as you're willing to tromp through snow. (You could look at snowshoeing as winter hiking—the trails are often the same.) This region has a wide range of terrain, from high-alpine scrambles that require stamina to flowered meadows that invite a relaxed pace.

### Fodor's Recommends

**Clear Creek Trail, Buffalo.** An easy 11-mile path leads through the historic town of Buffalo and out into nature, with good spots to stop for fishing and photography.

**Yellowstone Association Institute, Yellowstone National Park.** Yellowstone has more than 1,000 miles of trails, along which you can summit a 10,000-foot peak, follow a trout-filled creek, or descend into the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. This is the group to contact for guided hikes through the park, from day trips to overnight backpacking in the backcountry.

**Jenny Lake Trail, Grand Teton National Park.** You'll walk through a lodgepole-pine forest, have expansive views of the lake and the land to the east, and hug the shoulder of the massive Teton range itself. Along the way you are likely to see elk, pikas, golden mantle ground squirrels, a variety of ducks and water birds, plus you may hear elk bugling.

### Fishing

Casting into a clear stream or placid blue lake is a popular pastime all over Wyoming, with good reason: the waters of the entire state teem with trout, pike, whitefish, catfish, and bass of all kinds. Most

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## RODEOS, RENDEZVOUS, AND POWWOWS

The Western tradition of working hard then cutting loose is alive and well—look no further than Cheyenne Frontier Days, the rodeo extravaganza that's known simply as "The Daddy of 'Em All." It's the biggest event on the calendar, but it's hardly alone.

In July and August a weekend doesn't go by without some sort of celebration: there are rodeos, Native American powwows, and rendezvous (events commemorating 19th-century trappers and traders—the Green River Rendezvous in Pinedale is one of the best).

Winter begins with torchlight ski parades and traditional Christmas celebrations, but as the season wears on, things can turn wacky: witness golf on ice at the Wild West Winter Carnival in Riverton, Wyoming.



Left: mhasili, member fodor.com; Right: Public Domain

fishing enthusiasts stick to the land near Yellowstone, leaving the blue-ribbon streams of northern Wyoming relatively underutilized. The Bighorn River, Powder River, Crazy Woman Creek, Keyhole Reservoir, and Buffalo Bill Reservoir are all excellent venues.

Fly-fishing is especially big here, and there's no shortage of outfitters to equip you, both in the towns and in the wilderness. Anyone with a pole—be it an experienced fly-fisher or novice worm dangler—is respected here. All the same, if you're a beginner, you'd do well to hire a guide. Tackle-shop staff can direct you to some good fishing spots, but you're more likely to find the choicest locations if you have an experienced local at your side.

### Fodor's Recommends

**Flaming Gorge Reservoir, near Green River.** Home to state records for smallmouth bass, kokanee salmon, brown trout, channel catfish, Utah chub, and lake trout.

**North Fork of Shoshone River, west of Cody.** The river drops roughly 3,000 feet in 70 miles from the Silver-tip Basin to Buffalo Bill Reservoir.

**Platte River, near Casper.** With depths ranging from 1 to 15 feet, this blue-ribbon water attracts fishermen from all over the world.

**Yellowstone National Park.** Simply a tremendous fishing destination.

### Horseback Riding

It may be that no state in the union exalts cowboy life as Wyoming does. The concept of the dude-ranch vacation—where urban folk learn to rope, ride, and rodeo with weathered ranchers and professional cattle drivers—started in northern Wyoming, at Eatons' Guest Ranch 18 miles outside Sheridan in the town of Wolf.

Numerous other guest ranches are now strewn across the grassy plains, from the dusty prairies east

of Cody to the alpine meadows of the Big Horn Mountains. Most Big Horn-area dude ranches run pack trips into these high, rugged peaks, sometimes for days at a time. Even if you prefer a warm bed to sleeping under the stars, don't be deterred, and certainly don't leave the state without getting on a horse at least once: try a shorter trail ride or a pack trip that ends at a furnished cabin.

Horse-pack trips are a great way to visit the backcountry, since horses can travel distances and carry supplies that would be impossible for hikers. Although horsemanship isn't required for most trips, it's helpful, and even an experienced rider can expect to be a little sore for the first few days. June through August is the peak period for horse-pack trips; before signing up with an outfitter, ask what skills are expected.

### Fodor's Recommends

**Gunsel Horse Adventures, Yellowstone.** To get a taste of Yellowstone far from the traffic jams, pack up and head into the backcountry on trips ranging from 4 to 10 days.

**Paradise Guest Ranch, Buffalo, Northern Wyoming.** For 100 years this ranch has been putting guests on horseback. You can get rodeo training, hit the trail for a multiday pack trip, and get out of the saddle for barbecues and square dances.

### Rafting

Rafting brings on emotions varying from the calm induced by flat waters surrounded with stunning scenery, backcountry, and wildlife, to the thrill and excitement of charging a raging torrent of foam.

For the inexperienced, the young, and the aged, dozens of tour companies offer relatively tame floats ranging from one hour to one day, starting at \$20. Others fulfill the needs of adventure tourists content only with chills, potential spills, and the occasional wall of water striking them smack-dab in the chest. Beginners

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## WYOMING'S COWBOY SYMBOL

Ask a group of old-timers who the cowboy is in the Wyoming license plate's bucking-horse symbol, and you'll probably get four different answers. Artist Allen True, who designed the symbol, once said he had no particular rider in mind—but that doesn't end the story.

The symbol evolved over a number of years, beginning with a 1903 photograph by Professor B. C. Buffum of cowboy Guy Holt riding Steamboat, recognized as one of the five most difficult bucking horses of all time. In 1921 the University of Wyoming used that photograph as a model for the logo on its sports uniforms. Also, during World War I George Ostrom, a member of the Wyoming National Guard serving in Germany, had a bucking-horse-and-rider design painted on a brass drum. His 148th Field Artillery unit adopted the logo for its vehicles and became known as the Bucking Bronco Regiment. The horse in that case was Ostrom's own mount, Red Wing.

Using Allen True's design, the state of Wyoming first put the bucking bronco on its license plate in 1936, and it's been there ever since.



Left: Donna Billingsley, member fodor's.com; Right: apnep, member fodor's.com

and novices should use guides, but experienced rafters may rent watercraft.

Seasoned outfitters know their routes and their waters as well as you know the road between home and work. Many guides offer multiday trips in which they do everything, including searing your steak in a beach barbecue, setting up your tent, and rolling out your sleeping bag. Select an outfitter based on recommendations from the local chamber of commerce, experience, and word of mouth.

### Fodor's Recommends

**North Platte River, near Casper, Northern Wyoming.** Outfitters offer trips ranging from one hour to a full day on this tranquil stretch of water, ideal for the whole family.

**Snake River Canyon, south of Jackson, Northwest Wyoming.** Some of the wildest white water in the Rockies is in this winding stretch lined with trees, steep granite walls, alpine meadows, and abundant wildlife.

### Skiing and Snowboarding

The champagne powder of the Rocky Mountains can be a revelation for skiers and snowboarders familiar only with the slopes of other regions.

The snow builds up quickly, leaving a solid base that hangs tough all ski season, only to be layered with thick, fluffy powder that holds an edge, ready to be groomed into rippling corduroy or left in giddy stashes along the sides and through the trees. Volkswagen-size moguls and half-pipe-studded terrain parks are the norm, not the special attractions.

The added bonus of Rocky Mountain terrain is that so many of the areas have a wide variety of easier (green circle), intermediate (blue square), advanced (black diamond), and expert (double black diamond) slopes—often in the same ski resort. Turn yourself over to the rental shops, which are specialized enough to have experts who can help you plan your day and the types of equipment you'll need.

Renting is also a great chance for experienced skiers and snowboarders to try out the latest technology before investing in it.

Shop around for lift tickets before you leave home. Look for package deals, multiple-day passes, and online discounts. Call the resort and ask if there are any off-site locations (such as local supermarkets) where discount tickets can be purchased. The traditional ski season usually runs from mid-December until early April, with Christmas, New Year's, and the month of March being the busiest times at the resorts.

### Fodor's Recommends

**Jackson Hole Mountain Resort.** A place to appreciate both as a skier and as a voyeur, Jackson Hole is truly one of the great skiing experiences in America. There are literally thousands of ways of getting from top to bottom, and not all of them are hellishly steep, despite Jackson's reputation. First-rate racers such as Olympic champion skier Tommy Moe and snowboarders Julie Zell, A. J. Cargill, and Rob Kingwill regularly train here. As Kingwill has put it, "Nothing really compares to Jackson Hole ... This place has the most consistently steep terrain. You can spend years and years here and never cross your trail."

**Hogadon Ski Area.** For something a little less intense than Jackson Hole, try these family-friendly slopes perched on Casper Mountain a few miles outside of Casper.

**Shoshone National Forest.** In the Wood River valley near Meeteetse, 22 miles southeast of Cody, Wood River Ski Touring Park has 25 miles of groomed cross-country trails running through the forest.

**Yellowstone National Park.** Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing through geyser basins and along the canyon are both excellent ways to see the park in winter. Between December and March the summer crowds are long gone, and a majestic, snowy hush falls over the landscape.

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