

# YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK



## YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK ESSENTIALS:

**Address:** P.O. Box 168

Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190

**Season:** Some park areas, entrances, and roads are not open year-round, mostly due to weather and/or construction. Campgrounds and other facilities generally operate from mid-May through October.

## VISITOR INFORMATION:

**Web site:** [www.nps.gov/yell](http://www.nps.gov/yell)

**Phone:** (307) 344-7381

**TDD:** (307) 344-2386

## PARK OVERVIEW:

IN MANY WAYS, YELLOWSTONE IS THE EPICENTER OF EVERYTHING THAT'S STILL WILD AND UNTAMED IN THE UNITED STATES, AND EVERYTHING THAT'S RIGHT AND WRONG ABOUT MODERN-DAY TOURISM.

YELLOWSTONE IS THE OLDEST PARK IN THE U.S. PARK SYSTEM AND IS ITS FLAGSHIP. EACH YEAR, IT DRAWS THREE MILLION VISITORS; BY SOME ESTIMATES, ONE-THIRD OF THE U.S. POPULATION WILL VISIT THIS PLACE DURING THEIR LIFETIME. THEY COME TO EXPERIENCE THE PARK'S RESTLESS GEOLOGY; TO SEE GRIZZLIES, GRAY WOLVES, AND HERDS OF BUFFALO; AND TO FISH LEGENDARY TROUT STREAMS LIKE THE MADISON AND THE YELLOWSTONE RIVER. MOST OF ALL, THEY COME TO RECONNECT IN SOME WAY WITH A SENSE OF PRIMORDIAL AMERICA, THE LARGER-THAN-LIFE LANDSCAPE THAT EXISTED BEFORE RAILROADS, HIGHWAYS, TELEPHONES, AND A HOST OF OTHER TECHNOLOGIES BEGAN TO CUT EVERYTHING DOWN TO SIZE.

Riding a rare "hot spot" in the earth's surface, Yellowstone's turbulent landscape—which remains among the most geologically active lands on the planet, with steam-spewing geysers, gurgling fumaroles, and frequent earthquakes—was protected as the world's first national park in 1872. Yellowstone and the huge tracts of national forest land that ring it comprise one of the world's last intact temperate ecosystems—all its major species of plants and animals are still present. Yet Yellowstone is also deeply scarred by what Edward Abbey called "industrial tourism." Its most famous sights—Old Faithful geyser, the terraced wonders of Mammoth Hot Springs, the overwhelming size and hues of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone—can be a mob scene.

There is, however, a fairly simple way to break on through: Don't try to swallow this entire diverse place in one gulp. Pick one part of the park, and then walk or paddle or ride the extra mile into the wild country that's still back there. You'll leave behind the crowds and quickly find what you're truly looking for.

## PARK HIGHLIGHTS:

Yellowstone is so much more than a collection of scenic features and natural curiosities. The way to see Yellowstone is not with guidebook in hand, checking off attractions, but to feel it, to give it the time and contemplation it deserves.

But, while you're communing in this monument to nature, we recommend a few not-be-missed highlights.

The world's greatest concentration of thermal features is found in Yellowstone; many of the most famous geysers and hot springs are located on the west side of the park along the fifty mile stretch of road between Mammoth Hot Springs and Old Faithful. Areas to visit include the Mammoth Hot Springs Terraces, Norris Geyser Basin, Fountain Paint Pots, Firehole Lake Drive, Midway Geyser Basin, Biscuit Basin, Black Sand Basin, and the Old Faithful area. Visitor Centers along this road are located at Mammoth Hot Springs, Norris Geyser Basin, and Old Faithful. The Madison Museum, which houses an artist-in-residence program, is located at Madison Junction.

They say a watched pot never boils, but **Old Faithful**, the world's best-known geyser, faithfully erupts every 35 to 120 minutes for 1.5 to 5 minutes. The longer the eruption lasts, the longer the interval until the next eruption. It's not possible to predict more than one eruption in advance. Although it's best to have a laissez faire attitude about the eruptions, you can call the Old Faithful Visitor Center for current prediction times. Check out the view from Geyser Hill, and pay attention to the wind direction or you may only see steam.

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**Norris Geyser Basin** is the hottest, most thermal basin in the park. This, in addition to its acidic water (most other areas in the park have alkaline water) makes Norris' appearance a gorgeous anomaly. It's best viewed from the Porcelain Basin overlook trail near the museum.

**Mammoth Hot Springs** are quite different from other springs or geysers. Here the hot waters cascade over a series of delicately colored rimstone pools. Limestone dissolved in the waters deep beneath the surface is deposited rapidly to form terraces and pools that literally change from day to day.

**Yellowstone's Grand Canyon** leaves many people breathless. Go to Artist Point, Inspiration Point, or Lookout Point. Look down at the deceptively tiny river below, at the wisps of steam, and the pastel canyon walls. Here you can see ospreys far below as they wheel and soar over the canyon bottom. Or stand on the lip of the Lower Falls and watch the bottle-green Yellowstone River break into frothy white jets as it drops away 309 feet into the canyon below. Listen to its constant wild roar and feel the spray on your face.

**Yellowstone Lake**, with 110 miles of shoreline, is North America's largest mountain lake. The area is prime habitat for a variety of birds and animals, and it draws anglers and boaters as well. **Mud Volcano**, six miles north of Fishing Bridge Junction, and West **Thumb Geyser Basin**, 22 miles north of the South Entrance, are unique thermal areas. They hint at the complex ecologic story of Yellowstone Lake. Permits for fishing and boating are available at Lake Ranger Station and Grant Village Visitor Center. And a museum is located at Fishing Bridge.

Picking out just one superlative hike from among Yellowstone's 1,100 miles of trail is no easy feat, but the **Mount Washburn Spur Trail** is a pretty safe choice. Starting from the Glacial Boulder Trailhead in the Canyon area, this trail follows the north side of the awe-inspiring Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone on the **Seven-Mile Hole Trail** before climbing steeply up the east face of Mount

Washburn. (Hard-core hikers might consider following the Seven-Mile Hole Trail to its impressive terminus in the depths of the canyon, then powering all the way to Washburn's summit.) This hike offers an amazing breadth of high-country wildlife, midsummer wildflowers, and views. A large herd of bighorn sheep summer near the summit, and yellow-bellied marmots and red foxes are also common. On a clear day, the 10,243-foot peak offers views all the way to the Gallatins, Absarokas, and Tetons, along with panoramas closer to hand. Less hardy hikers can reach Washburn via the more heavily trafficked trails that begin at **Dunraven Pass** and the **Old Chittenden Road**, both off the Tower-Lake Road.

Picture yourself mid-river on a chilly September morning, steam billowing here and there from the geysers and hot springs, elk bugling during the fall rut, and trout rising hungrily for the late-season hatches. Many fly fishers consider the **Firehole River** in a class by itself. All the thermal activity warms the waters—the fishing action picks up earlier in spring and runs later through fall than at other Yellowstone streams, and the trout verge on gargantuan. It takes experience and wit to correctly gauge the hatch and duel the wily rainbows and browns on this river. If you're looking for an inside track, consider enlisting one of the many excellent guides leading clients onto Yellowstone trout waters.

One of the initial shocks Yellowstone delivers to first-time visitors is the presence of so many large critters—all free, wandering around. You just never know what's coming around the next bend of the Grand Loop. But some places in the park are extra special for **wildlife watching**, and the **Lamar Valley** is one of them. First of all, this is the range of the park's recently reintroduced gray wolves; there's nary a thrill comparable to seeing a pack of wild wolves socializing in a distant meadow, or perhaps even zeroing in on an elk kill. Your chances of being in the right place at the right time improve with the guidance of a park ranger, a Yellowstone Institute instructor, or a private guide. But either way, the Lamar Valley's inhabitants include grizzlies, wolves, bison, pronghorns, bighorn sheep, coyotes, and eagles. Bring along

a good spotting scope or pair of binoculars and head for one of several turnouts between the Tower-Roosevelt intersection and the Northeast Entrance.

Leave the crowds behind and find the essence of Yellowstone Country on your own terms on a multi-day trip into the park's vast **Bechler River backcountry**. Pack in and you'll find lush forests, spectacular waterfalls, backwoods thermal features, and solitude. Wildlife is everywhere, especially around the **Bechler Meadows**—a broad grassland expanse made bright by millions of wildflowers and frequented by moose, black bears, and a panoply of waterfowl and wading birds. Do it yourself on foot from the Cave Falls Road trailhead, or join a pack-stock trip or llama trek.

The **Thorofare**—the route from Yellowstone's southeastern corner north to the tip of Yellowstone Lake's Southeast Arm—was used for centuries by Native Americans to get from Jackson Hole to points north, and by mountain folk and trappers during frontier days. The scenery is spectacular: Thousands of elk summer here, and in the distance the crags of the **Absarokas** rise to the east and the **Wind River Range** to the south. These days, the Thorofare is one of the largest, most remote expanses of wilderness in the Lower 48. Many ranches and adventure companies outfit this trip; traveling this magnificent country by horse and spending nights in utter wilderness is as rare an adventure as can be had in the States.

The **Yellowstone Institute** finds unforgettable ways for people to interact with Yellowstone country. Choose among classes on outdoor skills such as tracking or "reading sign," wildlife photography, fly fishing, canoe camping, and horsepacking. Other courses offer rich insight into Yellowstone's history, geology, and ecosystem. With instructors who have an infectious enthusiasm for their subjects and are often much-heralded experts in their fields, Yellowstone Institute classes are also a bargain—averaging around \$50 a day.