

# BIG SKY COUNTRY

Montana's vast lands and boundless skies are a compelling gateway to the natural wonders and abundant wildlife found in America's iconic Yellowstone National Park

**A** symbol of the great American West, the state of Montana is a patchwork of rugged wilderness, rolling prairie and a cowboy culture that's as old as its historic ranches. While most of the nearly 3,500-square-mile Yellowstone National Park sits in Wyoming, the most sought-after entrances lie along the western and northern borders, which are best accessed from Montana. Crowned the first national park in the United States in the late 1800s, Yellowstone has been captivating imaginations for decades with its geothermal marvels, diverse wildlife and wild beauty. Situated atop a massive supervolcano, the park is brimming with over 10,000 hydrothermal features, including geysers, hot springs, mud pots, and fumaroles (steam vents). Roaming the conifer forests, and grassy meadows are America's most iconic fauna, including impressive herds of bison, elk and bighorn sheep to apex predators like grizzly bears, gray wolves and bald eagles. But Yellowstone is not just about its geological wonders and wildlife; it's also a place of timeless solitude. The park's unspoiled wilderness offers the chance to escape the cacophony of modern life and find a quiet corner of nature where the only sounds are melodic birdsong and the gentle whisper of the wind.



WORDS Nora Walsh, IMAGES © Montage Big Sky

*Yellowstone National Park captivates visitors with its vast geothermal features, including geysers, hot springs, mud pots, and fumaroles (steam vents)*

BIG SKY AND WEST YELLOWSTONE

To explore the park’s famous Southern Loop, hang your hat at the 139-key Montage Big Sky, located approximately an hour’s drive from Yellowstone’s West Entrance. The resort partners with expert naturalists from Yellowstone Safari Co., a premier adventure outfit based in the city of Bozeman.

“We don’t offer rehearsed cookie-cutter tours,” said Nate Udd, a professional guide and wildlife artist. “Every trip is tailored to guests’ interests, and flexible timelines allow us to get off the beaten path and visit popular sights when they’re less crowded.” Udd recommends setting aside two days to explore the park. This allows ample time to discover highlights of the Southern Loop, including its impressive geysers and steaming hot springs to Yellowstone Lake and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone River. The Northern Range is ideal for spotting wildlife roaming wide-open panoramic valleys.

Navigating Montage’s ultra-luxury Cadillac SUV, Udd explains that Yellowstone has the highest concentration of geothermal features in the world—more than both Iceland and New Zealand. Water features in and around the 35- by 40-mile caldera are heated by underground volcanic magma, creating an otherworldly landscape that gushes and gurgles while sending giant plumes of steam into the crystal blue sky. Old Faithful is a requisite stop to see both the famous geyser and the historic inn, which is the largest log cabin in the world. But some of the most exciting stops are the ones you won’t find on a tourist map—hidden gems the naturalists have uncovered during years of exploration.



EMBRAER TIP

The synthetic vision system onboard the Phenom 100EX easily navigates the parallel runways at Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport (BZN) to reach Montage Big Sky, 45-minute drive from Yellowstone National Park.



IMAGES ©Montage Big Sky

Opposite (top): Located just 45 minutes from Yellowstone National Park’s west entrance, Montage Big Sky offers guests the chance to venture off the beaten path with a professional guide  
Opposite (bottom): Montage Big Sky Resort boasts 139 luxury suites amid the Spanish Peaks

Top: Yellowstone has the highest concentration of geothermal features in the world, heated by underground volcanic magma  
Bottom: Onsite outfitter Compass Sports can arrange flyfishing excursions throughout Big Sky’s pristine river network

Back at Montage, a world of alpine pampering awaits against the backdrop of the sublime Spanish Peaks. Most notable is the warmth and friendliness of the Montage team, which infuses every interaction, from the bartenders at Alpenglow, the chic centerpiece bar, to attendants manning the 11,000-square-foot spa. Dig into cuts of buttery filet and hand-rolled *cacio e pepe* at the signature restaurant Cortina, inspired by its Northern Italy namesake, Cortina d’Ampezzo. Mountainside Backcast Bar & Grill and Beartooth Pub & Rec are both crowd-pleasers for a more casual meal; the latter comes with a bowling alley and an arcade. Don’t miss the pastries from Wildflower Market, where the chef imports butter and flour directly from France. The spa, a temple of relaxation, has a slick indoor lap pool, steam room and heated plunge pool, as well as a roster of treatments ranging from deep tissue massages using high-grade CBD to complimentary sound baths in the hot tub. Inside, glowing fireplaces, large-format mountain photography and drop-dead views are at every turn, while outdoor hot tubs, a heated pool and a s’mores firepit are great spots to take in the area’s glorious sunset skies. Adventure awaits at onsite outfitter Compass Sports, where guests can arrange skiing, flyfishing, archery and horseback riding, as well as hiking and biking Big Sky’s expansive network of mountain trails that zigzag stunning crystalline rivers and waterfalls.



## PARADISE VALLEY AND NORTH YELLOWSTONE

On the way to Paradise Valley, it's worth stopping in downtown Bozeman to stroll Main Street—a buzzy strip lined with art galleries, independent boutiques, restaurants and brewpubs catering to residents and college students from Montana State University. Livingston, a quintessential western town nestled in the scenic Yellowstone River Valley known for its rugged beauty and small-town charm, was a favorite of the late Anthony Bourdain for its vibrant dining scene. It's also a literary hub home to more writers per capita than any other city in America.

A 20-minute drive from the town center sits the newly minted glamping retreat Under Canvas North Yellowstone in the shadow of the Absaroka Mountains. The location is perfect for accessing Yellowstone's Lamar Valley—an area referred to as the Serengeti of North America for its quantity and diversity of wildlife species. Head out before dawn to maximize your chances of spotting grizzlies and wolves before the summer sun drives them into the forest seeking shade. Thanks to Yellowstone Safari Co.'s expert guiding and powerful spotting scopes, you'll be put in the best position to see baby cubs wrestle behind a mama bear digging for caraway, watch a yearling wolf prowl through a large herd of bison searching for easy prey, or spot witness coyotes and pronghorns dart for the hills as a wolfpack patrols its territory. If you're really lucky, a grizzly might lumber across the road right in front of your car.

*Top: Discover diverse wildlife species with an expert guide from Yellowstone Safari Co.*

*Below: In Yellowstone's Lamar Valley, visitors can spot grizzly bears, wolves and large bison herds*

*Opposite (left): At Under Canvas North Yellowstone, tents comprise king beds, flushing toilets, hot water showers, and woodburning stoves*

*Opposite (right): 20 minutes from downtown Bozeman lies Under Canvas North Yellowstone, a newly minted glamping retreat in the shadow of the Absaroka Mountains*



To see the breathtaking panorama from a different perspective, tap lifelong local Rowdy Nelson of Rowdy River Guides for a pleasure float down the Yellowstone River. He'll point out the 19<sup>th</sup>-century ranch where he grew up riding horses and competing in rodeos, the quaint schoolhouse where he spent youth, and regale you with tales of his young-gun years working at Chico Hot Spring Resort—famous for its A-list clientele including Dennis Quaid and local residents Jeff Bridges and John Mayer.

The 50-acre Under Canvas camp is a destination in its own right. Strewn along more than a mile of scenic riverfront, it's ideal for fly fishing, rafting and kayaking. Come nightfall, campers dine on tasty cuisine and roast s'mores around cozy firepits while a local musician plays. Tents lack nothing in the way of comfort with king-size beds (book one with a stargazing window), flushing toilets, hot-water showers, and woodburning stoves stocked with firewood. While you shouldn't expect Wi-Fi or electricity in your tent, you can text on-call attendants around the clock for help starting a fire or request a hot water bottle on chillier evenings. Private decks are designed to appreciate the hush of silence that pervades the camp, broken only by the gentle murmur of the Yellowstone River as it makes its journey northward. At sunset, pull up a seat as the sun paints the Absarokas in a brilliant golden hue and watch in awe as it slowly fades to a rosy alpenglow under an infinite Montana sky. ◀

## A VOICE FOR GREATER YELLOWSTONE

The Greater Yellowstone Coalition is a nonprofit organization with a mission to protect the lands, waters and wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem for present and future generations. With strategic offices in Montana, Wyoming and Idaho, it engages in local, regional and national efforts to safeguard this unique region, renowned for its native wildlife and pristine natural beauty.

Its vision encompasses a park where nature thrives, communities coexist harmoniously and collective efforts conserve this globally significant region. The coalition strives to secure vital habitats and freedom of movement for wildlife, combat regressive policies and advocate for science-based approaches to protect Yellowstone's ecology, economy and social fabric. Visitors can support its various advocacy efforts to ensure the park's continued flourishing.

[greateryellowstone.org](http://greateryellowstone.org)

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