



U.S. National Parks: The Grand Canyon to Yellowstone

12 days | 15 days with Missoula & Glacier National Park extension

This itinerary is proof that you don't have to go far to satisfy your wanderlust. Each day displays a new destination—and with it, new landscapes and adventures swathed in dusty oranges, sherbet pinks, and gemstone greens. You'll follow the footsteps of America's Indigenous peoples and learn about the explorers and settlers that followed them. Explore the ingeniously carved cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde in Colorado, gaze into the depths of the Grand Canyon in Arizona and stand in the shadow of the Grand Tetons in Wyoming. And if frontier life beckons, consider extending your trip to Montana's gritty, glacial expanse.



Your tour package includes

- 11 nights in handpicked hotels
- 11 breakfasts
- 1 lunch
- 3 dinners with beer or wine
- 8 sightseeing tours
- Expert Tour Director & local guides
- Private deluxe motor coach

Included highlights

- Loretto Chapel
- Mesa Verde National Park
- Monument Valley
- Grand Canyon
- Zion National Park
- Bryce Canyon National Park
- The Grand Tetons
- Yellowstone National Park

Tour pace

On this guided tour, you'll walk for at least 2 hours daily across mostly flat terrain, including paved trails and dirt paths, with some hills and high altitudes.

Group size

15–35

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Santa Fe, New Mexico → 2 nights

Day 1: Arrival in Albuquerque & transfer to Santa Fe

Welcome to New Mexico! You're officially in "The Land of Enchantment." The monicker has been in use since the 1930s and when you look around, you'll know why. As you transfer to your hotel in Santa Fe, keep an eye out for the Sandia Crest. This spruce- and fir-topped ridge is the highest point in the Sandia-Manzano Mountains at 10,679 feet, about twice the elevation of Denver, Colorado. Settle into your hotel this evening and prepare to meet the oldest state capital in the United States. (Santa Fe was founded in 1610—but the area was inhabited by Pueblo peoples for hundreds of years prior.)

Day 2: Sightseeing tour of Santa Fe

Included meals: breakfast, welcome lunch

Enjoy a guided sightseeing tour of New Mexico's capital. Santa Fe was settled by a Spanish conquistador nearly 500 years ago, and while we often picture America's oldest buildings standing on the East Coast, this city boasts both one of the oldest European-style homes and one of the oldest churches in the United States. Join your guide today for a panoramic tour of this haven of history and art, known as "The City Different" for its inimitable mix of cultures.

- Catch a sweeping view of Santa Fe, the Jemez Mountains, and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains from the Cross of the Martyrs overlook. The cross honors 21 Franciscan friars who perished in the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, one of the few successful Indigenous rebellions against colonial settlers.
- Pass the Romanesque Revival Saint Francis Cathedral, built of yellow limestone quarried in nearby Lamy. (Did you know: Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Willa Cather wrote a fictionalized account of the cathedral's origins in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.)
- Travel through the plaza in the heart of the city to view a pair of beloved icons: the circa-1610 Palace of the Governors and the State Capitol, known as the "Roundhouse." From above, the only circular state capitol in the United States resembles the Zia sun

symbol (You'll recognize it from the New Mexico state flag.) Although the resemblance wasn't intentional, the circular design was chosen to symbolize openness and inclusivity.

- Enter Loretto Chapel to view its miraculous staircase, whose construction is an engineering marvel steeped in lore. This intricately turned staircase makes two full 360-degree twists to reach the choir loft without a center pole for structural support, resting its entire weight on the bottom stair. Legend has it that a mysterious carpenter appeared with a donkey and tools to build the staircase—only to then disappear without a trace.

Later in the afternoon, enjoy a welcome lunch served with beer or wine with your fellow travelers.

Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado → 1 night

Day 3: Mesa Verde via Durango

Included meals: breakfast, dinner

The raw beauty of the Southwest unfolds as you make the journey from New Mexico to Colorado. Watch the lush greenery and towering trees of Carson National Forest fade out of view as rolling hills give way to the rugged terrain of the San Juan Mountains, part of the famous Rockies. You'll stop in the Old West frontier mining town of Durango en route to Mesa Verde National Park. Its stark, faded vermilion landscapes have beckoned artists, authors, and filmmakers for generations; if these vistas look familiar, they probably are.

- Pass by Abiquiu Lake, longtime home of artist Georgia O'Keeffe. Sited at the foot of the Cerro Pedernal mesa—itsself immortalized in many of O'Keeffe's works—it's the filming locale of Western favorites like *Wyatt Earp* and *City Slickers*.
- Continue to the Echo Amphitheater, a rock formation tucked into stratified sandstone

cliffs marked by an unusual mineral varnish staining the surface like blood. If you believe local legend, it was the site of two grizzly killings, and the echoes you hear are the cries of the doomed.

- Take in the stunning landscapes that inspired O'Keeffe's artistry. Pay attention to the dramatic play of light and shadow, intense colors, and unique forms that make up the Southwestern terrain that captivated her.
- Enjoy a stop in Durango, a town steeped in history with a well-preserved downtown area. Take a stroll along Main Avenue—chock-full of Victorian-era architecture and art galleries—and soak in its small-town atmosphere.

Sit down for an included dinner this evening, served with beer or wine.

Kayenta, Arizona → 1 night

Day 4: Mesa Verde National Park & transfer to Kayenta

Included meals: breakfast, dinner

Take a guided tour of Mesa Verde National Park, where ancient history and arresting landscapes converge against clear blue skies. Find yourself in the land of the Ancestral Puebloans: Also known as the Anasazi, they once inhabited this region, and their homes are remarkably preserved.

- View the 800-year-old dwellings that honeycomb the walls of the canyon. Perched precariously on cliffsides, they offer a glimpse into the lives of the Ancestral Puebloans, showcasing their ingenuity in adapting to the natural landscape.
- Immerse yourself in Mesa Verde's craggy terrain: towering sandstone cliffs emerging from a desert landscape of rust-red rocks and sagebrush-covered mesas.
- Enjoy free time to browse the unique treasures of the gift shop, where you can find authentic Native American crafts and artifacts.

As your journey continues, soak in the panoramic vistas of Monument Valley, where iconic rock

formations like the Mexican Hat capture your imagination with their playful shapes. Be sure to take plenty of photos of this landscape before continuing to Kayenta, Arizona, in the heart of the Navajo Nation.

This evening, enjoy an included dinner.

Please note: Tonight's dinner is served alcohol-free as it takes place on Navajo Nation territory.

Grand Canyon, Arizona → 2 nights

Day 5: Grand Canyon via Tuba City

Included meals: breakfast

Stop in Tuba City to learn about the culture and living history of the Navajo at the Explore Navajo Interactive Museum. Here, immersive exhibits and interactive displays open a window into the traditional way of life, spiritual beliefs, and artistic expressions of the tribe. You'll gain insight into the pivotal role played by Navajo leader Peter MacDonald and the World War II Code Talkers, whose linguistic contributions helped the Allies secure victory.

Please note: Meeting Peter MacDonald is not guaranteed.

Afterward, dive into the vibrant atmosphere of the Cameron Trading Post, a historic outpost that has served travelers and locals alike for more than a century. Browse a curated selection of Navajo artwork, jewelry, and crafts, and learn about the time-honored traditions of the artisans who created them.

As you continue your journey to the Grand Canyon, feel the anticipation build for the awe-inspiring spectacle that awaits. After arriving at the South Rim, set out on a scenic walk guided by your Tour Director, who'll illuminate the geological wonders and natural splendor of the landscape.

- Marvel at towering rock formations that bear witness to millions of years of geological evolution, their striated layers revealing the passage of time in hues of red, orange, and ochre. Pause to take in panoramic vistas that stretch to the horizon, where the vast expanse of the Grand Canyon unfolds endlessly before you.
- Let your gaze catch on the mighty Colorado River meandering along the canyon floor, a dizzying mile below, as a sense of reverence washes over you. Here, you're reminded of the profound forces that have shaped this landscape and the enduring legacy of those who call this land home.

Day 6: Free day at the Grand Canyon

Included meals: breakfast

To fully appreciate the enormity of the Grand Canyon—it's not just a name after all—add a helicopter tour to your itinerary and take to the skies for an electrifying perspective.

Prefer to explore the Grand Canyon on terra firma? Craft your own walk or hike to the South Rim by hopping on the free shuttle from your hotel and going at your own pace. Dozens of trails await you, and the shuttle will whisk you back when you're ready to rest.

+ Grand Canyon Helicopter Ride

Zion National Park, Utah → 1 night

Day 7: Transfer to Zion National Park

Included meals: breakfast

Continue your scenic journey through this rough-hewn portion of the Southwest as you traverse Vermilion Cliffs National Monument en route to Zion National Park. Here, the earth's rich tapestry flashes hues of yellow and orange as deeply eroded sedimentary rocks rise majestically into the azure sky.

- Pass the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument, whose history of human settlement dates back more than 12,000 years. (Its petroglyphs are some of the oldest in the United States.) You'll recognize it by the undulating layers of colorful rock strata that look like blazing orange waves.
- Delve into the history of Zion National Park, named by 19th-century Mormon settlers who were awestruck by its otherworldly beauty and reminded of their heavenly city.
- Experience the park from a unique vantage point aboard an open-air tram, where a guide will unravel the park's geological wonders, diverse flora and fauna, and cultural heritage.
- Enjoy the sway of winding roads as each bend reveals a new panorama of sandstone monoliths, green valleys, and waterfalls. You may also spot one of the park's many sheep, goats, and deer.

Please note: Depending on arrival time and season, you may have time to stay in the park and hike. There are free shuttles that will take you back to your hotel.

Salt Lake City, Utah → 1 night

Day 8: Salt Lake City via Bryce Canyon National Park

Included meals: breakfast

Today, you'll be making your way to Utah's capital, Salt Lake City, by way of the surreal landscapes of Bryce Canyon National Park. Long before the arrival of European settlers, Indigenous people inhabited the area; the Paiute tribe had a deep connection to the lands that now constitute the park. The Paiute referred to Bryce Canyon's hoodoos—huge rock pinnacles—as “Legend People,” believing them to be ancient beings transformed by Coyote, a prominent figure in their mythology.

Here's what you can expect at this stop:

- Enjoy a guided exploration of the park by bus and on foot. You'll learn about its unique formations, sculpted over millions of years through the process of erosion. The park sits atop the Paunsaugunt Plateau, where the forces of wind, water, and ice gradually carved out the intricate maze of canyons, fins, and spires that we see today.
- Feast your eyes as you get up close and personal with Bryce Canyon's iconic rock formations. Watch as arches, bridges, and spires made of pink limestone and sandstone change with the shifting light in a bewitching display of color and contrast.
- Keep your camera ready as you encounter the park's famous inhabitants—the hoodoos. These whimsical rock formations, shaped like totems and towers, create a surreal and otherworldly atmosphere that's unlike anything you've ever seen.

After stopping at the Inspiration, Sunset, and Sunrise viewpoints, you'll continue to Salt Lake City.

Jackson, Wyoming → 3 nights

Day 9: Transfer to Jackson & Grand Teton National Park

Included meals: breakfast

Cross into Wyoming on a scenic drive en route to the rustic resort town of Jackson, nestled amid the scenery of the Teton Range. Then, set out to explore Grand Teton National Park, home to the youngest mountain range in the Rockies. The Teton Range began forming during the Miocene Epoch, making it about nine million years young. In contrast, some of the older mountain ranges in the Rockies began sprouting 70 to 40 million years ago.

- Drive through picturesque Logan Canyon, where cliffs and lush forests frame the

roadway. Watch for wildlife peeking through the dense foliage. Soon, you'll encounter the turquoise waters of Bear Lake, known as the "Caribbean of the Rockies" for its vibrant hue.

- Tour Grand Teton National Park by bus and on foot, taking in the pristine wilderness. With luck, you may encounter elk, black bears, moose, and bison.
- Unwind and savor the charm of Jackson this evening. Prepare to swoon over its gallery-lined, quaint streets and to tap your foot (or dance, you're on vacation after all!) to live music in the town square.

Please note: The visit to Grand Teton National Park may take place on day 10, depending on seasonality and weather.

Day 10: Yellowstone National Park

Included meals: breakfast

Venture from Jackson to Yellowstone National Park, designated the world's first national park in 1872, for a full day of sightseeing. We'll take you from Oxbow Bend's overlook gazing out to Mount Moran in the Tetons to Yellowstone highlights like the overlook at Artist Point and the roaring Upper and Lower Falls, with plenty of time to stop for photos—and oohs and aahs—along the way.

- Immerse yourself in Yellowstone's untamed wilderness, marked by the forests and meadows carpeting its landscape, and behold its serene centerpiece: Yellowstone Lake.
- Experience the thrill of witnessing Old Faithful erupt, its towering plume of steam reaching skyward in a breathtaking crescendo. As you explore the park's hydrothermal areas, you'll see and hear—and smell—bubbling mud pots and steaming hot springs.
- Listen for the echoing, haunting howls of Yellowstone's resident grey wolves and look for bison grazing on swaying grasslands, agile mountain goats springing between rocks, and moose wading in tranquil streams.

Day 11: Free time in Jackson

Included meals: breakfast, farewell dinner

If you opted for the Grand Canyon helicopter ride for a bird's eye view, you might want to add the Snake River float to your itinerary today. Board a raft and drift down the Snake River for postcard-worthy moments of your own. And should an eagle soar overhead, consider this day a success.

If you'd prefer more time in town, Jackson's

Town Square beckons with its wooden boardwalks and famous elk antler arches that adorn each corner. You can also take part in the 100-year-old tradition of the Jackson Hole Rodeo (as a spectator) and check out barrel racing, roping, and live music.

Later, gather with your group at a local restaurant for a farewell dinner.

+ Snake River Float

Flight Home

Day 12: Departure

Included meals: breakfast (excluding early morning departures)

Transfer to the airport for your flight home or extend your trip and cross another incredible national park off your list. Get in the cowboy spirit with a stop at the Grant-Kohrs Ranch, then spend a full day exploring Glacier National Park's pristine alpine lakes and gnarled peaks with your Tour Director leading the way.

+ Missoula & Glacier National Park extension

Continue your National Park Tour in Missoula, Montana, beginning with an up-close look at authentic ranch living and ending at the place known as the "Crown of the Continent:" Glacier National Park. Conservationist and editor of Field and Stream magazine George Bird Grinnell gave the park its nickname and negotiated its sale from the Blackfoot Nation. Sawtooth peaks and carved valleys teeming with abundant wildlife are just a few hours away—ready to check them out?

Missoula, Montana → 1 night

Day 12: Transfer to Missoula

Included meals: breakfast

Say goodbye to Jackson, crossing the Rocky Mountains and plains of the American West en route to Missoula, Montana's second-most-populous city. Take in the meandering rivers and stretches of unspoiled vistas that unfurl all around you.

- Pause to delve into the legacy of the American frontier at the Grant-Kohrs Ranch

National Historic Site. You'll find meticulously preserved ranch buildings, cowboy dormitories, chuckwagons, and smithies that belonged to the early pioneers who shaped the Western frontier.

- Learn about the saga of the cattle ranching industry, which played a pivotal role in shaping the economy and culture of the American West.
- Join a park ranger for a tour of the ranch and listen as they regale you with tales of the open range, herding cattle, and tending to the land against the unforgiving backdrop of the Old West.

Please note: The stop at the Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site is time-permitting.

Glacier National Park Region → 2 nights

Day 13: Transfer to the Glacier National Park Region

Included meals: breakfast

Learn about the area's culture as you make your way to the Glacier National Park Region today. The park's lands are part of the history and heritage of the Blackfeet, Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai tribes; you'll learn how its stories span centuries of Native American traditions, military history, and resilience

- Begin your exploration at the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula, discovering its history as a military outpost in the late 19th century. Learn about its transformation into an internment camp during World War II, where Japanese and Italian Americans were detained.
- Travel through the Flathead Indian Reservation, home to the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), whose ancestral connections to the land stretch back millennia. You'll pass the CSKT Bison Range, where herds of the majestic, woolly beasts freely roam the rolling hills. You can witness these creatures in their natural habitat thanks to conservation efforts: In 2022, the area was officially restored to the CSKT, whose award-winning natural resource managers continue working as stewards of the habitat.

Arrive in the Glacier National Park Region and enjoy a free evening. You'll want to unwind and rest before tomorrow's unforgettable trek through the west side of the park.

Day 14: Glacier National Park

Included meals: breakfast

Travel along Going-to-the-Sun Road, a national landmark considered one of the world's most scenic drives. As you traverse the route, prepare to be awed by a symphony of natural wonders. Then, you'll board smaller vans and ford the high alpine region of the park. The road itself is a feat of engineering. Built between 1921 and 1932, it winds through steep cliffs and narrow ledges and cuts through the Continental Divide at an elevation of 6,600 feet.

(Please note: Activities in Glacier National Park may vary depending on the season and weather conditions.)

- Marvel at mountain ranges dotted with wildflowers and crashing waterfalls as you wind your way through Glacier National Park, half of the UNESCO-listed Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. Lose yourself in this soul-stirring expanse of cedar forests and rocky cliffs and ponder tranquil lakes reflecting the surrounding peaks.
- Bear witness to the poignant spectacle of melting glaciers, silent sentinels of the changing climate and our planet's fragile balance.

This evening, enjoy a farewell drink as you celebrate your trip with your fellow group members.

Please note: Due to seasonality concerns, the drive along Going-to-the-Sun Road will be replaced with a Lake McDonald cruise on our May and September departures.

Flight Home

Day 15: Departure

Included meals: breakfast (excluding early morning departures)

Transfer to Kalispell for your flight home.

Customize your experience

Customize your tour by adding excursion options. Excursions offered on the same day will occur at different times, so there's no need to choose. Save \$10 when you book your excursion up to three days before your tour departs.* Excursions requiring advance reservation only list this discounted price. Call or go online to customize your tour: goaheadtours.com/NPT | 1-800-597-0350

Day 6: Grand Canyon Helicopter Ride

\$259/\$269* (30 minutes, departs in the morning)

Enjoy a bird's-eye view of the Grand Canyon aboard a thrilling half-hour-long helicopter ride. Soar over the massive canyon, taking in a unique perspective of the striated terrain far below. From high above the canyon rim, you can begin to fully appreciate the immense scale of this natural wonder. Please note: This excursion is weather-dependent.

Day 11: Snake River Float

\$129 (3 hours, departs in the afternoon)

One of the best ways to see the Grand Tetons—the glorious peaks that surround Jackson—is from the Snake River. On a raft ride, you'll have a great chance of glimpsing some of Wyoming's wildlife, including soaring eagles and graceful elk. You'll also get a firsthand view of the site of Ansel Adams' famous photo. Please note: This excursion is weather-dependent and runs seasonally from mid-May through mid-September. Layered clothing and waterproof shoes are recommended. This excursion requires advance reservation and must be booked at least 20 days prior to departure.

*Optional excursions may be purchased up to three days prior to departure or while on tour. Pre-purchased optional excursions cannot be canceled within three days prior to departure or while on tour. Select optional excursions require advance booking and cannot be purchased or canceled after the advanced reservation deadline. GAT accepts payment by cash, Visa or MasterCard for optional excursions purchased on tour. Additional fees may apply for optional excursions purchased on tour. Excursions require a minimum number of participants to operate. Details and prices are subject to change. Due to seasonal hours of operation and availability, some excursions may not operate. If this occurs, you will be refunded any payments made for that excursion post-tour. Learn more at goaheadtours.com/terms