

# Bull River Valley Scenic Drive

*Montana's Pacific Northwest*



4 Days/3 Nights

Gateway City: Missoula, Montana



You may think you're in Northern California or in the Pacific Northwest. But you're not - you're in a very unique area of Montana that gets 50 to 100 inches of rain each year. It's the place where the landscape of the northern Rocky Mountains transitions to the lush vegetation of the Pacific Northwest. The result is the Bull River Valley, sitting alongside the Cabinet Mountains which are home to huge fir trees and western red cedars that thrive in abundant rainfall, coupled with Douglas firs and western larch that do best in dryer conditions. These Wilds of Northwest Montana is the traditional home of the Kootenai tribe. The Scenic Drive winds along the Bull River on a former Native American trail. The relaxing panorama on this very scenic drive rides between high peaks, lakes and streams, forested slopes, and alpine meadows. The highlight of this drive is the Ross Creek Giant Cedars Grove where ancient western red cedars grow 8 feet in diameter and 175 feet high. A nearly mile-long nature trail through the grove, delivers great views of the Bull River Valley and the Cabinet Mountains. It is reached by a four mile paved road that climbs to the parking area at the Cedars. This is a really great place to get away from it all.

## **Touring the Byway**

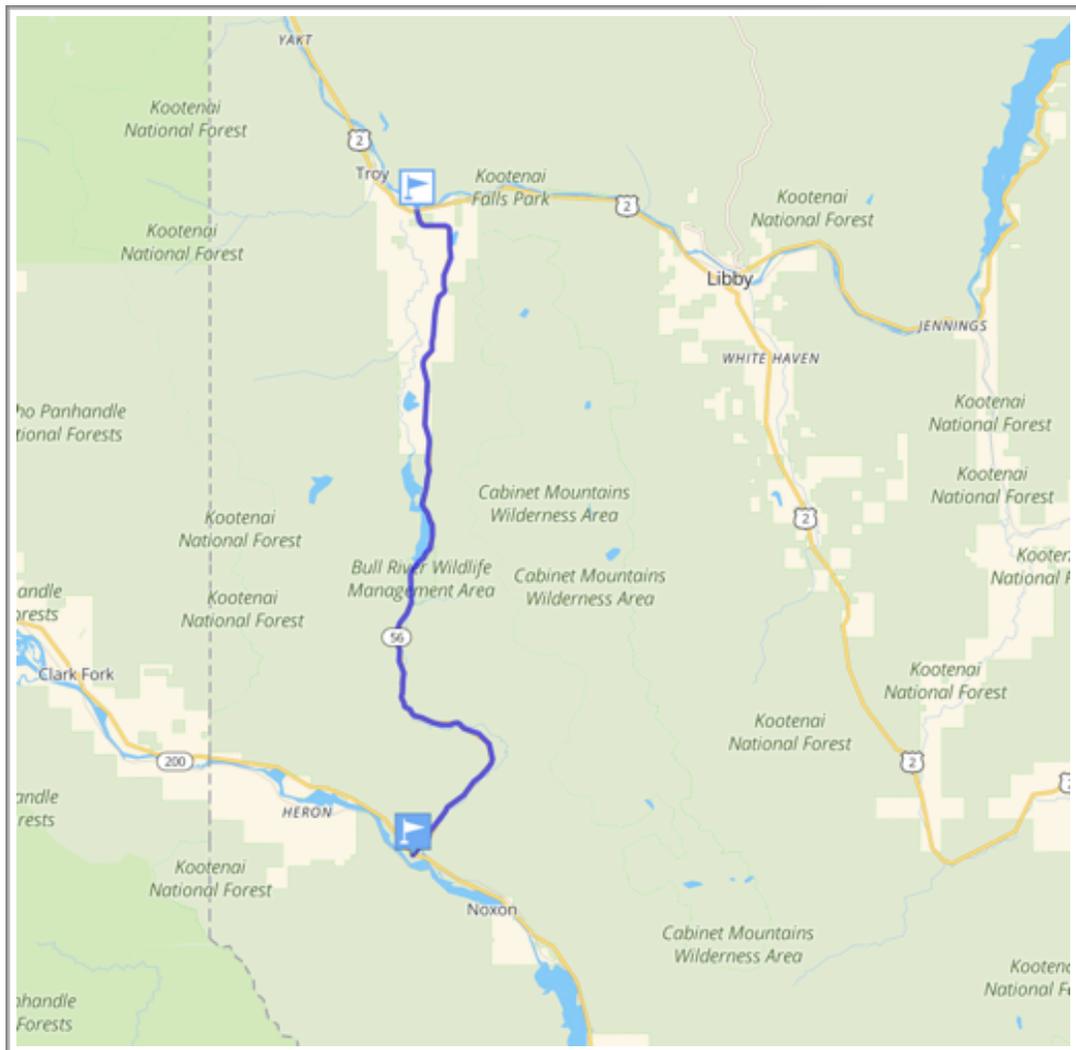
We recommend starting your journey in Missoula, where you can explore the downtown on a historic walking tour and visit the Montana Natural History Center, the Montana Museum of Art and Culture, and the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula, before taking the Riverfront Walking Trail and spending the night at the Blue Mountain Bed and Breakfast.

From there, you'll be taking Interstate 90 to the St. Regis exit, unless you want to wander the Clark Fork Scenic Drive from Alberton up to St. Regis. Either route will ultimately put you on the St. Regis-Paradise Scenic Byway, one of the bonus beauties of this trip. You'll continue on Montana 135 until you reach the Koo-Koo-Sint Bighorn Sheep Viewing Site eight miles east of Thompson Falls. A highway pullout provides information about the sheep. Weighing up to 300 pounds, they charge their rivals at 20 miles per hour and butt heads in a struggle for herd dominance. This violent sport can be heard miles away. As you pass through Thompson Falls, you'll see the Thompson Falls High Bridge just south of the intersection of Gallatin and Preston Avenue. Built in 1911, the bridge offers a stunning view of the dam, fish ladder, and nesting osprey, and a beautiful vista of the Clark Fork River. Here you can also visit the Old Jail Museum.



About 40 miles north of Thompson Falls, you'll be turning north on Montana 56, which is the Bull River Valley Scenic Drive. Traveling north, the Ross Creek Giant Cedars Grove will be on your left and the Cabinet Mountains on your right. The Scenic Drive ends in Libby. After staying the night in Libby and exploring the Heritage Museum and the Libby Dam Visitor Center, you'll be headed on US Highway 2 to Kalispell. After exploring for a day in Kalispell, if you have not been to Glacier National Park make sure to visit this wonderful Park and drive the Going to the Sun Road – possibly the most beautiful scenic drive in all of America. If you're looking for new adventures, take the drive around Flathead Lake and the other two scenic drives in the Kalispell Area.

From there, we wish you safe passage if you're traveling on another Montana Scenic Drive, or a safe and pleasant journey home.



## DAY ONE



### **Missoula**

C. P. Higgins and Francis Worden opened a trading post on the Blackfoot River in 1869, that was followed by the arrival of the Mullan Road connecting Fort Benton with Walla Walla, Washington. Fort Missoula was opened in 1877 to protect the growing community. The arrival of the railroad in 1883, along with the Missoula Mercantile Company, made the city a trading center. The University of Montana opened in 1895. Missoula's location within a heavily forested area made logging the mainstay industry until the mid-1970s. Saws could be heard over two miles away on a clear summer night.

### **Downtown Missoula Historic and Art Walking Tour**

Learn more about Missoula on the downtown walking tour, which has one of the largest collections of buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places in the country. Locations like the Atlantic Hotel and the Diner Café, with huge historic neon signs, that have long been repurposed, peacefully coexist with the 1910 Missoula County Courthouse and the 1909 Palace Hotel. The downtown partnership has funded over 20 works of public art, that appear along the tour.

### **Montana Natural History Center**

The Montana Natural History Center features displays of the flora and fauna, ecosystems, and geology in the state, including the Montana Ecosystem, The Magic Planet, a Naturalist Forest Station, Glacial Lake Missoula, Explore Fossils, Explore Geology, and the outdoor Nature Adventure Garden.

120 Hickory Street, Suite A, Missoula, MT 59801, 406-327-0405, T-F 9AM-5PM, Sat Noon-4PM, Adults \$4

### **Montana Museum of Art and Culture**

Located on the University of Montana campus, this museum now has 11,000 pieces including work by Rocky Mountain artists, historic European works, and collections from Southeast Asia, American Impressionists, contemporary Native American artists, ceramics, and public art sites across the campus. European masters include Rembrandt, Delacroix, Boucher, Piranesi, and Daumier, along with 20<sup>th</sup> century artists, Miro, Toulouse-Lautrec, Chagall, Dali, Picasso, Remington, Merritt Chase, and Andy Warhol.

Across from the Adams Center off East 6th Street. University of Montana Campus. 406-243-2019. Tu-Sat Noon-6PM. Free, donations accepted.

### **Historical Museum at Fort Missoula**

Fort Missoula was established by the US Army in 1877 to protect settlers in the region. Nearly 100 years later, the Historical Museum encompasses 32 acres with over 20 historic structures and a collection of nearly 50,000 artifacts.

3400 Captain Rawn Way, Missoula, MT 59804, 406-728-3476 M-Sat 10AM-5PM, Sun Noon-5PM

### **Riverfront Walking Trail**

The riverfront walking trail along the Clark Fork River takes you past McCormick Park, the Old Milwaukee Depot, John H. Toole Park, and other scenic and historic treasures in Missoula.



### **Destination Distinctive Accommodations**

**Blue Mountain Bed and Breakfast** 6980 Deadman Gulch Road, Missoula, MT 59804, 406-203-3187 The gardens here frame breathtaking views of the Bitterroot River. Elegant breakfasts go along with the Inn's lovely décor. Guest rooms have private baths with jetted tubs, air conditioning and amenities, plus Wifi.

### **Destination Distinctive Dining**

**Catalyst Café** 111 North Higgins Avenue, Missoula, MT, 59802, 406-542-1337  
American cuisine café.

**Scotty's Table** 131 South Higgins Avenue, Unit P3, Missoula, MT 59802, 406-549-2790 Fine dining in Missoula.

**Tamarack Brewing Company** 231 Front Street West, Missoula, MT 59802, 406-830-3113  
American pub and bar, vegetarian and vegan options.

### **Destination Distinctive Retail**

#### **Missoula Art Galleries**

**The Artists' Shop** 127 North Higgins, Missoula, MT 59801, 406-543-6393

Missoula's premiere co-op fine craft gallery. M-F 10AM-6PM, Sat-Sun 10AM-5PM

**Dana Gallery** 246 North Higgins Avenue, **Murphy-Jubb Fine Art** 210 North Higgins Avenue, Suite 300, **Radius Gallery** 114 East Main Street and **The Art Hang-up** 839 South Higgins Avenue

**Lake Missoula Tea Company** 136 East Broadway, Missoula, MT, 59801, 406-926-1038 Teas from around the world, including blends made in small batches.

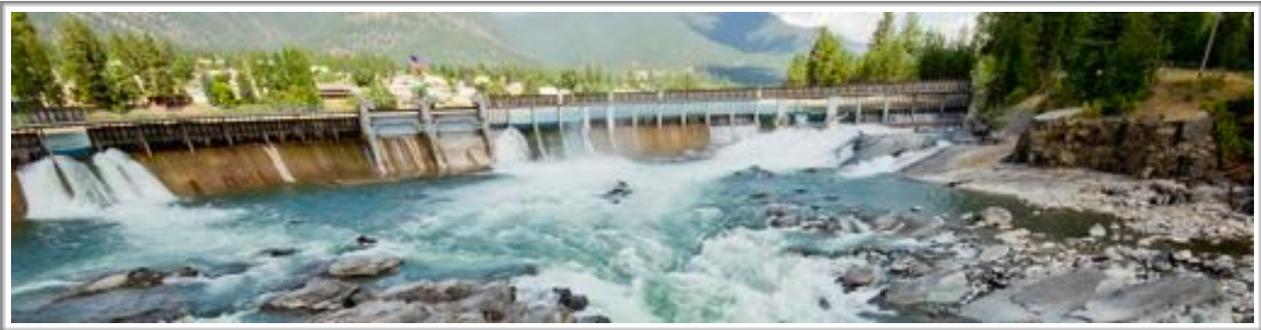
**Hometana** 312 North Higgins Avenue, Missoula, MT 59801, 406-224-4166

**Ducrey Chocolate Maker** 311 East Front Street, Missoula, MT 59801, 406-218-7396

## DAY TWO

### **Thompson Falls**

The Thompson Falls area was explored by David Thompson in 1809, who also founded the North West Fur Trading Company at Saleesh House just four years after Lewis and Clark passed through Montana. The lovely falls on the Clark Fork River provide the rest of the town's name. The railroad came through in 1881, followed by a gold rush two years later in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, that spurred growth from traffic on the Murray Trail to the mines. The Thompson Falls Dam was built atop the original falls in 1915.



### **Old Jail Museum**

This museum is located in the former old jail and sheriff's residence, which is adjacent to the Saleesh House of the North West Company. It preserves historical artifacts, images, maps and more, to celebrate the pioneers who explored, mapped, settled, and farmed this corner of Montana.

109 South Madison Street, Thompson Falls, MT 59873 406-827-4002, Memorial Day-Labor Day, Daily Noon-4PM

### **Destination Distinctive Dining**

**Minnie's Montana Café** 921 Main Street, Thompson Falls, MT 59873, 406-827-3747  
American Café with vegetarian, vegan, gluten free options, and comfort food.

### **Destination Distinctive Retail**

**Linda's Montana Gifts & Gallery** 913 Main Street, Thompson Falls, MT 59873,  
406-827-4383

**Sunflower Gallery** 301 Main Street, Thompson Falls, MT 59873 Located in one of the oldest homes in Thompson Falls, built in 1900.

### **Bull River Valley Scenic Drive**

About 40 miles northwest of Thompson Falls, Montana 56 is the Bull River Valley Scenic Drive that meanders through the Kootenai National Forest. Striking cliffs, spires, canyons and magnificent peaks follow your drive along the Kootenai and Clark Fork Rivers. Here, there are 191 species of birds here, along with elk, whitetail and mule deer, mountain goats and bighorn sheep, moose, black bear, mountain lions, grizzly bears, coyotes, weasels, mink, beavers, otters, squirrels, bobcats, lynx, and other animals who roam the forest.

### **Ross Creek Giant Cedars Grove**

Visitors to Ross Creek often say the ancient forest growing in Montana since before Columbus set foot in America, rival the giant sequoias of northern California. Loggers who cut trees in the area were the first to protect the trees before a protected area was established in 1960. A nature trail follows the banks of Ross Creek, some of which is hidden beneath the rocky stream bed. The turnoff for the grove from Montana Highway 56 is about a half mile past the southern end of Bull Lake. A scenic pull off about two miles north on 56 offers a scenic view of the Cabinet Mountains and the roar of Ross Creek Falls.





## **Libby**

John Fisher and Stephen Allen first searched around Libby for minerals in the early 1860s and named the town for Allen's daughter Elizabeth (Libby). Their success on Libby Creek in 1867 attracted nearly 600 men to the mining camp. Fortunes varied, with some miners making as much as \$1.25 per pan while others made only two cents per pan. Most men left when winter came and by the 1870s, the camp was virtually deserted. Later when the Snowshoe lode was discovered in 1889 on Leigh Creek, the area was unprepared for a major find requiring the ore be shipped to Great Falls before the mine could be electrified.

## **The Heritage Museum**

This unique twelve-sided, 130-foot diameter log structure preserves artifacts from the region focusing on early settlement, mining, and logging, coupled with the Museum Cookhouse, Outdoor Pavilion, and Swamp Creek Community Hall. 34067 US Highway 2, Libby, MT 59923, 406-293-7521, May-Sept, M-Sat 10AM-5PM, Sun 1PM-5PM, Donations accepted

## **Libby Dam Visitor Center**

Take a tour of the Dam and take advantage of picnic sites, fishing, golf, the bookstore, and lake and river access.

17877 Montana Highway 37, Libby, MT 59923, 406-293-5577



**Destination Distinctive Accommodations**

**Venture Inn** 1015 West Ninth Street, Libby, MT 59923, 406-293-7711

Northwest Montana's finest place to stay, featuring a full-service restaurant, pool, hot tub, and unlimited outdoor recreation.

**Destination Distinctive Dining**

**The Black Board Bistro** 803 Mineral Avenue, Libby, MT 59923, 406-293-4505

Outstanding find in Northwest Montana.

**Cabinet Mountain Brewing Company** 206 Mineral Avenue, Libby, MT

59923, 406-293-2739 American pub with great food and lots of options.

**Destination Distinctive Retail**

**Zero uno Zero Robotics** 28132 Highway 2, Libby, MT 59923, 406-334-7319

Highlighting fabulous and under-represented artists from all around the country.

## DAY THREE



### **Kalispell**

Kalispell was platted by Charles Conrad when he realized the railroad was going to come through. Named the Salish word for “flat land” or prairie above the lake, Kalispell became a division point for the railroad between St. Paul, MN and Seattle. Soon after “the iron horse snorted through” the remaining buildings from a neighboring town gone bust were moved to Kalispell on log rollers. The first brewery was established in 1894, and today local craft breweries produce more than 40 varieties of ales and lagers made with Montana-grown malts, hand-picked local hops, huckleberries, and Flathead cherries.

### **Downtown Historic District Walking Tour**

Take a walk past buildings from the 1890s and early 1900s including the Conrad Mansion, the Hockaday Museum of Art, Kalispell Grand Hotel, and the Northwest Montana History Museum. The tour includes Main Street and First Avenue East from Depot Park on Center Street, south to the 400 block. Near the tour route, St. Matthew’s Catholic Church, dating from 1910, remains the city’s most commanding Gothic landmark. 602 South Main Street, 406-752 678



### **Conrad Mansion Museum**

The residence of Charles Conrad sits proudly on three landscaped acres atop a bluff overlooking the valley. The shingle-style Norman building, a revivalist version of vernacular architecture in Normandy, France, is surrounded by large ever-blooming flower beds that provide constant color during the summer season, plus hedges, evergreens, and lawns.

330 Woodland Avenue, Kalispell, MT 55901, 406-755-2166, self-guided and docent led tours offer year around, May 15-Oct 15, docent led tours 11AM and 1PM. Adults \$20

### **Northwest Montana History Museum**

Housed in the restored Central School building, this museum features exhibits about history of the Northwest Montana region and Flathead Valley including artifacts, documents, and photographs that tell the story of Big Sky Country. In addition to permanent exhibits, rotating curated exhibits are presented throughout the year.

124 Second Avenue East, Kalispell, MT 55901, 406-756-8381, M-F 10AM-5PM, Sat 10AM-3PM, Adults \$5



### **Destination Distinctive Accommodations**

**Kalispell Grand Hotel** 100 Main Street, Kalispell, MT 59901, 406-755-8100

The Grand was one of the first hotels built on the frontier and the only early hotel remaining in Kalispell. It hosted the well to do at double the going rate for running water, door locks, and wake-up calls.

### **Destination Distinctive Dining**

**Hops Downtown Grill** 121 South Main Street, Kalispell, MT 59901, 406-755-7687 Try the bison burger and other interesting tastes.

**The DeSoto Grill** 227 First Street West, Kalispell, MT 59901, 406-314-6095 Great food and great service.

### **Destination Distinctive Retail**

#### **Art Galleries**

**Montana Modern Fine Art** 127 South Main Street, 406-755-5321, **Sassafras Arts, Crafts and Antiques** 120 South Main Street, 406-752-2433 and **Paint, Metal and Mud** 8 First Street East, Suite 104, 406-755-8886

**Western Outdoors** 48 South Main Street, Kalispell, MT, 59901, 406-756-5818

Featuring more than 2,500 boots and 1,500 hats.

**Bear Country Gallery** 4054 US Highway 93 South, Kalispell, MT 59901, 406-752-6735

**Flair Gifts and Cards** 123 Main Street, Kalispell, MT, 55901, 406-407-7210

## DAY FOUR



### **Glacier National Park**

Glacier National Park is a stunningly beautiful, ice-carved terrain of serrated ridges, jutting peaks, dramatic hanging valleys, 50 glaciers, more than 200 lakes and waterfalls, and some 1.2 million acres of forest. Some call it the Crown of the Continent and few know that it backs up to the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park across the Canadian border. In frontier days, visitors to the remote mountain valleys were likely to be horse-mounted hunters seeking hides and heads as trophies. Today's visitors are photographers, hikers, birders and scenic drive lovers. The Park is big, wild, majestic, awesome and spectacular - and when their open mouths begin working again, visitors seeing it for the first time say something profound, like "wow." A portion have returned with their work, urban tastes and expectations, and settled in, working to sustain and save working ranches, clear streams, and free ranging wildlife from the intrusions of modern life.



### **Going to the Sun Road**

Get ready for the drive of a lifetime! You saw it in the opening moments of the film “The Shining” as Jack’s Volkswagen glides past St. Mary’s Lake and up the road. You’ll be traveling through one of the most scenic 50 miles in the world, and a truly inspiring journey. Shining, glaciated peaks, plunging valleys, and turquoise blue lakes were carved by ice and slow-moving glaciers that still quietly creep across a vast wilderness. The Going to the Sun Road pierces the landscape through the heart of Glacier National Park, crossing the Continental Divide over Logan Pass at 6,646 feet. The steeper and more jagged peaks near the Continental Divide are about 10,000 feet. The 52-mile drive, both a National Historic Landmark and Civil Engineering Landmark completed in 1932, is the only road that crosses the park. It was literally carved out of the precipitous mountainside for 12 miles of its length, where the cliffs drop hundreds of feet from the roadside. As you start through the park, you’ll pass through lush forests of spruce, lodgepole pine, cedar, hemlock and subalpine fir. Turnouts allow you to relish vistas of glacier-sculpted mountains and glimpse wildlife. Further on, the vertical rock face along the road is known as the Garden Wall, a section that features amazing waterfalls, especially in late spring when the snow is melting. A long section of rock wall adjacent to the road covered by running water, called the Weeping Wall, is one of the more unusual. The road, generally only open from early June to mid-October, is one you want to take slowly. Even in summer, the peaks may be shrouded in clouds with fog at the top. In spite of that, don’t miss the Crown of the Continent’s beautiful road through rugged terrain. It’s a once in a lifetime adventure.

## **Glacier National Park Historic Areas**

### **Apgar**

Early trappers, loggers, and miners quickly realized that tourism would be a primary economic driver at Glacier, and by 1892, settlers Milo Apgar and Charlie Howe were offering rental cabins, meals, pack horses, guided tours, and boat trips to visitors who arrived on the Great Northern Railway. Guests were rowed across the river before a rugged dirt road connected the river to the foot of Lake McDonald. From there, guests would board George Snyder's steamboat for the trip up the lake to the Snyder Hotel, now the Lake McDonald Lodge.

### **East Side**

Miners came searching to strike it rich on copper and gold, but no large deposits were ever found here. To prevent any further damage from mining, this area of Glacier National Park was the first to receive protection from Congress as a forest preserve in 1900.

### **North Fork**

The existing wagon road up the North Fork became the western boundary of the park in 1910, the homesteads to the east of the new boundary fell within Glacier.

## **Glacier National Park Visitor Centers**

### **Apgar Visitor Center**

Located on the Going to the Sun Road, two miles from the West Glacier Entrance Station. Open Mid-May-Mid-Oct. There are exhibits, restrooms, a bookstore, WiFi, Ranger led activities, an astronomy program, paved path from Lake McDonald, and a shuttle service.

### **Logan Pass Visitor Center**

Located in the middle of the park at the highest point on the Going to the Sun Road. Open daily 9AM-7PM, mid-May-Labor Day, 9AM-4PM, Daily through Sept 26. Exhibits, restrooms, bookstore, Ranger led activities, a trailhead, and a shuttle service.

### **St. Mary Visitor Center**

Located adjacent to the St. Mary Entrance Station on the Going to the Sun Road, near the town of St. Mary. Open, daily, late May-early Oct. Exhibits feature the Native Americans of the region, are complemented with a park film "Land of Many Journeys" and other activities

## **Historic Lodge Accommodations**

### **Glacier Park Lodge, 1912**

With unpeeled log pillars and open campfire-like fireplaces in the lobby, this Great Northern Railroad Lodge acted as the grand entry to the wilderness, for visitors who arrived by train from the East. Located outside the park boundary but connected by a trail, visitors stepped off the train platform in East Glacier and walked across the street to the lodge grounds.



### **Lake McDonald Lodge, 1913**

The original Snyder Hotel constructed in 1896, was enlarged and surrounded with a new 65-room hotel in 1913. Construction materials that could not be locally sourced had to be hauled from the depot in Belton and ferried nearly 10 miles up the lake. Decorated as a hunting lodge, Lake McDonald became a gathering point where artist Charlie Russell could sometimes be found telling stories in the lobby. When the property was sold in 1930, the name was changed to Lake McDonald Lodge. The lodge also contains the Russell's Fireside Dining Room, Jammer Joe's Grill and Pizzeria, Lucke's Lounge, and Creekside Reading Room. All guest rooms are rustic, yet comfortable, although televisions, air conditioning, and elevators are only available in suites.

### **Many Glacier Hotel, 1914**

Many Glacier was built by the Great Northern Railway as the showplace of their network of chalets and hotels. A hardy crew of craftsmen overcame the difficulties of building what was then Montana's largest hotel, withstanding winter temperatures below zero in order to have the hotel complete for July 4, 1915. Most of the timber for the hotel was logged nearby and milled on the shores of Swiftcurrent Lake.

### **Prince of Wales Hotel, 1926**

Perched above Waterton Lakes in Canada, this GNR hotel is now a National Historic Site of Canada.

### **St. Mary's Lodge**

Even though it is not a Historic lodge, St. Mary's Lodge, located on the eastern side of the park, is a convenient to stay after driving the Going to the Sun Road. It has one of the most dramatic backdrops of all Glacier National Park hotels, with 127 guest rooms spread across seven facilities, coupled with a number of dining and shopping outlets.





### **Red Bus Tours**

If you'd rather ride than drive in Glacier, the famous Red Bus tours serve as an ideal way to see the park. With much of the park's scenery vertically oriented, the roll-back tops are perfect for providing a full view of the stunning scenery. The guides are seasoned park veterans who are here because they love the park and enjoy visitors. The buses seat 17 people, with 4 across on bench seating and 1 front passenger seat and tours generally sell out daily. East side departure points include: Swiftcurrent Motor Inn, Many Glacier Hotel and Rising Sun Motor Inn, all inside the park. Various spots outside the park include the town of St. Mary's, Johnson's (for their hotel guests only) and at the Glacier Park Lodge in East Glacier. West side departure points include: Apgar Visitor Center, Village Inn at Apgar and Lake McDonald Lodge.



### **Other Area Options**

If you have explored Glacier before and are looking for a different adventure, explore Flathead Lake, the largest natural freshwater lake in the western US and one of the cleanest in the world. At 28 miles long and 15 miles wide, the lake delivers breathtaking views. Wild Horse Island, the largest in Flathead Lake, has been a landmark since the Kootenai Indians used it to pasture horses to keep them from being stolen. A drive around Flathead Lake is best started on the west side, for reasons that will become vividly apparent around sunset. In early May, the cherry orchards that rim the lake are in full bloom. After rounding the lake at Polson, head back up to Kalispell. The higher peaks and steeper shoreline on the east side offer a dramatic contrast with orchards, farms, and sailboats.

The Swan Scenic Drive is a scenic corridor along Highway 83 southeast of Kalispell that includes majestic views of the Mission Mountains and Swan Range. Grab a picnic lunch in Kalispell before you take the approximately 40-minute drive to the Swan Lake day use area with picnic tables, restrooms, and a great beach.

The Hungry Horse Dam and Reservoir are located 20 miles northeast of Kalispell. At 564 feet high, the dam is one of the largest concrete arch dams in the U.S. and its morning-glory spillway, the highest in the world. The 34 mile long reservoir is surrounded by towering mountain peaks. The Hungry Horse Dam Visitor Center is open daily May – September and offers free guided tours of the dam.