

Where To Stay in Yellowstone



Yellowstone covers a vast and wild landscape, standing out as one of the [*best National Parks in the United States*](#). The park spans parts of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, featuring multiple entrances, extensive driving distances, and varying [*lodging options*](#) depending on location.

Some areas place you closer to iconic geothermal features and wildlife viewing, while others offer quieter stays with easier access to surrounding towns. Where you stay in Yellowstone directly affects how much you see each day, how early you can reach popular sights, and how much time you spend driving.

Understanding the park's layout and nearby gateway towns helps you choose a location that fits your travel plans, pace, and comfort level.

Best Areas to Stay in Yellowstone



A detailed look at the best places to stay in and around Yellowstone, based on park access, attractions, and travel style.

Old Faithful Area (Inside Yellowstone National Park)

Staying in the Old Faithful area places travelers directly inside Yellowstone's most iconic geothermal region. This area is centered around the Upper Geyser Basin, home to the world's highest concentration of geysers, including Old Faithful itself. Lodging here allows visitors to experience early morning eruptions, misty boardwalk walks, and quieter evenings after day-trippers leave. The atmosphere is immersive and nature-focused, with rustic accommodations designed to blend into the landscape rather than offer modern luxury. Travelers staying here can easily explore nearby geyser basins, hot springs, and short hiking trails without spending hours driving. This location is ideal for those who want to maximize time within the park and experience Yellowstone at a slower, more intimate pace.

Pros of staying near Old Faithful

- Closest access to Yellowstone's most famous geysers
- Fewer crowds early and late in the day
- Minimal driving to major geothermal attractions

Cons of staying near Old Faithful

- Limited lodging options
 - Higher prices for basic accommodations
 - Few dining choices and no nightlife
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Canyon Village (Inside Yellowstone National Park)

Canyon Village sits near the center of Yellowstone, making it one of the most practical bases for exploring the park. It is located close to the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, where dramatic waterfalls, colorful canyon walls, and scenic viewpoints define the landscape. Staying here reduces daily drive times to major regions such as Hayden Valley, Norris Geyser Basin, and Yellowstone Lake. The area feels busier than other in-park locations but offers reliable services, including dining and fuel. Accommodations are designed for travelers who want efficiency and access rather than isolation. Canyon Village works especially well for first-time visitors who plan full-day sightseeing loops and want balanced access to multiple parts of the park.

Pros of staying in Canyon Village

- Central location within the park
- Easy access to major attractions
- Good balance of convenience and scenery

Cons of staying in Canyon Village

- Busy during peak season
 - Limited lodging availability
 - Higher demand means early booking is essential
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Lake Yellowstone Area (Inside Yellowstone National Park)

The Lake Yellowstone area offers a quieter, more relaxed side of the park, centered around one of the largest high-elevation lakes in North America. This region is known for wide-open views, cooler temperatures, and a slower pace that appeals to travelers seeking tranquility. Staying here provides easy access to lakeside walks, fishing areas, and scenic

drives along the water. While geyser basins are farther away, the area excels in peaceful exploration and wildlife viewing, particularly in the early mornings. Lodging tends to be simple and historic, emphasizing location and scenery over modern amenities. This area is well-suited for travelers who prefer calm surroundings and a less crowded park experience.

Pros of staying near Yellowstone Lake

- Scenic lake views and quieter atmosphere
- Cooler summer temperatures
- Good for relaxed itineraries

Cons of staying near Yellowstone Lake

- Longer drives to geyser areas
 - Fewer nearby attractions
 - Limited dining and services
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Mammoth Hot Springs (Inside Yellowstone National Park)

Mammoth Hot Springs is distinct from other areas of Yellowstone due to its dramatic limestone terraces and year-round accessibility. Located near the North Entrance, this area feels more developed and historic, with stone buildings and a small village atmosphere. It serves as a gateway to wildlife-rich regions like Lamar Valley and provides quick access to nearby towns for supplies. Mammoth is especially popular for winter trips, as it remains open when other park roads close. The area offers a blend of geothermal features, hiking trails, and scenic drives, making it a strong choice for travelers who want both convenience and natural beauty without staying deep in the park's interior.

Pros of staying in Mammoth Hot Springs

- Year-round accessibility
- Close to wildlife-rich Lamar Valley
- Historic lodging options

Cons of staying in Mammoth Hot Springs

- Far from southern park attractions
 - Smaller lodging selection
 - Limited evening activities
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West Yellowstone, Montana

West Yellowstone is the most popular gateway town for visitors entering the park and offers the widest range of lodging options. Located just outside the West Entrance, the town is packed with hotels, restaurants, outfitters, and tour operators catering specifically to Yellowstone travelers. It provides comfort, flexibility, and services that are limited inside the park. Staying here is ideal for visitors who want modern accommodations, varied dining, and easy access to guided tours. While it lacks the immersive feel of in-park lodging, West Yellowstone makes up for it with convenience and reliability, especially for families and travelers planning longer stays with structured itineraries.

Pros of staying in West Yellowstone

- Largest selection of accommodations
- Plenty of dining and shopping
- Convenient access to major attractions

Cons of staying in West Yellowstone

- Crowded during peak season
 - Longer drives to northern areas
 - Less immersive park experience
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Gardiner, Montana

Gardiner sits at the North Entrance of Yellowstone and offers a more rugged, authentic gateway experience. The town is surrounded by mountains and open landscapes, and wildlife sightings are common even within town limits. Staying here provides fast access to Mammoth Hot Springs and Lamar Valley, making it a favorite for wildlife enthusiasts. Accommodations range from small hotels to lodges and cabins, often with scenic views. Gardiner has a laid-back atmosphere and fewer crowds than West Yellowstone, appealing

to travelers who prefer a quieter base while still maintaining year-round access to the park.

Pros of staying in Gardiner

- Open year-round
- Excellent wildlife viewing nearby
- Easy access to Mammoth and Lamar Valley

Cons of staying in Gardiner

- Limited lodging inventory
 - Fewer dining options
 - Not centrally located
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Cooke City-Silver Gate, Montana

Cooke City and Silver Gate are remote mountain towns near the Northeast Entrance of Yellowstone. This area is best known for its proximity to Lamar Valley, often called the “Serengeti of North America” for its wildlife density. Staying here offers a peaceful, off-the-grid experience surrounded by dramatic peaks and wide valleys. Lodging options are limited and rustic, but the payoff is unmatched access to sunrise and sunset wildlife viewing. This area appeals most to photographers, nature-focused travelers, and those who want to avoid crowds entirely while prioritizing scenery and solitude.

Pros of staying in Cooke City

- Best access to Lamar Valley
- Fewer crowds and remote feel
- Excellent wildlife opportunities

Cons of staying in Cooke City

- Very limited services
 - Seasonal road closures
 - Not ideal for first-time visitors
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Jackson, Wyoming

Jackson is a well-developed mountain town located south of Yellowstone and adjacent to Grand Teton National Park. It serves as a premium base for travelers combining both parks in one trip. The town offers upscale hotels, boutique lodges, fine dining, shopping, and cultural attractions. Staying in Jackson provides a polished travel experience with modern comforts, but it requires longer daily drives into Yellowstone. This area is ideal for travelers who value lodging quality, nightlife, and amenities, and who are planning a broader Wyoming road trip rather than a Yellowstone-only visit.

Pros of staying in Jackson

- High-end accommodations and dining
- Ideal for Yellowstone + Grand Teton trips
- Lively town atmosphere

Cons of staying in Jackson

- Long daily drives into Yellowstone
 - Higher accommodation costs
 - Busy tourist town
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Island Park, Idaho

Island Park is a quiet, nature-focused area near the West Entrance of Yellowstone, known for its wide-open spaces, rivers, and cabin-style accommodations. It offers a peaceful alternative to West Yellowstone, appealing to travelers who prefer privacy and scenic surroundings. Lodging here often includes vacation rentals, lodges, and fishing cabins, making it suitable for families and longer stays. While services are limited, the area provides easy access to the park and a strong connection to the outdoors. Island Park works best for travelers who enjoy slower mornings, self-catering stays, and uncrowded environments.

Pros of staying in Island Park

- Quiet and scenic setting
- Good value accommodations
- Close to West Entrance

Cons of staying in Island Park

- Limited dining and nightlife
 - Car required for all travel
 - Fewer hotel-style options
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Travel Tips for Staying in Yellowstone National Park



Practical planning makes a major difference when choosing where to stay in and around Yellowstone.

- **Book lodging early:** In-park hotels and popular gateway towns often sell out 6-12 months in advance, especially from June through September.
- **Choose location over luxury:** Shorter drive times mean more wildlife sightings, fewer crowds, and less fatigue.
- **Plan by park entrances:** Base your stay near the entrance you will use most to avoid backtracking.
- **Expect limited cell service:** Download offline maps, reservations, and park guides before arrival.

- **Stay inside the park if possible:** Early mornings and late evenings offer the best wildlife viewing.
 - **Pack for all weather:** Temperatures can swing dramatically, even in summer.
 - **Fuel up whenever possible:** Gas stations are scarce inside the park and close early.
 - **Start days early:** Popular areas become congested by mid-morning.
 - **Respect wildlife distance rules:** Staying closer does not mean approaching animals.
 - **Consider splitting stays:** Moving locations mid-trip reduces long daily drives.
 - **Prepare for limited dining options:** Especially inside the park; reservations help.
 - **Check seasonal road closures:** Some routes close early due to weather.
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Conclusion: Choosing the Best Place to Stay in Yellowstone

Yellowstone ranks among the [*best places to visit in the United States*](#), attracting travelers from all over the country. Choosing where to stay in Yellowstone shapes the entire travel experience. Location matters more than hotel style, especially in a park as vast and diverse as Yellowstone. Staying inside the park offers unmatched access and atmosphere, while nearby towns provide flexibility, comfort, and services. The best choice depends on travel style, season, and priorities, wildlife, scenery, convenience, or amenities.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the best place to stay in Yellowstone for first-time visitors?

Canyon Village and West Yellowstone are the most practical options due to central access and services.

Is it better to stay inside Yellowstone National Park or outside?

Staying inside saves drive time and offers quieter mornings, while staying outside provides more lodging choices and amenities.

What is the most scenic place to stay in Yellowstone?

Old Faithful and Lake Yellowstone offer immersive scenery and iconic landscapes.

Which area is best for wildlife viewing in Yellowstone?

Lamar Valley, accessed via Cooke City or Mammoth Hot Springs, is best for wildlife sightings.

Where should families stay near Yellowstone?

West Yellowstone and Island Park offer family-friendly hotels and vacation rentals.

Is West Yellowstone a good base for the park?

Yes, it offers the widest range of hotels, restaurants, and tour operators.

Where can I stay in Yellowstone year-round?

Mammoth Hot Springs and Gardiner remain accessible even in winter.

What is the quietest place to stay near Yellowstone?

Cooke City-Silver Gate and Lake Yellowstone are the least crowded options.

Can I stay in Jackson and visit Yellowstone?

Yes, but expect longer drive times; it's best for combined Yellowstone–Grand Teton trips.

Are there budget-friendly places to stay near Yellowstone?

Gardiner, Island Park, and parts of West Yellowstone offer more affordable options.

How many nights should I stay near Yellowstone?

A minimum of 3-4 nights is recommended; 5-7 nights allows deeper exploration.

Do Yellowstone hotels have modern amenities?

In-park lodging is rustic, while gateway towns offer more modern comforts.