

ARTHUR FROMMER'S

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Wild True Wonder

Searching for the authentic in a land built on legend? In Wyoming, the two coexist in the most beautiful way. By David LaHuta
Photographs by Joshua Cogan

The West doesn't make you wait long for a scenic view. Within half an hour of leaving the Jackson Hole Airport, my friend Josh and I find our first frame-worthy landscape: Like gigantic arrowheads rising from the Snake River Plain, the mountains that Ansel Adams made famous are unmistakable from the Southern entrance of **Grand Teton National Park**. The tallest peak, the 13,770-foot Grand Teton, has beckoned climbers since it was first ascended in 1898—and it has inspired less adventurous gawkers for even longer. We hop out of the car to snap some photos alongside a busload of German tourists, and admire the mountains' reflections in Jenny and Jackson Lakes.

The eight-mile long John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway stretches from Grand Teton to >>>



On Highway 191 in Grand Teton National Park, in a restored 1930s open-roof tour bus



The view from Artist Point lookout in Yellowstone National Park, above. Right: The Cowboy Cafe in Dubois

LODGING

Old Faithful Inn
307/344-7311,
travel
yellowstone.
com, doubles
from \$93

The Irma Hotel
1192 Sheridan
Ave., Cody,
800/745-4762,
irmahotel.com,
doubles from
\$60

**Pronghorn
Lodge**
150 East Main
St., Lander, 307/
332-3940,
pronghorn
lodge.com, from
\$99

Yellowstone National Park, and both are covered by the same seven-day, \$25 admission fee. We're mostly interested in Yellowstone for its size (it's more than seven times as large as Teton), but exploring all 2.2 million acres of America's oldest national park would be nearly impossible in the time we have. So Josh and I decide to tackle only the 134-mile Lower Loop road, which leads to many of Yellowstone's highlights, like Old Faithful and the Fountain Paint Pot. After a quick lakeside lunch, we head north past Fishing Bridge and catch our second big sighting of the day: A herd of buffalo crossing the plain, just 15 yards away. There are more than a dozen of them, all with thick brown coats and small birds perched on their backs.

Artist Point is our next stop, and it's clear why painters have been drawn here for generations: It's the perfect vantage point for taking in the 20-mile-long Grand Canyon of Yellowstone and the mighty Lower Falls, a cascade of whitewater that drops over 300 feet. We find a narrow slot between the crowds to snap a photo and move on.

After driving past lodgepole pine forests still scorched by the wildfires of 1988, and the Lower Geyser Basin's 12 square miles of hot springs, geysers, and pools, we check into the **Old Faithful Inn**, a 105-year-old National Landmark on the southwestern edge of the lower loop road. The 327-room log and timber hotel has a seven-story lobby ringed by balconies, and sits directly in front of its namesake geyser, which erupts every ninety minutes. At 8:02 P.M., we catch the spray before enjoying a bison rib eye from the all-you-can-eat buffet at the **Old Faithful Inn Dining Room**.



RODEO DRIVE

In the morning, Josh and I set out on a final Yellowstone hike. Near Indian Pond, we follow a muddy trail to the edge of Yellowstone Lake, and along the way, we find thick tufts of black and tan fur, fresh off the backs of the bison. We both grab a few handfuls, excited to finally be off the beaten path, however briefly.

Next, we drive east on the Buffalo Bill Cody Scenic Byway, which Teddy Roosevelt called "the fifty most beautiful miles in America"; it spans the distance between the park and Cody, Wyoming, cutting through the basalt cliffs of the Wapiti Valley and the sagebrush-covered plains and dense firs of Shoshone National Forest, one of the few remaining natural habitats harboring grizzlies and wolves.

Around midday, we reach Cody, a cowpoke town founded by prodigious buffalo hunter and traveling entertainer William F. Cody, a.k.a. Buffalo Bill, in 1896. The Buffalo Bill Historical Center, which has five separate museums in its seven-acre facility, pays fitting tribute to its namesake as well as the Wild West experience. There's the Buffalo Bill Museum, dedicated to Mr. Cody's life and legend; the Whitney Gallery >>>



A plain in Yellowstone, which is home to roughly 3,500 bison, above. Right: A family watching the eruption of Old Faithful



of Western Art, containing works by Frederic Remington and others, as well as a reconstruction of Remington's painting studio; the Plains Indian Museum, devoted to the culture and crafts of the Arapaho, Crow, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, Blackfeet, Sioux, Gros Ventre, Shoshone, and Pawnee Indian tribes; the 5,000-gun Cody Firearms Museum; and the Draper Museum of Natural History, home to the Greater Yellowstone Sights and Sounds Archive, a collection of audio and video recordings and photographs of local ecosystems. I'm particularly drawn to Edgar S. Paxson's *Custer's Last Stand*, in the Whitney Gallery, impressive both in its size (six feet by nine feet) and in the density of its detail.

Buffalo Bill is still big business in these parts and even the **Irma Hotel**, where we stay for the night, makes much of his legacy. Bill founded the inn in 1902 and named it after his youngest daughter. The original cherrywood bar—a gift from Queen Victoria—is still intact, the fireplace contains fossils from Big Horn Basin, and some of the inn's outer walls are made from local river rocks.

We ask around in Cody for dinner recommendations and everyone directs us to **Cassie's Supper Club**, a onetime brothel-turned-steakhouse (and town hang-out). My buffalo-and-elk burger is right on the money, but we skip the entertainment—a band of geriatric musicians called the Knights of Note—and visit the Cody Nite Rodeo, instead.

The nightly summertime tradition, going strong since the 1950s, earned Cody the title of Rodeo Capital

of the World, and it draws large crowds looking for cold beers, a starry sky, and the chance to watch some of the best bull and bronco riders in the country. Each event features about half a dozen high-adrenaline contests, like steer wrestling and barrel racing.

WE ALL SPRING FOR HOT SPRINGS

The next day, we load up on homemade biscuits and sausage gravy at **Peter's Cafe**, then drive to Cody's main street in search of old-school western shirts. The **Traditions West Antique Mall** delivers: Among the racks of rusty signs and silver belt buckles, we find a cache of flashy cowboy shirts with snaps down the front and embroidered flowers.

Eighty miles down the road, past abandoned

ranches and abundant patches of purple iris, we arrive in Thermopolis, a small town with a huge mineral hot spring gushing 3.6 million gallons of water each day. Josh and I put on our swimsuits and take a tension-melting dip in the 104-degree waters at **Hot Springs State Park**, a free public recreational area with indoor and outdoor pools fed by the spring.

About an hour and a half south, after passing through tunnels carved from 600-million-year-old granite,

we pull into the town of Lander at 9:30 P.M. and are disheartened to find most everything closed. The owner of **Cowfish**, a casual restaurant with an on-site microbrewery and an organic vegetable garden, takes pity on us and puts in our order as the last one of the day. We spend the night at the **Pronghorn Lodge**, a no-frills motel next to the Popo Agie River. >>>

Near Indian Pond, we follow a trail to Yellowstone Lake and find thick tufts of black and tan fur, fresh off the backs of the bison

FOOD & DRINK

Old Faithful Inn Dining Room
307/545-4999,
buffet \$30

Cassie's Supper Club
214 Yellowstone Ave., 307/527-5500, cassies.com, buffalo-and-elk burger \$14

Peter's Cafe, 1219 Sheridan Ave., Cody, 307/527-5040, peters-cafe.com, biscuits and gravy \$5.50

Cowfish
126 Main St., Lander, 307/332-8227, landerbar.com, sandwich \$9

Cowboy Cafe 115 E. Ramshorn, Dubois, 307/455-2595, chili \$3.50

Million Dollar Cowboy Bar
25 N. Cache St., Jackson, 307/733-2207, beer \$4.50



The front desk staff of the Old Faithful Inn in Yellowstone, above. Left: A rider gearing up for a calf-roping competition at the Cody Nite Rodeo

ACTIVITIES

Grand Teton N.P. Visitor Center
Moose, 307/739-3300, nps.gov/grte

Yellowstone N.P. Visitor Center
307/344-7381, nps.gov/yell

Hot Springs S.P. 538 North Park St., Thermopolis, 307/864-2176, artsparkshistory.com

Sinks River Canyon S.P. 3079 Sinks Canyon Rd., Lander, 307/332-3077, artsparks history.com

Buffalo Bill Historical Center 720 Sheridan Ave., Cody, 307/587-4771, bbhc.org, \$15

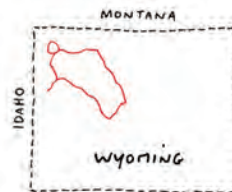
Cody Nite Rodeo 1326 Sheridan Ave., Cody, 800/207-0744, cody-stampede rodeo.com, \$18

THE ACTION IN JACKSON

Rock formations are Lander's claim to fame, from its hundreds of challenging climbing spots to the **Sinks River Canyon State Park**, named for the way the Popo Agie river disappears into underground limestone caves for a quarter mile before rising and reemerging. We don't have enough time for a climb, so Josh and I take a walk by the river's edge and toss fish food from a dispenser in the park to a school of trout who nose right up to the surface to eat.

On our way back west, we pull off at the one-road town of Dubois (pronounced "doo-boys"), and grab a booth and a bowl of chili at the **Cowboy Café**. We're about 85 miles from Jackson, but the snow-capped Tetons are already visible in the distance. By the time we reach the resort town, at 6,237 feet above sea level, the temperature has dropped at least ten degrees. As the sun sets, Josh and I walk under the town square's four elk-horn arches, made up of thousands of shed horns recovered on the National Elk Refuge in 1960.

With fancy new shops and cafes, Jackson is threatening to become another Aspen or Vail, a little too glossy for its own good, but the 73-year-old **Million Dollar Cowboy Bar** retains the best of the town's original spirit, with antique rifles in glass cases and a bar covered with 600 silver-dollar coins. In spite of its status as a well-oiled tourist trap, the bar is still popular with locals who watch country music bands six nights a week from leather-saddle barstools. Out here, under these wide-open skies, there's plenty of room for a little artifice alongside the authenticity. ■



WYOMING DRIVING TIPS

Yellowstone is in the midst of a 20-year highway-repair program, so check for road closings on your route before setting out. A portion of the northwest side of the Lower Loop closed for the season on August 17; for other alerts, call the Yellowstone Current Road Report Hotline (307/344-2117). For advisories elsewhere in the state, consult the Wyoming Department of Transportation's Travel Information Service (888/996-7623, wyoroad.info).

Credit: