

Yellowstone's Wolves and Winter Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Jackson and overnight.
Day 2	Grand Teton National Park.
Day 3/5	Yellowstone National Park from West Yellowstone.
Day 6/9	Yellowstone National Park from Gardiner.
Day 10	Depart Bozeman.
Day 11	Arrive London.

Departs

January

Focus

Mammals, birds, other wildlife and Yellowstone's geothermal highlights.

Grading

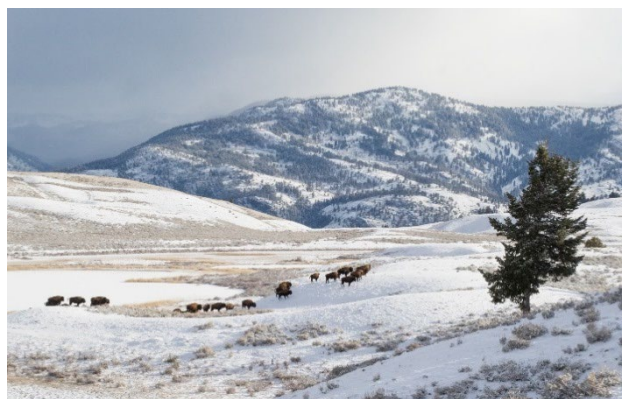
Grade B – Easy to moderate, but please be aware that conditions will be very cold and it will be snowy and icy underfoot.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code USA09).

Highlights:

- Spectacular winter landscapes of Yellowstone National Park & the Grand Tetons.
- Look for Grey Wolves in the Lamar Valley.
- Old Faithful & other geothermal highlights.
- North American Bison & Pronghorn Antelope.
- Explore Yellowstone by heated 'snowcoach'.
- Birds including Bald & Golden Eagles, Clark's Nutcracker & Pine Grosbeak.
- Led by expert naturalist guides.



From top: Grey Wolves, Clark's Nutcracker & North American Bison, Yellowstone. (images courtesy of Shutterstock Images & Peter Dunn).



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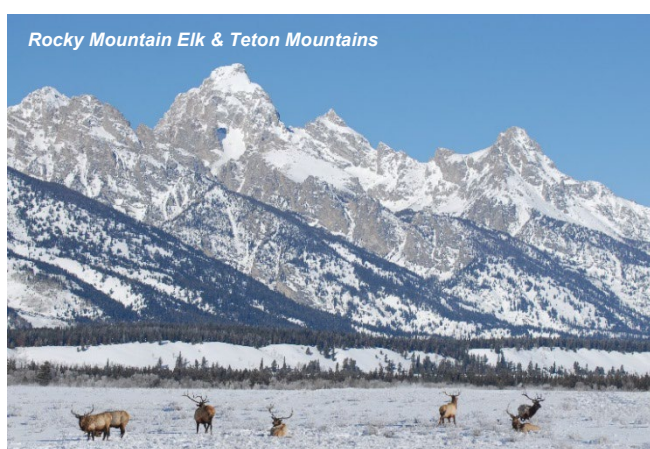
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Introduction

In the year 1872 a huge area of pristine mountains, forests and geothermal springs known as 'Yellowstone' was set aside as the world's very first national park. Today, almost a century and a half later, Yellowstone National Park is a World Heritage Site and remains one of America's finest protected landscapes, drawing visitors from around the world to appreciate its scenery, waterfalls, geysers and abundant wildlife. The park's geology is fascinating. Yellowstone sits in a huge active volcanic caldera measuring 45 by 30 miles. The heat that wells up from deep beneath fuels over 10,000 geothermal features, from boiling pools of water and mud to huge geysers such as Old Faithful, one of over 250 geysers that dot the Park's steaming valleys. The jagged peaks of the Grand Teton National Park lie just to the south and are now included as part of the 'Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem' a vast protected tract of land that covers over 28,000 square miles.

Yellowstone has become one of the country's most popular national parks, but in winter, once the snow has fallen and the crowds have retreated, it is largely returned to the resident wildlife. Against a spectacular snowy backdrop, herds of North American Bison huddle around the steaming geothermal pools for warmth, Moose, Rocky Mountain Elk and Bighorn Sheep venture down into the valleys and Bald Eagles soar effortlessly overhead. Perhaps Yellowstone's greatest wildlife highlight, however, are the Grey Wolves that hunt and play in Yellowstone's Lamar and Hayden Valleys! The last Wolf was shot in Yellowstone in 1926, but in 1995 this much maligned predator was reintroduced back into the park, and today Yellowstone is one of the best places in the world to see this secretive, and unfairly persecuted, mammal.



Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Jackson

We depart London this morning on a scheduled flight to Jackson in the US state of Wyoming (via a US hub). On arrival we will be met by our local guide and transferred to a comfortable hotel for 2 nights.

Jackson is a traditional 'western' town situated on the edge of Grand Teton National Park and is surrounded by dramatic mountain landscapes. In winter, the jagged snowy peaks of the Teton Range become especially breathtaking. Later in the evening those who wish can head out into the town for dinner.

Day 2

Jackson

We have a full day to explore the beautiful snowy landscapes of the Grand Teton National Park, Yellowstone's equally spectacular neighbour. The jagged mountains of the Grand Teton range are part of the magnificent Rocky Mountain chain and overlook a picturesque mosaic of forests, frozen lakes and meadows bordering the meandering Snake River. During our time here we will be looking out for a wide variety of mammals including large herds of Rocky Mountain Elk, plus Moose, Mule Deer and Coyote. Jackson Lake may still have a few pockets of open water which act as a magnet for Trumpeter Swans, Barrow's Goldeneye and Bufflehead. Bald Eagle and Mountain Chickadee are also likely today and for the fortunate there's even a chance of a Great Grey Owl!

Day 3 - 5

Yellowstone National Park from West Yellowstone

Following breakfast on Day 3 we will drive to the town of West Yellowstone, located just outside the national park's western entrance. Since the southern entrance to Yellowstone National Park is now closed to snowcoaches in the winter months, our journey – which will take in the region of 4 hours – will take us up and over the spectacular Teton Pass and then north through the state of Idaho, along the western edge of the mountains.



West Yellowstone will be base for the following 3 nights whilst we explore the western highlights of the National Park. We will spend 2 full days within the Park travelling by a heated 'snowcoach', a specially designed snowmobile-come-minicoach with large wheels, large enough to carry our entire group safely and easily over the snowy and frozen landscape. By having our own private transport, we can stop when we like and view wildlife as it appears. River Otter, Rocky Mountain Elk, Moose and herds of North American Bison are all possible. Birdlife is sparse in the middle of

winter, but may include Bald Eagle, American Kestrel, Rough-legged Buzzard, Ruffed Grouse, Pine Grosbeak, Common Crossbill and perhaps, for the very fortunate, the magnificent sight of a Great Grey Owl perched on a dead snag or hunting along the edges of a pine-fringed meadow.

We will also explore the Upper Geyser Basin and Yellowstone's most famous geothermal highlight 'Old Faithful'. Winter is undoubtedly the most spectacular time to watch this natural wonder for, not only is Old Faithful less crowded in January, but the cold air accentuates the cloud of steam freezing much of the eruption into an arcing crystalline veil. We are now in the heart of the caldera where steaming fumeroles, hot springs and pools of boiling mud dot the landscape testament to the heat welling up from deep beneath.

A variety of hardy wildlife live nearby including Rocky Mountain Elk, Moose and Pronghorn Antelope (the fastest North American mammal). Here we are also sure to encounter the majestic North American Bison, an animal that was driven to the brink of extinction from an initial population estimated to number



over 65 million! The story of the Bison is one of the most tragic in natural history, but today nearly 5,000 animals roam the grasslands of Yellowstone National Park and the sight of a herd feeding or standing huddled around a steaming hot spring will no doubt be one of the enduring memories of the holiday.

At this time of year the park opens at 0700 hours and closes again at 1600 hours so we have plenty of time to explore the main scenic and wildlife hotspots. The most productive area for wildlife in the middle of winter lies along a 14 mile stretch between West Yellowstone and Madison Junction and it is here we will concentrate our efforts, as well as heading a little further north or south as our local guides see fit. In addition to the mammals and birds already mentioned above we should be on the lookout for Bobcat, Coyote, Steller's and Grey Jay, Clark's Nutcracker and Northern Shrike. We will take a boxed lunch out with us to have during the middle part of the day and then return to our hotel in West Yellowstone for dinner.

Day 6 - 9

Yellowstone National Park from Gardiner

Next we head north to the dramatic steaming travertine terraces of Mammoth Hot Springs where we swap our snowcoach for more conventional vehicles. We then continue our exploration of Yellowstone from Gardiner, our base for 4 nights whilst we explore the Lamar Valley and the northern sector of the national park. We will make a particular effort to find Grey Wolf on evening and early morning drives and walks. This is one of the most reliable places in the world to view this secretive mammal, and although nothing is certain in the world of wildlife-watching – and the Wolves range over huge areas (especially in the winter) – we stand a good chance of striking lucky!



The re-introduction of the Wolf into Yellowstone is one of the world's great conservation success stories. The last Wolf was shot in the park by government backed hunters in 1926, but 69 years later they were returned to the Lamar Valley and, despite some local opposition and a lot of controversy, Wolves are once again thriving and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is again complete!



We will concentrate our Wolf-watching to the morning and evening hours when they tend to be at their most active, but we will spend the rest of the day (with an lunchtime break) out searching for mammals and birds. The Lamar Valley is one of the best areas of the park to look for a range of wildlife. Rocky Mountain Elk, Moose and Mule Deer are common and both Black and Grizzly Bear also occur here, although both will be hibernating at this

snowy time of year! Each evening we will return to Gardiner, an old western mining town steeped in history and worthy of exploration in its own right.

Day 10

Depart Bozeman

This morning we must head north out of Gardiner and make the two hour drive to Bozeman. Here we catch our midday return flight back to London (via a US hub airport).

Day 11

Arrive London

We are due to arrive back into London around midday.

Grading

Grade B. Easy to moderately strenuous. Please be aware that conditions will be very cold and it will be snowy and icy underfoot. Although some of the wildlife viewing will be from the heated vehicles, the tour will include plenty of short walks which will be over snowy and icy terrain. Yellowstone National Park lies at altitude and the tour will be exploring areas that lie between approximately 1,980 and 2,560 metres above sea level.

Weather

Winter temperatures in Yellowstone National Park often hover around minus 10°C throughout the day (and can dip well below this), but may reach minus 5°C on occasion. Night time temperatures are even colder! Occasionally, warm Chinook winds will push daytime temperatures above zero, causing significant melting of snowpack – especially at lower elevations. Yellowstone can also experience periods of bitterly cold weather, and we ask that you be properly prepared! Annual snowfall averages near 3.8 metres in most of the park, although at higher elevations 5 metres to 10 metres of snow has been recorded.

At any time of year, it is important to be prepared for sudden weather changes; unpredictability, more than anything else, characterises Yellowstone's winter weather!

Food & accommodation included in the price

We use a mix of basic, yet comfortable hotels and motels, all rooms having private facilities. Single occupancy can be secured for the supplement cost outlined on our website and in our brochure.

All accommodation is included in the cost of this holiday. Breakfasts and lunches are included in the tour cost; however, evening meals are at an additional expense. We recommend you budget around £40 per day for these. We will be eating out most evenings in restaurants and diners and choosing from a-la-carte menus. We will take packed lunches into the field, but depending on the weather, may also have the occasional cafe lunch from time to time.

Please note that the accommodation outlined above may - very occasionally - need to be amended. Replacement hotels will always be of the same standard as the ones outlined in the itinerary and will in no way affect your holiday. Should we have to implement any changes to the above we will notify you as soon as possible.

Tour focus

This is a general natural history holiday focusing on the mammals, birds and Yellowstone's geothermal highlights.

Guiding

This tour will be guided by expert local naturalist guides who will meet the group on arrival into Jackson Hole and leave at Bozeman Airport at the end of the tour. This holiday will not be accompanied by a Naturetrek tour leader from the UK.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of your holiday; dinner on Day 1, lunch and dinner on Day 10, drinks, tips, locally payable airport taxes, US electronic visa fees (ESTA) and all items of a personal nature such as souvenirs, telephone calls, laundry etc.

Your Safety & Security

Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/usa prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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