

Yellowstone in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Jackson Hole and overnight.
Day 2/4	Grand Teton National Park from Jackson Hole.
Day 5/8	Yellowstone National Park from West Yellowstone.
Day 9/11	Yellowstone National Park from Cooke City.
Day 12	Bozeman.
Day 13	Depart Bozeman.
Day 14	Arrive London.

Departs

June.

Focus

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

Grading

Grade A – Easy.

Dates and Prices

Visit: www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code USA12).

Highlights:

- Spectacular landscapes of Yellowstone National Park & the Grand Tetons.
- Look for Grey Wolves & Grizzly Bears in the Lamar Valley.
- Old Faithful & other geothermal highlights.
- North American Bison, Moose, Pronghorn Antelope, Black Bear, Beaver & Coyote.
- Yellowstone Falls & Mammoth Hot Springs.
- Birds including Mountain Bluebird, Williamson's Sapsucker & Black Rosyfinch.
- Led by expert local naturalist guides.



From top: North American Bison, Western Tanager & Grand Tetons. Images courtesy of Shutterstock Images & David Phillips. .



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Introduction

Spring comes late to the mountains, forests and meadows of Yellowstone National Park. Sitting on the Yellowstone Plateau at an average altitude of 2,400 metres (8,000 feet), it is not until June that the winter snows have melted sufficiently, and the sun's rays are warm enough for America's flagship wildlife haven to burst into life. This is a busy time for Yellowstone's mammals and birds and a wonderful time to visit. The resident birds are augmented by an interesting mix of summer and passage migrants, all resplendent in their breeding plumage. The mammals are fattening up after the lean months of winter, many have young and, importantly, the summer holiday tourist crowds have yet to arrive!

This 14-day spring tour to Yellowstone National Park will focus on the region's wildlife and geological highlights at a time of year when the reserve is transitioning from winter to summer. It begins with four nights in Jackson Hole and a thorough exploration of Yellowstone's equally impressive neighbour, the Grand Teton National Park home to North American Bison and Rocky Mountain Elk, along with birds including the colourful Mountain Bluebird and Western Tanager ... all backed by the snow-capped jagged peaks of the Teton Range! Next we head north into Yellowstone itself and split our stay between the communities of West Yellowstone and Cooke City. From these two conveniently-located bases we will look for Black and Grizzly Bears, Pronghorn Antelope, Bighorn Sheep and Coyote, plus smaller species including Yellow-bellied Marmot and the attractive Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel. We will also make a special effort to find the reserve's most famous inhabitants, the Grey Wolf packs that patrol the Lamar Valley. Much of Yellowstone National Park sits in a huge sunken volcanic caldera over 40 miles across, the heat welling up from beneath fuelling the geysers, boiling mud pools and hot springs - including Old Faithful and Grand Prismatic Spring - which dot its steaming landscape.



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 the best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Jackson Hole

We depart London's Heathrow Airport this morning on a scheduled United Airlines flight to Jackson Hole in the US state of Wyoming (via a US hub). On arrival, we will be met by our tour leader and transferred to a comfortable

hotel for a 4-night stay whilst we explore the mountains, lakes and river valleys of the Grand Teton National Park. It is likely to be mid to late evening by the time we arrive at our hotel.

Day 2 - 4

Grand Teton National Park from Jackson Hole

We now have three full days to explore the beautiful landscapes of the Grand Teton National Park. The jagged mountains of the Grand Teton range are part of the magnificent Rocky Mountain chain and overlook a picturesque mosaic of forests, lakes and sagebrush meadows bordering the meandering Snake River. During our time here we will not only be admiring the breathtaking scenery, but looking out for a wide variety of mammals and birds including herds of Rocky Mountain Elk, plus Moose, Mule Deer, Pronghorn Antelope (America's fastest land-mammal), Black Bear and Coyote. With the changing of the seasons in full flow, many breeding warblers, vireos, thrushes and grosbeaks to be back on territory and busily defending their patch of forest, meadow or scrub. Colourful Mountain Bluebirds, Western Tanagers and Yellow-headed Blackbirds sing alongside less showy species such as Song Sparrow, Grey Catbird, Western Wood Pewee, Warbling Vireo and Marsh Wren. Diminutive Broad-tailed Hummingbirds zip from flower to flower, whilst Bald Eagle, American Kestrel, Sage Grouse, Yellow-rumped, Yellow and Orange-crowned Warblers, Cedar Waxwing, Green-tailed Towhee and Mountain Chickadee are also likely to be seen.



Nearby Jackson Lake acts as a magnet for migrating and breeding waterfowl such as Trumpeter Swan, Barrow's Goldeneye, Bufflehead and Ring-necked Duck.



Although the rocks of the Grand Tetons are ancient, the spectacular peaks themselves were only pushed up in the past 10 million years and are the youngest range in the Rocky Mountain chain. Massive tectonic forces along the Teton fault have caused the mountains to rise, while the valley floor to the west has dropped. Recent ice-age glaciation then sculpted the mountains into their current form and glacial moraines have enclosed the series of beautiful lakes on the western flanks of the mountains.

The town of Jackson Hole will be our base for our time here. This attractive town, which doubles as a ski resort in the winter, has many good restaurants as well as shops and galleries selling wildlife art and souvenirs. There are also some excellent shops catering for outdoor enthusiasts.

We will return to Jackson Hole each evening and head out into town for our evening meal.

Day 5

West Yellowstone

Today we move our base from Jackson Hole to the town of West Yellowstone, located just outside the national park's western entrance. Our journey will take us back through the Grand Teton National Park and into Yellowstone through its south entrance. Heading north, the road follows the Lewis River and passes the beautiful Lewis Lake. On our journey we will also cross the 'continental divide', the line that divides the flow of water between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Rain or snow falling to the west of this line eventually drains into the Pacific Ocean whereas water falling to the east flows down towards the Atlantic. We will cross this important watershed twice more before reaching West Yellowstone!



Old Faithful

At the 'West Thumb' end of Yellowstone Lake we will take the road west to explore the Upper Geyser Basin and view Yellowstone's most famous geothermal highlight 'Old Faithful' (which erupts every 35 to 120 minutes). We are now in the heart of the caldera where steaming fumaroles, hot springs and thick pools of boiling mud dot the landscape testament to the heat welling up from deep beneath our feet.

A short drive from Old Faithful is Grand Prismatic Spring, perhaps the most spectacular geothermal pool in the world! Here extremophile bacteria produce pigments as protection from the heat and, as the water cools towards the edge of the pool, the different levels of pigmentation produce bands of colour that mirror the colours of the rainbow.

Our final 14 mile stretch between Madison Junction and West Yellowstone can be very productive for wildlife. Rocky Mountain Elk are common and both Moose and Black Bear are likely. Birds to look out for include Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Black-headed Grosbeak, Red-naped Sapsucker, Clark's Nutcracker and Gray Jay. 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 slowly plodding across the road in front of us will no doubt be one of the enduring memories of the holiday. A comfortable hotel in West Yellowstone will be base for the following 4 nights whilst we explore the western and central highlights of the national park.



Grand Prismatic Spring

Day 6 - 8

Yellowstone National Park from West Yellowstone

We have the next 3 full days to head back into Yellowstone National Park early each morning to go in search of the wildlife and scenic highlights of the western and central regions of the reserve. We will split out time exploring by vehicle and on foot, but will try, where-ever possible, to escape the confines of the minibus to bird and wildlife watch from the numerous footpaths that criss-cross the forests, meadows and hills.

Once again Rocky Mountain Elk, Moose and herds of Pronghorn Antelope and North American Bison are all likely, plus smaller mammals such as the endearing Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel and its larger cousin the Yellow-bellied Marmot. River Otter, Beaver and American Marten are also possible, whilst birds to look out for include American Kestrel, Swainson's Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, American Dipper, Ruffed Grouse, Pine Grosbeak and mixed flocks of migrating sparrows, warblers and flycatchers. For the very fortunate, there's even the chance of the magnificent sight of a Great Grey Owl perched on a dead snag in the late afternoon sun or hunting along the edges of a pine-fringed meadow!



In a park full of breathtaking sights, perhaps the most famous spectacle is the Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River. Here the river plunges 94 metres into the Yellowstone Canyon, a 24 mile-long gorge created by the Yellowstone River as it cuts through the pastel-coloured rhyolite bedrock. On both the north and the south sides of the canyon there are overlooks that give tremendous views. The aptly named 'brink of the falls trail' leads down to an observation platform perched at the top of the Lower Falls.

We will take a boxed lunch out with us to have during the middle part of the day and then return to West Yellowstone each evening for dinner.

Day 9 - 11

Yellowstone National Park from Cooke City

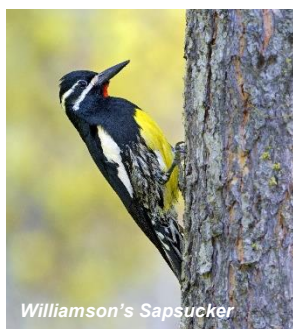
Next we head north to Cooke City, our base for 3 nights whilst we explore the Lamar Valley and the northern and eastern sectors of Yellowstone National Park. En route we will stop at the dramatic steaming travertine (calcium carbonate) terraces of Mammoth Hot Springs. Here the hillside is composed of stepped pools and run off streams, brightly coloured by bacteria and the dissolved minerals in the water. The whole scene is quite otherworldly. From the boardwalks close views of Killdeer is also possible.



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 – 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!

The Lamar Valley is also one of the best places in Yellowstone to look for the park's top predator, the powerful Grizzly Bear along with its smaller, and commoner, cousin the Black Bear. Northern American Bison are common as are Rocky Mountain Elk, Bighorn Sheep, Coyote and Red Fox whilst birds to look out for include Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Williamson's and Red-naped Sapsuckers, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Mountain Bluebird, Western Meadowlark, Tree and Violet-Green Swallows, Townsend's Solitaire and Swainson's Thrush.



We will also climb (by vehicle) the spectacular Beartooth Pass which cuts through the mountains at 11,000 feet and offers the opportunity to look for an interesting variety of hardy high altitude species. Foremost of these is the attractive Black Rosyfinch and the nimble-footed Mountain Goat, but we will also be on the lookout for Golden Eagle, Horned Lark and White-crowned Sparrow.

Each evening we will return to Cooke City, an old western mining town steeped in history and worthy of exploration in its own right.

Day 12

Bozeman

We have the majority of today to continue our exploration of the northern section of Yellowstone National Park, before we must leave the park for a final time in the mid to late-afternoon to drive a couple of hours north to the town of Bozeman for a 1-night stay in a comfortable hotel.

Day 13 - 14

Fly London

Our flight from Bozeman to London is due to depart late morning (via a US hub airport). We are due to arrive back into London's Heathrow Airport at around midday on Day 14.

Grading

Grade A/B. Easy to moderately strenuous. We will be viewing wildlife from vehicles and on foot. Most of the trails are well maintained, but some can be rough and steep in places. As such this tour is most suitable for those with an average level of fitness who enjoy walking. 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 with the occasional trip higher such as to Beartooth Pass which sits at around 3,300 metres.

Weather

Spring weather in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks is as changeable as we experience in the UK. It can be sunny and relatively warm, but equally a few colder and wetter days should be expected and packed for. Daytime temperatures climb to the mid-teens to low twenties centigrade, but will drop significantly overnight. The occasional snow flurry is not unheard of in early June at higher altitudes.

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

Food & accommodation included in the price

We use a mix of 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 and meals are included in the cost of this holiday, with the exception of dinner on Day 1 and lunch and dinner on Day 13. We will be eating out most evenings in restaurants and diners and choosing from a-la-carte menus (up to an entrée limit of \$20 per head). 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 and scenic 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 13, 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 (FCO). 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 or telephone 0870 6060290 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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