

Glacier Country MONTANA

Motorcoach Itinerary A loop tour from Glacier Park International Airport (FCA)

Day 1: Whitefish

Spend your day in charming Whitefish (12 miles/16 minutes from Glacier Park International Airport). The October 2009 issue of Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel Magazine picked Whitefish as one of the *10 Coolest Small Towns in America*.

Downtown Whitefish is perfect for leisurely strolls from unique galleries and shops to delicious eateries. Shopping is near the top of any Whitefish activity list. Must-stop places for one-of-a-kind finds line Whitefish's downtown on Central Avenue.

History buffs will enjoy the historical Great Northern Railway Depot. Here, Amtrak trains still come and go in the same fashion as the early models that brought tourists to Glacier. Through collections that span from fur trapper times to the early days of skiing, the Stumptown Historical Museum (one block from downtown) tells the story of how the logging camp of Stumptown became Whitefish.

The Summit Nature Center at Whitefish Mountain Resort (9 miles/15 minutes from downtown Whitefish) sits atop Big Mountain at Whitefish Mountain Resort in the Summit House. Take a chair lift/gondola ride (20 minute ride) to the top. Managed by the US Forest Service, the Nature Center features interactive, hands-on exhibits about the region's flora, fauna, geology, fire ecology and history. The summit offers fabulous views of the Flathead Valley and peaks in Glacier National Park. Take advantage of Whitefish Mountain Resort's group package; a round-trip lift/gondola ride to the summit, USFS nature presentation and/or a short hike -- and lunch.

The Walk in the Treetops is one of the area's striking outdoor activities; a naturalist-led hike through the forest canopy on a boardwalk suspended 60 feet above ground. Brace for glorious views of mountains and lakes, where red-tailed hawks, western tanagers and kinglets vie for your attention. (2 ½ Hour Guided Tour limited to groups of 12 people). Don't miss Whitefish Mountain Resort's newest, exhilarating activities; the Zip-Line and the Alpine Slide!

Choose from a variety of group-friendly dining experiences in Whitefish -- The Bar W Ranch; after a wagon ride, sit down and enjoy an awesome Montana dinner in the special meadow event tent complete with a live country singer. Or at Grouse Mountain Lodge; enjoy a meal while overlooking the 18th hole of the Whitefish Golf course and the back drop of the Whitefish Mountain Range.

Overnight in Whitefish.

IF YOU GO:

- Whitefish Mountain Resort • (406) 862-2900 • www.skiwhitefish.com/activities
- Whitefish Downtown Shopping • (877) 862-3548 • www.explorewhitefish.com
- The Stumptown Historical Museum • (406) 862-0067 • www.stumptownhistoricalsociety.org
- Whitefish Convention & Visitors Bureau • (877) 862-3548 • www.whitefishvisit.com

EATS:

- Grouse Mountain Lodge • www.grousemountainlodge.com/dining
- Whitefish Mountain Resort • (406) 862-2600 • www.skiwhitefish.com
- Bar W Ranch • (406) 863-9099 • www.thebarw.com/WagonRideRates

SLEEPS:

- Grouse Mountain Lodge • 2 Fairway Drive, Whitefish • (406) 862-3000 • www.grousemountainlodge.com
- The Lodge at Whitefish Lake • 1380 Wisconsin Avenue, Whitefish • (406) 863-4000 • www.lodgeatwhitefishlake.com
- Best Western Rocky Mountain Lodge • 6510 Highway 93 South, Whitefish • (406) 862-2569 • www.rockymtnlodge.com
- The Pine Lodge • (406) 862-7600 • www.thepinelodge.com

Day 2: Glacier National Park

You'd be hard pressed to find a more scenic drive in the lower 48 than Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park. A wilderness of lakes, towering peaks and remnants of glaciers is readily accessible off road or on.

Travel to the hand-hewn, grand Lake McDonald Lodge (36 miles/45 minutes from Whitefish) where you can hop aboard a Red Jammer Bus for a tour of the 52 mile Going-to-the-Sun Road (2 ½ - 3 Hour Guided Tour, may include lunch). The historic soft-top tour buses were introduced in the 1930s and have since been recently restored and outfitted with propane engines as a gift from the Ford Motor Company. Since a motor coach exceeds the Sun Road size restrictions, the motor coach can "deadhead" around on Highway 2 to meet the Red Jammer Tour in St. Mary (86 miles/1.5 hours) on the east side of the park.

Boat tours of St. Mary Lake and Many Glacier set out several times a day. Glacier Park Boat Company's narrated trips are top notch. The St. Mary Visitor Center is also definitely worth a stop.

Overnight at St. Mary Lodge or Many Glacier Hotel (21 miles/30 minutes from St. Mary).

IF YOU GO:

- National Park Service • (406) 888-7800 • www.nps.gov/glac
- Glacier Park, Inc. • (406) 892-2525 • www.glacierparkinc.com
- Going-to-the-Sun Road • (406) 888-7800 • www.nps.gov/glac
- Glacier Park Boat Co. • (406) 257-2426 • www.glacierparkboats.com

EATS & SLEEPS:

- St. Mary Lodge and Resort • St. Mary • Hwy. 89 (888) 778-6279 • www.stmarylodgeandresort.com
- Many Glacier Hotel • 12 miles east of Babb. (406) 892-2525 • www.glacierparkinc.com

Day 3: Glacier to Kalispell

From St. Mary, your next stop is Browning (29 miles/30 minutes from St. Mary). The exhibits of cultural artifacts at the Museum of the Plains Indian are among the finest in the West. The Blackfeet Heritage Center and Art Gallery and the Lodgepole Gallery and Tipi Village feature traditional and contemporary arts and crafts. If you visit during the second week in July, don't miss the dancing, drumming, rodeo action and tipis at North American Indian Days.

From Browning, you'll continue on Highway 2 west toward Essex (41 miles/45 minutes from Browning). Essex is home to the historic Izaak Walton Inn that once housed winter snow removal crews for the Great Northern Railroad. Today, it's enjoyed by railroad buffs. The Inn is a well-known stop for lunch, overlooking the railway and the inn's caboose lodging. A few miles from Essex, watch for the Walton Goat Lick pull-off. Mountain goats graze and lick the mineral-laden rock of an exposed river bank cliff at this site (30 minute self-guided walk).

Follow Highway 2 to West Glacier (27 miles/30 minutes from Essex). For a bit of adventure check-in at Glacier Raft Company in the Village of West Glacier for a whitewater raft trip on the Middle Fork of the Flathead River bordering Glacier National Park. Or enjoy a mild scenic float along the Park boundary with the chance to view moose, deer, bears and a host of smaller mammals and birds that frequent the river. There

will be opportunities to see close up the effects of the 2003 Robert Fire and nature's new cycle of growth in the burned areas. The only rapids on this trip are short and modest Class II (easy, intermediate rapid) at Devil's Elbow, exciting enough to thrill the beginner but not dangerous enough to cause concern.

Another option; visit these downtown Kalispell museums (32 miles/45 minutes from West Glacier):

- Conrad Mansion Museum - the historic home of Kalispell's founding family, built in 1895.
- Hockaday Museum of Art - interactive exhibits showcase the art and culture of Montana and Glacier National Park, including the contributions of the Blackfeet Indian Nation.
- Museum at Central School - offers exhibits, tours and programs that illuminate the history of Kalispell and Northwest Montana.

Overnight in Kalispell.

IF YOU GO:

- National Park Service • (406) 888-7800 • www.nps.gov/glac
- Glacier Park, Inc. • (406) 892-2525 • www.glacierparkinc.com
- Izaak Walton Inn • (406) 888.5700 • www.izaakwaltoninn.com
- Glacier Raft & Outdoor Center • (800) 235-6781 • www.glacierraftco.com
- Browning • (406) 338-2344 • www.browningmontana.com
- Flathead Convention & Visitors Bureau • (800) 543-3105 • www.fcvb.org

EATS:

Motor coach friendly restaurants in Kalispell include:

- Mackenzie River Pizza Company • (406) 756-0060 • www.mackenzieriverpizza.com
- Blue Canyon Kitchen Tavern • (406) 758-2583 • www.bluecanyonrestaurant.com

SLEEPS:

- Red Lion Hotel Kalispell • (406) 751-5050 • www.redlion.com
- Hilton Garden Inn Kalispell • (406) 756-4500 • www.hiltongardeninn.com

Day 4: Kalispell to Flathead Lake

This morning, head south on Highway 93 for a stunningly beautiful drive along the shores Flathead Lake, the largest natural freshwater lake west of the Mississippi.

At the southern end of Flathead Lake, in the wonderfully scenic town of Polson (52 miles/1 hour from Kalispell), stop by the Best Western KwaTaqNuk Resort to enjoy a Flathead Lake boat tour. Choose between a narrated Bay Cruise (1 ½ hour) or cruise the shores of Wild Horse Island, the largest island on Flathead Lake, home to 100 different birds and mammals; including bighorn sheep, bald eagles, osprey, mule deer, and – a few wild horses (3 hour). Take advantage of KwaTaqNuk's package especially for groups; including lunch and the boat cruise.

Drive back up the opposite shore of Flathead Lake on Highway 35 through the cherry orchards while enjoying more fabulous views of the Flathead Lake to the lovely lakeside town of Bigfork (33 miles/45 minutes from Polson). This quaint Western village was chosen as "One of the 50 Great Towns of the West," designated as "One of the 100 Best Small Art Towns of the Nation," and was listed in National Geographic's Guide to Small Town Escapes, which is no surprise given its gourmet restaurants, fun shops, local character, and beautiful natural surroundings.

Or enjoy a Naturalist Hike along the Swan River Nature Trail, a level trail that follows the "wild mile" on the Swan River. The trailhead is at the east end of Grand Avenue, a couple blocks up the hill past the Bigfork Inn.

Or visit THE BARN, the big red barn is home to a variety of antiques and gifts that are beautifully displayed. With reservations, they will provide a complimentary refreshment stop for groups.

Consider taking in a group dinner at the Bigfork Inn, followed by an evening at the Bigfork Summer Playhouse, one of the very finest professional live theaters in the Northwest. Group rates are available.

Overnight in Whitefish or Kalispell before departing from Glacier Park International Airport (FCA) the following day.

IF YOU GO:

- Best Western KwaTaqNuk Resort • (800) 882-6363 • www.kwatagnuk.com
- Polson • (406) 883-5969 • www.polsonchamber.com
- Bigfork • (406) 837-5888 • www.bigfork.org
- Bigfork Summer Playhouse • (406) 837-4886 • www.bigforksummerplayhouse.com
- THE BARN • (406) 837-2276 • www.thebamantiques.biz

EATS:

- Bigfork Inn Restaurant • (406) 837-6680 • www.bigforkinn.com – will open for a special group lunch reservation or provide a private room for group dinners.
- BruMar Estate • (406) 837-2231 • www.brumarestate.com – offers a catered group meal in a gorgeous setting.
- ShowThyme • (406) 837-0707 • www.showthyme.com - next-door to the Bigfork Summer Playhouse.

*Would you like to extend your trip?
Beautiful country and relaxed Montana charm doesn't end here!*

*For individual/family travel assistance, visit www.glaciermt.com or
call one of our travel counselors toll-free at 1-800-338-5072.*

*For group travel assistance, please call 1-800-956-6537 or visit
www.touropoperators.glaciermt.com.*