

# Wide Wyoming

*Wyoming is the state with the smallest population but the most compelling mountains. Among its attractions are expansive prairies, real cowboys and, of course, Yellowstone National Park. According to the Expert Traveler, Gig Gwin, it is also a great place for paragliding, skiing and an array of other exciting activities.*



Wyoming is a state for all seasons. In the winter, Jackson Hole, a deep valley located at the edge of the Teton Mountain Range, has some of the finest powder around for ski buffs. In the summer, Cheyenne's Frontier Days — the



"Daddy of 'em All"— attracts thousands of spectators for ten exhilarating wild west days. I enjoyed my latest adventure to the state closer to fall. Even so, leaving

the airport I was able to take in the last of the summer wildflowers and green-gray sage indigenous to the area. My first stops were the resort towns of Jackson Hole and Teton Village. Made up of a collection of sumptuous hotels nestled just below the Teton Range, the area is mecca for the "jet set" crowd. On any given day, you might catch a view of your favorite star, a genuine cowboy or even Dick Cheney.

In addition to star-gazing, there are a myriad of other activities for families or adventurers. Let's start with horseback riding, biking and hiking. Trailheads seem to start at every turn of the road and you can choose your degree of difficulty. I met hikers just back from a half hour walk and others who planned to spend three days high on the summit trail. Typically I would be heading out for my own hiking adventure, but on this trip I was bound for another unique experience. Along with its other attractions, Teton Village is home to outstanding tandem paragliding. For about \$200 you get a



lift on the aerial tram to the top of the mountain to meet your paragliding pilot. After some instructions, you are strapped into the harnesses and told to run headlong down the side of the mountain. Just about the time you are ready to question the sanity of your decision, your shoot opens and suddenly you are soaring above the magnificent Grand Teton Mountain Range. What a view!

For a tamer experience, Jackson Hole and Teton Village are interesting places to create your own dine-around. The local food specialties include healthy buffalo burgers, medallions of elk or you can try the huckleberry chicken salad. If you are thirsty, mosey on down to the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar in Jackson Hole. No stools or benches here — just some well-worn saddles to straddle while you share a conversation and a cold drink.



After spending time “in town,” shift your vacation fun to the north and Grand Teton and Yellowstone National parks. Lesser known, but no less beautiful, Grand Teton National Park has as its focal point the picturesque Teton mountain range. Three pristine lakes — Jenny, Leigh and the larger Jackson — supply water for animals and recreational sports for visitors. Stop for a meal in the historic Mural Dining Room at Jackson Lake Lodge. The food is divine and the

panoramic view of the Teton Mountains is breathtaking. Of all places I’ve visited in my many years of travel, I consider this the finest hotel view in the world.

Make this trip’s final destination the greatest geyser area in the world — Yellowstone National Park, home of Old Faithful. Although the time between eruptions has lengthened over the years, Old Faithful is still the most predictable geyser in the world and a sight not to be missed. The National Park provides outdoor seating and Old Faithful

goes off with sound and fury, blasting steaming water high into the sky. The resulting spectacle would make Walt Disney, himself, proud. While the massive fire of 1988 took its toll on the park, Yellowstone is regenerating beautifully. I hiked through the thermals, took a photo safari, then drove north to see

the upper and lower falls and the “grand canyon” of Yellowstone. This is an Ansel Adams moment for photographers. The powerful Yellowstone River explodes into the canyon and the multi-colored rock formations provide a fine backdrop to this scenic part of the country.

Here’s a friendly reminder: take a leisurely pace as you travel to and from points of interest. Allow plenty of time for unscheduled buffalo crossings, elk grazings and other wildlife sightings. Often as I drove through the park I saw cars, motorcycles and RVs pulled to the side with camera lenses



poking out of open windows. Driving up, I’d ask, “What’ve you got?” The answer — moose, elk or maybe a bald eagle.

Ironically, I found my last challenge not while navigating the rocky terrain of one of Yellowstone’s hiking trails but rather in the historic bar at the Old Faithful Inn while trying to choose which digital photos to bring back for your enjoyment. One thing was clear, Wyoming should be in your future travel plans. It’s a spellbinding experience. ▀

