

which spurts as high as 400 feet (122 m), though its eruptions are infrequent.

At Mammoth Hot Springs a different sort of geothermal action is at work. Here, hot springs flowing through limestone have left deposits as they hit the cooler air, creating the massive travertine terraces, another of Yellowstone's famous sights. Boardwalks lead around the terraces and to lovely Palette Springs and Canary Springs.

Some of Yellowstone's most impressive geothermal features lie in the primeval landscape of Norris Geyser Basin (4).

Rivers, Lakes, and Canyons

Resting on a high plateau in the Rocky Mountains, most of Yellowstone lies above 7,500 feet (2,286 m) in altitude. It is bordered by mountain ranges with

peaks up to 11,358 feet (3,462 m) high. The Continental Divide runs diagonally through the southern part of the park, near many of the geothermal features. But there is much more to see, from lakes, forests, grassland, and canyons to dramatic rivers and waterfalls.

When the park was founded, the hunting of large grazing animals was still rife. In 1886 the army was brought in to patrol the park and stop the slaughter. Yellowstone then became the last refuge of the buffalo, which had been wiped out on the Great Plains. Today Yellowstone is one of the best places in the country to see large animals; its herd of wild bison is 3,000 strong, and there are large herds of

elk and antelope, as well as grizzly bears, moose, bighorn sheep, and many other animals. Wolves have also been successfully returned to the park.

Yellowstone's scenery is so grand and its atmosphere (away from the crowds) so peaceful that it is easy to forget its violent beginnings, formed by the catastrophic explosion of a supervolcano some 640,000 years ago. It left the Yellowstone Caldera in its wake, 30 miles (48 km) wide, 45 miles (72 km) long, and thousands of feet deep. Yellowstone Lake fills much of the crater today and is among the world's largest high-altitude lakes.

The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone clearly shows the volcano's handiwork. This deep gorge was carved by the Yellowstone River through layers of ancient lava flows, exposing the yellow-hued rock that inspired the park's name. Two viewpoints near Canyon Village overlook the Upper and Lower Falls plunging into the gorge. The fire lookout on Mount Washburn offers another fine panoramic vista.

Yellowstone is always crowded in high summer. The only way to escape is to get out of the car and onto the many hiking trails. Then you will discover the majesty of the natural wilderness those early explorers found here.



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CLIMATE Weather is unpredictable at any time of year due to the park's high elevation. Winters are cold with daytime temperatures ranging from 0–20°F (-18–7°C). Summers are mild with average daytime temperatures in the 70s°F (24°C) or 80s°F (29°C) at lower elevations, cool nights, and afternoon thunderstorms. Snowfall can occur in spring and fall. Average annual rainfall is 15¼ inches (39 cm), average annual snowfall is 72 inches (183 cm).

WHAT TO TAKE Rain gear and a warm jacket, even in summer; sturdy shoes or hiking boots.

BEST TIME Summer has the best weather but also the most crowds. Spring is normally rainy with snow at higher elevations, but a good time for wildlife viewing. September is a good month for wildlife and fall color. Most park roads are closed from November, reopening in April or May depending on conditions.

NEAREST AIRPORTS Yellowstone Airport in West Yellowstone is the closest to the park, with regional flights via Salt Lake City in summer. Jackson Hole Airport, 8½ miles (13.7 km) from Jackson, is inside Grand Teton National Park. Larger airports in Montana include Gallatin Field at Bozeman and Logan International Airport at Billings.

ACCOMMODATIONS The Old Faithful Inn and Lake Yellowstone Hotel offer atmospheric lodging in the park, and there are also cabins and campgrounds. More park lodging is available in Grand Teton National Park. They are often fully booked months in advance, especially in summer, so reserve as early as you can.

PARK ENTRANCE An entrance fee per vehicle is valid for seven days. Annual passes good at all national parks are also available.