

Yellowstone in The Fall

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



September 15 – 22, 2019

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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



“Woody did a great job of teaching, listening, showing, and bird finding. ... We were very pleased with our first Naturalist Journeys trip”

— Bonnie Marks & Bob Miller

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Discover the crisp air, scarce crowds, and incredible wildlife of Yellowstone National Park in the fall. Magnificent bull Elk fill the air with frosty breath and clarion mating calls while cottonwoods shimmer in hues of gold. An early snowfall may decorate the landscape, bringing a sense of urgency to animals preparing for winter. Few places in the world match Yellowstone for viewing the dynamics of large mammals and the drama played out between predator and prey.

Follow the Snake River to Yellowstone Lake, Canyon, Old Faithful, the Madison River, and Mammoth Hot Springs, exploring the geyser basins, Hayden Valley, and the dramatic Upper and Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River. Spot mammals in their prime: Bison, Elk, Pronghorn, Bighorn, Mountain Goat, Otter, Beaver, and more. Raptors on the wing, possible wolf sightings, fall color, and perhaps the first snowfall — this trip is a naturalist's or photographer's dream!

Absorb the rich legacy that is Yellowstone, the world's first and still most famous national park, and a World Heritage Site — there is simply no other place like it on the planet. This is a relaxed-pace tour with time to savor this treasured landscape and its signature species, and with time to enjoy photography, watch animal behavior, and meet local experts working with wolves and other species.

Early on they called it Wonderland ... and we think you will too.



Tour Highlights

- See Grand Teton National Park's landscape — snowy peaks and fall foliage — en route to Yellowstone
- Visit iconic Yellowstone destinations, including Old Faithful and Mammoth Hot Springs, without the summer crowds
- NEW! for 2018, Visit the park's west side and beyond to Harriman State Park and the Madison River
- Search for Bison, two species of deer, Elk, Pronghorn, Bighorn, and Mountain Goat
- Witness the dramatic Upper and Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River
- Spot Trumpeter Swan, Pine Grosbeak, Harlequin Duck, American Dipper, numerous raptors including Golden Eagle, and Gray-crowned and Black Rosy Finches
- Savor a relaxed-pace tour immersed in the wild wonder of Yellowstone

Tour Summary

7-Night / 8-Day Yellowstone Birding & Wildlife Tour with Woody Wheeler

\$2995 from Jackson, WY

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Itinerary

Airport is Jackson Hole (JAC)

Sun., Sept 15

Arrival in Jackson Hole | On to Yellowstone National Park | Yellowstone Lake

Arrive in scenic Jackson Hole today, beautiful this time of year, and enjoy views of the Snake River and the majestic Grand Teton Mountains, fringed with fall color and often capped in fresh snow. We pick up those at hotels in town, and then those at the Jackson airport at 1:00 PM for our drive alongside Grand Teton National Park, en route to Yellowstone Lake and the historic Lake Hotel. We stop for photos and to scan for Moose, Elk, Sandhill Crane, and Mule Deer.



We cross the Snake River, looking for Belted Kingfisher and mixed flocks in the conifers that may include Red Crossbill, Cassin's Finch, and Pine Grosbeak. We are sure to stop to walk a loop trail at West Thumb Geyser Basin, one of the best areas in the park to see Barrow's and Common Goldeneye, and inquisitive River Otter. West Thumb Geyser Basin holds rainbow-colored thermal pools and hissing steam vents called fumaroles — a spectacular sight.



Waterfowl use the Yellowstone Lake lakeshore to loaf and feed, and we scan a few of the coves where large congregations gather before reaching Lake Hotel, situated in one of the most scenic places in all of Yellowstone. Tonight we enjoy our kick-off dinner in the grand dining room.

Accommodations at Lake Hotel (D)



Mon., Sept. 16 & Tues., Sept. 17 **Hayden Valley | Sylvan Pass | Yellowstone Lake**

Morning is a delight to wake up and walk out to the shores of Yellowstone Lake, looking off to mist over some of the thermal basins and the pointed peaks of the Absaroka Mountain Range. Breakfast in the historic dining room brings Yellowstone's rich history to mind. At this time of year flocks of songbirds like large pines near the lake shore and we may find feeding mixed flocks as we greet the day.

We have two full days to explore from the lake, and during the fall this puts us in a prime raptor migration area, as well as in



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superb terrain to find Elk, possible Black and Grizzly Bear, Bison in good number, Coyote, and with luck, elusive Gray Wolves of the Hayden Valley pack.

We drive Hayden Valley very early in the morning, return for breakfast in Lake Hotel's grand dining room, and then head out along the lakeshore to Lake Butte where we should see raptors on the wing. Cooper's, Sharp-shinned, Swainson's, Ferruginous, and Rough-legged Hawks are all possibilities, as well as American Kestrel, Merlin, and Peregrine. Along the shoreline we may find Redhead, Canvasback, Bufflehead, and both species of Goldeneye. Bald Eagle nest in the area and we can hope to see fledged young practicing their hunting skills — a real treat!

One day we stop at viewpoints from the famed Upper and Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River. We also walk the boardwalk at Mud Volcano. Each outing takes us through Hayden Valley, where the Yellowstone Raptor Initiative has run raptor census counts since 2011. It's an exciting time and with several days we should see both good numbers and a good mix of species, including Golden Eagle.

Accommodations at Lake Hotel (B,L,D)

Wed., Sept. 18

Norris Geyser Basin | Madison River | West Yellowstone | Madison River

Driving from the lake, we make one more pass through Hayden Valley before going on to the west side of Yellowstone. We stop for a last look on the other side of Yellowstone's famous Upper Falls. If weather permits, we take a trip up to the high country of Dunraven Pass, a place of marvelous vistas. From the higher elevation viewpoints there is a good mix of forest and meadow to scan for wildlife; the area is frequented by Bighorn Sheep, some large herds of Elk, and possibly Dusky Grouse. Dense conifer forests attract flocks of kinglets and finches, and we may find lingering Green-tailed Towhee or other songbirds.



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A highlight of the day is a walk around Norris Geyser Basin, hottest in the park with a lot of mudpot and hot spring activity. Colorful basins are inspiring in the autumn crisp air. From here we go to Madison Junction and out along the river, with excellent chances to see wildlife like Red Fox, Coyote, Mule Deer, Elk, waterfowl gathering up, Sandhill Crane, Pine Grosbeak, Steller's Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, and more. Bald Eagle nest in this area and may be hunting along the corridor of the river. We pass through West Yellowstone, taking a break for lunch and some time to look around. From here we cross the divide, looking out for Moose, and raptors such as Ferruginous Hawk, and then turn south to Island Park and our lodgings on the river.

Accommodations at lovely Angler's Lodge on the Henry's Fork of the Snake River, west of Yellowstone (B,L,D)

Thurs., Sept. 19

Yellowstone's West Side

We love exploring this side of the Yellowstone ecosystem. At Angler's Lodge we are close to Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Hegben, and Earthquake Lakes, and to Harriman State Park, a conservation area left as part of the legacy of the Harriman family of railroad fame. We plan our day according to weather and road access, with plans to spend time looking for Moose, Northern Flicker, Williamson's Sapsucker, and both Hairy and American Three-toed Woodpeckers. Big valley meadows here are frequented by Elk, the river bottoms by Moose; in view of the Centennial Mountains we hope to find Prairie Falcon, Golden Eagle, and a host of waterfowl species. In groves of conifers we look for seed-eating specialties like Pine Grosbeak, Cassin's Finch, and Pine Siskin.

Common Loon and Red-necked Grebe use the lakes here, and the area has always been a stronghold for the Yellowstone population of Trumpeter Swan. Harriman State Park has extensive trails and several wildlife viewing areas. Osprey and Bald Eagle are frequent sightings here, too.

We return to our lodgings on the river for a nice dinner and some time to enjoy the views.



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Accommodations at Angler's Lodge, on the Henry's Fork of the Snake River (B,L,D)

Fri., Sept. 20 Madison River | Old Faithful

From Yellowstone's west side, we retrace our steps back up the Madison River. At this time of year Elk often congregate in the lushness of the river corridor. On sunny days they seem to savor the warmth ... perhaps they know winter is coming. Cow and calf herds lounge, feed, and interact. Big bulls may bugle, round up the females, or do some sparring. There are several geyser areas to see en route to Old Faithful, our destination for day's end, with lodgings close to the iconic geyser. After dinner, those that wish can venture out for a night walk on the boardwalk trails here — fun!

Accommodations in the Old Faithful area, Yellowstone (B,L,D)

Sat., Sept. 21 Old Faithful & Nearby Geyser Basins

We enjoy the morning by walking to various thermal features of the Upper Geyser Basin, watching wildlife along the way. American Dipper are often in the Firehole River, where we have a chance to find River Otter and Bald Eagle, too. Bison are common here — imagine the views of their steamy breath in the cool morning air.

We take some time at the park's main visitor center here and to photograph Old Faithful. The park posts times to expect several of the most famous geysers to erupt, and we plan some of our walks accordingly. We have lunch in the famous Old Faithful Lodge. River Otter may be active in the Firehole River, along with Barrow's Goldeneye and American Dipper.

In the afternoon, we drive out to some of the other basins and Grand Prismatic Spring of Midway Geyser Basin, the largest and one of the most colorful in the park. In open habitat around the basin we should find Elk and other wildlife.



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Tonight we enjoy our end-of-tour celebratory dinner, record species we've seen on the journey, and share impressions as we recall our adventures, toasting a grand trip.

Accommodations in the Old Faithful area, Yellowstone (B,L,D)

Sun., Sept. 22

Return to Jackson Hole | Departures

It is about a three-hour drive from Old Faithful to Jackson Hole. Since we keep our eyes peeled for wildlife along the way, we plan to leave early to pad our arrival to the airport, reaching the airport by 11:30 AM for afternoon flights out from 12:30 PM onward. If there is a flight at Noon we can adjust back a bit, but please do not book flights out before Noon. (B)



Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the week-long journey (7N/8D) is \$2995 per person, double occupancy; \$3555 single occupancy. This cost includes: accommodations for 7 nights, all meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner), park entrance and other activity fees for activities for 8 days as described in the itinerary, professional guide services, pre-departure materials, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour cost does not include: round-trip airfare to and from Jackson Hole Airport, Wyoming (JAC). The tour cost does not include items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar; or gratuities for luggage handling or personal services.

You may wish to add additional time in Grand Teton National Park or the fun town of Jackson and if so we can pick you up at a Jackson hotel.

Travel Information

The airport for this journey is Wyoming's Jackson Hole Airport



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(JAC). Please plan to arrive in Jackson on or before September 15, no later than 1:00 PM. We will travel to Lake Hotel this day, so we do suggest coming in a night early, as there is no public transport into the park, so a delay could mean a costly transfer to catch up to the group. We plan to return to the airport by 11:30 AM on September 22, for flights out 12:30 PM onward. If you find a flight at Noon, we can back this up, but please, no flights out before Noon. We can also drop you off at a hotel in town if you plan to stay on after the tour.

Photo Credits

Great Gray Owl, Greg Smith (GS); Grazing Bison, Peg Abbott (PA); Yellowstone Falls in the Snow, GS; Coyote, GS; Bull Elk, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Moose, Sandy Sorkin (SS); Pilgrim Creek Pond, GS; Sandhill Cranes, Bud Ferguson; Lake Hotel, NJS; Yellowstone Lake, Woody Wheeler (WW); Golden Eagle, GS; Bald Eagle, GS; Elk, GS; Steller's Jay, PA; Clark's Nutcracker, NJS; Pine Grosbeak, SS; Black-billed Magpie, PA; Red Fox, GS; Black Wolf, GS; Group in Yellowstone, NJS; Trumpeter Swans, GS; American Kestrel, GS; Hot Springs, NJS; Pronghorns, GS; Group at the Continental Divide, WW; Soda Butte Creek, WW; Naturalist Journeys Group in Aspens, NJS; Grotto Geyser, PA; Old Faithful, NJS; Bighorn Sheep, NJS; Grizzly Bear, NJS.

