

Yellowstone Fall Sampler

with Naturalist Journeys



September 20 – 28, 2022

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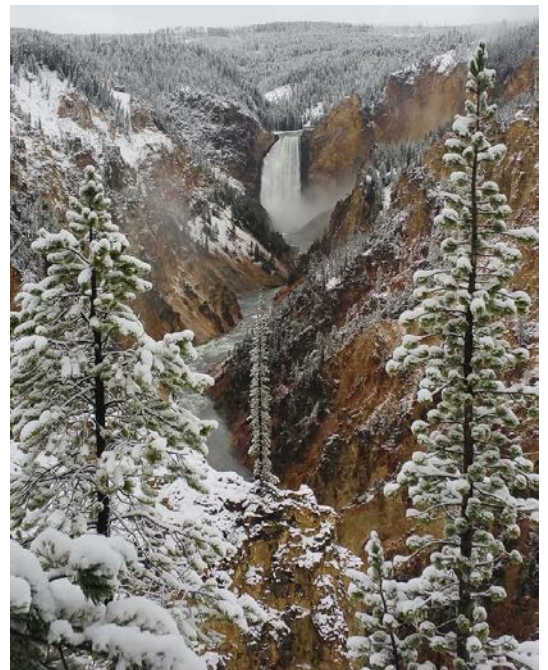
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Tour Summary

9-Day / 8-Night Yellowstone Birding & Wildlife Tour
\$3590 from Bozeman
Airport is Bozeman Yellowstone International (BZN)

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. What's new for this year's trip? We're sending along a photo expert in addition to our Naturalist Journeys guide to help those who are interested in improving their photography.

We begin on the west side of the park, at wildlife refuges and Harriman State Park, vital wetland areas for the Yellowstone Ecosystem replete with waterfowl and significant species such as Trumpeter Swan and Sandhill Crane. After two nights at a beautiful lodge on the Henry's Fork River, continue with two nights at West Yellowstone from which we follow the Madison River to witness steamy, iconic geyser basins and plentiful wildlife at Old Faithful and other thermal basins. From two nights' lodgings at Gardiner on the park's north entrance we visit Swan Flats and Mammoth Hot Springs and venture to Hayden Valley, where we see wildlife and the dramatic Upper and Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River. Finally, we travel through Yellowstone out the South Entrance where views of the spectacular Grand Tetons frame our journey. Wildlife and fall color are at their prime here. We watch for bull Moose, River Otter, Sandhill Crane, and Pronghorn and have time to explore this dramatic valley from lodgings in Jackson Hole. Dining is fun here too! Raptors on the wing, possible wolf sightings, fall color, and perhaps the first snowfall—this trip is a naturalist's or photographer's dream! We circle back to celebrate a final evening at Sacajawea Inn west of Bozeman at Three Forks, the headwaters of the Missouri River.

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 tour in the fall is a sampler trip, designed not for keen birding but for time to savor this treasured landscape and its signature species, and with time to enjoy photography if you wish, watch animal behavior, and to bird a mix of habitats for classic western species.

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

Tour Highlights

- **JUNE UPDATE:** Due to flood damage on the northern range we've rerouted our tour to the south, adding time in spectacular Grand Teton National Park and a two night stay in Jackson Hole.
- See Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and Harriman State Park—en route to Yellowstone
- Visit iconic Yellowstone destinations, including Old Faithful and Mammoth Hot Springs, without the summer crowds
- Watch for Bald Eagle, Osprey, Trumpeter Swan, and Elk along the rushing Madison River
- Search for Bison, two species of deer, Elk, Moose, Pronghorn, Bighorn, and Mountain Goat
- Witness the dramatic Upper and Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River
- Spot possible Great Gray Owl, Pine Grosbeak, Harlequin Duck, American Dipper, numerous raptors including Golden Eagle, and Gray-crowned and Black Rosy Finches
- Watch for Mountain Bluebird, Dusky Grouse, and Red-naped Sapsucker under colorful Quaking Aspens
- Savor a relaxed-pace tour immersed in the wild wonder of Yellowstone
- Travel in comfortable minivans, easy to carry gear and getting in and out of for our wildlife stops
- Find awe in this region's landscapes
- Gain skills in wildlife watching and photography with an expert in each venue!

Itinerary

Tues., Sept. 20

Arrival in Bozeman, Montana | Yellowstone National Park | Angler's Lodge

Bozeman is a great small city with a western flair and some of you may want to arrive early to enjoy it. We can make recommendations—book early to find the best rates. We plan to leave from the airport not later than 2:00 PM today to head south to West Yellowstone, following the Gallatin River, film site for the Robert Redford directed film *A River Runs Through It*.

En route we cross the Continental Divide from the Madison to the Snake River drainage, looking out for Moose and raptors such as Ferruginous Hawk and Northern Harrier. Near Island Park we settle into our lovely lodgings on the river. With luck a Common Loon glides on the river and Caspian Tern fly overhead.

Accommodations at Angler's Lodge (D)

Wed., Sept. 21 Red Rock Lakes NWR | Yellowstone Ecosystem's Western Side

We love exploring the quieter side of the Greater 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. Enjoy a picnic lunch afield.

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.

Accommodations at Angler's Lodge (B,L,D)

Thurs., Sept. 22 Harriman State Park | Yellowstone's West Entrance | Madison River Norris Geyser Basin

We make an early morning foray to nearby Harriman State Park to be there at prime light for photography and prime time for birds and mammals. At Silver Lake we have a good chance to find a variety of ducks, grebes, and Osprey fishing. We return to Angler's Lodge to enjoy a hearty brunch and pack up our gear to head to Yellowstone.

Our next stop is West Yellowstone where we stay for three nights. From here this afternoon, we enter Yellowstone Park and drive up a wildlife-rich corridor along 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. With luck a pair of Trumpeter Swan may be regally gliding near one of the bridges.

At Madison Junction we turn north to go walk and explore the Norris Geyser Basin, hottest in the park. A loop trail reveals a variety of mudpots, fumeroles, and geysers. Colors of the hot springs here are incredible. We then

retrace our steps back to West Yellowstone, watching for wildlife as we go. Dinner tonight is at a favorite local restaurant.

Accommodations at Three Bears Lodge (B,L,D)

Fri., Sept. 23 Old Faithful | Upper Geyser Basin

We have the full day to explore several thermal basins today, all leading into the grandest of them all at Old Faithful. Photographers and naturalists equally delight in seeing boiling mudpots, crystalline pools of rainbow colors, and steamy misty landscapes. We should spot Coyote, Killdeer, Barrow's Goldeneye, American Dipper, and possibly River Otter.

After breakfast we head out and enjoy a stop along the Firehole Falls Loop. We continue on to Fountain Paint Pots to walk the boardwalk loop there. Then it's on to Grand Prismatic Spring and then the Upper Geyser Basin, which holds not only Old Faithful Geyser but also a host of other impressive features such as Grand, Beehive, Riverside, and Castle Geysers and Morning Glory Pool. We take time to walk the loop that winds between them.

Walking back along the Firehole River is memorable. As we travel in three mini-vans for ease of carrying gear and stopping for wildlife, we can offer options this afternoon. Some may want to return to West Yellowstone for free time or to experience the Wolf and Grizzly Discovery Center. Others may wish to do more photography and birding along the Madison on the route home. Some may want to linger in the area for sunset light over one of the thermal areas on our return drive back.

This is a free night for dinner as we may be on different schedules, and in West Yellowstone restaurants abound. You are welcome to join the guides or strike out on your own.

Accommodations at the Three Bears Lodge (B,L)

Sat., Sept. 24 West Thumb | Lake | Hayden Valley | Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone | Dunraven Pass

Today is a full but rewarding day. We leave West Yellowstone in the morning to drive the grand loop, this time going beyond Old Faithful over Craig Pass to reach the West Thumb Geyser Basin, a small thermal wonderland right on the lake. We walk a loop here that is often good for birding, with a chance to see Fox Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak, or Red Crossbill.

From here we continue up to Lake, where we make a stop to see the famous Lake Hotel and take a break. At the lakeshore we may find Western Grebe. LeHardy Rapids is our next stop, with hopes of finding late season Harlequin Duck. Hayden Valley is one of the most beautiful landscapes of the park and also home to Bison, Sandhill Crane, a resident wolf pack, and raptors.

At the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone we have lunch, and take time to also stop at viewpoints from the famed Hayden Valley and the Upper and Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River. Enjoy exhibits on the park's geology and lunch at Canyon. We may take a peek up Dunraven Pass if we hear of recent bear sightings, and eventually we head back passing by Norris Geyser Basin before returning to West Yellowstone. Herds of Elk should be seen along the Madison River, and with luck we watch the antics and hear the bugle of courting males.

Accommodations at Three Bears Lodge, West Yellowstone (B,L,D)

Sun., Sept. 25 South to Grand Teton National Park | Jackson Hole

We head back through Yellowstone Park today, always an adventure as wildlife abounds. We enjoy the Artist's Paint Pot Drive and a few of the smaller geyser basins along the way. At West Thumb we take a rest stop, then turn south towards Grand Teton National Park. There are scenic waterfalls and some grand meadows along the route. At the Snake River we get out and do some birding as this is a natural corridor for migratory birds.

We stop at Jackson Lake Lodge for lunch with a million dollar view and chance to scan for Moose, Sandhill Crane and other wildlife. At Oxbow Lake we may find White Pelican, a host of waterfowl including Barrow's Goldeneye, and with luck River Otter. Fall color from all of these pull-offs can be breathtaking with the mountains behind. We arrive in Jackson with time to check a local boardwalk along a wetland area that is great for birding before checking into our lodgings. It's hard to choose a restaurant here but we are sure to choose a favorite.

Accommodations at Jackson Hole, Wyoming (B,L,D)

Mon., Sept. 26 Grand Teton National Park

We have the full day to explore this dramatic national park, replete with wildlife and scenic views. The park has a loop road, with numerous pull-outs. There are wetland areas visible from some of the viewpoints that have excellent willow and cottonwood habitat and trails to explore. There is an excellent visitor center at Moose and a chain of lakes, one more beautiful than the other. With luck we could find American Three-toed Woodpecker or Dusky Grouse as we explore.

We enjoy a picnic lunch, and as we loop around past Oxbow Lake we stop again to scan. We then pass through sagebrush habitat and from several vantage points get views of the entire Teton Range, with a ribbon of gold in front of it with fall color along the Snake River. Blacktail Ponds is a great birding area.

We return in time for you to look around the fun western town of Jackson Hole before our dinner this evening.

Accommodations in Jackson Hole, Wyoming (B,L,D)

Tues., Sept. 27 Teton Pass | Three Forks, Montana

We return to the Bozeman area today to be in position for flights out tomorrow. Just when you thought you'd had the best views possible of Jackson Hole and the Grand Tetons, we take you over a high pass into Idaho, with superlative views all along the way. The top of the pass lets you experience alpine conditions and perhaps some late-blooming flowers as well as the view.

Near Ashton there are some lovely waterfalls and cascades along a flowing stream, a great place to watch for American Dipper. We pass through Island Park, and turn north on Highway 87, giving us a chance to check the ponds we saw going into Red Rock Lakes early in the week—each visit is unique and we might find Long-billed Curlew, Cinnamon Teal, or any number of species. We follow the course of the Madison River to Three Forks, headwaters of the great Missouri River where the Madison, Gallatin, and Jefferson Rivers unite. This drive is quintessential Big Sky country with lots of wide open spaces and mountains always in view.

Accommodations at the historic Sacajawea Inn (B,L,D)

Wed., Sept. 28 Missouri Headwaters State Park | Departures

This morning we visit Missouri Headwaters State Park, where Lewis and Clark camped in 1805. Braided stream channels and their confluence are a significant part of western geography; from here the Missouri flows 2300 miles to its confluence with the Mississippi. We have a hearty brunch so you are set for travel, and from here it's just 25 minutes to the airport. (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.

Travel Information

The airport for this journey is Montana's Bozeman International Airport (BZN). Please plan to arrive in Bozeman on or before September 20, no later than 1:00 PM. We travel to Island Park, past West Yellowstone 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 11:00 AM on September 28, for flights out 12:30 PM onward. We can also drop you off at a hotel in town if you plan to stay on after the tour.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$3590 DBL / \$4145 SGL per person, based on double occupancy.

This cost includes: accommodations for 8 nights, all meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner), park entrance and other activity fees for activities for 9 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 Bozeman, Montana (BZN). 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.

Photo Credits

Great Gray Owl, Gary Stone (GAST); Grazing Bison, Peg Abbott (PA); Yellowstone Falls in the Snow, Greg Smith (GS); Coyote, GS; Bull Elk, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); American Kestrel, GS.

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