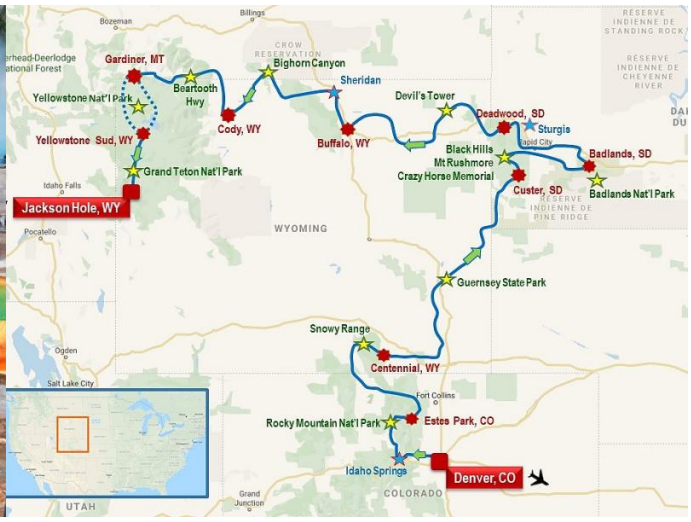
USA West

Tour : car

16 days • 15 nights • 3000 km

Rockies & Yellowstone





Starting from **Denver**, this “favorite” itinerary crosses northern **Colorado** and **Rocky Mountain National Park**, then the wide-open spaces of **Wyoming**, before the **Black Hills**—in **Sioux** territory—and the captivating **Badlands National Park**. Head to **Devil's Tower** and the **Bighorn Mountains**, then finally reach **Yellowstone** via stunning high-altitude roads on the edge of southern **Montana** and **Wyoming**. Breathtaking **landscapes** and rich **wildlife** ... The trip ends in **Jackson Hole**, at the gateway to **Grand Teton National Park**.



Day 1

Arrival at Denver airport, pick up your rental vehicle and drive to your downtown hotel.

Nicknamed the "Mile High City" due to its altitude (1,609m), Denver is a city we really like — the capital of Colorado. It's young and dynamic, born from the 19th-century gold rush. Between the historic LoDo district, Victorian homes and newer neighborhoods, it's a great mix.

Overnight in Denver.



Day 2

Stroll through the buzzing RiNo district with its former warehouses turned into restaurants, bars and trendy shops. Or explore Santa Fe, or Cherry Creek with its huge mall.

Depending on your travel dates, you might catch a Colorado Rockies baseball game at Coors Field, or a Nuggets game (NBA).

The surroundings of Denver are a paradise for hikers, mountain bikers, skiers and outdoor lovers, with the Rockies at your doorstep.

Head south of Denver to Roxborough Park with its red/orange sandstone formations, or to famous Red Rocks, a natural amphitheater hosting major artists. North of the city, Golden has a lovely museum dedicated to Colorado railroads.

Overnight in Denver.



Day 3

Leave Denver and head to the magnificent Rocky Mountain National Park.

After the charming town of Grand Lake on the lake of the same name, you enter the spectacular Trail Ridge Road, one of the most beautiful roads in the country.

Along the way, you'll enjoy breathtaking viewpoints and, early season, massive snowbanks, with a high point near 3,600m at Fall River Pass (road closed in winter). Rocky Mountain NP is unique due to its very high average elevation (Longs Peak reaches 4,341m). Jagged peaks, narrow canyons, glacial valleys and sparkling lakes make it a hiker's paradise.

Arrival in Estes Park, a small seasonal resort popular with Denver residents. Have a drink at the Stanley Hotel, where Stephen King wrote The Shining.

Overnight in Estes Park.



Day 4

Leave Estes Park toward Glen Haven via a lovely road that may remind you of Switzerland, then head through the Arapaho & Roosevelt forest and along Poudre Canyon Road, winding beside the turbulent Cache la Poudre River.

You pass the Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge with splendid views before reaching Walden. Enter Wyoming and drive to the west access of the beautiful Snowy Range Road (closed in winter). Expect great switchbacks and the crossing of Snowy Range Pass at 3,306m, facing impressive Sugarloaf Mountain. There's skiing in the area.

Descend to Centennial, a small town that has kept its 19th-century gold rush vibe, where only the main street is paved.

Overnight in Centennial, WY.

Optional: possibility of 2 nights in a ranch near Laramie (supplement). In that case, you must add one night to the trip (subject to availability).



Day 5

Drive toward Laramie, a university town, then continue to Guernsey State Park, a refreshing oasis perfect for a picnic by the water. A few miles away, Fort Laramie is a former U.S. Army outpost in Native territory.

Continue to South Dakota and the Black Hills, in Sioux territory. The region is full of gems, like Custer State Park, and the famous caves of Wind Cave National Park and Jewel Cave.

Overnight in Custer (possible to stay inside the park / supplement).



Day 6

Crossing Custer State Park, you'll likely encounter bison and mustangs. The park features beautiful roads with tight curves, rock tunnels and incredible viewpoints, including one that frames Mt Rushmore perfectly — you won't see it better!

The Black Hills, rising from the plains of Wyoming, are steeped in history. You are in the heart of the Sioux Lakota nation.

The discovery of gold in the late 19th century accelerated the collapse of relations between Native peoples (who refused to give up their land) and white settlers. The bloody military campaign led by the U.S. Army and Custer was the outcome.

You can visit the memorial dedicated to the famous chief Crazy Horse, whose profile is still being carved into the rock. This colossal project was launched in response to Mt Rushmore.

Overnight in Custer (possible to stay inside the park / supplement).



Day 7

The transition between the green Black Hills and the mineral Badlands is striking — it's not unusual to gain 20°C! You can also visit Mt Rushmore (free entry but paid parking required), a pilgrimage site for many Americans.

Once the green is behind you, stop in Scenic, a tiny nearly abandoned hamlet in Native territory.

Arrival in Badlands National Park in South Dakota. Eroded canyons, buttes, pinnacles and prairie create a huge kaleidoscope of bizarre

shapes.

Badlands exist in many places in the USA, but here you truly grasp the fragile beauty of these "bad lands" considered unsuitable for farming and ranching. It's one of our favorite parks, and one of the least visited.

Overnight at Cedar Pass Lodge (subject to availability).



Day 8

Stop in Wall, where everything revolves around the huge Drug Store. You'll find everything: restaurants, shops with belts, boots and all kinds of artifacts... A must.

After Rapid City and a small green road typical of the Black Hills, you reach Sturgis. The name evokes the famous annual motorcycle rally (nearly half a million bikers over about ten days in August). Outside that period, the town is calm. Don't miss the Sturgis Motorcycle Museum & Hall of Fame!

Arrival in Deadwood, listed as a historic district for its Victorian-style houses. The town boomed during the gold rush. Brothels and gambling saloons attracted legends like Calamity Jane (buried here) and Wild Bill Hickok, who was assassinated in town.

Overnight in Deadwood.



Day 9

After the beautiful scenic drive winding through Spearfish Canyon, pass through Spearfish, a pleasant Black Hills town.

Aladdin is a tiny Wyoming hamlet that once thrived thanks to coal mines and the railroad. Today about fifteen people live there... and there's an incredible General Store, a real Aladdin's cave, in business since 1896!

After the town of Hulett, arrive at Devils Tower National Monument, a monolith rising out of nowhere to 1,558m. The site is sacred to many tribes (Crow, Cheyenne, Lakota...), who still hold ceremonies here. You can walk around it respectfully. A beautiful place, where you'll meet your first prairie dogs.

Further west, Spotted Horse Bar is another very "roots" stop on the local Route 66. You then reach Buffalo, at the foot of the Bighorn Mountains.

Overnight in Buffalo (or Sheridan).



Day 10

After the magnificent road that hugs the peaks of the Bighorn Mountains, you descend toward impressive Bighorn Canyon, on the edge of Montana. The view over the Bighorn River below is breathtaking!

Head to Cody, the eastern gateway to Yellowstone. The town was founded by William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody.

You can visit the museum dedicated to him: the Buffalo Bill Center of the West. It also hosts 4 other museums: the excellent Plains Indians Museum, the Whitney Western Art Museum, the Draper Natural History Museum, and the Cody Firearms Museum. Cody calls itself the "Rodeo Capital of the World", and we recommend attending a show (daily in summer).

Overnight in Cody.

Optional: add one more night in Cody to visit the Buffalo Bill Center of the West (this extra night can replace the Badlands night if you can't add a night).



Day 11

After a break in the pleasant little town of Red Lodge, in Montana, head for the superb Beartooth Highway (subject to it being open when you pass / otherwise we will suggest an alternative).

It's one of the most beautiful roads in the country, with stunning views and a summit crossing at 3,335m, between giant snowbanks early in the season.

Enter Yellowstone from the northeast. The park is as large as Corsica — it takes time! After the Lamar Valley (where wolves were reintroduced in 1995), you reach Mammoth Hot Springs in the north of the park.

With its historic buildings (Fort Yellowstone was occupied by the U.S. Army in the late 19th century to protect the park), its beautiful terraces and elk herds, it is the park headquarters. Arrival in Gardiner.

Overnight in Gardiner (or Mammoth Hot Springs / supplement).



Day 12

What other park combines geysers, multicolored hot springs, a huge lake, waterfalls, a grand canyon, spectacular limestone terraces — all in an outstanding environment filled with incredibly diverse wildlife?

Yellowstone is undeniably one of the most beautiful parks in the world!

In the north, the splendid Mammoth terraces are laid out on two levels, revealed along a boardwalk route.

Head east to the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone and its impressive falls, with particularly strong flow early in the season. You can enjoy viewpoints from both rims.

Note there are many marked hiking trails for all levels...

Overnight in Gardiner (or Mammoth Hot Springs / supplement).



Day 13

Yellowstone has several distinct "areas": Tower/Falls, east of Mammoth, is known as a great wildlife spot, and it's common to see a black bear — or even a grizzly!

Norris, west of Mammoth, is home to many geysers and hot springs.

But it's the park's southwest sector, with its impressive geysers (Yellowstone contains about 70% of the world's geysers) and rainbow-colored hot springs, that draws the most visitors. Its two stars: the punctual Old Faithful and the ultra-photogenic Grand Prismatic Spring.

Allow a few hours to walk the network of boardwalks through the Upper Geyser Basin: it's magical!

Overnight at Lake Yellowstone, Grant Village, near Old Faithful (or in West Yellowstone).



Day 14

Head south to the beautiful Grand Teton National Park.

Different from its famous neighbor, it has a more "alpine" feel, with superb views of the Teton Range, especially at sunset from the meanders of the Snake River.

Along Teton Park Road, you'll have many hike options, all with great views over lakes, canyons and nearby peaks.

At Jenny Lake, you can take the boat to Inspiration Point and the lovely Hidden Falls. Return by boat or on foot. Arrival in Jackson Hole, an adorable but pricey mountain town with many nice shops and bars.

Overnight in Jackson Hole (possibility to stay on the hills above Jackson

with an amazing view over the Tetons, with a ranch for horseback riding: supplement).



Day 15

A full day to enjoy Grand Teton and the surrounding area. Jackson sits among excellent ski resorts. The town has many shops, galleries and antique stores... and even a cinema.

Scenic walks are plentiful. West side: along the beautiful Moose - Wilson Road and the resort of Teton Village. East side: toward the Gros Ventre River...

And to the north, the lakes: Jenny Lake is perfect for a drink at the lovely lodge or for a boat ride to the opposite shore, where several hikes start.

A bit further north, drive up to the viewpoint of Signal Mountain. Rafting is possible on the Snake River.

Overnight in Jackson Hole (option to stay above Jackson with a spectacular view over the Teton Range, with a ranch for horseback riding: supplement).



Day 16

Drive to Jackson airport and return your rental vehicle.

Return flight to Europe.

Optional: extension in Chicago (during the stopover)

Accommodation