



CENTRAL MONTANA

www.centralmontana.com · 800.527.5348



When it comes to Central Montana, the question is, how far back in time would you like to go? To 1960s kitsch at the Sip'n Dip in Great Falls, a tiki bar with live performing mermaids? To Rockwellian winters, schussing the time-honored slopes of Montana's oldest ski area? Or back to painter Charlie Russell's frontier West, viewed from the windows of a dinner train? Here, you'll experience Fort Benton's days as a fur-trading outpost; Lewis and Clark's 1805–06 Montana expedition; and Bear Paw Battlefield, where Chief Joseph resigned to "fight no more forever."

This land of sunny wheat fields, snowy plains and rolling mountains can take you back to a time before human civilization, too, like Choteau's Cretaceous days as a hip dinosaur hangout. Or go back farther still, to geologic time, when sandstone rock formations slowly emerged along the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River, and the entire Rocky Mountain Front lifted into existence.

While Central Montana is home to 21st-century trappings like one of Montana's largest wind farms, even everyday interactions here are tinged with a sort of old-fashioned charm. Chatting with the guy at the next ice fishing hole, swapping field notes with fellow birders and running into skinny-skiers on the trails, you'll find folks warmly welcoming and unpretentious, much like the hotels, cafes, saloons and museums. In such a laid-back, unbustling place, it's easy to feel like you have all the time in the world...maybe because you do.



Left: Hiking Mission Canyon, Fort Belknap Indian Reservation

Above: Snow geese migration at Freezout Lake

AT A GLANCE

- + *White Sulphur Springs* gets its name from the natural hot springs in the heart of town. Historically, the springs were used by multiple Indian nations who regarded the area as a "valley of peace" to be shared by all.
- + *Cornflower-blue Yogo sapphires* hail from Yogo Gulch in the Little Belt Mountains (between Great Falls and Lewistown) and are prized worldwide.
- + The town of *Ringling* is named for John T. Ringling, one of the original seven brothers of the Ringling Brothers Circus. He financed bringing the railroad to Ringling.
- + *Trek along the Montana Dinosaur Trail* to see the first baby dinosaur bones found in North America at the Two Medicine Dinosaur Center in Bynum, and unearth mysteries at the Old Trail Museum in Choteau.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

BEST TIME TO VISIT

With Central Montana's uncrowded nature, any time is the best time to visit. That said, many claim that early fall and late spring are the best times to experience outdoor treats like hearing the elk bugle or watching the migration of tens of thousands of snow geese.

Winter brings a wealth of activities, from skiing on downhill slopes and well-maintained cross-country ski trails to cruising on an extensive network of backcountry snowmobile trails, and let's not forget the popular sport of ice fishing.

WHAT TO PACK

While there are plenty of beautiful 90 degree summer days in this area of Montana, the dry air makes for cool evenings, nights and early mornings.

(If you have a windbreaker, bring it.) Comfortable, understated, well-worn practical fashion is the norm, and the layered look is always in.

HOW TO GET HERE

Driving, you'll arrive on I-15 or one of the smaller highways. Take time to enjoy spectacular scenery, rolling hills and abundant wildlife. You can also fly into Great Falls International Airport or ride Amtrak's Empire Builder passenger train across Montana's Hi-Line with stops in Havre and Shelby. Public transportation in the region is limited; renting a car is strongly advised.

PASSPORT/ PORT OF ENTRY

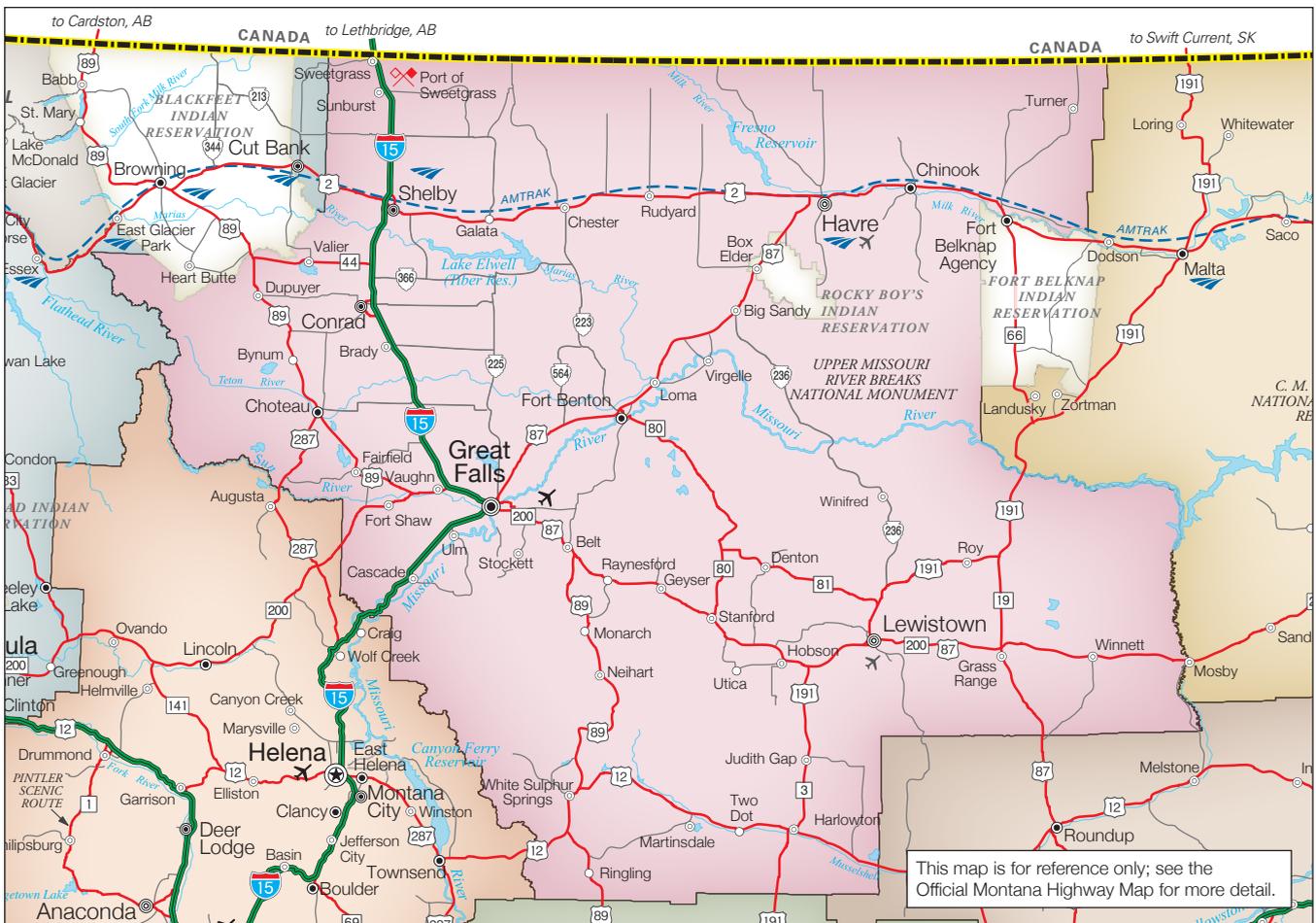
If you're entering the U.S. from Canada, you must report to the Customs and Immigration Services and present a passport. Sweetgrass has a 24-hour port of entry, and there are several smaller ports with limited hours. **406.335.9559**.

PHOTOGRAPHING TRIBAL CEREMONIES

Powwows and dances have deep religious significance and typically do not allow flash photography. Be sure to have permission before snapping photos at tribal ceremonies. For more information on proper etiquette while visiting the reservations and how to best enjoy your experience, contact tribal offices at visitmt.com/indiannations.

FOOD

Central Montana is cattle ranching country, and juicy burgers or steaks are menu favorites. Small-town cafes to gourmet restaurants offer the gamut from elegant to rustic. Save room for dessert via the new "pie trail." centralmontana.com/pietrail





Square Butte near Great Falls

PLACES TO GO

COMMUNITIES

CHOTEAU, located on Montana's Rocky Mountain Front, offers camping, swimming, shopping and golf right in town. Nearby activities include hiking, skiing, wildlife viewing, fishing, hunting and dinosaur digging. Choteau is surrounded by outstanding outdoor recreational opportunities in the Lewis and Clark National Forest and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. The community has several taverns and restaurants, gift stores, clothing boutiques and art galleries. Bynum Reservoir and Eureka Lake are favorite local ice fishing spots. Teton Pass Resort, located 35 miles west of Choteau, offers 25 downhill runs, while the Teton Pass area has cross-country and snowmobile trails.
406.466.5316
www.choteaumontana.us

FORT BENTON was one of the most important early trading posts built along the Missouri River. Steamboats brought supplies upriver this far, but because of rapids, could go no farther. Cargo was unloaded here and taken by freight wagons to the gold camps at Helena, Virginia City and other places in western Montana. Today, Fort Benton is recognized as a National Historic Landmark because of the importance it played as the head of navigation on the Missouri River. It's also the gateway for exploration of the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River and the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.
406.622.3864
www.fortbenton.com

GREAT FALLS is Montana's third-largest city, known as the "Electric City" due to its numerous hydroelectric dams built on the Missouri River. The city sits among four large falls that were both a magnificent spectacle and a formidable barrier to early river travel. Grand vistas can be found in every direction; Great Falls is surrounded by mountains and buttes on three sides, as well as vast plains to the north. Nearby, Showdown Montana ski area, Silver Crest Winter Recreation Area, and Kings Hill Recreation Area provide exciting terrain for winter activities.

800.735.8535
www.genuinemontana.com

HARLOWTON is a convenient stop at the junction of US 12 and 191. Of special interest are the E-57B Electric Train Park and a pioneer bronze sculpture entitled *And They Called the Land Montana*. The Upper Musselshell Museum includes a general store, Indian artifacts, pioneer home and *Avaceratops lammersi* dinosaur display. Chief Joseph Park, off US 12, features camping, scenic walkways, a fishing pond and playground. The Judith Gap Wind Energy Center is located 12 miles north of Harlowton on US 191.

406.632.4694
www.harlowtonchamber.com

HAVRE is situated close to the Canadian border amid the wide panorama of the open plains. With daily Amtrak passenger rail service, it offers modern city conveniences in a remote setting, surrounded by vast and uncluttered plains. In the Bears Paw Mountains to the south is Beaver Creek Park. This 10,000-acre park, one of the largest county parks in the U.S., features rolling grasslands, wooded groves, rocky cliffs and rushing

streams. There are excellent year-round fishing opportunities here and also west of Havre off US 2 at Fresno Reservoir. Beaver Creek Park's scenic beauty attracts snowmobilers and cross-country skiers as well. If you're looking for some "steep-n-deep" fun, try nearby Bear Paw Ski Bowl, just 29 miles south of town. The Rocky Boy's and Fort Belknap Indian Reservations are nearby.

406.265.4383
www.havremt.com

LEWISTOWN is an agricultural community located at the geographic center of Montana. Although mostly rolling prairie, farms and ranches, the Lewistown area features two beautiful mountain ranges, the Snowy and Judith Mountains, where grand 100-mile vistas stretch out in all directions. Four different lakes around Lewistown offer ample year-round fishing spots. Try the Big Snowy Mountains near Crystal Lake south of town for great snowmobiling and the Green Pole and Rock Creek areas for excellent cross-country trails.

406.535.5436
www.lewistownchamber.com

SHELBY is 35 miles south of the Canadian border at the junction of US 2 and I-15. In the 1890s, Shelby was a trade center supplying cowboys and sheepherders. In 1921, oil was discovered north of town, and, for a while, the town grew by leaps and bounds. While in Shelby, visit the Marias Museum of History and Art for a look at the area's history, homesteading, a dinosaur collection and more. Marias Valley Golf Course and Williamson Park Campground offer outdoor recreation and camping. Deer, antelope, elk, foxes, golden eagles, grouse



The White Cliffs along the Missouri River

and the unique “sweet grass” can be seen in the nearby Sweet Grass Hills. North of town, Lake Shel-oolle offers outdoor recreation and camping, and south of town is the Marias River, named after Meriwether Lewis’s cousin.

406.434.7184

www.shelbymtchamber.org

WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS was named because of the white deposits around the hot springs that were discovered here. Located near the Smith River—a premier scenic and fishing area—camping, hiking and hunting opportunities are found here in abundance. The Showdown Montana ski area is just 30 miles north. After a day of fun, take a soak in the natural mineral pools at Spa Hot Springs.

406.547.2250

www.whitesulphurspringsmt.com

NOTABLE SITES

BEAR PAW BATTLEFIELD Just 16 miles south of Chinook, visitors can see the site of the last major Indian battle in the U.S. The Nez Perce Indians surrendered to the U.S. Army on October 5, 1877, after a 1,300-mile retreat. It was here that Chief Joseph spoke his famous words, “From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever.” The Blaine County Museum in Chinook offers a unique multimedia presentation, “40 Miles from Freedom,” that describes the battle. Open all year.

406.357.3130

www.nps.gov/nepe

C.M. RUSSELL MUSEUM COMPLEX

Take a look at the art and soul of the real West at this amazing Great Falls museum featuring Charlie Russell’s works in all types of media, personal items and artifacts. The museum also has outstanding pieces from his contemporaries. The complex includes Russell’s original log studio and his home. Open all year.

406.727.8787

www.cmrossell.org

FORT BELKNAP INDIAN RESERVATION

is the fourth-largest Indian reservation in Montana, encompassing 675,147 acres of rolling plains. It is the homeland of the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine tribes. They were traditionally known by their native name of A’aninin, which means “the White Clay People”; the largest tribe is now called Gros Ventre. Points of interest include Fort Belknap Community College, Fort Belknap Tourism Office and Information Center, Mission Canyon/Natural Bridge and St. Paul’s Mission Church.

406.353.2463

www.discoverfortbelknap.com

FREEZOUT LAKE WILDLIFE

MANAGEMENT AREA is an excellent wildlife viewing area for migratory birds. As many as 300,000 snow geese and 10,000 tundra swans gather and rest here on their spring and fall journeys. Year-round opportunities for viewing wildlife are available and include upland game birds and raptors in winter, waterfowl migrations

in spring and fall, and waterfowl and shorebirds in summer. Located west of Great Falls. Open all year.

406.467.2646

www.visitmt.com/freezeoutwma

PINE BUTTE SWAMP PRESERVE,

located west of Choteau, is the largest wetlands area along the Rocky Mountain Front. Noted for its diverse geography, from mountains to foothills and prairie, this huge wildlife preserve is home to more than 150 species of birds and 43 species of mammals. The preserve is managed by The Nature Conservancy, which also operates Pine Butte Guest Ranch, next to the preserve.

406.443.5526

www.nature.org/montana

ROCKY BOY’S INDIAN RESERVATION,

30 miles south of Havre, is home to the Chippewa Cree tribe and features many attractions, such as their annual August powwow and rodeo, annual Christmas powwow, Bear Paw Ski Bowl and Square Butte Trading Post for authentic arts and crafts.

406.395.5705

www.chippewacree.org

UPPER MISSOURI RIVER BREAKS NATIONAL MONUMENT

includes an ecosystem that parallels the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River through north-central Montana. Much of the land in this area (375,000 acres) is public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management. In the center of this

monument is the 149-mile-long Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River. The Upper Missouri begins at historic Fort Benton on US 87 and ends 149 miles east where the Fred Robinson Bridge on US 191 crosses the Missouri River. This remote location retains unspoiled, natural settings that form a backdrop for outstanding recreational and cultural opportunities. An interpretive center for the area is located in Fort Benton. Open all year.
 406.538.1900 or 406.622.4000
www.visitmt.com/missouribreaks

THINGS TO DO

EVENTS

For exact dates and a complete listing of all events go to visitmt.com/events.

MONTANA PRCA PRO RODEO CIRCUIT FINALS – GREAT FALLS, JANUARY Held at the Montana ExpoPark in Great Falls, over 96 of Montana’s best pro rodeo contestants travel to Great Falls to pit their wit and ability against the skill and heart of Montana’s finest PRCA rodeo stock. Festivities include an auction Thursday before the rodeo and Saturday afternoon. The Miss Rodeo Montana coronation is on Sunday.
 406.727.8900

THE RUSSELL: AN EXHIBITION AND SALE TO BENEFIT THE C.M. RUSSELL MUSEUM – GREAT FALLS, MARCH
 The Wall Art Sale, Art in Action and live

auction are highlights of this three-day event to benefit the C.M. Russell Museum. Works from living legends and deceased artists make up this spectacular Western art show.
 406.727.8787

ICE BREAKER ROAD RACE – GREAT FALLS, APRIL This race has been named one of the top 100 road races in the country by *Runner’s World* magazine. Averaging over 3,500 participants, it is not only a fitness and competitive event, but also a social event for the community.
 406.771.1265

MANNEQUIN JUMPING – NEIHART, APRIL Come check out Showdown Montana’s Mannequin Jump, the strangest ski jumping contest on the planet. Contestants build their own skiing mannequin jumpers and send them off the giant mannequin jump. The rest of us just watch and laugh.
 800.433.0022

ANNUAL LEWIS AND CLARK FESTIVAL – GREAT FALLS, JUNE
 This weekend of rediscovery is your opportunity to experience the incredible journey of Lewis and Clark. Included are reenactors in historical dress, demonstrations, tours of Lewis and Clark sites, children’s activities, exhibits, float trips, a relay race, concert and more.
 406.452.5661

HUTTERITE COMMUNITIES

Follow the hand-painted “Fresh Vegetable” signs to locally grown products and a glance into utopian colony culture.



Farmers market in Great Falls

- + *There are about 4,000 Hutterites living in roughly 40 self-sufficient colonies in Montana.*
- + *Hutterites follow the teachings of Jakob Hutter, a 16th-century Reformation Christian, and live in tiny agricultural colonies where hard work and modern farm methods are embraced.*
- + *The colonies produce and sell high-quality furniture, vegetables, soaps, clothes, preserves, eggs, pork, milk and butter. Most eggs in Montana come from chickens raised on Hutterite colonies.*
- + *Often a small hand-painted sign for fresh vegetables on the side of the road is your only signal to turn into a Hutterite colony.*
- + *In the colonies, you’ll find a lot of “quaint”—meticulously weeded gardens and tidy simple dwellings. Married men wear beards, while women wear modest (if sometimes bright) dresses and head coverings.*



Wylie and the Wild West performing at the Red Ants Pants Music Festival, White Sulphur Springs

THE OLD FORTS TRAIL

Once upon a frontier time, all roads led to Fort Benton (the "birthplace" of Montana); Fort Assiniboine served as Montana's biggest military outpost; and trappers, traders, bootleggers and American Indians traversed between both, along with the forts of the Canadian West.



Now, the original forts are mostly gone, but their replicas and the well-worn paths between them tell the tales of their important pasts. Following the Old Forts Trail, travelers experience the museums and artifacts of Forts Benton and Assiniboine in Montana, Forts Walsh, Battleford and Wood Mountain Post in Saskatchewan and Forts Whoop-up, MacLeod and Calgary in Alberta.

The journey along this international trail follows foothills and prairie routes trodden more than a century ago, retracing the flow of goods and people that helped lay the groundwork for the modern West.

www.oldfortstrail.com



Lewis and Clark Memorial in Fort Benton

FORT BENTON SUMMER CELEBRATION – FORT BENTON, JUNE Montana's "birthplace" community celebrates summer with a parade, arts and crafts on the levee, Missouri River Traders Market, historical tours, free entertainment, street dance, fishing derby and fireworks display on the levee. Also included is a fun walk and run. **406.622.2013 or 406.750.2918**

WHOOOP-UP DAYS AND RHUBARB FESTIVAL – CONRAD, JUNE The Annual Whoop-Up Trail Days and Rhubarb Festival features a kids' carnival, Rodeo Calcutta, pancake breakfast, parade, fun run and lots of delicious treats. **406.271.7791**

C.M. RUSSELL STAMPEDE, BBQ, QUICK DRAW AND RODEO – STANFORD, JULY Two days of western family entertainment comes from the heart of Central Montana at the Judith Basin County Fairgrounds in Stanford. On Saturday afternoon, enjoy the sounds of a jam session featuring local and regional music talent. A barbeque begins at 5 p.m. Quick draw action (featuring well-known artists) and then an auction of the art follows. The evening is capped off with a Calcutta auction for the Wild Cow milking teams. On Sunday, great PRCA rodeo action begins at 1:30 p.m. The Wild Cow milking contest is at the intermission of the rodeo. **406.566.2422**

MILK RIVER INDIAN DAYS – FORT BELKNAP, JULY Milk River Indian Days highlights spirited and colorfully clad dancers. A powwow features Native American dancers and drummers combining culture, dance and music for a spectacular display. **406.353.2452**

MONTANA STATE FAIR – GREAT FALLS, JULY Experience Montana's culture and history in the heart of Montana—Great Falls. Superstar entertainment, the Mighty Thomas Carnival, five nights of pro rodeo, 40 food vendors, livestock shows, stage acts, quilts, floral and cooking exhibits and more! **406.727.8900**

RED ANTS PANTS MUSIC FESTIVAL – WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS, JULY Connect with good folks and dance your pants off! It's time to celebrate the hard-working side of Montana. The festival

offers a main stage, kids area, food and beer vendors, craft vendors and agricultural demonstrations. Camping is available. **406.547.3781**

ANNUAL MONTANA COWBOY POETRY GATHERING AND WESTERN MUSIC RENDEZVOUS – LEWISTOWN, AUGUST This four-day cultural event gives visitors the opportunity to experience a visual and oral history of the West and Central Montana. With hourly poetry readings and music sessions, this gathering is the second-oldest cowboy poetry gathering in the country. **406.538.4575**

ROCKY BOY'S ANNUAL POWWOW – BOX ELDER, AUGUST The powwow is an event of Indian heritage and tradition. Dance, regalia and drumming competitions are the featured events. Competitions last throughout the weekend with all ages participating. Exciting, excellent cultural demonstrations as well as ethnic and traditional food are offered. **406.395.4478**

HAVRE FESTIVAL DAYS – HAVRE, SEPTEMBER The Festival Days weekend opens with a 48-hour softball tournament. Saturday highlights include a community parade, craft and commercial show, local organizational events and activities. On Sunday participate in a fun run/walk for all ages or watch the annual soap box derby. **406.265.4383**

MONTANA BALE TRAIL – UTICA, SEPTEMBER This event, formerly called "What the Hay," started out as a good-natured spoof between two neighboring ranchers. Now a nationally recognized celebration, you can see more than 50 hay bale sculptures in fields between Hobson and Windham. **406.423.5453**

CULTURE/HISTORY

BAIR FAMILY MUSEUM Charles M. Bair came to Montana in 1883 as a conductor on the Northern Pacific Railroad and went into the ranching business in 1891. He made his fortune in the Alaska gold rush and went on to invest in mining, oil and real estate. Many of the antiques and works of art were purchased on his daughters' frequent trips to Europe. A trip to the Bair home allows you to step into the life of one of Montana's most

prosperous families. Located near Martinsdale. Open daily Memorial Day through Labor Day. Limited off-season hours. 406.572.3314
www.bairfamilymuseum.org

CASTLE MUSEUM “The Castle,” in White Sulphur Springs, is an imposing mansion built in 1892 by Bryon Roger Sherman, which is now the home of the Meagher County Museum. The Victorian landmark is made of hand-cut granite blocks hauled by oxen from the nearby Castle Mountains. The museum is complete with period furniture, mineral samples, clothing and artifacts from the region’s past. Open May 15 through September 15.
 406.547.2324
www.visitmt.com/castlemuseum

LEWIS AND CLARK NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL INTERPRETIVE CENTER This spectacular center in Great Falls features interactive exhibits that give you the opportunity to test your strength against canoe-carrying explorers, hear the languages used during the sometimes complicated translations between the explorers and Native Americans and much more. Open all year.
 406.727.8733
www.visitmt.com/lewisclark

TWO MEDICINE DINOSAUR CENTER See the world’s largest full-size skeletal model of a *Seismosaurus halli* (earth-shaker lizard), a Guinness Book of World Records listing. Also featured are the first baby dinosaur bones found in North America. The center is famous for its public hands-on dinosaur research and education programs designed to allow participants to work beside actual research professionals and staff. All programs require advance registration. In Bynum. Open May through September.
 406.469.2211
www.tmdinosaur.org

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

BUFFALO JUMP ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE in Havre is one of the best-preserved buffalo jumps and campsites in the plains area. On your tour you’ll view extensive in-place bison kill and campsite deposits excavated at various depths up to 20 feet below the surface. A one-hour guided walking tour is available all year, weather permitting.
 406.265.6417

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING AND SNOWSHOEING You’ll find well-maintained cross-country ski trails in



Giant Springs State Park near Great Falls

Central Montana. Silver Crest Ski Trail in the Kings Hill Winter Recreation Area near Neihart grooms over 19 km of trails for cross-country enthusiasts or snowshoers. Snowshoe rentals and naturalist-escorted snowshoe tours are available at Showdown Montana near the Kings Hill area. Teton Pass near Choteau also has trails for both activities. Beaver Creek Park near Havre, and Green Pole and Rock Creek southwest of Lewistown offer excellent cross-country trails.
www.wintermt.com/xcski

CRYSTAL LAKE This beautiful lake is located south of Lewistown in the Big Snowy Mountains. A campground sits in a thick stand of spruce on the lake with 28 campsites that are large, secluded and widely spaced. The lake is well suited for canoeing or floating. The area also has a large network of hiking and snowmobile trails.
 406.566.2292
www.visitmt.com/crystallake

DOWNHILL SKIING/SNOWBOARDING If you’re a skier or a boarder, you’ll be able to hit the slopes at three areas in Central Montana: Showdown Montana southeast of Great Falls, Teton Pass Resort west of Choteau and Bear Paw Ski Bowl near Havre. These areas are smaller, mom-and-pop hills, but they offer everything you need to have some great runs and a great time. Eagle Mount, in conjunction with Showdown Montana, 406.454.1449 or eaglemount.net, offers people with disabilities an adaptive ski program.
www.skimt.com

FIRST PEOPLES BUFFALO JUMP STATE PARK See for yourself how Native Americans hunted for bison at this prehistoric bison kill site, just south

of Great Falls. For more than 600 years, Indians stampeded buffalo over the mile-long cliff. Today, the top of the jump gives you panoramic views of the Rocky Mountain Front and the Missouri River valley as well as the buttes and grasslands that characterize this Great Plains setting. The visitor center is open all year.
 406.866.2217
stateparks.mt.gov

FISHING Central Montana has some fantastic fishing. Experience fly fishing in peaceful streams and rivers or cast a line in one of the area’s beautiful lakes. Some of the local favorites are the blue-ribbon stretch of the Missouri River between Craig and Great Falls, Bynum Reservoir (Choteau), Arod Lake (Conrad), Beaver Creek Park or Fresno Reservoir (Havre), Ackley Lake, Carter’s Pond, Hanson Creek Dam, East Fork Dam (Lewistown), Martinsdale Reservoir and Bair Reservoir (Martinsdale), Lake Elwell (Shelby/Chester) and Lake Frances (Valier).

GIANT SPRINGS STATE PARK Noted by the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805, Giant Springs is one of the largest freshwater springs in the world and flows at a rate of 156 million gallons per day. This is also the site of the Roe River, once listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world’s shortest river. Visit the adjacent fish hatchery, walk along the River’s Edge Trail or visit the nearby Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center. All of these attractions are located along a three-mile section of Giant Springs Road recently designated as a Montana State Scenic Byway. Open all year.
 406.454.5840
stateparks.mt.gov



Showdown Montana

ICE BOATING is a sport where a boat, similar to a sailboat, is fitted with skis or runners (skates) designed to run over ice. Watch this winter sport at Freezout Lake near Fairfield, Lake Frances near Valier or Priest Butte Lake near Choteau.

MOTORCYCLE TOURS Central Montana offers some great motorcycle rides. If you want to follow history on your ride, try the Lewis and Clark, C.M. Russell, Last Battle or Cowboy routes. Some amazing geography and scenery can be seen on the Plains to Peaks, Centermark, Mountains to Wind Towers and Scenic Byway routes. If you just want to ride, check out the Big Loop and Figure 8 routes. All can be found at centralmontana.com/motorcycle_rides.

RANCH VACATIONS How about vacationing in a world that feels light years away from your day-to-day routine? Let your current life disappear for a spell as you live out the Montana ranch vacation experience. The best thing about a ranch vacation is you only need to bring yourself. All-inclusive vacations include meals, lodging and activities with a personalized touch. You'll be taken care of from morning to night.
www.visitmt.com/ranch

RIVER'S EDGE TRAIL Extending over 40 miles along the beautiful Missouri River in Great Falls, this trail offers spectacular views of Black Eagle Falls, Rainbow Falls, Crooked Falls and the Great Falls of the Missouri. The paved, wheelchair-accessible urban portions of the trail link many riverfront parks, boat launches, a waterslide

park, a skateboard park and native open spaces on both sides of the river. Open year-round during daylight hours.
406.788.3313
www.thetrail.org

SMITH RIVER STATE PARK Permits are required to float this 59-mile stretch of the Smith River from Camp Baker (put-in) to Eden Bridge (take-out). This popular section of the river is noted for its scenery and red-ribbon trout fishery. On average, floaters take four days for the float. A minimum of two nights and three full days should be planned for normal water levels. From June 10 through July 10, floaters are restricted to a four-night maximum stay on the river once they launch. Floating the Smith requires careful planning, preparation and, of course, as mentioned already, a permit. Northwest of White Sulphur Springs.
406.454.5840
stateparks.mt.gov

SNOWMOBILING Kings Hill Winter Recreation Area is one of Montana's most popular sports areas with trailheads to more than 200 miles of groomed snowmobile trails. Other areas offering great trails are near the town of Belt, the South Fork Waldron northwest of Choteau, Teton Pass area west of Choteau, Beaver Creek Park near Havre, the Big Snowy Mountains near Lewistown and the Little Belt Trail southwest of Utica.
www.wintermt.com/snowmobiling

TIBER DAM-LAKE ELWELL Just east of Shelby is the Tiber Reservoir area. The lake provides excellent year-round

angling for walleye, northern pike, sauger, native trout, ling, perch and others. For boaters and swimmers the area boasts over 178 miles of shoreline, a marina and five well-maintained boat ramps located strategically around the lake. There are also numerous campground areas. Open all year.
406.456.3226
www.visitmt.com/tiberdam

SCENIC & WILDLIFE

BENTON LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE covers 12,383 acres on the western edge of the Great Plains, near Great Falls. The refuge supports a great variety of waterbirds with both nesting and migration habitat. Up to 100,000 ducks, 40,000 geese, 5,000 tundra swans, bald eagles and peregrines may be observed in migration. A nine-mile tour route is open to the public for wildlife observation. The refuge is open all year.
406.727.7400
www.fws.gov/refuge/benton_lake

CHARLIE RUSSELL CHEW CHOO Experience a spectacular evening as you travel by train through the mountains and prairies of central Montana. This three-and-a-half-hour dinner train travels through rolling hills, ranch lands, a half-mile tunnel and over two trestles and offers excellent wildlife viewing opportunities as well. The journey begins 20 miles northwest of Lewistown. Around Christmas, the dinner train is transformed into the North Pole Adventure, which is a holiday journey for families, complete with elves serving hot cocoa and cookies.
406.535.5436
www.montanadinnertrain.com

C.M. RUSSELL AUTO TOUR This auto tour uses Charlie Russell's art to open a window to the Judith Basin area and its history. The basin truly fits the classic Montana description of high, wide and handsome. The auto tour is designated as the "Charles M. Russell Trail" and lies between Great Falls and Lewistown on US 87. Make sure to visit the C.M. Russell Museum located in Great Falls and the charming museums located in Stanford, Utica and Hobson. Open all year.
800.527.5348
www.visitmt.com/russellauto

KINGS HILL SCENIC BYWAY Start at White Sulphur Springs and follow US 89 north to its intersection with US 87. Gravel roads intersecting the scenic highway

lead to backcountry trailheads, lakes, abandoned mines and other interesting sites to explore.

800.527.5348

MISSOURI BREAKS NATIONAL BACKCOUNTRY BYWAY

There's plenty to see and do on this 81-mile stretch of road east of Winifred. Take the Lewis & Clark and Nez Perce National Historic Trails or a side trip to the free McClelland Ferry across the Missouri River that runs April through October. Byway is open all year.

406.538.1900

MONTANA DINOSAUR TRAIL Enjoy six stops of the Montana Dinosaur Trail while in Central Montana. Choteau and Bynum (US 89), Rudyard, Havre and Chinook (US 12) and Harlowton (junction of US 191 and US 12) offer significant paleontology displays, and some have "hands-on" field digs. Open all year.

www.mtdinotrail.org

MONTANA SCENIC LOOP This route covers nearly 400 miles of spectacular landscapes and offers travelers the opportunity to see one of the most intact mountainous ecosystems in the U.S. The route encompasses the Flathead, Lolo, Helena and Lewis and Clark National Forests and circles the largest expanse of wilderness in the lower 48 states. Glacier National Park borders the northern section of the loop, and travelers can drive along the west and east slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Recreation opportunities are unparalleled along this route, and there are many small towns offering a variety of services. Open all year.

SUN RIVER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

The Sun River is one of Montana's most beautiful and scenic rivers. Beginning in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, the river flows southeast to Great Falls where it meets the Missouri River. Not only will you see abundant wildlife, but you'll also enjoy great fishing for trout and mountain whitefish as well as excellent boating on Gibson Reservoir. Open May 15 through November 30.

406.454.5840

www.visitmt.com/sunriverwma

FOR THE BIRDS

Montana is full of bird brains—in fact, we have more bird watchers per capita than any other state. With its steep Rocky Mountain Front and miles of unbroken prairie, Central Montana provides ample habitat for hawks, geese, falcons, owls, sandpipers and other feathered fowl. While the chance to glimpse so many birds in one place is in itself remarkable, Montana's heartland also gives birders the chance to scratch a few "bucket-list birds" off their list. The calliope hummingbird, great grey owl, Clark's nutcracker and many other rarely glimpsed birds occasionally make one of their infrequent appearances here.



Dueling sandhill cranes

While birds can be spotted year-round, spring brings two treats for avian enthusiasts: the massive migrations of snow geese from Freezout Lake Wildlife Management Area, and the colorful courtship dances of the sharp-tailed grouse at Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

In reality, almost all of Central Montana serves as a birder's paradise, but we've marked a few likely hot spots just to get you started.

For more information visit centralmontana.com/birding.

