

The Great Outdoors:

A visitor's guide to Yellowstone National Park

What to bring:

Depending on the type of trip you have planned, this list can vary greatly. I've made mine with the day hiker in mind, but the more serious backpacker should plan accordingly.

- 1. Camera**
- 2. map of the park**
- 3. trail maps, small backpack**
- 4. more water, protein bars**
- 5. walking stick**
- 6. worn-in boots**
- 7. raincoat (the weather changes fast)**

When to go:

The majority of the park is closed from September to May. Mammoth and the Inn at Old Faithful are open year-round, but are often only accessible by snowmobile or cross-country skis.

There is no bad time to visit from June to August, but the crowds tend to hit their peak around July 4, so plan accordingly. In my experience, if you wait until the public schools are in session for the fall, you can get lower rates at local accommodations, avoid the biggest crowds, and enjoy a nice temperatures.

What not to bring:

Anything you don't want to pack out.

What no one else tells you :

The park is large, 3,468 square miles. So seeing it all involves a lot of driving. Staying inside the park is a good way to cut an hour or two off your daily driving, but reservations must be made more than a year in advance.

There are gas stations in the park, at Norris and Canyon, but those stations can be several hours from the corners of the park. Fill up before you come in.

The hot springs are a popular destination, but be aware that outside the park (where you're more likely to be able to get in) the springs are often accessed by public swimming pools kept warm year-round.

There are cell phone towers in parts of the park and you should get access at Tower Falls and Norris. It's hard to believe that you can connect to the outside world inside the park when much of the area outside the park has no service, but it's true.

Where the wildlife is:

Information on where and what time of day animals typically show up can be found at one of the Welcome Centers. When you're driving, keep an eye out for other people who are pulled off the road and seem to be looking at something.

This is common throughout the park and accepted practice as long as you can pull off the road (not stop in it) and remain aware of animal safety.

Always keep at least 300-feet between yourself and a Grizzly bear. Other animals, such as Bison, which look docile, maim overly eager tourists each year. The signs warning you of this with an illustration may be a little disconcerting, but you're in the wilderness, not on a ride in Disneyland.

What else to see:

Old Faithful is not the only hydrothermal feature in the park. It's not even the best one. Hiking to a geyser like Imperial will give you a much better feel for seeing the phenomenon in its natural setting (and without 400 other tourists).

The Artists' Paint Pots and Devil's Mouth are not to be missed. Grad Prismatic Spring is amazing, particularly if you're willing to scale a 400-foot hill for the best view.

The Inn at Old Faithful is pretty amazing because it holds so much of the park's history. Hayden Valley will take you back in time. You can see herds of buffalo roam here as they have for hundreds of years.



What not to do:

1. Do not spend all your time driving. Set a destination. Go there and get outside. If you only have a few days you'll be able to see a lot from the road, but resist the temptation to think that driving equals experiencing.
2. Do not miss the side routes, which are usually one-way for 5 to 7 miles and take you through lesser-traveled areas.
3. Do not wear flip flops on the trails. I know it sounds ridiculous, but a shocking number of people are completely unprepared for day hikes. Preparation is particularly important for people traveling with children. Some gravel trails can handle a stroller. Ask at the welcome centers.
4. Do not bring your pets. Yes, dogs are allowed in parts of Yellowstone, but these parts are

few and far between. It's so sad to see all these wild animals next to dogs locked inside of cars on hot days.

