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# Naturally Spectacular: Glacier National Park

by Roddy Scheer

Glacier National Park, with its serrated peaks, alpine meadows, turquoise lakes, abundant wildlife and rich human history, dominates the Northern Rockies region known as the Crown of the Continent. Created in 1910 under President Taft as the nation's 10th national park, Glacier was named after the 150 glaciers that existed there—each larger than 25 acres. Today, only 25 glaciers remain within the park's boundaries.

Sun Point in Glacier National Park



Many Glacier Hotel

There's never been a better time to head for Glacier National Park. While fully exploring this million-acre expanse of Northern Rockies would take a lifetime—it's the fifth largest national park in the Lower 48—you can grasp the scale of its grandeur in just a few days.

## Going-to-the-Sun Road

The main draw at Glacier National Park is the 50-mile Going-to-the-Sun Road, typically accessible from mid-June to mid-October. This thrilling two-lane road cuts through the heart of the park, crossing the Continental Divide at Logan Pass (elevation 6,646 feet). Completed in 1933 after 12 years of construction, it's a marvel of engineering, ingenuity and persistence. Workers carved miles out of a precipitous granite mountainside, where today roughly two million people each year visit some of the most spectacular scenery in the world.

Highlights along the route include viewing waterfalls and mountain goats at Oberlin Bend, drinking hot chocolate at the chalet-style Lake McDonald Lodge, taking a short hike on the old-growth Trail of the Cedars loop, and, perhaps most importantly, throwing snowballs in summer at

Logan Pass, the highest point accessible by car in the park.

At Logan Pass, "purple mountain majesty" is on display in every direction. The architecturally striking Logan Pass Visitor Center offers a big warm fireplace and interpretive exhibits with rangers on hand to answer questions and provide advice on exploring the high country. Hikers can pick up the 11.4-mile Highline Trail there, a loop that can be completed in a long day.

## Many Glacier

While traveling Going-to-the-Sun Road is a must, other sections of the park also yield amazing scenery with much smaller crowds. The Many Glacier area in the northeast section of the park is home to the historic Many Glacier Hotel, an oasis of civilization tucked alongside the evergreen-lined shores of turquoise Swiftcurrent Lake. From the hotel's wrap-around deck, the 180-degree view of Swiftcurrent Lake, surrounded by imposing mountains and glistening glaciers, is otherworldly.

Head for the dock behind the hotel and hop aboard the Glacier Boat Company's historic lake cruiser, Chief Two Guns, to cross Swiftcurrent Lake. You'll walk a quarter-mile and board

another boat, Morning Eagle, for a second ride across Lake Josephine (see [glacierparkboats.com](http://glacierparkboats.com) for details). From there you can either return via the boats or join a ranger for a group day hike up to Grinnell Lake or even farther to Grinnell Glacier before catching a later boat back.

## Two Medicine

At Two Medicine, you can visit Running Eagle Falls, which drops forty feet in two passes and thunders throughout the canyon it has created. The falls, named after a female Blackfoot Indian warrior who had a vision quest there, according to native mythology, is accessible via an easy wheelchair-friendly path from the parking lot. A ride on the Sinopah, the oldest and first boat in the Glacier Boat Company's fleet, is a great way to take in the grandeur of Two Medicine Lake and marvel at the imposing profile of glacier-clad Sinopah Mountain (elevation 8,271 feet).

## North Fork and Goat Haunt

If an experience deeper in the backcountry is more your style, take time to visit the North Fork area in the park's northwest corner. Accessible only on rough dirt roads (4WD

recommended), the North Fork is a living laboratory of forest succession given a spate of fires that have ravaged the area over the last two decades.

Even more remote is Goat Haunt, which most visitors access via boat from Waterton Lakes National Park, adjacent to Glacier in Canada. The two national parks function as one huge protected expanse from an ecological perspective. Although the parks were established separately and are still independently managed, the U.S. Congress and Canadian Parliament officially “joined” them in 1932 as the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. During summer season, rangers from both parks guide the 8.5-mile International Peace Park hike along the western shore of Waterton Lake in Canada, across the border and into Goat Haunt, with a return trip by boat aboard the International, another historic wooden lake cruiser (bring your passport).

Long recognized as one of the continent’s most spectacular natural destinations, Glacier National Park

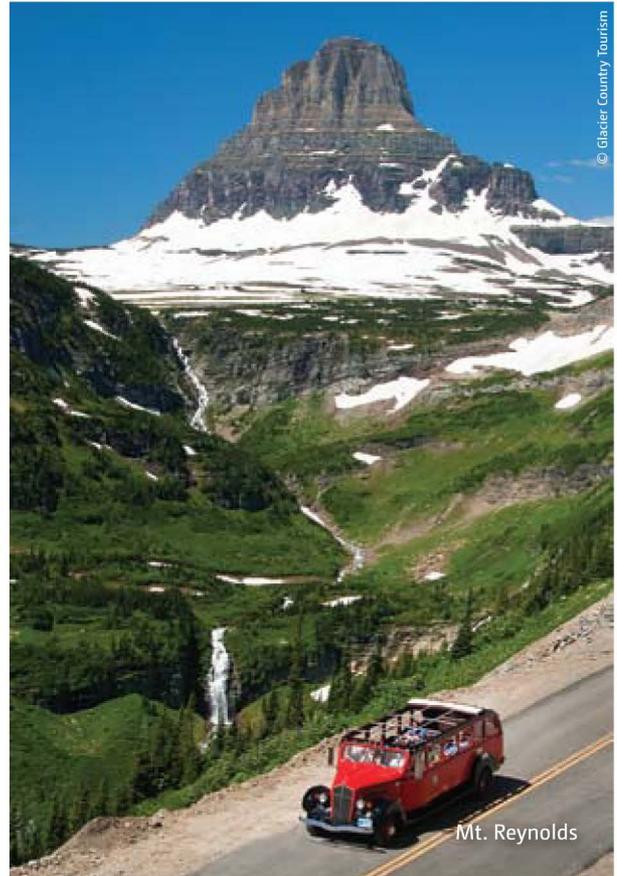
never fails to inspire those who seek it out. There’s no time like the present to plan a visit.

### Glacier’s Changing Ecosystems

According to the U.S. Geologic Survey, the eventual loss of glaciers in Glacier National Park will impact not only the “landscape aesthetics valued by park visitors” but also the park’s ecosystems. Disrupted melt-out patterns and water flows as well as increased surface temperatures will lead to more and wider ranging forest fires, insect infestations and ultimately species extinctions. Researchers predict that Glacier National Park will eventually be devoid of many of the features and species that make visiting the Crown of the Continent such a rich experience today.

### Planning Your Visit

**Getting there:** Glacier National Park is at least a nine- to 10-hour drive from Seattle, Portland or Boise, so many visitors leave the car at home. You can fly into Glacier Park International Airport (25 miles west of the park, [ifbyglacier.com](http://ifbyglacier.com)) and rent a car from there. Or you can take Amtrak ([amtrak.com](http://amtrak.com)), a direct route from both Seattle and Portland, and get off at the West Glacier or East Glacier depot inside the park.



Mt. Reynolds

**Getting around:** Once inside the park, use the free shuttle system, which whisks people both ways across the Going-to-the-Sun Road, with stops at 15 major points of interest. Shuttle

buses run every 30 to 60 minutes from July 1 to September 2. You may have to wait for more than one shuttle ([nps.gov/glac/planyourvisit/shuttles.htm](http://nps.gov/glac/planyourvisit/shuttles.htm)). You can also indulge in a tour on one of the park’s historic Red Buses, restored classic

“...as one of the continent’s most spectacular natural destinations, Glacier National Park never fails to inspire those who seek it out.”

touring motor coaches that run on gasoline or cleaner-burning propane with four rows of passenger seats and retractable canvas roofs. The Red Bus tours travel the Going-to-the-Sun Road and other parts of the park ([glacierparkinc.com/tour\\_detail.php](http://glacierparkinc.com/tour_detail.php)).



Sinopah tour boat

## Naturally Spectacular: Glacier National Park

**Lodging:** Glacier Park Lodge in East Glacier is the most famous of the park's chalet-style hotels and is celebrating its 100th birthday throughout 2013. Built around a three-story lobby lined with 40-foot-tall old-growth Douglas fir columns with the bark still on them, the lodge is a rustic architecture lover's dream. Even more picturesque are Lake McDonald Lodge and the Many Glacier Hotel, each perched on the shores of turquoise lakes and surrounded by peaks within the heart of Glacier National Park. Other options are The Village Inn at Apgar, Rising Sun Motor Inn and Swiftcurrent Motor Inn. Rooms fill up early, so make reservations through Glacier Park, Inc. ([glacierparkinc.com](http://glacierparkinc.com), 406-892-2525).

**Camping:** Glacier offers campsites



Hiking in Glacier Park

for RVs and tents. Most are first come, first served, so get there early to snag a spot. Reservations are accepted for Fish Creek and St. Mary campgrounds.

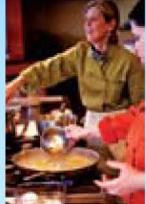
**More information:** For more about Glacier National Park, visit [nps.gov/glac](http://nps.gov/glac). For information about visiting western Montana, go to [glaciermt.com](http://glaciermt.com).

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### Exploring Whitefish, Montana

On your way to Glacier National Park, be sure to stop at the historic town of Whitefish, MT. The town's Swiss-style train depot is a must-see for history and train buffs alike. Built in 1927, it now doubles as the Whitefish History Museum. The scenic mountain town, mostly known for its world-class winter recreation, also plays host to a vibrant summer community. Downtown's Central Avenue invites browsing and lingering with its shops, restaurants and busy farmers market. To assure your Whitefish visit is one to remember, check out the lodging at the Lodge at Whitefish Lake ([lodgeatwhitefishlake.com](http://lodgeatwhitefishlake.com)) and Whitefish Mountain Resort ([skiwhitefish.com](http://skiwhitefish.com)).