



Exploring Three Montana Valleys *A Three Day Loop Tour*

Day 1: Missoula – The Garden City

Begin with a visit to the nearby Smokejumper Visitor Center (.8 miles from airport), the largest active smokejumper base in the nation. The Smokejumper Visitor Center is a unique opportunity to learn about this unusual, demanding and dramatic occupation. As you walk through the center you will visit the National Smokejumper Memorial, go inside a replica of a 1930s lookout tower and tour the smokejumper loft, where the smokejumpers work when they are not fighting fires. (one hour guided tour)

A bit further down the road toward Missoula, stop in at The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's Visitor Center (3.7 miles from the Smokejumper Center). The center celebrates the conservation of public wildlands, working ranches and forests where elk herds can thrive. (one hour self-guided tour)

Enjoy one of the several downtown Missoula eateries. From here explore downtown Missoula (6 miles from the airport), ride one of 38 wooden ponies at A Carousel for Missoula, while hearing a 400-pipe organ play notes directed by perforations in continuous paper rolls or stroll trails along the Clark Fork River. While enjoying the river views at Caras Park, you'll notice Brennan's Wave—a man-made engineered whitewater playpool for kayakers.

Travel south on Highway 93 to Travelers' Rest State Park in Lolo. This National Historic Landmark marks the location of a centuries-old American Indian campsite which the Lewis and Clark Expedition used in 1805 and 1806. In 2009, Montana State Parks opened the Holt Museum and Visitor Center at Travelers' Rest. This exciting addition to this timeless place gives visitors glimpses of the time before and immediately after the Lewis and Clark Expedition traveled through the Bitterroot Valley.

Continue south on Highway 93 and take in stunning views of the Bitterroot Mountains before arriving in the charming community of Hamilton (47 miles/50 minutes from Missoula), the hub of the Bitterroot Valley.

Tour the Daly Mansion to see how one of Montana's famous copper kings lived. Marcus Daly's 24,000 square foot summer mansion is a 42-room home with seven Italian marble fireplaces. (one hour guided tour)

Tour the Ravalli County Museum, the original county courthouse built in 1900, that now houses what is considered by many to be the finest little museum in the northwest. Permanent collections include an American Indian exhibit, Ricketts Museum commemorating the development of the Rocky Mountain Laboratory, an antique kitchen, miner/trapper room, a veteran's display, Ernst Peterson photo exhibits, extensive archives, Victorian rooms and Lewis and Clark room.

Overnight in Hamilton.



IF YOU GO:

Smokejumper Visitor Center – 406.329.4934 – <http://smokejumpers.com>

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's Visitor Center – 406.523.4545 – www.rmef.org

Missoula Downtown – 406.523.4238 – www.missouladowntown.com

Travelers' Rest State Park – 406.273.4253 – www.travelersrest.org

Daly Mansion – 406.363.6004 – www.dalymansion.org

The Ravalli County Museum – 406.363.3338 – www.brvhsmuseum.org

EATS:

Mackenzie River Pizza Co – 406.721.0077 – www.mackenzieriverpizza.com

The Edge Restaurant & Sportsbar – 406.375.0007 – www.theedgerestaurant.com

Bitter Root Brewery – 406.363.7468 – www.bitterrootbrewing.com

SLEEPS:

Bitterroot River Inn – 406.375.2525 – www.bitterrootriverinn.com

Townhouse Inn of Hamilton – 406.363.6600 – www.townhouseinnhamilton.com

Day 2: Flathead Lake

Head north on Highway 93 to your first stop at the St. Ignatius Mission in St. Ignatius. (one hour, 30 minutes from Hamilton)

Founded in 1854 by Jesuit missionaries, the mission, and especially Brother Carignano's remarkable frescoes, are a must-see for anyone who appreciates historical landmarks. (30 minute self-guided tour)

After visiting the mission, head toward Dixon on Highway 200 and north to Moiese to visit the National Bison Range. Established in 1908, it is one of the oldest wildlife refuges in the nation and is home to hundreds of bison, as well as elk, white-tail and mule deer, pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep and black bear. The visitor center provides interpretive displays and orientation videos, as well as a bookstore and restrooms. Staff is on hand to answer questions and dispense maps and brochures. A six mile loop is accessible to motorcoaches. (one hour self-guided tour)

Check out The Ninepipes Museum, located six miles south of Ronan and adjacent to the scenic Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge. Enjoy the 2,000+ acre scenic refuge for native birds – and the museum's collection of early photos, artifacts and antiques representing more than a century of life in the Flathead Valley.

The People's Center, one mile north of Pablo (20 miles/25 minutes from St. Ignatius) on Highway 93, is the place to experience the rich cultural heritage of the Salish, Pend d'Oreille and Kootenai tribes. The center features an exhibit gallery, educational programs and Native Ed-Venture interpretive tours focusing on American Indian heritage, natural history and cultural interpretation. (one hour tour)



The Best Western KwaTaqNuk Resort in Polson (8 miles/11 minutes from The People's Center) is your next stop, beautifully located on the southwest shore of the Flathead Lake. This is the perfect place to stop for a meal and to overnight with magnificent views of the Flathead Lake. You will enjoy exploring downtown Polson or a boat tour from KwaTaqNuk Resort's marina. Choose between a narrated bay cruise (1.5 hours) or cruise to the shores of Wild Horse Island, the largest island on Flathead Lake. The island is home to 100 different birds and mammals, including bighorn sheep, bald eagles, osprey, mule deer and a herd of wild horses (3 hours). Take advantage of KwaTaqNuk's group packages that include lunch and a boat cruise.

Overnight in Polson.

IF YOU GO:

National Bison Range – 406.644.2211 – www.fws.gov/refuge/national_bison_range

St. Ignatius Mission – 406.745.2768 – www.glaciermt.com/st-ignatius

Ninepipes Museum of Early Montana– 406.644.3435 – www.ninepipesmuseum.org

The People's Center – 406.675.0160 – www.peoplescenter.org

Polson Chamber of Commerce– 406.675.0160 – www.polsonchamber.com

EATS & SLEEPS:

Best Western KwaTaqNuk Resort – 800.882.6363 – www.kwataqnuk.com

Day 3: Seeley-Swan Valley

From Polson, continue north on Highway 93 along the shores of Flathead Lake to Bigfork (33 miles/42 minutes from Polson), a walker's delight of galleries and eateries. This is a perfect stop to stretch your legs and do some shopping. This quaint western village was chosen as "One of the 50 Great Towns of the West," designated as "One of the 100 Best Small Art Towns of the Nation," and was listed in *National Geographic's* Guide to Small Town Escapes, which is no surprise given its gourmet restaurants, fun shops, local character and beautiful natural surroundings.

From Bigfork, travel east on Highway 82, then south on Highway 83 through the Seeley-Swan Valley. Pinched between the east slope of the Mission Mountains and the west slope of the Swan Range, the Seeley-Swan is a series of pristine mountain lakes among dense stands of ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and larch.

Seeley Lake (74 miles/1.25 hours from Bigfork) is a great choice for lunch. Try Seasons Restaurant at Double Arrow Lodge.

From Seeley Lake you may choose to travel on to Yellowstone National Park (279 miles/4 hours), or follow Highway 200 back to Missoula (78 miles/1 ¾ hours) to complete a Missoula loop route, or continue into Idaho and Washington on Interstate 90.

If traveling back to Missoula make time for The Historical Museum at Fort Missoula. The museum is located on 32 acres and its collection includes 24,000 objects and 13 historic structures. As a major historical museum in Western Montana, the Historical Museum at Fort



Missoula provides a valuable educational and cultural experience for the community and entire region. The museum's indoor galleries contain both permanent and changing exhibits that deal with topics of interest from the period of early exploration to modern times.

Overnight in Missoula.

IF YOU GO:

Bigfork Chamber of Commerce – 406.837.5888 – www.bigfork.org

Seeley Lake Chamber of Commerce – 406.677.2880 – www.seeleylakechamber.com

The Historical Museum at Fort Missoula – 406.728.3476 – www.fortmissoulamuseum.org

EATS:

The Double Arrow Resort – 406.468.0777 – www.doublearrowresort.com

MacKenzie River Pizza Co – 406.721.0099 – www.mackenzieriverpizza.com

Scotty's Table – 406.549.2790 – www.scottystable.net

SLEEPS:

Holiday Inn Downtown Missoula at the Park – 406.721.8550 – www.himissouladowntown.com

Hilton Garden Inn Missoula – 406.532.5300 – www.hiltongardeninn.com

Doubletree Hotel Missoula – 406.728.3100 – <http://doubletree1.hilton.com>