



Three Days in Montana's Flathead Valley

Day 1: Whitefish

Spend your day in charming Whitefish (12 miles/16 minutes from Glacier Park International Airport).

Downtown Whitefish is perfect for leisurely strolls from unique galleries and shops to delicious eateries. Shopping is near the top of any Whitefish activity list. Must-stop places for one-of-a-kind finds line Whitefish's downtown on Central Avenue.

History buffs will enjoy the historical Great Northern Railway Depot. Here, Amtrak trains still come and go in the same fashion as the early models that brought tourists to Glacier National Park. Through collections that span from fur trapper times to the early days of skiing, the Stumptown Historical Museum (one block from downtown) tells the story of how the logging camp of Stumptown became Whitefish.

Whitefish Mountain Resort's (9 miles/15 minutes from downtown Whitefish) Summit Nature Center sits atop Big Mountain in the Summit House. Take a chair lift/gondola (20 minute ride) to the top. Managed by the US Forest Service, the Nature Center features interactive, hands-on exhibits about the region's flora, fauna, geology, fire ecology and history. The summit offers fabulous views of the Flathead Valley and peaks of Glacier National Park. Take advantage of Whitefish Mountain Resort's group package that includes a round-trip lift/gondola ride to the summit, USFS nature presentation and/or a short hike and lunch.

Walk in the Treetops is one of the area's striking outdoor activities and takes participants through a forest canopy on a boardwalk suspended 60 feet above ground. Brace for glorious views of mountains and lakes, where red-tailed hawks, western tanagers and kinglets vie for your attention. (2.5 hour guided hike; limited to groups of 12)

Whitefish Mountain Resort's newest offering is the Aerial Adventure Park. With five courses of varying difficulties (think ski trails: yellow, green, blue and black), you are challenged to cross suspended bridges and cable walkways, climb on nets and ladders, swing on trapezes and tube traverses and negotiate other fun elements like zip lines, barrels, etc.

Other activities include the wildly popular and exhilarating zip line tours. The resort has a 5 zip tour and 7 zip tour, with both featuring lines that range from 100 – 1,900 feet long! Tours are guided by two of Montana's finest guides who will teach you the techniques, lead you through the course and keep you entertained. Each person will be outfitted with a paragliding harness and zip line trolley so you can fly comfortably and safely. Up to 14 people can be in a group, with participants flying two at a time on side-by-side lines. The resort also has an alpine slide, ideal for all ages.

Whether you're looking to beat the heat, take in incredible vistas or hitch a ride to the top for some mountain bike action, the summer lift rides at Whitefish Mountain Resort are a great way to enjoy Montana's great outdoors.



Check what's playing at two of Whitefish's remarkable performing arts venues—the O'Shaughnessy Center and the Whitefish Performing Arts Center at Central School. If you can, catch a Broadway-caliber performance from the Alpine Theatre Project.

Whitefish also has a variety of group-friendly dining experiences. After a wagon ride at Bar W Guest Ranch, sit down and enjoy an awesome Montana dinner in an open meadow, complete with live country entertainment. Or dine at Grouse Mountain Lodge and enjoy a meal overlooking the 18th hole on the Whitefish Golf Course, with a backdrop of the Whitefish Mountain Range.

Overnight in Whitefish.

IF YOU GO:

Whitefish Mountain Resort – 406.862.2900 – www.skiwhitefish.com

The Stumptown Historical Museum – 406.862.0067 – www.stumptownhistoricalsociety.org

Whitefish Convention & Visitors Bureau – 877.862.3548 – www.explorewhitefish.com

Alpine Theater Project – 406.862.7469 – www.alpinetheatreproject.org

EATS:

Great Northern Brewing Company – 406.863.1000 – www.greatnorthernbrewing.com

Tupelo Grill – 406.862.2600 – www.tupelogrill.com

Bar W Ranch – 406.863.9099 – www.thebarw.com

SLEEPS:

Grouse Mountain Lodge – 406.862.3000 – www.grousemountainlodge.com

The Lodge at Whitefish Lake – 406.863.4000 – www.lodgeatwhitefishlake.com

Best Western Rocky Mountain Lodge – 406.862.2569 – www.rockymtnlodge.com

Day 2: Glacier National Park

You'd be hard pressed to find a more scenic drive in the lower continental United States than the Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park. A wilderness of lakes, towering peaks and remnants of glaciers is readily accessible.

Travel to the hand-hewn, grand Lake McDonald Lodge (36 miles/45 minutes from Whitefish) where you can hop aboard a red bus for a tour of the 50-mile-long Going-to-the-Sun Road (various tour lengths available; reservations required). The historic soft-top tour buses were introduced in the 1930s and have since been restored and outfitted with propane engines as a gift from the Ford Motor Company. Since a motor coach exceeds the road's size restrictions, the motor coach can "deadhead" around on Highway 2 to meet the red bus tour in St. Mary (86 miles/1.5 hours) on the east side of the park.

Narrated boat tours with Glacier Park Boat Company are offered several times a day on St. Mary and Swiftcurrent lakes. The St. Mary Visitor Center is also definitely worth a stop.



Overnight at St. Mary Lodge or Many Glacier Hotel (21 miles/30 minutes from St. Mary).

IF YOU GO:

Going-to-the-Sun Road + National Park Service – 406.888.7800 – www.nps.gov/glac

Glacier Park Boat Co. – 406.257.2426 – www.glacierparkboats.com

EATS & SLEEPS:

St. Mary Lodge and Resort – 888.778.6279 – www.glacierparkinc.com

Many Glacier Hotel – 406.892.2525 – www.glacernationalparklodges.com

Day 3: Glacier to Kalispell

From St. Mary, your next stop is Browning (29 miles/30 minutes from St. Mary). The exhibits of cultural artifacts at the Museum of the Plains Indian are among the finest in the West. The Blackfeet Heritage Center and Art Gallery and the Lodgepole Gallery and Tipi Village feature traditional and contemporary arts and crafts. If you visit during the second week in July, don't miss the dancing, drumming, rodeo action and tipis at North American Indian Days.

From Browning, you'll continue on Highway 2 west toward Essex (41 miles/45 minutes from Browning). Essex is home to the historic Izaak Walton Inn that once housed winter snow removal crews for the Great Northern Railroad. Today, it's enjoyed by railroad buffs. The inn features tasty meal options and has lodge rooms, as well as caboose and locomotive lodging. A few miles from Essex, watch for the Walton Goat Lick pull-off. Mountain goats graze and lick the mineral-laden rock of an exposed river bank cliff at this site (30 minute self-guided walk).

Follow Highway 2 to West Glacier (27 miles/30 minutes from Essex). For a bit of adventure, check-in for a whitewater raft trip on the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. The river borders the southern end of Glacier National Park and several outfitters offer guided rafting trips on the Middle Fork. Or enjoy a mild scenic float along the park's boundary with the chance to view moose, deer, bears and a host of smaller mammals and birds that frequent the river. There will be opportunities to see the effects of the 2003 Robert Fire and nature's new cycle of growth in the burned areas. The only rapids on this trip are short and modest class II – III (easy, intermediate rapids), but are exciting enough to thrill the beginner but not dangerous enough to cause concern.

An alternate option is to visit these downtown Kalispell museums (32 miles/45 minutes from West Glacier):

- Conrad Mansion Museum: the historic home of Kalispell's founding family, built in 1895. www.conradmansion.com
- Hockaday Museum of Art: interactive exhibits showcase the art and culture of Montana and Glacier National Park, including the contributions of the Blackfeet Nation. www.hockadaymuseum.org
- Museum at Central School: offers exhibits, tours and programs that illuminate the history of Kalispell and Northwest Montana. www.yourmuseum.org

Overnight in Kalispell.



IF YOU GO:

National Park Service – 406.888.7800 – www.nps.gov/glac

Izaak Walton Inn – 406.888.5700 – www.izaakwaltoninn.com

Rafting in West Glacier – www.glaciermt.com/west-glacier

Browning – 406.338.2344 – www.browningmontana.com

EATS:

Motorcoach friendly restaurants in Kalispell include:

Mackenzie River Pizza Company – 406.756.0060 – www.mackenzieriverpizza.com

Blue Canyon Kitchen Tavern – 406.758.2583 – www.bluecanyonrestaurant.com

SLEEPS:

Red Lion Hotel Kalispell – 406.751.5050 – www.redlion.com

Hilton Garden Inn Kalispell – 406.756.4500 – www.hiltongardeninn.com

Day 4: Kalispell to Flathead Lake

This morning, head south on Highway 93 for a stunningly beautiful drive along the shores of Flathead Lake, the largest natural freshwater lake in the West.

At the southern end of Flathead Lake in the wonderfully scenic town of Polson (52 miles/1 hour from Kalispell), stop by the Best Western KwaTaqNuk Resort to enjoy a Flathead Lake boat tour. Choose between a narrated bay cruise (1.5 hours) or cruise the shores of Wild Horse Island, the largest island on Flathead Lake. Wild Horse 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 package especially for groups that include lunch a boat cruise.

Drive back up the opposite shore of Flathead Lake on Highway 35 to the lovely lakeside town of Bigfork (33 miles/45 minutes from Polson). Be sure to keep an eye for cherry orchards en route. Bigfork 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.

Or enjoy a naturalist hike along the Swan River Nature Trail, a level trail that follows the "wild mile" of the Swan River. The trailhead is at the east end of Grand Avenue, a couple blocks up the hill past the Bigfork Inn.



Consider taking in a group dinner at the Bigfork Inn, followed by an evening at the Bigfork Summer Playhouse—one of the finest professional live theaters in the northwest. Group rates are available.

Overnight in Whitefish or Kalispell before departing from Glacier Park International Airport (FCA) the following day.

IF YOU GO:

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

Polson Chamber of Commerce – 406.883.5969 – www.polsonchamber.com

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

Bigfork Summer Playhouse – 406.837.4886 – www.bigforksummerplayhouse.com

EATS:

Bigfork Inn Restaurant – 406.837.6680 – www.bigforkinn.com

**Will open for a special group lunch reservation or provide a private room for group dinners.*

BruMar Estate – 406.837.2231 – www.brumarestate.com

**Offers a catered group meal in a gorgeous setting.*

ShowThyme – 406.837.0707 – www.showthyme.com