

Chasing the Wild West in Wyoming

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Hankering for a wild west experience for the whole family? Then head to Cody, Wyoming and nearby Yellowstone National Park. And prepare to step back in time to when the West was wild and free.



Buffalo Bill Cody founded Cody, Wyoming in 1896.

Submitted photo

Cody is in the northwest corner of Wyoming, 50 miles east of Yellowstone. Buffalo Bill Cody, a famous man in 1900 for his Wild West show, founded the town in 1896.

His Wild West show, which began in 1883 and lasted three decades, showcased stories and experiences of the American West, featuring Native Americans, cowboys riding bucking broncos, trick riding and sharp shooting. Annie Oakley and Wild Bill Hickock were among the

stars who toured the United States and Europe and performed for Queen Victoria in 1887.

Today, the thriving town of Cody values and showcases its historic roots.

Here are some summer highlights of the Western adventures that Cody offers:

Stay or dine at the Irma Hotel, built by Buffalo Bill in 1902 and named after his youngest daughter. The bar, carved cherry wood, was a gift from Queen Victoria after the Wild West show performed in England. The hotel is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

(irmahotel.com/)

Watch the Wild Bunch perform a Wild West Shoot-Out in the street in front of the Irma Hotel on Monday through Saturday each summer evening at 6 p.m. in a free 30-minute skit.

(codytrolleytours.com/cody-gunfight/)

Take a Cody Trolley Tour and learn about the rich history of Cody. Narrators in period costumes showcase the town and its highlights in a one-hour tour. (codytrolleytours.com)

Visit Old Trail Town, a representation of an old Wyoming Frontier town, which has buildings dating from 1879 to 1900 collected from the Cody area. It includes the Hole-in-the-wall cabin used by Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. (oldtrailtown.org/)

Explore the Buffalo Bill Center of the West. Founded in 1917 to preserve the legacy and vision of Buffalo Bill Cody, the museum has grown from a log cabin in 1927 to a seven-acre building containing 34,977 artifacts,

20,000 books and 260,000 photo archives. Allow plenty of time to enjoy the five separate museums housed under one roof, Buffalo Bill Museum, Plains Indian Museum, Whitney Western Art Gallery, Cody Firearms Museum and the Draper Natural History Museum.

Be sure to take in the Raptor Experience featuring owls, bald and golden eagles, a peregrine falcon, vulture and other amazing birds.

(centerofthewest.org/)

The Dan Miller Cowboy Music Review, at the museum is a lively and entertaining hour of songs and music. Enjoy the review as a dinner and show package or just the show and plan to laugh and sing along.

(cowboymusicrevue.com/)

Learn about (and shoot) the guns of the Wild West at the Cody Firearms Experience. The types of guns used by Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley and Lewis and Clark are available to hold and shoot (as well as more modern varieties). Trained instructors work with each visitor to put firearms into a historical perspective and to teach safety procedures and practices. At their state-of-the-art firing range, under the close supervision of the instructor, visitors can fire a gun. (codyfirearmsexperience.com/)



The Cody Nite Rodeo has earned Cody the designation of Rodeo Capital of the World.

Andy Watson photo, courtesy of Watson Rodeo Photos, INC.

Cheer at The Cody Nite Rodeo, which has earned Cody the designation of Rodeo Capital of the World. Seven nights a week, (June through August), in addition to all the usual bucking broncos, bull riding and calf roping, kids can get their faces painted by the rodeo clowns or have a picture taken on the live (more tame) rodeo bull "Mongo."

(codystampederodeo.com/p/about/226)

Looking for more outdoor adventures? River rafting, windsurfing, zip-lining, rock climbing, hiking, biking or fishing are all available near Cody. (codyyellowstone.org/what-to-do/outdoor-recreation/)



Elk in the Lamar Valley of Yellowstone.

Yellowstone National Park

Once you've experienced all the fun in Cody, it's an easy drive to Yellowstone National Park. You pass through such wide-open spaces, it feels like another experience of stepping back in time.

Yellowstone, which was designated as America's first National Park in 1872 contains about 50 percent of the world's geothermal features, geysers, mud pots and hot springs that bubble, gurgle, hiss and spout. The park covers 2.3 million acres, of which only about 1 percent is visible from the road.

On a visit in early June, we saw bison nuzzling their newborn calves in a meadow, against a backdrop of snowy peaks, bright blue sky and puffy clouds. We also saw big horn sheep, antelope, elk and an osprey sitting on her nest. Bears had just emerged from their winter slumber, although we didn't spot any.

To enter Yellowstone, drive west from Cody, along the North Fork of the Shoshone River, passing through the East Yellowstone Valley, also known as Wapiti Valley. Be sure to stop at Buffalo Bill Cody's hunting lodge, Pahaska Tepee, which is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Yellowstone Falls and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone.

Submitted photo

You'll enter the park through the Eastern entrance and pass by Yellowstone Lake and the Lake Hotel, originally built in 1891, the oldest hotel in operation in Yellowstone and a National Historic Landmark. Renovated in 2014 and dubbed the "Lady of the Lake," this hotel offers upscale dining and rooms and is considered the "quiet side of the park."

This is a great place to stop, relax and take in the peace and splendor of the lake and the park. Yellowstone Lake, one of the world's largest natural fresh water lakes, has the largest inland populations of cutthroat trout in North America.

(yellowstonenationalparklodges.com/press-releases/lake-yellowstone-hotel-the-hotel-that-has-stood-in-a-national-park-longer-than-any-other-turns-125-as-the-nps-turns-100/)

Then follow the loop to Old Faithful, the famous geyser, which erupts about every 75 minutes. You can walk along wooden paths through the geysers and mud pots. We watched Old Faithful erupt, before and after enjoying lunch at the spectacular Old Faithful Inn.

The Old Faithful Inn was designed by architect Robert Reamer, with the original building opening in June of 1904. Later wings were added in 1913 (East Wing) and 1927, (West Wing). The lobby is a magnificent three-story structure of wooden beams and windows. The deli at the hotel serves rich ice cream, giving you two flavors in one generous scoop, a perfect way to sit and take in the experience of the architecture in the lobby.

After lunch, geysers and ice cream, we followed the road to the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone and Tower Falls, with spectacular views of

the falls and river. We spent the night at the Canyon Lodge, where outdated buildings from the mid 1900s have been replaced with five new LEED-certified lodges in 2016.

The next morning, we continued our drive through the La Marr Valley where we stopped to view bison, antelope, sheep and mountain goats. Then leaving the park through the Northeast Entrance, we drove back to Cody through more wide-open spaces any cowboy or cowgirl would love.