

# TRAVEL

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## The best of the West in Jackson Hole

In [USA](#) [National Parks](#) By Kristin Conard

Wyoming's [Jackson Hole](#), surrounded by the towering Gros Ventre and rugged Teton mountain ranges, is best known for its “steep and deep” skiing and snowboarding. Plus, it is home to one of the US’ longest vertical drops, often featured in daredevil snow sports films.

However, the valley is more than a snow sports mecca. After the spring snowmelt when the wildflowers begin to bloom, millions of people pass through on their way to the nearby [Grand Teton](#) and [Yellowstone National Parks](#). But there is no need to rush to see Yellowstone’s famous geysers – from romance to wildlife to family bonding and high adventure, Jackson Hole has something for everyone.

### Rekindle the romance

A perfect romantic stay in Jackson Hole should include lunch or dinner at [Couloir](#). A ride up Bridger Gondola from [Jackson Hole Mountain Resort](#) takes you to 9,095ft, with stunning views over the entire valley. All the ingredients on the prix fixe, four-course seasonal menu are from within 250 miles of the restaurant, with fresh and flavourful dishes like bison tenderloin, fresh greens and pan-roasted fish. So as you relax and reconnect with a loved one on the outdoor patio or in front of the picture windows overlooking the valley, you will also be caring for the Earth by eating sustainable, local food.

With fireplaces in the rooms, a heated infinity pool and a rooftop hot tub overlooking the [Jackson Hole Mountain Resort](#), Teton Village’s [Hotel Terrais](#) is a luxury, eco-friendly hotel. Hit up the Chill Spa for a couple’s massage; if you are feeling extra romantic add on a chocolate body wrap and champagne sugar scrub. And if you really want to go all out, splurge on the couple’s spa suite which has a large spa tub with a mountain view, where you can get treatments in the privacy of your own room.

Waking up before dawn will be worth it for the sight of the sun's rays hitting the Tetons from a hot air balloon thousands of feet in the air. From May to October, both [Elevated Ballooning](#) and [Wyoming Balloon](#) in Jackson will take you for a quiet and unforgettable hour-long sunrise ride over the valley.

### **Wildlife and the Wild West**

Right across from Jackson's town square, with its iconic elk antler arches, is one of the oldest commercial sites in Jackson Hole – the [Million Dollar Cowboy Bar](#). The bar, originally built around the beginning of the 20th Century, is a favourite with visitors; who could pass up the chance to belly up to a bar on a saddle instead of a regular bar stool? For a post-drink meal, go downstairs to the [Million Dollar Cowboy Steakhouse](#) in the basement. Along with classic western dishes including T-bone steak, elk fillet and steelhead trout, the restaurant also has vegetarian options, and the food is regionally sourced whenever possible.

In the Jackson area, wildlife runs free and has the right of way; it is not uncommon to stop and let a moose cross the road. The region is a part of the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem – about 20 million acres with Yellowstone National Park at its centre and extending south through Grand Teton National Park. With the controversial [reintroduction of grey wolves](#) to Yellowstone in 1995, the ecosystem here is complete again, with every predator, from wolves to grizzly bears, and every prey species, such as elk, moose, bighorn sheep and bison, that belongs here.

One of the best safari tours in town is through the [Four Seasons Jackson Hole](#). The hotel has its own wildlife biologist and photographer, Tenley Thompson, who created the programme and trained a team of naturalists to take small groups (with at least one guide for every five hotel guests) on customised wildlife safari tours through [Bridger Teton National Forest](#), Grand Teton National Park and the [National Elk Refuge](#). If you are visiting in July, sign up for an “evening with the wolves”, where you can safely watch a mother and her pups at their den while enjoying some delicious treats from the Four Seasons kitchen.

Wildlife has been a source of fascination and inspiration for artists for thousands of years. And at the [National Museum of Wildlife Art](#) a few miles north of Jackson there are more than 5,000 wildlife art works, with pieces by John James Audubon, Georgia O'Keefe, Rodin and Picasso, with much of the collection focussing on art by European artists as they explored the US West. The building itself is a work of art; on a bluff overlooking the National Elk Refuge, the wintering grounds for the approximately 7,500 elk of the Jackson elk herd, the rocky architecture of the museum blends nearly seamlessly into the mountainside.

## **Family time**

Head to the rustic, homey [Il Villagio Osteria](#) in Teton Village to watch pizza chef Cassidy Hudson show off her dough tossing skills – she competed in the highest dough toss at the [Las Vegas Pizza Expo](#) in March 2013. Let your kids chow down on pizza topped with homemade sausage while parents will be tempted by the more complex dishes of fried Brussels sprouts and foie gras caramel sausage.

At the base of 1,571ft-high Snow King mountain in Jackson, [Snow King Resort](#) can keep your kids entertained with its an outdoor pool, arcade game room and a mini golf course. But it also has something no other place in town has – the Alpine Slide. Open in summer only, take the double chairlift up and ride a sled 2,500ft down the mountain on a plastic track through wildflowers. You can take it slow or bomb down as fast as you want – you control the speed with brakes on each sled.

Jackson has claimed itself the “Last and Best of the Old West”, and it proves it in its free daily summertime “[shootouts](#)” in the town square at 6 pm. Frontier justice involved taking the law into your own hands, and the re-enactments of these gunfights, complete with elaborate costumes, are performed by the “Shootout Gang”.

## **High adventure**

From 15 June to 2 September, Jackson Hole Mountain Resort transforms from ski resort to mountain biking heaven for cyclists of all levels. One of the best spots to fuel up after a ride is one of the newest pubs in Teton Village – [The Handle Bar](#). Right at the base of Apres Vous Mountain, the restaurant serves classic pub food with a spin – try the bacon burger with peanut butter or fried pickles.

Surrounded by national park and forest, there is plenty of camping in the Jackson Hole area. But if you do not want to pack your own tent or food to overnight in the wilderness, head to [Rock Springs Backcountry Yurt](#). A guide will lead you 2.5 miles and 1,400ft up from Teton Village into Bridger National Forest to the yurt, a domed structure with canvas tent walls. It sleeps up to eight on bunk beds, and the guide can prepare dinner while you relax on the deck or in front of the fireplace.

Jackson Hole also has hundreds of rock climbing routes for all abilities. To get around on the rock, [Jackson Hole Mountain Guides](#) teaches climbing classes, and lead single day or overnight trips up into the mountains on classic climbs. If heights are not your thing, get your thrills by hitting the water. [Jackson Hole Whitewater](#) organises half day excursions on the class III Snake River with some big rapids through the limestone cliffs of Snake River Canyon.