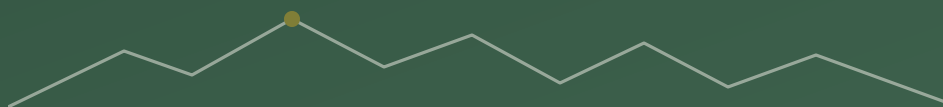


LOCAL PICKS GUIDE

A FIELD GUIDE · GLACIER NATIONAL PARK ROAD TRIP · AUGUST 16–29, 2026

Glacier National Park

Road Trip



St. Paul to Glacier National Park and the long, beautiful loop home. Seven nights based in Whitefish at the centre — and, at every stop, a primary and a backup for coffee and for food, plus four ways to spend the day. Ranked by what is actually best, not by what is busiest.

PREPARED FOR

A family of four

2 ADULTS + 2 KIDS (9 AND 12) · BASE · STAYING IN WHITEFISH · AUG 18 – 25 ON THE LAKE

WHAT YOU TOLD US YOU WANTED

- “ Slow mornings. We are not doing five things a day.
- “ One big hike we will still be talking about in ten years — but the nine-year-old has to be able to do it.
- “ We would drive forty minutes for a genuinely great dinner. We would not wait forty minutes in a line.
- “ No chain restaurants. Not once.

Everything in here is built around those four sentences — slow mornings, one big hike the whole family can do, food worth the drive, and not a single chain. Anything off, anything missing — write to us directly at nina@localpicksguide.com and we will fix it.

— Local Picks Guide

The one page to screenshot. Every line below is a decision already made — where you are, what you do, what you eat, and what would ruin the day if you missed it.

THE SPINE — ONE LINE A DAY

SUN AUG 16	St. Paul → Bismarck · Roll early on I-94. Coffee: Mi Cartagena, Detroit Lakes. Dinner: Pirogue Grille.
MON AUG 17	Bismarck → Lewistown · 5h of high plains. Fuel in Miles City. Dinner: Central Feed. Early night.
TUE AUG 18	Lewistown → Whitefish · 4h45, the reveal. Settle in, then Depot Park farmers market, 5–7:30pm.
WED AUG 19	GLACIER · day one · Out by 6:30am. Sun Road → Logan Pass → Hidden Lake. Home to swim by 2.
THU AUG 20	Lake day · Dawn paddle. Mudman burgers. Whitefish Trail loop. Nothing ambitious.
FRI AUG 21	GLACIER · day two · Trail of the Cedars + Avalanche Lake (~4.5 mi, flat). Dinner: Herb & Omni.
SAT AUG 22	The mountain · The resort — gondola, alpine slide, huckleberry hillside. Shake downtown.

THE EIGHT THAT MATTER

Herb & Omni — Whitefish · date night ➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS
Loula's Café — Whitefish · breakfast, and the pie ➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS
Montana Coffee Traders — Whitefish · the cup, since 1981 ➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS
Logan Pass / Hidden Lake — Glacier · biggest payoff, least effort ➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS
Avalanche Lake trailhead — Glacier · the family-doable real hike ➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS
Hudson's Hamburgers — Coeur d'Alene · lunch only, since 1907 ➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS
Blackbird Kitchen — Bozeman · the James Beard dinner ➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS
Harvester Kitchen by Bryan — Sioux Falls · the send-off ➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

THE THINGS THAT RUIN A DAY

No vehicle entry reservation is needed for Glacier in 2026. Any site selling you one is out of date.
Logan Pass parking is capped at 3 hours , enforced 24/7 (Jul 1 – Sep 7). Take the free timestamped permit at the kiosk and put it on the dash.
Hudson's closes at 5pm and does not serve dinner. It is a lunch plan or it is nothing.
Bear spray on your belt, not in the pack. Buy it in Whitefish — you cannot fly with it and you cannot buy it in the park at 6am.
No cell service in the park or on the rural legs. Download offline maps before you leave.
Rapid City is one night after a seven-hour drive. Pick Custer State Park OR Rushmore. Both is a fantasy.

EVERYTHING IN HERE — TAP ANY OF THESE TO JUMP STRAIGHT TO IT

p02 The Route & the One Thing to Book	p03 What You Should Know	p04 The Drive Out · Detroit Lakes	p05 First Overnight · Bismarck
p06 Into the Mountains · Lewistown	p07 Whitefish · Coffee	p08 Whitefish · Eat	p09 Whitefish · Do
p10 Glacier National Park	p11 The Road Home · Coeur d'Alene	p12 The Road Home · Bozeman	p13 The Road Home · Rapid City
p14 The Road Home · Sioux Falls	p15 Before You Roll		

SUN AUG 23	River day · Morning float with Glacier Raft Co., then the dock all afternoon.
MON AUG 24	Wildcard · Clear air? Many Glacier, arrive 6:30am. Smoky? Run the lazy-day menu.
TUE AUG 25	Whitefish → Coeur d'Alene · 3h15. Tubbs Hill, and Hudson's for LUNCH — it shuts at 5, no dinner.
WED AUG 26	Coeur d'Alene → Bozeman · 5h30 via Missoula. Museum of the Rockies if there is light. Dinner: Blackbird.
THU AUG 27	Bozeman → Rapid City · 7h, the long one. Start early, tank above half. Rushmore at golden hour.
FRI AUG 28	Rapid City → Sioux Falls · Needles loop only if you are out by 7am. Then 5h east. Dinner: Harvester.
SAT AUG 29	Sioux Falls → home · Falls Park at first light, coffee at The Source, then the last hop home.

BOOK IT BY

TODAY	Logan Pass Express Shuttle · \$1pp · Recreation.gov #10087424 60-day rolling release; 7pm MDT next-day drop is the backup
AUG 14	Pirogue Grille · Bismarck
AUG 15	Central Feed Grilling · Lewistown
AUG 18	Herb & Omni · Whitefish (date night)
AUG 18	Glacier Raft Co. · morning float
AUG 23	Blackbird Kitchen · Bozeman
AUG 24	Tally's Silver Spoon · Rapid City
AUG 25	Harvester Kitchen · Sioux Falls

TIMING — WHEN, NOT JUST WHAT

Going-to-the-Sun Road: out the door by 6:30am. By 9 the pullouts are full and the light is flat.
Loula's: before 8am, or take the wait. Order the pie when you sit down — they sell out.
Many Glacier: 6:30am arrival or skip it. 2026 construction has parking very tight.
Mount Rushmore: golden hour, not midday — warmer light, half the people.
Whitefish Farmers Market: Tuesdays only, 5–7:30pm, Depot Park.
Huckleberry: peak is right now and it does not travel. Get the shake.

Screenshot this page. It works with no signal.

Something wrong on the road? nina@localpicksguide.com

DO THIS FIRST — BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

Glacier changed the rules for 2026. Here is the real deal.

There are *no* vehicle entry reservations in 2026 — the timed-entry ticket system of prior years is gone. You can drive your own car the full 50 miles of Going-to-the-Sun Road any time; it is fully open for the season. If a site tells you to buy an entry reservation, that page is out of date.

What replaced it — and what to actually book:

- **Logan Pass = 3-hour parking, permit required.** Every private-vehicle spot at Logan Pass is capped at 3 hours, enforced 24/7 (Jul 1 – Sep 7). Take the free timestamped permit from the kiosk when you park and put it on the dash.
- **Want a longer day, or the Highline?** Book the Logan Pass Express Shuttle — \$1 per person on Recreation.gov (facility #10087424), ages 2+. It is the only park booking worth making. Release is 60-days rolling plus a 7pm MDT next-day drop, so if your dates look gone, check at 7pm the night before.

Bottom line: you do not need a reservation to enter or drive the road. Only book the \$1 shuttle for a full Logan Pass day or a Highline hike. Verified against nps.gov and Recreation.gov, July 2026.

LEG	NIGHTS	APPROX. DRIVE	THE ONE THING
St. Paul, MN	Depart Aug 16	home	Fuel, coffee, roll early
Detroit Lakes, MN	pass-through	~3h30 · 225 mi	Lake-town leg-stretch and a real Colombian coffee
Bismarck, ND	Aug 16 – 17	~3h30 · 235 mi	ND Heritage Center; a proper fine-dinner
Lewistown, MT	Aug 17 – 18	~5h · 340 mi	Geographic centre of Montana; Big Spring Creek
Whitefish, MT HUB	Aug 18 – 25	~4h45 · 290 mi	Glacier · the lake · the town
Coeur d'Alene, ID	Aug 25 – 26	~3h15 · 185 mi	The lake, Tubbs Hill, a 1907 burger
Bozeman, MT	Aug 26 – 27	~5h30 · 370 mi	Museum of the Rockies; a James Beard dinner
Rapid City, SD	Aug 27 – 28	~7h · 475 mi	Mt Rushmore, Badlands, Custer State Park
Sioux Falls, SD	Aug 28 – 29	~5h · 350 mi	Falls Park; a tasting-menu send-off
St. Paul, MN	Aug 29	~3h40 · 245 mi	Home

Two long legs to respect: Bozeman → Rapid City (~7h) and Rapid City → Sioux Falls (~5h). Fuel up in towns — the Montana and North Dakota stretches have 60–90 minute service gaps and spotty cell. The westbound push is four easy days; the eastbound return stacks up faster.

The expert layer — what a first-timer misses. Read this once and you will move through the week like a local.

▲ How to read this guide

Every stop gives you a **Primary** and a **Backup** for coffee and for food — each with a one-line *when to pick this one* — plus four ways to spend the day: a PRIMARY·LONG and BACKUP·LONG (half or full day) and a PRIMARY·SHORT and BACKUP·SHORT (~1–2 hr), so you can flex to the weather, the smoke and everyone's energy. The chips under each pick tell you price · reserve-ahead? · minutes from your base · hours at a glance, and every place opens in Google Maps with one tap. Everything is ranked by the quality of the actual thing — the food, the roast, the walk — not by star count or crowd size. The gold card is the number one.

▲ Wildfire smoke is the August wildcard

Late summer is fire season in the Northern Rockies. Some days are crystal; some the valley hazes over and the mountain views vanish. Not a reason to skip — just stay flexible, which is what the short backups are for. Check **AirNow.gov** (fire and smoke map) and the Montana DEQ smoke forecast each morning, and do your big Glacier day on the clearest air. If the air quality spikes, the Whitefish Library on Spokane Ave is a designated clean-air centre. Pack a couple of N95s.

▲ Huckleberry season is now

Mid-to-late August is peak huckleberry — Montana's wild treasure, and it never travels, so this is the only time and place you get it. You will see huckleberry everything: pie, ice cream, shakes, jam. Whitefish Mountain Resort is a known picking area and publishes a "Huck Report." Get a real huckleberry milkshake at least once. It is the flavour of this trip.

▲ Grizzly country — carry bear spray

Both black bears and grizzlies live in and around Glacier. Buy bear spray locally — you cannot fly with it, and any Whitefish outfitter or grocery has it for about \$40–50 — and keep it **on your belt, not in the pack**. Make noise on trails, hike in groups, and never leave food out at your rental or in the car.

▲ START • DAY 1

St. Paul, MN. Top off the tank, grab your travel coffee and aim northwest on I-94. The first worthwhile break is about three and a half hours out, in Minnesota's lakes country.

Detroit Lakes, MN

PASS-THROUGH

MN LAKES COUNTRY
~3H30 • 225 MI FROM HOME

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING

Pull off for a real Colombian coffee at Mi Cartagena and stretch your legs on the City Beach — the best cup and the nicest twenty minutes on this whole first stretch.

COFFEE — PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Mi Cartagena Cafe
Pick this: It is the reason to stop — genuinely the best coffee for 200 miles.
Owner Kerlis Blunco brings real Cartagena tradition: specialty Colombian beans, inventive signature lattes, an art-filled room right on the main drag.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
\$ WALK-UP DOWNTOWN ~7A-4P

BACKUP

Lakes Fika
Pick this: If Mi Cartagena is closed, or you want Scandinavian pastries with the cup.
Bright Nordic-leaning café — solid espresso and a good grab-and-go pastry case for the road.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
\$ WALK-UP DOWNTOWN MORNING

FOOD — PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

La Barista
Pick this: Quick, real food before the North Dakota miles.
The local lunch favourite — big wraps, salads, fast and fresh. In and out without losing the afternoon.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
\$\$ WALK-UP DOWNTOWN LUNCH

BACKUP

Lakeside Tavern & Brewery
Pick this: If you want to linger lakefront and stretch the stop into a real meal.
A City Beach staple since 1891 — elevated pub food and its own brews, right on Detroit Lake.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
\$\$ WALK-UP CITY BEACH LUNCH-LATE

FOUR WAYS TO SPEND THE DAY (IT IS A PASS-THROUGH — KEEP IT LIGHT)

PRIMARY • LONG ~2 hr

City Beach + Detroit Mountain
Swim or loaf on the wide sandy public beach, then a short hop to Detroit Mountain Rec Area (~15 min) for a summer lift, a bike or a forest walk.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

BACKUP • LONG ~2 hr

Tamarac Wildlife Refuge
A scenic auto-tour loop through lakes, bog and hardwood forest about 20 minutes north — quiet, beautiful and a genuine leg-stretch from the interstate.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

PRIMARY • SHORT ~20 min

Big Detroit Lake City Beach
The classic move — a wide sandy beach right in town. A taste of Minnesota lake life before the plains open up.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

BACKUP • SHORT ~20 min

Historic Washington Ave
Stroll the walkable downtown, grab an ice cream and window-shop, or wave at Zorbaz on the lake.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

▲ 3H30 • 235 MI

Detroit Lakes → Bismarck on I-94 W through Fargo, which is the halfway point and a good fuel-and-food backup. The land flattens into the Red River Valley, then the North Dakota prairie. You cross into Central Time near the border.

Bismarck, ND AUG 16 – 17ON THE MISSOURI RIVER
THE TRIP'S FIRST OVERNIGHT

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING

Book a table at Pirogue Grille — a twenty-year farm-to-table dinner is the reward for day one. The free ND Heritage Center in the afternoon if you have the time.

COFFEE — PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

BittyBean

Pick this: The locals' pick for the best cup in Bismarck-Mandan, plus brunch.

Cosy local espresso bar — friendly staff, creative rotating flavours, a proper start to day two. ➤ [OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

\$ WALK-UP ~3 MIN 7A-5P

BACKUP

Boneshaker Coffee Co.

Pick this: For a balanced, dialled espresso in a relaxed local-hangout room.

Praised for perfectly balanced espresso drinks and great service — the connoisseur's alternate. Mighty Missouri roasts locally too. ➤ [OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

\$ WALK-UP ~5 MIN MORNING

FOOD — PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Pirogue Grille

Pick this: The quality pick, not the loudest — the best dinner in town.

A twenty-year farm-to-table fine-dining cornerstone: venison sausage, dry-aged New York steak, sourced from nearby ranches. ➤ [OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

Why it is the one: Two decades of chef-driven, ranch-sourced cooking — the clearest quality signal in Bismarck. Reserve.

\$\$\$ RESERVE DOWNTOWN DINNER

BACKUP

Butterhorn

Pick this: If Pirogue is booked — an equal, with a Top Chef pedigree.

Chef Stephanie Miller (Bravo's Top Chef) cooking French and Italian on local Midwest ingredients. Want casual instead? Laughing Sun Brewing for barbecue and local beer.

➤ [OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

\$\$\$ RESERVE DOWNTOWN DINNER

FOUR WAYS TO SPEND THE DAY

PRIMARY • LONG

~3 hr

Fort Abraham Lincoln SP

About 15 minutes south: Custer's reconstructed house, the On-A-Slant Mandan village and Missouri river-bluff trails. The area's best half-day. ➤ [OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

BACKUP • LONG

~2-3 hr

ND Heritage Center

Free and genuinely excellent — mammoths through Sitting Bull — then walk the Capitol grounds. The rainy or smoky-day play.

➤ [OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

PRIMARY • SHORT

~45 min

Missouri riverfront at golden hour

Stroll the Riverfront and Sertoma trails along the big river — the easy, beautiful reset after a driving day. ➤ [OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

BACKUP • SHORT

~30 min

Downtown historic walk

The compact downtown core and the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit — a quick pre-dinner leg-stretch. ➤ [OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

▲ 5H • 340 MI

Bismarck → Lewistown on I-94 W to US-12 W. Long, open, beautiful high plains — fuel in Miles City or Forsyth, because services get sparse and cell drops out. You gain an hour into Mountain Time. The West is arriving.

Lewistown, MT

AUG 17 – 18

THE EXACT GEOGRAPHIC CENTRE OF MONTANA

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING

Dinner at Central Feed Grilling in the historic Mercantile, then a quiet dusk walk along Big Spring Creek. Early night — tomorrow is the payoff drive.

COFFEE – PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

The Rising Trout Coffee & Café
Pick this: The local morning room — espresso and café plates on Main.
Where Lewistown actually starts its day: good espresso, real breakfast, unhurried. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

\$

WALK-UP

MAIN ST

~7A-2P

BACKUP

Six 18 Coffee
Pick this: A quick espresso to go on your way out toward Great Falls.
Fast, friendly, dependable cup for the road — the grab-and-go alternate. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

\$

WALK-UP

DOWNTOWN

MORNING

FOOD – PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Central Feed Grilling Co.
Pick this: The best dinner in town — a Montana-sourced steakhouse and wine bar.
In the historic Mercantile Building downtown: steaks and craft beer, seafood a day off the docks, a covered patio. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

Why it is the one: A chef-driven steakhouse and wine bar sourcing high-quality Montana product — a clear notch above the bar-dinner options.

\$\$

WALK-UP

DOWNTOWN

DINNER

BACKUP

Mint Bar & Grill
Pick this: A classic, casual Montana supper if you want simple.
The old-school Montana bar-and-grill — burgers, steaks, a friendly local room. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

\$\$

WALK-UP

DOWNTOWN

DINNER

FOUR WAYS TO SPEND THE DAY (SHORT OVERNIGHT – ARRIVE IN THE EVENING, LEAVE IN THE MORNING)

PRIMARY • LONG

~2-3 hr

Judith Mountains drive
Head up into the Judiths for big central-Montana overlooks, or cast on Big Spring Creek — one of the state's cleanest spring creeks, at the edge of town. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

BACKUP • LONG

evening, reserve

Charlie Russell Chew-Choo
A seasonal scenic dinner train across trestles and prairie — it does not run nightly, so check the schedule. The memorable option if the day lines up. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

PRIMARY • SHORT

~45 min

Sandstone downtown + creek path
Stroll the historic sandstone-block downtown and the Big Spring Creek path — the perfect low-key arrival-evening walk. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

BACKUP • SHORT

~30 min

Frank Day Park
A quick riverside-park stretch to shake out the drive before dinner. Quiet, green, easy. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

▲ 4H45 • 290 MI •
THE REVEAL

Lewistown → Whitefish via US-87 and MT-200. Great Falls is your midpoint for food, fuel and the Missouri. Then the plains crash into the Rocky Mountain Front and you climb through forest toward the Flathead — the last hour along the mountains is the payoff.

ARRIVAL — you are based in Whitefish itself: about 5 minutes to downtown, 25–30 minutes to Glacier's West entrance, 15 minutes up to the resort, with your own lake access. You roll in on a Tuesday — so the **Whitefish Farmers Market** at Depot Park (5–7:30pm, every Tuesday through September) is on that evening: live music, food trucks, local produce. A perfect low-key first night.

Grab-and-go before a Glacier dawn, or a slow lake-morning cup. Ranked by the coffee, not the crowd — a primary and a backup, then four more for a seven-morning week.

★ #1 • LEGEND • EST. 1981

Montana Coffee Traders

ROASTER • FULL CAFÉ • LOCAL INSTITUTION

The original Whitefish roaster — a full café plus the beans to take home. Started in a vintage farmhouse in 1981; now the most respected specialty roaster in the state.

Why it is the one: The quality benchmark and the institution — small-batch, 100% arabica, roasted for flavour clarity. Everyone else in town is measured against this cup.

\$ WALK-UP ~5 MIN 6A–6P > OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

328 Central Ave (downtown) • roastery on US-93 S

BACKUP • DRIVE-THRU

Cowgirl Coffee

FAST • THE DAWN MOVE

When to pick it: a Glacier-dawn day when you do not want to leave the car. A Nucleus Ave walk-up plus a Highway 2 E drive-thru — reliably excellent, open early.

\$ WALK-UP ~4 MIN OPENS ~5:30A

> OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

270 Nucleus Ave • & 3796 US Hwy 2 E

FOUR MORE STOPS FOR THE WEEK

THIRD-WAVE

Folklore Coffee

CRAFT ESPRESSO •
MINIMALIST

The serious-coffee pick — carefully pulled shots, a quiet room off the drag. For when the cup itself is the event.

> OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

403 E 2nd St

COFFEE + BAKERY

Uptown Hearth

ESPRESSO & FRESH PASTRY

The best combination of espresso and from-the-case pastry — perfect pre-drive fuel. Get there before the bakery clears.

> OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

619 Nucleus Ave

BAKERY CAFÉ

Ceres Bakery

COFFEE + FROM-SCRATCH
BREAD

Coffee plus proper breads — grab a picnic loaf and sandwiches to take up the Sun Road.

> OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

318 S Main St

THE HUCKLEBERRY

Sweet Peaks Ice Cream

NOT COFFEE • THE AFTERNOON
ONE

The post-hike ritual and the easiest way to keep a promise to the back seat. Huckleberry is the flavour that is actually worth it, not just marketing.

> OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

419 E 3rd St

From a house breakfast run to a real date night — ranked by the food, each category with a primary and a backup.

DATE NIGHT — PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Herb & Omni

Pick this: The best food in Whitefish, in the most beautiful room — your date night.

Modern New American on Central — elegant gold finishes, a killer bar, local plates that punch far above a mountain town.

[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

Why it is the one: James Beard-nominated Chef Earl James — the town's clearest quality signal. Reserve two to three days out.

\$\$\$ RESERVE 2–3D ~5 MIN DINNER

BACKUP

Enga (Larch House)

Pick this: The buzzy special-occasion alternate if Herb & Omni is booked.

The newest star — creative alpine-inspired dishes inside the Larch House hotel. Tupelo Grille (Creole-mountain) and the old-school Whitefish Lake Restaurant supper club are the other reserve-ahead rooms. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

\$\$\$ RESERVE ~5 MIN DINNER

BREAKFAST — PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Loula's Café

Pick this: The breakfast institution — and the best from-scratch pie on the route.

Decades-deep local love; expect a wait and take it. Order the pie when you sit down, not when you finish — they sell out.

[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

\$\$ WALK-UP ~5 MIN BREAKFAST–LUNCH

BACKUP

Buffalo Café

Pick this: When Loula's has a line and you have a park day to start.

A Whitefish classic for 40-plus years — chicken-fried steak, buttermilk pancakes, the "buffalo pie" hash. Swift Creek Café is the quieter third option. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

\$\$ WALK-UP ~5 MIN BREAKFAST

CASUAL / NIGHTS IN — PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Mudman Burgers

Pick this: The burger locals actually name — an easy win with the kids.

Top-quality griddle burgers, breakfast too — a genuinely great patty, fast and family-friendly. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

\$\$ WALK-UP ~5 MIN LUNCH–DINNER

BACKUP

Jersey Boys Pizzeria

Pick this: A takeout night in — brick-oven New York pies.

The best-loved pizza around, south of town on 93. Abruzzo is the from-scratch Italian alternate; Bonsai Brewing's beer garden is the classic après hang. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

\$\$ WALK-UP ~10 MIN DINNER

Glacier is the headliner and gets its own ranked page next — but the lake at your door, the mountain above town and downtown itself fill the week easily. Here are the four ways to spend a Whitefish day.

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING

Do Glacier at dawn on your clearest-air morning — then come home and swim through the hot middle of the day. That is the whole trip in one sentence.

FOUR WAYS TO SPEND THE DAY (BASE = YOUR RENTAL)

PRIMARY • LONG

full day

Glacier via Going-to-the-Sun

The headline day — leave by 6:30am for the road and the light to yourself. Full ranked plan on the next page. The West entrance is 25–30 minutes from your rental. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

BACKUP • LONG

half day

Raft the Flathead • or the resort

Glacier Raft Co. runs mellow-to-lively floats on the park's edge — book a morning. Or ride Whitefish Mountain Resort: gondola, alpine slide, zipline, huckleberry hillside, about 15 minutes up. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

PRIMARY • SHORT

~1–2 hr

Whitefish Lake, right out the door

A dawn paddle or a golden-hour swim. Rent boards and kayaks from Glacier Outfitters or Sea Me Paddle; City Beach has a swim area and the sunset view. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

BACKUP • SHORT

~1–2 hr

Whitefish Trail + downtown

An easy forest loop on the Whitefish Trail (Lion Mountain — 40-plus miles of low-key singletrack), then Central Ave and, on Tuesdays, the Depot Park farmers market. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

▲ The lazy-day menu (when you skip the park)

Not every day needs Glacier. A perfect off-day: Cowgirl coffee → morning paddle → Mudman burgers → a Whitefish Trail forest walk → Bonsai beer garden → a huckleberry shake downtown. Reverse the crowds and you will have the best of Whitefish nearly to yourself.

Seven days gives you room for repeat trips — do Glacier two or three times, a different corner each time. Ranked by payoff. West Glacier is 25–30 minutes from your rental.

TOP THINGS TO DO — RANKED BY PAYOFF

- 1 Going-to-the-Sun Road** THE WHOLE DAY • DRIVE AT DAWN
 The 50-mile crown jewel over Logan Pass and the Continental Divide. Leave by 6:30am to have the road and the light to yourself — a slow, cliff-hugging two-plus hours one way with stops, not a quick hop. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
- 2 Logan Pass + Hidden Lake Overlook** 6,646 FT • ~2.7 MI RT • BIGGEST PAYOFF, LEAST EFFORT
 The high point you can drive to — take the free 3-hour parking permit at the kiosk. Hidden Lake Overlook is the best effort-to-reward hike in the park (goats and bighorn near-guaranteed) and fits inside the 3-hour window. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
- 3 Lake McDonald & Trail of the Cedars** WEST SIDE • FLAT • FAMILY
 The famous coloured-pebble shoreline plus the one-mile Trail of the Cedars boardwalk through old growth — stroller-friendly, and the launch point for number four. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
- 4 Avalanche Lake** ~4.5 MI RT • EASY-MODERATE
 From Trail of the Cedars to a waterfall-ringed alpine lake — the best family-doable "real" hike in Glacier. Mostly flat; the only challenge is the length. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
- 5 Many Glacier & Grinnell Glacier** ~1.5 HR DRIVE • STRENUOUS • 2026 CAUTION
 The park's most dramatic basin. Grinnell Glacier (~11 mi round trip to a turquoise lake) is a bucket-list day. In 2026 the Swiftcurrent construction means parking is very limited — arrive at 6:30am, or do the shorter Grinnell Lake (~6.8 mi). [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
- 6 The Highline Trail** ~11.6 MI TO THE LOOP • STRENUOUS • SHUTTLE IT
 The iconic cliff-ledge traverse from Logan Pass — a greatest-hits of alpine Glacier in one walk. Use the \$1 Logan Pass shuttle so you do not have to backtrack to your car. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
- 7 St. Mary Lake & the east side** WILD GOOSE ISLAND • SUNRISE GORGE
 The drier, more dramatic east end of the Sun Road — Wild Goose Island is the classic postcard and St. Mary Falls is a short, high-reward stop. [➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

▲ Three day-plans by effort

EASY / FAMILY — Lake McDonald → Trail of the Cedars → the Sun Road to Logan Pass → Hidden Lake Overlook: all roadside or short, huge scenery, one relaxed day. **MODERATE** — dawn Sun Road → Avalanche Lake → picnic at Lake McDonald → home by the midday heat. **STRENUOUS** — the Highline (shuttle-assisted) or a Many Glacier / Grinnell day on one clear-air morning. Carry bear spray and a warm layer, and download offline maps — there is no cell in the park.

▲ 3H15 • 185 MI

Whitefish → Coeur d'Alene on US-2 to US-95 and I-90. Easy and scenic along the Kootenai and into the Idaho panhandle lakes.

Coeur d'Alene, ID AUG 25 – 26

IT IS ALL ABOUT THE LAKE

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING

Hike Tubbs Hill on the lake and eat a century-old Hudson's burger — the two things this town does better than anywhere. Hudson's is lunch only and closes at 5.

COFFEE — PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Evans Brothers Coffee

Pick this: Downtown on Sherman Ave, expertly pulled — quality and convenient to the lake walk.

A local favourite in the heart of downtown: full espresso bar, rotating single-origin pour-overs, fresh roasts.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

\$ WALK-UP DOWNTOWN 6A–5P

BACKUP

DOMA Coffee Roasting

Pick this: The roaster pilgrimage — the Inland Northwest's benchmark, at the Atlas Waterfront.

A nationally known direct-trade roaster; small-batch cups and pastries on the water, ~7 min out. Worth the hop if you love coffee.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

\$ WALK-UP ~7 MIN 6A–4P

FOOD — PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Hudson's Hamburgers

Pick this: A 1907 institution — the local legend you would never find by star count.

A no-frills downtown counter and a burger perfected over a century. Lunch, not dinner — go before it closes at 5.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

Why it is the one: 115-plus years, one thing done perfectly — exactly the pick that beats a tasting menu when the food is this good.

\$ WALK-UP DOWNTOWN 11A–5P

BACKUP

Café Carambola

Pick this: For a sit-down quality dinner.

Standout Latin American cooking. The Blue Bird — intimate, seasonal, locally sourced — is the other quality dinner room.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

\$\$ RESERVE DOWNTOWN DINNER

FOUR WAYS TO SPEND THE DAY

PRIMARY • LONG

half day

Lake cruise + Tubbs Hill

A Lake Coeur d'Alene scenic cruise, then the Tubbs Hill 2.2-mile natural-area loop straight from downtown. One of the prettiest lakes in the West.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

BACKUP • LONG

half day

Route of the Hiawatha

The famous rail-trail bike ride — tunnels and sky-high trestles, ~45 min east. Or Farragut State Park on Lake Pend Oreille. The big bluebird-day backup.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

PRIMARY • SHORT

~1 hr

Tubbs Hill loop

The short version — a forested lakeshore loop right off downtown. Quick, free and the signature Coeur d'Alene walk.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

BACKUP • SHORT

~45 min

Resort boardwalk + City Beach

Stroll the world's longest floating boardwalk around the marina and dip at City Beach. An easy golden-hour move.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

▲ 5H30 • 370 MI

Coeur d'Alene → Bozeman east on I-90 back into Montana. Missoula (about two hours, and a great food town) or Butte make the midpoint fuel-and-lunch stop.

Bozeman, MT

AUG 26 – 27

COLLEGE ENERGY UNDER THE BRIDGERS
MONTANA'S FOOD CAPITAL

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING

Eat a James Beard dinner at Blackbird Kitchen. Bozeman holds half of Montana's James Beard nods — this is where you eat well on the way home.

COFFEE – PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Treeline Coffee Roasters
Pick this: For the coffee itself — single-origin obsessives, Montana's finest cup.
Obsessive roasting precision and vivid single-origin flavour — highly regarded by locals and the clear quality benchmark in town.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
\$ WALK-UP ~3 MIN 6:30A–5P

BACKUP

Wild Crumb
Pick this: If you want a top-tier pastry with the cup.
Bakery plus coffee, and a James Beard Outstanding Bakery semifinalist. Worth the line for the pastry case alone.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
\$ WALK-UP ~4 MIN MORNING

FOOD – PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Blackbird Kitchen
Pick this: The best food in town — a James Beard Outstanding Restaurant semifinalist.
Small downtown Italian, a decade deep, wood-fired and consistently excellent.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
Why it is the one: A James Beard-recognised kitchen doing the most complete cooking in a serious food town. Reserve.
\$\$\$ RESERVE DOWNTOWN DINNER

BACKUP

Shan
Pick this: For something singular — Chef Jarrett Wrisley's mountain Chinese and Thai.
A James Beard Best New Restaurant nominee — unlike anything else on the route. The adventurous alternate to Blackbird.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)
\$\$ RESERVE DOWNTOWN DINNER

FOUR WAYS TO SPEND THE DAY

PRIMARY • LONG half day

Hyalite Canyon
About 20 minutes south: the short Palisade Falls walk to a waterfall, plus reservoir paddling, fishing and trails for every level. Bozeman's backyard alpine playground.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

PRIMARY • SHORT ~1 hr

Historic Main Street
Stroll downtown's real small-city Main — shops, bookstores, ice cream and the university buzz. The easy pre-dinner move.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

BACKUP • LONG ~2–3 hr

Museum of the Rockies
A Smithsonian affiliate with one of the largest dinosaur collections in the US — a full-size T. rex and the Taylor Planetarium. The smoky or rainy-day play.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

BACKUP • SHORT ~45 min

Peets Hill sunset walk
A quick ridge walk over town for Bridger Range light, or the Gallatin History Museum in the old jail. A simple golden-hour reset.
[➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

▲ 7H • 475 MI • THE LONG ONE

Bozeman → Rapid City on I-90 E through Billings (fuel and lunch) and across the plains into the Black Hills. Respect this leg — start early and keep the tank above half.

Rapid City, SD

AUG 27 – 28

BASECAMP FOR THE ICONS

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING

One night after a seven-hour drive means you pick ONE: the Custer State Park Needles Highway loop, or Mount Rushmore at golden hour. Trying to do both is how this day gets ruined.

COFFEE – PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Pure Bean

Pick this: The downtown local favourite to start a big park day.

Reliable, well-pulled espresso in the walkable downtown core — easy in and out before you head for the Hills.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

\$ WALK-UP DOWNTOWN MORNING

BACKUP

Dixon Coffee Co.

Pick this: A solid second downtown option if Pure Bean is slammed.

Local roast, friendly counter — the dependable alternate cup.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

\$ WALK-UP DOWNTOWN MORNING

FOOD – PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Tally's Silver Spoon

Pick this: The best cooking in town, all day.

Chef Benjamin Klinkel trained at Le Cordon Bleu with honours and in Michelin-starred French kitchens; Tally's is a creative, from-scratch "fine diner" doing the best breakfast, lunch and dinner in Rapid City.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

Why it is the one: Michelin-trained technique in an unpretentious downtown room — quality without the fuss.

\$\$ RESERVE DOWNTOWN BREAKFAST-DINNER

BACKUP

Delmonico Grill

Pick this: A proper steak or fine-dining night.

Downtown's white-tablecloth steakhouse — the reserve-ahead special-occasion room.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

\$\$\$ RESERVE DOWNTOWN DINNER

FOUR WAYS TO SPEND THE DAY

PRIMARY • LONG

full day

Custer State Park loop

Needles Highway plus Sylvan Lake plus the Wildlife Loop — bison, pronghorn and burros, best late afternoon. The strongest scenery-to-effort in the Black Hills.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

BACKUP • LONG

full day

Badlands National Park

About an hour east: the otherworldly loop road plus the ladder-climb Notch Trail. A completely different landscape — pair it if you have two mornings.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

PRIMARY • SHORT

~1.5 hr

Mount Rushmore at golden hour

About 30 minutes southwest — the icon, best in warm evening light and much less crowded than midday. The short must-do.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

BACKUP • SHORT

~45 min

City of Presidents walk

Downtown's free bronze-statue stroll, plus the Dinosaur Park overlook above town — a fun, quick leg-stretch.

➤ OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

▲ 5H • 350 MI

Rapid City → Sioux Falls east across South Dakota on I-90 — you pass Wall Drug, the 1880 Town and the Missouri River overlook at Chamberlain.

Sioux Falls, SD

AUG 28 – 29

LAST STOP • THE NAMESAKE FALLS

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING

Falls Park at golden hour, then a tasting-menu send-off at Harvester Kitchen by Bryan — the pink-quartzite falls and the best plate in the city, back to back.

COFFEE – PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

The Source Coffee Roastery + Taproom

Pick this: Roastery by day, taproom by night — a two-in-one in the downtown core.

House-roasted coffee in the morning, local beer in the evening. The most complete local coffee stop.

OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

\$ WALK-UP DOWNTOWN COFFEE AM • BEER PM

BACKUP

Coffea Roasterie

Pick this: The classic downtown espresso bar for a quick, dialled cup.

A longtime Sioux Falls roaster — dependable, well-made, right downtown.

OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

\$ WALK-UP DOWNTOWN MORNING

FOOD – PRIMARY + BACKUP

★ PRIMARY

Harvester Kitchen by Bryan

Pick this: The send-off dinner — the city's most ambitious cooking.

Chef Bryan Moscatello's tasting-menu room: local-farm sourcing, a warm dinner-party feel, the highest-quality plate in Sioux Falls.

OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

Why it is the one: A tasting-menu chef sourcing from local farms — the clear top of the city, and the right way to end the trip.

\$\$\$\$ RESERVE DOWNTOWN DINNER

BACKUP

Minervas

Pick this: Reliable fine dining with an easier table.

A Sioux Falls fine-dining fixture since 1977. Maribella is the Italian alternate if you want pasta on the last night.

OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

\$\$\$ RESERVE DOWNTOWN DINNER

FOUR WAYS TO SPEND THE DAY

PRIMARY • LONG

half day

Good Earth State Park

About 15 minutes southeast: six miles of oak-and-prairie trails over the Big Sioux, on one of the oldest continuously inhabited sites in the US. Quiet, beautiful, well marked.

OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

BACKUP • LONG

~2 hr

Falls Park + downtown

The 120-acre falls, the Overlook Café, the summer Levitt free concerts and the downtown SculptureWalk — an easy, full evening in one loop.

OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

PRIMARY • SHORT

~45 min

Falls Park + viewing tower

The Big Sioux cascading over pink quartzite, floodlit at night — the perfect closing image before the last hop home. Climb the tower for the overview.

OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

BACKUP • SHORT

~45 min

Phillips Ave SculptureWalk

One of the world's largest annual public-sculpture exhibits — a walkable downtown loop past the Washington Pavilion.

OPEN IN GOOGLE MAPS

PACK FOR GLACIER IN AUGUST

- ▲ Layers — a warm mid-layer and a rain shell. Logan Pass is cold and windy even in August
- ▲ Bear spray, bought in Whitefish (you cannot fly with it), carried on your belt
- ▲ N95 masks for a smoke day
- ▲ Reusable water bottles, a daypack and sturdy trail shoes
- ▲ Sunscreen, sunglasses and a brimmed hat — high-altitude sun is intense
- ▲ Swimsuits and towels for the lake right out the door
- ▲ Binoculars — goats, sheep and bears from a safe distance
- ▲ Cash for the Tuesday farmers market

BOOK / DO AHEAD

- ▲ Logan Pass shuttle (\$1 per person) on Recreation.gov — only if you want a Highline or full Logan Pass day. The 7pm next-day drop is the backup
- ▲ Download offline maps (Google Maps and AllTrails) — there is no cell in the park or on the rural legs
- ▲ Reserve the date-night tables: Herb & Omni, Blackbird, Tally's, Harvester — a couple of days out
- ▲ Book a morning raft trip with Glacier Raft Co.
- ▲ Bookmark AirNow.gov and the Montana DEQ smoke forecast
- ▲ Many Glacier: if Grinnell is the plan, arrive at 6:30am — construction parking is tight
- ▲ Fuel up before every long or rural leg

▲ The one-line plan

Do Glacier at dawn on your clearest-air mornings, live at the lake through the hot middays and take downtown Whitefish in the golden evenings. Eat where the chef is — Herb & Omni, Blackbird, Tally's, Harvester — or where the legend is: Hudson's since 1907, Loula's pie. Get the huckleberry shake. Everything else is a bonus.

One last thing

You asked for slow mornings and one hike you will remember. The Summary Itinerary on page 01 is built exactly that way: two dawn starts, everything else unhurried, and Avalanche Lake as the hike that a nine-year-old finishes proud.

If a place has changed, a pick misses, or you want more of something — email us at nina@localpicksguide.com. We read every one, and it is how the next guide gets better.

— Local Picks Guide

How these picks were chosen. Every pick here was chosen for the quality of the actual thing — the food, the roast, the walk. Not the star average, which mostly measures how many people have already found a place. We look for the signals that separate a local's regular from a tourist stop, we check that a place is still open and still good, and we verify the rules that change from year to year against the agency that sets them. Glacier's 2026 entry rules on the route page were checked against nps.gov and Recreation.gov in July 2026 — the rule most guides still print is out of date. Distances are approximate, and hours move: confirm anything time-critical before you drive to it.