

Mountain

By Sue Arko

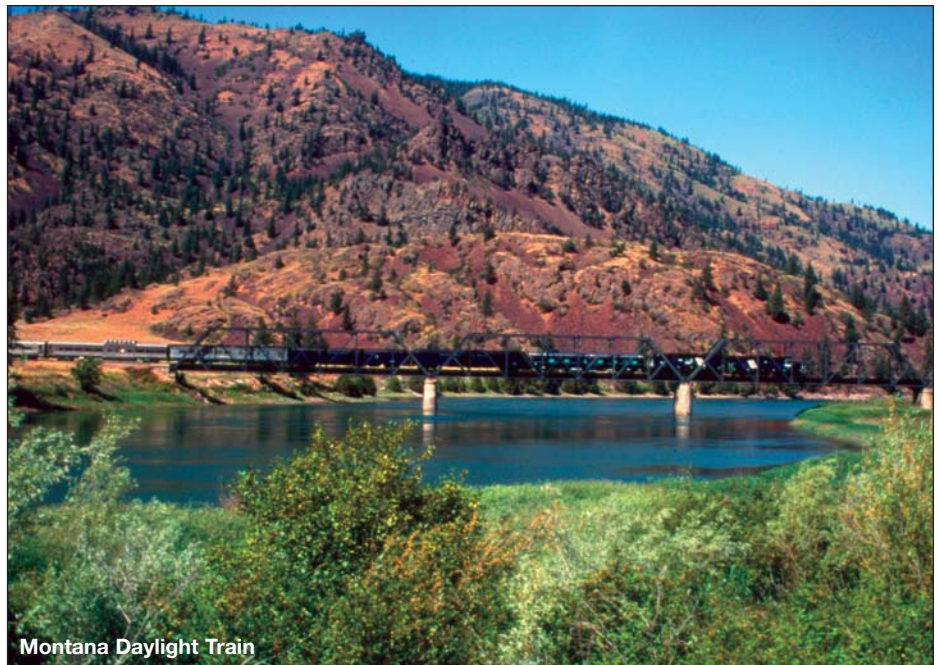
Imagine a region where mountains seem to touch the sky, where sweeping plains seem to reach to the horizon, where clear rivers flow over polished rocks, and where an abundance of wildlife frolic and play. This region is the Mountain West, USA. And imagine ... a train running through it.

West

A restored streamliner train, complete with refurbished cars from the 1880's, travels on the original Northern Pacific route. This route, completed in 1883, was America's second transcontinental rail line and is the most scenic route through the American West. Operated by Montana Rockies Rail Tours from June to September, the Montana Daylight Train travels through the Rocky Mountains along a 478-mile route between Sandpoint, Idaho and Livingston, Montana. This signature rail tour lasts three days and two nights. Add to this, scenic, mildly adventurous, and historical extensions by deluxe motorcoach for tour itineraries that explore the entire region.

Spokane, Wash. is the gateway for most of the eastbound departures. All guests arrive in Spokane and spend the night in a comfortable hotel. Early the next morning, the journey begins by boarding a motorcoach and traveling 90 miles to Sandpoint Idaho. Surrounded by the Selkirk and Cabinet mountain ranges, Sandpoint is a world-class ski and summer resort area. Idaho's largest lake, Lake Pend Oreille, lies on one side of the town and the lazy Pend Oreille River on the other. Talented artists, actors, and musicians live in town and offer year-round shows and festivals, making Sandpoint Idaho's largest arts community.

Soon the call is heard, "All Aboard" and the Montana Daylight Train departs Sandpoint. All travel is during daylight hours, so nothing is missed along the way, beginning with the bald eagles, which can be seen



Montana Daylight Train

along the shores of Lake Pend Oreille. Comfortable hotels are utilized each evening.

The first stop is Missoula, Mont., located at the mouth of Hellgate Canyon and on the banks of the Clark River. While in Missoula, visit the hand-carved Carousel for Missoula. Crafted by volunteers, it is one of the first fully hand-carved carousels to be built in the United States since the Great Depression. The carousel revolves to the sound of the largest band organ in continuous use in the United States.

The rail portion of the journey concludes the following afternoon in Livingston, Mont., located just 50 miles north of Yellowstone National Park. In the 1880's, soon after the railroad arrived, Livingston was the original entrance to Yellowstone.

The historic Northern Pacific train depot has been restored to its original grandeur and houses exhibitions of Western history, railroad history and art of the region. In Livingston, guests board a comfortable motorcoach and travel to Gardiner, the new northern entrance to Yellowstone, for the evening. President Theodore Roosevelt visited Gardiner in 1903 to dedicate the arch made of basaltic rock, which marks the entrance to the "Yellowstone Wonderland." This arch is inscribed with the words "For the Benefit and Enjoyment of All People."

The next three days are spent discovering Yellowstone National Park and the Grand Tetons National Park. Powerful natural forces, including furious volcanic explosions, crashing waves, grinding glaciers, shuddering

earthquakes, and strong winds, created the diverse landscape that became Yellowstone National Park in 1872. Many uncommon sites are contained in the 3,472 square miles of Yellowstone. Old Faithful Geyser is the most famous and the most consistent of Yellowstone's 10,000 hydrothermal features. It erupts 18-21 times each day, normally reaching maximum heights averaging 130 feet for about 20 seconds. The eruption then ends with a few puffs of steam.

Other highlights in Yellowstone include the Norris Geyser Basin and the Mammoth Hot Springs area.



Many believe Norris Geyser Basin to be the most exciting area in the park. It is the most compact thermal area, with hundreds of geysers, pools, and hot springs and can be viewed on a walk of less than two miles. The Mammoth Hot Springs area includes the Minerva Terrace, comprised of travertine, which has been dissolved from the limestone beneath the ground.

Because the area remains largely in the same natural state as it was more than 123 years ago, an abundance of wildlife dwell in the park, including elk, bears, bison, moose, bighorn sheep, and more.

Grand Tetons National Park was established and dedicated in 1929 and the area was enlarged in 1943. The entire area is now almost 500 square miles. The Tetons seem to touch the clouds as they thrust from the floor of Jackson Hole, Wyo., into the wide Wyoming sky. They appear majestic by day, mysterious by night, brilliantly colored at dawn, and slate blue at dusk. The 50 mile long valley, called Jackson Hole, is home to elk, deer, and the rare trumpeter swan. Tour the extensive Native American exhibit at the Colter Bay Visitors Center in the

Park and cruise the waters of Jackson Lake on a scenic boat tour (water levels permitting).

The evening is spent in the town of Jackson Hole, one of the leading western cultural centers in the US. It is home to more than 30 galleries, museums, playhouses, performance dance theatre, orchestral and Western music and poetry festivals. Shopping is another favorite activity of visitors to Jackson Hole.

The tour concludes seven days later in Salt Lake City. Salt Lake City, nestled in a valley at the foot of two mountain ranges, combines the amenities of a major metropolitan area with the friendliness of a small, western city. The city is a thriving cultural center—home to one of the nation's finest regional symphony orchestras, world-class opera, dance,



and theater companies, an illustrious choir, and many art galleries. Historic Temple Square, Salt Lake's most popular tourist attraction, is included on the tour. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints dedicated several downtown city blocks and a guided tour is included through Temple Square, including the Beehive House and through the gardens that surround Temple Square.

If your group prefers Denver as a gateway, consider the Montana Rail Tours' New Wyoming Trails itinerary. From Spokane to Yellowstone the same inclusions are provided. However, when departing Yellowstone, the routing shifts and the motorcoach traverses the high, rugged interior plateau of Wyoming to Cody. Stops are made at Split Rock, a geological landmark on the Oregon Trail and the site of an 1860 Pony Express Station, and at the Sixth Crossing and the Mormon Handcart Visitors Center. Continue through Wind River Canyon to

Thermopolis to view the massive hot springs and terraces created by the mineral rich water.

The itinerary also crosses Medicine Bow National Forest and the hot springs in Saratoga, known to Native Americans as "Place of the Magic Waters" before overnighting in Rawlins, Wyo. Dating back to 1868 when the tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad were being laid across Wyoming, Rawlins became an important location for stagecoaches and wagon trains headed for the new gold fields throughout Wyoming.

This nine-day tour concludes in Denver, by way of Fort Collins. Located in a spectacular setting at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, Denver is one of America's fastest growing cities. Founded in 1859 as a gold mining camp, this Mile High City has turned into a booming metropolis and entertains over 8.8 million visitors per year.

So, with all the spectacular scenery, the nostalgia of train travel, cultural attractions and the



historical destinations that comprise the Montana Rail Tours programs, what is it that groups like best? Talbot Tours, a member of the National Tour Association and the Travel Alliance Partners, just concluded a fam tour with their group leaders. Serge Talbot said, "The things that stick out though is the enjoyment of the train ride (everyone loves trains!) and especially the staff (kids) on board. They were very efficient and polite and won the seniors over as if they were their grandchildren. Truly, this is a tour not to be missed."

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