

ROAD-TRIPPING MONTANA

BY AMANDA BLOOM
Special to amNewYork

Whether you decide to drive there or fly out, Montana is an iconic road tripping state during warmer months. If you only have a week to

spare, fly to Rapid City Regional Airport in South Dakota, rent a car and hop west onto Interstate 90. If you have two weeks and the gumption,

take I-80 until you link up to 90 outside Chicago. The landscape will begin to shift along the way, to expand and mountain, scrub and sky.

DAY 1

From I-90, take Old U.S. 87 to **Fly Creek Road**, a miles-long straight stretch of dirt, gravel and ranch. You'll see a house now and again, but for the most part, it's wire fence and distant white-black spots on flaxen hills. Reconnect with I-90 after several miles north, or continue on up to I-94 through another 15 miles of ranch. From there, follow the Yellowstone River back to I-90, and take a stop at Pompey's Pillar — a 150-foot sandstone butte bearing William Clark's carved signature — on the way.

Heading west you'll hit **Bozeman**. There are plenty of hiking trails (try the M, a mile-long climb with spectacular views), coffee shops (visit Wild Joe's on Main Street for locally roasted beans and live music) and beer (stop in at Montana Ale Works, a few blocks east of Wild Joe's). If dive bars are your scene, stop in at Crystal Bar on Main, where you might see a girl walk across the bar topless and

hang her bra on the wall in the name of free drinks. But most of all, buy as many Bequet caramels as you can at the local grocery store. They're out of this world.



DAY 3

About three hours northwest of Hot Springs is **Missoula** — bigger than Bozeman, with a richer arts and music scene. Check out Five on Black (235 N. Higgins Ave.), a Brazilian eatery with build-your-own rice bowls, Top Hat Lounge (134 W. Front St.) for live music and Kettle Brewery (313 N. First Street W.) for a pale ale — just plan accordingly, they stop pouring at 8 p.m. If you happen to need a circular saw, meat grinder or plaster spreader, stop by Tool Library (1527 Wyoming St.)

DAYS 4 & 5

A few hours north of Missoula is the beautiful **Flathead National Forest** and **Glacier National Park**, known as the "Crown of the Continent." Glacier has more than 700 miles of trails, close to 1,000 campsites, lakes, mountains, alpine forest and the infamous 50-mile-long Going-to-the-Sun Road that winds throughout the park's interior. Take a few days here. A single-entry seven-day permit is \$12.

DAY 6

Missoula International Airport will take you back home if you flew out west. On your return to Missoula, bid Montana farewell with an evening at **The Florence** (111 N. Higgins Ave.), a 1940s-era hotel now home to offices, the Red Bird restaurant and a gorgeous, comfortable lobby to lounge in while having a drink.

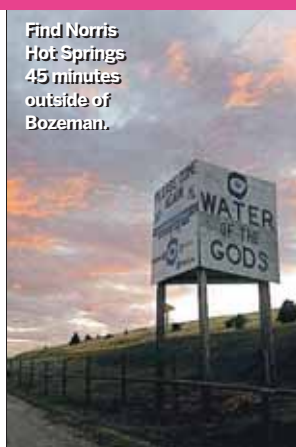
DAY 2

Start your morning in Bozeman at the **Stockyard Café** (1018 East Griffin Dr.), where you'll find orange juice in purple metal cups, huevos rancheros, French toast, a bathroom in the barn next door and a helpful guide titled "The Way of the Stockyard." Some of the "ways": "2. If you have a fork, you don't need a spoon to stir your coffee." "18. Save room for dessert."

Next up: **Norris Hot Springs**.

This hot spring is located quite literally in the middle of nowhere, 45 minutes from Bozeman in the town of Hot Springs. Have a soak in the mineralized waters, check out live music from the pool on the weekends and order up good (and low-carbon footprint) food and drink. Water temperature sits around 100 degrees depending on the season. A soak is \$7 adults \$5 over 64, \$3 under 12. Music cover is \$2. Campsites are available for \$22-\$33 per day.

Find Norris Hot Springs 45 minutes outside of Bozeman.



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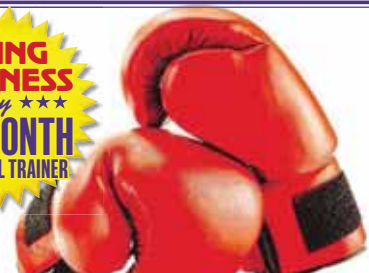
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