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Glacier National Park
September '08

Three**Perfect**Days

Glacier

By Becky Lomax / Photography by Jim Franco / FOR EONS, ICE BLANKETED ALL but the highest summits of what is now Glacier National Park in Montana. Under writhing ice floes, mountains took shape. Glaciers gnawed gaping valleys, etched rocks, piled up long ridges of rubble, and left large turquoise-blue lakes on the landscape. Since the time that ancient ice birthed the park's landforms, several miniature ice ages have come and gone. They scooped out the nooks with cirques and hanging valleys. More recently, Glacier Park has sung a different tune. In the late 1800s, when ►►►





DAY 1

Glacier Park
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Take in Glacier National Park's pristine panoramas atop Big Mountain. Ride the chairlift or an enclosed gondola to 6,818 feet. Air just doesn't get any fresher than it is up here.

explorer George Bird Grinnell first laid eyes on the Continental Divide, a ridge that the Blackfeet called the Backbone of the World, he lobbied for its preservation. By the time Congress designated Glacier as the nation's 10th national park in 1910, the 150 pockets of ice from Grinnell's day had begun to thaw into ponds.

Today, only a handful of ethereal ice fields remain. Climatologists predict that the park's 26 lingering glaciers will be extinct in a little more than two decades. So this is the time to visit, while ice still leaves its fingerprints in the rugged Northern Rocky Mountain landscape. Visitors to the park can glimpse what future generations may not see: white pearls strung along the area that Grinnell named the Crown of the Continent.

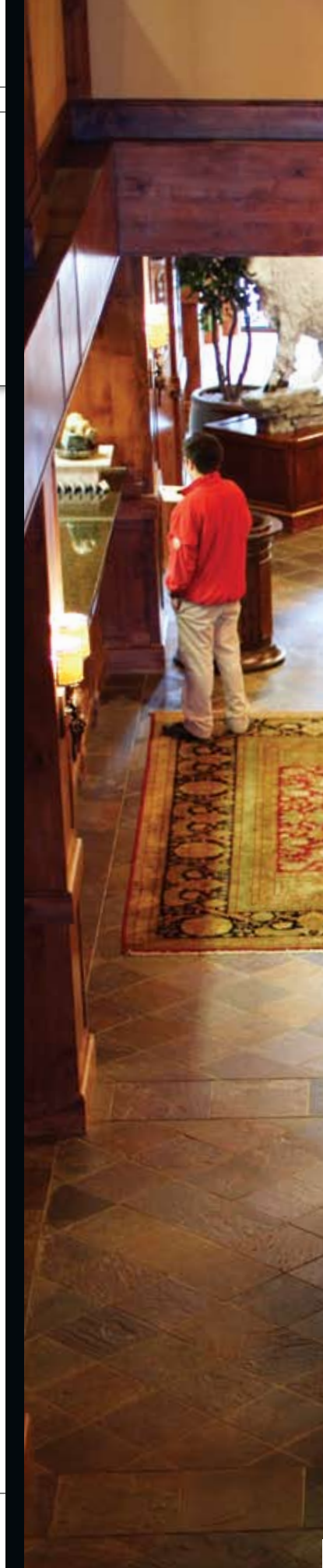
DAY ONE / Adjacent to Glacier Park on the shores of one of Flathead Valley's largest lakes sits your hotel, **1 The Lodge at Whitefish Lake**. Built in the style of historical park lodges, the new upscale structure retains the flavor of its early cousins with native stone and wood, but it's more modern and luxurious, with spacious slate-floored rooms overlooking the lake. In its two-story lobby, a fireplace crackles on cold days and bronze wildlife sculptures give a foretaste of upcoming sights.

This morning, grab a daypack, hiking boots, and a water bottle and head to Glacier. To carbo-load for hiking, stop in downtown Whitefish at **2 Loula's**, located in the large brick hall of the old Masonic Temple. Try the lemon-stuffed French toast topped with raspberry sauce while enjoying the work of local artists. Owners Mary Lou and Laura—the two parts of the café's name—are best known for their fruit pies.

Waltz through Flathead Valley, watching the park's peaks leap into view as you wind closer to the town of West Glacier. Meet your tour for the day at **3 Glacier Guides**. With a deli lunch packed, the guide will orient you to the park's history, geology, wildflowers, and diverse fauna—especially grizzly bears.



(previous page) scenic Two Medicine Lake; (this page, top) Big Mountain; (above) huckleberry-peach pie from Loula's; (right) The Lodge at Whitefish Lake









A river runs through it: Rushing water makes its way between the park's greenery (left); The Lodge at Whitefish Lake retains the classic ambiance of park lodges (above).

On Going-to-the-Sun Road, only fully open three months a year, hair-raising curves hug narrow cliffs on the climb to **4 Logan Pass**. Under the Continental Divide, the 75-year-old National Historic Landmark rises for 12 miles up one long switchback. Tunnels, arches, and rock walls hang thousands of feet above the valley floor. Around every corner, new views pop into sight: tumbling waterfalls, plunging valleys, and serrated peaks scraping the sky. Revel in glimpses of the park's namesake ice in an alpine wonderland.

At the **5 Piegan Pass** trailhead, you'll be advised about meeting a grizzly bear: Don't run, back up slowly, and act submissive. The guide leads you up the nine-mile (roundtrip) path. If that seems a little ambitious, you can make it a six-mile roundtrip with a turnaround at Preston Park. Here, seas of purple, yellow, and fuchsia wildflowers bloom with colors that would impress even van Gogh. Piegan Glacier, looming above in a hanging valley, spews waterfalls. Ahead, the trail leaps above the tree line, sweeping around a large cirque below Mount Siyeh, one of the park's highest monoliths. Jackson-Blackfoot Glaciers—once linked in a large ice field but now cleft in two—sail into distant sight. If you make it to Piegan Pass, have lunch facing the Continental Divide.

After hiking, head back down Going-to-the-Sun Road with the afternoon light casting a different glow. This time, stop at historic **6 Lake McDonald Lodge**. Built in 1914, the lodge sports a taxidermy décor reminiscent of hunting days before parkhood. The park's megafauna—moose, elk, and bighorn sheep—



surround the lobby, which stretches several stories upward. Stroll out the back door, where the lodge originally received its guests via a stairway from the boat dock. The park's largest lake provided the only access before the Sun Road's construction. Relax with a local microbrew while you rock in the large antique chairs.

Back in Whitefish, top off your day at **7 Whitefish Lake Restaurant**, the clubhouse at the town-owned 36-hole golf course. The restaurant is a local favorite.

Chef Daniel Crumbaker roasts up a juicy prime rib and rack of lamb soused in garlic and three-onion flavor. Pair either dish with an appetizer of New Zealand mussels, and finish with a huckleberry dessert—the sweet, wild berry grows rampant hereabouts.

Head back to your lodge to visit The Boat Club. Lounge on the outside deck to watch the sun set over Whitefish Lake while sipping wine from the West Coast. To sample a more local flavor instead, order a hucktini.

DAY TWO / As the sun rises on Whitefish Lake, walk the half-mile on the town's new bicycle path to **1 Rising**

Sun Bistro for breakfast. Split two versions of the bistro eggs Benedict. They come trussed up with sausage, salmon, or spinach and drizzled with lemony hollandaise.

Next, drive to City Beach to meet a guide from **② Whitefish Sea Kayaking**. Rent a tandem kayak and paddle the glassy lake in the morning before the drone of Jet Skis starts. Tour the shoreline south to the Whitefish River outlet and float down to the Riverside Park walking bridge. The river yields a riparian habitat perfect for birds. Watch for bronze-headed mergansers, red-winged blackbirds, and the flashy-tipped tails of cedar waxwings before paddling back.

Cruise up to **③ Whitefish Mountain Resort**. In winter, it's one of Montana's biggest ski resorts, but in summer it's a top-of-the-world sightseeing pleasure. For the 15-minute ride up to 6,818 feet on Big Mountain, go alfresco on the chairlift or inside a gondola. From the summit, a panorama of Glacier's 1 million-acre ridgeline spans from Kintla Peak near the Canadian border to the southern St. Nicholas spire. Flathead Valley sprawls thousands of feet below. Tour the United States Forest Service Summit Nature Center to run your fingers through the fur of a grizzly bear (unless you did that yesterday!). Lunch on the panino of the day while sitting on the deck overlooking the park.

For the return to the lowlands, ride the chairlift or hike four ski slope miles downhill back to the resort for the drive to Whitefish. With all the hiking you've been doing, it's time for a Mountaineers Survival Foot Treatment at **④ Remedies Day Spa**. In this 100-year-old farmhouse, your feet get fed all-natural products stirred up in the kitchen. First, you'll soak them in hot water mixed with peppermint and eucalyptus leaves, fresh garden flowers, and essential oils. Then, your feet receive an olive oil and sugar scrub before being wrapped in honey and whipped cream for remoisturizing. The treatment finishes with a foot massage.

Your rejuvenated feet are now ready to explore

(below) Want to bring the spa home? Remedies Day Spa offers many products to take back with you; (bottom) Central Avenue is a shopping hot spot.



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Glacier Weather

September carves out a meteorological sweet spot at Glacier National Park. Highs range from the mid-70s around Labor Day to the low 60s by month's end. The month also manages a high probability of sunshine. Low-elevation snow typically holds off until October. But you'll still need a sweater or jacket in the morning. Lows settle into the 30s or low 40s. Fall's colors peak in early October.

The Weather Channel

Weather information is provided by The Weather Channel. For more Glacier National Park climatological details, visit weather.com.

Getting Around

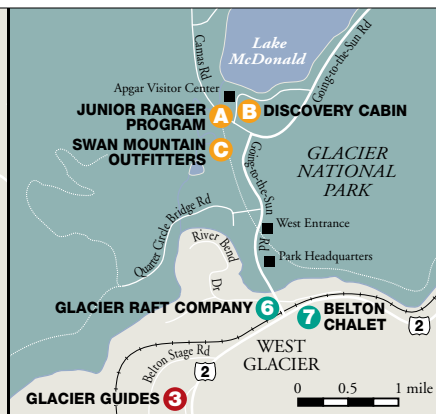
Glacier National Park pairs with Flathead Valley, the home of Glacier Park International Airport (FCA) and Whitefish. Rent a car to get around; public transportation is scarce. Before leaving home, you can purchase guidebooks, maps, and natural-history books through the Glacier Natural History Association (glacierassociation.org). At Glacier's entrance station, pick up a park map and the *Waterton-Glacier Guide* newspaper for current park information.

Glacier for Kids

- A Junior Ranger Program** (nps.gov/learn/juniorranger.htm) Activities on Going-to-the-Sun Road that earn kids a Junior Ranger badge
- B Discovery Cabin** (nps.gov; search for Discovery Cabin) Exhibits that teach about wildlife and habitats
- C Swan Mountain Outfitters** (swanmountainoutfitters.com) Guided trail rides in McDonald Valley
- D Hidden Lake Overlook** A 1.5-mile hike to stand on the Continental Divide and see goat nannies and kids

Stroll Central Avenue's shops for a variety of goods—unique toys at Imagination Station, tempting truffles at Copperleaf Chocolate Company, and rare park books at Two Medicine Gallery.





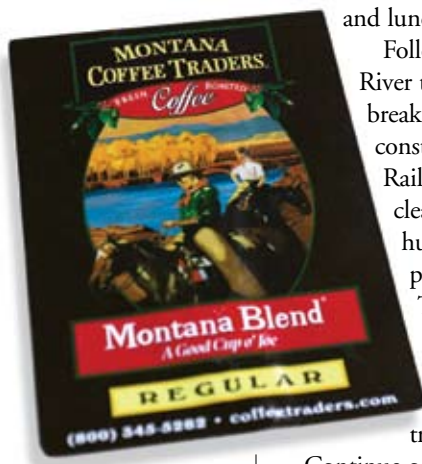


shops on Whitefish's **5 Central Avenue**. Drop in to Imagination Station, where the owners carry the type of eclectic toys they grew up with. They'll even ship them home for you. Try a handmade dark-chocolate truffle at Copperleaf Chocolate Company. Browse the art in a few of the 14 galleries, and check out at least one of the three antiques shops. For Glacier Park art and rare books about the park, visit Two Medicine Gallery.

Relax over dinner at **6 Tupelo Grille & Fine Wine**. Your hikes have earned calorie credits, so choose from the menu brim full of Cajun specialties and an award-winning wine list. Start off dipping "Looziana" crawfish cakes in tarragon mustard. Relish the grilled shrimp and garlic cheddar grits smothered in tasso cream, and finish off with the just-right sweetness of the bread pudding.

Then, walk two blocks to the Whitefish Performing Arts Center for an evening with **7 Alpine Theatre Project**. Featuring Broadway talent lassoed from New York and LA, the company stages three shows each summer. If you visit after the theater season ends, dance to live music at the Great Northern Bar & Grill on Central Avenue.

DAY THREE / Make it an early start for what may be your busiest day. Smell the coffee as you open the door of **1 Montana Coffee Traders** in downtown Whitefish, an outlet for the company's popular locally roasted fair-trade beans. Pick up a bag of the medium-roast Grizzly Blend; \$1 of every pound sold helps protect grizzly bear habitat. Stock up on two needs for the day here: lattes and lunch, both to go.



Follow the Middle Fork of the Flathead River to Essex for a taste of park history with breakfast at **2 Izaak Walton Inn**. The inn was constructed in 1939 to house Great Northern Railway workers, especially those needed to clear the snowy tracks in winter. Order the huckleberry pancakes served on replica plates featuring scenes from Glacier Park. The original plates were used on the Empire Builder train, which brought wealthy tourists to the park in its early days. Today, the inn's a favorite with train aficionados and cross-country skiers.

Continue on over Marias Pass and through East Glacier to Two Medicine, a less-crowded park corner steeped in Blackfoot history. Hop on the **3 Sinopah boat** for a ride across Two Medicine Lake's azure waters. The massive red hulk of Rising Wolf Mountain dwarfs the tiny boat touring the shoreline, which allows cruisers to spy grizzlies feeding on bulbs or berries. Peaks surrounding the lake are named in tribute to Blackfoot legend—Rising Wolf married the chief's daughter Sinopah, the peak opposite.

At Pray Shelter on the lake's west end, debark for a roundtrip hike of less than two miles to **4 Twin Falls**.

Try the savory nori fumi panko crusted ahi from Tupelo Grille & Fine Wine (left); go to Montana Coffee Traders for your morning jolt and lunch to go (above).



Brave the roaring rapids named Bonecrusher, Jaws, and Pinball on the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. You're sure to work up an appetite—a perfect prelude for dinner at Belton Chalet.

Although Two Medicine's glaciers melted long ago, find evidence of their passing in the vertical walls ground thin between two icefields. Climb to Upper Two Medicine Lake, which mirrors the rocky pyramid of Lone Walker Mountain, named for Sinopah's father, or hike the south shoreline back across a swinging bridge.

From Two Medicine, retrace your drive around Glacier's southern tip, grabbing the binoculars for a stop at the **5 Goat Lick**. This natural mineral lick provides the nutrients and salts that goats crave after a long winter. Billies and nannies with kids will swim the river and tread sure-footed up the steep cliff for a lick.

As a frothy finale to your adventure, catch **6 Glacier Raft Company's** last afternoon boat for a raft trip down the Middle Fork of the Flathead River, designated a National Wild and Scenic River. If Bonecrusher and Jaws rapids don't soak you, Pinball will.

Last, dine right next door at **7 Belton Chalet**, built in 1910 by Great Northern Railway, the first lodge to welcome its guests to Glacier. And don't worry about your casual clothes. You've noticed by now that Glacier is not a dress-to-dine destination. Start by matching the wild-mushroom and goat cheese bruschetta with one of the regional microbrews on tap. For entrées, share the Montana buffalo meatloaf smothered in chipotle gravy and the grilled vegetable napoleon with colorful layers of eggplant, tomatoes, zucchini, squash, and mushrooms. If the dessert tray holds cheesecake covered in succulent cherries from the owner's local orchard, try it.

After dinner, amble outside to lounge on the deck. In three days, you've seen a lot, breathed lots of fresh air, and actively engaged one of the most memorable slices of America's great outdoors. You've earned the simple luxury of watching the alpenglow of sunset smear Glacier Park with pink. **Becky Lomax** first saw Glacier when she was 3, but she still marvels at its beauty. After being a hiking guide in the park for 10 years, she authored Moon Handbooks: Glacier National Park.



(top) a rousing, dousing excursion with Glacier Raft Company; (above) cowboy hats for sale; (right) breakfast at Montana Coffee Traders



Please
ORDER
Here

COFFEE

Americano	\$1.70
Latte - Caramel	\$2.75
Mocha	\$3.20
Hot Chocolate	\$2.00
Steamer	\$2.00
CHAI (Spiced Tea)	\$3.75
Hot Tea	\$1.50
Extras: Sugar, Cream, Vanilla	

Blended drinks \$4.95 - \$5.95

Chocolate	\$4.95
Mango	\$5.95
Banana Smoothie	\$5.95

HOMECHE GARDEN

