

Seeley-Swan Scenic Drive

90 Mile Chain of Lakes



5 Days/4 Nights

Gateway City: Billings, Montana



Eons ago, slowly creeping glaciers covered Montana, scouring the land and cutting deep valleys as they pushed mounds of soil in their path. As they melted, Glacial Lake Missoula filled with as much as 1,000 feet of iceberg-filled meltwater. When at last, the ice holding the millions of gallons in the lake finally broke loose and flowed out to the Pacific Ocean, it revealed a beautiful landscape filled with hundreds of lakes, mountain ranges, and fertile land for growing lush forests. Thank all this natural upheaval for the stunning drive along the Seeley-Swan Valley Chain of Lakes, connected by the Clearwater and Swan Rivers. The route, stretching 90 miles along Montana Highway 83, also known as the Glacier Parkway, backs up to the Bob Marshall Wilderness, the largest roadless area in the lower 48 states. The Seeley-Swan Scenic Drive is bounded by the Swan Mountains on one side and the Mission Mountains rising majestically on the other. Midway between Seeley Lake and Swan Lake, hike to Holland Lake Falls where the views are jaw-dropping. Within the unspoiled nature here, you'll find Seeley Lake and Bigfork, charming, visitor friendly towns and Gus, the world's largest western larch tree. Take it slow as you enjoy the scenic beauty along the last natural chain of lakes in the Northwest. This is about as good as it gets.



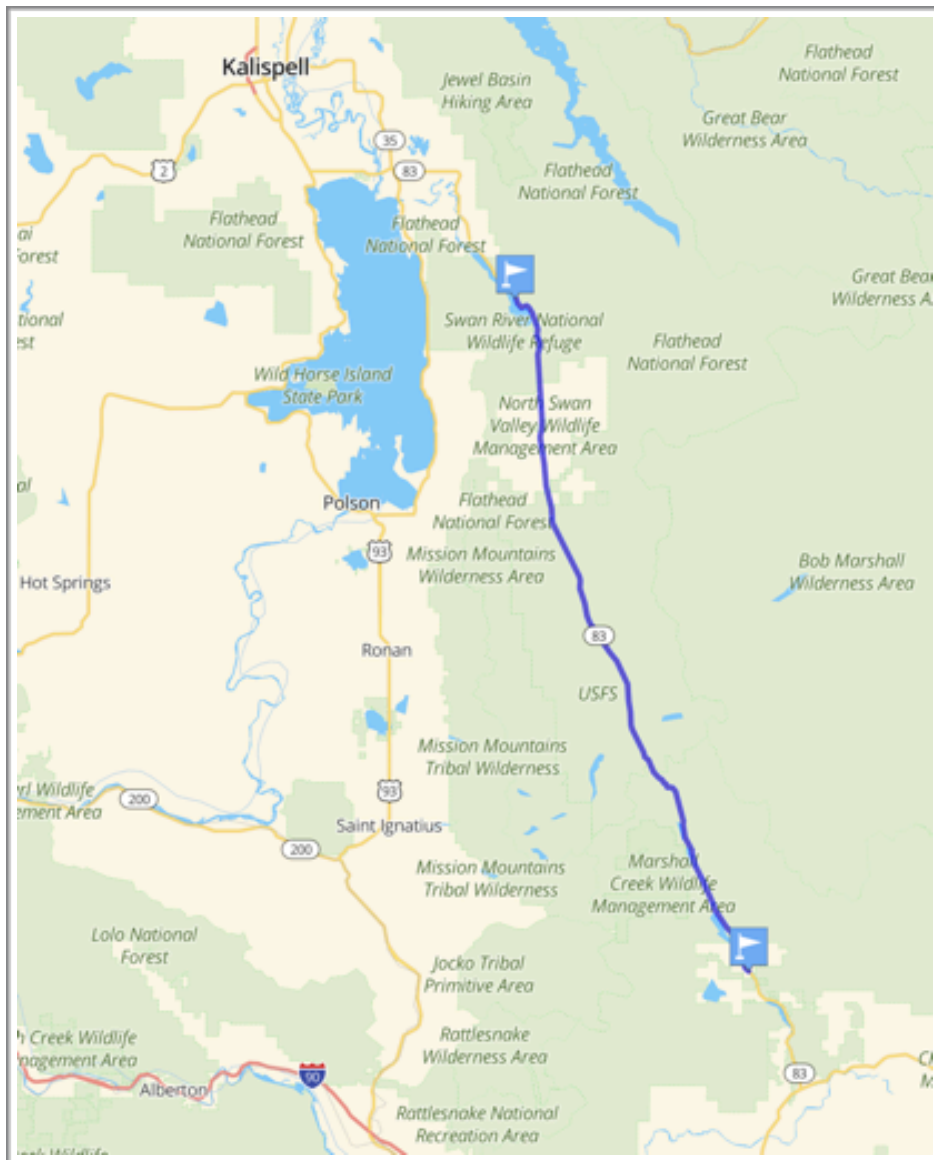
Touring the Byway

We recommend you start your journey in Missoula where you can take the Downtown Missoula Historic and Art Walking tour to learn a bit about the city and visit the Montana Natural History Center, the Montana Museum of Art and Culture, and the Historical Museum of Fort Missoula, before taking the Riverfront Walking Trail and a stay at the Blue Mountain Bed and Breakfast. On Day Two, you'll be off to Bonner to visit the Bonner Milltown History Center and Museum before beginning to travel alongside the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, which accompanies you on the whole route. Explore the natural beauty of Salmon Lake State Park and Placid Lake State Park before moving on to Seeley Lake. Enjoy strolling through this quaint little town and visit the Seeley Lake Historical Museum before settling in at the Lodges on Seeley Lake for a relaxing evening.

The next morning, it's a short drive off the route to view Gus, the tallest western larch tree in the world, and another short drive to Holland Lake Lodge to see the waterfall and if the timing is right, enjoy the dining room. In Condon, tour the Upper Swan Valley Historical Museum to learn the logging story in the region.

After some lunch and enjoying the Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge, have another great night's stay at the Laughing Horse Lodge. From there, it's on to Bigfork, with art galleries and a distillery, and then to Kalispell where you can take the Downtown Historic District Walking Tour and visit the Conrad Mansion Museum and the Northwest Montana History Museum while staying at the Kalispell Grand Hotel.

We wish you safe passage if you're traveling another Montana Scenic Drive, or a safe and pleasant journey home.



DAY ONE



Missoula

C. P. Higgins and Francis Worden opened a trading post on the Blackfoot River in 1869, that was followed by the arrival of the Mullan Road connecting Fort Benton with Walla Walla, Washington. Fort Missoula was opened in 1877 to protect the growing community. The arrival of the railroad in 1883, along with the Missoula Mercantile Company, made the city a trading center. The University of Montana opened in 1895. Missoula's location within a heavily forested area made logging the mainstay industry until the mid-1970s. Saws could be heard over two miles away on a clear summer night.

Downtown Missoula Historic and Art Walking Tour

Learn more about Missoula on the downtown walking tour, which has one of the largest collections of buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places in the country. Locations like the Atlantic Hotel and the Diner Café, with huge historic neon signs, that have long been repurposed, peacefully coexist with the 1910 Missoula County Courthouse and the 1909 Palace Hotel. The downtown partnership has funded over 20 works of public art, that appear along the tour.

Montana Natural History Center

The Montana Natural History Center features displays of the flora and fauna, ecosystems, and geology in the state, including the Montana Ecosystem, The Magic Planet, a Naturalist Forest Station, Glacial Lake Missoula, Explore Fossils, Explore Geology, and the outdoor Nature Adventure Garden.

120 Hickory Street, Suite A, Missoula, MT 59801, 406-327-0405, T-F 9AM-5PM, Sat Noon-4PM, Adults \$4

Montana Museum of Art and Culture

Located on the University of Montana campus, this museum now has 11,000 pieces including work by Rocky Mountain artists, historic European works, and collections from Southeast Asia, American Impressionists, contemporary Native American artists, ceramics, and public art sites across the campus. European masters include Rembrandt, Delacroix, Boucher, Piranesi, and Daumier, along with 20th century artists, Miro, Toulouse-Lautrec, Chagall, Dali, Picasso, Remington, Merritt Chase, and Andy Warhol.

Across from the Adams Center off East 6th Street. University of Montana Campus. 406-243-2019. Tu-Sat Noon-6PM. Free, donations accepted.

Historical Museum at Fort Missoula

Fort Missoula was established by the US Army in 1877 to protect settlers in the region. Nearly 100 years later, the Historical Museum encompasses 32 acres with over 20 historic structures and a collection of nearly 50,000 artifacts.

3400 Captain Rawn Way, Missoula, MT 59804, 406-728-3476 M-Sat 10AM-5PM, Sun Noon-5PM

Riverfront Walking Trail

The riverfront walking trail along the Clark Fork River takes you past McCormick Park, the Old Milwaukee Depot, John H. Toole Park, and other scenic and historic treasures in Missoula.



Destination Distinctive Accommodations

Blue Mountain Bed and Breakfast 6980 Deadman Gulch Road, Missoula, MT 59804, 406-203-3187 The gardens here frame breathtaking views of the Bitterroot River. Elegant breakfasts go along with the Inn's lovely décor. Guest rooms have private baths with jetted tubs, air conditioning and amenities, plus Wifi.

Destination Distinctive Dining

Catalyst Café 111 North Higgins Avenue, Missoula, MT, 59802, 406-542-1337
American cuisine café.

Scotty's Table 131 South Higgins Avenue, Unit P3, Missoula, MT 59802, 406-549-2790 Fine dining in Missoula.

Tamarack Brewing Company 231 Front Street West, Missoula, MT 59802, 406-830-3113
American pub and bar, vegetarian and vegan options.

Destination Distinctive Retail

Missoula Art Galleries

The Artists' Shop 127 North Higgins, Missoula, MT 59801, 406-543-6393

Missoula's premiere co-op fine craft gallery. M-F 10AM-6PM, Sat-Sun 10AM-5PM

Dana Gallery 246 North Higgins Avenue, **Murphy-Jubb Fine Art** 210 North Higgins Avenue, Suite 300, **Radius Gallery** 114 East Main Street and **The Art Hang-up** 839 South Higgins Avenue

Lake Missoula Tea Company 136 East Broadway, Missoula, MT, 59801, 406-926-1038 Teas from around the world, including blends made in small batches.

Hometana 312 North Higgins Avenue, Missoula, MT 59801, 406-224-4166

Ducrey Chocolate Maker 311 East Front Street, Missoula, MT 59801, 406-218-7396

DAY TWO

Bonner

Even though Bonner was famous for lumbering, its most important history comes from a strategic location at the confluence of the Big Blackfoot River and Clark Fork River. From time immemorial, Native Americans used the area for fishing and a stop along “The Road to the Buffalo.” At some point, Meriwether Lewis, of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, continued up the Blackfoot River after leaving William Clark at Travelers’ Rest. He proceeded north, then took the East branch of Clark Fork where guides directed him to the river he should take-- Cokahlarishkit, or "river of the road to the buffalo" - but they would not go with him for fear of the Blackfeet tribe further west.

Bonner Milltown History Center and Museum

Lt. John Mullan, of the famous Mullan Road built from Fort Benton, Montana to Walla Walla, Washington, located his camp at the confluence of the Big Blackfoot and Clark Fork rivers during the winter of 1861-1862, on a high bank above the Blackfoot where Milltown stands today. The History Center at Milltown reveals makes this history and the area’s timber heritage, including preservation of the neighborhoods surrounding the original lumber mill.

9397 Montana Highway 200, Bonner, MT 59823, 406-370-5929





Bob Marshall Wilderness Area

The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, affectionately known as “The Bob,” encompasses 1.5 million acres of land traditionally inhabited by the Blackfeet, Salish, Pend d’Oreille, and Kootenai tribes. Considered by many to be the “crown jewel” of the Wilderness system, with untrammeled nature straddling the Continental Divide. The entire expanse stretches from Glacier National Park to Rogers Pass, with towering limestone reefs, the famous Chinese Wall, several mountain ranges, lush forests, broad basins and valleys, and two “wild and scenic” designated rivers.

Salmon Lake State Park

This beautiful lake nestled along the Clearwater River, between the Mission Mountains and the Swan Mountains, is the perfect place for birdwatching.
2329 Montana Highway 83, Seeley Lake, MT 59868, 406-677-6804

Placid Lake State Park

The forest around this absolutely still lake was some of the best logging territory in the area, where the roads used to haul out trees have been transformed into great hiking and mountain biking trails. Interpretive panels placed along the trails reveal the lumbering history of the area.

5001 North Placid Lake Road, Seeley Lake, MT 59858, 406-677-6804

Seeley Lake

The community of Seeley Lake, named for Jasper Seely who built a cabin on Clearwater Lake in 1881, and served as the first ranger of the Lewis and Clark Forest Reserve, was not served with a road until 1895. Today, this very visitor-friendly town is surrounded by pine and larch forests, and crystal lakes.



Seeley Lake Historical Museum

The 1930s horse barn that the Seeley Lake Historical Society salvaged from collapse and rebuilt, holds museum exhibits in seven double size (two horse) stalls, including themed displays about local cultural and natural resources. Other exhibits include the Joe Waldbillig Pioneer display, the Norman Maclean fire, the Big Burn fire of 1910, Cabin Fever, old time logging, and the wilderness information epicenter. The outside grounds have additional displays.

2920 Montana Highway 83 North, Seeley Lake, MT 59868, 406-677-2990



Destination Distinctive Accommodations

The Lodges on Seeley Lake 2156 Boy Scout Road, Seeley Lake, MT 59868 800-900-9016

Enjoy a dramatic view of the Swan Mountain range across the water from your lodge equipped with a convenient modern kitchen, fireplace, a flat-screen TV and Wi-Fi service. The utter privacy achieved by the expansive grounds assures that your time here can be as active or quiet as you like. Private dinner service available.

Destination Distinctive Dining

Lindley's Prime Steak House 3129 Montana Highway 83, Seeley Lake, MT 59868, 406-677-9229

Destination Distinctive Retail

Grizzly Claw Trading 3187 Montana Highway 83, Seeley Lake, MT 59868, 406-677-0008

DAY THREE

Gus

Trees grow big in the water-abundant Seeley-Swan valleys and there's plenty of big trees in Girard Grove on the western shore of Seeley Lake where many are 600 or more years old. But, at 163 feet high and with another 10 foot dead top, Gus has been documented as the largest larch tree in the world.

Holland Lake Lodge 8717 Holland Lake Lodge Road, Condon, MT 59826, 406-754-2282

Holland Lake Lodge is a rustic lakeside resort that reflects authentic Montana, with stunning views of two mountain ranges, a pristine lake, a 100-foot waterfall and to die for food in the dining room.

Condon

This tiny forest town, named for James L. Condon, a Corvallis-area logger and farmer, was once abuzz with loggers cutting timber in the area.

Upper Swan Valley Historical Museum

The upper Swan Valley area that was a very active lumbering region, is unique in that it was not homesteaded until 1910. You can still see old Native American trails, trapper cabins, marten and springboard notched trees, and sawmills dotting the landscape, coupled with early Forest Service ranger station buildings and cabins. 6774 Montana Highway 83, Condon, MT 59826, 406-754-2745 or 406-754-2238

Destination Distinctive Dining

Hungry Bear Steak House 6287 Montana Highway 83, Condon, MT 59826, 406-754-2240

Destination Distinctive Retail

Grace's Gallery 7217 Montana Highway 83, Condon, MT 59826, 406-210-1744 Work in this gallery ranges from photography by John Mercer and Stacy Boyd to paintings by Paul Surber and sculptures by the renowned Eric Thorsen.

Swan Lake

A vibrant timber camp in the early 1900s, this sleepy little village is now famous for exceptional hiking and bird watching. Local birds include sandhill cranes, bald eagles, and the elusive black tern.

Swan River National Wildlife Refuge

Approximately 1,254 acres of the Refuge are covered with dense stands of reed canary grass while the remaining acreage is a forested upland dominated by old growth fir, spruce, cedar, and larch. In places, large cottonwood trees shade the banks of the Swan River.



Destination Distinctive Accommodations

Laughing Horse Lodge and Dining Room 22360 Montana Highway 83, Milemarker 71.5, Swan Lake, MT 59911, 406-886-2080

Enjoy this traditional Montana lake lodge at the southern end of Swan Lake, nestled at the base of the Swan Range and the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

DAY FOUR



Bigfork

Known as the “Village by the Bay” and the major arts community in Northwest Montana, Bigfork is a year-round resort with art galleries, restaurants, sidewalk cafes, golf, boutiques, and live theater.

Bigfork Art and Culture Center

Located in a converted gas station, the center features local artists, artisans, and craftsmen who work in fiber, metal, gemstones, paint, clay, photography, sculpture, textiles, wood, glass, and the written word.

525 Electric Avenue, Bigfork, MT 59911 406-837-6927, Tu-Sat 11AM-5PM

Destination Distinctive Dining

Pocketstone Café 444 Electric Avenue, Bigfork, MT 59911, 406-837-7223

Breakfast and lunch favorites.

Destination Distinctive Retail

Art Fusion 471 Electric Avenue, Bigfork MT, 59911, 406-837-3526,

A contemporary gallery blending art and fine craft from over seventy Montana artists including contemporary art, glass, metal, fiber, wood and one of a kind jewelry.



Whistling Andy Distillery

Taste spirits made from unmilled grains with no shortcuts or automation. Age old recipes coexist peacefully with unique new blends derived from what's in season.
8541 Montana Highway 3, Bigfork, MT 59911, 406-837-2620

Bigfork Summer Playhouse

Check out performances on offer at the “Theatre by the Bay,” winner of the Montana Governor's Award for the Arts.
526 Electric Avenue, Bigfork, MT 59911, 406-837-4886



Kalispell

Kalispell was platted by Charles Conrad when he realized the railroad was going to come through. Named the Salish word for “flat land” or prairie above the lake, Kalispell became a division point for the railroad between St. Paul, MN and Seattle. Soon after “the iron horse snorted through” the remaining buildings from a neighboring town gone bust were moved to Kalispell on log rollers. The first brewery was established in 1894, and today local craft breweries produce more than 40 varieties of ales and lagers made with Montana-grown malts, hand-picked local hops, huckleberries, and Flathead cherries.



Destination Distinctive Accommodations

Kalispell Grand Hotel 100 Main Street, Kalispell, MT 59901, 406-755-8100

The Grand was one of the first hotels built on the frontier and the only one remaining in Kalispell. It hosted the well to do at double the going rate for running water, door locks, and wake-up calls.

Destination Distinctive Dining

Hops Downtown Grill 121 South Main Street, Kalispell, MT 59901, 406-755-7687 Try the bison burger and other interesting tastes.

The DeSoto Grill 227 First Street West, Kalispell, MT 59901, 406-314-6095 Great food and great service.

Destination Distinctive Retail

Art Galleries

Montana Modern Fine Art 127 South Main Street, 406-755-5321, **Sassafras Arts, Crafts**

and Antiques 120 South Main Street, 406-752-2433 and **Paint, Metal and Mud** 8 First Street East, Suite 104, 406-755-8886

Western Outdoors 48 South Main Street, Kalispell, MT, 59901, 406-756-5818

Featuring more than 2,500 boots and 1,500 hats.

Bear Country Gallery 4054 US Highway 93 South, Kalispell, MT 59901, 406-752-6735

Flair Gifts and Cards 123 Main Street, Kalispell, MT, 55901, 406-407-7210

DAY FIVE

Downtown Historic District Walking Tour

Take a walk past buildings from the 1890s and early 1900s including the Conrad Mansion, the Hockaday Museum of Art, Kalispell Grand Hotel, and the Northwest Montana History Museum. The tour includes Main Street and First Avenue East from Depot Park on Center Street, south to the 400 block. Near the tour route, St. Matthew's Catholic Church, dating from 1910, remains the city's most commanding Gothic landmark. 602 South Main Street, 406-752 678



Conrad Mansion Museum

The residence of Charles Conrad sits proudly on three landscaped acres atop a bluff overlooking the valley. The shingle-style Norman building, a revivalist version of vernacular architecture in Normandy, France, is surrounded by large ever-blooming flower beds that provide constant color during the summer season, plus hedges, evergreens, and lawns.

330 Woodland Avenue, Kalispell, MT 55901, 406-755-2166, self-guided and docent led tours offer year around, May 15-Oct 15, docent led tours 11AM and 1PM. Adults \$20

Northwest Montana History Museum

Housed in the restored Central School building, this museum features exhibits about history of the Northwest Montana region and Flathead Valley including artifacts, documents, and photographs that tell the story of Big Sky Country. In addition to permanent exhibits, rotating curated exhibits are presented throughout the year.

124 Second Avenue East, Kalispell, MT 55901, 406-756-8381, M-F 10AM-5PM, Sat 10AM-3PM, Adults \$5