20-Day Inspirational Itinerary

WESTERN & Native Culture

THE GREAT AMERICAN WEST

IDAHO · NORTH DAKOTA
SOUTH DAKOTA · WYOMING

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Embark on an 20-day journey through the Great American West, where Western history and Native American culture come to life. This itinerary blends breathtaking landscapes with deep historical insights, from rugged terrain to iconic Old West landmarks. Discover the legacy of pioneering explorers, explore significant Native American sites and experience diverse cultural traditions. This immersive adventure provides a rich connection to the past and the vibrant heritage of the American frontier.

Routing Overview

Total Trip*: 20 days/19 overnights | 8,130 km/5,052 miles

DAY 1: Arrival at Salt Lake City International Airport (SLC)

DAY 2: Idaho (City of Rocks National Reserve / Boise)

DAY 3: Idaho (Wallace)

DAY 4: Idaho (Stanley / Salmon)

DAY 5: Idaho (Pocatello / Montpelier)

DAY 6: Wyoming (Fort Bridger / Evanston)

DAY 7: Wyoming (Wind River / Lander / Medicine Wheel)

DAY 8: South Dakota (Deadwood)

DAY 9: South Dakota (Badlands National Park)

DAY 10: South Dakota (Chamberlain / Pierre)

DAY 11: North Dakota (Standing Rock / Bismarck / Fort Abraham Lincoln / On-A-Slant Indian Village)

DAY 12: North Dakota (Medora)

DAY 13: North Dakota (MHA Nation / Minot)

DAY 14: North Dakota (Turtle Mountain / Spirit Lake / Devils Lake)

DAY 15: North Dakota (Jamestown)

DAY 16: South Dakota (Aberdeen / De Smet / Mitchell)

DAY 17: South Dakota (Southern Black Hills)

DAY 18: Wyoming (Casper)

DAY 19: Wyoming (Cheyenne)

DAY 20: Departure from Denver International Airport (DEN)

Drive times and distances are approximate and meant for inspiration only

Images provided by: Visit Idaho, North Dakota Tourism, Travel South Dakota, Wyoming Office of Tourism, Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation, Utah Office of Tourism & Visit Denver

Day 1: Arrival (Salt Lake City)

Welcome to the Great American West! Your Western Heritage and Native American Culture adventure begins in the Gateway City of Salt Lake City, Utah, a modern city with every urban amenity set minutes away from spectacular mountains. The history of Salt Lake City spans eons, from prehistoric dinosaurs to Native American tribes and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints pioneers. In addition to Salt Lake's full calendar of events, there are thousands of interesting places, sights, and curiosities waiting to be explored. Check out the arts and culture scene, shop till you drop, take in some pro sports, research your family history, or get your nature fix in the mountains or in a nearby state or national park.

Overnight: Salt Lake City

Day 2: Idaho (City of Rocks)

Emigrants on the California Trail named City of Rocks National Reserve "The Silent City" for its towering rock formations resembling a deserted cityscape, etching their names as they passed through. Explore this historical site through hiking and rock climbing. Visit downtown Boise's Old Idaho Penitentiary to discover the region's Wild West outlaws. One of four territorial prisons open to the public, you can tour the preserved cell blocks that once held infamous figures from the era.

Distance: 620km/400 miles, 6.5 hours driving time

Overnight: Boise

Day 3: Idaho (Wallace)

Wallace is famed as the "Silver Capital of the World" due to its rich mining heritage, blending Wild West charm with modern techniques. Its downtown, a National Historic Place, features quirky, historic buildings. As you drive to or from Wallace, visit Nez Perce National Historic Park – there are 34 sites in four states with the park's headquarters in Spaulding. Learn about the Nimiipuu people through these historic sites, trails, exhibits and films.

Distance: 652 km/405 miles, 8 hours driving time

Overnight: Wallace

Important note: *Travelers will be switching time zones between Day 2 (Mountain Time Zone) and Day 3 (Pacific Time Zone). Plan to either gain an hour traveling into the Pacific Time Zone or lose an hour traveling into the Mountain Time Zone.*

Day 4: Idaho (Stanley / Salmon)

Drive the Salmon River Scenic Byway to Land of the Yankee Fork State Park near Challis for Idaho's frontier mining history. Explore museums, historical sites and ghost towns that tell tales of early inhabitants and gold-seekers. Continue on to explore the legacy of Sacajawea, the Agaidika woman who guided the Lewis & Clark Expedition, at Salmon's Sacajawea Interpretive, Cultural & Educational Center.

Distance: 922 km/573 miles, 11 hours driving time

Overnight: Salmon

Important note: *Travelers will be switching time zones between Day 3 (Pacific Time Zone) and Day 4 (Mountain Time Zone). Plan to either lose an hour traveling into the Mountain Time Zone or gain an hour traveling into the Pacific Time Zone.*

Day 5: Idaho (Pocatello / Montpelier)

Explore the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Museum at Fort Hall to delve into the history, culture and art of the tribe. Attend summer events like Indian Relay Races and the Shoshone-Bannock Indian Festival. Follow the Oregon Trail-Bear Lake Scenic Byway southeast to the Oregon National Historic Trail in Montpelier. Discover trail ruts from American settlers' westward migration, perfect for auto-touring, hiking, biking or horseback riding, offering a personal connection to this historic route.

Distance: 475 km/295 miles, 4.5 hours driving time

Overnight: Montpellier

Day 6: Wyoming (Fort Bridger / Evanston)

Today you will journey into Wyoming for a captivating glimpse into the Old West. Fort Bridger State Historic Site, once a crucial trading post, brings history to life with preserved buildings and engaging exhibits. In nearby Evanston, explore the charming downtown with its unique shops, restaurants and historic sites, including the historic Roundhouse and Railyards. Don't miss Bear River State Park, perfect for outdoor adventures, picnicking and wildlife viewing.

Distance: 185 km/115.9 miles, 2 hours driving time

Overnight: Evanston

Day 7: Wyoming (Wind River / Lander / Medicine Wheel)

Lander serves as the gateway to a route rich in natural beauty and cultural heritage. Explore the stunning Sinks Canyon, where the river vanishes into a limestone cavern. Discover the Wind River Indian Reservation, offering cultural experiences and historical insights from both the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho. Visit the ancient Medicine Wheel, a sacred Native American site perched high in the Bighorn Mountains, offering stunning panoramic views.

Distance: 600 km/370 miles, 7 hours driving time

Overnight: Lander or Lovell

Day 8: South Dakota (Deadwood)

Deadwood is where Western heritage begins in South Dakota. This 1870s Gold Rush town was home to Western legends like Wild Bill Hickok, Calamity Jane and Seth Bullock, and the history is alive still to this day. Today, it teems with Black Hills entertainment and things to do, including concerts, casinos, museums, historic sites, spas, parades, and the best rodeo in the West – the Days of 76 rodeo and parade week.

Distance: 450 km/279 miles, 4.5 hours driving time

Overnight: Deadwood or Spearfish

Day 9: South Dakota (Badlands National Park)

Start your day with a sunrise hike at Bear Butte State Park outside Sturgis. The Sioux or Lakota call it Mathó Pahá ("Bear Mountain"). The geological entity most commonly known as Bear Butte is considered to be a sacred site to Native Americans. It's also a place to hike past prayer cloths along your ascent to a beautiful view of the Black Hills. Continue east to Badlands National Park, a striking South Dakota landscape that boasts a maze of buttes, canyons, pinnacles and spires. Wildlife abounds in the park's 244,000 acres and can often be seen while hiking, camping and traveling the Badlands Loop Scenic Byway.

Distance: 160 km/100 miles, 1.5 hours driving time

Overnight: Rapid City

Day 10: South Dakota (Chamberlain / Pierre)

Venture along the Mighty Missouri River, where history and adventure abound, and be greeted by Dignity: Of Earth & Sky, a sculpture combining Native American history and art located in Chamberlain next to its Welcome Center. Work your way up the Missouri River and visit South Dakota's iconic Capitol building in Pierre.

Distance: 450 km/280 miles total, 3 hours driving time

Overnight: Pierre

Important note: *Travelers will be switching time zones between Day 9 (Mountain Time Zone) and Day 10 (Central Time Zone). Plan to either lose an hour traveling into the Central Time Zone or gain an hour traveling into the Mountain Time Zone.*

Day 11: North Dakota (Standing Rock / Fort Lincoln)

Located on Highway 1806, Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park is North Dakota's oldest state park. Discover the area's history at the Visitor Center and On-a-Slant Village's reconstructed earthlodges, learning about the Mandan Native Americans. Tour the reconstructed Commanding Officer's Quarters and Central Barracks. The Standing Rock Nation area features the original Sitting Bull burial site, offering insights into Lakota history and legends. Mandan hosts the state's oldest rodeo and Bismarck the annual United Tribes Powwow in September.

Distance: 257km/160 miles, 3 hours driving time

Overnight: Bismarck

Day 12: North Dakota (Medora)

Medora is an authentic Old West cow-town. Enjoy a musical extravaganza, mountain biking, hiking, museums, shops and dining. Visit the North Dakota Cowboy Hall of Fame, the Pitchfork Steak Fondue and the Medora Stables for horseback riding. Explore the Chateau de Mores and Theodore Roosevelt National Park South Unit. The Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library will highlight his transformation in the Badlands (opening in 2026).

Distance: 217 km/135 miles, 2 hours driving time

Overnight: Medora

Important note: *Travelers will be switching time zones between Day 11 (Central Time Zone) and Day 12 (Mountain Time Zone). Plan to either gain an hour traveling into the Mountain Time Zone or lose an hour traveling into the Central Time Zone.*

Day 13: North Dakota (MHA Nation / Minot)

Visit where Lewis and Clark stayed with the Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara Tribes and learn about their history and global trade routes. Discover modern MHA culture and traditions through dancing, food and tipi/earthlodge demonstrations. Explore the MHA Interpretive Center, MHA Museum and Crow Flies High Butte, and enjoy a riverboat ride. In Minot, experience the ND State Fair with ranch rodeos, bull riding, Indian Horse relays and more.

Distance: 350 km/200 miles, 3.5 hours driving time

Overnight: Minot

Important note: *Travelers will be switching time zones between Day 12 (Mountain Time Zone) and Day 13 (Central Time Zone). Plan to either lose an hour traveling into the Central Time Zone or gain an hour traveling into the Mountain Time Zone.*

Day 14: North Dakota (Turtle Mountain / Spirit Lake)

Visit the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians Heritage Center to learn about the history and traditions of the Anishinabe, Cree and Metis cultures. Create traditional baskets or parfleche with a local artist. Enjoy the scenic Turtle Mountains with lakes, hills and forests. Nearby, explore the International Peace Garden, a beautiful 2,300-acre park on the U.S.-Canada border. At Spirit Lake Nation, learn Dakota traditions, history and legends, and visit Fort Totten State Historic Site to understand its military and boarding school history.

Distance: 330 km/200 miles, 3.5 hours driving time

Overnight: Devils Lake

Day 15: North Dakota (Jamestown)

In Jamestown, where buffalo still roam, the world's largest buffalo, "Dakota Thunder," towers over the plains. Beyond the North American Bison Discovery Center, explore pioneer and military history at Fort Seward Military Post and the Stutsman County Memorial Museum. Visit Frontier Village to experience prairie pioneer life. Discover the inspirations of Western writer Louis L'Amour, born and raised in Jamestown, by walking a trail highlighting sites he frequented.

Distance: 200 km/125 miles, 2 hours driving time

Overnight: Jamestown

Day 16: South Dakota (Aberdeen / De Smet / Mitchell)

Aberdeen is the perfect mid-sized city awaiting visitors from all over with affordable lodging, over 80 eateries and the famous Story Book Land and the Land of Oz in Wylie Park. Don't forget to stop at Sica Hallow. The park, part of the Prairie Coteau Hills, offers a wide variety of year-round activities and is the source of many eerie Native American legends. Finish your northeast South Dakota swing with the Ingalls Homestead in De Smet and relive the life of "Little House on the Prairie" or with South Dakota's favorite roadside attraction in Mitchell at the World's Only Corn Palace.

Distance: 400 km/250 miles, 4 hours driving time

Overnight: Mitchell

Day 17: South Dakota (Southern Black Hills)

As you work your way west to Crazy Horse Memorial, stop through Pine Ridge to embrace history and culture at Red Cloud Indian School or the Wounded Knee National Historic Landmark. Continue to the ultimate tribute to a Lakota leader with Crazy Horse Memorial and take in what will someday be the world's largest mountain carving. End the day with an evening drive on the Custer State Park Wildlife Loop to see the iconic American bison roam.

Distance: 500 km/310 miles, 4.5 hours driving time

Overnight: Custer or Rapid City

Important note: *Travelers will be switching time zones between Day 16 (Central Time Zone) and Day 17 (Mountain Time Zone). Plan to either gain an hour traveling into the Mountain Time Zone or lose an hour traveling into the Central Time Zone.*

Day 18: Wyoming (Casper)

Casper, Wyoming, nestled in the heart of the state, offers a perfect blend of natural beauty and vibrant culture. Explore the stunning Casper Mountain, ideal for hiking, skiing and breathtaking views. Downtown, David Street Station is a lively hub for community events, concerts and markets. Don't miss the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center, where history comes alive through engaging exhibits. With its rich history, friendly locals and outdoor adventures, Casper is a must-visit destination for travelers seeking a unique Wyoming experience.

Distance: 370 km/230 miles, 4.5 hours driving time

Overnight: Casper

Day 19: Wyoming (Cheyenne)

Cheyenne, the state's vibrant capital, boasts a rich Western heritage and modern charm. Visit during Cheyenne Frontier Days, the world's largest outdoor rodeo and Western celebration, for thrilling events and concerts. Explore the historic downtown on a charming trolley tour, discovering museums, shops and the iconic Capitol Building. Enjoy the scenic beauty of Curt Gowdy State Park, perfect for outdoor enthusiasts. With its unique blend of history, culture and adventure, Cheyenne offers an unforgettable Western experience.

Distance: 290 km/180 miles, 3 hours driving time

Overnight: Cheyenne

Day 20: Departure (Denver)

Urban sophistication meets outdoor adventure in the Great American West Gateway City of Denver, Colorado, where 300 days of sunshine, a thriving cultural scene, diverse neighborhoods and natural beauty combine for the world's most spectacular playground. Explore the art, culture and food of the many Native American tribes who have long called Colorado home and immerse yourself in Denver's Gold Rush and Western history before you board your flight home. We hope you had a wonderful adventure in the Great American West!

Distance: 160 km/100 miles, 2 hours driving time

Idaho Must-Sees

1. **Silver City**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Tucked into the Owyhee Mountains, Silver City looks as if the entire mining town is still in its heyday. The town has about 75 structures still standing that date back to the 1860s, the height of mining boom towns. Visitors can still walk through the Idaho Hotel and several shops.

2. **Coeur d'Alene's Old Mission State Park**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: The park is home to the Mission of the Sacred Heart, built by Catholic Missionaries and the Coeur d'Alene tribe in the early 1850s. See the history of the complex relationship between the missionaries and tribe. The park sits next to the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes bike path.

3. **Lochsa Historical Ranger Station**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Mining and forestry were the two occupations that helped drive immigration to Idaho. The Lochsa Historical Ranger Station operated as the administrative hub for many fire lookouts in Idaho's remote wilderness. Visitors can learn about Idaho's history with the forest service.

4. **Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Museum**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: The Shoshones and Bannock bands are well-traveled people who once occupied land that stretched from the Canadian border through Utah and Nevada. Learn about their history and culture at this museum.

5. **Chesterfield**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Originally settled by pioneers looking for good land to ranch on, the township was abandoned as its people were drawn to larger communities. Visitors are able to walk around the township to see what life was like for pioneers in the frontier of the Oregon Trail.

North Dakota Must-Sees

1. **Original Sitting Bull Burial Site**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Honor the legacy of Sitting Bull at his initial burial place, a site of deep historical and cultural significance.

2. **Theodore Roosevelt National Park**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Discover the untamed beauty and diverse wildlife of the badlands that deeply influenced Theodore Roosevelt's conservation efforts.

3. **MHA Earthlodge Village and Interpretive Center**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Experience the vibrant culture and history of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nations in a setting that brings their traditions to life.

4. **International Peace Garden**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Visit this tranquil and symbolically important garden that celebrates the enduring peace between the United States and Canada.

5. **North American Bison Discovery Center**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Engage with the fascinating history and ongoing conservation efforts surrounding North America's majestic bison.

South Dakota Must-Sees

1. **Crazy Horse Memorial**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Once complete, this tribute to the Lakota leader will be the largest mountain carving in the world. The on-site Indian Museum of North America and the Native American Educational & Cultural Center also provide educational and cultural programming.

2. **Historic Deadwood**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Walk in the footsteps of historic Old West legends like Wild Bill Hickok, Calamity Jane and Seth Bullock. This 1870s Gold Rush town earned National Historic Landmark status in 1961. Today, it teems with activities, like concerts, casinos, museums, historic sites, spas and rodeos.

3. **Ingalls Homestead**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Step back into 1881 by visiting De Smet, home of the original Laura Ingalls Wilder Homestead. The Homestead has something for every type of traveler, from families and kids to bookworms and history buffs alike.

4. **Rapid City**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Rapid City makes the perfect base for explorations and doing big things with several national parks, monuments and memorials as well as a contemporary vibe with rich cultural experiences like the Journey Museum, Art Alley or Prairie Edge Trading Co & Galleries.

5. **Dignity / Akta Lakota Museum & Cultural Center**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: On a bluff between Exits 263 and 265 on Interstate 90 near Chamberlain stands "Dignity: Of Earth & Sky," a 15-meter-tall statue featuring a Native American woman. Continue on to the Akta Lakota Museum for a living lesson on the Native American way of life, past and present.

Wyoming Must-Sees

1. **Carissa Gold Mine**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Located in the historic town of South Pass City, the Carissa Gold Mine is a restored gold mining operation that dates back to the 1860s. It played a pivotal role in the Wyoming Gold Rush and offers visitors a chance to step back in time and experience the life of a 19th-century miner.

2. **Hot Springs State Park**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Hot Springs State Park in Thermopolis is a natural oasis known for its mineral-rich hot springs. The park features the world's largest mineral hot spring, where visitors can soak in soothing waters that maintain a constant temperature year-round.

3. **Lovell Wild Horses**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: The Pryor Mountain Wild Mustang Center near Lovell offers visitors the opportunity to observe one of the last free-roaming herds of wild horses in the U.S. These mustangs, descendants of horses brought by Spanish explorers, roam the rugged terrain of the Pryor Mountains.

4. **Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: Spanning the border of Wyoming and Montana, Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area is a stunning natural wonder offering dramatic landscapes, outdoor adventures and rich history. Visitors can enjoy a variety of activities, including boating, fishing, hiking and wildlife viewing.

5. **Cheyenne's State Capitol Building**
WHY YOU CAN'T MISS IT: The Wyoming State Capitol Building in Cheyenne is an iconic symbol of the state's government and history. Visitors can take guided tours to explore the beautifully restored chambers, learn about Wyoming's path to statehood, and admire the impressive craftsmanship of the building.

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