

S P I R I T T R A I L S



Tribes of the Northern USA Trip #2

LAKOTA TERRITORY – THE SIOUX RESERVATIONS

14 days (13 nights)

This trip represents an all-round introduction to the Lakota way of life, touching on its history, its spirituality and its future. It involves visits to sites of natural beauty and historical significance, as well as fun activities and the chance to explore.

For a fortnight you will live amongst the Lakota on and around their Reservations in South Dakota, with activities that include an evening under the stars in a tipi, watching exhilarating dance displays at a powwow, and visits to see paint horses, bison and mustangs. The excursion will also take you to see beautiful places such as the Black Hills and the Badlands National Park, and important locales like Wounded Knee and the Crazy Horse Monument.

Itinerary:

Day 1:

Our exciting adventure with the Lakota begins as our expert guide, anthropologist Francesc Nolla, greets us at Rapid City airport before we are transported to our motel for the night.

Day 2:

We will spend a day in and around **Rapid City**, which is known as the gateway to the Black Hills, whose beautiful peaks can be seen from the city.

The **Black Hills** area, or Pahá Sápa, is considered sacred by the Lakota, and is an isolated range of mountains rising up out of the Great Plains.

The region is a source of longstanding contention between the Lakota people and the United States government, which disenfranchised Native American people from it in violation of the 1886 Fort Laramie Treaty when gold was subsequently discovered there. A 1980 Supreme Court decision ruled that the lands were seized illegally. To the Lakota Pahá Sápa is the centre of their spiritual universe.

After soaking up the ambience of the city and the surrounding area, we will settle in our motel for the last night before we enter the Lakota lands.

Day 3:

Today our journey into the Native American prairie begins as we head towards Cheyenne River, the fourth largest Indian Reservation in America.

Along the way we will stop off to visit the home of an antique dealer with a close interest in Native American culture and its artefacts, and then travel on to Bear Butte, an important place of pilgrimage for the Lakota. **Bear Butte** (or Mato Paha) is a hill in the form of a sleeping bear, an ancient volcano that the Indians have used as a place of prayer for centuries. Still today it is an important centre of pilgrimage for those undertaking vision quests, one of the most important ceremonies in the belief system of the prairie Indians. Here we will have the chance to climb the hill before contemplating the awesome view.

We then continue to the capital of Cheyenne River Indian Reservation, **Eagle Butte**, where we will check in to a comfortable motel that will be our home for the next week.

Day 4-9:

Based in **Cheyenne River Indian Reservation**, South Dakota, we now have a whole seven days of exciting possibilities, with a wide range of activities available to us, both here and at **Standing Rock Indian Reservation**, which together represent home to more than sixteen thousand people.

Our programme is flexibly organised, fitting around local people and the natural elements, so there will be a sense of fluidity and spontaneity that will help enhance the experience. Please bear in mind that we are not visiting a tourism area with people working full-time in tourism. All those we spend time with live mostly from other means, so we need to be able to accommodate them. Similarly we will have no control over the weather.

Our time here will see us explore all areas of Lakota life, reflecting both the heritage of Native Americans, and their living, breathing, evolving modern society.

We shall visit Lakota institutions such as the **Tribal Government**, where we will gain insight into what Reservations are and how they function, and the **local school**, where we will hear how the people here organise and educate themselves.

We will see the **Cheyenne River Bison Project**, which will help us understand the importance of the 'buffalo' to Native American life, in economic, cultural, religious and environmental terms. A trip to the **Prairie Deer and Wild Horse (or Mustang) Project** will further our appreciation of the connection with the natural world, and the importance of living things in the Lakota belief systems.

We will visit **talented local artists**, who will talk about their craft, their inspiration, their vision, and how their creativity fits in with the culture of their people. This will include star quilts, woodwork and antler carvings, amongst other things.

To help us explore the interplay between the past and the present, we will visit both a **museum** and the editor of the **Eagle Butte News**, the main newspaper in Cheyenne River. And whilst the introduction of gaming to Native American lands has been controversial, we will have the chance to visit a **casino** to decide for ourselves whether the good effects outweigh the bad.

Possibly the highlight of the week will be the night we spend in a traditional **tipi**, where we will share a delicious Lakota meal with a local family beneath the infinite sky of the prairie.

Finally, on the closing weekend of our introduction to reservation life, we will cut loose at both a rodeo and a powwow, two distinct community events, but both events bringing people together in excitement and joy. The **rodeo** is principally a fiesta of the whites on the Reservation, but one that many Native Americans also love, especially those who work with cattle. Many of the best competitors are Indian. The **powwow**, meanwhile, is a gathering of people with singing, dancing and socialising.

Day 10-12:

Our next stage takes us to the **Pine Ridge Reservation**, a place rich in history both recent and far-gone. We will be lodging at a motel in the nearby tiny town of Interior.

During our time here we will be greatly assisted by the guidance of **White Thunder**, who will show us his ranch where he raises horses, many of them 'Indian Paint Horses'. He will also share Lakota knowledge with us as we visit important sites, such as **Wounded Knee**, where the US 7th Cavalry massacred more than three hundred Lakota in 1890, and also the location of the long stand-off between the American Indian Movement and the Federal government in 1973. We shall also take time at the **Red Cloud Catholic Mission School**, named after the great leader whose grave is nearby, and see the important collection of contemporary Native American art held here.

Day 13:

We begin our journey back to our starting point, and as we pass through **Pahá Sápá**, the Black Hills, we might now better understand the relationship the Lakota have with it after spending time with them.

We shall take time to visit both **Mount Rushmore** - where the faces of four US Presidents are carved into the cliff face - and the **Crazy Horse Monument**, which celebrates the legendary Lakota war leader.

Finally we arrive back in Rapid City, where we will have an afternoon free to explore or shop before one final night in our motel. We may wish to visit the Journey Museum or Prairie's Edge shop, both of which have lots to see relating to the Plains Indians.

Day 14:

Our exhilarating adventure must now come to a close, and so we head off to the airport, richer for our time with the Lakota.

Includes:

Airport transfers and land transportation; 12 night in motels (bed and breakfast); traditional dinner with wojapi at Cheyenne River ; one night tipi camping with equipment; entrance to Badlands National Park, Mount Rushmore and Crazy Horse Monument; visits to Cheyenne River Reservation bison and prairie deer herds; specialist guide.

What to expect:

Participants will stay in comfortable motels, with one night in a traditional tipi. We will lodge both on a Native American Reservation, Cheyenne River, and in Rapid City, and there will be amenities at both places; also three nights in the tiny town of Interior near Pine Ridge. You will meet many friendly people happy to talk about Lakota culture, and have the expert help of Francesc Nolla to guide you through the trip. Excursions will be by road, with additional opportunities for walking or hiking.

What To Wear:

Summers are reasonably hot, typically reaching into the mid-80s (Fahrenheit) or above; however, evenings can be cool. During the summer months, thunderstorms in the afternoon or evening surprise us from time to time. It is spectacular to see these storms, with all the electrical activity, wind and rain, but it does mean that the prairie can be turned into a quagmire. If this happens we simply change the order of our activities, and venture onto the prairie only once conditions have improved.

Be prepared with proper clothing befitting seasonal weather changes. You are advised to bring good hiking shoes, hat, sunblock and rain gear.

Health:

Obtain health clearance. Disclaimer available for any activities assumed by participants. Physical activities will not be excessive.

Culture:

Be prepared for any preconceived notions about Native American culture to be challenged. Come with an open mind and an open heart.