

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



Tribes of the Northern USA Trip #5

MYTHS OF THE AMERICAN WEST

14 days (13 nights)

This is a varied tour of many of the historical, natural and cultural wonders in the American West, encompassing Native American and pioneer life. We will be driving to many beautiful places, and staying in a variety of homely lodgings, each of which reflect their surroundings and local heritage.

The trip will cover a lot of territory as we explore the places that helped create the mythical Old West. There will be visits to museums, cultural centres, historic towns and Native American Reservations, as well as national parks and wilderness areas, where there will be ample opportunity for hiking. Much of our time will be taken up in absorbing the history and spirit of the land we are travelling around, but there will also be the chance to connect with the natural environment.

Itinerary:

Day 1:

On arrival at the airport in **Spokane**, Washington, we will be met by our guide and transferred to our hotel for the night.

Day 2:

After first taking a brief look around Spokane, we head south into Idaho and the lands of the Nez Perce. The **Nez Perce** Nation is a Native American people of the Pacific northwest believed to have been in the area for ten thousand years, and one with a history of adaptability in its relationship with nature.

Travelling through its lush forests and magnificent prairie, we will pitch up in the small town of Winchester, where we stay overnight. We then visit the **Wolf Education & Research Center** to learn about the relationship between wolves and the Nez Perce. The Nez Perce have a strong cultural and spiritual connection with wolves, and started the Nez Perce Wolf Recovery Project to help wild wolves. The centre is currently home to eleven wolves born in captivity and so unable to be returned to the wild. We shall hopefully be able to see wolves and hear them howl.

Day 3:

Today we leave the Nez Perce Indian Reservation, stopping off at a ranch where **Appaloosa and Nez Perce horses** are bred. The Nez Perce Horse is the result of a programme begun in 1995 to help re-establish the culture of selective breeding the Nez Perce were once famous for before the practice was snuffed out in the nineteenth century.

Our Nez Perce hosts will then accompany us to a nearby river, where they will demonstrate their **traditional fishing techniques**.

Our journey continues with an ascent towards **Lolo Pass**, on the border between Idaho and Montana, an area of outstanding natural beauty and important historical significance to both the Nez Perce and the pioneers of the Old West. It was here that the famous Lewis and Clark expedition of the early nineteenth century crossed through the northern Rockies on their overland journey to the Pacific coast. The Nez Perce under Chief Joseph also used the pass to move from Idaho into Montana during the Nez Perce War with the United States. In these richly resonant surroundings, we will settle into rugged comfort in a hotel of wooden cabins.

Day 4:

Now we get to explore the region around us, hiking into the forest, following the course of the river until we arrive at an area of natural thermal waters. In the evening we descend to the Ranger station near our hotel (the first in the Rockies), where forests of giant cedars fill the view.

Day 5:

We leave Lolo Pass, descend past Missoula and into **Deer Lodge**, home of one of the first ranches in the United States, where once thirty thousand cattle roamed, and a place that still has that Old West feel to it. From here we move on to the nineteenth century Gold Rush town of **Butte**, before ending our day's road trip in **Three Forks**, near the source of the Missouri. We shall be staying in the exquisite Sacajawea Hotel (named after the Shoshone woman who accompanied Lewis and Clark), which oozes the feel of the Old West, with antique porch rockers, claw foot bathtubs and delightful period furniture.

Day 6:

Our journey next takes us south into the world-renowned **Yellowstone National Park**, which became the first federally administered national park in the United States in 1872. We will travel through it at a leisurely pace in order to take in its many wonderful sights, such as its lakes, canyons, rivers and waterfalls, and of course the geysers, including its most celebrated, Old Faithful. There will also be the chance to see bison, deer and maybe even bears. Afterwards we shall settle in for the night in the town of West Yellowstone to the far side of the park.

Day 7:

We continue our exploration of Yellowstone, and also visit **Grand Teton National Park**, named after the mountain which dominates it, and a place where elk, wolves, coyotes and moose all live amongst its rich forests and plains. Afterwards we return to our West Yellowstone lodgings.

Day 8:

After another morning spent in Yellowstone, we make our way east down towards **Cody** in Wyoming, a town named after Buffalo Bill, the iconic frontiersman who ultimately contributed to the creation of many of the Wild West myths. After check-in at our motel we will get to see a Rodeo, in which skilled cowboys and cowgirls compete to ride the wildest horses and even cattle.

Day 9:

Whilst in Cody we will visit the local **Buffalo Bill Historical Center**, a complex of museums dedicated to explaining the history, culture and myths of the Old West. As well as the main Buffalo Bill Museum, there are natural history, Plains Indians and firearms sections, and a gallery devoted to art depicting the American West.

Leaving Cody, we venture into the **Big Horn Mountains**, where astounding views abound both up and down. This part of the trip includes a half-hour hike to Medicine Wheel, the archaeological site of a place of prayer for the Native Americans of the plains, which is still in use today. We then continue on to **Sheridan**, Wyoming, a rodeo town where we will spend the next two nights.

Day 10:

Our day will be spent over the border in Montana, where Cheyenne ranch owner Rowdy will introduce us to rodeo culture, and take us on a horse riding trail around the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation. The terrain here is sagebrush prairie and rolling wooded hills. Afterwards Rowdy will take us to the **Little Bighorn Monument** on the Crow Indian Reservation, which commemorates the battle there between Custer's 7th Cavalry and the joint Lakota-Northern Cheyenne-Arapaho war band under Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. Later we bid farewell to Rowdy and return to Sheridan.

Day 11:

On leaving Sheridan we head through the red-tinted landscape of Wyoming into the Black Hills, where we will see **Devil's Tower**, a natural rock formation of great spiritual significance to many Native American peoples (including the Lakota, Arapaho, Crow, Cheyenne, Kiowa and Shoshone), and instantly recognisable to fans of the film *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*. Known to the Lakota as Mato Tipila, or Bear Tower or Bear Lodge, this enormous monolith is sacred to many Native American tribes, and the subject of several legends.

We continue on to Rapid City, South Dakota, stopping off at an antique dealer specialising in the ephemera of the Old West, such as antique firearms and tribal costume. We briefly visit the Badlands National Park before settling into our Rapid City motel for the night.

Day 12:

We get to spend a whole day wandering around the stunning natural sculptures formed out of the desert plateau in **Badlands National Park** - a site containing rich fossil beds and America's largest protected mixed grass prairie, and for thousands of years a hunting ground for Native Americans - before returning to our Rapid City lodgings.

Day 13:

In the morning we have the chance to visit the shops of **downtown Rapid City**, where many books, artworks and craft pieces relating to the American West and the Native Americans of the Great Plains may be found.

Later we head back into the Black Hills to see **Mount Rushmore**, the enormous sculpture of four United States presidents hewn into a cliff face, and also the **Crazy Horse Monument**, which remembers the life of the Lakota warrior who fought to preserve his people's way of life.

Our final excursion will be to the historic Black Hills town of **Deadwood**, where Wild Bill Hickock was killed and Calamity Jane mourned him and was later buried. It is a town that perhaps best encapsulates the dichotomy of the Old West, having been illegally established in the gold rush years in defiance of the treaty that gave ownership of the Black Hills to the Lakota - a 'Cowboy' town built on 'Indian' lands.

Afterwards, Rapid City beckons for one last night.

Day 14:

Our packed tour of the American West now over, we are returned to the airport in Rapid City with our many memories to take home with us.

Includes:

Land transportation and airport transfers; 13 nights in various hotels/motels (double rooms); 13 breakfasts; entrance to National Parks, Mount Rushmore, Crazy Horse Monument, Devil's Tower, Wolf Education & Research Center, Deer Lodge farm, Butte mining town and Buffalo Bill museum; rodeo in Cody; horse riding in Cheyenne Reservation; specialist guide.

What to expect:

The trip will cover a lot of territory as we explore the places that helped create the mythical Old West. There will be visits to museums, cultural centres, historic towns and Native American Reservations, as well as parks and wilderness areas, where there will be ample opportunity for hiking. Much of our time will be taken up in absorbing the history and spirit of the land we are travelling around, but there will also be the chance to connect with the natural environment.

What to wear:

The temperature of the places we will visit tends to reach the mid-80s (Fahrenheit) at this time of the year, with the possibility of cold nights and occasional stormy weather. The altitude of some of our destinations will likely mean a cooler climate at times. We will be travelling with a vehicle, so whilst we will be spending a lot of time outside, we will not be out in the wilderness alone should the weather unexpectedly change. Warm clothes for evenings and wet weather gear in case of rain would be a sensible precaution, and good, stout footwear is recommended.

Health:

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

Culture:

Some of our time will be spent with Native American people on Reservations. Be prepared for any preconceived notions about Native American culture to be challenged. Come with an open mind and an open heart.