



INTO THE WILD IN WYOMING

A SKI VACATION AT JACKSON HOLE DELIVERS
A WHOLE LOT MORE THAN SNOW. BY DAN AVILA



Opening image: A herd of bison makes it clear who owns the roads in Yellowstone National Park.

Clockwise from right: Jackson Hole delivers world-class skiing and snowboarding along with jaw-dropping views; Mormon Row is worth the walk; XXXXXX; Sit in the saddle at the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar in Jackson.

It may be in the fly-over zone of the continental USA and a booming metropolis it is not, but for this travel writer, Jackson Hole, Wyoming is small-town, American perfection – balancing outdoor adventure and old-fashioned cowboy hospitality with some of the most reliable and abundant snow falls of any ski zone in the USA.

It is nice to have options. Given the tyranny of distance that Australians face in getting to any non-airline hub location in the US, once you arrive at Jackson Hole for a snow sport holiday, it is nice to know there is more to the place than skiing. The surrounding landscape is strikingly beautiful. From the waterways with grazing moose, the flats that fatten large herds of elk and bison, to the two National Parks that beg for exploration; Grand Teton and Yellowstone, Jackson Hole sits within a natural wonderland that has captured the imagination of travellers the world over for generations.

For photographers, there is the chance to follow in the footsteps of the giants. Ansel Adams, the father of modern photography, took his famous photo of the Teton Mountains overlooking Snake River here in 1942. After driving out before the pre-dawn light with my son to photograph the Tetons, we stood on this photographic hallowed ground as our bodies shivered in the –20 °C conditions, channelling Ansel Adams, completely transfixed by the ever-changing mountain scenery in front of us. On the highway leading from Jackson Hole to Yellowstone National Park, there are signs that mark all the perfect spots to snap an amazing photograph – no matter the camera. Rivers, lakes and the Tetons are all easily accessible for photographers and sightseers with miles of mountains and abundant wildlife. Mormon Row, with its famous historic barns,



begs to be photographed at sunrise as the light hits the Tetons. Just watch out for herds of bison and elk as you drive around in the low light, as they frequently cross the highway with little warning.

Into Yellowstone

Even hard-core skiers should pull themselves away from the slopes to visit Yellowstone. Through the warmer months, Yellowstone hosts millions of guests as the crowds continue to come to experience a landscape that could simply not be more beautiful. In mid-winter, it's a different story, with the main road in to Yellowstone closed to traffic, except for the private guides with their monster trucks that power through and over the deep snow-covered road to the lodges surrounding the Old Faithful cone geyser.

What is beautiful in summer is magical in winter, with the landscape powdered white and devoid of the tourist throng. This allows a special appreciation and connection with this landscape of boiling thermal activity and intimate wildlife interactions sans-crowds. My favourite by far was when our guide, Jay, positioned us in front of a bison herd on the move. Led by a monster bull, they were unperturbed by this photographer standing in their way as we played a very one-sided game of chicken.

Back to the slopes

Jackson Hole Resort is the major drawcard for snow sports and is about a 20-minute drive from the town of Jackson. For skiing and snowboarding, the best bet is to stay at the resort with plenty of options available.

Teton Village is small by comparison to most mega resorts, yet it has everything one would expect of a ski resort and





operates like a well-oiled machine. For Australians planning a US ski trip, Jackson Hole is not only exciting – with slopes for all levels and some of the world's best back county terrain – it is also the most reliable ski region in the US with 10 to 12 metres of snow per year. It is beautiful, scenic and bone dry with powder and groomed runs so gorgeous, it almost hurts your eyes. Even if you are not going to ski down, it's worth taking the big red tram up to the top just for the views: it is quite something.

Jackson Hole has two mountains – Rendezvous and Apres Vous – with about half the 1010 ha terrain for experts, with another big chunk for intermediates, and the rest for beginners. A lot of work has been done in recent years to improve the offering for beginners and intermediates, with

the newest addition, the Sweetwater Gondola, which opened in 2016, providing great access to suitable terrain. The Sweetwater's mid-station stop is where the brand-new Solitude Station Learning Center will be when it opens in the coming winter, streamlining the beginner experience even further.

This is a family owned and run resort and owners take immense pride in even the small details to ensure that every part of the Jackson Hole experience is seamless and memorable. The ski guides are patient and highly competent,



with guides being a necessity for a backcountry experience. Dining and après options are plentiful in the village with fine dining, lively pubs and casual options available. Teton Thai is an ever-popular option – book early for this one.

For a change of scenery, leave early and make the white-knuckled drive over the icy mountain pass to Grand Targhee. Or join a tour. This petite resort feels quiet compared to Jackson Hole, but for intermediate skiers, it is heaven. Every skier or boarder remembers their first magic off-piste powder run; it is almost magical. Targhee is the perfect place to push off the path and carve your own track in untouched powder. Cutting first tracks through the forest with my son, without another person in sight was a moment of complete skiing joy.

Going to Jackson

With its four antler archways on the Town Square, its Western-style boutiques and galleries and historic wooden boardwalks, Jackson is western through and through. Stroll down the streets and drop into places like Crazy Horse Jewelry; Made with its many beautiful wares; JD High Country Outfitters and Stio for beautiful outerwear. There are many wonderful galleries, too, including the excellent Mangelsen Images of Nature Gallery with photography by the brilliant Thomas Mangelsen, who was featured on the *US 60 Minutes* in May 2018.

While in town, visit the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar with its saddles for stools, count the money under the bar at the Silver Dollar Bar & Grill at the historic The Wort Hotel and, if you're lucky, a band will be playing, and the dance floor will be aflutter with cowboy boot-clad locals dancing the night away.

Jackson Hole is one of those unusual places that remains popular all-year-round with the outdoor action in the warmer months just as popular as in the white season. This, combined with its natural beauty and friendly cowboy culture make Jackson Hole pure American holiday heaven. •

Photography by Dan Avila.

Above, from top: The landscape around Jackson Hole is breathtaking; One of four antler arches marking the corners of Town Square.



TRAVEL FACTS

GETTING THERE

Jackson Hole Airport is serviced by United, Delta and American Airlines from Los Angeles, San Francisco, Salt Lake City or Dallas. It's a 30-minute drive from the airport to Teton Village. **united.com; delta.com; americanairlines.com.au**

WHERE TO STAY

- Teton Village at Jackson Hole Resort: **jhrl.com**
- Old Faithful Snow Lodge & Cabins, Yellowstone National Park: **yellowstonenationalparklodges.com**

WHERE TO EAT

- The Kitchen at Jackson Hole: **thekitchenjacksonhole.com**
- Teton Thai: **tetonthaivillage.com**
- Il Villaggio Osteria: **jhosteria.com**
- Silver Dollar Bar & Grill: **worthotel.com**

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Jackson Hole Resort: **jacksonhole.com**
- Grand Targhee Ski Resort & Bike Park: **grandtarghee.com**
- Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce: **jacksonholechamber.com**
- Travelplan Ski: **travelplanski.com.au**
- Yellowstone Tours: **scenic-safaris.com**



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Jackson Hole has preserved the real Old West character of the Cowboy state. Teton Village is both rustic and refined and the views are of majestic mountain ranges and wide open spaces. The proximity to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the National Elk Refuge make Jackson Hole a hub for many great outdoor activities besides world-renowned skiing!

Travelplan is the #1 international tour operator in the world for Jackson Hole!

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