

The Great Wild North



Nature and animals are the stars in this tour. Whether in an urban or wilderness setting, visitors get an up-close and personal look at wildlife while learning about their behavior and changing habitat. From the north woods home of wolves and black bears, to the rolling prairie habitat of bison, prairie dogs and wild horses, to the sub-arctic tundra that is home to polar bears, caribou and beluga whales, the wildlife is as magnificent as the scenery. Sky-piercing granite peaks, rich forest land, rolling prairies and gentle foothills along this route provide scenic landscapes unique to this part of North America.

Day 1 Minneapolis/ St. Paul

The Minnesota Zoo provides wide-open spaces for animals in habitats similar to their homes. Animals native to the state, such as puma, wolverines and otters, delight visitors. For a change of pace, follow the Tropics Trail to see Malayan sun bears, leopards and kangaroos; then end the morning with an exciting dolphin show at Discovery Bay (2.5 hrs). After lunch, get away from it all in one of the few urban U.S. wildlife refuges, the **Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge**. Coyotes, bald eagles, beavers, and badgers live along the 34-mile (55-km) long corridor which follows the Minnesota River (1.0 hr). Eagles, hawks, owls and other birds of prey are rehabilitated at **The**

Overnight: Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN



Day 2 Minneapolis/St. Paul – Virginia (292 mi/468 km)

Enjoy the drive from Minneapolis as you head straight north, moving from city life to the quiet beauty of the north woods. Located in the heart of the Superior National Forest, Ely is the gateway to the **Boundary Water Canoe Area (BWCA)**, which *National Geographic* named as one of the 50 “must visit destinations” in the world. From this charming north woods town, canoe enthusiasts launch expeditions into the BWCA or enjoy browsing through local shops on a sunny afternoon. In Ely, the **International Wolf Center** features interpretive exhibits on the reclusive timber wolf. Visitors can also view live wolves through glass walls, as the wolves play, eat and move about in the forested hillside of the Center (2.0 hrs). A special evening experience is to venture out into the woods on a “howling” trek to communicate with the timber wolves (1.0 hr).

Overnight: Virginia, MN

Day 3 Virginia – Bemidji (193 miles/309 km)

From Virginia, drive a short distance to Orr to view wild black bears in a natural setting as they play, eat, climb, vocalize or just hang out in the trees! Just imagine – you’ll have a rare glimpse into the secretive life of the black bear. Naturalists will interpret behavior as it happens in front of your eyes at the **American Bear Association Observation Stand** (1.0 hr). Then relax on the drive through Minnesota’s forested countryside to Bemidji, the first city on the Mississippi River. Bemidji is home to a giant statue of the legendary giant lumberjack, **Paul Bunyan and his pet blue ox, Babe**, standing on the shore of Lake Bemidji. The famous red and black lumberjack woolen shirts are made at the **Bemidji Woolen Mills**. Just a few miles away, Mark Twain’s **Mississippi River**, the world’s third longest river, begins as a pristine stream in **Itasca State Park**. Cross the mighty river on stepping stones at the source. A naturalist guided tour provides a close-up look at flora, fauna and wildlife native to the area (2.5 hrs).

Overnight: Bemidji, MN

Day 4 Bemidji – Winnipeg (229 mi/367 km)

Drive north this morning to Winnipeg, Manitoba’s capital city with a population of 670,000. Sites in Winnipeg provide a great orientation to the port town of Churchill, the polar bear capital of the world, located on Hudson Bay. Visit **The Manitoba Museum** and learn about the habitats of polar bears and beluga whales in the Arctic Gallery (2.0 hrs). Visit the **Winnipeg Art Gallery** which contains one of the largest Inuit art collections in the world (1.0 hr). Then move outdoors to award-winning **Oak Hammock Marsh** where marshland wildlife comes to life through nature programs, canoe excursions and nature walks along a system of dikes that have turned farmland back into its original marsh (2.0 hrs). Seasonal migrations bring thousands of ducks and geese to the area including **Fort Whyte Nature Center** with its Aquarium of the Prairies, an urban bison herd and interpretive displays (1.0 hr), or the **Assiniboine Zoo** specializing in animals found in cooler climates from around the world (1.0 hr).

*Overnight: Winnipeg, MB
Festival du Voyageur, Winnipeg, mid-February*

Oak Hammock Marsh Waterfowl Celebration, Winnipeg, May and October

Winnipeg Folk Festival, Winnipeg, early July

Folklorama – Canada's Cultural Celebration, Winnipeg, first two weeks in August



Day 5 and Day 6 Winnipeg – Churchill (600 air mi/960 air km)

Fly or take VIA Rail Train to Churchill, as it is not accessible by road. Each fall **polar bears** migrate to the shore of Hudson Bay and wait for the ice to form so they can access their winter feeding ground. Giant tundra vehicles travel along the coastline so you can safely view these magnificent animals that have no known natural predators. The bears tip the scales at over 1,500 pounds, stand 10-foot tall and can move with surprising speed and agility. Churchill is also famous with birders as some 250 species of birds nest or pass through on their migration while the northern lights, or aurora borealis, dance across the evening skies on clear nights. In summer, some 3,000 **beluga whales** spend the summer months feeding and nursing their young at the mouth of the **Churchill River**. Boat tours to see the beluga whales bring you close to these gentle mammals (3.0 hrs). Tour the Churchill town site and visit the **Eskimo Museum** (1.0 hr), **Parks Canada Visitor Center** (1.0 hr), and shop for Inuit and native art.

Overnights: Churchill, MB

Day 7 Churchill – Winnipeg (air) – Kenmare (266 mi/426 km)

Following an early morning return flight to Winnipeg, travel south along Highway 3. Walk through one of the largest prehistoric marine reptile fossil displays in North America at the **Morden and District Museum** (1.0 hr) and then travel to Boissevain and tour the outdoor art murals and **Wildlife Museum** followed by a home-cooked meal at **Duecks's Cedar Chalet Farm** (2.0 hrs). Next stop is at the **International Peace Garden**, a symbol of peace between Canada and the United States, located just 12 miles (20 km) north of Dunseith. The International Peace Garden is one of the most spectacular floral gardens on the continent with more than 140,000 annuals planted each year (2.0 hrs). From the International Peace Garden, the **Turtle Mountain Scenic Byway** follows 24 miles (39 km) through the tree-covered Turtle Mountains allowing visitors to enjoy scenic lakes, lush foliage, wildflowers, and an abundance of wildlife. Located on the Souris River in north central North Dakota is **Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge** (30 min), where white pelicans summer.

Overnight: Kenmare, ND

Day 8 Kenmare – Medora (200 mi/320 km)

Located on the Souris River near Kenmare, at **Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge** (30 min), visitors can appreciate the beauty of unbroken prairie, just as settlers saw it 100 years ago. The refuge remains among the best examples of mixed-grass prairie pothole lands in the United States. The **Killdeer Scenic Byway**

passes about 30 miles (48 km) through the Killdeer Mountains, Little Missouri Bay and Little Missouri State Park. The **Little Missouri National Grasslands** are the largest and most diverse of the 19 grasslands found in the western U.S. This 140-mile (225-km) stretch of rolling prairie, Badlands terrain, woody draws and high buttes includes more than a million acres. Watch for prairie dog towns, more than a hundred eagle and falcon nests, elk, antelope, mule deer and white-tailed deer. Then take a loop drive through **Theodore Roosevelt National Park** (2.0 hrs). The colorful North Dakota Badlands provide the scenic backdrop to this park. Named for the 26th U.S. President, the park memorializes his contribution to conservation. An early morning loop drive is the best time to view the wildlife at the park. At the entrance to the South Unit of the Park, tour the **Visitors Center** (30 min) and **Theodore Roosevelt's Cabin from the Maltese Cross Ranch** (30 min).

Overnight: Medora, ND

Medora Musical, Medora, early June through early September



Day 9 Medora – Custer (280 mi/448 km)

Driving south to the northern Black Hills, thousand-foot-high limestone palisades tower over U.S. Highway 14A as it twists through **Spearfish Canyon**. The canyon floor is lined by **Spearfish Creek**, while canyon waterfalls make for popular roadside attractions, along with hiking, fishing and wildlife viewing. The **Mickelson Trail**, a 114-mile (183-km) gravel trail through the heart of the Black Hills, follows an original railbed and has been designed for biking, hiking and horseback riding. Take a side-trip to **Mount Rushmore National Memorial** and enjoy an energizing walk along the Presidential Trail for the best view of The Shrine of Democracy. Travel on S.D. Highway 244 W and watch for mountain goats. The Black Hills region offers two national caves and nine private caves carved in limestone, a 320-million-year process. At **Wind Cave National Park** (1.5 hrs), rare cave formations such as boxwork, frostwork, and popcorn create a unique visual experience. Wind Cave is one of the oldest and longest caves in the world. Above ground, the park is a wildlife sanctuary to bison as well as elk, deer, pronghorn, coyotes and prairie dogs.

Overnight: Custer, SD

Day 10 Custer – Pierre (260 mi/416 km)

Custer State Park offers a wildlife loop tour (1.5 hrs). Watch for whitetail and mule deer, elk, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, prairie dogs, wild turkeys, coyotes, mountain goats, and a herd of 1,500 bison as you drive through this 73,000-acre wildlife preserve. Leave the Black Hills and drive along S.D. Highway 240, a national scenic byway, to the **Badlands National Park**. Watch for whitetail and mule deer, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, prairie dogs, coyotes and black-footed ferrets. Look for bison in the **Sage Creek Wilderness Area** of the Badlands. There are many scenic pull-offs along the route with great locations for pictures and short hikes. You will travel through **Buffalo Gap National Grassland** and the **Fort Pierre National Grassland** on your drive to South Dakota's capital city.

Overnight: Pierre, SD

Day 11 Pierre – Gettysburg (180 mi/288 km)

Travel to **Lantry** and **Eagle Butte** to see wild horses on the **Cheyenne River Reservation**, along with elk and bison. Tours are available through the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Game, Fish and

Parks Office. In the afternoon, enjoy a boat ride on the Missouri River or visit the Salmon Station near Gettysburg. Either option provides a wonderful conclusion to your adventures in the Great Wild North.

Overnight: Gettysburg, SD

Custer State Park Buffalo Roundup, Custer, late September/early October