

Jackson Hole and The Tetons: Wyoming's Wide Open Spaces Will Take Your Breath Away

By Suzanne Wright

Within 30 minutes of landing at Jackson Hole, Wyoming's airport—the only commercial airport that sits in a national park—you can be face to face with a moose and her offspring and a gawking crowd of snap-happy tourists.

Grand Teton National Park is best known for the jagged, snow-kissed granite peaks—they look like an erratic EKG—that rise to nearly 14,000 feet against a cornflower blue sky. The Tetons (teton is French for breast) are the youngest of the Rocky Mountains and still growing. Early spring and summer is a great time to spot moose, elk, pronghorn antelope, black and grizzly bears and bison while enjoying perfectly warm days and cool evenings.

I enter the park through—fittingly enough—Moose, Wyoming. Added to the national park system in 1929, Grand Teton is under-visited compared to nearby Yellowstone, yet its diverse communities include alpine, forest, sagebrush flats, meadows and wetlands, lakes, ponds and rivers hold myriad charms. Driving Signal Mountain Road I marvel at the tallest mountain, Mount Moran, and the entire sweep of the arresting range dubbed by some “America's alps.”

During my visit to the least populated state in union, I stay at four properties: Jackson Lake Lodge and Jenny Lake Lodge in the park and Snake River Lodge just outside the park and Amangani in Jackson Hole.

Jackson Lake Lodge was the last national park lodge designed by Gilbert Stanley Underwood, who also created Ahwahanee in Yosemite, in his signature mid-century architectural style. Talk about a room with a view: 907 has a huge picture window that offers a knockout, panoramic view of the sharp ziggurats.

Walking to the main building, I pass by a wedding party from England. The young bride and groom are pink-cheeked and exhilarated—perhaps as much by their surroundings as their love. In the lounge, sipping a huckleberry margarita as the sun sets, the scenery looks almost hand painted: the base of the mountains tint slate blue, the glacier caps shining stark white. The more formal Mural Room has 100-foot picture windows and, yes, murals depicting the area's history. Try the bison medallions. The Pioneer Grill has a retro, soda-fountain casual feeling; I recommend the huckleberry milkshake and huckleberry pancakes.

The next morning, we opt for gentle sightseeing: a float ride down the Snake River as it serpentine through the green valley. Wayne Johnson is a steel-haired, lean, Gary Cooper-handsome river guide who regales us with 40 years of stories. On the cushy yellow raft, arcing back and forth, he “reads the river,” while we take in the outrageously glorious view of the mountains, that look almost like a child's paper cutouts. Bison graze in a meadow. There's evidence of beavers. Sand hill cranes swoop the banks. An eagle

perches in a pine. Two and a half hours later we're rewarded with an old-fashioned cookout: burgers and hotdogs, potato salad and cookies served on picnic tables topped with red-checkered cloths. Back at the lodge, we hear grizzly paw prints have been found on the chaise lounge cushions at the general manager's house. Sure enough, a dusty footprint on green fabric is revealed.

The next day, we hop bus for a scenic park tour. Winding through cottonwoods, the state tree, we spy the charming cabins and tents of Colter Bay and drink in the crystal-clear waters of Jenny Lake, where the shape and color of stones is visible from the trail. The mountains loom closer as we pull into Jenny Lake Lodge.

Thirty-seven rustically deluxe cottages with names like Columbine and Larkspur are perfect for couples, many of who return year after year. This AAA four-diamond resort is nestled among the trees at the base of the Tetons. Inside I find braided rugs, tartan-covered chairs, twig furniture, cedar scented lotion, down comforter and pillows and walking sticks. In the pleasingly cool air, I grab a book and enjoy the front porch rocker before dinner. The main lodge boasts a five-course, prix fix dinner with silky carrot cilantro soup, espresso-rubbed venison and tangy chevre cheesecake. Filmmaker Ken Burns trolls the room; I learn he's shooting documentary on national parks.

I've booked a two-hour horseback ride around String Lake. As the horse picks its way across streams and up and down the trails, I try to imprint the astonishing scenery in my brain so I can refer to it when I'm back home. I return to my cabin to find bath salts on my pillow, perfect for a saddle-sore body.

Bears cavort on a bench outside, pop up on the mantel and lounge on banisters at The Snake River Lodge, located slope side in the ski hamlet of Teton Village. The Gamefish Restaurant serves American cuisine with western flair, such as elk quesadillas, smoked trout cakes and elk chops, and the room has a view of the Sleeping Indian mountains. My handsome, burnished junior suite features a working fireplace, hammered copper accents, leather covered chairs and a deep, round soaking tub.

At the Avanyu Spa my feet spend the best hour and half ever, with Mark, who gives a killer pedicure. The colorful mud found in nearby Yellowstone inspires the signature paint pot mud bath. Jennifer slathers it on, wraps me for 20 minutes, and then helps me to a hydrotherapy tub where the water washes away the gunk and sooth sore muscles.

The Aerial Tram just outside the hotel travels 7.2 miles to the top of Rendezvous Hill; at the 10,450-foot summit are breathtaking, peripheral views. After descent, we hit the Mangy Moose, for its good-natured atmosphere. We've come full circle with moose.

For information and reservations on lodging in Grand Teton National Park, or to make reservations, call 1-307-543-3100 or visit www.gtnc.com.

Leave the Kids at Home

I long to be an “Aman junkie.” These elite jet setters travel the world, lolling at the ravishing Aman Resorts. On a high butte above Jackson Hole, where movie stars, ski bums, millionaires, ranchers and college kids rub elbows, sits the only stateside Aman property. It’s easy to see why they choose this spot for the handsome redwood and sandstone Amangani. This is the perfect getaway for couples.

Amangani is a hybrid of the Sanskrit word for peace, aman, and gani means “home” in the language of the Native American Shoshone tribe. The intimate, 40-suite resort is a seamless blend of East and West: Asian hospitality and American scenery. The rooms are simple, yet sumptuous, with rattan and cowhide furniture, a working fireplace snuggled next to a daybed, a deep bath of slate featuring a bath pillow and candles and his and hers sinks. My balcony provides a sweeping, dramatic vista of the Snake River range and the ranch below. Off the lobby, is a library stocked with CDs, videos and books. The iconoclastic employees include cowboy-booted George who doubles as the on-staff naturalist and British Kevin. The place feels like a wealthy friend’s very tasteful home.

A fleet of Lexus SUVs are at the ready to take you the 10 minutes into town. Elk antler arches mark the four entrances of the city square. They are collected during the winter shedding of the largest herd in America. After strolling the shops, I stop at Sweetwater for the sampler: humus, apricot tuna and cranberry chicken salads. The world-famous Million Dollar Cowboy Club features saddle-topped barstools, but I prefer The Rancher where it’s “town meeting” when locals turn out for \$1 beer.

I spend my last day lounging on property. The heated infinity swimming pool has a magnificent view of the snow-kissed mountains that ring the resort. The pool attendant brings me a basket filled with lip balm, water, an apple and a cool washcloth. At the health club, I’ve opted for the seaweed wrap. Tisch slathers me with mineral-rich mud in the black granite steam room, wraps icy compresses on my feet and gives me a sip of cucumber-spiked water, before turning on the steam. She changes the compresses so I am always comfortable. I feel reborn an hour and half later.

That night as I eat in the restaurant, with its Pacific-influenced menu, the staff says that special preparations were made that afternoon. In a corner room, replete with en-suite dinner, candles and rose petals, a wedding proposal is in progress. The next morning, it doesn’t surprise me to hear the answer was yes.

For information and reservations, visit www.amanresorts.com or phone 1-877-734-7333.

Gear to Go (boxed item)

Packing a few smart items for an active vacation guarantees greater enjoyment no matter what the weather. Royal Robbins, a company founded 30 years ago by global wanderers Liz and Royal Robbins, has several versatile pieces.

The Echo Canyon Vest for ladies is a light topper perfect for chilly mornings. Made of great looking, handcrafted taffeta in a random diamond pattern, the tight weave keeps warmth in, yet if it gets wet, a handy tab on the back will allow you to hang it to dry. Best of all, you can pack it into its own zippered interior pocket. Underneath it, try the woman's Jaya Crew, a long-sleeve crew neck made of feather light Tactel that's as snuggly as a bunny. For changing temperatures, you'll want the nifty Zip n' Go pant (\$70) that converts from a pant to mid-thigh length shorts made of fast drying, cottony soft nylon. There's also a convertible pocket/stuff sack that attaches to the back belt loops. Available in men's and women's versions. Finally, the top-selling \$120 Travellite parka (available in men's and women's versions) is waterproof, breathable, has a hidden hood and folds into its own zippered pocket. Visit www.royalrobbins.com or call 877-734-7333 for stores.