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# Visiting Wyoming

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## Introduction

Welcome to Wyoming, where the spirit of the American West thrives amidst breathtaking landscapes and endless horizons. Known as the "Cowboy State," Wyoming offers travelers a unique and unforgettable journey through its wild frontiers and vibrant cultural experiences. As you delve into this guide, you'll discover all that makes Wyoming an exceptional destination for adventurers, nature lovers, and history enthusiasts alike.

The allure of Wyoming begins with its natural beauty. Vast prairies stretch endlessly towards the horizon, dotted with towering mountain ranges that cut through the sky. The famed national parks, Yellowstone and Grand Teton, draw travelers from all corners of the globe with their geologic marvels and copious wildlife. Whether it's witnessing the eruption of Old Faithful, hiking around the crystal-clear lakes, or catching glimpses of bison, elk, and bears, the parks offer a profound connection to nature's wonders.

Beyond its parks, Wyoming's landscapes invite exploration and adventure. Trails throughout the state offer hikes for all levels, from meandering paths in Bighorn Mountains to challenging treks in the Wind River Range. For those seeking the thrill of whitewater, rafting down Snake River's formidable rapids promises both excitement and unforgettable memories. And when snow blankets the land, Wyoming becomes a winter sports haven, offering world-class skiing and snowboarding among snow-blanketed peaks.

The history of Wyoming unfolds in its numerous historic sites and cultural experiences. Delve into stories of the Old West at Fort Laramie, or walk in the tracks of pioneers along the Oregon Trail. Wyoming's towns — from Cheyenne to Cody — spotlight the enduring cowboy culture, where rodeo events and Western shops keep traditions alive. Visits to local museums enrich understanding, offering insights into Native American history, cowboy legends, and paleontological discoveries.

Practical considerations make Wyoming an accessible destination. With major airports like Jackson Hole and regional roads connecting its towns, travelers can arrive with ease. Accommodations in Wyoming span from rustic lodges to luxury dude ranches, ensuring something for every taste and budget. The state's dining scene satisfies with Western fare, craft beers, and farm-to-table experiences in charming local establishments.

In essence, Wyoming is not just a destination; it is an experience that stirs the soul and renews a sense of adventure. As you turn the pages of this guide, embrace the

journey through Wyoming's untouched beauty, historic landmarks, and authentic cowboy spirit. Whether you seek solitude in nature, thrilling activities, or cultural discoveries, Wyoming offers limitless possibilities for exploration and unforgettable experiences.

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## CHAPTER ONE: Getting There

Wyoming, a state defined by its immense scale and dramatic landscapes, doesn't just appear on your doorstep. Reaching the Cowboy State requires a bit of forethought, as its sparse population and wide-open spaces mean transportation hubs are fewer and farther between than in more densely populated regions. Whether you choose to soar through the skies or embark on a classic American road trip, understanding your options for arrival is the crucial first step in planning your Wyoming adventure. The two primary methods, flying and driving, each offer distinct advantages and considerations tailored to different travel styles and itineraries.

Choosing to fly into Wyoming offers speed and convenience, particularly for visitors traveling long distances. The state is served by several regional airports, each strategically located to provide access to different areas. Jackson Hole Airport, famously designated JAC, holds the unique distinction of being located entirely *within* Grand Teton National Park. Arriving here is an experience in itself, with breathtaking views of the Teton Range often visible right from the tarmac. It provides immediate access to both Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks, as well as the bustling resort town of Jackson. Major airlines like American, Delta, and United offer service, though many flights are seasonal, concentrating heavily around the summer peak and winter ski seasons.

Further east, Casper-Natrona County International Airport (CPR) serves the central part of the state. While designated "international," its traffic is predominantly domestic. Its central location makes it a practical entry point for exploring Casper Mountain, accessing the renowned fishing waters of the North Platte River, or beginning a journey towards other parts of Wyoming. Like many regional airports, connections usually route through larger hubs such as Denver or Salt Lake City. It offers a less crowded alternative to Jackson Hole, particularly if your itinerary focuses more on central or eastern Wyoming.

For travelers prioritizing access to Yellowstone National Park's eastern side and the historic town of Cody, Yellowstone Regional Airport (YRA) is the logical choice. Situated just outside Cody, it's less than an hour's drive from the park's East Entrance. Flying into YRA allows visitors quick access to the Buffalo Bill Center of the West and the myriad attractions of Cody before venturing into the park. Service here is also somewhat seasonal, aligning with Yellowstone's main visitor season, typically operating from late spring through mid-fall. Connections again often come via Denver or Salt Lake City.

In the southeastern corner of the state lies Cheyenne Regional Airport (CYS), serving

Wyoming's capital city. This airport is convenient for visitors focused on Cheyenne itself, perhaps attending the famous Cheyenne Frontier Days rodeo, exploring nearby state parks like Curt Gowdy, or visiting Fort Laramie National Historic Site. Its proximity to the Colorado border also makes it potentially accessible for itineraries starting or ending in Denver. While smaller, it provides essential air links for the region, typically connecting through Denver.

Beyond these key airports, Wyoming has several other smaller regional facilities catering to specific communities and surrounding areas. Gillette-Campbell County Airport (GCC) serves the Powder River Basin in the northeast, near Devils Tower. Laramie Regional Airport (LAR) supports the university town of Laramie and access to the Snowy Range and Vedauwoo. Riverton Regional Airport (RIW) provides access to the Wind River Reservation area. Rock Springs-Sweetwater County Airport (RKS) serves southwestern Wyoming, near Flaming Gorge. Sheridan County Airport (SHR) offers access to Sheridan and the Bighorn Mountains in the north. These smaller airports invariably rely on connections through hubs like Denver or Salt Lake City and generally have fewer flight options than the larger Wyoming airports.

A critical point for air travelers to understand is that direct flights into Wyoming from major cities outside the immediate Rocky Mountain region are rare. The vast majority of itineraries will involve at least one connection, most commonly through Denver International Airport (DEN) in Colorado or Salt Lake City International Airport (SLC) in Utah. These large hubs offer extensive flight networks, making them the primary gateways for reaching Wyoming by air. Occasionally, connections might route through other hubs depending on the airline and origin city, but DEN and SLC are the most frequent players.

Interestingly, sometimes the most practical or economical way to fly "to" Wyoming is actually to fly into an airport in a neighboring state. Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport (BZN) in Montana is a very popular choice, particularly for visitors heading to Yellowstone's North or West entrances. BZN is often larger, offers more flight options and sometimes lower fares than Wyoming's internal airports, and is conveniently positioned for exploring the northern sections of the park and surrounding Montana attractions. It's a significant gateway for the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

Similarly, Idaho Falls Regional Airport (IDA) in Idaho can be a viable option for accessing western Wyoming, including Jackson Hole and Grand Teton National Park, particularly if flight schedules or prices into JAC are unfavorable. Salt Lake City International Airport (SLC) in Utah, while requiring a longer drive (roughly 4-5 hours to Jackson), offers the most extensive flight options and rental car availability in the region, potentially yielding significant cost savings that outweigh the extra driving time for budget-conscious travelers. Denver International Airport (DEN) serves a similar role for southern and eastern Wyoming, being a major hub with competitive

pricing and extensive connections, located about two hours south of Cheyenne. Billings Logan International Airport (BIL) in Montana can also be useful for accessing northern Wyoming, including Cody and the Bighorn Mountains.

When selecting your arrival airport, consider your overall itinerary. If Yellowstone and Grand Teton are your primary focus, JAC or BZN are often the most convenient. If you're exploring central or eastern Wyoming, CPR or CYS might be better suited. For the northeast including Devils Tower, GCC or even Rapid City Regional Airport (RAP) in South Dakota could be considered. Factor in not just flight costs but also potential driving times and rental car availability and pricing at each location. Sometimes a slightly more expensive flight into a closer airport saves time and money on ground transportation.

Booking flights well in advance is highly recommended, especially if traveling during the peak summer months (June-August) or the popular fall season (September). Flights into Jackson Hole (JAC) particularly fill up quickly due to high demand for the national parks. Being flexible with travel dates by even a day or two can sometimes yield significant savings. Also, investigate different airlines, as service levels and pricing can vary considerably. Don't forget to account for baggage fees, which can add substantially to the overall cost.

Consider the possibility of flying into one airport and out of another. For instance, flying into Jackson (JAC) to explore the Tetons and Yellowstone, then driving east to Cody and flying out of Yellowstone Regional Airport (YRA), or driving south through the state and flying out of Cheyenne (CYS) or even Denver (DEN). This can create a more efficient itinerary by eliminating the need to backtrack, though it may result in higher one-way rental car fees. Weigh the convenience against the potential extra cost.

Once your plane touches down, you'll need ground transportation to explore Wyoming effectively. Public transportation options are extremely limited outside of a few specific shuttle services in resort areas like Jackson. For the vast majority of visitors, renting a car is not just recommended, it's practically essential. The distances between attractions, towns, and even trailheads are significant, and having your own vehicle provides the freedom and flexibility needed to experience the state fully.

Rental car facilities are available at all the major Wyoming airports (JAC, CPR, YRA, CYS) and usually at the nearby out-of-state airports (BZN, IDA, SLC, DEN, BIL) as well. However, availability and selection can vary. Jackson Hole Airport, due to its high tourist volume, typically has a good selection from major rental agencies, but prices can be higher, and cars book up very quickly, especially in summer. It is absolutely crucial to reserve your rental car well in advance - ideally at the same time you book your flights. Waiting until the last minute, particularly during peak season, can lead to exorbitant prices or, worse, no vehicles being available at all.

Consider the type of vehicle you'll need. While a standard sedan is sufficient for driving major highways and accessing most towns and front-country attractions in the national parks during summer, an SUV or vehicle with higher clearance might be desirable if you plan on exploring less-maintained Forest Service roads or venturing out during shoulder seasons (spring/fall) when conditions can be variable. All-wheel drive (AWD) or four-wheel drive (4WD) can provide added confidence, especially if encountering gravel roads or potentially slick conditions, and is highly recommended for winter travel. Check rental agreements regarding driving on unpaved roads, as some contracts prohibit it.

Beyond rental cars, options are scarce. Taxi services exist in the larger towns like Cheyenne, Casper, and Jackson, but they are not practical for extensive touring. Ride-sharing services like Uber or Lyft have a very limited presence, primarily concentrated in Jackson and perhaps Cheyenne, and should not be relied upon for travel outside these immediate areas. Some lodges and tour operators offer shuttle services from airports, particularly in the Jackson/Yellowstone area, but these typically cater to specific properties or tours and don't provide general transportation freedom. Plan on being self-sufficient with a rental car.

The alternative to flying is, of course, driving to Wyoming. For many visitors, particularly those coming from neighboring states or embarking on a longer cross-country journey, a road trip is the quintessential way to experience the American West. Driving allows you maximum flexibility in packing, scheduling, and route planning. It lets you witness the gradual change in landscape as you approach the state's borders and provides the opportunity for spontaneous stops along the way. It's often the most cost-effective option for families or groups.

Three major Interstate highways provide the primary arteries for driving into and across Wyoming. Interstate 80 (I-80) cuts across the southern tier of the state, entering from Nebraska in the east near Cheyenne, passing through Laramie and Rock Springs, and exiting into Utah in the west. This is a major transcontinental trucking route, known for its high winds, especially between Laramie and Rawlins, and its susceptibility to closures during winter storms due to snow and ice. While perhaps not the most scenic route in Wyoming, it provides efficient east-west travel across the southern plains.

Interstate 90 (I-90) clips the northeastern corner of Wyoming. Entering from South Dakota near Sundance (providing access towards Devils Tower National Monument), it runs west through Gillette and Buffalo before crossing into Montana near Sheridan. This route offers access to the Black Hills region just outside Wyoming and serves as a gateway to the Bighorn Mountains and the northern part of the state. Like I-80, it carries significant traffic and can be impacted by winter weather.

Interstate 25 (I-25) is the main north-south corridor in eastern Wyoming. It enters from Colorado south of Cheyenne, proceeds north through the capital, continues to Casper, and eventually passes through Buffalo before terminating at I-90. This route connects Wyoming's largest cities and provides primary access from the Denver metropolitan area and other points south. It traverses primarily rolling plains and grasslands.

Beyond the Interstates, numerous US Highways and State Routes serve as important entry points and scenic corridors. US Highway 191 is a significant north-south route in western Wyoming, entering from Utah near Flaming Gorge, passing through Pinedale (gateway to the Wind River Range), Jackson, and traversing both Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks before continuing into Montana near West Yellowstone. US Highway 287 offers another major north-south path, entering from Colorado near Laramie, merging with I-80 briefly, then heading northwest through Lander and Dubois towards Grand Teton National Park and Moran Junction.

Other key routes include US Highways 14, 16, and 20, which converge as the approach routes to Yellowstone's East Entrance from Cody, originating further east near the Bighorns or Black Hills. US Highway 85 enters the state from Nebraska and South Dakota in the east, providing access towards Cheyenne and the Fort Laramie area. These highways often offer more scenic driving experiences than the Interstates but typically involve slower speeds and passage through small towns.

One undeniable reality of driving to or within Wyoming is the vast distances involved. Cities and towns can be hundreds of miles apart, and even reaching major attractions from the nearest town can require significant driving time. Consult maps carefully when planning your route and allow ample time for travel between destinations. Don't underestimate driving times based solely on mileage; factor in potential construction delays in summer, lower speed limits on non-interstate highways, and the possibility of needing breaks.

Fuel availability is another crucial consideration, especially when venturing off the main Interstate corridors. While gas stations are readily available along I-80, I-90, and I-25 and in larger towns, they can become sparse in more remote areas, particularly in central Wyoming, the Bighorn Basin, or parts of the southwest. It's wise to adopt a "top off the tank" mentality - if you see a gas station and your tank is less than half full, fill it up. Don't assume another station will be available just down the road, especially if you're turning onto a less-traveled highway or heading into a national forest or park area. Running out of gas in rural Wyoming can turn an adventure into a serious predicament quickly.

Road conditions are a year-round factor. Summer often brings road construction, which can cause significant delays, particularly on popular routes leading to national parks. Always check for current construction projects and potential detours before setting out. Fall and spring are transitional seasons where weather can be

unpredictable; sunny days can quickly turn to snow, especially at higher elevations. Mountain passes like the Beartooth Highway (US-212, technically entering Wyoming from Montana), the Snowy Range Scenic Byway (WY-130), and highways crossing the Bighorn Mountains (US-14, US-14A, US-16) have seasonal closures, typically from late fall through late spring or early summer, depending on snowfall.

Winter driving in Wyoming demands serious preparation and caution. Heavy snowfall, drifting snow, ice, and high winds (which can close highways even without precipitation) are common occurrences. If driving to or within Wyoming between late October and late May, ensure your vehicle is equipped for winter conditions. Good all-season or preferably snow tires are essential. Carrying an emergency kit with blankets, food, water, a flashlight, jumper cables, and a shovel is highly recommended. Before any winter drive, check the Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) 511 travel information website ([www.wyoroad.info](http://www.wyoroad.info)) or app for the latest road conditions, closures, and advisories. Conditions can change rapidly, and highway closures are frequent. Heeding travel warnings and closures isn't just advisable; it's critical for safety.

Wildlife poses another significant driving hazard across Wyoming. Encounters with deer, pronghorn, elk, moose, and even bison on roadways are common, especially during dawn and dusk when animals are most active and visibility is reduced. Be particularly vigilant when driving through forested areas, open rangelands, and anywhere wildlife crossing signs are posted (which is much of the state). Scan the roadsides ahead and be prepared to brake suddenly. Colliding with a large animal like an elk or moose can cause severe vehicle damage and injuries. Slow down, especially at night.

For those driving their own vehicle, ensure it's in good working order before embarking on a long trip. Check tires, brakes, fluids, and wipers. Consider if your vehicle is suitable for the type of driving you anticipate. While AWD/4WD isn't strictly necessary for highway driving in summer, it offers peace of mind and capability if you plan to explore gravel roads or encounter variable weather. If renting a car for a road trip originating outside Wyoming, the same considerations about vehicle type apply.

Many visitors find a combination of air and road travel offers the best balance. Flying into a major regional hub like Denver, Salt Lake City, or Bozeman often provides more flight options and potentially lower fares compared to flying directly into a smaller Wyoming airport. From the hub airport, you can rent a vehicle and enjoy a scenic drive into the state, incorporating different sights along the way. This strategy requires factoring in the additional driving time from the hub airport to your first Wyoming destination.

Using different arrival and departure points, either within Wyoming or including nearby out-of-state airports, is another strategy enabled by combining flying and driving. For

example, flying into Bozeman (BZN), exploring Yellowstone and the Tetons, driving south through western Wyoming, and flying out of Salt Lake City (SLC) creates a linear route. While efficient for sightseeing, remember to check the cost implications of a one-way car rental, which can sometimes be significantly higher than round-trip rentals. Get quotes for both options to make an informed decision.

Regardless of whether you fly, drive, or combine the two, remember that Wyoming operates on Mountain Time (MT). Depending on where you're coming from, you may gain or lose hours, which can impact your arrival day schedule and potentially contribute to fatigue. Factor this time difference into your planning, especially for flight connections or estimating driving times on your first day.

Ultimately, reaching Wyoming is the first chapter of your adventure. Planning your travel logistics carefully - choosing the right airport or driving route, booking flights and rental cars well in advance, preparing for the distances and potential road conditions - will set the stage for a smoother and more enjoyable experience. The journey to the Cowboy State, across its vast landscapes or through its welcoming airport gateways, is part of the unique appeal of visiting this remarkable corner of the American West.

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