



INGE JOHNSON/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Have Glacier National Park to yourself

In summer, millions of tourists flock to the Montana attraction full of unbelievably scenic vistas. But there's a better time to go.

BY JUSTIN FRANZ

Logan Pass in Glacier National Park, near the United States' border with Canada.

I probably shouldn't be telling you any of this. ¶ Last year, more than 2.9 million people visited Glacier National Park in the northwest corner of Montana, most of them between Memorial Day and Labor Day. In recent years, it's been normal for nearly a million people to visit the park in July alone. ¶ Of course, in a 1 million-acre park, one would think there would be enough room for everyone to stretch their legs in peace. But much of the park is wild and remote, meaning hundreds of thousands of people are crammed into a few easily accessible areas, such as the legendary Going-to-the-Sun Road, a tight alpine highway that stretches 50 miles across the park. On a sunny Saturday in the middle of summer, it's not uncommon for the line of cars at the park entrance to stretch for miles.

SEE GLACIER ON F4



PHOTOS BY JUSTIN FRANZ FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

In fall, Glacier National Park is a vibrant sanctuary

GLACIER FROM F1

That's why most locals — myself included — elect to visit the park after the hordes of summer visitors have packed up their hiking and selfie sticks and headed home. We know the best time of year to visit Glacier Park is during the quiet days of autumn, when visitation drops like a rock through clear Lake McDonald, the largest body of water in the park.

In September, visitation is cut in half to approximately 400,000. In October, it plummets even further, usually somewhere south of 100,000 visitors.

But more leg room is only one of the reasons that autumn is the perfect time to visit Glacier. Come late September and early October, the vista-obscuring haze from wildfires near and far that can occasionally affect the region during the summer has (hopefully) lifted for the year. The snowdrifts that can render some trails inaccessible early in the season have finally melted, meaning all 734 miles of hiking trail are accessible. And by late September and early October, the fireworks of autumn ignite the mountainsides.

The east side of the park is dominated by aspens, while the

west side features the western larch, a conifer exclusive to the Inland Northwest. Both types of trees turn bright yellow, adding a dash of color to the cool, cloudy days that can dominate the forecast come mid-October. While the autumn color palette in Glacier isn't as diverse as New England's, interpretive ranger Diane Sine says she prefers the park's golden fall. "We specialize in yellow," she says.

Sine is a retired schoolteacher who has worked in Glacier for 40 years, mostly as a seasonal ranger in the summer. She first came to Glacier in the 1970s on annual family vacations before scoring a summer job as a waitress at the Many Glacier Hotel, a wilderness lodge that opened in on July 4, 1915. When President William Howard Taft signed the legislation turning 1 million acres of federal land into a national park in May 1910, the nearby Great Northern Railway saw it as a golden opportunity to promote the passenger trains that ran along the southern edge. But the railroad quickly ran into a problem: While people could take the train to the park, they had no place to stay once they got there. The Great Northern solved that by building nearly a dozen lodges and chalets inside the park, in-



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cluding the Many Glacier Hotel on the shores of Swiftcurrent Lake.

When the hotel opened, it was heralded as the "Showplace of the Rockies," and a century later, that grandeur still shines. The three-story lobby features a hooded fireplace that almost feels like a campfire and is surrounded by 20 Douglas fir pillars that give the space the look of a remote wilderness campground. Large picture windows let guests take in views of pristine Swiftcurrent Lake and the mountains that tower over it. Down the hallway, the dining

room has been restored to its early-20th-century appearance, and the kitchen still serves some of the finest meals around.

Glacier's wilderness lodges were the brainchild of Great Northern President Louis W. Hill, who during the 1910s and 1920s was obsessed with helping develop the park. According to legend, Hill was interested in the most minute details, right down to what type of soap was stocked in the hotels.

The railroad remained active in the park through much of the early 20th century, but its presence declined as the highway system improved and the rail industry started to focus more on freight. Some of the remote wilderness chalets were torn down during World War II, and those that remained were sold off in the 1950s.

It's still possible to travel to Glacier Park by rail. Amtrak's Empire Builder passenger train, which connects Chicago with Portland and Seattle, makes three stops along the park's southern boundary. One of those stops, at Essex, is just steps from the historic Izaak Walton Inn, an old railroad lodge built in 1939 that welcomes guests year round.

Today, a half-dozen historic

SEE GLACIER ON F5

If you go

WHERE TO STAY

Lake McDonald Lodge

288 Lake McDonald Lodge Loop, West Glacier
855-733-4522

glaciernationalparklodges.com

Located about 10 miles from the park's west entrance, the lodge traditionally stays open into late September. The Lake McDonald Lodge is unique in that it is the only lodge that was not built by the Great Northern, although it shares many of the same characteristics of the others and was later purchased by the railway in the 1920s. Open mid-May to late September. Double occupancy rooms start at \$315. Rooms in Snyder Hall, a dorm that is part of the lodge complex, start at \$115.

Glacier Park Lodge

499 Montana Hwy. 49, East Glacier Park
844-868-7474

glacierparkcollection.com

The first hotel built by the railroad is located just outside the park, not far from the train depot in East Glacier Park. Like many of the accommodations in the park, parts of the Glacier Park Lodge were built to look like a Swiss chalet, a nod to the railroad's effort to brand the area as the "American Alps." Usually stays open until late September. Rooms for two start at \$220.

Izaak Walton Inn

290 Izaak Walton Inn Rd., Essex
406-888-5700

izaakwaltoninn.com

The railroad-themed lodge is on the southern edge of the park and is open year round. The main lodge was built in 1939 to house railroad workers but has since been turned into a resort that is especially popular with train enthusiasts and cross-country skiers in winter. Guests can stay in the lodge or in their very own caboose or a locomotive that has been turned into a luxury room. Rooms for two start at \$100 but vary depending on the time of week. Weekends are usually the most expensive, but visitors to the area in the middle of the week can find great deals.

WHERE TO EAT

Two Medicine Grill

314 U.S. Hwy. 2, East Glacier Park
406-226-9227

[facebook.com/twomedicinegrill](https://www.facebook.com/twomedicinegrill)

This small diner located just across from the East Glacier Park train station is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The breakfast menu features favorites such as pancakes and French toast, and

the dinner menu includes chicken fried steak and a juicy Montana steak. Grab a seat at the counter and see what the locals are up to. Open 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily. Entrees start at \$6.

Backslope Brewing

1107 Ninth Street West, Columbia Falls
406-897-2850

backslopebrewing.com

This family-friendly brewpub in Columbia Falls offers sandwiches, burgers, rice bowls and more alongside a growing roster of housemade beer. The brewery has four regular brews plus a rotating selection of seasonal beers. Open 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily. Entrees start at \$12.

WHAT TO DO

Glacier National Park

West Glacier, Montana
406-888-7800

nps.gov/glac

With 1 million pristine acres of wilderness and hundreds of miles of trail, Glacier National Park is an outdoor enthusiast's dream. One of the highlights is the Going-to-the-Sun Road, a 50-mile alpine highway that cuts through the heart of the park and has been heralded by many as one of the most memorable drives in all America. The road was completed in 1933 and is on the National Register of Historic Places. The road is open from July until late October. Park entrance is \$35 per vehicle (covering all occupants) for a seven-day pass. Entrance for bikers and people on foot is \$20 per person for a seven-day pass. Annual passes \$70. Open 24 hours, 365 days a year.

Red Bus Tour

Multiple locations in and around Glacier National Park
855-733-4522

glaciernationalparklodges.com/red-bus-tours

This fleet of vintage Red Buses was built by the White Motor Co. between 1936 and 1939. Tours from the east side of the park go until Sept. 22, and west side tours go until Oct. 20. Reservations recommended. Tours start at \$46 for adults and \$23 for children.

INFORMATION

glaciermt.com

J.F.

TOP: Autumn colors line the Going-to-the-Sun Road in Montana's Glacier National Park. ABOVE: At the Many Glacier Hotel, heralded as the "Showplace of the Rockies" when it opened in 1915, picture windows give guests a view of Swiftcurrent Lake and the mountains.

The newest Swedish word for sleepover is Ikea

Grab your jammies. The company founder’s hometown of Almhult invites you to get comfy in a Bernhard, under the light of a Riggad.

BY ANDREA SACHS

I have a fantasy about Ikea: While shopping, I don’t hear the closing announcement and security overlooks me on its evening sweep. I have no choice but to spend the night inside the store. To bide my time until the opening hour, I try out all of the chairs, sofas, beds, light fixtures, outdoor furniture and stuffed animals. For dinner, I raid the cafe and eat Swedish meatballs dipped in lingonberry jam. When I run out of meatballs, I eat just the jam, with a giant serving spoon from the kitchen department. After the sugar high has worn off, I fall asleep in the lifestyle I covet the most.

I assumed the likelihood of my fantasy coming true was as low as me assembling a shelving unit without cursing. But then, on a July trip in Sweden, I had to pinch myself. The chair was a Bernhard. The lamp was a Riggad. The trash can was a Mjosa. The sink was an Ensen. Yes, it was happening: I was sleeping in an Ikea.

Almhult doesn’t call itself IKEAville, though it could. Founder Ingvar Kamprad grew up on a nearby farm and established his first store here in 1958. In 2012, a new outpost opened in Almhurst. It isn’t the biggest store in the world (Kungens Kurva in Stockholm holds that title), but it does carry the largest range of Ikea products. Four years later, the Ikea Museum arrived, coinciding with the expansion of the Ikea Hotell. Both sites run restaurants, and meatballs are on the menu. The only detail missing from my full-on Ikea immersion was losing my car in the immense parking lot. I took the train, because I didn’t need to relive that nightmare.

This being Sweden, the land of subtlety, I didn’t see any Ikea billboards or neon signs rubbing the charm off the village square. Near the train station, I noticed a whisper of a sign that led me up and over the tracks and onto the Ikea campus. The blue-and-yellow flags of Ikea and Sweden rustled in the wind like fraternal twin banners. Several Ikea buildings — Fastigheter, Communications, Test Lab and Tillsammans — lined the lot. I turned my back on the Ikea Museum and walked into my fantasy.

The Ikea Hotell dates from 1964, when the company built accommodations for shoppers who drove a distance to stroll through the showroom and order furniture. In the lobby, I felt like one of those early customers. If only I had a clipboard so I could check off the items I wanted to take home. Instead, I had to crawl on my hands and knees to look for the labels. When I couldn’t find the product name, I approached the front desk.

“Can you please look up the cow-print ottoman for me?” I asked the attendant, pointing at the dairy farm-chic object in one of several seating areas.

He happily obliged — “I have time. I’m working till 6 a.m.” — and turned the computer screen to show me his findings. I could have played this game all night.

My room resided on the second floor in the new section of the hotel. The guest rooms come in four categories, such as the Family Room, which features cur-



OLA TORKELSSON/TT/ASSOCIATED PRESS

tained bunk beds, and the 45-square-foot Cabin, ideal for solo travelers with retractable limbs. I chose the Grand Lit, an update on the original Grand Standard.

If I had taken the museum tour before I had checked in, I might not have been so startled when I first entered the room. Instead of the multi-textured and -patterned look on the ground floor, my room resembled a hospital recovery room. It contained a few pieces of furniture (bed, desk, chair) in soothing monochromatic tones (white, blue-gray, light wood). The hot pink hook and hanger provided the sole pops of color.

The second time I stepped inside, I had gained a better understanding of Kamprad’s egalitarian and economical aesthetic, and I embraced the room with a newfound appreciation. The minimal style, I now realized, upheld the principles of Democratic Design, a philosophy that promotes form, function, quality, sustainability and low price. As long as I didn’t raid the Borrow Cabinet, which was stocked with loaner accessories, I could honor Kamprad’s spirit. I just had to resist that fuzzy woolly mammoth throw.

The founder

The English-language tour started in front of Kamprad’s face.

“He would not have liked this,” our guide, Ebba, said of the oversize portrait of the founder that graced the museum entrance.

Kamprad was a humble, deferential man who credited his staff — all 208,000 of them in 2018, the year he died at age 91 — for the success of Ikea. A wall quote summed up his hiring strategy as, “When looking for co-workers, I look for people that are good at the things that I’m bad at.”

Ebba urged us to approach the artwork. Kamprad’s eyes, ears, nose and neck dissolved into tiny head shots of his employees,



SIMON NAGEL/PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA/AP IMAGES

A visitor, top, takes a photo of an image of Ikea founder Ingvar Kamprad — made of 5,000 head shots of employees — at the Ikea Museum, above, in Almhult, Sweden. It occupies the space of the first Ikea, which opened in 1958.

5,000 in all.

The museum follows several thematic tracks. Ebba chose “Our roots,” but encouraged our group to independently explore the others, including “Ikea through the ages” and “The many sides of Ingvar Kamprad.” We threaded our way through a hallway plastered with Ikea objects. The items — a pink flower-shaped light, a yellow clock, a green watering can, a blue stool — were grouped by hue, a burst of brightness before we entered a darker Sweden.

The Scandinavian country is one of the wealthiest in the world, but it wasn’t also so prosperous. From the mid-1800s through the 1920s, Swedes struggled to survive. They lived in dank, cramped quarters and scavenged the land for food. Lingonberries were a staple. More than a million people, or about a quarter of the population, fled Sweden for better opportunities in Australia and the United States.

Ebba led us through this rough period in Swedish history.

“This is not an Ikea kitchen,” she said. “But you can see many of

the same ideas at Ikea.”

We stood before a rustic kitchen with an open hearth and a hanging baby seat that saved space and protected the infant from the germ floor. She showed us a handmade chair that folds into a table, a piece tailor-made for a survivalist or an urban studio-dweller.

“This is the Ikea Effect,” she said. “You feel proud and lots of love for your furniture.”

In the 1930s, the Social Democratic Party assumed control of the government and initiated a public housing plan called “the people’s home.” The goal was to raise the standard of living through such means as rent caps, subsidies and linoleum flooring.

Kamprad grew up in this era of uplift. He started selling objects at the peewee age of 5 — matchboxes provided by his Aunt Erna, fish he peddled on his mother’s bicycle. When he turned 17, his birthday wish was not a car or a kiss from his sweetheart but to register his own company. He called his business Ikea, which I was surprised to learn is an acro-

nym. A sign on the wall spelled it out: I and K, the initials of his name; E for his family farm, Elmtaryd; and A for the province, Agunnaryd. He originally spelled Ikea with an acute accent on the “e,” but dropped the fake diacritic in the 1960s.

You know how you think you can race through an Ikea, grab what you need and escape while it’s still daylight outside? And how hours later, you find yourself inspecting kitchen cabinets, even though you came for towels? Well, that same voluntary hostage situation takes place at the museum. I couldn’t help myself: I read every informational placard (there were dozens of them) and inspected every piece of sample furniture (ditto). I posed for a mock catalogue cover and looked at family photos, wondering if Kamprad furnished his three boys’ first apartments with Ikea pieces, as my father did mine.

I returned to the ground floor for the gift shop. The retail space was small but, for those of us without restraint, dangerous. I eyed a T-shirt with an Allen wrench design and real furniture, including the Mjolkpall stool that Kamprad and his son, Jonas, designed in 2004. (Kamprad said he was inspired by his first job, milking cows on the family farm.) For Swedish souvenirs, I checked out the Dala horses and the lingonberries, both of which appeared in myriad forms. I Google-translated a lot of words.

At Kotet, the museum’s restaurant, I pretended to study the menu even though I had known my order since breakfast time. The cafe offers five versions of meatballs with different accompaniments. The traditional Kottbullar cozies up with potatoes, lingonberries, pickled vegetables and cream sauce; the salmon balls share plate space with three kinds of peas, egg and potatoes. I picked the veggie balls, which

If you go

WHERE TO STAY Ikea Hotell

IKEA Agatan 1, Almhult
011-46-476-64-11-00

ikeahotell.se/en/home

The hotel is completely furnished with Ikea products, down to the trash can in the fitness center. The ground floor offers a restaurant, bar and gift shop — a mini-version of the museum shop across the parking lot. Guests can also prepare meals in a community kitchen on the second floor. Four room types are available for solo travelers, couples and families keen on bunk beds. Rates start at about \$52 per night and include a generous breakfast buffet.

WHERE TO EAT Koket

IKEA Agatan 5, Almhult
011-46-476-44-16-00

ikeamuseum.com/en/museum-restaurant

Meatballs are the star of the menu. Stick with the traditional, which come with potatoes and lingonberries, or stretch your palate with veggie, salmon, chicken or oriental balls. And for dessert, chocolate balls. The cafe also serves salads and non-round sweets, such as Swedish cheesecake with cream and strawberry jam. Open daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed major holidays. Meatball platters about \$8.

WHAT TO DO Ikea Museum

IKEA Agatan 5, Almhult
011-46-476-44-16-00

ikeamuseum.com

Learn all about Ikea and its founder Ingvar Kamprad through exhibits that explore such topics as Swedish history, Scandinavian design and furniture fads. English-language tours are held in July and August. The museum also hosts exhibits and has a gift shop with a curated selection of Ikea items. Open daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed major holidays. Adult admission costs about \$6; free for children 17 and under.

INFORMATION

almhult.se/visitalmhult/en

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seemed to have rolled east into India. The kitchen staff piled on the curry, yellow rice, mango chutney, dill raita, chapati bread and roasted chickpeas.

I carried my meal across the parking lot to the hotel and ordered an Ikea lager at the bar. Three guys sitting in Ikea chairs positioned themselves before a TV screen airing the women’s World Cup semifinal between the Netherlands and Sweden. We all howled, the universal sound of disappointment, when the Dutch scored the winning goal.

I went upstairs to my room, curled up in the Rodtoppa comforter and lay my head on the Arenpris pillows. Then, I bid my fantasy a good night.

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Splendor and quiet solitude

GLACIER FROM F4

lodges or chalets survive in and around Glacier Park, with another being rebuilt. The Sperry Chalet, a stone lodge accessible only to those willing to hike up a steep mountain, was nearly destroyed in a wildfire in 2017. Park officials hope to have it restored by next year.

Most of the lodges stay open for a week or two after Labor Day before closing one by one. The Lake McDonald Lodge on the west side of the park usually stays open the latest. (This year, it closes Sept. 25. The Many Glacier Hotel closes Sept. 17.) Sine says that once the lodges, shops and restaurants in the park start to close, visitation drops even further and people need to be more self-reliant. It’s also important to prepare for whatever weather the mountains might throw at you.

“Pack every type of clothing you have, because it can easily go from a warm 70-degree day to a snowy night,” she says.

There are dozens of spectacular hikes in the park for visitors of all abilities. The Trail of Cedars near Avalanche Creek is a mile-long loop that goes through an old-growth cedar and hemlock forest, perfect for all ages. The Hidden

Lake Overlook is a 2.8-mile round trip from Logan Pass through an Alpine meadow. It’s especially spectacular later in the day, close to sunset.

One of the most famous hikes in the park is the five-mile trek to Grinnell Glacier, one of about two dozen such ice formations that survive in the park, down from an estimated 150 glaciers in 1850. Scientists say that more will disappear in the coming years. (For a glacier to be considered active, it must be at least 25 acres in size and be moving — albeit at a speed that makes a snail look fast.)

Ironically, while the park is named for them, it’s not particularly easy to see a glacier in Glacier National Park. That’s because most of the glaciers are tucked into shadowy crevices along the Continental Divide. The easiest one to see is the Jackson Glacier, about five miles east of Logan Pass on the Going-to-the-Sun Road, although if you want a detailed view you’re going to have to bring binoculars. But that’s not the case with Grinnell, where, with a little bit of effort, people can walk right up to the mass of ice. It’s a breathtaking experience for first-timers and Glacier veterans alike.

Sine says what she loves most about Glacier Park is that after

more than 40 years of working and playing there, she still finds something new to explore every season. She often talks to visitors who say they have specific hikes or activities in mind when they arrive, but she’s quick to remind them that they can get more out of their trip if they’re flexible. Sometimes trails or roads are closed with little notice late in the season because of weather or maintenance, and visitors are encouraged to have backup plans at the ready.

“There are an incredible number of different experiences in Glacier Park,” she says. “This place has never gotten old to me.”

Ask just about any local and they’ll say the same thing: Whether you’ve lived here for five years or 50, there is always one more trail to scratch off that to-do list, one more awe-inspiring vista to drink in. And there’s perhaps no better time to work on that to-do list than during the quiet days of autumn.

But let’s just keep that between you and me.

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JUSTIN FRANZ FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

A woman reads inside the lobby of the Many Glacier Hotel. Most of the accommodations within Glacier National Park stay open until a week or two after Labor Day before closing one by one.