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SIX REASONS TO FALL IN LOVE WITH MONTANA'S GREAT FALLS, AND WHY

'THE ELECTRIC CITY' SHOULD BE PART OF TRAVELERS' 2026 SUMMER PLANS

Whether for National Parks and natural beauty, or Western cultural significance and tremendous value, Great Falls aligns perfectly with 2026's top travel trends

(GREAT FALLS, Mont.) – From Detour Destinations and Cowboy Core travel, to JOMO (the Joy of Missing Out) and value-based travel, there's no shortage of trends defining domestic travel in 2026. Fortunately, there's an unexpected destination in Central Montana that checks a number of boxes when it comes to these and other trends: [Great Falls](#). Here, where the Rocky Mountains give way to the Great Plains and the Missouri River flows through town, genuine Montana hospitality and stunning landscapes combine with a rich history and culture to define the modern-day Great Falls experience, while also paying homage to its Wild West roots. Following are six great reasons to make visiting Great Falls a priority in 2026:

GLACIER & YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK BASECAMP/LAYOVER

Given its proximity to Glacier National Park (2.5 hours north) and Yellowstone National Park's North Entrance (3.5 hours south), Great Falls has all the makings of a perfect basecamp, layover, or detour destination for travelers planning to visit and travel between the parks. Its Central Montana location highlights the stunning contrast of the rolling Great Plains against a backdrop of dense forest. Add in the abundance of waterfalls and the chance to see roaming bison herds along the way, and the drive alone can offer views that rival some of those in the parks. With easy accessibility to lodging, amenities, and attractions – without sacrificing the charm and natural beauty the city has long been known for – a visit to Great Falls while traveling between the National Parks feels less like a pit stop and more like its own vacation.

NATURAL BEAUTY & OUTDOOR RECREATION ABOUND

Over the course of just 10 river miles, the Missouri River passes over a series of impressive waterfalls that give Great Falls its name, losing more than 600 feet of elevation as it transitions from the Rocky Mountains to the Great Plains. The beauty of these falls caught the attention of Lewis & Clark in 1805 and has captivated visitors ever since. The 53-mile mixed-use [River's Edge Trail](#) features a variety of paved, dirt, gravel, and singletrack surfaces, and offers up-close views of all five waterfalls as it stretches up and down both sides of the Missouri River. From wildflower hikes to fly fishing, and from paddlesports to mountain biking, Mother Nature could not have painted a more stunning backdrop for outdoor recreation in Great Falls.

LEWIS & CLARK SLEPT HERE

It's no secret that the Lewis & Clark Expedition used the Missouri River as a primary conduit for their 1805 Corps of Discovery expedition, and Great Falls was among the places they passed through on their journey. In June of 1805, while Sacagawea was recovering from an illness that is believed to have been healed in part by the waters of nearby Sulphur Springs (which remain largely as they were in the 1800s), Lewis & Clark spent 31 days in the Great Falls area. Profoundly moved by his time here, Meriwether Lewis described in his journal the "majestically grand scenery" that unfolded before him in hopes that he could, "give to the world some faint idea of the object which at this moment fills me with such pleasure and astonishment." Today, their impact is still felt throughout the region and is preserved at the [Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center](#) and beyond.

THE WESTERN ART CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Home to one of the world's largest festivals dedicated to Western art – the annual [Western Art Week](#) (March 18-22, 2026) – it should come as no surprise that Great Falls is widely recognized as the Western Art Capital of the World. As a pillar of the Cowboy Core travel trend, one of Great Falls' enduring legacies is its tie to "America's Original Cowboy Artist" Charles Marion Russell, whose work showcased his love for Montana and his passion for the Montana way of life. Great Falls, being his chosen home for more than 46 years, was where a significant amount of his work was inspired and created. The award-winning [C.M. Russell Museum](#) covers an entire city block, containing not only the largest collection of Russell's most intimate work in the world, as well as his original house and studio, but thousands of pieces from his contemporaries. In addition to Western art, Great Falls has a thriving public art scene, including more than 50 outdoor murals by artists from around the globe, which are part of the city's [Downtown Art Walk](#).

MUSEUMS, HISTORY, & CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

There is perhaps no finer example of the cultural significance of the Great Falls area than the [First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park](#), which honors the mile-long cliff that was home to one of the largest buffalo jump sites in the country. The [Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center](#) chronicles the journey of the Corps of Discovery and their enduring impacts on the region, while the [Malmstrom Museum & Air Park](#) on the [Malmstrom Air Force Base](#) contains both indoor and outdoor parks showcasing aircraft and vehicle displays as well as other artifacts used during World War II. The previously mentioned C. M. Russell Museum is not only home to an expansive art collection, but it also includes interactive exhibits like [Tales from the Saddle: Come Ride Along](#) – a collaboration with the [Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame](#), a sculpture garden, educational programs, and a research center. Other notable Great Falls museums, historical, and cultural attractions include the [Montana Museum of Railroad History](#), the [Montana Veterans Memorial](#), and the annual [Montana State Fair](#).

VALUE WHEN IT'S NEEDED MOST

The cost of traveling continues to rise, with the nationwide travel price index rising 19.2 percent from 2019 to 2024. With an average daily hotel rate of less than \$110 (2024), Great Falls' lodging options represent a significant value compared to many other popular Montana destinations – often 15-48 percent lower than nearby resort towns. At a time when economic uncertainty abounds from the grocery store to the gas pump, those savings add up quickly making Great Falls a welcome alternative for budget-conscious travelers or those seeking to save where it's wise and have money left over to spend in other aspects of a trip.

Whether for a night, a weekend, or a week, there's no shortage of things to see and do in Great Falls this summer. For additional information or to begin planning a trip to Great Falls, go to www.visitgreatfallsmontana.org.

ABOUT GREAT FALLS:

Located at the transition of the Rocky Mountains to the Great Plains, Central Montana's Great Falls (pop. 60,000) is characterized by the namesake waterfalls of the Missouri River, an abundance of scenic beauty and year-round outdoor recreation, a thriving arts & culture scene, deep cultural and historical significance, and a community and economy that is as welcoming to visitors as it is conducive to business. Nicknamed "The Electric City" due to the power generated by the turbulent waters of the Missouri River, Great Falls is situated between Glacier National Park (2.5 hours north) and Yellowstone National Park's North Entrance (3.5 hours south), making it an ideal basecamp or layover for exploring two of the country's top National Parks. With direct flights into the Great Falls International Airport from six major markets including Denver, Salt Lake City, Seattle, Phoenix (Mesa), Minneapolis, and Las Vegas, getting to Great

Falls is a breeze. For more information or to begin planning a trip, visit www.visitgreatfallsmontana.org.

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