

Big Sky, MT

Montana is known as Big Sky Country, and if you take in the expansive landscape on any given day, views for dozens of miles in every direction, it's easy to understand why. But the fourth largest state in the Union (edged off the podium by Alaska, Texas and California, in that order) is also known as the Last Best Place. Paying a visit to [Big Sky](#), not far from iconic Yellowstone National Park, and the nearby city of Bozeman, underscores this heartfelt slogan that Montanans hold near and dear.



[Big Sky Golf](#)



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Pick up a National Rental Car in Bozeman, a short, non-stop flight from numerous western cities. In an hour's time, after a lovely drive down the canyon, you'll be in Big Sky. Golf at the Big Sky Resort is a small part of the recreational puzzle, but a tour of the one public-access course in town is mandatory for any avid player. At 6,500 feet above sea level, flatlanders will be pleasantly surprised with the 'pop' they get from a well-struck tee ball.

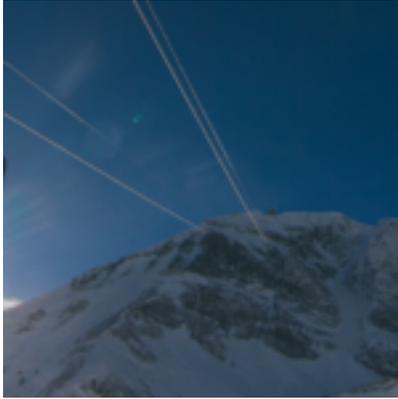
This Arnold Palmer design features some wonderful views of iconic Lone Peak, which is the beacon of the ski resort some six or eight miles up the road. The course bumps up against the west fork of the scenic Gallatin River on several occasions, and wildlife sighting are not uncommon. While the golf course features a bit too much back-and-forth, with numerous parallel fairways, there are some holes of note. The closing stretch in particular garners much of the interest.

The 16th is a short-but-tricky par-4, with bunkers pinching the landing zone. The next is a downhill par-3 of nearly 200 yards, ringed by trouble. The finale is a sweeping dogleg par-4, trouble to the right, a small-but-round-ruining pond adjacent to the green. Finding success through this final gauntlet will make the beer in the onsite tavern known as the Bunker Bar that much tastier.



Bridger Creek

Owing to the fact the Big Sky Resort Course is the only public option in town, golfers hankering for a second round should check out **Bridger Creek**, the only public course within the city limits of Bozeman. This former farmland features a large metal silo, visible from most front nine holes, located behind the fifth green. The ninth seems to be an unassuming par-5, though Bridger Creek itself gurgles ominously to the right of the fairway. The challenge is a pair of large trees standing sentinel, perhaps a hundred yards from the green. They narrow the landing area, and add some menace to what would otherwise be a stock approach shot to the putting surface.



Big Sky Lone Peak Tram

When the golf itch has been sufficiently scratched, there's plenty to do at Big Sky Resort, and topping the list is a ride up the [Lone Peak Tram](#). Those who tend to get queasy or are acrophobic be warned, the smallish capsule, suitable for fifteen passengers at a time (which moves slowly—this isn't an amusement park ride) brings intrepid riders north of 11,100 feet, with magnificent views in every direction. Wandering the summit affords views of three states, two national parks, and some of the wildest, wooliest terrain in the Rockies.



Big Sky Zipline Tours

Further down the hill, a few hours zip-lining around the resort will sate the adrenaline rush that brings many souls to the mountains. The views can't compare to the tram summit, (what can?) But the speed, height, and deliciously dreadful anticipation as one is clipped into the zip before launch is something to savor, especially in retrospect, when one is safely ensconced at the destination platform, post-ride!

While in this wonderful area it would be a capital offense to not take in the grandeur of [Yellowstone](#), the original, and in the minds of many, the finest national park in the country. The hot pots, (they look as cool and inviting as the azure waters of the Caribbean Sea, but the scalding temperatures make them deadly) the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, the waterfalls, hiking, abundant wildlife, and of course, the world's most famous geyser known as Old Faithful, are but half-a-dozen highlights in a park that has dozens of others. Plan to spend an entire day, if not two or three, exploring the unique beauty of this special place.

For a small burgh there are some surprisingly good restaurants in Big Sky. The real beauty is that the three named here are literally two minutes from each other, all in The Meadows area of town. Leading the way is [Olive B's](#), (named after the owner/chef's young daughter.) Chalkboard specials vie with menu staples like the ribeye steak, seafood fettuccini, veal cutlet and lobster mac n' cheese. Perhaps a hundred steps away is [Michelangelo's](#), with an interior so slick and cool, with wonderfully understated lighting and an uncountable number of displayed wine bottles, you'll assume you're in New York or L.A, not a small Montana town. As the name implies, lots of fine Italian dishes here. Antipasti and calamari as starters, various risottos and raviolis for the pasta course, and specialties like veal Ossobuco and salmon con porcini as entrees. Lastly, check out [Lone Peak Brewery](#) for a wonderful array of handcrafted beers (don't miss those aged in bourbon barrels) and a nice selection of pub food. Bison burgers, jambalaya, grilled lamb lollipops and fish tacos are among the favorites, as is the shuffleboard set, perfect for antsy kids or adults enjoying a pint or two of made-on-the-premises beer.