

STEAL THE ITINERARY

FREE NATIONAL PARK ITINERARIES • GUIDE NO. 004

The Perfect 3-Day Glacier National Park Itinerary

The west side, the full Going-to-the-Sun Road, and Grinnell Glacier — the icons of Montana's crown jewel in three days, built around Glacier's new 2026 access rules.

GUIDE 004

3 DAYS

BEST: JUL–SEP

EASY–STRENUOUS

WHERE	Glacier National Park, Montana (West Glacier & St. Mary)
AIRPORT	Glacier Park International (FCA), ~30 min from West Glacier
ENTRANCE	\$35 / vehicle (7 days) or \$70 annual — park is cashless
2026	No vehicle reservations; Logan Pass 3-hr parking + ticketed shuttle
BEST	Mid-July to mid-September (full Sun Road access)
ROUTE	Lake McDonald → Going-to-the-Sun Road → Many Glacier

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DAY 01 • WEST SIDE

Lake McDonald & Avalanche Lake

Ease in on the forested west side and get your first alpine-lake payoff.

- 1 Lake McDonald & the colored pebbles.** Enter at West Glacier and stop at Apgar on the park's biggest lake — famous for red, green, and blue stones under clear water. Dip your feet or rent a kayak.
- 2 Trail of the Cedars + Avalanche Lake.** 4.6 mi round trip, easy–moderate. An old-growth cedar boardwalk up a gorge to a waterfall-ringed alpine lake. Arrive before 9am or ride the shuttle.
- 3 Sunset at Lake McDonald Lodge.** Close the day at the 1913 lodge dock, or take an evening boat cruise.

Tonight: book tomorrow's Logan Pass shuttle tickets the moment they drop at 7pm on Recreation.gov (\$1/person).

DAY 02 • GOING-TO-THE-SUN ROAD

Logan Pass & the Full Sun Road

The crown of the trip — 50 cliff-hanging miles over the Continental Divide.

- 1 Climb the west half.** Leave by 7am to beat the parking rush. Bird Woman Falls Overlook, the Weeping Wall, and The Loop — every pullout is a photo.
- 2 Logan Pass & Hidden Lake Overlook.** At 6,646 ft — 3-hr parking limit, free kiosk permit, lots full by mid-morning. Walk the 2.8-mi wildflower boardwalk past goats and bighorn sheep.
- 3 Wild Goose Island & St. Mary Falls.** Descend past Jackson Glacier Overlook to the park's most photographed view, then the St. Mary & Virginia Falls hike (2.4–3.8 mi). Overnight east side.

DAY 03 • MANY GLACIER

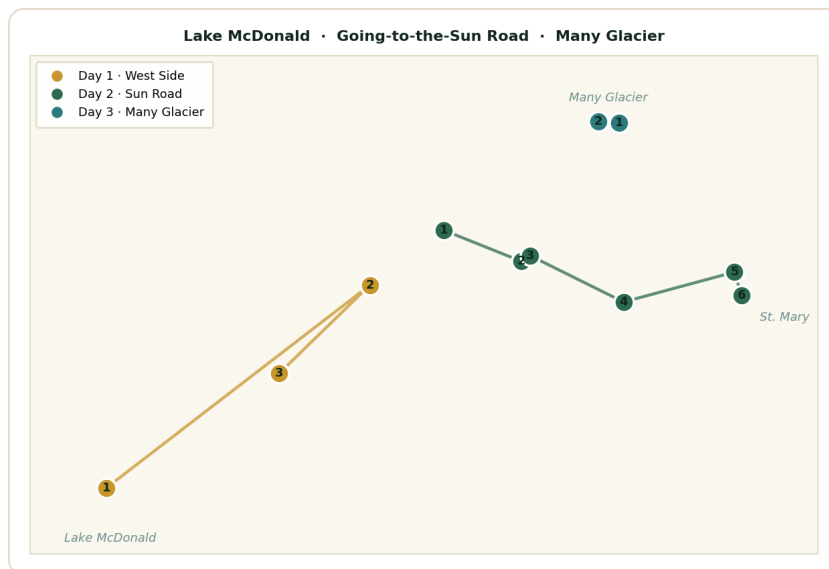
Grinnell Glacier Finale

Save the best for last — the most scenic valley in the park, fully open again in 2026.

- 1 Hike to Grinnell Glacier.** 10.6 mi / 1,600 ft past Swiftcurrent Lake and Lake Josephine to an iceberg-flecked basin. The two-boat combo trims ~3.4 mi. Carry bear spray — prime grizzly country.
- 2 Shorter option: Grinnell Lake.** Take the boats and walk the gentle path for the same glacial-blue water without the elevation (~7.2 mi via boat).
- 3 A drink on Swiftcurrent Lake.** Toast the trip on the deck of the 1915 Many Glacier Hotel; watch the hillsides at dusk for moose and bears before the drive out.

2026 update: the Swiftcurrent construction is complete — Many Glacier is fully open with 339 parking spaces, but it's the busiest trailhead in the park. Arrive early.

Map This Route



SCAN FOR THE LIVE MAP

Opens the interactive Google Map, color-coded by day — tap any pin to navigate.

Where to Stay

- **Two nights west, one night east.** Stay near Lake McDonald or Whitefish for Days 1–2, then one night on the east side (St. Mary or Many Glacier) so you never re-drive the pass.
- **In-park lodges** (Lake McDonald Lodge, Many Glacier Hotel) sell out fast — book 12–13 months out.
- **On a budget?** Whitefish and Columbia Falls have the most rooms and the easiest last-minute availability.
- Full guide: stealthitinerary.com/where-to-stay-glacier/

What to Pack

- **Layers.** 40°F mornings at Logan Pass, 80°F afternoons in the valleys.
- **Sturdy trail shoes** and a light rain shell.
- **Bear spray** — essential in Many Glacier. Buy or rent in-park (you can't fly with it).
- **Refillable water**, sun protection, and a card (the park is cashless).
- Full gear guide: stealthitinerary.com/national-park-gear-guide/

Three days is enough to fall hard for this place.

The west side, the most beautiful road in America, and Grinnell Glacier for the finale — timed around Glacier's new 2026 rules. Save this guide and follow along for the rest of the National Park series.

stealthitinerary.com/glacier

Last updated for the 2026 season. Access rules, shuttle tickets, and construction status can change — confirm current conditions on the official NPS Glacier page before you go.