

# BISON QUEST

## FAMILY LONG WEEKEND ITINERARY

(3 Days/2 Nights)



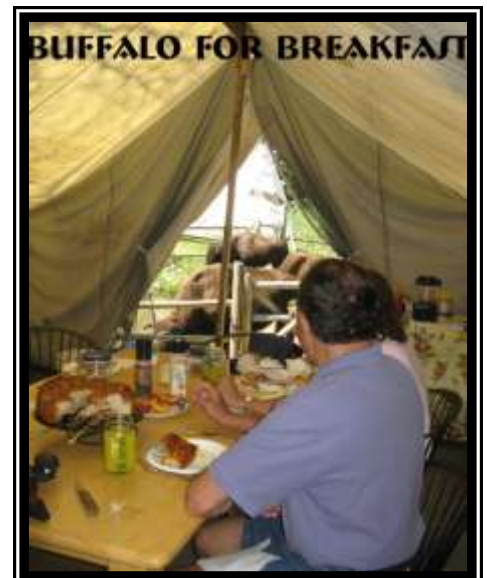
**Arrival Day:** Because the Reserve is about a 1 ½ to 2 hour drive, we will plan to pick you up at the airport between 10am and 3pm. That will give us time to track down luggage or take you shopping for anything that you might want. Because once we get to the ranch, there aren't any stores for miles around!

We usually plan on stopping at Madison Buffalo Jump State Park for a picnic lunch/snack, while we introduce you to some bison history. This Park is a historic buffalo jump used by the early native people.

Once we arrive at the ranch, you'll have time to unpack and settle into your homey log cabins after our rather bumpy and dusty ride. Since our Bison Quest camp is in a fenced area to keep the bison out, we may find ourselves surrounded by the herd.

Your first meal will probably be a Dutch oven "buffalo" roast with organic vegetables and homemade breads. We have a variety of foods (one of our questionnaires will be about your food preferences), but for those of you who like beef, you're going to LOVE bison. It's a little sweeter than beef (with a lot less fat and cholesterol) and the roasts just melt in your mouth. We can accommodate other diets that you might have including vegetarian, low fat or heart healthy diets. Just let us know before you arrive.

Of course, one of the reasons you're here is to meet our famous residents. So whenever you're ready, we'll jump into the ranch truck



and go off in search of the Wild Echo bison herd. Unlike domestic cows, bison are on the move most of the time, so it may take a bit of 4 wheel driving to find them. Since the “moms” are very used to us, they come up to the truck to get their share of the oats - and Junior comes right along with them. There aren’t many places you can sit and safely watch baby bison play tag with each other just a stone’s throw away!

One of our goals here at Wild Echo Bison Reserve is to give you a new appreciation and love for the beauty of our natural world. As wildlife biologists, we have a number of plant and wildlife studies going on



here at the reserve. Since you will be working with us on some of these studies, your first night will be an overview of what those studies are, and which ones we will be working on during your stay. Whether your interest is in photography, birdwatching, flowers, or our furry four footed friends, we have something for everyone. Some of our ecological studies involve yellow-bellied marmot behavioral study, bison behavioral studies, Bluebird and woodpecker nesting studies, etc.

**Day 2:** We will start our day with a typical ranch-style breakfast which will feature combinations of fresh eggs from our chickens, homemade bread, bison sausages, etc. After breakfast, we’ll jump in the 4x4 and give you a “show-me” tour of the ranch and how it runs. Some of our summer wildlife work involves checking on, recording the use of, and cleaning/repairing the cavity nesting birdhouses as well as checking on (via binoculars) any of our raptor nests that are currently occupied, so you’ll start that this morning as we drive/hike around the ranch. At some point, we’ll return to a lunch of natural and organic foods that might be comprised of grilled buffalo burgers, Dutch oven beans, and an abundance of fresh vegetables and fruits, before heading back out to continue our tour in the afternoon.

Evening time at Wild Echo comes late since we’re so far north. But after our outdoor barbeque dinner (bison steaks are often on the menu, along with homemade potato salad, chicken or other finger licking good stuff), there is time to sit in the wood fired “hot tub”, take an after dinner stroll, peek in on one of our wildlife studies, or do some of the other activities that we offer here.

**Sweat Lodge:** For those interested, we can end our evening with a journey into the past and experience the ancient purification rites of the sweat lodge (or combine both for a really relaxing way to start your vacation). Sweats have been used since the beginning of man for a variety of purposes including purification, healing, and to symbolize the beginning of a new life. Besides, they’re just plain fun! There are as many different sweat lodge types as there are groups of people who use them, but ours has been built in traditional Assiniboine fashion (the Assiniboine people are one of the current Montana tribes). Although we will share with you some of the traditions used by Native Americans here in Montana, the sweat will be uniquely yours.



Or you can load up in the 4 wheel drive truck, and we’re off for a look into the evening lives of the wildlife that lives here. Bears, coyotes, deer, elk, mountain lions and bobcats all live here. It’s kind of like Christmas - you never know how many presents you’ll get, or what you’ll see!

**Bison Behavioral Studies:** Monitoring bison behavior is one of our favorite jobs! We love spending time watching the bison up close - a glass of lemonade in one hand and binoculars in the other with a clipboard on our lap, lounging in the back of a 4x4 under a blue Montana sky- and we call it science ☺! And for the adventurous kids, we'll sit inside the cage over the water tank to get REALLY close to the bison when they come jostling and grunting to get their drinks! Pay attention to what you see here – after getting up close and personal with the bison here, you will better understand the behavior that you'll witness in the huge numbers of bison that we will see in Yellowstone National Park.



**Small Mammal Studies:** Small mammals are, well, just that – the small furry critters (though many folks might simply call them mice) that are so important to our world for numerous reasons. They serve as an indicator of various habitat types and provide information on the health of those systems, as well as provide a vital food source for our birds of prey and mammalian predators (this little short tailed weasel is just one of the camp residents who depends on the mice in the area for food). We use live trapping and marking as a means of determining small mammal abundance and distribution.

**Cavity Nesting Birds:** We have numerous cavity nesting birds here on the Reserve, including bluebirds, house wrens, chickadees, tree swallows, and nuthatches, who will use artificial nest boxes. We will visit each box and record the bird species using it, how many young are in the nest, and how far along they are. For those of you who come later in the summer, we will discuss who lived there and look at their nests (the different bird species use different types of nest material in their box), while we clean out and repair the boxes for next year.



**Plant Studies:** Don't you just love how biologists call all of the fun things they do, "studies". Lends an air of distinction to just having fun with wilderness. We'll take nature hikes and learn about the uses of the plants we see – both by the animals that live here, as well as what the Native Americans (and you) can use them for. We'll also collect plants (pick flowers), put them in plant presses and mount them (flatten 'em, dry 'em and put them in a scrapbook for you to take home with you). Plants are a fascinating part of any ecosystem, and understanding them will go a long way to helping you understand the wild world around you.

**Kid Specials:** Okay – these are supposed to be for the kids, but we find that the grown-ups usually can't stand being on the sidelines.

- **Drum Making:** We were taught by an Assiniboine medicine man, and we are honored to be able to share that drum making craft with those interested. There is something haunting about drums – perhaps they take us into the past when our own ancestors used them to summon the spirit world.
- **Play with paint:** If you like to get “gooey”, we'll play around with paint and Native American designs. You can paint your own medicine bag, or help us decorate the tipis.
- **Speaking of medicine bags** – each kid gets to make their own.
- **Stargazing:** It's hard to ignore the stars when the night skies here at 6000 feet in the mountains are just dripping with them. We'll take a night time sojourn where the only lights you're going to see, are those that you can see through a telescope aimed at the heavens



- **Hot tubbing:** Ok, it's not like the “hot tubs” you'll find at some luxury resort. Here it's a rustic wood fired "hot tub" unlike anything you've ever seen before. But just how we do it is a secret until you get here!

- And, of course, there is the campfire. Sometimes outside, sometimes in the tipi, but it's hard to let a night go by without one. Sometimes we sing around it, roast s'mores over it, or just watch the flames dance to the haunting sounds of the drums (you can count on the kids to get out those newly made drums). Serenaded by coyotes and mama buffalo grunting to their calves - it just doesn't get any better than this.

\* We do not offer trail rides as part of this package. However, we do have some horses available and we can provide limited horseback riding as long as guests are willing to share the horses that we do have here. If you would like your own horse for the entire time of your stay, then let us know and we can give you an adjusted price, or sign up for the [Bison Quest Private Adventure Vacation](#).

All packages require a two night minimum stay. For additional days and activities, check out our [Family Internship Week Package](#)! Or chose your own number of days and make your own.

*Some things...*



*.....defy description.*