

FEATURE

FOREVER

Yellowstone

Delve deeper into what the expansive park has to offer

By Sam Ujvary
Assistant Editor





Above: One of the 11 locations operated by Yellowstone Forever throughout the park. Photo: Yellowstone Forever/Matt Ludin©2017.

Opposite page: Just north of Yellowstone Lake, Hayden Valley is one of the park's prime locations to spot wildlife. Photo: Alex Mouch

With a highly Instagramable presence and three endemic plants that grow only within its borders, Yellowstone is the world's first national park. Called Mi tse a-da-zi by the Minnetaree tribe, the literal translation is Rock Yellow River, named for the Yellowstone River that runs through it.

At 2.2 million acres, this national treasure is larger than Rhode Island and Delaware put together, spanning the states of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho. Every summer, visitation is high, with the peak months running from June to August. More than 700 people work for the National Park Service during this busy season when visitors come to marvel at the colorful hot springs, mud pots and many geysers scattered across the park.

July and August are the two months out of the year when all facilities, roads and services are open, including nearly 30 gift shops. Among these is the collection of shops that Yellowstone Forever operates.

"Yellowstone Forever is the official nonprofit partner of Yellowstone Park," said Chelsea VanRoekel, merchandise coordinator, Yellowstone Forever. "Ninety cents of every dollar we make in our educational retail stores goes back to the park for educational products, etc." This includes the recent remodel of one of the visitor centers that ran up a \$2 million-dollar tab.

In any one of the 11 retail shops it operates in and around the park, Yellowstone Forever Park Stores' biggest seller is always its supporter-ship; people can sign up to be a supporter of Yellowstone Forever with a \$35 tax-deductible donation (minimum). That money goes back to the park and they get to become a member, receiving discounts at stores in the park as well as additional benefits.

Tangibly, however, the stores have an interesting selection of top products. "One of our top-sellers is bear spray," said VanRoekel. (Bear spray is an absolute necessity for hikers in Yellowstone as well as many other national parks.) "Other than that, our second-most sold item is



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Outside of its retail operations, Yellowstone Forever also offers an abundance of educational courses that allows guests to get the most out of their visit. Photos: Yellowstone Forever/Matt Ludin©2017.

“A big part of our mission is to educate people, that’s why we have that branch of teachers who do (these) educational programs.”

— Chelsea VanRoekel, merchandise coordinator, Yellowstone Forever

our official guide, which is a book that we publish in-house. Some of our educators helped develop content for it.”

A lot of their other bestselling products are almost always books, with many written by people who live in the area or spend a lot of time in the park conducting research.

Outside of the retail operations, Yellowstone Forever has an educational branch that provides classes where people can learn about wildlife, discuss geology or find out more about the geysers that are found around the park. “A big part of our mission is to educate people, that’s why we have that branch of teachers who do (these) educational programs,” she said. “But then we take that a little bit further by offering educational books in our shops. They can take a class, then come and get a book in our shops to educate themselves further. That’s an example of how we try to mesh those two parts of our organization together.”

The Yellowstone Forever Institute has two seminar catalogs per year; winter and summer. In each of these you will find offerings like Spring Into Wildlife Photography; Bears: Bones, Signs and Stories; The Bison of Yellowstone; and Between A Rock And A Hard Place: Facing Geological Challenges In Yellowstone. The options vary incredibly for first-timers and returning guests to learn about and experience all this bucket-list park has to offer. *M*