

saltlake

Outdoor Adventures To and From McCall Idaho

By Christie Porter, October 30, 2023



Osprey Cliff Overlook in McCall, Idaho. Photo courtesy of Visit Idaho

From Boise, take Highway 55 toward McCall. The Payette River Scenic Byway winds through the rugged mountains along the Payette River. This is an absolutely stacked outdoor road trip adventure in Idaho, with hot spring soaks and places to stay along the way to recover between watersports and hiking.

STOP: RAFT THE PAYETTE RIVER

About 30 miles north of Boise, book a whitewater adventure on the Payette River at the Cascade Raft River Center (cascaderaft.com) or Bear Valley Rafting (bearvalleyrafting.com). Depending on which river fork you take, experience a chill adventure for the whole family (north fork) or a more intense guided river trip through class-IV rapids (south fork).

STAY: SMITH'S FERRY

Smith's Ferry is a popular Payette River access point with a rustic lodge and gas station. During snowy months, there's also access to snowmobiling and snowshoeing trails. Stay the night at Cougar Mountain Lodge (cougarmountainlodge-idaho.com), a throwback to the traditional mountain lodge.

STOP: LAKE CASCADE STATE PARK

Take the turn-off to Cascade Lake (parksandrecreation.idaho.gov), where you'll find a serene blue lake surrounded by ponderosa pines and sandy beaches. Enjoy a cool swim or set out on a paddleboard on one of the largest lakes in the state. After a day out on the water, camp at one of the lakeside campsites.



Payette River. Photo courtesy of Visit Idaho

STOP: GOLD FORK HOT SPRINGS

At Gold Fork Hot Springs (goldforkhotsprings.com), soak in one of the six tiered pools overlooking mountain meadows. Your feet will love the heated sidewalks and sandy-bottomed pools.

STAY: MCCALL

Continue to McCall, near the shores of Lake Payette, and stroll streets lined with cafes, boutiques and galleries. McCall is a charming mountain town with ideal access to the outdoors. Spend a day at the lake, where everything from kayaks to jet boats and pontoons are for rent or book a lake cruise. Find sanctuary for the evening at Shore Lodge (shorelodge.com), and, for winter adventures, check out the nearby Brundage Mountain Resort (brundage.com).

Nearby hikes: Goose Creek Falls Trail is a short, 3-miles out-and-back, dirt trail. Once you reach the falls, you might have to do a little bit of rock scrambling to get an unobstructed view, but it's worth it.

STOP: PONDEROSA STATE PARK AND PAYETTE LAKE

Hike or bike the variety of trails at Ponderosa State Park (parksandrecreation.idaho.gov). Most of the park's trails are interconnected, making it easy to navigate. The Ridgeline Trail can be accessed through the Lily Marsh Trail, an easy 2.3-mile out-and-back trail for the whole family. The Ridgeline Trail is a moderate-to-difficult hike that takes you up to the Narrows Overlook and Osprey Cliff Overlook to take in stunning views of Payette Lake.