

# TRAVEL+ LEISURE

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## The Ultimate South Dakota Road Trip Itinerary: Where to Stop, What to Do, and More

Discover Mount Rushmore, Badlands National Park, Custer State Park, Sioux Falls, and more on a road trip through South Dakota.



*Editor's Note: Travel might be complicated right now, but use our inspirational trip ideas to plan ahead for your next bucket list adventure.*

South Dakota was made for road trips: There are scenic, paved roads that lead to national treasures, natural anomalies, perfectly preserved Wild West towns, and quirky attractions. Whether you're a history buff, foodie, or nature lover, this Midwest state delivers. Read on for the ultimate South Dakota road trip itinerary, including where to stop, what to do, and more.

## Sioux Falls



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

The state's largest city and likely the place where you'd fly into, Sioux Falls is the logical starting point for a South Dakota road trip. If you're driving west, follow this route, but if you're heading east, flip it. Sioux Falls is an ever-growing and extremely walkable city with lots of incredible food options. Stay at the [Hotel on Phillips](#) for an example of the posh direction the city is headed. After checking in and exploring the nearby falls the city is famously named after, grab a happy hour drink on the [PAve](#) rooftop. [Phillips Avenue Diner](#) or [Crave](#) are the best spots for dinner. Plus, make sure to enjoy a cocktail at [The Treasury](#), an upscale bar conveniently located back at the Hotel on Phillips.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

This massive, 76,000-square-foot roadside attraction started from humble beginnings, with just the promise of free ice water. Now, there are signs lining hundreds of miles of highway and displaying the many offerings of the beloved shop. [Wall Drug Store](#) has giant dinosaur statues, ample souvenirs, and, of course, free ice water for the roughly 20,000 people that stop in every day.

## Badlands National Park



The surreal landscapes of Badlands National Park are alone worth the drive to South Dakota. From the rolling hills of the prairie lands protrude jagged spires that quickly expand to the horizon. The formations look like they could crumble with the slightest touch, but fear not, as they are solid and very fun to climb for all ages. Check into a cabin at the [Cedar Pass Lodge](#) for a night or two, and watch the sunset. The next morning, continue driving the Badlands Loop State Scenic Byway to glimpse wildlife like bison, bighorn sheep, and prairie dogs.

# Deadwood



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

Take a step back in time at this Old West-style main street full of boutiques, restaurants, and charm – and yes, this is where the Hulu series *Deadwood* was filmed. After role-playing as Billy the Kid, head to the [Hotel Alex Johnson](#) in Rapid City for the night. The city is set among the Black Hills, and the downtown area is a treat to wander through. The hotel's rooftop restaurant and bar, [Vertex Sky Bar](#), is a nice spot for dinner. Another delicious spot is [Murphy's Pub & Grill](#).

# Custer State Park



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

Leave early in the morning to enjoy the fresh pine air of Custer State Park. Head to [Blue Bell Lodge](#) for a perfect few hours of horseback riding through fields of flowers and trickling streams in the surrounding forests. Then, grab a bite at the lodge's restaurant before heading to the picturesque Sylvan Lake. After an afternoon of water activities, drive to Custer for a pint and dinner at [Mt. Rushmore Brewing Company](#) and [Pounding Fathers Restaurant](#). Finally, cap off the day with some much-deserved shut-eye at [Rock Crest Lodge & Cabins](#).

# Custer State Park



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

On day four, it's finally time to see the Founding Fathers' faces carved into the mountain – the enormity of the sculpture is truly a sight to see. [Under Canvas](#) has set up camp near Mount Rushmore, so you can enjoy luxury tented accommodations that evening, along with on-site dining and camping activities.

# Needles Highway



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

The last day brings a scenic, 14-mile drive along giant granite spires. On this drive, there will be breakneck turns, handcarved tunnels, and vistas that will instill the wonder of South Dakota and solidify the past five days of incredible adventure in your memory forever. Continue your road trip through Wyoming, Utah, and Montana, or stop here – the choice is up to you.