



Discover the Mount Rushmore State

South Dakota offers presidents, parks and patriotism

BY ROBIN ROENKER



Its official nickname may be “The Mount Rushmore State” — appropriate, since that iconic presidential façade is destination-worthy all on its own — but there’s plenty more to see and do in South Dakota, a state rich in both history and breathtaking natural beauty.

MOUNT RUSHMORE NATIONAL MEMORIAL

Gazing up at those four faces — George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln — carved into the mountainside near Keystone, in South Dakota’s famed **Black Hills**, is an experience to remember. You’ll be awed by the sheer scale of the memorial, but the history of how it came to be is fascinating, too.

Self-guided audio tours (available for \$6 from the visitor center) shed light on sculptor Gutzon Borglum’s motivation for the design and factors shaping its construction between 1927 and 1941.

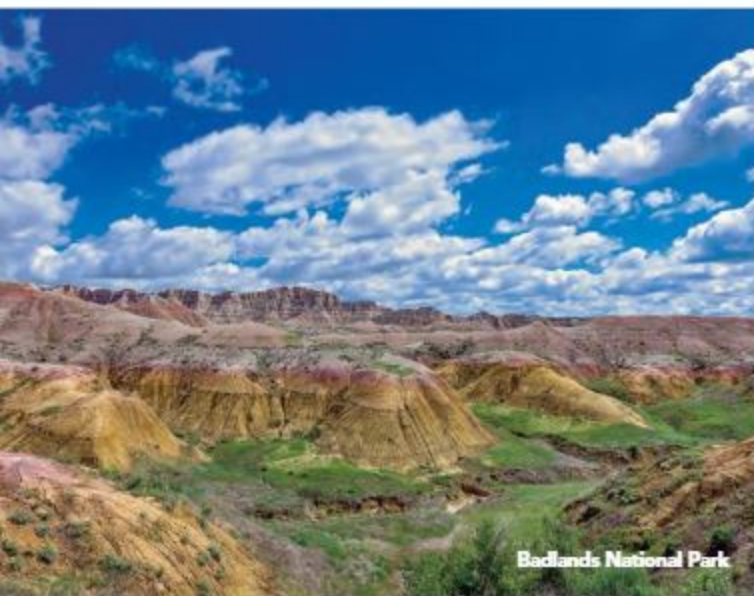
Be sure to stay until dark, when the memorial is beautifully illuminated. “The evening lighting

ceremony is one of my favorite things to recommend,” says Katlyn Richter, global media and public relations director for the South Dakota Department of Tourism. “The park rangers explain why each president’s face was chosen. There’s a huge patriotic element, too. The national anthem is played, and the American flag that flew that day is retired, with the help of military service members in attendance. It’s a very moving and meaningful ceremony.”

CUSTER STATE PARK

With an array of National Park sites to visit in South Dakota, your first impulse might be to skip a spot with “state park” in its name. Don’t. “You cannot miss **Custer State Park**. It is a shining star. It is a gem,” says Julie Schmitz Jensen, president and CEO of Visit Rapid City.

Set amidst 71,000 acres of pristine natural beauty, the park is home to some 1,300 buffalo, which you can see up-close via guided jeep tours. For a full taste of the Old West, book a room at one of the park’s lodges and enjoy an old-fashioned hayride and chuck wagon feast. >



Badlands National Park

BADLANDS NATIONAL PARK

You can explore the almost otherworldly rock formations that permeate **Badlands National Park** by foot or by car. The park's popular hiking trails range from easy quarter-mile treks offering views of the so-called Badlands Wall to the 10-mile-round-trip Castle Trail, which puts hikers right in the midst of Badlands formations. For a stunning drive, take Badlands Loop State Scenic Byway, which weaves 38 miles through some of the park's most photo-worthy landscapes.

CRAZY HORSE MEMORIAL

Not far from Mount Rushmore, another prominent face emerges from the Black Hills granite: that of legendary Lakota leader **Crazy Horse**. Conceived by Lakota Chief Henry Standing Bear and sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski as a way to honor the culture and contributions of all Native Americans, construction on the memorial started in 1948 and remains underway. Crazy Horse's face is fully formed, but visitors can watch as workers chisel out his hand and arm. "It's a lot of work, but it's beautiful

to see it coming along," says Jadwiga Ziolkowski, the memorial's CEO and director of public affairs — and daughter to its original sculptor. The on-site **Indian Museum of North America** features art and artifacts representing more than 300 Native Nations. ■



Indian Museum of North America

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

These lesser-known South Dakota attractions are worthy of a visit:

WALL DRUG STORE

Located in the tiny town of Wall, since 1931 this roadside mecca has been offering food, souvenirs and more, and has become a must-stop tourist destination of its own. With plenty to do for kids, including a toy emporium and the chance to pan for gemstones, the store also boasts an on-site restaurant, making it the perfect spot to grab a burger after a full day exploring Badlands National Park.

MINUTEMAN MISSILE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Dive deep into America's Cold War history at this decommissioned nuclear missile site in Philip. The visitor center features exhibits outlining the technology and science behind the ballistic missiles once at the ready there. With advanced reservations, you can take a ranger-led tour of the site's underground **Delta-01 Launch Control Facility**.



CITY OF PRESIDENTS

Following a trip to Mount Rushmore, take more photos with former presidents — all 44 of them — via the popular **City of Presidents** statues that dot the street corners of

Rapid City. "They're life-size and beautifully done, and really show the personality of each president," says Julie Schmitz Jensen, president and CEO of Visit Rapid City.

DEADWOOD

A National Historic Landmark, the former mining town of **Deadwood** still boasts plenty of Old West fun, including daily reenactor "shootouts" along Main Street. Tour an authentic gold mine; visit the **Adams Museum**, with artifacts linked to **Wild Bill Hickok** and **Calamity Jane**; and end the day with a modern taste of fun at one of the area's many breweries, wineries, spas or casinos.

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