

Exploring South Dakota

South Dakota is an expansive, sparsely populated midwestern U.S. state where rolling prairies give way to the dramatic Black Hills National Forest. Black Hills is home to two historical monuments carved right into towering granite peaks: Mt. Rushmore, the iconic depiction of 4 revered U.S. presidents, and Crazy Horse Memorial, a tribute to the storied Native American tribal leader.

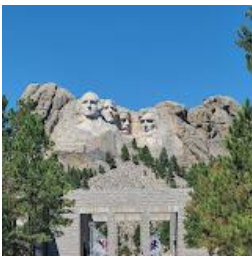
- Capital: [Pierre](#)
- Population: 919,318 (2023)
- Governor: [Kristi Noem](#) ([Republican Party](#))
- Motto: [Under God the people rule](#)
- Founded: November 2, 1889

Main Attractions:

1. **Mt. Rushmore National Memorial:** A symbol of freedom and hope for people from all cultures and backgrounds. All the cultures that make up the fabric of this country are represented by the memorial and surrounding Black Hills. The four American Presidents (the forefathers), George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln are carved into the mountain at Mount Rushmore. This Memorial, established in 1925, features 60-foot sculptures of these four US presidents. Visit the memorial in daytime and/or evening. There is no entrance fee to the Memorial, but there is a fee to park (\$10 per car). Driving distance from Lodge - 3.3 miles.
2. **Badlands National Park:** These striking geologic deposits contain one of the world's richest fossil beds. Ancient horses and rhinos once roamed here. The park's 244,000 acres protect an expanse of mixed-grass prairie where bison, bighorn sheep, prairie dogs, and black-footed ferrets live today. The first humans to see this area were Native Americans. Modern tribes like the Lakota called this land "mako sica" (mah-koh see-kah). This has been translated into "badlands." Some of the first European explorers came up with similar names. French traders called it a "bad land to travel". Best time to visit Badlands is between 5pm to sunset. Sunset views are stunning. Closest city to Badlands is Rapid City. Make time to visit Wall Drug store in downtown Rapid City famous for its Western Art Gallery Restaurant, homemade donuts, rolls, pie and ice cream, legendary hot beef sandwiches with mashed potatoes and homemade gravy, buffalo burgers, and 5-cent coffee. Distance to Rapid City from the Lodge – 21 miles.
3. **Custer State Park** (<https://wereintherockies.com/quick-guide-to-custer-state-park/>): Custer State Park is a South Dakota State Park and wildlife reserve in the Black Hills named after Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer. The Park is known for one of the largest free-ranging bison herds (1500+) in the world. Pronghorn, deer, elk, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, mountain lions, burros, prairie dogs, coyotes, eagles, and wild turkeys are other residents of the park's variety of habitats. Some of the best and highest views in the Black Hills will be found in Custer State Park. A good portion of trailheads will be located at or very near Sylvan Lake. This is a good spot to park, picnic, and hike any level of trail you desire on any given day. Distance to Sylvan Lake from the Lodge – 29 miles (slow driving curving road).
4. **Crazy Horse Memorial** (Architect: [Korczak Ziolkowski](#)): The Crazy Horse Memorial is a mountain monument under construction on privately held land in the Black Hills, in Custer County, South Dakota. It will depict the Oglala Lakota warrior Crazy Horse, riding a horse and pointing to his tribal land. Ziolkowski's vision, which his family has perpetuated, was for a sculpture of Crazy Horse, who was among the warriors who fought under Sitting Bull at the Battle of the Little Bighorn (1876), where Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his men were killed; about 50 Lakota and Northern Cheyenne also died. At the time construction started in 1948, Ziolkowski estimated the work would be complete in 30 years. As of 2022, there was no timeline for when the monument would be completed; however, the hand, arm, shoulder, hairline, and top of the horse's head were estimated to be finished by 2037. A must visit place in your lifetime. Distance to Crazy Horse Memorial from the Lodge – 19 miles.
5. **Bear Country:** Very few people have had a full-grown black bear look from the window of their family car, or if they have, it was not by choice. Even fewer have seen a reindeer or an elk up close. However, many people are getting experiences like these at Bear Country. Nestled over 200 acres amidst towering pines and along rolling meadows just eight miles south of Rapid City, Bear Country offers visitors intimate views of most North American mammals. Visitors take a leisurely three-mile drive through several enclosures and encounter black bear, elk, reindeer, deer, cougars, bobcats, rocky mountain goats,

bighorn sheep, Dall sheep, pronghorn and buffalo. Admission prices are \$22 for adults, \$17 for children ages 5–12, free for children 4 and under, \$20 for seniors (62+). You can buy tickets at admissions when you arrive or you can book them online below. Distance to Bear Country from the Lodge – 12 miles.

6. **Two must do Scenic Drives:** Within the Black Hills National Forest, there are two scenic drives offering stunning views of natural beauty (mountains and lakes). 1) The demanding 17-mile scenic drive on Iron Mountain Road inside the Black Hills National Forest going through Custer State Park featuring 314 curves, 14 switchbacks, 3 tunnels, and 3 pigtails (turns that loop over their own road, allowing the road to climb rapidly). Allow two hours to take this drive stopping at scenic spots to take photos. Distance to Iron Mountain Road from the Lodge – 5.4 miles. 2) Another beautiful drive to consider is the 14-mile drive of Needles Highway. It's part of the Peter Norbeck Scenic Byway and is known for its granite formations (needles), sharp turns, narrow tunnels, and views of Sylvan Lake. Time to traverse Needles Highway is around 45-60 minutes. Distance to start of Needles Highway from the Lodge – 12 miles. [Note: It is possible to do both drives in one afternoon.]
7. **Cosmos Mystery Area** (<https://cosmosmysteryarea.com/>): An accidental discovery. In 1952, two college boys searched the Black Hills looking for the perfect spot to build a summer cabin. Upon their search, they stumbled upon the mysterious world of the Cosmos. A place where science, mystery, and fun merge to create an experience unlike any other. Explore the secrets of the Cosmos force with guided tours and demonstrations. Hours of operation - 9:30AM-5:00PM (first tour at 10AM and last tour at 5PM). Tour times vary daily so please call ahead. Distance to Cosmos Mystery Area from the Lodge – 4.4 miles.
8. **Sturgis Motorcycle Rally** (<https://www.sturgismotorcyclerrally.com/>): This is the largest motorcycle rally in the USA started in 1938 as a small gathering of Indian Motorcycle riders held in the town of Sturgis. It has since grown into a premier biker event with many different groups putting on events and shows. Visit Sturgis to experience the once in a lifetime Motorcycle Rally show and its numerous activities. Food is great too. Rally dates: August 1-10. Book your hotel early as this motorcycle rally attracts 700K+ visitors in the Black Hills area. Distance to Sturgis from the Lodge – 49 miles.
9. **Hiking & Mountain Climbing:** There are ample opportunities for hiking and mountain climbing in the Black Hills National Forest. Check out these sights:
<https://www.alltrails.com/parks/us/south-dakota/black-hills-national-forest>
<https://www.sylvanrocks.com/>



Mt. Rushmore



Badlands



Custer State Park



Crazy Horse



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Needles highway



Iron Mountain Road



Cosmos Mystery



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