

## *Hagerman Valley*

Springs gushing from the Hagerman Valley's canyon walls have fascinated residents and visitors for generations. That aquifer discharge – both lovely and economically vital – is the key to the Hagerman area's character. It's a land of fish, fruit stands, and famous fossils, a paradise for recreation and a dynamic classroom for archaeology and geology. The Thousand Springs Scenic Byway on U.S. Highway 30 – perhaps southern Idaho's most beautiful motor route – delivers drivers right to many of the unique attractions along this stretch of Snake River. To call the Snake your own, just cast a line in these waters, picnic by their shores, photograph their crashing rapids, launch a raft, or step into a hot-as-you-can-take-it geothermal pool.

### **There's Lots to See and Lots to Do**

The traveler in a hurry could taste memorable splendor by simply driving the scenic byway. But you won't regret taking time to delve into the wonders along the way, whether your preference leans to fish hatcheries, fine cuisine, locally crafted pottery, or, of course, nature's finery.

The Earl M. Hardy Box Canyon Springs preserve, for instance, is home to three endangered snails, to the Shoshone sculpin – a rare fish found only in Idaho – and to the United States' 11th largest spring. It's one of the West's most pristine areas, with undisturbed examples of riparian alkaline and upland plant communities. Farther north, Billingsley Creek State Park provides habitat for many bird species, including tundra swans and other migratory waterfowl. A mile-long road on the former farm is open to walkers, bicycles and horses, and you'll enjoy an exclusively spring-fed creek. The Hagerman Wildlife management Area provides excellent trout fishing. Ambitious anglers there can try for feisty sturgeon, too, though they must be released immediately. And the Nature Conservancy's Thousand Springs Preserve – hundreds of acres along the

SNAKE RIVER – is a prime spot for nature walks and observing spring-water drama.

In and around the town of Hagerman, you'll find accommodations with character – whether you prefer bed and breakfast, a pleasant RV village, or the creek-side cabins of Billingsley Creek Lodge. Outfitters offer river tours, including some with gourmet meals served on the water. Watch for the town's old rock buildings, too, including one that houses a modern bank.

A must-see stop in Hagerman is the visitor center of the Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument. The center offers fossil exhibits, a slide show, guides to the site's scenic trails, and lessons on the remarkable events that embedded some of North America's oldest fossils in the southern Idaho soil – most famously, the Hagerman Horse. That may whet your appetite for a venture into the fossil beds and their excavation sites, best experienced through the national monument's educational tours. If you go, arm yourself with sturdy shoes, a hat, sunscreen, and plenty of water.

### **Get Off the Beaten Path**

One of the state-protected attractions of the Thousand Springs area takes a little more effort to reach. But the reward is well worth the trip. Niagara Springs and its nearby companion, Crystal Springs, are accessed from Interstate 84 on the north side of the Snake River. At Niagara, a national landmark, 250 cubic feet of water per second gushes from basalt walls. It's a sight you'll talk about back home. At Crystal Springs, a five-acre lake draws anglers year-round. Only non-motorized boats are allowed, so you'll find it a peaceful retreat.



# Malad Gorge State Park

Right off Interstate 84, Malad Gorge State Park combines remarkable scenery with family-friendly recreation – open year-round and well worth the \$4-per-vehicle access fee. To best enjoy your time there, take along walking shoes, camera, binoculars, a picnic lunch, and – if you’re inclined – a Frisbee and horseshoes.

Start your visit at the Devil’s Washbowl overlook. From a metal footbridge, spanning a rocky chasm 250 feet deep and 140 feet wide, you can look straight down on the churning, frothy Malad River as it plunges down an angry waterfall 60 feet high. It’s not for the height-averse. Then by car or by foot, enjoy the gorge’s other overlooks downstream and watch as springs in the basalt canyon walls turn the murky Malad River crystal clear.

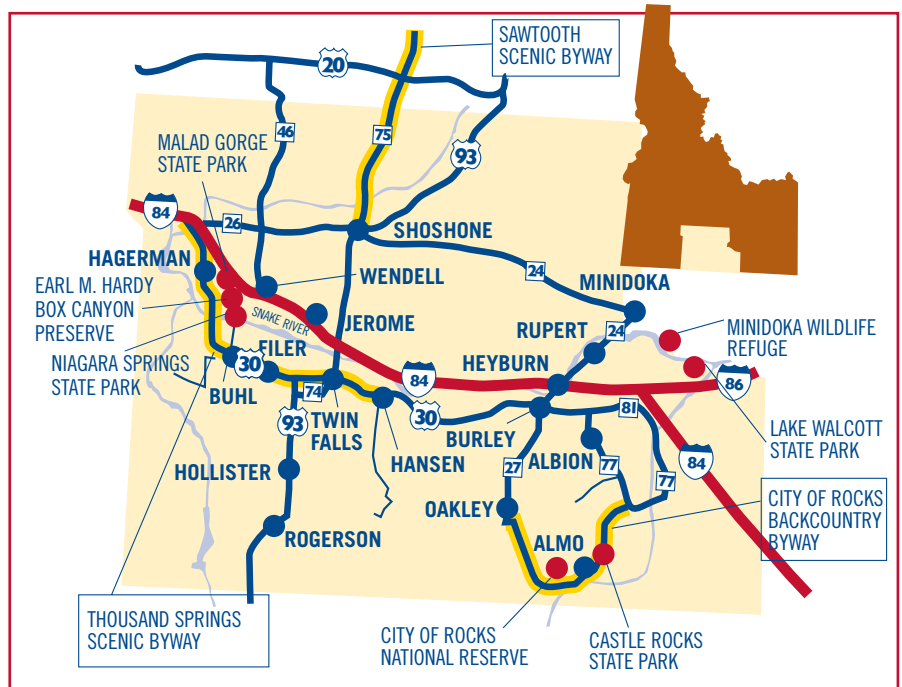
Does history make you happy? This spot was important to the Oregon Trail and early roads. Want wildlife? Canyon walls provide nesting cavities for many bird species – including the eagles and hawks that soar on warm air rising from the canyon – and the wooded canyon floor at Woody’s Cove provides habitat for coyote, mule deer and red fox. Interested in unusual flora? The moss-like “cow-pie buckwheat” growing along the canyon rim’s poor soils is a rare plant in Idaho. Excited by massive forces? Signs throughout the park explain the volcanic activity, glacial snowmelt, and powerful erosion that shaped this area.

The state park’s pond-side picnic tables, boat docks, horseshoe pits, and a playground (with restrooms) make for great family recreation. An unusual attraction is the nine-hole Frisbee golf course. Holes range from 274 feet, par 3, to 700 feet, par 5.

## COOL FOOD HOT SPRINGS

The locals might tell you a perfect way to finish a day of Hagerman hiking: Feast on the Snake River’s bounty, then soak in the soothing natural warmth of a mineral pool.

Without doubt, some of Idaho’s finest food is at Snake River Grill, on the south end of Hagerman. Don’t be fooled by the casual décor; this restaurant is presided over by Kirt Martin, a renowned leader of Idaho cuisine who’s known particularly for his creative skill with wild game. Be sure to pick local river fare from Martin’s menu – like gilled Hagerman sturgeon fillets, for example, or a cornmeal-breaded catfish sandwich, a boneless fillet of Idaho rainbow trout, or alligator hors d’oeuvres with chipotle aoli. Local catfish are grown in fresh spring water. And the same geothermal water that makes it possible to raise alligators in this unlikely place is also a perfect way to end your day.



Three businesses capitalize on the area’s hot springs by offering swimming pools and private, steaming mineral baths: Miracle Hot Springs, Banbury Hot Springs, and Sligar’s 1000 Springs Resort. At Miracle, for example, the private baths are small concrete rooms open to the sky. Attached to private changing rooms, the baths are each

large enough for about four people to soak comfortably. Drained and refilled between each use, the baths at Miracle have fresh geothermal water pouring in constantly – you adjust the inflow rate to control the temperature. And it’s guaranteed: You won’t meet any of those alligators.