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12 PARADISE VALLEY, MT CHICO HOT SPRINGS

BY JOEANN FOSSLAND

“When we see the first blue bird, we know that spring is here for real,” says Seabring Davis, co-owner of Chico Hot Springs. In spring, blue birds flock to the habitats that the resort provides.

The name “Paradise Valley” gives you the first clue of what to expect. Near the Yellowstone River, Chico feels a bit like a working ranch. Approaching, you pass horses and cows grazing under the shadow of 11,000-foot Emigrant Peak.

In 1900, Chico opened as a boarding house for miners. Founders Percie and William Knowles found that “people will travel far for a good soak and a fine meal.” Additional sleeping rooms and a dance hall were soon added. Over the next 70 years, Chico had incarnations as a hospital, health spa, guest ranch and retreat center. In 1973, the Art family rescued it from decline. In 2015, after 24 years working there in management, Colin Davis and his wife, Seabring, purchased Chico, with a commitment to turn guests into friends and treat friends like family.

You, of course, come for the hot springs. Steam puffs up from the hot, therapeutic, natural mineral water which flows

through the two open air pools. The big 95-degree pool is just the right temperature for the kids or a long soak. The toastier 104-degree small pool is next to the Saloon (with a take-out window). Find your bliss alternating between the two or by relaxing in the lounge chairs surrounding the pools.

Take the relaxation up a notch by walking up the hill to luxuriate at the full-service day spa. Massage therapy, geothermal treatments using rocks from the Yellowstone River, or a wrap or scrub using oils and spices, will melt any stress.

If you can walk after this, it’s time to go eat.

The Poolside Grill and Saloon bookend the pools for lunch or casual dining. Live music livens up the weekends. Veggies, herbs and edible flowers for scrumptious, gourmet meals grow in the geothermal heated greenhouses and the gardens behind the lodge.

The reputation of Chico’s Dining Room as the best food in Montana is the other reason to come. Breakfast and dinner are prepared under the direction of 2019 James Beard award-



winning chef, David Wells. The steaks and trout are Montana sourced, fresh seafood is flown in daily. Sunday's Brunch is a special treat. The famous Flaming Orange dessert is a must.

A *Wine Spectator* award winner, Chico takes wine seriously. Near the bar is a wine tasting room. A separate, elegant, wine cellar provides an ultimate experience: a chef's menu with a 7 or 12 course meal and 2 levels of wine pairings.

Thankfully, it's just a short walk to your bed! Economical, comfortable rooms in the iconic main lodge have shared bathrooms. Rooms in the lower lodge, the cottages, cabins and caboose will satisfy every other need. A new addition—the ultimate Glamping experience—is a stay in one of the Conestoga Wagons (each with a king-sized bed and twin bunks).

The winter-white days of snowshoeing and cross-country skiing give way to warmer, spring activities. Yellowstone is only 45 minutes away. However, you don't have to leave. Next to the resort are the rolling hills of Ranch 635 with miles of trails for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding. Or fly fish and river rafting are nearby.

End your day relaxing in the hot springs viewing the stars twinkling in the big Montana sky. Chico still delights those willing to travel for a good soak and a fine meal!

Chico Hot Springs is one hour from the Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport. For reservations or more information, visit chicohotsprings.com. To plan your trip to the Paradise Valley region of Montana, go to visityellowstonecountry.com. 🍷

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