

Salmon River Rafting - Alumni

Missoula, MT

July 10-17, 2026



Highlights

- 8 total days, 6 nights on the river
- Approximately 80 miles of river travel
- Emphasis on paddle skills, river expedition planning, and river hazard management
- May encounter up to Class III and Class IV rapids
- Opportunities to fly fishing and day hiking
- Great for families
- **NOLS covers shuttle fees, 2 hotel nights and dinner the last night in Missoula**

Cost: \$3,155

Minimum Age: 10

Max group size: 12 Participants

3 NOLS Instructors

Trip Description

With beautiful sandy beaches, fantastic fly fishing, natural hot springs, and class IV rapids, the Salmon River in Idaho is one the most exciting rivers to raft in North America. Join NOLS Alumni on our first *family* Salmon River rafting trip. For 7 days we will travel through the heart of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in NOLS expedition style. We've designed this trip with families in mind and are excited to welcome children as young as 10 years of age with their parents. If you are looking for a river adventure to share with your family, this is the perfect trip to introduce your kids to NOLS.

The Salmon River is not conveniently located near major hubs so NOLS help smooth out the complicated logistics. You will start and end in Missoula, Montana which helps to minimize time spent in the car while maximizing time spent on the river.

If flying in, you are welcome to arrive early and enjoy Missoula or arrive on the first day when you will be picked up. The logistics section below lines out these options a bit more specifically.

NOLS will pick everyone up in Missoula and head down to Corn Creek for an evening orientation, dinner, and camping. You won't visit a NOLS campus on this trip so we will bring any gear that you need with us to that first campsite. The next morning, the group will pack up camp, do some raft orientation, and launch into one of the most famous river corridors in the world.

Throughout that first day, we will cover the basics of camping in a river system (or review, if this is not new to you) including the basics of camping, including cooking, sanitation, and Leave No Trace skills.

On the river, instructors will work with all participants on rafting skills in high water. You might learn to guide paddle rafts and row oar rigs, to recognize and avoid river hazards and obstacles, how to find good lines through rapids, work together with your fellow rafters to navigate rapids, and the basics of river rescue. This trip is appropriate for all levels of paddlers and a great way to introduce friends and family to the NOLS experience.

Over the next 7 days you will travel through the iconic Salmon River valley. Mountains, pine forests and rocky slopes frame the valley and create habitat for wildlife including moose, golden eagles, gray wolves, osprey, and black bears. With keen eyes, we may be lucky to spot a few.

We will paddle for most of the day pulling up to shore in the afternoon to set up camp, cook our meals, and maybe even enjoy a cozy campfire before crawling into our sleeping bags for a good night's rest. River travel allows us to bring along a few more comforts, but this is a classic backcountry NOLS expedition. We will appreciate the simplicity of camping and enjoyment of each other's company. Instructors will work with adults on the trip to provide age appropriate tasks and instruction for the younger participants. Everyone will get the chance to contribute to group success with a little dose of NOLS leadership.

On the last day, we will have a short paddle to the takeout where we will meet our vehicles again. From here, we'll drive back to Missoula to check into the group hotel and clean up. With our street attire back on, the group will have one last celebratory dinner together in Missoula before heading onward the next day.

Trip Environment

The Salmon River flows through central and eastern Idaho and its waters are fed by the Sawtooth Salmon River, Clearwater and Bitterroot Mountains. It is known for its rugged surroundings passing through some of the most isolated terrain in the United States. The steep canyons cut by Salmon's course have created some of the deepest canyons in the contiguous United States with over 7,000 feet of vertical relief.

This trip follows the main branch of the Salmon River meandering through the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. The name originates from the early days of river travel on the Salmon, when boats traveled downstream, but the number of rapids and strong current prevented boats from traveling back upstream.

Participants should expect a variety of weather conditions. Weather in the intermountain west is unpredictable. On any given day, temperatures may range from below freezing to sweltering. Afternoon thunderstorms are common and can be intense, or long stretches of sun and blue skies!

Spending all day on the river means some amount of getting wet. Because the Salmon River is fed by mountain snow melt, water temperatures can remain cold even in the middle of summer. Rafting

adventures are exciting because of the thrill associated with river features. The group may face river hazards including large, crashing waves; shallow, rock-strewn rapids; recirculating holes; fallen trees; strong currents; and sun exposure. Instructors will lead the way in risk management decision making and provide both judgment and instruction with identifying hazards.

This river corridor is also home to black bears! We will work hard to respect these year-round residents of the forest during our short foray into their terrain. Instructors will teach bear camping practices to minimize the risk of a bear encounter.

The Main Salmon River boasts an impressive diversity of fish including cutthroat trout, bull trout, rainbow trout, mountain whitefish, sockeye salmon, chinook salmon, steelhead, smallmouth bass, and more.

In addition to its substantial natural history, the Salmon river has an equally rich human history. Artifacts from the Shosone and Nez Perce Indians remain along the river banks as well as historic homesteads and mines. The group will have opportunities to stop along the river to visit these historic sites and learn about the longstanding relationship between people and Salmon River.

NOLS Staff

Our staff are employees of NOLS and trained and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to NOLS' high standards in risk management. They are senior staff at NOLS who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments all over the world. Additionally, our staff specialize in bringing together groups of strangers and building the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

A Day in the Life

Our days will start out with breakfast followed by a refresher of the plan for the day. You will then likely break camp, pack lunches, load rafts and head downstream.

River trips have a large group kitchen to help minimize our impact on the river corridor. Instructors will lead the cooking process with a few participants helping at each meal. Food on the trip is a step up from normal backpacking fare, river trips eat well! Meals might include simple bases but then layer on some extra treats and surprises. Grains, rice and beans, pastas, oatmeal, hash browns; snack food like nuts, dried fruit, crackers, and granola bars are all common fare that can be expected. As a special treat, dutch oven style cooking will certainly be present for deserts!

We will be on the river for most of the day including breaks, photo stops, eating snacks, and a lunch stop as desired. Once we reach our destination, we will set up camp and make some time for fishing, exploring the area, games, and maybe a dip in the river. Tents sleep 3-4 and we will prioritize putting families together.

Difficulty Scale



This trip is rated 3 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.

We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

Food on the trip

There will be plenty of food provided on the trip for everyone. We are happy to ensure that folks who have reasonable dietary needs and/or preferences are well taken care of throughout the entire trip. Listing those needs on your registration paperwork is critical for our success here.

If you would like to bring your own snacks along, that is highly encouraged. We all have treats that we enjoy and bringing something special is a great way to keep motivation high and not have to rely on the group's schedule for your munchies.

Curriculum

Instructors hold both formal and informal classes on a wide range of subjects and skills that will enhance your ability to travel in a river environment. These begin with the basics of river travel — covering basic raft curriculum beginning with paddle strokes, paddle signals, group travel, and then moving on to hazard assessment, reading water, and basic rescue techniques. Leave No Trace camping techniques for a desert river environment will be emphasized along with cooking in a group kitchen. In addition, instructors can hold additional classes if the group desires, including natural history, NOLS' leadership topics, and relevant human history.

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS course; however, it is not a guided trip—we call it an educational, participatory vacation. Alumni trips are self-reliant adventures through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Throughout the course, you will live outdoors, help to prepare meals, and care for yourself.

Unlike our standard expeditions, Alumni trips do allow electronics and alcohol for those that are of legal age in the country of the trip. We believe that these luxuries can add to a course experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

July 10	We will meet for the trip introduction and orientation at the hotel this evening.	Lodging provided by NOLS in Missoula
July 11	This morning will be an early one, as we will drive to Corn Creek, prep our gear and camp at the launch site.	Tent camp

July 12-16	This morning we will launch on the Salmon River! And begin the 80 mile trip downstream.	Tent camp
July 17	Arrive at take out. NOLS transport back to Missoula for final dinner together.	Lodging provided by NOLS in Missoula
July 18	Travel home.	

Trip Logistics

Getting to Missoula by air

The Missoula airport (MSO) is an excellent regional airport with regular direct flights from many major cities around the country. We ask that you arrive before 3pm on the first day when NOLS will pick you up.

If you arrive a day early, the airport is a short distance from town and you can easily grab a taxi/ride share/ or hotel shuttle. Downtown Missoula is a vibrant college town and worth the visit if interested.

Driving to Missoula

If you are bringing a family and not traveling too far, driving to Missoula might be a great option. As is common, parking might be the hardest logistic to figure out here during the trip as you will need to leave your vehicle in Missoula. You can park at the airport for \$8/day or perhaps arrive early to a hotel and leave your vehicle there for the duration.

Lodging (pre-trip, during trip, post trip)

During the trip, you will be camped in 3-4 person tents. We will make sure that families share a tent together, just make sure we know who you are traveling with.

At the end of the trip, NOLS is providing the last night of lodging at a hotel in Missoula. We'll keep families and traveling buddies together, just let us know your preference and what works best. If you are traveling solo, we will pair you up with a same gendered person in a room that has 2 beds.

Check back here closer to the trip start date for the NOLS hotel on the last night.

Storage of Personal Belongings

Personal belongings can be left in the hotel in Missoula.

NOLS does not assume any liability for lost, stolen or damaged personal property while stored in a hotel. NOLS will not honor any personal claim for property loss while in our care.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have or check out cat70.com for a wide variety of options.

Carbon Footprint and Offset

Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem but we do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend [South Pole. Their calculator](#) can help easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. [Here is a link to their calculator.](#)

Tipping

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors if you choose, but many instructors are honored by [a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund](#) which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Trip Registration

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the [nols.edu](#) website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip**.

Your tuition includes meals starting with dinner on the first day and through dinner on the last night, all group equipment, camping gear (tents, kitchen gear, etc.), safety equipment, instruction, permits, and transportation from the NOLS Teton Valley Campus to the put-in and from the take-out back to the NOLS Teton Valley Campus.

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

For your reference, here is the [Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy](#). When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Suggested Readings:

- [The River of No Return](#) by Johnny Carrey and Cort Conley
- [Thousand Pieces of Gold](#) by Ruthanne Lum McCunn

Group Equipment

Gear provided by NOLS

Cooking Gear, Stoves, Fuel	Rafting gear, paddles	PFD's, paddle jacket, Hydroskin, Helmets	Maps and Reference Books
Food	Dry Bags	First Aid kits	Emergency Communication
Rescue Gear	Tents or Shelters	Repair kits	Water Treatment

Upper Body Clothing

Required Items	Notes
T-shirt (1-2)	Synthetic or wool.
Long-Sleeve Shirt (1-2)	Synthetic or wool for on the river and cotton is great for camp as well. One of each will meet all your needs.
Insulated Jacket	A lightweight puffy or fleece might be nice when evenings are cool.
Rain jacket	Durable, waterproof, non-insulated jacket.
Sports bra (2-3)	Lightweight bras that offer adequate support. Synthetic or natural fibers (non-cotton) that dry quickly are preferable. Fine to double as a swimsuit.
Splash Jacket	This is a waterproof breathable jacket with tight closures at the neck and wrists. <i>NOLS provides one for you</i> but you are welcome to bring your own if you prefer.
Wetsuit/ Hydroskin	Thin neoprene like material. <i>NOLS provides one for you</i> but you are welcome to bring your own if you prefer. 0.5-2 mm thickness is all you would need.
Optional Items	
Sun Hoody	A lightweight synthetic or natural fiber (non-cotton) hoodie that provides both sun protection and works well as a base layer.
Wind shirt	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell.

Lower Body Clothing

Required Items	Notes
Long underwear	Mid-weight synthetic or wool bottoms for cool evenings.
Hiking pants (1-2)	Nylon or synthetic pants to paddle in and/or a pair of jeans for in camp can be very nice.
Underwear (2-3 pairs)	Synthetic or natural fibers (non-cotton) are great options.
Swimsuit	Dedicated swimsuit or shorts + sports bra combo is great.
Optional Items	
Nylon shorts (1-2)	Quick dry, loose-fitting athletic shorts. Fine to double as a swimsuit
Rain pants	Not required and likely not needed.

Stuff for your Extremities

Required Items	Notes
Ball cap or sun hat	Headwear for sun protection. Ball caps can usually be worn under helmets on the river.
Warm Hat	Nights can be cool and you might want this.
Mosquito head net	A light, nylon head net.
Socks (2)	Wool or wool synthetic blend trail/hiking socks.
Camp Shoes	Something to wear around camp, Chaco sandals or running shoes are great.
River Shoes	Footwear should be sturdy and closed toed. Old running shoes work well.
Optional Items	
Neck Gaiter/ Buff	Synthetic pieces of multi-functional headwear. Buff is a common brand.
Warm Gloves	If your hands get cold easily you might want these in the evenings.
Neoprene Gloves	If your hands are prone to being cold, neoprene gloves while paddling can help.
Neoprene Socks	Neoprene socks can be worn for warmth.
Toiletries	
Required Items	Notes
Sunscreen + Lip balm	Products with zinc provide superior protection in water environments.
Dental Care	Typical oral hygiene is easy to maintain in the backcountry.
Menstrual products	Bring more supplies than you need. Tampons, pads, a menstrual cup, or some combo.
Medications	Prescriptions/supplements that you need.
Miscellaneous Items	
Required Items	Notes
Sleeping bag + compression sack	Synthetic or down fill bags are fine. 30 degrees is likely the coldest you would need. Compression sacks help keep bulk down.
Sleeping pad	Foam pad or an inflatable version are fine.
Dry Bags (2)	Heavy-duty. 1x 100 liters and 1x 20 liters. <i>NOLS provides these.</i>
Bowl + spoon	A plastic bowl with a screw- or snap-on lid is handy. Any spoon is great.
Water bottle (1-2)	Wide-mouth, hard sided Nalgene work well. Have 2+ liters of capacity.
Bandana (1-2)	Always handy to have.
Small stuff sack (2-3)	Something to organize your gear inside of the large drybag
Headlamp	Durable and lightweight. Bring spare batteries.
Watch	A watch with an alarm is a nice feature.
Pen/pencil/pad	For journaling and taking notes.
Sunglasses + retainer	Sunglasses with UV protection; lenses should be dark. Something to hold them on.

Glasses/contacts	Bring spares. Contact-lens wearers should also bring a pair of glasses as backup.
Optional Items	
Pack towel	A washcloth sized towel is great for backcountry cleanliness.
Book or e-reader	We recommend bringing a padded or hard-shell case for an e-reader as well.
Thermos	Insulated drinking vessels are ideal for hot beverages.
Camera	We would love to see your photos!
Camp chair	Bonus for camp life, something compact is good.
Hydration system	An alternative hydration system to bottles, whether a Camelbak, Platypus, etc.
Pocket knife	One small knife is sufficient; simple folding knives are popular.

***We recommend that you leave any expensive jewelry at home (engagement rings, wedding bands with diamonds, etc.)