Who says you have to keep on the trail? Wind down with a leisurely soak at the Mountain Village Resort's natural hot spring or take a detour along roads less traveled. There's plenty to discover for wide eyes and open minds.

→ the plaque marking the start of the trail, and the National Frontier Trails Museum.

Cross into Kansas to Alcove Spring, a favorite stop for Oregon Trail travelers thanks to a natural spring and waterfall. An easy hike parallels wagon swales, deep depressions in the earth made from thousands of wagons. Before you reach Nebraska, take pictures of the Hollenberg Pony Express Station State Historic Site in Hanover, Kansas. Built in 1858, it's the most intact Pony Express stop in the United States.

As the open landscape of Nebraska welcomes you, settle in at Scottsbluff. Find cozy lodging at Barn Anew Bed and Breakfast or more rustic accommodations at Riverside Campground. This will be your base for exploring Scotts Bluff National Monument. Must-dos at this 3,000-acre (1,214-hectare) landmark include seeing the interactive exhibits dedicated to the Oregon Trail, driving the Summit Road, and hiking the prairie trails.

This rural region invites you to slow down and enjoy the simple things in life.

Before continuing west, consider a 3.5-hour detour north to South Dakota's famed Mount Rushmore. The colossal granite rock formations sport the carved-in-stone faces of four U.S. presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. Early designs called for the inclusion of Lewis and Clark and their guide Sacagawea, Buffalo Bill Cody, and Lakota war leader Crazy Horse. Though none of these made it onto the monument, Crazy Horse does have an under-construction memorial nearby, which will be the largest mountain sculpture in the world when—if ever—completed.

Return to the Oregon Trail and motor west to Wyoming's Guernsey Ruts. These are some of the best wagon runs along the trail, measuring 4 feet (1.2 meters) deep. Pair this visit with a trip to Register Cliff Historic Site in Guernsey. Weary travelers spent the night here and many of them inscribed their names →