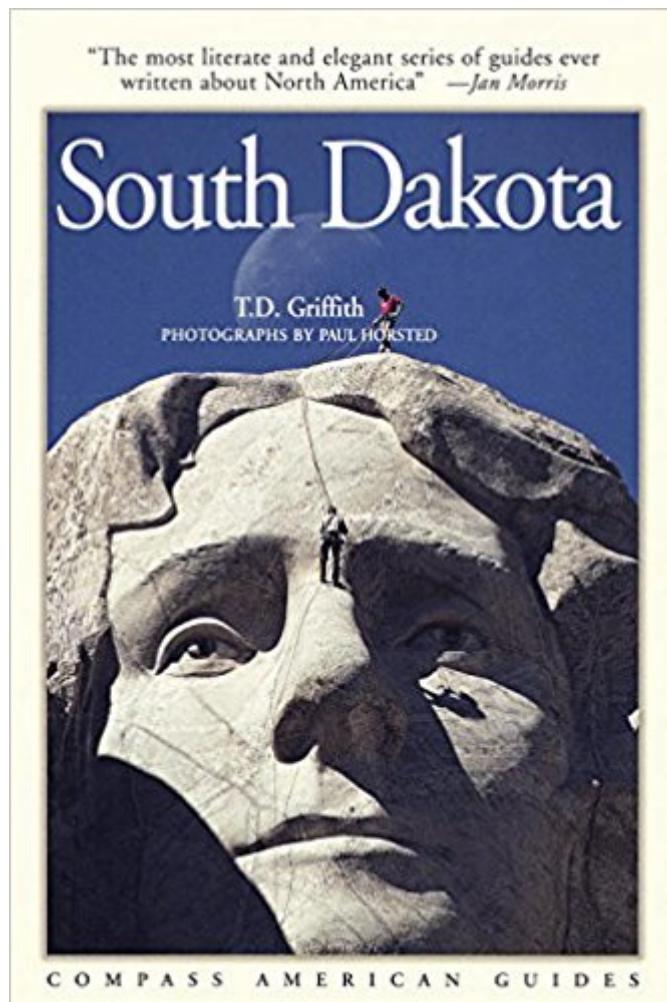


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Compass American Guides : South Dakota



Synopsis

Created by local writers and photographers, Compass American Guides are the ultimate insider's guides, providing in-depth coverage of the history, culture and character of America's most spectacular destinations. Covering everything there is to see and do as well as choice lodging and dining, these gorgeous full-color guides are perfect for new and longtime residents as well as vacationers who want a deep understanding of the region they're visiting. Outstanding color photography, plus a wealth of archival images. Topical essays and literary extracts. Detailed color maps. Great ideas for things to see and do. Capsule reviews of hotels and restaurants.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

South Dakota History Sodbusters and Pioneers Like a wave on a prairie ocean, immigrants to the American frontier kept pushing westward in search of unbroken ground and a lease on the future. Most of those who came into South Dakota in the mid-nineteenth century followed the route of trappers and traders, heading west out of St. Louis and north through Nebraska via the Missouri River. They settled first in the southeastern corner of the state, in Vermillion, Yankton, and Sioux Falls, fanning out and building their homesteads along waterways: the Big Sioux, Vermillion, James, and Chouteau rivers. Their vision for a new life included farms and houses, and to their eyes the land they first encountered was empty. In 1862, the U.S. Congress passed the Homestead Act and sold 160 acres of unsettled land (for about 18 dollars in parts of the Dakota Territory) to men and women willing to meet a few government requirements. Once a pioneer had paced off 160 acres as his

claim, the government compelled him to complete several steps to "prove up" -- or hold onto -- his claim. The first order of business was to construct a dwelling. Due to a lack of building materials, early dwellings were most often tarpaper shacks, dugouts carved from swells in the land, or sod shanties. "Sodbusters" cut long strips of three-inch (7.6-cm)-deep sod with a spade and then sliced the strips into manageable lengths. These were stacked like bricks into four walls, with openings for a window and a door. If the settler was lucky, trees growing on banks of a nearby stream or creek would provide enough wood to construct a crudely framed roof strong enough to support more sod. The completed sod shanty was windproof, fireproof, and structurally sound, but it often failed to keep out rain. Though few of these original structures can be found today, they once littered the landscape. The large number that were built, only to be summarily abandoned, provided mute testimony to the struggles of trying to make a life on a vast, treeless prairie, broiling hot in the summer, freezing cold in the winter, and for the most part, arid. The deep, impacted prairie grasses rendered planting the first crops extremely difficult. No matter how sharp their blades, plows could rarely churn up earth so entangled with tough roots. After chopping at the earth with an ax, many settlers simply dropped seeds into the crevices, then waited in their little "soddies" for the grain to grow. If the first crop was spared by drought, hail, grasshoppers, and fire, a homesteader might have enough money by the end of the summer to buy seed to plant a few additional acres. With luck, the cultivated acreage would increase each year, allowing the family to grow a vegetable garden, buy a milk cow, purchase lumber for a real house, and get shoes for the children. The success of these pioneer families often relied as much on their own ability to endure in the face of solitude and misfortune as it did on the weather.

I am planning to visit South Dakota this summer and since I manage to turn everything I do into an educational project I have been reading up and writing chambers of commerce for information. This book is written in the neutral public relations politically correct style of a guidebook. (Heaven forbid we ever say anything critical about the Indians or why we're still paying \$1.5 billion a year for Indian health care.) In fact I believe the author has a PR background. He conveys a lot of information but he could have made the book much more interesting. For example, the story of the trapper Hugh Glass is one of the best stories ever. Glass was mauled by a grizzly and left for dead by his companions. He vowed revenge on those who left him and literally crawls back to civilization to kill the men who left him. However, the author here really does not get into the revenge theme. I had to get that from a Chamber publication. The pictures in the book are great and I would rate the pictures five stars. However, there just aren't that many books about South Dakota. So if you are going to South

Dakota it probably is worth picking up. For an interesting book about the entire Great Plains which includes South Dakota read Great Plains by Ian Frazier, which is a five star book.

At first , I didn't think this book was of much help in planning my trip but the more I read it, the more great information I found. I would advise you to read it like a novel and not just skim through it looking for specific information.

An ideal book for those intending to visit South Dakota. As well as giving places to visit and stay it provides an interesting insight into the history of the state. A few more photographs would be even better.

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