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Clockwise: Minam River Lodge owner Barnes Ellis departs to the north in his Cessna 206; The lodge offers four outdoor teepees that are popular with kids and backpackers; Mealtimes in the modern yet woodsy dining room with big windows are the perfect time to get to know other guests; The wood-burning, spring-fed outdoor hot tub is one of the most popular amenities.



Idaho and Montana have long been known to have spectacular, remote fly-in lodges, and with the opening of the new Minam River Lodge, you can now add Oregon to that list. Nestled on 126 acres in the remote Eagle Cap Wilderness Area of northeastern Oregon, the Minam River Lodge is only accessible via an 8.5-mile hike or horseback ride or by flying in to its private airstrip. First opened nearly 70 years ago as a hunting lodge, the property has been thoughtfully reimaged as an elegant hideaway filled with handmade touches by local artisans. The hand-built log cabins and their custom-built furniture are all made with native woods. Local farms and an on-site garden are utilized to create the Lodge's own distinctive cuisine. Amenities include a wood-fired hot tub and a rustic sauna, each just steps from the wild and scenic Minam River. With accommodations for just 40 guests, Minam River Lodge feels private and intimate. Life's complications will fall away as you reconnect with nature. No need to bring your cell phone or computer as there is no service here; just relax in the tranquil surroundings. Go hiking or horseback riding, fish along the river, get a relaxing massage, and gaze at the star-filled sky.

Flying There

The Minam River Airstrip (7OR0) lies within the Eagle Cap Wilderness Area of the Wallowa Mountains in northeast Oregon, along the Minam River. It's about halfway between Enterprise (8S4) and La Grande (LGD), the two closest airports with fuel (each about 16 nm away). The airstrip is at 3,589 feet in a canyon surrounded by steep terrain; mountain-flying experience is highly recommended. Approaches from the north cross relatively low (4,000–5,000-foot) terrain; but from other directions, you'll have to cross tall mountains.

From the north, simply fly over the town of Minam and follow the river south to the Lodge about 17 nm away. Just 40 nm to the east lies America's deepest canyon, Hells Canyon, carved by the Snake River which defines the border between Oregon and Idaho. Just beyond, the terrain rises dramatically to mountainous regions with peaks exceeding 13,000 feet MSL. To find a lower route from the east, you can follow the large curve of the Snake River Plain across southern Idaho, and then angle north of Boise's Class C airspace toward Hells Canyon. Follow the canyon until just north of the Wallowa Mountains and then descend west-bound when you are abeam Enterprise. Follow the railroad tracks and Wallowa River from Enterprise to the town of Minam and then fly along the Minam River south.

From the south, it's easiest to divert west around the Wallowa Mountains to the town of Minam before following the river to the Lodge. Alternatively, if you wish to cross the mountains, you can pick up the river at the intersection of the Donnelly (DNJ) 278° and Baker City (BKE) 007° radials and follow it



Top to bottom: One of two Grand Cabins, Sabal is just a short walk from the lodge; Much of the food served is grown onsite, and edible flowers are used often; On the second floor of the lodge, the Eagle Cap Suite's wall of windows provide great views.



northwest. If you do cross the mountains, keep in mind that winds and weather can be dramatically different than reported in the valleys, and remember to maintain at least 2,000 feet AGL above the wilderness area.

From above, you'll see that the Red's Horse Ranch airstrip (6OR9) is only about 750 yards south of the Minam River Airstrip. The Minam River runs just east of both strips and flows toward the north. When you self-announce on 122.9 MHz, use terms like "upriver" and "downriver," as well as "north" or "south" rather than runway numbers. Winds permitting, it's best to land upriver (toward the south), because the airstrip will be slightly uphill that way. Locals prefer landing before 10 a.m., due

to shifting winds that sometimes crop up later in the day. The windsock at Minam is on the east side of the runway at mid-field, across from the greenhouse. The windsock at Red's Horse Ranch is on the west side of that runway and is easily visible on approach. Continue north and cross over the river, hugging the canyon wall on the east side, and you'll get a good look at the Minam runway on your left to check for animals or planes. Continue a long quarter-mile past the Lodge on downwind toward a flat spot in the ridge on the east side of Minam River and make a 180-degree turn, not a squared base. This should set you up flying upriver on the west side of the Minam River on final. The trees are cut away in a

notch; slip into that notch and then make your touchdown. There is a slight hump in the middle of the runway, but you should be able to slow down by then. You'll have about 2,000 x 40 feet of runway total, although the strip doglegs toward the end as it approaches the river to the south. Most aircraft can stop by the hangar.

Park on the east side of the runway, near the hangar by the greenhouse. Bring your own tiedowns. Winds permitting, depart downriver, to the north. As long as you follow the river north, you'll be flying toward lowering terrain. If you are worried about climb-out performance, another option is to take off toward the south and land immediately at Red's Horse Ranch. Then, taxi to the south end of Red's Horse Ranch and take off downriver (to the north) from Red's and overfly Minam. This will give you more room as you climb out over lowering terrain.

History

The Lodge property dates to a homestead established around 1890. Mert and Erma Loree purchased the property and built the original Minam River Lodge from 1950 to 1951 using materials ferried over the mountains by mule. Hunters flocked to the Lodge for years, finding great success in an area known as "Mert's Meat Locker." Back then, the adjacent Red's Horse Ranch was an iconic dude ranch that drew celebrities including Burt Lancaster. In 1964, Congress passed the Wilderness Act, designed to preserve areas "where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." The Eagle Cap Wilderness that surrounds the Lodge was placed in the National Wilderness Preservation System and eventually grew to 359,991 acres. In 1994, the Forest Service acquired Red's Horse Ranch and ended its use as an out-back tourist resort. The buildings are now maintained with the help of volunteers and used primarily as a staging point for wildland firefighters. Although the buildings are closed, you can camp onsite. The Minam River Lodge remained open as a rare, private inholding, surrounded by protected wilderness. The Lodge changed hands several times but fell into disrepair during the early 2000s.

In 2011, the property was purchased by Barnes Ellis, a former journalist and founder of Baker Ellis Asset Management, a Portland-based investment advisory firm. Ellis earned his private pilot certificate in 2016 and owns a 2008 Cessna T206H in which he flies the 217-nm distance to the Lodge from its home base at Aurora State Airport (UAO), outside Portland. A native Oregonian, Barnes says he was lucky to have a dad who gave him an ice axe when he was five; together they hiked and explored all over the Northwest. The Minam River Lodge became one of his favorite places in Oregon. When he saw it was for sale, he was inspired to restore it and worked to assemble a team of archi-

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pects and craftsmen who shared his dream of rebuilding the lodge and cabins for new generations to enjoy.

On the weekend of April 14–15, 2012, over 20 aircraft flew in for the “Minam Airlift,” organized by members of the Recreational Aviation Foundation, Idaho Aviation Association, Oregon Pilots Association, and BackcountryPilots.org. Flying multiple sorties between the Lodge and Joseph, Ore., volunteers flew new supplies in and hauled over 50 years of accumulated debris out. When rebuilding the lodge and cabins, the Minam River Lodge crew overcame many of the same challenges as the original owners. Using helicopters instead of mules, the construction crew flew in building supplies. They harvested logs and skidded them across the frozen river in the winter. They milled their own lumber and repurposed as many materials as possible from the original structures. From the cabins to the teepees, wall tents, hot tubs, and bath house, the team created numerous unique dwellings where people can hear birds sing in the morning, coyotes howl at night, and the Minam River rush by under rustling leaves without end. After six years, the new Minam River Lodge opened in May 2017. Building this retreat has been a labor of love and a gift to outdoor enthusiasts from around the world.

What to Do

Minam River Lodge is open from Memorial Day weekend through Oct. 1. Summer highs are usually in the 70s or 80s, with lows in the 40s. Bring comfortable layers and a rain jacket just in case of an afternoon thunderstorm, although eastern Oregon is normally dry in summer.

The Eagle Cap Wilderness includes 534 miles of trails, four wild and scenic rivers, and almost 60 high alpine lakes. **Hiking** is probably the most popular activity; you can forge out on your own through forests of fir and larch, speak to a staff member for trail suggestions, or buy one of the hiking guidebooks recommended on the Lodge website before your trip.

Horseback riding is a wonderful way to see the beautiful forests and alpine meadows of the Eagle Cap Wilderness. The Lodge can arrange the horses and guide through Eagle Cap Wilderness Outfitters, which offers half-day riding trips from the Lodge for \$150; full-day trips \$250, 541-962-5900, www.EagleCapWildernessOutfitters.com.

Del Sol Wilderness Adventures, owned by Barry and Shirley Cox, is another option. Barry is a professional horse trainer, and you can be assured of a steady mount. They can arrange a deluxe **summer pack trip** where you'll sleep in your own personal dome tent and have access to a hot shower. Plus, you'll dine in a large wall tent with full kitchen and skilled camp cook, \$225 per person per day; supplied and drop camps also available. Del Sol also offers a range of rifle and archery **hunting trips** for deer, elk, and bear, \$1,200–\$3,250 per

person, 541-561-2143 or 398-2088, www.DelSolWildernessAdventures.com.

While you're out and about, keep your binoculars handy because the wilderness is great for **birding**. Unusual species to look for include spruce grouse, pine grosbeaks, Wallowa rosy finches, and black swifts. You can also pick wild huckleberries or hunt for edible wild mushrooms, depending on the season.

The Minam, which flows right past the Lodge, is one of Oregon's most pristine rivers and offers great **fishing** for wild rainbow trout and whitefish. The river fishes more like a small stream, with seasonal changes in flow rates and holes where fish lurk. Bring an assortment of flies, because you never know what they'll be biting on a given day. It's catch-and-release here, especially for bull trout, which must be quickly and gently let go. A favorite spot is the corner below Horse Heaven Creek, which can be accessed by hiking a mile downstream. A mile upstream, near the south end of the runway at Red's Horse Ranch, there's a horseshoe-shaped hole with fish that's also good for **swimming**, as it's 10–15 feet deep.

After a long day of activities, nothing beats sore muscles like a soak in the wood-fired, spring-fed, **outdoor hot tub** and a stint in the **riverside sauna**. Relax to the max with a deep tissue Swedish **massage** and myofascial release by Landra Skovlin, an Oregon licensed massage therapist and 2014 graduate of the Ashland Institute of Massage, half-hour \$40, full hour \$75, please reserve and pay at time of booking.

You can always practice yoga, meditation, or read a book along the peaceful Minam River. The Lodge also offers **special events**, such as free live music via the occasional “Music in the Minam” series, plus yoga retreats and naturalist talks.

Evenings at the Lodge are a wonderful time for guests to relax and perhaps share tales of the day's adventures. The resort's grand, central wood-burning fireplace is both a warm place to gather and an efficient heat source that provides hot water for the lodge. As you savor one of the private-labeled beers or a glass of wine on the deck, you'll smell dinner cooking over the fire pit. Later, you can lie back and re-learn your constellations as you marvel at the Milky Way, unaffected by light pollution.

Where to Stay

The Lodge is operated by a devoted staff, all of whom are paid a living wage and share equally with the owner in any profits. Lodge Manager Isaac Trout is an avid outdoorsman with expertise in everything from hunting and fishing to backcountry skiing and wild edible gathering. He was the acting superintendent during the construction of the new facilities. Kelsey Juve, Lodge Operations Manager, is a sixth-generation Wallowa County resident who grew up exploring the Eagle Cap Wilderness, venturing to Red's Horse Ranch and Minam



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River Lodge. Her great-grandfather took the historic photographs that hang throughout the lodge. Kelsey's father, Ted Juve, is a noted ceramic artist who made the dinnerware in addition to the ornamental vessels that are displayed in the lodge.

Minam River Lodge features artwork made by generations of Eastern Oregon craftsmen and artists. Kirk Skovlin, a talented landscape painter from Enterprise whose family wrote the book "Into the Minam," was commissioned to contribute a painting to the Lodge. The furniture in the lodge and cabins was designed and built by Oregon's Liz Holoubek and her husband, Alan. Liz, who earned an MFA in furniture design at the Rhode Island

School of Design, describes the custom design for the lodge as inspired by preservation, simplicity, and beauty. Incorporating local wood and rock at every opportunity, the lodge and cabins seem part of the surrounding landscape. Other features, such as the wooden cross-bracing inset in the stone aprons on the exterior of the cabins, are nods to the Willowa Mountains' reputation as "the Alps of Oregon."

Every detail of the new Minam River Lodge is designed to honor the surrounding wilderness and minimize environmental impact. Salvaged wood from historic structures around the state is incorporated throughout the property. The Lodge's minimal energy needs are largely met by

its 10-kilowatt solar energy system; water is heated by the central woodstove. Under permit with the Forest Service, the Lodge preserved the original gravity-fed water system, and added a supplemental well and water-treatment system. The entire property can accommodate a maximum of 40 guests in the lodge, cabins, wall tents, and teepees. Well-behaved dogs are allowed for \$100 per stay in all accommodations except Lodge Rooms. Owners must pick up after their dogs, and, out of consideration for the handmade furniture and fine linens, if your dog is inclined to scratch or chew, it's best to leave it at home.

In the main building, you'll find four **Lodge Rooms** that can each accommodate two guests. Three upstairs guest rooms, called Chimney, Aneroid, and Steamboat, each include a queen bed, custom-made furniture, and offer sweeping views of the property and Minam River Valley, \$245. A shared toilet and shower room are located off the hallway. Also upstairs, the **Eagle Cap Suite** boasts floor-to-ceiling windows for great views, plus a private bath with a freestanding copper bathtub and queen bed, \$495.

Three **individual cabins**—Huckleberry, Treehouse, and Pebble—each have a private bath with waterfall shower, electricity that connects to a solar array for modest needs (please no blow-dryers), a cozy wood stove, and custom-made furniture that includes a queen bed with fine linens, \$495. Four **attached cabins**—Morel, Chanterelle, Nettle, and Paintbrush—form two duplexes. They share a broad front porch but are otherwise like the individual cabins, \$395. Two **grand cabins** offer special features. Boulder oozes wilderness style, from the wagon-wheel chandelier in the spacious living room to the bathroom sink carved out of a boulder. The cabin sleeps up to four in two queen beds: one on the main floor, and another in an upstairs loft accessible by a ladder, \$595. It's a short walk from the lodge to a private bluff above the river where you'll find the other grand cabin, Sabai. French doors open to a covered porch, and extra windows fill this spacious cabin with dappled sunlight, one queen bed, \$545.

Want to sleep outside in total comfort? Two **wall tents**, Lupine and Yarrow, are built on raised platforms and provide a luxurious camping experience. Nestled in forest clearings near the lodge, bathhouse, and wood-fired hot tub, each wall tent includes simple furnishings and a queen bed with fine linens, \$195.

Fun for kids and adults who want to play Cowboys and Indians, four authentic **teepees** each come with a futon pad to sleep two (bring your own sleeping bag). A 10-minute walk from the bathhouse and hot tub, Kingfisher offers riverside seclusion; Warbler, Tanager, and Nuthatch are all just a short walk from the lodge and facilities, \$95.

To make reservations, email your phone number to info@Minam-Lodge.com, 541-362-4453, www.Minam-Lodge.com.

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Where to Eat

Food is a central component to the Minam River Lodge experience. Using organic principles and incorporating practices such as crop rotation, no-till, and vermicomposting, as much food as possible is grown on-site in the wilderness garden and greenhouse. Extensive recycling practices minimize the need to fly supplies in and waste out. Nicole Freshley, lead gardener, oversees the growth of vibrant food that provides the Lodge's chefs with a wide variety of greens, vegetables, and aromatic herbs, inspiring seasonally focused dishes that feature each day's fresh harvest. An elevation above 3,600 feet and a microclimate created in the narrow valley challenges her with a short growing season and the possibility of frost any morning of the year. Guests are asked to refrain from bringing food other than trail snacks, as it can quickly attract bears, packrats, and other wildlife. Cooking and cooking fires are prohibited anywhere on the property due to fire hazard.

In the main lodge, the solar-powered refrigerator is always full of cold beer from Terminal Gravity Brewing in Enterprise. There's a bar in front of the open kitchen where you can order signature craft cocktails with infusions of plants from the area. The lodge also boasts one of the best wine cellars in eastern Oregon. If you prefer to bring your own wine, they will happily provide bottle service for \$20 per 750-ml bottle. Your credit card will be pre-authorized for incidentals at the time of reservation, and you can settle your bar tab when you check out.

Chef Carl Krause graduated from the prestigious Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y. and most recently was the Culinary Director at Portland's Biwa, Inc. and its three restaurants, Biwa, Noraneko, and Parasol. Guests can expect meats from local ranches cooked over an open fire, veg-



Departures are generally flown "downriver," or to the north.

Evan Schneider

etables roasted straight on the coals, and lettuces and herbs from the garden, fed by the mountain spring water. Lodge Manager Isaac Trout has a passion for food preservation and living off the land, and he brings those skills to the Lodge with house-cured and smoked meat recipes that are prepared weekly. Whenever possible, local mushrooms and other wild foods are weaved into the menu. Meals are served family-style, either in the lodge dining room or under the stars. Things you might find on the table include Mountain Blackberry Crisp with Bourbon Crème Anglaise; Nicole's Garden Greens with Herbs and Baby Radishes; Blistered Cherry Tomatoes and Ground Cherries with Fresh House-Made Cheese and Garden Basil; Coal-Roasted New Potatoes with allium; and Slow-Smoked Carman Ranch Ribeye with Minam Chimichurri.

Breakfast and lunch are \$25, dinner is \$75, kids under 12 are half-price.

There are so many things to do at the Minam River Lodge: wander around and admire all the unique artistic woodwork, hike or ride through the forest, play hide-and-seek with the local trout, relax in the delightful outdoor hot tub, read a book, or even bring your paints and set an easel up with a view over the valley. What can't you do? Cruise the Internet. Answer emails. Hear traffic. This is a place where you can just slow down and become a part of the forest, sky, and river. Minam is not only ideal for personal vacations, but also family reunions, weddings, and corporate get-aways. It's the perfect place to reconnect with nature, family, friends, and, perhaps most importantly, yourself. It may just become your own favorite retreat. ■

70R0

Minam Lodge Airport

Cove, OR • N 45° 21.5' W 117° 38.1' • Elevation: 3,589 ft.

Sectional Chart: Seattle

Pattern Altitude: 4,589 ft. MSL

FREQUENCIES

CTAF: **122.9**

Seattle ARTCC: **132.6**

McMinneville FSS: **122.5**

AWOS-3 at JSY: **123.775**
(16 nm E)

AWOS-3 at LGD: **135.075**
(16 nm W)



View facing west



Not to be used for navigation

NOTES: Private use airport; permission required to land. Recommended use is early mornings and evenings. Call the lodge for weather information at 541-508-2719.

RUNWAYS: N/S 2,000 x 40 ft. Turf.

SERVICES: None.

PHONES: Airport office: 503-277-5778, AWOS-3 at JSY: 541-432-0458, AWOS-3 at LGD: 541-963-6824.