

**THE  
USA  
BOOK**  
A JOURNEY THROUGH  
**AMERICA**

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# INTRODUCING THE USA



THE PLAYWRIGHT ARTHUR MILLER ONCE SAID THAT THE ESSENCE OF AMERICA WAS ITS PROMISE. FOR NEWLY ARRIVED IMMIGRANTS AND JETLAGGED TRAVELERS ALIKE, THAT PROMISE CAN TAKE ON NEAR-MYTHIC PROPORTIONS.

The USA is a land of dazzling cities, towering redwoods, alpine lakes, rolling vineyards, chiseled peaks, barren deserts and a dramatic coastline of unrivaled beauty. And that's just one state (California).

In the other 49 states lie an astounding collection of natural and cultural wonders, from the wildly multihued tapestry of urban streets to the mountains, plains and forests that cover vast swaths of the continent. The USA is the birthplace of LA, Las Vegas, Chicago, Miami, Boston and New York City – each a brimming metropolis whose name alone conjures a million different notions of culture, cuisine and entertainment.

Look more closely, and the American quilt unfurls in all its surprising variety: the eclectic music scene of Austin, the easygoing charms of antebellum Savannah, the ecoconsciousness of free-spirited Portland, the magnificent waterfront of San Francisco, and the captivating old quarters of New Orleans, still rising from its (waterlogged) ashes.

This is a country of road trips and great open skies, where 4 million miles of highways lead past red-rock deserts, below towering mountain peaks, and across fertile wheat fields that roll toward the horizon. The sun-bleached Native American hillsides of the Great Plains, lush forests of the Pacific Northwest and the scenic country lanes of New England are a few fine starting points for the great American road trip.

The world's third-largest nation has made substantial contributions to the arts. Georgia O'Keeffe's wild landscapes, Robert Rauschenberg's surreal collages, Alexander Calder's elegant mobiles and Jackson Pollock's drip paintings have entered the vernacular of avant-garde 20th-century art. And cities like Chicago and New York have become veritable drawing boards for the great architects of the modern era. Musically speaking, the USA has few peers. From the big-band jazz that was born in New Orleans to the Memphis blues, Detroit's Motown sound, funk, hip-hop, country, and rock and roll – the USA has invented sounds integral to any understanding of contemporary music.

Cuisine is another way of illuminating the US experience. While thick BBQ ribs and sizzling meats arrive fresh off the grill at a Tennessee roadhouse, miles away talented chefs blend organic, fresh-from-the-garden produce with Asian accents at an award-winning West Coast restaurant. A smattering of locals get their fix of bagels and lox at a century-old deli in Manhattan's Upper West Side, while several states away, plump pancakes and fried eggs disappear in a hurry under the clatter of cutlery at a 1950s diner. Steaming plates of fresh lobster served off a Maine pier, oysters and champagne in a fashion-conscious wine bar, beer and pizza at a Midwestern pub – just a few ways to dine à la Americana.



But the USA isn't just about its geography, its cities or even its art and cuisine. It's also about people. The 'teeming nation of nations' (as Walt Whitman famously described it) was built on immigration and still attracts over one million arrivals per year. Representatives from nearly every country can be found inside the boundaries of the USA, adding an astounding mix of ethnicities, religions and languages to the national character.

As a collective voice, the USA has a complicated soul. In addition to the wide mix of racial and ethnic groups, it is a mishmash of factory workers and farmers, born-again Christians and Hatha yoga practitioners, literary-minded college students and tradition-bound Native Americans, beer-swilling baseball lovers and back-to-nature commune dwellers. This is a country in which regional stereotypes help Americans get a handle on their own elusive country, whether the people in question are gracious Southern belles, street-smart New Yorkers, humble Midwesterners, SoCal surfers or straight-talking Texans.

The collective identity, however, goes only so far in defining Americans. This is, after all, a country that celebrates – or rather mythologizes – feats of 'rugged individualism,' a notion well supported by the enormous ranks of the great and dastardly alike who have left their mark on the USA. This is the land of Teddy Roosevelt, John Muir, Jack Kerouac, Andy Warhol, Frank Lloyd Wright, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, Muhammad Ali and Oprah Winfrey. It is also the birthplace of Billy the Kid, Al Capone, the Dukes of Hazzard and hundreds of other real and fictional characters who contribute to that portrait of the American hero or villain heading off into the sunset.

The USA still has the ability to inspire. Although many years have passed since Martin Luther King was assassinated, his message of hope lives on. The USA is still a place where big dreamers can triumph over adversity. No one in recent history has demonstrated that more clearly than Barack Obama, the country's first African American president.

Despite this unprecedented moment in US history, change is no stranger to the American scene. Even the nation's creation was a daring paradigm shift in a world of monarchies and autocracies. A country founded as a refuge for religious tolerance by early colonists later became the world's first modern democratic republic. Over the centuries, visionary statespeople like Jefferson, Lincoln and Roosevelt have helped move the country in bold new directions. But it was courageous citizens, fighting (and sometimes sacrificing their lives) in the battle against injustice who brought about some of the USA's most profound changes – in abolishing slavery, earning equal rights for women, protecting the environment and enshrining fair wages and working conditions for laborers.

Citizens from all walks of life have participated in 'the great American experiment,' a concept that rewards bold ideas and hard work, no matter one's place in society. The results of nurturing this entrepreneurial spirit have been far-reaching. From the historic flight by the Wright Brothers to the Apollo moon landing, Americans have achieved ambitious goals. Technological revolutions beginning with Thomas Edison's lightbulb and Henry Ford's automobile manufacturing methods continue today in the pioneering work by Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Larry Page and Sergey Brin, whose innovations in information technology continue to have an overwhelming effect on communication and industry across the globe.

# THE USA AT A GLANCE

**POPULATION** 303.8 MILLION

**AREA** 3.8 MILLION SQ MILES

**GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT**  
\$13.8 TRILLION



YELLOWSTONE'S GRAND PRISMATIC SPRING IS ONE OF US-20'S SPOILS. ↗



THE SMITHSONIAN STUFFS A LOT IN ITS MUSEUMS. ↗



IT'S ALWAYS A FINE DAY FOR A WALK IN YOSEMITE. ↗

## LONGEST ROAD

US-20 spans 3365 miles across 11 states on its coast-to-coast route from Boston, MA, to Newport, OR. In between it dawdles through Rust Belt towns, Amish farms, Plains prairie land, Yellowstone National Park and mountain hamlets before depositing road trippers on the wave-bashed Pacific shore.

## BEST BEER

With more breweries (30) than any city on the planet, Portland, OR, wins the 'beervana' award. Stumble between brewpubs in watch-repair shops and old rope factories, pull up a chair by the fire and clink your fresh-from-the-vat pint of Hefeweizen, Belgian ale or ESB in gratitude to the beer gods.

## BEST MUSEUM

If America was a quirky grandfather, Washington, DC's Smithsonian Institution would be his attic. Rockets, dinosaurs, Rodin sculptures, Tibetan *thangka* (banners) – even the 45-carat Hope diamond lights up a room here. The Smithsonian is actually a group of museums and they're all free.

## BEST FEST

Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington are among those who've blown their horns and tickled the ivories at the New Orleans Jazz Fest, a 10-stage bash rocking over two weekends in spring. Almost better than the music is the food: soft-shell crab po'boys, Cajun rice-and-pork sausage and white-chocolate bread pudding. Bring dancing shoes and loose-waisted pants.

## BEST BEACH

Lace up tough footwear and pack water – you're going to need them for the lava trail leading to Makalawena Beach on the Big Island of Hawai'i. The payoff is huge: a series of secluded coves lapped by azure waters, white sand dunes, close encounters with turtles and excellent body boarding.

## BEST HIKE

Hiking Yosemite National Park's Mist Trail is like walking into an Ansel Adams photo, where frothy white waterfalls shoot over dark granite monoliths under a stark sky. Spectacular views and cools sprays occur throughout the 3-mile round-trip to Vernal Falls (and onward to Nevada Falls).

## BEST APPLE PIE

Unsheathe your fork in Mukwonago, WI, and follow your nose to the Elegant Farmer, where pies are baked in brown paper bags, a trick that makes the crust so flaky it crunches. Surrounding orchards produce the juicy Ida Reds that plump the pies to pillowlike proportions.



LEE FOSTER // LONELY PLANET IMAGES

THANK THE COLORADO RIVER FOR CARVING SUCH A GRAND CANYON. ⌘

### BEST NATURAL FEATURE

When the earth cracks open to reveal a mile-deep, 277-mile-long wilderness of rock, glowing red-orange and purple-pink in a kaleidoscopic sunset, that is indeed a Grand Canyon. Gawk with the masses at the South Rim or go for a hard-earned remote view on the North Rim. Either way, the Grand Canyon will knock your socks off.

### BEST PLACE TO SPEND THE FOURTH OF JULY

Patriotism and partying in the city where it all began – how can you beat Philadelphia? Descendants of the men who signed the Declaration of Independence ring the Liberty Bell at 2pm; and parades, fireworks, big-name bands and Tastykakes add to the fun.

### TALLEST MOUNTAIN

Rising 20,320 feet, Alaska's Mount McKinley is the highest peak in North America. The Native Alaskans who live at its flanks call it Denali (Great One). The first climbers to reach the summit did so in 1913 and many have attempted since. Only about half succeed before ferocious weather (it's colder than Everest) forces them back.

### BRAVEST MENU CHOICE

Man up (or woman up) for Rocky Mountain oysters, aka Montana tenderloins, cowboy caviar or swinging beef. Common in western ranchlands where bulls are castrated (so they'll grow meatier), these fruits of labor are salvaged and then peeled, breaded and fried. The chewy nuggets are best dipped in hot sauce.

### BEST ADVENTURE STATE

Skiing between the 10th Mountain Division's backcountry huts? Climbing a frozen waterfall in Ouray Ice Park? Paddling class V rapids on the Colorado River? Sand boarding at Great Sand Dunes National Park? Heli-skiing in Telluride? So much to do in Colorado, so little time.

### BEST OFF-THE-BEATEN-PATH DESTINATION

Roam with the buffalo in Theodore Roosevelt National Park, through a badlands patchwork of chalky cliffs and whispering grasses. You'll likely have the place to yourself. Located in forlorn North Dakota, the park bewitches, especially when the moon's 'silvery rays' transform it into a 'grim fairy-land,' as Roosevelt himself once wrote.

### BEST SUNSET

Sure, the USA's mountains, canyons and beaches offer fine places to watch the sun drop. But for sheer dramatic effect, the waterfront of Red Hook, Brooklyn, is the place to be at the end of the day. Here you'll look straight at the Statue of Liberty as the red-orange orb falls behind her mighty torch.

### MOST SPIRITUAL PLACE

At the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, deer and peacocks roam the gardens, monks and nuns pray in the misty dawn half-light and visitors admire the 10,000 hand-molded buddhas in the Jeweled Hall. That the Zen community is located amid Northern California's mountains and vineyards adds to the bliss.



© MOUNTAIN - EASTCOTT // CORBIS

MOUNT MCKINLEY STANDS SO TALL IT CREATES ITS OWN WEATHER. ⌘



CHERYL ROLFE // LONELY PLANET IMAGES

COLORADO'S BIG ADVENTURE INCLUDES OURAY ICE PARK. ⌘



ALISON WRIGHT // CORBIS

BUDDHIST MONKS IN PRAYER, IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA. ⌘