

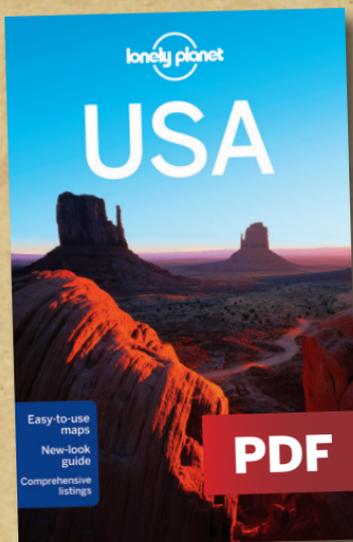
USA

Planning (Chapter)

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Coverage includes: 25 Top Experience, If You Like, Month by Month, Itineraries, Road Trips & Scenic Drives, USA Outdoors, Travel with Children, Regions at a Glance, USA's National Parks.

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welcome to the USA



Bright Lights, Big Cities

America 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 easy-going 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 up from its waterlogged ashes.

On the Road Again

This is a country of road trips and great open skies, where four million miles of highways lead past red-rock deserts, below towering mountain peaks, and across fertile wheat fields that roll off toward the horizon. The sun-bleached hillsides of the Great Plains, the lush rain 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.

Food-Loving Nation

Cuisine is another way of illuminating the American experience. On one evening in the US, thick barbecue ribs and smoked

Enormous and staggeringly diverse, America harbors an astounding collection of natural and cultural wonders, from teeming city streets to mountains, plains and forests covering vast swaths of the continent.

(left) Statue of Liberty (p63), New York City.
(below) Burger and fries.



brisket come piping hot at a Texas roadhouse; over 1500 miles away, talented chefs blend organic, fresh-off-the-farm produce with Asian accents at award-winning West Coast restaurants. 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-style diner. Steaming plates of fresh lobster served off a Maine pier, oysters and champagne in a fashion-forward wine bar in California, beer and pizza at a Midwestern pub – these are just a few ways to dine à la Americana.

Cultural Behemoth

The world's third-largest nation has made tremendous 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 modern 20th-century art. Cities like Chicago and New York have become veritable drawing boards for the great architects of the modern era. Musically speaking, America has few peers on the world stage. From the soulful blues born in the Mississippi Delta to the bluegrass of Appalachia and Detroit's Motown sound, plus jazz, funk, hip-hop, country, and rock and roll – America has invented sounds that are integral to modern music.



Top Experiences >



Chicago

Stunning architecture and lakefront festivals (p505)

New York

Famed metropolis and cultural capital (p62)

Boston

Follow the cobblestones into history (p167)

National Mall

Iconic monuments on America's front lawn (p249)

Blue Ridge Parkway

Drive among the scenic Appalachian Mountains (p39)

New Orleans

Cajun cookin', hot jazz and Mardi Gras (p410)

Austin

Creative and indie-loving music capital (p656)

Hawaii

Beaches, volcanoes and tropical island allure (p1079)

Miami

Cuban food, art deco and sultry beaches (p445)

25 TOP EXPERIENCES



New York City

I Home to striving artists, hedge fund moguls and immigrants from every corner of the globe, New York City (p62) is constantly reinventing itself. It remains one of the world centers of fashion, theater, food, music, publishing, advertising and finance. A staggering number of museums, parks and ethnic neighborhoods are scattered through the five boroughs. Do as every New Yorker does: hit the streets. Every block reflects the character and history of this dizzying kaleidoscope, and on even a short walk you can cross continents.



RICHARD JINSON/CONLEY PLANTIMAGES ©

Grand Canyon 7

2 You've seen it on film, heard about it from all and sundry who've made the trip. Is it worth the hype? The answer is a resounding yes. The Grand Canyon (p823) is vast and nearly incomprehensible in age – it took 6 million years for the canyon to form and some rocks exposed along its walls are 2 billion years old. Peer over the edge and you'll confront the great power and mystery of this earth we live on. Once you see it, no other natural phenomenon quite compares.



JOHN ELK/CONLEY PLANTIMAGES ©

Route 66

3 This ribbon of concrete was the USA's original road trip, connecting Chicago with Los Angeles in 1926. You'll find neon signs, motor courts, pie-filled diners and drive-in theaters along the way. The route was bypassed by I-40 in 1984, but many original sites remain, and tracing Route 66 (p35) today is a journey through small-town America. Whether you do the whole length or just a stretch, you'll come face to face with classic, nostalgic Americana. National Route 66 Museum (p647), Elk City

New Orleans

4 New Orleanians live to eat. The French, Spanish, Sicilians, Filipinos, Haitians, former Yugoslavians, Irish and Germans have all contributed to the gastro-amalgamation, making New Orleans (p410) one of the most food-centric cities in the USA. Sure, there's unique history, gorgeous architecture and amazing music, but, in the end, a visit here turns out to be all about the food. Get out of the French Quarter and eat with the locals in Riverbend, Uptown, Faubourg Marigny and the Bywater for a true taste of N'awlins. Soft-shell crab with new potatoes and almonds



JERRY ALEXANDER/ONLINE PLANET IMAGES ©

Yellowstone National Park

5 Stunning natural beauty, amazing geology and some of the best wildlife watching in North America: these are just a few reasons why Yellowstone (p744) has such star power among the world's national parks. Divided into five distinct regions, this place is huge – almost 3500 sq miles – and you could spend many days exploring the park's wonders. Highlights include massive geysers, waterfalls, fossil forests, rugged mountains, scenic overlooks and gurgling mud pools – with some 1100 miles of hiking trails providing the best way to take it all in. Morning Glory Pool, Upper Geyser Basin (p745)



JOHN ELLIOT/ONLINE PLANET IMAGES ©



New England in Fall

6 It's a major event, one approaching epic proportions in New England (p162): watching the leaves change color. You can do it just about anywhere – all you need is one brilliant tree. But if you're most people, you'll want lots of trees. From the Litchfield Hills in Connecticut and the Berkshires in Massachusetts to Stowe in northern Vermont, entire hillsides blaze in brilliant crimsons, oranges and yellows. Covered bridges and white-steeple churches with abundant maple trees put Vermont and New Hampshire in the forefront of leaf-peeping heaven. New Hampshire (p222)



San Francisco & Wine Country

7 Amid the clatter of old-fashioned trams and thick fog that sweeps in by night, San Francisco's (p947) diverse hill and valley neighborhoods invite long days of wandering, with great indie shops, world-class restaurants and bohemian nightlife. Round a corner to waterfront views, and you'll be hooked. If you can tear yourself away, the lush vineyards (p975) of Napa, Sonoma and the Russian River Valley lie just north. Touring vineyards, drinking great wine and lingering over farm-to-table meals – it's all part of the wine-country experience. Golden Gate Bridge (p960), San Francisco



RIK GERHARTER/LOVELY PLANET IMAGES ©

© DISNEY

Chicago

8 The Windy City (p505) will blow you away with its cloud-scraping architecture, lakefront beaches and world-class museums. But its true mojo is its blend of high culture and earthy pleasures. Is there another city that dresses its Picasso sculpture in local sports team gear? Where residents queue for hot dogs in equal measure to North America's top restaurant? Winters are brutal, but come summer, Chicago fetes the warm days with food and music festivals. John Hancock Center (p513)

Walt Disney World

9 Want to set the bar high? Call yourself 'the happiest place on earth.' Walt Disney World (p493) does, and then pulls out all the stops to deliver the exhilarating sensation that you are the most important character in the show. Despite all the frantic rides, entertainment and nostalgia, the magic is watching your own child swell with belief after they have made Goofy laugh, been curtsied to by Cinderella, guarded the galaxy with Buzz Light-year, and battled Darth Maul like your very own Jedi knight. Walt Disney World, Orlando





JOHN ELIX HILL/LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

The Deep South

11

10 Steeped in history and complex regional pride, the Deep South (p320) is America at its weirdest and most fascinating, from the moss-draped South Carolina swamps to the cinder block juke joints of the steamy Mississippi Delta to the isolated French-speaking enclaves of the Louisiana bayou. Famous for its slow pace, the Deep South is all about enjoying life's small pleasures: sucking down fresh Gulf oysters at an Alabama seafood shack, strolling Savannah's antebellum alleys, sipping sweet tea on the porch with new friends. Oak Alley Plantation (p427), Vacherie

Las Vegas

11 Sin City (p790) is a neon-fueled ride through the nerve center of American strike-it-rich fantasies. See billionaires' names gleam from the marquees of luxury hotels. Hear a raucous soundscape of slot machines, clinking martini glasses, and the hypnotic beats of DJs spinning till dawn. Sip cocktails under palm trees and play blackjack by the pool. Visit Paris, the Wild West and a tropical island, all in one night. It's all here and it's open 24 hours, all for the price of a poker chip (and a little luck).

RICHARD CLIMMINS/LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©



JAN STROMME/LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

Pacific Coast Highway

12 Stunning coastal highways (p38) wind their way down the US West Coast from Canada all the way to the Mexican border and offer dramatic scenery that's hard to match anywhere in the world. Cliff-top views over crashing waves, sunlit rolling hills, fragrant eucalyptus forests and lush redwoods. There are wild and remote beaches, idyllic towns and fishing villages, and primeval rain forest. Amid the remote natural beauty you can mix things up with big-city adventures, dipping into Seattle, Portland, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Coastal poppies, Big Sur (p941)

Miami

13 How does one city get so lucky? Most content themselves with one or two attributes, but Miami (p445) seems to have it all. Beyond the stunning beaches and Art Deco Historic District, there's culture at every turn. In cigar-filled dancehalls, Havana expats dance to *son* and boleros, in exclusive nightclubs stiletto-heeled, fiery-eyed Brazilian models shake to Latin hip-hop, and in the park old men clack dominos. To top it off, street vendors and restaurants dish out flavors from the Caribbean, Cuba, Argentina and Spain. Ocean Drive (p447), Miami Beach



WILLOD SKRIPCZAK/CONEL PLANET IMAGES ©

National Mall

14 Nearly 2 miles long and lined with iconic monuments and hallowed marble buildings, the National Mall (p249) is the epicenter of Washington, DC's political and cultural life. In the summer, massive music and food festivals are staged here, while year-round visitors wander the halls of America's finest museums lining the green. For exploring American history, there's no better place to ruminate, whether tracing your hand along the Vietnam War Memorial or ascending the steps of Lincoln Memorial, where Martin Luther King Jr gave his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech.



JEFF FOSTER/CONEL PLANET IMAGES ©

Yosemite National Park

15 Yosemite's iconic glacier-carved valley never fails to get the heart racing, even when it's loved bumper-to-bumper in summer. In springtime, get drenched by the spray of its thundering snowmelt waterfalls and twirl singing to the *Sound of Music* in high-country meadows awash with wildflowers. Yosemite's scenery (p989) is intoxicating, with dizzying rock walls and formations, and ancient giant sequoia trees. If you look for it, you'll find solitude and space in the 1100 sq miles of development-free wilderness. Yosemite Falls (p991)



CAROL ROUCH/LOONEY PLANET IMAGES ©



DAVID TOMLINSON/LOONEY PLANET IMAGES ©

Rocky Mountains

16 The Rockies (p703) are home to the highest peaks in the lower 48. Craggy peaks, raging rivers, age-old canyons and national parks set the scene. Go skiing and snowboarding down pristine, powdery slopes in the winter, hike and mountain bike amid springtime wildflowers or feel the rush of white water on sundrenched summer afternoons. You can also recharge at microbreweries, farm-to-table restaurants and refreshing hot springs. Bison, Grand Teton National Park (p750)

Blue Ridge Parkway

17 In the southern Appalachian Mountains of Virginia and North Carolina, you can take in sublime sunsets, watch for wildlife and lose all sense of the present-day while staring off at the vast wilderness surrounding this 469-mile roadway (p39). Dozens of great hikes take you deeper into nature, from easy trails along lakes and streams to challenging scrambles up to eagles' nest heights. Camp or spend the night at forest lodges, and don't miss the great bluegrass and mountain music scene of nearby towns.

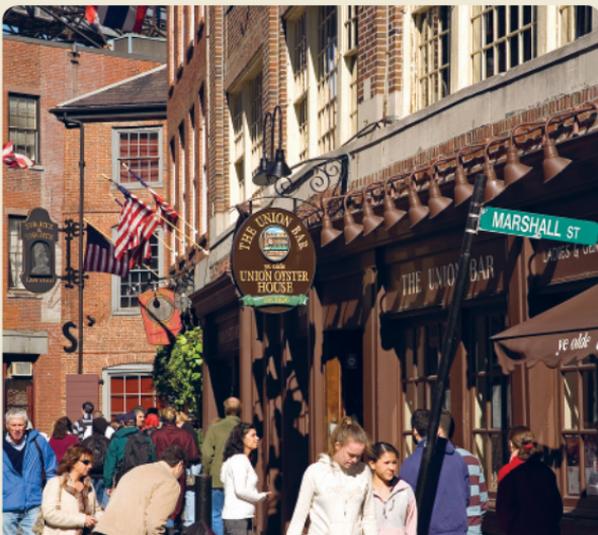


Austin & San Antonio

18 One of Texas' brightest stars, eco-friendly Austin (p656) is a great dining, drinking and shopping city, with a creative, bohemian vibe courtesy of its university and renegade subculture. Austin is one of America's music capitals with a dizzying variety of sounds playing out on stages nightly. Two major music fests showcase the best of the best. Southwest of Austin, San Antonio (p666) beguiles visitors with its pretty Riverwalk, lively festivals (including the 10-day San Antonio fest) and rich history (from serene Spanish missions to the battle-scarred Alamo). Riverside dining, San Antonio

Boston & Cape Cod

19 Start by tracing the footsteps of early Tea Partiers like Paul Revere and Sam Adams on Boston's (p167) famed Freedom Trail. After following the road through American revolutionary history, go romp around the campus of Harvard University and do a little rebel-rousing yourself at one of the city's famed clubs. Then cool off by hitting the beaches of the Cape Cod National Seashore (p190), hopping on a whale-watching cruise and getting lost in the wild dunes of Provincetown. Freedom Trail (p174), Boston





Native American Sites

20 The Southwest is Native American country (p1120) with a fantastic array of sites covering both the distant past and the present. In Colorado and Arizona, you can visit the ancient cliff-top homes of Puebloan peoples who lived among this dramatic and rocky landscape before mysteriously abandoning it. For living cultures, pay a visit to the Navajo Nation. Amid spectacular scenery, you can hire a guide and trek to the bottom of the sacred Canyon de Chelly, overnight on the reservation land and purchase handicrafts directly from the artisans. Puebloan cliff houses, Cortez

Seattle

21 A cutting-edge Pacific Rim city with an uncanny habit of turning locally hatched ideas into global brands, Seattle (p1007) has earned its place in the pantheon of 'great' US metropolises, with a world-renowned music scene, a mercurial coffee culture, and a penchant for internet-driven innovation. But, while Seattle's trendsetters rush to unearth the next big thing, city traditionalists guard its soul with distinct urban neighborhoods, a homegrown food culture, and what is arguably the nation's finest public market, Pike Place. Space Needle (p1011)





RICHARD CUMMINS/LOVEY/PLANETIMAGES ©

Los Angeles

22 Although it's the entertainment capital of the world, Los Angeles (p887) is more than two-dimensional silver-screen star. This is the city of odd-loving Venice Beach, art galleries and dining in Santa Monica, indie-loving neighborhoods like Los Feliz and Silverlake, surf-loving beaches like Malibu, and rugged and wild Griffith Park. And this is just the beginning. Dig deeper and you'll find an assortment of museums displaying every kind of ephemera, a cultural renaissance happening downtown and vibrant multi-ethnic 'hoods where great food lies just around the corner. Walt Disney Concert Hall (p890)

Texas Barbecue

23 Texas barbecue (p652) is an obsession. Who makes the best is the subject of countless newspaper and magazine articles. But with the endless varieties of sauces and rubs, it's probably best just to grab a plate and find out for yourself. Don't bother looking for the latest and greatest; the real treasures are the joints that look like they've been around for decades. And if you're wondering how to eat it without making a mess, don't. Just grab some napkins and dig in.



PHILLIP KOSCHEL/WESTENBOG CORPIS ©



Middle Americana

24 Endless open roads, stunning parks like the Badlands and great food in Kansas City are just some of the myriad allures of the Great Plains (p598). Surprises abound, some much more surprising than you'd expect: Nebraska's Carhenge, South Dakota's Corn Palace (just down the road from the huckster mecca of Wall Drug) and Kansas' fantabulous space museum plus its wild art in Lucas are but a few. Start down iconic old roads like US50 and you'll find so many diversions that the journey is the point of the trip. Corn Palace (p625), Mitchell



Hawaii

25 Hawaii (p1079) is a magical place. Where else can you find tropical rain forest, smoking volcanoes, thundering waterfalls and beautiful beaches all in such a condensed area? There's great hiking and kayaking by ancient seacliffs, surfing (for pros and learners alike) and that intangible island allure that makes you take things slow and relish the great food and vistas. Hawaii also has a culture all of its own, with a laid-back Polynesian vibe. It's all rather addictive, so plan to stick around longer than you originally intend. Hanauma Bay (p1086)

need to know

Currency

» US dollar (\$)

Language

» English

When to Go



High Season

(Jun-Aug)

- » Warm days across the country, with generally high temperatures
- » Busiest season, with big crowds and higher prices
- » In ski resort areas, January to March is high season

» Shoulder Season

(Oct & Apr-May)

- » Milder temps, fewer crowds
- » Spring flowers (April); fiery autumn colors (October) in many parts

Low Season

(Nov-Mar)

- » Wintery days, with snowfall in the north, and heavier rains in some regions
- » Lowest prices for accommodation (aside from ski resorts and warmer getaway destinations)

Your Daily Budget

Budget: less than

\$100

- » Dorm beds: \$20-30; campgrounds: \$15-30; budget motels: \$60
- » Free activities (beach days, free concerts, free museums)
- » Travel off-season; avoid resort areas

Midrange:

\$150- \$250

- » Double room in midrange hotel: \$100-200
- » Decent-restaurant dinner: \$50-80 for two
- » Car hire: from \$30 per day

Top end: more than

\$250

- » Lodging in a resort: from \$250
- » Dining in top restaurants: \$60-100 per person
- » Big nights out (plays, concerts, nightclubs): \$60-200

Money

» ATMs widely available. Credit cards accepted at most hotels, restaurants and shops.

Visas

» Visitors from Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and many EU countries don't need visas for under 90-day stays. Other nations might (see <http://travel.state.gov>).

Cell Phones

» Only foreign phones that operate on tri- or quad-band frequencies will work in the USA. Or purchase inexpensive cell phones with a pay-as-you-go plan here.

Driving

» Drive on the right; steering wheel is on the left side of the car.

Websites

» **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com/usa) Destination information, hotel bookings, travel forum, photos.

» **Away.com** (www.away.com) Boundless ideas for outdoor and urban adventure travel across the 50 states.

» **Festivals.com** (www.festivals.com) Find America's best celebrations; live-music, food, drink and dance.

» **New York Times Travel** (<http://travel.nytimes.com>) Travel news, practical advice and engaging features.

» **Roadside America** (www.roadsideamerica.com) For all things weird and wacky.

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	US\$1.03
Canada	C\$1	US\$0.98
Europe	€1	US\$1.37
Japan	¥100	US\$1.29
New Zealand	NZ\$1	US\$0.78
UK	UK£1	US\$1.60

For current exchange rates see www.xe.com

Important Numbers

To call any regular number, dial the area code, followed by the seven-digit number.

Emergency	☎911
USA Country Code	☎1
Directory Assistance	☎411
International directory assistance	☎00
International access code from the USA	☎011

Arriving

» **JFK, New York** (p112)

Airtrain to Jamaica Station, then LIRR to Penn Station: \$12-14
Taxi to Manhattan: \$45, plus toll and tip

» **Los Angeles International (LAX)** (p910)

LAX Flyaway Bus to Union Station: \$7
Door-to-door Prime Time & Supershuttle: \$16-28
Taxi to downtown: \$47

» **Miami International** (p459)

Airport Flyer Express Bus to Lincoln Rd & Washington Ave, South Beach: \$2.35
Taxi to Miami Beach: \$32

Time Zones in the USA

There are four time zones in the continental US:

EST Eastern (which is GMT – 5 hours): NYC, New England and Atlanta

CST Central (GMT – 6 hours): Chicago, New Orleans and Houston

MST Mountain (GMT – 7 hours): Denver, Santa Fe, Phoenix

PST Pacific (GMT – 8 hours): Seattle, San Francisco, Las Vegas

Most of Alaska is one hour behind Pacific time (GMT – 9), while Hawaii is two hours behind Pacific time.

So if it's 9pm in New York, it's 8pm in Chicago, 7pm in Denver, 6pm in Los Angeles, 4pm in Anchorage and 3pm in Honolulu.

Daylight Savings Time pushes the clocks ahead an hour and runs from the second Sunday in March to the first Sunday in November. A few places (like Hawaii and Arizona) don't observe daylight savings time.

what's new

Food Truck City

1 No longer the domain of hot dogs and soggy pretzels, food trucks are taking America by storm. You'll find incredibly diverse gourmet fare – dumplings, free-range herb-roasted chicken, lobster rolls, thin-crust pizzas, banh mi, BBQ, Colombian arepas, creme brulee and much much more. Find the best variety of trucks in NYC, LA, San Francisco, Austin and Portland. You can track down the action on twitter.

The High Line

2 NYC's much loved new greenway, the Highline (p73), has opened stage two, meaning you can now walk for almost a mile peacefully above the traffic following the former railroad tracks.

Art-loving Boston

3 Boston's Museum of Fine Arts (p171) opened a spectacular new multimillion-dollar Art of the Americas wing with over 50 galleries of American art, covering everything from pre-Columbian to contemporary American works.

Bike-Friendly Nation

4 Cities across the country have added adding hundreds of miles of bike lanes. Boston and DC even have bike-sharing programs, making it easy to go for a pedal.

For this new edition of USA, our authors have hunted down the fresh, the transformed, the hot and the happening. These are some of our favorites. For up-to-the-minute recommendations, see lonelyplanet.com/usa.

Napa is Now

5 Downtown Napa (p975) is popping, with enticing new restaurants and the now fully functioning Oxbow Market, with artisanal bakers, cheesemongers, and yet more sustainable restaurants.

A Moveable Feast

6 Denver's latest trend is its underground dining, held in random locations like plane hangars, fields and warehouses with top chefs and theme menus (see www.hushdenver.com).

Wizards and Such

7 In Florida, Universal Orlando (p489) opened the Wizarding World of Harry Potter in 2010, to great acclaim. It's currently the hottest theme park experience of the moment.

Hello, Dali

8 Also in Florida, the spectacular Salvador Dali Museum (p485) opened the doors of its theatrical new home, complete with geodesic atrium, in the waterfront town of St Petersburg.

Destination Dining

9 At Chicago's Next (p526), chef Grant Achatz chooses a place and time period, say Paris 1906, and serves a multi-course meal of that era. Every three months he changes everything.

Greening NYC

10 NYC is all about parks and green living these days, with new waterfront parks in Brooklyn (near the Brooklyn Bridge) and all along Manhattan's West Side.

if you like...



Beaches

Coastlines on two oceans and the Gulf of Mexico (not to mention those tropical Hawaiian islands) make for some tough choices for beach-lovers, from the rugged and wild shores of Maine to the surf-loving beauties of Southern California.

Point Reyes National Seashore

The water is cold but the scenery is magical along this 110-mile stretch of untamed coastline in Northern California (p973).

South Beach Famous the world over, South Beach is less about wave frolicking than taking in the passing people parade crossing Miami's favorite playground (p447).

Cape Cod National Seashore

Massive sand dunes, picturesque lighthouses and cool forests invite endless exploring on the Massachusetts cape (p190).

Montauk Past Fire Island and the Hamptons, at the eastern tip of Long Island lies windswept Montauk, with pretty shoreline, beach camping and an 18th-century (still functioning) lighthouse (p115).

Santa Monica This LA beauty captivates with its two-pack of beach fun and urban allure. Hit the shore, then go celeb-spotting at edgy art galleries and high-end bistros (p897).

Theme Parks

America's theme parks come in many varieties – from old-fashioned cotton candy and rollercoaster fun to multiday immersions in pure Peter-Pan-style make-believe. Some parks are impressive enough to plan a whole itinerary around.

Disney With one on either coast, Disney makes things easy when you're ready to delve into this enchanting fairy-tale world. (p493) and (p913).

Dollyworld A paean to the much-loved country singer Dolly Parton, with Appalachian-themed rides and attractions in the hills of Tennessee (p370).

Legoland Everyone's favorite building block gets its due in this creative hands-on park for the younger set outside of San Diego (p927).

Cedar Park The Valhalla of roller coasters is this massive theme park near Sandusky, Ohio. Masochists line up for the Top Thrill Dragster, one of the world's highest and fastest roller coasters (p547).

Universal Studios Florida

You'll need a few days to exhaust this massive complex, with action-filled theme parks and a water park, with something for all ages (p489).

Wine

The American wine industry has grown in leaps and bounds in recent years, becoming the world's fourth-largest producer along the way. Visiting wineries isn't just about tasting first-rate drops, but drinking in the pretty countryside and sampling the enticing farmstands and delectable bistros that often sprout alongside vineyards.

Napa Home to over 230 vineyards, Napa is synonymous with world-class winemaking. You'll find superb varietals, gourmet bites and beautiful scenery in which to enjoy them (p975).

Willamette Valley Outside of Portland, Oregon, this fertile region produces some of the tastiest pinot noirs on the planet (p1046).

Finger Lakes Wine Trail Upstate New York is a prime growing wine region (particularly for ice wine). After a few quaffs, you can walk it off at the lovely state parks in the area (p118).

Virginia Wine Country This up-and-coming wine district makes for some great vineyard rambles among countryside packed with history – you can even sample the wines grown on Thomas Jefferson's old estate (p307).



» National Museum of Natural History (p253), Washington, DC

Great Food

The classic American dining experience: making a mess at a Maine lobster shack, plowing through BBQ in Texas Hill Country, feasting at world-famous restaurants in New York and California and finding farm-to-table locavore-loving spots all across the country. It's all this and much more.

New York City Whether you crave steak frites, linguini con vongole, sushi, chicken tikka masala or gourmet hot dogs, globe-trotting Gotham has you covered (p97).

Chicago No 'Second City' when it comes to dining, Chicago earns rave reviews for its fantastic culinary scene, with great Greek, Thai and molecular gastronomy, famously deep-dish pizzas and much more (p523).

San Francisco A bewildering array of temptations await food-minded diners: real-deal taquerias and trattorias, world-class Vietnamese, magnificent farmers markets and critically acclaimed chefs firing up the best of California cuisine (p964).

Hill Country Texas smokes them all – at least when it comes to barbecue meats. Carnivores shouldn't miss the legendary capital of mouth-watering brisket (p664).

Hiking

The stage is set: soaring mountains, mist-covered rainforests, red-rock canyons and craggy cliff tops overlooking wild, wind-swept seas. These are just a few places where you can hike the great American wilderness.

Appalachian Trail Even if you chose not to walk all 2178 miles of this mother-of-all hiking trails, the AT is well worth a visit – 14 different states provide access (p44).

Marin County Across the Golden Gate Bridge from SF, in one day you can hike amid towering redwoods at Muir Woods then head to the nearby headlands for an unforgettably scenic walk overlooking the Pacific (p972).

North Cascades Glaciers, jagged peaks and alpine lakes are all part of the scenery at this wild and remote wilderness with some superb hiking (p1029).

Acadia National Park Maine's coastal beauty reaches high art on the hiking trails coursing through and over this dramatic park with its sea cliffs, forests, boulder-strewn peaks and rich wildlife (p239).

Museums & Galleries

Visiting the local museum can mean gazing at world-class collections (if you happen to be standing in New York's Upper East Side) or contemplating brilliant folk art (if you find yourself in Lucas, Kansas), while art galleries serve up a mix of the classic, the avant-garde and the downright indescribable (not to mention free wine at openings).

New York City Spend a few weeks ploughing through the city's museums and galleries and you'll barely scratch the surface. Come again a few weeks later and you'll see entirely new collections – that's the beauty (and despair!) of the NYC art scene (p63).

Washington, DC The capital has treasured halls dedicated to outer space, history and art (western, eastern, African, Native American) – plus woolly mammoths; and they're all free (p249).

Art Basel Art lovers descend upon Miami each year to take in edgy exhibitions, music and copious amounts of alcohol at this massive revelry-loving art fair (p455).

If you like... outdoor music

Red Rocks Park has a 9000-seat amphitheater dramatically set between 400ft-high red sandstone rocks. The acoustics are phenomenal, which is why many artists record live albums here (p711).



Off-beat America

When you tire of traipsing through museums and ticking off well-known sights (perhaps because some guidebook suggested you shouldn't miss it), unbuckle your safety belt and throw yourself into the strange world of American kitsch and nonesuch. Really, you won't want to miss it.

Foamhenge A magnificent homage to Styrofoam, this is Stonehenge redux, done to scale and appropriately tranquil around sunset – there's even a resident wizard (also made of Styrofoam) watching over the mystifying proceedings (p312).

Emma Crawford Coffin Races Paint your coffin, add wheels and join the races at this spirited free-for-all held just before Halloween in Colorado Springs (p717).

NashTrash Tours Nashville's tall-haired 'Jugg Sisters' take visitors on a deliciously tacky journey through Nashville's spicier side (p363).

Spam Museum What's not to love about Spam? The tinned meat has fed armies, inspired poets and even been adopted into the culinary family in some parts (ahem, Hawaii). Pay your respects at the tiny altar of Spam (p593).

Architecture

Whether you're a devotee of Frank Lloyd Wright or simply enjoy gazing at beautifully designed buildings, the US has some aesthetic head-turners. With the rapidly changing nature of American cities, you can come back again next year, and see a completely different architectural landscape.

Chicago If you think New York is tall, try Chicago, birthplace of the skyscraper and home of the nation's tallest building. To see works by all the 20th-century greats, sign up for a tour given by the Chicago Architectural Foundation (p505).

Fallingwater A few hours from Pittsburgh, this 1939 Frank Lloyd Wright masterpiece seamlessly blends into the forested landscape and the waterfall over which the house is built (p161).

New York City Despite the relentless buzz on the ground, there's as much happening overhead as there is on the streets. Much photographed classics include the art-deco Chrysler Building, the spiraling Guggenheim and the majestic Brooklyn Bridge (p63).

Miami Miami's art-deco district is a Technicolor dream come to life – and the largest collection of Deco buildings found anywhere in the world (p445).

Wildlife

Home to soaring eagles, masticating buffaloes and bellowing sea lions – not to mention coyotes, alligators and grizzlies – America has a treasure chest of wildlife. Among the hits: whale-watching off the coasts, moose sightings up north and great birdwatching all over (even Manhattan's Central Park).

Alligators The road signs will alert you: Florida is gator country; head to the Everglades for the chance to see these prehistoric creatures in their swampy homeland (p463).

Grizzlies The mighty Grizzly lives out west and generally eats whatever he wants. Your best chance to see them in the wild is in Montana's Glacier National Park (p761).

Whales Pack your binoculars and head out to Washington state's San Juan Islands for a glimpse of breaching whales on their annual migration (p1027).

Elk In the pristine wilderness of Yellowstone, the noble elk is just one of many animal species you might see – along with bison, wolves, eagles and gulp, brown bears (p744).

If you like... mountain climbing

Sign up for a challenging five-day guided climb to the summit of 14,411ft Mt Rainier (p1031).

If you like... kayaking

Head to Alaska's Tracy Arm, a steep-sided fjord lined with icebergs that's an enchanting destination for an extended paddle (p1069).



Native American Culture

The continent's first peoples have a connection to the land and its animals, which stretches back many generations. To learn more about Native American culture, and to see historic sites and flourishing tribes, plan a trip through the southwest.

Washington, DC Appropriately, the capital holds the nation's finest museum dedicated to Native peoples. Multimedia exhibits provide an excellent introduction to the different customs, practices and spiritual beliefs of tribes from every corner of the Americas (p248)

Mesa Verde Carved into the mountains of Southern Colorado, this fascinating site was mysteriously abandoned by Ancestral Puebloan peoples (p740)

Pine Ridge Indian Reservation Visit the tragic site where Lakota men, women and children were massacred by US Cavalry in 1890, then visit nearby Wall, to learn more about the Lakota (p627)

Navajo Nation In Arizona, you can travel on Navajo land, visit spectacular scenery, stay in a sandstone guesthouse beautifully integrated into the environment and purchase crafts directly from the artisans (p829)

Historical Sights

The East Coast is where you'll find the original 13 colonies. To delve into the past, head south and west, where Spanish explorers and indigenous peoples, left their mark.

Philadelphia The nation's first capital is where the idea of America as an independent nation first coalesced. Excellent museums and multimedia exhibits, not to mention 300-year-old buildings help tell the story (p134).

Boston The ghosts of the past live on in the cobblestone streets and house museums of historic Boston. Visit Paul Revere's former home, walk the graveyard where 18th-century patriots lie buried and hear the creak of the decks aboard the 1797 USS Constitution (p167).

Williamsburg Be transported back to the 1700s in the preserved town of Williamsburg, the largest living history museum on the planet (p299).

Washington, DC Visit the theater where John Wilkes Booth shot America's favorite president, the steps of Lincoln Memorial where Martin Luther King Jr gave his famous 'I have a dream' speech and the Watergate Hotel, which destroyed Nixon's presidency (p248).

Beer & Microbreweries

In case you haven't heard, Americans don't drink much Budweiser anymore. Microbreweries have exploded in popularity, and you'll never be far from a finely crafted pint. Colorado, Washington and Oregon are particularly famed for their breweries.

Magic Hat Brewery Vermont, which has more microbreweries per capita than any other state in America, deserves special mention – and Magic Hat makes for a refreshing and entertaining beer outing (p220).

Mountain Sun Pub & Brewery Boulder's favorite microbrewery serves an array of excellent drafts, plus good food and regular music jams (p721).

Fullsteam In Durham, NC, Fullsteam is the first 'Southern brewery' of its kind, with sweet potato beer, kudzu beer and other unusual but surprisingly successful drops (p333).

Portland Valhalla for beer lovers, Portland has over 30 microbreweries within city limits including the famous McMenamin brothers and the Bridgeport, one of America's first brewpubs (p1042).



LOU JONES/LOVELY PLANET IMAGES ©

» Buskers, Santa Monica Pier (p897)

Geologic Wonders

The American landscape is littered with awe-inspiring sights, particularly out west. With red rock deserts, petrified forests, blasting geysers and one massive hole in the ground, you might feel like you've stepped onto another planet.

Grand Canyon Needing little introduction, the Grand Canyon is mesmerizing. It's a mile deep and 10 miles across and was carved over 6 million years. Take your time when you go (p823).

Yellowstone Massive geysers, rainbow-colored thermal pools and the supervolcano it all sits on – this 3472-sq-mile national park certainly puts on a dazzling show (p744).

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park Home to two active volcanoes, this park is the place to go for a look at lava deserts, smoldering craters and, with luck, the sight of molten lava rolling into the ocean (p1091).

Carlsbad Caverns Take a two-mile walk along a subterranean passage to arrive in the great room – a veritable underground cathedral concealed in this massive cave system (p881).

Live Music

Americans may not agree on a national soundtrack, but they do know where to catch a good live band – whether they're after Memphis blues, Appalachian bluegrass, New Orleans jazz, fist-pumping rock, country crooning, brassy funk, bouncing hip-hop, sultry salsa and much much more.

Austin Home to more than 200 venues and the country's biggest music fest, Austin proudly wears the music crown – with a stunning variety of talent playing on stages nightly (p661).

New Orleans The Big Easy has a soundtrack as intoxicating as the city itself – room-filling big-band jazz that slips easily into funk, plus blues, zydeco, Cajun and indie rock (p424).

Nashville Lots of country stars got their start singing on the bright stages of Nashville. But this river city is more than a one-trick pony with bluegrass, blues, folk and plenty of rough-and-tumble honky-tonk (p366).

Los Angeles LA is a magnet for aspiring stars and that means some seriously talented street performers. Of course, don't miss the legendary Sunset Strip clubs for A list artists (p907).

Sports

No matter when you visit, there will be something happening in the arena of sport – whether it's baseball, basketball, football, hockey or soccer. While big pro games are fun to attend, don't overlook minor leagues or college sporting events, which can be an equally good time.

Fenway Park Seeing the Red Sox play at venerated Fenway Park – the nation's oldest baseball park – is reason enough to come to Boston (p182).

New York Although most folks think New Yorkers go more for opera and champagne than ballparks and hotdogs, this city is mad for sport – with pro teams in hockey, soccer, basketball (two), football (two) and baseball (two) (p109).

Chicago The Windy City has a soft spot for its (five) pro sports teams – even if they're woefully bad like the Cubs, who have the worst record of any team, any sport. Don't miss the chance to see them play their hearts out at historic Wrigley Field (p529).

month by month

January

The New Year starts off with a shiver, as snowfall blankets large swaths of the country. Ski resorts kick into high gear, while sun-lovers seek refuge in warmer climes (especially Florida).

Mummers Parade

Philadelphia's biggest event is this brilliant parade (p144), where local clubs spend months creating costumes and mobile scenery in order to win top honors on New Year's Day. String bands and clowns add to the general good cheer at this long-running fest.

Chinese New Year

In late January or early February, you'll find colorful celebrations and feasting anywhere there's a Chinatown. NYC throws a festive parade, though San Francisco's is the best, with floats, firecrackers, bands and plenty of merriment.

Sundance Film Festival Film

The legendary Sundance Film Festival (www.sun

dance.org; p845) brings Hollywood stars, indie directors and avid filmgoers to Park City, UT, for a 10-day indie extravaganza in late January. Plan well in advance, as passes sell out fast.

February

Aside from mountain getaways, many Americans dread February with its long dark nights and frozen days. For foreign visitors, this can be the cheapest time to travel, with ultra-discount rates for flights and hotels.

Mardi Gras

Held in late February or early March, on the day before Ash Wednesday, Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) is the finale of Carnival. New Orleans' celebrations (p418) are legendary as colorful parades, masquerade balls, feasting and plenty of hedonism rule the day.

March

The first blossoms of spring arrive (at least in the south – the north still shivers in the chill). In

Top Events

- 1** **Mardi Gras**, February or March
- 2** **South by Southwest**, March
- 3** **National Cherry Blossom Festival**, March
- 4** **Chicago Blues Festival**, June
- 5** **Independence Day**, July

the mountains, it's still high season for skiing. Meanwhile, drunken spring breakers descend on Florida.

St Patricks Day

On the 17th, the patron saint of Ireland is honored with brass bands and ever-flowing pints of Guinness; huge parades occur in New York, Boston and Chicago (which goes all-out by dyeing the Chicago River green).

National Cherry Blossom Festival

The brilliant blooms of Japanese cherry blossoms around DC's Tidal Basin are celebrated with concerts, parades, taiko drumming, kite-flying and 90 other events during the five-week fest (p261). More than one million go each year, so don't forget to book ahead.

South by Southwest

Each year Austin, Texas, becomes ground zero for one of the biggest music fests (p657) in North America. Over 2000 performers play at nearly 100 venues. SXSW is also a major film festival and interactive fest – a plat-

form for ground-breaking ideas.

April

The weather is warming up, but April can still be unpredictable with chilly weather mixed with a few, teasingly warm days up north. Down south, it's a fine time to travel.



Jazz Fest

On the last weekend in April, New Orleans hosts the country's best jazz jam (p418), with top-notch acts (local resident Harry Connick Jr often headlines) and plenty of good cheer. In addition to world-class jazz, there's also great food and crafts.



Gathering of Nations

For an immersion in indigenous culture, head to Albuquerque for the Gathering of Nations (www.gatheringofnations.com; p860), the largest Native American pow-wow in the world. You'll find traditional dance, music, food, crafts and the crowning of Miss Indian World.

May

May is true spring and one of the loveliest times to travel, with blooming wildflowers and generally mild sunny weather. Summer crowds and high prices have yet to arrive.



Cinco de Mayo

Celebrate Mexico's victory over the French with salsa music and pitchers of margaritas across the country. Denver throws one

of the best Cinco de Mayos (p711), with music on three stages and dozens of food and craft stalls.

June

Summer is here. Americans spend more time at outdoor cafes and restaurants, and head to the shore or to national parks. School is out; vacationers fill the highways and resorts bringing higher prices.



Red Earth

Native American Cultural Festival

In early June, Oklahoma City becomes the epicenter of Native American culture, when indigenous artists, performers and craftmakers from all over North America light up the city. With over 100 tribes attending, it's an incredibly diverse affair. See p645.



Gay Pride

In some cities, gay pride celebrations last a week, but in San Francisco, it's a month-long party, where the last weekend in June sees giant parades (p961). You'll find other great pride events at major cities across the country.



Chicago Blues Festival

It's the globe's biggest free blues fest (www.chicago bluesfestival.us; p521), with three days of the music that made Chicago famous. More than 640,000 people unfurl blankets by the multiple stages that take over Grant Park in early June.



Mermaid Parade

In Brooklyn, Coney Island celebrates summer's steamy arrival with a kitsch-loving parade (p93). Skimpily attired but brilliantly imaginative mermaids and horn-blowing mermen march through Coney Island. Afterwards, everyone (at least those not afraid of NY Harbor Water) takes a dip in the ocean.



CMA Music Festival

Legions of Country music fans from every corner of the globe come to Nashville for the chance to hear a few of the nation's top singers (www.cmaworld.com; p363). More than 400 artists perform at stages on Riverfront Park and LP Field.



Telluride Bluegrass Festival

The banjo gets its due at this festive, boot-stomping music jam (www.planetbluegrass.com; p738) in Colorado mountain country. You'll find nonstop performances, excellent regional food stalls and great locally crafted microbrews. It's good all-comers entertainment and many folks even camp.

July

With summer in full swing, Americans break out the backyard barbecues or head for the beach. The prices are high and the crowds can be fierce, but it's one of the liveliest times to visit.

Independence Day

The nation celebrates its birthday with a bang as nearly every town and city stages a massive fireworks show. Quick to the draw, Chicago goes off on the 3rd. Washington, DC; New York, Philadelphia and Boston are all great spots.

Oregon Brewers Festival

The beer-loving city of Portland pulls out the stops and pours a heady array of handcrafted perfection (www.oregonbrewfest.com; p1039). Featuring 80 different beers from around the country, there are plenty of choices; and it's nicely set along the banks of the Willamette River.

Pageant of the Masters

This eight-week arts fest (www.LagunaFestivalofArts.org; p915) brings a touch of the surreal to Laguna Beach, CA. On stage, meticulously costumed actors create living pictures – imitations of famous works of art – which is accompanied by narration and an orchestra.

Newport Folk Festival

Newport, RI, a summer haunt of the well-heeled, hosts a world-class music fest (www.newportfolkfest.com; p205) in late July. Top folk artists from every corner of America and beyond take to the stage at this fun, all-welcoming event.

August

Expect blasting heat in August, with temperatures and



(above) Thanksgiving Day Parade, New York City.
(below) Mardi Gras, New Orleans.



humidity less bearable the further south you go. You'll find people-packed beaches, high prices and empty cities on weekends, when residents escape to the nearest waterfront.



Lollapalooza

Once upon a time, this mondo rock fest (www.lollapalooza.com; p521) traveled city to city; now its permanent home is in Chicago. It's a raucous event, with 130 bands – including many A-listers – spilling off eight stages in Grant Park the first Friday-to-Sunday in August.



Iowa State Fair

If you've never been to a state fair, now's your chance (www.iowastatefair.org; p617). You'll find country crooning, wondrous carvings (in butter), livestock shows, sprawling food stalls and a down-home good time in America's heartland. Runs over 10 days in mid August.

September

With the end of summer, cooler days arrive, making for pleasant outings nationwide. The kids are back in school, and concert halls, gallery spaces and performing arts venues kick off a new season.



Burning Man Festival

Over one week, some 50,000 revelers, artists and assorted free spirits descend on Nevada's Black Rock Desert to create a temporary metropolis of art installations, theme camps and environmental curiosities. It culminates in the burning

of a giant stick figure (www.burningman.com; p805).



New York Film Festival

Just one of many big film fests (www.filmlinc.com; p93) in NYC (Tribeca Film Fest in late April is another), this one features world premiers from across the globe, plus Q&As with indie- and prominent directors alike. Lincoln Center plays host.

October

Temperatures are falling, as autumn brings fiery colors to northern climes. It's high season where the leaves are most brilliant (New England); elsewhere expect lower prices and fewer crowds.



Halloween

It's not just for kids; adults celebrate Halloween at masquerade parties. In NYC, you can don a costume and join the Halloween parade up Sixth Avenue. West Hollywood in Los Angeles is the places to see California's most outrageous outfits.



Fantasy Fest

Key West's answer to Mardi Gras brings more than 100,000 revelers to the subtropical enclave on the week leading up to Halloween. Expect parades, colorful floats, costume parties, the selecting of a conch king and queen and plenty of alcohol-fueled merriment. (www.fantasyfest.net; p472).

November

No matter where you go, this is generally low season, with cold winds

discouraging visitors and lower prices (although airfares skyrocket around Thanksgiving). There's much happening culturally in the city.



Thanksgiving

On the fourth Thursday of November, Americans gather with family and friends over day-long feasts – roast turkey, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, wine, pumpkin pie and loads of other dishes. New York City hosts a huge parade, and there's pro football on TV.

December

Winter arrives as ski season kicks off in the Rockies (out east conditions aren't usually ideal until January). Aside from winter sports, December means heading inside and curling up by the fire.



Art Basel

This massive arts fest (www.artbaselmiami-beach.com; p455) is four days of cutting-edge art, film, architecture and design. More than 250 major galleries from across the globe come to the event, with works by some 2000 artists; plus much hobnobbing with a glitterati crowd in Miami Beach.



New Year's Eve

Americans are of two minds when it comes to ringing in the New Year. Some join festive crowds to celebrate; others plot a get-away to escape the mayhem. Whichever you choose, plan well in advance. Expect high prices (especially in NYC).

itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travelers.



Two to Three Weeks East Coasting

The great dynamo of art, fashion and culture, **New York City** is America at her most urbane. Spend four days exploring the metropolis, visiting memorable people-watching hoods such as the West and East Villages, the Lower East Side, Soho, Nolita and the Upper West Side, with a museum hop down the Upper East Side. Have a ramble in Central Park, stroll the High Line and take a detour to Brooklyn. After big-city culture, catch your breath at the pretty beaches and enticing charms of the **Hamptons** on Long Island. Back in NYC, catch the train to **Boston**, for two days visiting historic sights, dining in the North End and pub-hopping in Cambridge. Strike out for **Cape Cod**, with its idyllic dunes, forests and pretty shores. Leave time for **Provincetown**, the Cape's liveliest settlement. Back in Boston, hire a car and take a three-day jaunt taking in New England's back roads, covered bridges, picturesque towns and beautiful scenery, staying at heritage B&Bs en route. Highlights include **Salem** and **Concord** in Massachusetts; **Bennington**, Vermont; and **Portsmouth**, New Hampshire. If time allows, head all the way up to **Maine** for lobster feasts amid beautifully rugged coastline.



Three Weeks Northern Expedition

For a different take on the transcontinental journey, plan a route through the north. From **New York City**, head west toward **Harrisburg** via **Philadelphia**, but stop first to explore the idyllic backroads of Pennsylvania Dutch Country. Next is **Pittsburgh**, a surprising town of picturesque bridges and green spaces, cutting-edge museums and lively neighborhoods. Enter Ohio by interstate, but quickly step back in time on a drive through old-fashioned Amish Country. Big-hearted **Chicago** – aka Second City, the Windy City – is the Midwest’s greatest city. Stroll or bike the lakefront, marvel at famous artwork and grand architecture, and take a culinary journey amid Chicago’s celebrated restaurant scene. Head north to **Madison**, a youthful green-loving university town.

Detour north to the land of 10,000 lakes (aka Minnesota) for a stop in friendly, arty **Minneapolis**, followed by a visit to its quieter historic twin, **St Paul**, across the river.

Return to I-90 and activate cruise control, admiring the corn (and the **Corn Palace**) and the flat, flat South Dakota plains. Hit the brakes for the **Badlands National Park** and plunge into the Wild West. In the Black Hills, contemplate the nation’s complex history at the massive monuments of **Mt Rushmore** and **Crazy Horse**. Watch mythic gunfights in **Deadwood** and learn about Native American culture at **Pine Ridge Indian Reservation**.

Halfway across Wyoming, cruise into **Cody** to catch a summer rodeo. Then take in the wonders of **Yellowstone National Park**, home to geysers, alpine lakes and waterfalls, with magnificent wildlife watching. Next, hike past jewel-like lakes and soaring peaks in **Grand Teton National Park**. Through rural Montana, the outdoorsy towns of **Bozeman** and **Missoula** make fun stops. Hit the boutique- and cafe scene, enjoy a fabulous meal, then head off again into the alpine beauty of **Glacier National Park** followed by a trek through the **Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex**.

After a few days out in the wild, surprising **Spokane** is a great place to recharge, with a pleasant riverfront and historic district sprinkled with enticing eating and drinking spots. For more cosmopolitan flavor, keep heading west to **Seattle**, a forward-thinking, eco-minded city with cafe culture, abundant nightlife and speedy island escapes on Puget Sound. If you still have time, the region has some great places to explore, including **Mt Rainier**, **Olympic National Park**, and the **San Juan Islands**.



- » (above) Vineyard, Napa Valley (p975)
- » (left) General store in a small Texan town



One Month Coast to Coast

➤ The Great American road trip: It's been mythologized hundreds of ways. Now live the dream, driving the length and breadth of the USA. Start in **New York City** (but hire a car in cheaper New Jersey) and hit the road. First stop: **Philadelphia**, a historic city with a burgeoning food, art and music scene. Continue on to **Washington, DC**. The nation's capital has a dizzying array of sights, plus great dining (crab feasts, global fare) and revelry, after the museums close. Continue south through Virginia, taking a detour to visit the fantastic historic settlement of colonial **Williamsburg**. Stick to the coast as you drive south, visiting **Cape Hatteras** with its pristine dunes, marshes and woodlands. Catch the ferry to remote **Ocracoke Island** where the wild ponies run. Further down, take in the antebellum allure of **Charleston** and **Savannah**, two of the south's most captivating destinations. Next it's on to jazz-loving **New Orleans**, with a soundtrack of smokin' hot funk brass bands, and succulent Cajun and Creole food.

The big open skies of Texas are next. Hit the beach at **Galveston Island** outside **Houston**. Follow the Mission Trail and stroll the tree-lined riverwalk in thriving **San Antonio**, then revel in the great music and drinking scene in **Austin**. Afterwards, eat your way through barbecue-loving Hill Country, then walk it off in jaw-dropping **Big Bend National Park**. Head north to New Mexico, following the Turquoise Trail up to artsy **Santa Fe** and far-out **Taos**. Roll west to red-rock **Sedona**, one of Arizona's loveliest and – to Native American tribes – most sacred places. The awe-inspiring **Grand Canyon** is next. Stay in the area to maximize time near this great wonder. Try your luck amid the bright lights of (luck be a lady tonight?) **Las Vegas**, then skirt the vast desert wilderness of **Mojave National Preserve** on your ride into California. From there, it's onto the lush towering forests of majestic **Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks** in the Sierra Nevada, followed by hiking and wildlife watching in **Yosemite**, California's most revered national park. The last stop is in hilly **San Francisco**, an enchanting city spread between ocean and bay with beautiful vistas, world-class dining and bohemian-loving nightlife. If there's time, tack on a grand finale drinking in the vineyards and gourmet produce of **Napa Valley**.



Three Weeks The Left Coast

Geographically and politically, the West Coast couldn't be further from Washington, DC. This is a trip for those who lean left, and who like their nature ancient and wild, and their horizons and beaches wide-open.

Start in **Seattle**, taking in sprawling food markets, microbreweries and waterfront scenery. Heading south, visit **Mt Rainier National Park**, with superb hiking and relaxing inns nestled beneath the snow-covered peak. Continue on to the cutting-edge city of **Portland**, known for its sprawling parks, environmentally minded residents and progressive urbanism – plus food carts, coffeehouse culture and great nightlife to boot. After your culture fix, jump into nature's bounty by driving east along the Columbia River Gorge. Then turn south and make for **Mt Hood** for winter skiing and summer hiking. Further adventures await in the **Sisters**, a trio of 10,000ft peaks, and the striking blue waters of **Crater Lake**. Catch a Shakespearian play in sunny **Ashland**, then trade the mountains for the foggy coast. Enter California via Hwy 199 and take a stroll through the magnificent old-growth forests in **Redwood National & State Parks**.

Hug the coast as it meanders south through funky **Arcata** and seaside **Eureka**, lose yourself on the **Lost Coast**, then catch Hwy 1 through quaint **Mendocino** whose scenic headlands and rugged shoreline make for a requisite wander.

Make your way inland to the **Napa & Sonoma Valleys** for a wash-up and wine tasting amid rolling vineyards. Then continue south to the romantically hilly, ever free-spirited **San Francisco**.

Return to scenic Hwy 1 through surf-loving **Santa Cruz**, stately bayfront **Monterey** and beatnik-flavored **Big Sur**, where you can get scruffy again. In no time you'll reach the surreal **Hearst Castle** and laid-back, collegiate **San Luis Obispo**.

Roll into Mediterranean-esque **Santa Barbara**, then hop aboard a ferry in Ventura to the wildlife-rich **Channel Islands**. The pull from **Los Angeles** is strong. Go ahead, indulge your fantasies of **Hollywood** then cruise through LA's palm-lined neighborhoods – from Santa Monica to Los Feliz, Beverly Hills to Long Beach. After wracking up a few sins in the city of Angels, move on down to picture-perfect **San Diego**, visiting the historic Mission, the world-famous zoo, and of course those enticing beaches.



Road Trips & Scenic Drives

Best Experiences

Seeing dazzling coastal scenery on the Pacific Coast Highway.

Discovering charming, rarely visited destinations on Route 66.

Watching dramatic sunsets over the Appalachian Mountains on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Listening to Memphis blues at a jumping music joint off the Great River Road.

Best Time

April to October

Key Starting Points

Chicago or Los Angeles – Route 66

Seattle or San Diego – Pacific Coast Highway

Waynesboro, VA or Cherokee, NC – Blue Ridge Parkway

Itasca State Park, MN or Venice, LA – Great River Road

Major Sights

Grand Canyon – Route 66

Point Reyes National Seashore – Pacific Coast Highway

Peaks of Otter – Blue Ridge Parkway

Shawnee National Park – Great River Road

Fill up the gas tank and buckle up. Everyone knows road-tripping is the ultimate way to see America. You can drive up, down, across, around or straight through every state on the continental US. Revel in yesteryear along Route 66, marvel at spectacular sunsets on the Pacific Coast Highway, or carve your own path through the Appalachian Mountains or along the mighty Mississippi. The great American experience is about so many things – bluegrass and beaches, Cajun food and farmers markets, rolling vineyards and redwood forests, and big cities and small towns in which to retreat after days well spent beneath those wide open skies. And there's no better way to get a taste for America in all its complexity and contradiction than setting off on the classic four-wheeled journey.

For more road-tripping ideas, turn to the Itineraries chapter (p30).

Route 66

For a classic American road trip, nothing beats good ol' Route 66. Nicknamed the nation's 'Mother Road' by novelist John Steinbeck, this string of small-town main streets and country byways first connected big-shouldered Chicago with the waving palm trees of Los Angeles in 1926.

Why Go?

Whether you seek to explore retro Americana or simply want to experience big horizons and captivating scenery far from the maddening crowd, Route 66 will take you there. The winding journey passes some of the USA's greatest outdoor attractions – not just the Grand Canyon, but also the Mississippi River, Arizona's Painted Desert and Petrified Forest National Park, and, at road's end, the Pacific beaches of sun-kissed Southern California.

Other highlights along the way: old-fashioned museums stocked with strange and wondrous objects from the past, Norman Rockwell-ish soda fountains, classic mom-and-pop diners, working gas stations that seem to have fallen right out of an old James Dean film clip and ghost towns (or soon-to-be ghost towns) hunkering on the edge of the desert.

Culturally speaking, Route 66 can be an eye-opener. Discard your preconceptions of small-town American life and unearth the joys of what bicoastal types dismissively term 'flyover' states. Mingle with farmers in Illinois and country-and-western stars in Missouri. Hear the legends of cowboys and Indians in Oklahoma. Visit Native American tribal nations and contemporary pueblos across the Southwest, all the while discovering the traditions of the USA's indigenous peoples. Then follow the trails of miners and desperados deep into the Old West.

When to Go

The best time to travel Route 66 is May to September, when the weather is warm and you can take advantage open-air activities. Take caution if you travel in the height of summer (July and August) as the heat can be unbearable – particularly in desert areas. Avoid traveling in the winter (December to March), when snow can lead to perilous driving conditions or outright road closures.

The Route

The journey starts in Chicago, just west of Michigan Ave and runs for some 2400 miles across eight states before terminating in Los Angeles near the Santa Monica pier. The road remains a never-ending work in progress as old sections get resurrected or disappear owing to the rerouting of other major roads.

For a run-down of some of the highlights and attractions along the way, see the following state sections, listed from east to west:

Illinois (p534)

Missouri (p610)

Kansas (p640)

Oklahoma (p647)

Texas (p694)

Arizona (p831)

History of the Mother Road

Route 66 didn't really hit its stride until the Great Depression, when migrant farm-

BEFORE YOU HIT THE ROAD

A few things to remember to ensure your road trip is as happy-go-lucky as possible:

- » Join an automobile club (p1173) that provides members with 24-hour emergency roadside assistance and discounts on lodging and attractions; some international clubs have reciprocal agreements with US automobile associations, so check first and bring your member card from home.
- » Check the spare tire, tool kit (eg jack, jumper cables, ice scraper, tire pressure gauge) and emergency equipment (eg flashers) in your car; if you're renting a vehicle and these essential safety items are not provided, consider buying them.
- » Bring good maps (p1159), especially if you're touring off-road or away from highways; don't rely on a GPS unit – they can malfunction, and in remote areas such as deep canyons or thick forests they may not even work.
- » Always carry your driver's license (p1173) and proof of insurance (p1173).
- » If you're an international traveler, review the USA's road rules (p1176) and common road hazards (p1176).
- » Fill up the tank often, because gas stations can be few and far between on the USA's scenic byways.



ers followed it as they fled the Dust Bowl across the Great Plains. Later, during the post-WWII baby boom, newfound prosperity encouraged many Americans to hit the road and ‘get their kicks’ on Route 66.

Almost as soon as it came of age, however, Route 66 began to lose steam. The shiny blacktop of an ambitious new interstate system started systematically paving over Route 66, bypassing its mom-and-pop diners, drugstore soda fountains and once-stylish motor courts. Railway towns were forgotten and way stations for travelers became dusty. Even entire towns began to disappear.

By the time Route 66 was officially decommissioned in 1984, preservation associations of Mother Road fans had sprung up. Today you can still get your kicks on Route 66, following gravel frontage roads and blue-line highways across the belly of America. It’s like a time warp – connecting places where the 1950s seem to have stopped just yesterday.

Getting Lost

You need to be an amateur sleuth to follow Route 66 these days. Historical realignments of the route, dead-ends in farm fields

and tumbleweed-filled desert patches, and rough, rutted driving conditions are par for the course. Remember that getting lost every now and then is inevitable. But never mind, since what the road offers is so valuable: a leap back through time to see what America once was, and still sometimes is. Nostalgia never tasted so sweet.

Resources

Before you hit the road, arm yourself with useful maps and key insider tips to help you make the most of your trip.

Historic Route 66 (www.historic66.com)

Excellent website, with turn-by-turn directions for each state.

Here It Is: Route 66 Maps with directions (traveling both east-to-west and west-to-east) that you’ll definitely want to take along for the ride.

Route 66: EZ66 Guide for Travelers by Jerry McClanahan, earns high marks for its glossy easy-to-follow maps.

Route 66: The Mother Road by Michael Wallis, is a fascinating look at the history and lore of the great road with old photographs bringing it all to life.

OTHER GREAT ROAD TRIPS

ROUTE	STATE(S)	START/END
Rte 28	NY	Stony Hollow/Arkville
Old Kings Hwy	MA	Sagamore/Provincetown
Natchez Trace Hwy	AL/MS/TN	Nashville/Natchez
Beartooth Hwy	MT	Red Lodge/Yellowstone
Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway	CO	Ouray/Lake City
Maui's Road to Hana	HI	Paia/Hana
Hwy 13	WI	Bayfield/Superior
Hwy 61	IA	Duluth/Canadian Border
Hwy 2	NE	I-80/Alliance
El Camino Real	TX	Lajitas/Presidio
Sawtooth Scenic Byway	ID	Ketchum/Stanley
Turquoise Trail	NM	Albuquerque/Santa Fe
US 50	NV	Fernley/Baker
Historic Columbia River Hwy	OR	Portland/Portland
Monument Valley	UT	Monument Valley
VT 100	VT	Stamford/Newport
Kancamagus Hwy	VT	Conway/Lincoln

Pacific Coast Highway

The classic west coast journey through California, Oregon and Washington takes in cosmopolitan cities, surf towns and charming coastal enclaves ripe for exploration. For many travelers, the real appeal of the Pacific Coast Highway is the magnificent scenery – wild and remote beaches, cliff-top views overlooking crashing waves, rolling hills and lush forests (redwoods, eucalyptus trees) – that sometimes lies just beyond a city's outskirts.

Why Go?

The Pacific Coast Highway is an epic adventure for water babies, surfers, kayakers, scuba divers and every other kind of outdoor enthusiast, including landlubbers. Or if you're a more laid-back road-tripper, who just dreams of cruising alongside the ocean in a cherry-red convertible, drifting from

sunrise to sunset, the insanely scenic PCH can deliver that, too.

The PCH is a road trip for lovers, nomadic rambblers, bohemians, beatniks and curiosity seekers keen to search out every nook and cranny of forgotten beachside hamlets and pastoral farm towns along the way.

The Route

Technically 'the PCH' is one of several coastal highways, including Hwy 101, stretching nearly 2000 miles from Tijuana, Mexico to British Columbia, Canada. The route connects the dots between some of the West Coast's most striking cities, starting from surf-style San Diego, through hedonistic Los Angeles and offbeat San Francisco in California, then moving north to equally alternative-minded and arty Seattle, Washington.

When the urban streets start to make you feel claustrophobic, just head out back on the open road and hit the coast again, heading north or south. The direction doesn't

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	BEST TIME	MORE INFO
Catskills mountains, lakes, rivers, hiking, leaf-peeping, tubing	May-Sep	p119
historic districts, period homes, coastal scenery	Apr-Oct	p189
'Old South' history, archaeological sites, scenic waterways, biking, camping, hiking	Mar-Nov	p368
wildflowers, mountains, alpine scenery, camping	Jun-Sep	p757
Mountains, views, valleys, abandoned mines	Jun-Sep	p736
jungle waterfalls, beaches, hiking, swimming, surfing	year-round	p1095
lakeside beaches, forests, farmlands, nature walks	May-Sep	p581
state parks, waterfalls, quaint towns, hiking	May-Sep	p595
grass-covered sand-dunes, open vistas	May-Sep	p637
vast desert & mountain landscapes, hot springs, hiking, horseback riding	Feb-Apr & Oct-Nov	p696
jagged mountains, verdant forests, backpacking, hiking, wildlife watching	May-Sep	p767
mining towns, quirky museums & folk art, cycling, hiking	Mar-May & Sep-Nov	p859
'Loneliest Road in America', epic wilderness, biking, hiking, spelunking	May-Sep	p807
scenery, waterfalls, wildflowers, cycling, hiking	Apr-Sep	p1049
iconic buttes, movie-set locations; 4WD tours, horseback riding	year-round	p830
rolling pastures, green mountains, hiking, skiing	Jun-Sep	p218
craggy mountains, streams & waterfalls, camping, hiking, swimming	May-Sep	p225

really matter – the views and hidden places you find along the way make for rewarding exploring.

You could bypass metro areas and just stick to the places in between, like the almost too-perfect beaches of California's Orange County ('the OC') and Santa Barbara (the 'American Riviera'); wacky Santa Cruz, a university town and surfers' paradise; red-wood forests along the Big Sur coast and north of Mendocino; the sand dunes, sea-side resorts and fishing villages of coastal Oregon; and finally, the wild lands of Washington's Olympic Peninsula, with its primeval rain forest, and bucolic San Juan Islands, served by coastal ferries.

When to Go

There's no very bad time of year to drive the PCH, although northern climes will be rainier and snowier during winter. Peak travel season is June through August, which isn't always the best time to see the road – as many stretches

of the coast are socked in by fog during early summer (locals call it 'June Gloom'). The shoulder seasons before Memorial Day (ie April and May) and after Labor Day (ie September and October) can be ideal, with sunny days, crisply cool nights and fewer crowds.

Blue Ridge Parkway

Snaking for some 469 miles through the southern Appalachian Mountains, the Blue Ridge Parkway is the land of great hiking and wildlife watching, old-fashioned music and captivating mountainous scenery – all of which make for a memorable and easily accessible road trip.

Construction on the parkway began in 1935 under President Franklin D Roosevelt and it was one of the great New Deal projects that helped put people back to work. It was a huge effort that took over 52 years to complete, with the final section laid in 1987.

ROADSIDE ODDITIES: ROUTE 66

Kitschy, time-warped and just plain weird roadside attractions? Route 66 has got 'em in spades. Here are a few beloved Mother Road landmarks to make your own scavenger hunt:

- » Gemini Giant (p534) in Illinois
- » Pacific's Black Madonna Shrine and Red Oak II outside Carthage in Missouri
- » Blue Whale (p647) in Oklahoma
- » Devil's Rope Museum (p694), Cadillac Ranch and Bug Ranch (p659) in Texas
- » Seligman's Snow Cap Drive-In and Holbrook's WigWam Motel and Meteor Crater in Arizona (p831)
- » Roy's Motel & Cafe in Amboy, in the middle of California's Mojave Desert

Why Go?

Watch the sunset over this wilderness of forest and mountain, tranquil streams and blissful silence – and you might feel like you've gone back a few centuries. Although it skirts dozens of towns and a few metropolitan areas, the Blue Ridge Parkway feels far removed from modern-day America. Here, rustic log cabins with rocking chairs on the front porch still dot the rolling hillsides, while signs for folk-art shops and live bluegrass music joints entice travelers onto side roads. History seems to permeate the air of these rolling backwoods – once home to Cherokee tribal people and later early colonial homesteads and Civil War battlefields.

There are great places to sleep and eat. Early-20th-century mountain and lake-side resorts still welcome families like old friends, while log-cabin diners dish up heaping piles of buckwheat pancakes with blackberry preserves and a side of country ham.

When you need to work off all that good Southern cooking, over 100 hiking trails can be accessed along the Blue Ridge Parkway, from gentle nature walks and easily summited peaks to rough-and-ready tramps along the legendary Appalachian Trail (p44). Or clamber on a horse and ride off into the refreshingly shady forests. Then go canoeing, kayaking or inner tubing along rushing rivers, or dangle a fishing line over the side of a rowboat on petite lakes. And who says you even have to drive? The parkway makes an epic trip for long-distance cyclists, too.

The Route

This rolling, scenic byway still connects Virginia's Shenandoah National Park with Great Smoky Mountains National Park,

straddling the North Carolina-Tennessee border. Towns include Boone and Asheville in North Carolina; and Galax and Roanoke in Virginia, with Charlottesville, VA, also within a short drive of the park. Cities within range of the parkway are Washington, DC (140 miles) and Richmond, VA (95 miles).

When to Go

Keep in mind that the weather can vary greatly, depending on your elevation. While mountain peaks are snowed in during winter, the valleys can still be invitingly warm. Most visitor services along the parkway are only open from April through October. May is best for wildflowers, although most people come for leaf-peeping during fall. Spring and fall are good times for birdwatching, with nearly 160 species having been spotted in the skies over the parkway. Expect big crowds if you go during the summer or early autumn.

Resources

Blue Ridge Parkway (www.blueridgeparkway.org) Maps, activities and places to stay along the way. Can also download here the free *Blue Ridge Parkway Travel Planner*.

Hiking the Blue Ridge Parkway, by Randy Johnson, has in-depth trail descriptions, topographic trail maps and other essential info for hikes both short and long (including overnight treks).

Recreation.gov (www.recreation.gov) Can reserve some campsites through this site.

Great River Road

Established in the late 1930s, the Great River Road is an epic journey from the Mississippi's headwaters in the northern lakes of

Minnesota, floating downstream all the way to the river's mouth on the Gulf of Mexico near New Orleans. For a look at America across cultural divides – north-south, urban-rural, Baptist-bohemian – this is the road trip to make.

Why Go?

You'll be awed by the sweeping scenery as you meander alongside North America's second-longest river, from the rolling plains of Iowa down to the sunbaked cotton fields of the Mississippi Delta. Limestone cliffs, dense forests, flower-filled meadows and steamy swamps are all part of the backdrop – along with smokestacks, riverboat casinos and urban sprawl: this is the good, the bad and the ugly of life on the Mississippi. The portrait though isn't complete without mentioning the great music, lip-smacking food and down-home welcome at towns well off the beaten path on this waterfront itinerary.

Small towns provide a glimpse into American culture: there's Hibbing, MN, where folk rocker Bob Dylan grew up; Brainerd, MN, as seen in the Coen Brothers' film *Fargo*; Spring Green, WI, where architect Frank Lloyd Wright cut his teeth; pastoral Hannibal, MO, boyhood home of Mark Twain; and Metropolis, IL, where you'll find Superman's quick-change phone booth.

The southern section of this route traces American musical history, from rock and roll in St Louis to Memphis blues and New Orleans jazz. And you won't go hungry either, with retro Midwestern diners, Southern barbecue joints and smokehouses, and Cajun taverns and dance halls in Louisiana.

The Route

The Great River Road is not really one road at all, but a collection of roads that follow the 2300-mile-long Mississippi River, and takes travelers through 10 different states. Major urban areas that provide easy access to the road include New Orleans, Memphis, St Louis and Minneapolis.

When to Go

The best time to travel is from May to October, when the weather is warmest. Avoid going in the winter (or else stick to the deep south) when you'll have to contend with snowstorms.

Resources

Mississippi River Travel (www.experiencemississippiriver.com) 'Ten states, one river' is the slogan for this official site, which is a great resource for history, outdoor recreation, live music and more.



USA Outdoors

Best Wildlife Watching

Bears in **Glacier National Park, MT**
 Elk, bison and gray wolves in **Yellowstone National Park, WY**
 Alligators, manatees and sea turtles in the **Florida Everglades**
 Whales and dolphins on **Monterey Bay, CA**

Top Aquatic Activities

White-water rafting on the **New River, WV**
 Surfing perfect waves in **Oahu, HI**
 Diving and snorkeling off the **Florida Keys**
 Kayaking pristine **Penobscot Bay, ME**

Best Multiday Adventures

Hiking the **Appalachian Trail**
 Mountain-biking **Kokopelli's Trail, UT**
 Climbing 13,770ft Grand Teton in **Grand Teton National Park, WY**
 Canoeing, portaging and camping in the vast **Boundary Waters, MN**

Best Winter Activities

Downhill skiing in **Vail, CO**
 Snowboarding in **Stowe, VT**
 Cross-country skiing off **Lake Placid, NY**

Towering redwoods, alpine lakes, rolling hills, chiseled peaks, lunarlike deserts and a dramatic coastline of unrivaled beauty: the USA has no shortage of spectacular settings for a bit of outdoor adventure – and so far, we've described just one state (California). In the other 49 lie an astounding collection of natural wonders, from red-rock canyons and lush rainforests to snow-covered mountains and vast stretches of wilderness devoid of people but full of endless possibility.

No matter your weakness – hiking, biking, kayaking, rafting, surfing, horseback riding, rock climbing – you'll find world-class places to commune with the great outdoors. And if you're thinking of trying something new, the USA is a great place to take a course or hone your craft.

For outdoor activities, the USA has excellent infrastructure and a wealth of resources for planning an adventure – whether that entails trekking some (or all!) of the Appalachian Trail, mountain biking in Moab or carving up the legendary powder ski runs in the Rockies; for something more obscure you can kayak Washington's San Juan Islands, ski the maple woods of Vermont or canoe and camp in Minnesota's Boundary Waters. This really is just the beginning, with few limits save your own imagination.

For an overview of the nation's top national parks, see p769.

Hiking & Trekking

Fitness-focused Americans take great pride in their formidable network of trails – literally tens of thousands of miles – and there's no better way to experience the countryside up close and at your own pace.

The wilderness is amazingly accessible, making for easy exploration. National parks are ideal for short and long hikes, and if you're hankering for nights in the wilderness beneath star-filled skies, plan on securing a backcountry permit in advance, especially in places like the Grand Canyon – spaces are limited, particularly during summer.

Beyond the parks, you'll find troves of trails in every state. There's no limit to the places you can explore, from the sun-blasted hoodoos and red spires in Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains to the dripping trees and mossy nooks in Washington's Hoh River Rainforest (p1022); from the dogwood-choked Wild Azalea Trail in Louisiana to the tropical paradise of Kaua'i's Na Pali Coast (p1097). Almost anywhere you go, there's great hiking and backpacking within easy striking distance. All you need is a sturdy pair of shoes (sneakers or hiking boots) and a water bottle.

Hiking Resources

» **Survive Outdoors** (www.surviveoutdoors.com) Dispenses safety and first-aid tips, plus helpful photos of dangerous critters.

» **Wilderness Survival** by Gregory Davenport, is easily the best book on surviving nearly every contingency.

» **American Hiking Society** (www.americanhiking.org) Links to local hiking clubs and 'volunteer vacations' building trails.

» **Backpacker** (www.backpacker.com) Premier national magazine for backpackers, from novices to experts.

» **Rails-to-Trails Conservancy** (www.railstotrails.org) Converts abandoned railroad corridors into hiking and biking trails; publishes free trail reviews at www.trailink.com.

Cycling

Cycling's popularity grows by the day in the USA, with cities (including New York) adding more cycle lanes and becoming more bike-friendly and an increasing number of greenways dotting the countryside. You'll find die-hards in every town, and outfitters offering guided trips for all levels and durations. For the best advice on rides and rentals, stop by a local bike shop or do an internet search of the area you plan to visit.

Many states offer social multiday rides, such as Ride the Rockies in Colorado. For a modest fee, you can join the peloton on a scenic, well-supported route; your gear is ferried ahead to that night's camping spot. Other standout rides include Arizona's Mt

HONE YOUR SKILLS (OR LEARN SOME NEW ONES)

Whether you're eager to catch a wave or dangle from a cliff, learn some new outdoor tricks in these high-thrill programs.

» **Club Ed Surf Camp** (www.club-ed.com) Learn to ride the waves from Manresa Beach to Santa Cruz, CA, with field trips to the surfing museum and surfboard companies included.

» **Craftsbury Outdoor Center** (www.craftsbury.com) Come here for sculling, cross-country skiing and running amid the forests and hills of Vermont.

» **Joshua Tree Rock Climbing School** (www.joshuatreerockclimbing.com) Local guides lead beginners to experts on 7000 different climbs in Joshua Tree National Park, CA.

» **Nantahala Outdoor Center** (www.noc.com) Learn to paddle like a pro at this North Carolina-based school, which offers world-class instruction in canoeing and kayaking in the Great Smoky Mountains.

» **Otterbar Lodge Kayak School** (www.otterbar.com) Top-notch whitewater kayaking instruction is complemented by saunas, hot tubs, salmon dinners and a woodsy lodge tucked away on California's north coast.

» **Steep and Deep Ski Camp** (www.jacksonhole.com/info/ski.ac.steepski.asp) Finesse skiing extreme terrain (and snagging first tracks) then wind down over dinner parties. You can also ski with Olympian Tommy Moe.

TOP TRAILS IN THE USA

Ask 10 people for their top trail recommendations and it's possible that no two answers will be alike. The country is so varied and distances so enormous, there's little consensus. That said, you can't go wrong with the following all-star sampler.

- » **Appalachian Trail** (www.appalachiantrail.org) Completed in 1937, the country's longest footpath is more than 2100 miles long, crosses six national parks, traverses eight national forests and hits 14 states from Georgia to Maine.
- » **Pacific Crest Trail** (PCT; www.pcta.org) Follows the spines of the Cascades and Sierra Nevada, traipsing 2650 miles from Canada to Mexico, passing through six of North America's seven ecoregions.
- » **John Muir Trail in Yosemite** (p992) 222 miles of scenic bliss, from Yosemite Valley up to Mt Whitney.
- » **Enchanted Valley, Olympic National Park, WA** (p1022) Magnificent mountain views, roaming wildlife and lush rainforests – all on a 13-mile out-and-back trail.
- » **Great Northern Traverse, Glacier National Park, MT** (p761) A 58-mile haul that cuts through the heart of grizzly country and crosses the Continental Divide.
- » **Kalalau Trail, Na Pali Coast, Kaua'i, HI** (p1097) Wild Hawaii at its finest – 11 miles of lush waterfalls, hidden beaches, verdant valleys and crashing surf.
- » **Mount Katahdin, Baxter State Park, ME** (p243) A 9.5-mile hike over the 5268ft summit, with panoramic views of the park's 46 peaks.
- » **South Kaibab/North Kaibab Trail, Grand Canyon, AZ** (p825) A multiday cross-canyon tramp down to the Colorado River and back up to the rim.
- » **South Rim, Big Bend National Park, TX** (p694) A 13-mile loop through the ruddy, 7000ft Chisos Mountains, with views into Mexico.
- » **Tahoe Rim Trail, Lake Tahoe, CA** (p998) This 165-mile all-purpose trail circumnavigates the lake from high above, affording glistening Sierra views.

Lemmon, a thigh-zinging 28-mile climb from the Sonoran Desert floor to the 9157ft summit and Tennessee's Cherokee Skyway, 51 glorious miles of undulating road and Great Smoky Mountain views.

Top Cycling Towns

- » **San Francisco, CA** A pedal over the Golden Gate Bridge lands you in the stunningly beautiful, and stunningly hilly, Marin Headlands.
- » **Madison, WI** More than 120 miles of bike paths, taking in the city's pretty lakes, parks and university campus.
- » **Boulder, CO** Outdoors-loving town with loads of great biking paths, including the 16-mile Boulder Creek Trail.
- » **Austin, TX** Indie-rock-loving town with nearly 200 miles of trails and great year-round weather.
- » **Burlington, VT** Bike haven in the Northeast, with great rides, the best-known along Lake Champlain.
- » **Portland, OR** A trove of great cycling (on- and off-road) in the Pacific Northwest.

Surfing Hawaii

Blessed is the state that started it all, where the best swells generally arrive between November and March.

Waikiki (South Shore of Oahu) Hawaii's ancient kings rode waves on wooden boards well before 19th-century missionaries deemed the sport a goddess activity. With warm water and gentle rolling waves, Waikiki is perfect for novices, offering long and sudsy rides.

Pipeline & Sunset Beach (North Shore of Oahu) Home to the classic tubing wave, which form as deep-water swells break over reefs into shallows, these are expert-only spots but well worth an ogle.

West Coast/California

Huntington Beach, CA, (aka Surf City, USA) The quintessential surf capital, with perpetual sun and a 'perfect' break, particularly during winter when the winds are calm.

Black's Beach, San Diego, CA This 2-mile sandy strip at the base of 300ft cliffs in La Jolla is known as one of the most powerful beach breaks in So-Cal, thanks to an underwater canyon just offshore.

Huntington Beach, CA Surfer central is a great place to take in the scene - and some lessons.

Oceanside Beach, Oceanside, CA One of SoCal's prettiest beaches boasts one of the world's most consistent surf breaks come summer. It's a family-friendly spot.

Rincon, Santa Barbara, CA Arguably one of the planet's top surfing spots; nearly every major surf champion on the globe has taken Rincon for a ride.

Steamer Lane & Pleasure Point, Santa Cruz, CA There are 11 world-class breaks, including the point breaks over rock bottoms at these two sweet spots.

Swami's, Encinitas, CA Located below Seacliff Roadside Park, this popular surfing beach has multiple breaks guaranteeing you some fantastic waves.

East Coast

The Atlantic seaboard states harbor some terrific and unexpected surfing spots - especially if you're after more moderate swells. You'll find the warmest waters off Florida's

Gulf Coast, where jetties, piers, and sandbars offer up many fine surfing opportunities.

Cocoa Beach, Melbourne Beach, FL Small crowds and mellow waves make it a paradise for beginners and longboarders. Just south is the Inlet, known for consistent surf and crowds to match.

Reef Rd, Palm Beach, FL This stellar spot features exposed beach and reef breaks with consistent surf, especially at low tide; winter is best.

Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, NC This very popular area has several quality spots and infinitely rideable breaks that gracefully handle swells of all sizes and winds from any direction.

Long Island, Montauk, NY More than a dozen surfing areas dot the length of Long Island from Montauk's oft-packed Ditch Plains to Nassau County's Long Beach, with its 3-mile stretch of curling waves.

Casino Pier, Seaside Heights, NJ Both sides of the pier offer arguably the longest tube rides in NJ - just be prepared to compete with the crowds and entitled locals.

Point Judith, Narragansett, RI Rhode Island has premier surfing, with 40 miles of coastline and more than 30 surf spots, including this rocky point break offering long rollers as well as hollow barrels. Not for beginners.

MAD FOR MOUNTAIN BIKING

Mountain-biking enthusiasts will find trail nirvana in Boulder, CO; Moab, UT; Bend, OR; Ketchum, ID; and Marin, CA, where Gary Fisher and Co bunny-hopped the sport forward by careening down the rocky flanks of Mt Tamalpais on home-rigged bikes. Other great destinations include the following:

» **Kokopelli's Trail, UT** One of the premier mountain-biking trails in the Southwest stretches 140 miles on mountainous terrain between Loma, CO, and Moab, UT. Other nearby options include the 206-mile, hut-to-hut ride between Telluride, CO, and Moab, UT, and the shorter but very challenging 38-mile ride from Aspen to Crested Butte - an equally stunning ride.

» **Maah Daah Hey Trail, ND** A 96-mile jaunt over rolling buttes along the Little Missouri River.

» **Sun Top Loop, WA** A 22-mile ride with challenging climbs and superb views of Mt Rainier and surrounding peaks on the western slopes of Washington's Cascade Mountains.

» **Downieville Downhill, Downieville, CA** Not for the faint of heart, this piney trail, located near its namesake Sierra foothill town in Tahoe's National Forest, skirts river-hugging cliffs, passes through old-growth forest and drops 4200ft in under 14 miles.

» **Finger Lakes Trail, Letchworth State Park, NY** A little-known treasure, 35 miles south of Rochester in upstate New York, featuring more than 20 miles of singletrack along the rim of the 'Grand Canyon of the East'.

» **McKenzie River Trail, Wilamette National Forest, OR** (www.mckenzievertrail.com) Twenty-two miles of blissful single-track winding through deep forests and volcanic formations. The town of McKenzie is located about 50 miles east of Eugene (p1047).

» **Porcupine Rim, Moab, UT** (p848) A 30-mile loop from town, this venerable high-desert romp features stunning views and hairy downhills.

Coast Guard Beach, Eastham, MA Part of the Cape Cod National Seashore, this family-friendly beach is known for its consistent shortboard/longboard swell all summer long.

White-Water Rafting

East of the Mississippi, West Virginia has an arsenal of legendary white water. First, there's the New River Gorge National River (p318), which, despite its name, is one of the oldest rivers in the world. Slicing from North Carolina into West Virginia, it cuts a deep gorge, known as the Grand Canyon of the East, producing frothy rapids in its wake. Then there's the Gauley, arguably among the world's finest white water. Revered for its ultrasteep and turbulent chutes, this venerable Appalachian river is a watery roller-coaster; dropping more than 668ft and churning up 100-plus rapids in a mere 28 miles. Six more rivers, all in the same neighborhood, offer training grounds for less-experienced river rats.

Out west there's no shortage of scenic and spectacular rafting, from Utah's Cataract Canyon, a thrilling romp through the red rocks of Canyonlands National Park, to the Rio Grande in Texas, a lazy run through limestone canyons. The North Fork of the Owyhee – which snakes from the high plateau of southwest Oregon to the rangelands of Idaho – is rightfully popular and features towering hoodoos. In California, both the Tuolumne and American Rivers surge with moderate-to-extreme rapids while in Idaho, the Middle Fork of the Salmon River has it all: abundant wildlife, thrilling rapids, a rich homesteader history, waterfalls and hot springs. If you're organized enough to plan a few years in advance, book a spot on the Colorado River, the quintessential river trip. And if you're not after white-knuckle rapids, fret not – many rivers have sections suitable for peaceful float trips or inner-tube drifts you can traverse with a cold beer in hand.

Kayaking & Canoeing

For exploring flatwater (no rapids or surf), opt for a kayak or canoe. While kayaks are seaworthy, they are not always suited for

carrying bulky gear. For big lakes and the seacoast (including the San Juan Islands), use a sea kayak. For month-long wilderness trips – including the 12,000 miles of watery routes in Minnesota's Boundary Waters or Alabama's Bartram Canoe Trail, with 300,000 acres of marshy delta bayous, lakes and rivers – use a canoe.

You can kayak or canoe almost anywhere in the USA. Rentals and instruction are yours for the asking, from Wisconsin's Apostle Islands National Seashore and Utah's celebrated Green River (p848) to Hawaii's Na Pali Coast (p1097). Hire kayaks in Maine's Penobscot Bay to poke around the briny waters and spruce-fringed islets, or join a full-moon paddle in Sausalito's Richardson Bay, CA.

Skiing & Other Winter Sports

You can hit the slopes in 40 states, making for tremendous variety in terrain and ski-town vibe. Colorado has some of the best skiing in the nation, though California, Vermont and Utah are all top-notch destinations for the alpine experience. The ski season typically runs from mid-December to April, though some resorts have longer seasons. In summer, many resorts are great places to go mountain biking and hiking courtesy of chair lifts. Ski packages (including airfare, hotel and lift tickets) are easy to find through resorts, travel agencies and online travel booking sites; these packages can be a good deal if your main goal is to ski.

Wherever you ski, it won't come cheap. Find the best deals by going midweek, purchasing multiday tickets, heading to lesser-known 'sibling' resorts (like Alpine Meadows near Lake Tahoe) or checking out mountains that cater to locals including Vermont's Mad River Glen (p218), Santa Fe Ski Area (p866) and Colorado's Wolf Grade.

Top Ski & Snowboard Resorts

Vermont's first-rate Stowe (p218) draws seasoned souls – freeze your tail off on the lifts, but thaw out nicely après ski in timbered bars with local brews. Find more snow, altitude and attitude out west at Vail, CO (p729), Squaw Valley, CA (p999) and high-glitzy Aspen, CO (p731). For an unfussy scene and

steep vertical chutes, try Alta, UT (p844), Telluride, CO (p738), Jackson, WY (p751) and Taos, NM (p872). In Alaska, slopes slice through spectacular terrain outside Juneau, Anchorage and Fairbanks. Mt Aurora Ski-Land has the most northerly chairlift in North America and, from spring to summer, the shimmering green-blue aurora borealis.

Rock Climbing

Scads of climbers flock to Joshua Tree National Park, an otherworldly shrine in southern California's sun-scorched desert. There, amid craggy monoliths and the country's oldest trees, they pay pilgrimage on more than 8000 routes, tackling sheer vertical, sharp edges and bountiful cracks with aplomb. Or not. Fortunately, a top-notch climbing school offers classes for all levels (see p43).

In Zion National Park, UT, multiday canyoneering classes teach the fine art of going *down*: rappelling off sheer sandstone cliffs into glorious, red-rock canyons filled with trees. Some of the sportier pitches are made in dry suits, down the flanks of roaring waterfalls into ice-cold pools.

Other great climbing spots:

Wyoming's Grand Teton National Park (p750)

A great spot for climbers of all levels: beginners can take basic climbing courses; the more experienced can join two-day expeditions up to the top of Grand Teton itself: a 13,770ft peak with majestic views.

City of Rocks National Reserve, ID More than 500 routes up wind-scoured granite and pinnacles 60 stories tall.

Yosemite National Park, CA (p989) A hallowed shrine for rock climbers, offers superb climbing courses for first timers as well as for those craving a night in a hammock 1000ft above terra firma.

Bishop, CA (p997) South of the park and favored by many top climbers, this sleepy town in the Eastern Sierra is gateway to excellent climbing in the nearby Owens River Gorge and Buttermilk Hills.

Red Rock Canyon, NV (p802) Ten miles west of Las Vegas is some of the world's finest sandstone climbing.

Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, TX Located 70 miles west of Austin, this national park with its huge pink granite dome, has hundreds of routes and stellar views of the Texas Hill Country.

Rocky Mountain National Park, CO Offers alpine climbing near Boulder.

Flatirons, CO Also near Boulder, has fine multi-pitch ascents.

Shawangunk Ridge, NY (p117) Located within a two-hour drive north of New York City, this ridge stretches some 50 miles, and the 'Gunks' are where many East Coast climbers tied their first billets.

Climbing & Canyoneering Resources

American Canyoneering Association

(www.canyoneering.net) An online canyons database and links to courses, local climbing groups and more.

Climbing (www.climbing.com) Cutting-edge rock-climbing news and information since 1970.

SuperTopo (www.supertopo.com) One-stop shop for rock-climbing guidebooks, free topo maps and route descriptions.

Scuba Diving & Snorkeling

The most exotic underwater destination in the USA is Hawaii. There, in shimmering aquamarine waters that stay warm year-round, you'll besmnn treated to a psychedelic display of surreal colors and shapes. Swim alongside sea turtles, octopuses and fiesta-colored parrot-fish – not to mention lava tubes and black coral. Back on shore, cap off the reverie with a Kona brew and *poke* made from just-caught ahi tuna.

The best diving is off the coast or between the islands, so liveaboards are the way to go for scuba buffs. From the green turtles and WWII wrecks off the shores of Oahu to the undersea lava sculptures near little Lana'i, the Aloha State offers endless underwater bliss – but plan ahead, as the dive sites change with the seasons.

On the continental USA, Florida has the lion's share of great diving, with more than 1000 miles of coastline subdivided into 20 unique undersea areas. There are hundreds of sites and countless dive shops offering equipment and guided excursions. South of West Palm Beach, you'll find clear waters and fantastic year-round diving with ample reefs. In the Panhandle, or northern part of the state, you can scuba in the calm and balmy waters of the Gulf of Mexico; off Pensacola and Destin, there are fabulous wreck dives; and you can dive with manatees near Crystal River.

The Florida Keys, a curving string of 31 islets, are the crown jewel; expect a brilliant mix of marine habitats, North America's only living coral garden and the occasional shipwreck. Key Largo is home to the John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park with over 200 miles of underwater bliss.

There's terrific diving and snorkeling (and much warmer water) beyond the mangrove swamps of the Florida Keys, FL, boasting the world's third-largest coral system. Look for manatees off Islamorada (p467) or take an expedition to Dry Tortugas (p471), where the expansive reef swarms with barracuda, sea turtles and a couple of hundred sunken ships.

Other Underwater Destinations

Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve, Oahu, HI

(p1086) Despite the crowds, this is still one of the world's great spots for snorkeling, with more than 450 resident species of reef fish.

Point Lobos State Reserve, CA (p941) Some of best shore-diving in California, with shallow reefs, caves, pinnacles, sea stars, torpedo rays, sea lions, seals and otters. The **Monterey Bay Dive Company** (www.montereyscubadiving.com) is a handy resource for sites and guides.

The Channel Islands, CA (p937) Lying between Santa Barbara and Los Angeles, harbor spiny lobsters, angel sharks and numerous dive sites best accessed by liveaboard charter.

Jade Cove (about 10 miles south of Lucia on Hwy 1) This aptly named spot has the world's only underwater concentration of jade, making for an unforgettable dive.

Cape Hatteras National Seashore, NC Along the northern coast of North Carolina, divers can explore historical wrecks from the Civil War (and encounter tiger sand sharks); there are also numerous options for dive charters within the Outer Banks and the Cape Lookout areas.

Lake Ouachita, AR The largest lake in Arkansas is ringed by forested mountains and known for its

pristine waters and some 30 distinct dive spots. Camp along the lakeshore and, quite literally, dive in. It's also the site of a 16-mile water-based trail, the first of its kind in the country.

Great Lakes, MI The USA's most unexpected dive spot? Michigan's Lakes Superior and Huron, with thousands of shipwrecks lying strewn on the sandy bottoms – just don't expect to see any angelfish!

Horseback Riding

Cowboy wannabes will be happy to learn that horseback riding of every style, from Western to bareback, is available across the USA. Out west, you'll find truly memorable experiences – everything from week-long expeditions through the canyons of southern Utah and cattle wrangling in Wyoming, to pony rides along the Oregon coast. Finding horses is easy; rental stables and riding schools are located around and in many of the national parks. Experienced equestrians can explore alone or in the company of guides familiar with local flora, fauna and history. Half- and full-day group trail rides, which usually include lunch in a wildflower-speckled meadow, are popular and plentiful.

California is terrific for riding, with fog-swept trails leading along the cliffs of Point Reyes National Seashore, longer excursions through the high-altitude lakes of the Ansel Adams Wilderness, and multiday pack trips in Yosemite and Kings Canyon. Utah's Capitol Reef (p852) and Canyonlands (p850) also provide spectacular four-hoofed outings, as do the mountains, arroyos and plains of Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Montana and Texas.

Dude ranches come in all varieties, from down-duvet luxurious to barn-duty authentic on working cattle ranches. They're found in most of the western states, and even some eastern ones (such as Tennessee and North Carolina). Real-life cowboys are included.



Travel with Children

Best Regions for Kids in the USA

New York, New Jersey & Pennsylvania

New York City has museums, carriage rides and row-boating in Central Park, cruises on the Hudson and theme restaurants in Times Square. Head to the NJ shore for boardwalk fun, and to Pennsylvania for Amish Country horse-and-buggy rides.

California

See stars in Hollywood and get behind the movie magic at Universal Studios, hit the beaches then head south to Disneyland and the San Diego Zoo. In Northern California, see redwoods and the Golden Gate Bridge.

Washington, DC, & the Capital Region

Washington has unrivalled allure for families, with museums, a panda-loving zoo, and open spaces on the Mall. Virginia's Williamsburg is a slice of 18th-century America with costumed interpreters and fanciful activities.

Florida

Orlando's Walt Disney World is well worth planning a vacation around. Afterwards, hit the state's beautiful beaches.

From coast to coast, you'll find superb attractions for all ages in the USA: bucket-and-spade fun at the beach, amusement parks, zoos, eye-popping aquariums and natural history exhibits, hands-on science museums, camping adventures, battlefields, hikes in wilderness reserves, leisurely bike rides through serene countryside (easy-going and challenging alike), and plenty of other activities likely to wow the young ones. The great outdoors is a good place to start: most national and state parks gear at least some exhibits, trails and programs (junior ranger activities and the like) towards families with kids.

Traveling with children can bring a whole new dimension to the American experience. You may make deeper connections, as locals (especially those with their own children) brighten and coo and embrace your family like long-lost cousins. From the city to the country, most facilities are ready to accommodate a child's needs.

The USA for Kids Dining with Children

Child- and family-friendly activities are listed throughout this guide in the On the Road chapters, and major cities have a section devoted specifically to kids.

The US restaurant industry seems built on family-style service: children are not just accepted almost everywhere, but usually are

encouraged by special children's menus with smaller portions and lower prices. In some restaurants children under a certain age even eat for free. Restaurants usually provide high chairs and booster seats. Some restaurants may also offer children crayons and puzzles, and occasionally live performances by cartoon-like characters.

Restaurants without children's menus don't necessarily discourage kids, though higher-end restaurants might; however, even at the nicer places, if you show up early enough (right at dinner time opening hours), you can usually eat without too much stress – and you'll likely be joined by other foodie couples with kids. You can ask if the kitchen will make a smaller order of a dish (also ask how much it will cost), or if they will split a normal-size main dish between two plates for the kids. Chinese, Mexican and Italian restaurants seem to be the best bet for finicky young eaters.

Farmers markets are growing in popularity in the USA, and every sizeable town has at least one a week. This is a good place to assemble a first-rate picnic, sample the local specialties and support independent growers in the process. After getting your stash, head to the park or waterfront, which is probably nearby.

Accommodations

Motels and hotels typically have rooms with two beds, which are ideal for families. Some also have roll-away beds or cribs that can be brought into the room for an extra charge – but keep in mind these are usually Pack 'n Plays, which not all children sleep well in. Some hotels offer 'kids stay free' programs for children up to 12 or sometimes 18 years old. Be wary of B&Bs, as many of these don't allow children; ask when reserving.

Babysitting

Resort hotels may have on-call babysitting services; otherwise, ask the front-desk staff or concierge to help you make arrangements. Always ask if babysitters are licensed and bonded, what they charge per hour per child, whether there's a minimum fee, and if they charge extra for transportation or meals. Most tourist bureaus list local resources for childcare and recreation facilities, medical services and so on.

To find family-oriented sights and activities, accommodations, restaurants and entertainment throughout this book, just look for the child-friendly icon (👶).

Necessities, Driving & Flying

Many public toilets have a baby-changing table (sometimes in men's toilets too), and gender-neutral 'family' facilities appear in airports.

Medical services and facilities in America are of a high standard, and items such as baby food, formula and disposable diapers are widely available – including organic options – in supermarkets across the country.

Every car-rental agency should be able to provide an appropriate child seat, since these are required in every state, but you need to request it when booking and expect to pay around \$10 more per day.

Domestic airlines don't charge for children under two. Those two and up must have a seat, and discounts are unlikely. Rarely, some resorts (eg Disneyland) offer a 'kids fly free' promotion. Amtrak and other train operators run similar deals (with kids up to age 15 riding free) on various routes.

Discounts for Children

Child concessions often apply for tours, admission fees, and transport, with some discounts as high as 50% off the adult rate. However, the definition of 'child' can vary from under 12 to under 16 years. Some popular sights also have discount rates for families, which will save a few dollars compared to buying individual tickets. Most sights also give free admission to children under two years.

Planning

Weather and crowds are all-important considerations when planning a US family getaway. The peak travel season across the country is from June to August, when schools are out and the weather is warmest. Expect high prices and abundant crowds – meaning long lines at amusement and water parks, fully booked resort areas and heavy traffic on the roads; you'll need to reserve well in advance for popular destinations. The same holds true for winter resorts (in the Rockies, Tahoe, Catskills) during its high season of January to March.

Children's Highlights Outdoor Adventure

- » Kayaking, canoeing or taking guided walks in the Florida Everglades
- » Watching powerful geysers, spying wildlife and taking magnificent hikes in Yellowstone National Park

- » Gazing across one of earth's great wonders at Grand Canyon National Park
- » Exploring the wild and pristine wilderness of Olympic National Park, one of the world's only temperate rain forests
- » Going white-water rafting in the New River Gorge National Park, West Virginia

Theme Parks & Zoos

- » Bronx Wildlife Conservation Park, NY – One of the nation's biggest and best zoos is just a subway ride from Manhattan
- » Walt Disney World, Florida – With four action-packed parks spread across 20,000 acres, this is the place your children will long remember
- » Disneyland, California – Kids four and up appreciate the original park, while teenagers go nuts next door at California Adventure
- » SeaWorld – Killer-whale and dolphin shows, rides and loads of other amusements at these aquatic parks in Florida and California
- » San Diego Zoo – A fantastic place to see creatures great and small, this pioneering zoo has more than 4000 animals (880 species)

Traveling in Time

- » Donning 18th-century garb and mingling with costumed interpreters in the history-rich settings of Plimoth, Williamsburg, Yorktown and Jamestown
- » Plugging your ears as soldiers in 19th-century garb fire muskets and cannons at Fort Mackinac, Michigan
- » Go on a walking tour of Boston's Freedom Trail with Ben Franklin (or at least his 21st century lookalike)
- » Strolling in the footsteps of one of America's greatest presidents at the Lincoln Home in Springfield, Illinois
- » Rattling along in a horse-drawn carriage through the historic streets of St Augustine, Florida

Rainy-Day Activities

- » National Air & Space Museum, Washington, DC – rockets, spacecraft, old-fashioned biplanes and ride simulators will inspire any budding aviator

- » American Museum of Natural History, New York City – kids of all ages will enjoy a massive planetarium, immense dinosaur skeletons and 30 million other artifacts
- » City Museum, St Louis – a packed funhouse of unusual exhibits, plus a Ferris wheel on the roof
- » Port Discovery Museum, Baltimore – three stories of adventure and (cleverly disguised) learning, including an Egyptian tomb, farmers market, train, art studio and physics stations
- » Pacific Science Center, Seattle – Fascinating, hands-on exhibits, plus an IMAX theater, planetarium and laser shows

Eating

- » Getting messy eating scrumptious Maryland blue crabs at open-air restaurants along the Chesapeake Bay
- » Turn the clock back a few generations at the 1950s retro Ellens Stardust Diner in NYC
- » Dive face-first (no plates or cutlery provided) into Texas' best barbecue at City Market in Luling
- » Tasting the world's best deep-dish pizza (and scrawling your name on the wall) at Gino's East in Chicago
- » Assembling a gourmet picnic from the weekend farmers market at San Francisco's ferry building

Helpful Resources for Families

For all-around information and advice, check out Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children*. For outdoor advice, read *Kids in the Wild: A Family Guide to Outdoor Recreation* by Cindy Ross and Todd Gladfelder, and Alice Cary's *Parents' Guide to Hiking & Camping*.

Family Travel Files (www.thefamilytravelfiles.com) Ready-made vacation ideas, destination profiles and travel tips.

Go City Kids (www.gocitykids.com) Excellent coverage of kid-centric activities and entertainment in more than 50 US cities.

Kids.gov (www.kids.gov) Eclectic, enormous national resource; download songs and activities, or even link to the CIA Kids' Page.

regions at a glance

Deciding where to go can be daunting in the massive USA. The East Coast has big-city allure, picturesque towns (especially New England), historic attractions, bountiful feasts (Maine lobsters, Maryland crabs) and outdoor beauty (beaches, islands, mountains).

The West Coast has memorable urban exploring (San Francisco, LA, Seattle), stunning scenery (dramatic coastline, redwoods, high Sierra) and feasting aplenty (wineries, award-winning restaurants).

In between, there's much: soulful music and belly-pleasing fare in the south; big skies and Native American culture in the Rockies, Southwest and Great Plains; live music and barbecue in Texas; and off-the-beaten path adventures in the Great Lakes.



New York, New Jersey & Pennsylvania

Arts ✓✓✓
History ✓✓✓
Outdoors ✓✓✓

Arts

Home to the MET, MOMA and Broadway – and that's just NYC. Buffalo, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh also have a share of world-renowned cultural institutions.

History

From preserved Gilded Age mansions in the Hudson Valley, Independence National Historic Park in Philadelphia and sites dedicated to formative moments in the nation's founding, the region gives an interactive education.

Outdoors

The outdoors lurks beyond the city's gaze, with hiking in the Adirondack wilderness and Catskills, rafting down the Delaware River and Atlantic Ocean and frolics along the Jersey Shore or Hamptons.

p58

New England

Seafood ✓✓✓
History ✓✓✓
Beaches ✓✓✓

Seafood

New England is justifiably famous for its fresh seafood. The coast is peppered with seaside eateries where you can feast on fresh oysters, lobster and fish as you watch the dayboats haul in their catch.

History

From the Pilgrims landing in Plymouth and the witch hysteria in Salem to Paul Revere's revolutionary ride, New England has shaped American history.

Beaches

Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard and Block Island – New England is a summer mecca for sand and sea worshippers. The region's scores of beaches run the gamut from kid-friendly tidal flats to gnarly open-ocean surf.

p162



DC & the Capital Region

Arts ✓✓✓
History ✓✓✓
Food ✓✓✓

Arts

Washington has a superb collection of museums and galleries. You'll also find down-home mountain music on Virginia's Crooked Red, famous theaters and edgy art in Baltimore.

History

For historical lore, Jamestown, Williamsburg and Yorktown offer windows into Colonial America, while Civil War battlefields litter the Virginia countryside. There are fascinating presidential estates like Mount Vernon and Monticello.

Food

Feasts await: Maryland blue crabs, oysters and seafood platters; international restaurants in DC and farm-to-table dining rooms in Baltimore, Charlottesville, Staunton and Rehoboth.

p244



The South

Food ✓✓✓
Music ✓✓✓
Charm ✓✓✓

Food

From Georgia BBQ to Mississippi soul food to the Cajun-Creole smorgasbord in Louisiana, the South is a diverse, artery clogging, magnificent, place to eat.

Music

Nowhere on earth has a soundtrack as influential as the South. Head to music meccas for the authentic experience: country in Nashville, blues in Memphis and big-band jazz in New Orleans.

Charm

Picture-book towns like Charleston and Savannah among others have captivated visitors with their historic tree-lined streets, antebellum architecture and down-home welcome.

p320



Florida

Fun ✓✓✓
Wildlife ✓✓✓
Beaches ✓✓✓

Fun

Florida has a complicated soul: it's the home of Miami's art deco district and Little Havana, plus historical attractions in St Augustine, theme parks in Orlando and museums and island heritage in Key West.

Wildlife

Immerse yourself in aquatic life on a snorkeling or diving trip. For bigger beasts, head off on a whale-watching cruise, or spy alligators – along with egrets, eagles, manatees and other wildlife – on an Everglades trip.

Beaches

You'll find an array of sandy shores from steamy South Beach to upscale Palm Beach, island allure on Sanibel and Captiva and panhandle rowdiness in Pensacola.

p440



Great Lakes

Food ✓✓✓
Music ✓✓✓
Attractions ✓✓✓

Food

From Beard-award-winning restaurants in Chicago and Minneapolis to fresh-from-the-dairy milkshakes, the Midwest's farms, orchards and breweries satisfy the palate.

Music

Home to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, blowout fests like Lollapalooza and thrashing clubs in all the cities, the Midwest rocks, baby.

Attractions

A big ball of twine, a mustard museum, a cow-doo throwing contest: the quirks rise from the Midwest's backyards and back roads, wherever there are folks with a passion, imagination and maybe a little too much time on their hands.

p500



Great Plains

Road Trips ✓✓✓
Geology ✓✓
Nightlife ✓✓

Road Trips

Beneath big open skies, a two-lane highway passes sunlit fields, rolling river valleys and dramatic peaks on its journey to the horizon – all par for the course (along with oddball museums and cozy cafes) on the great American road trip.

Geology

The Badlands are b-a-a-a-d in every good sense. These geologic wonders are matched by the wildlife-filled beauty of the Black Hills and Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Nightlife

Out in the wilds, streets roll up at sunset but in St Louis and Kansas City, that's when the fun begins. Legendary jazz, blues and rock are played in clubs and bars big and small.

p598



Texas

Barbecue ✓✓✓
Live Music ✓✓✓
Outdoors ✓✓

Barbecue

Meat lovers, you've died and gone to heaven (vegetarians, you're somewhere else). Some of the best barbecue on earth is served up in Lockhart near Austin, although you can dig in to brisket, ribs and sausage all across the state.

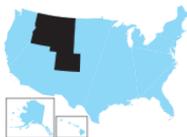
Live Music

Austin has proclaimed itself (and no one's arguing) the 'Live Music Capital of the World,' and you can two-step to live bands on worn wooden floors at honky-tonks and dance halls all around the state.

Outdoors

Canyons, mountains and hot springs set the scene for memorable outings in Texas. Go rafting on the Big Bend River or get your beach fix along the pretty Southern Gulf Coast.

p651



Rocky Mountains

Outdoors ✓✓✓
Culture ✓✓✓
Landscapes ✓✓✓

Outdoors

Skiing, hiking and boating make the Rockies a playground for adrenaline junkies. Hundreds of races and group rides, and an incredible infrastructure of parks, trails and cabins.

Culture

Once a land of Stetsons and prairie dresses, today's Rocky folk are more often spotted in lycra, mountain bike nearby, sipping a microbrew or latte at a cafe. Hard playing and slow living still rule.

Landscapes

The snow-covered Rocky Mountains are pure majesty. With chiseled peaks, clear rivers and red-rock contours, the Rockies contain some of the world's most famous parks and bucketloads of clean mountain air.

p703



Southwest

Scenery ✓✓✓
Outdoors ✓✓✓
Cultures ✓✓✓

Scenery

Home to spectacular national parks, the Southwest is famous for the jaw-dropping Grand Canyon, the dramatic red buttes of Monument Valley and the vast Carlsbad Caverns – just a few of many regional wonders.

Outdoors

Ski powdery slopes at Park City, splash and frolic in Slide Rock State Park, skitter down dunes at White Sands and hike to your heart's content at Brice, Zion and countless other spots.

Cultures

This is Native American country, and visiting the Hopi and Navajo Nations provide a fine introduction to America's first peoples. For a journey back in time, explore cliff-top dwellings abandoned by ancient Puebloan peoples.

p785



California

Beaches ✓✓✓
Outdoors ✓✓✓
Eating ✓✓✓

Beaches

With more than 1100 miles of coast, California rules the sands: rugged, pristine beaches in the north and people-packed beauties in the south, with great surfing, sea kayaking or simply beach-walking all along the coast.

Outdoors

Snow-covered mountains, glittering sea and old-growth forests set the stage for skiing, hiking, biking, wave frolicking, wildlife-watching and more.

Eating

Fertile fields, talented chefs and an insatiable appetite for the new make California a major culinary destination. Browse food markets, sample the produce at lush vineyards and eat well in California's many celebrated dining rooms.

p882



Pacific Northwest

Food & Wine ✓✓✓
Skiing ✓✓
Parks ✓✓✓

Food & Wine

'Up-and-coming' is the word in Portland and Seattle where chefs blend fish caught in local waters with vegetables harvested in the Eden-like valleys surrounding the Columbia River. Then there's Washington wine.

Skiing

From year-round ski areas, to rustic cross-country, to the snowboarding heaven that is Mt Baker; the region with the highest snowfalls in North America delivers unparalleled winter-sports.

Parks

The northwest has four national parks, including three Teddy Roosevelt-era classics - Olympic, Mount Rainier, and Crater Lake - each bequeathed with historic lodges; plus a wilder addition - the North Cascades.

p1001



Alaska

Wildlife ✓✓✓
Glaciers ✓✓✓
Food & Drink ✓

Wildlife

Alaska offers some of the best wildlife viewing opportunities in the country. Seeing the sight of breaching whales and foraging bears Southeast Alaska is unforgettable, while Denali National Park is home to caribou, dall sheep, moose and yet more bears.

Glaciers

If you want to explore glaciers in the USA, Alaska is the place to go. Glacier Bay National Park is the crown jewel for the cruise ships and a favourite for kayakers looking for an icy wilderness.

Food & Drink

Alaska's restaurant scene is not Manhattan, but the seafood is magnificent and you may make a friend or two - Alaskans are always up for a drink.

p1061



Hawaii

Beaches ✓✓✓
Adventure ✓✓✓
Scenery ✓✓✓

Beaches

There's great sunning and people watching on Waikiki (among dozens of other spots); stunning black-sand beaches on the Hamakua Coast, and world-class surfing all over Hawaii.

Adventure

You can trek through rain forest, kayak the Na Pali coast, descend on mule ride into the Kalaupapa Peninsula, and go eye-to-eye with aquatic life in marvelous Hanauma Bay.

Scenery

Hawaii has its head-turners, and we're not just talking people: volcanoes, ancient rainforests, picturesque waterfalls, cliff-top vistas and jungle-lined valleys - not to mention the sparkling seas surrounding the islands.

p1079

USA's National Parks

MARK NEWMAN/CONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

Glacier National Park (p761)



Welcome to the Parks

National parks are America's big backyards. Every cross-country road trip connects the dots between the USA's big-shouldered cities, but not always its national parks. There you'll encounter remarkable places, rich in unspoiled wilderness, rare wildlife and rich history.

Some parks look much the same as they did centuries ago, when this nation was just starting out. From craggy islands off the Atlantic Coast, to prairie grasslands and buffalo herds across the Great Plains, to the Rocky Mountains raising their jagged teeth along the Continental Divide, and onward to the tallest trees on earth – coast redwoods – standing sentinel on Pacific shores, you'll be amazed by natural bounty.

Historically speaking, the USA's voracious appetite for land and material riches drove not only the false doctrine of Manifest Destiny, but a bonanza of building pioneer homesteads, farms, barrier fences, great dams, concrete roadways and train tracks from sea to shining sea. This artificial infrastructure quickly swallowed up vast wilderness tracts from the Appalachian Mountains to the mighty Mississippi River and far into the West.

That is, until the creation of a web of federally protected public lands, starting with the national parks, whose guiding mission is to 'preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.'

WITOLD SIERPICHAK/LOVELY PLANET IMAGES ©



JOHN ELK/LOVELY PLANET IMAGES ©



Clockwise from top left

1. Canyonlands National Park (p850) 2. Bryce Canyon National Park (p854) 3. Olympic National Park (p1022).



2



Evolution of the Parks

During a trip to the Dakotas in 1831, artist George Catlin had a dream. As he watched the USA's rapid westward expansion damage the wilderness and Native American peoples, Catlin penned a call to action, to create 'a nation's park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty!' Four decades later, Congress finally created Yellowstone National Park.

The late 19th century saw a rush of new parks – including Yosemite, Sequoia and Mount Rainier – as a nascent conservation movement fired up public enthusiasm. The Antiquities Act of 1906, signed by President Theodore Roosevelt, preserved a trove of archaeological sites from Native American cultures, including Mesa Verde and Devils Tower, and two years later the Grand Canyon.

The National Park Service (NPS) was created in 1916, with self-made millionaire and former ad man and tireless promoter Stephen Mather as its first director. In the 1930s, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt added 50 more historic sites and monuments to the NPS portfolio and hired Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) workers to build scenic byways and create recreational opportunities in the parks.

After WWII, the NPS kept expanding. The biggest growth spurt so far happened in 1980, when the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act turned over 47 million acres of wilderness to the NPS, more than doubling the federal agency's holdings.

Right

1. Crater Lake National Park (p1052) 2. Joshua Tree National Park (p930).

JERRY AL EXANDER/ONELV PLANET IMAGES ©



TYLER ROEMER/ONELV PLANET IMAGES ©



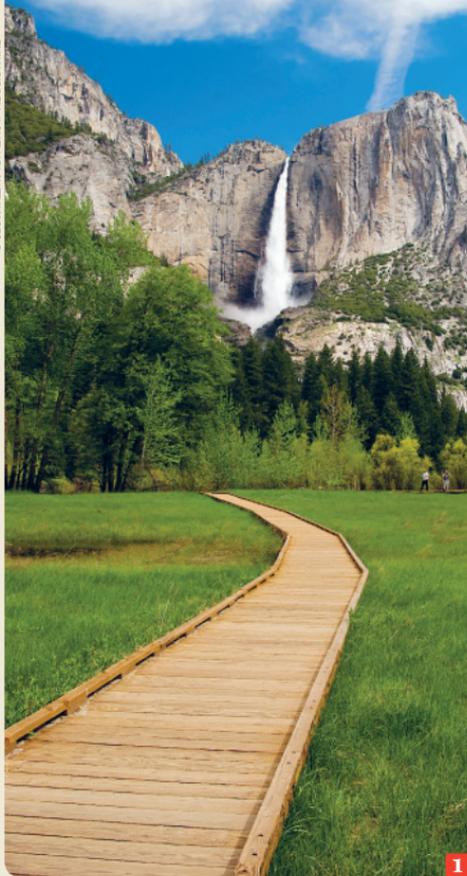
Early Park Heroes

In a country founded on the philosophy that individuals matter, the solo voices of artists, explorers, environmentalists and iconoclast presidents have given shape to the USA's national parks as much as government bureaucrats.

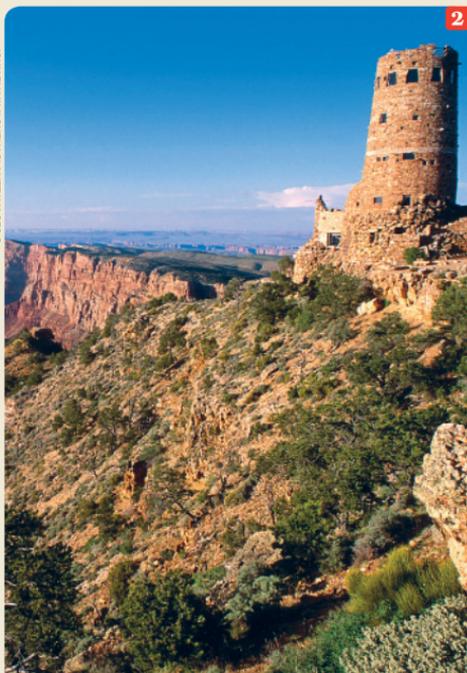
In the late 19th century, the herald of the Sierra Nevada, John Muir (1838-1914), galvanized the public while campaigning for a national park system, delivering open-air lectures and writing about the spiritual value of wilderness beyond just its economic advantages. He inspired President Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), a big-game hunter and rancher, to establish wildlife preserves, national forests and new national parks and monuments.

Women have also been pivotal in protecting parks, as narrated in Polly Kaufman's book *National Parks and the Woman's Voice: A History*. Western architect Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter (1869-1958), who built grand railway hotels for the Fred Harvey Company, helped create the rustic national-park architectural style, seen in her masterworks at Grand Canyon Village. Environmentalist Marjory Stoneman Douglas (1890-1998) penned the influential *The Everglades: River of Grass* (1947) while crusading for greater protections of Everglades National Park.

First lady during the 1960s, 'Lady Bird' Johnson (1912-2007) contributed to the groundbreaking report *With Heritage So Rich*, which led to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 that expanded the NPS system. Her parks advocacy also influenced her husband, President Lyndon B Johnson, who enacted more environmental-protection legislation than any administration since FDR.



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Left

1. Yosemite Falls (p991), Yosemite National Park
2. Watchtower, Grand Canyon National Park (p823).

The Parks Today

Today the NPS protects almost 400 parklands and more than 80 million acres of land from coast to coast. Recent additions include noteworthy historical sites and memorials, including the Martin Luther King, Jr Memorial in Washington DC, NYC's African Burial Ground National Monument and Colorado's Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site. Not all NPS growth has been without controversy, for example, when local residents protest added restrictions on public land use or when agency goals conflict with the self-determination rights of Native American nations.

Federal budget cuts and the enormous pressures of 280 million visitors every year together have also taken huge tolls on national parks, as has global warming, which leads to habitat loss and species extinction. Aiming to make major improvements in time for the NPS's 100th anniversary in 2016, ambitious centennial projects at parks across the country include restoring historic buildings, controlling invasive plant and animal species, and inventorying archaeological sites before they are lost forever.

Nonprofit partners such as the National Parks Conservation Association (www.npca.org) and Western National Parks Association (www.wnpa.org) are critical to national parks' survival. These organizations raise money, staff visitor centers, publish books and maps, and promote education and conservation in the parks. Recent media spotlights have also swayed public opinion about the importance of parks, including Ken Burns' inspiring documentary, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea* (www.pbs.org/nationalparks).

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Right

1. Grand Teton National Park (p750) 2. Bear, Yellowstone National Park (p744).

Visiting the Parks

At any park entrance station, be ready to hand over some cash (credit cards may not be accepted). Entrance fees vary, from nothing at all to \$25 per vehicle. Because ATMs are scarce in the parks, bring extra cash to pay for campsites, wilderness permits and guided tours. Ask at visitor centers about free (or low-cost) 'junior ranger' activity programs for kids.

National park lodges and campgrounds book up far in advance; for summer vacations, reserve six months to one year ahead. Some parks offer first-come, first-served campgrounds – if so, try to arrive between 10am and noon. For overnight backpacking and some day hikes, you'll need a wilderness permit; the number of permits is often subject to quotas, so apply in advance. Some park stores may sell or occasionally rent basic camping and outdoor supplies, but prices tend to be inflated and some items may be out of stock. Bring your own gear from home instead.

Do your utmost to preserve the park's wild and beautiful natural environment. Follow the principles of the Leave No Trace (www.lnt.org) outdoor ethics. National-park policies and regulations may seem restrictive, but they're intended to keep you safe and to protect natural and cultural resources. Pets are not allowed outside of the parks' developed areas, where they must be leashed and accompanied at all times.



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1. Geysir, Yellowstone National Park (p744) 2. Angels Landing Trail (p855), Zion National Park.

Eastern USA

Roam from New England's rocky, wild and weather-beaten shores to the sugar-sand beaches shaded by palm trees of Florida. Or immerse yourself in the USA's wealth of historic sites starting with the nation's capital, then roll through the pastoral hills of old-timey Appalachia on the ridiculously scenic Blue Ridge Pkwy.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

1 Receiving more visitors than any other US national park, this southern Appalachian woodland pocket protects thickly forested ridges where black bears, white-tailed deer, antlered elk, wild turkeys and over 1600 kinds of flowers all find sanctuary (p338).

Acadia National Park

2 Catch the first sunrise of the new year atop Cadillac Mountain, the highest point on the USA's eastern seaboard. Come back in summer to play on end-of-the-world islands tossed along rocky, wind-whipped Atlantic coastlines (p239).

Shenandoah National Park

3 Drive from the Great Smoky Mountains north along the historic Blue Ridge Parkway past Appalachian hill hamlets to Shenandoah, a pastoral preserve where waterfall and woodland paths await, just 75 miles from the nation's capital (p309).

Everglades National Park

4 Home to snaggle-toothed crocodiles, stealthy panthers, pink flamingos and mellow manatees, South Florida's Caribbean bays and 'rivers of grass' attract wildlife watchers, especially to unique hardwood hammock flood-plain islands (p463).

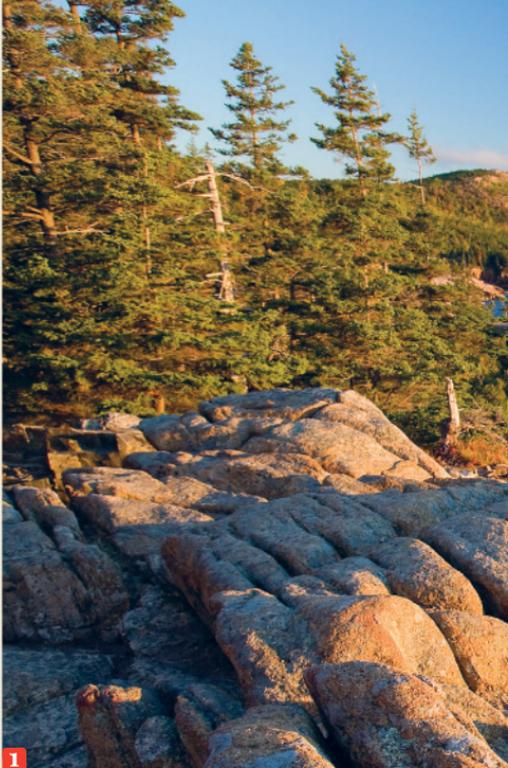
Mammoth Cave National Park

5 With hidden underground rivers and almost 400 miles explored, the world's longest cave system shows off sci-fi-looking stalactites and stalagmites up close (p377).

Clockwise from top left

1. Acadia National Park **2.** Cabin, Great Smoky Mountains National Park **3.** Alligator, Everglades National Park.

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Great Plains & Rocky Mountains

Wildflower-strewn meadows, saw-toothed peaks and placid lakes along the spine of the Continental Divide are among America's most prized national parks. Equally rich in wildlife, Native American culture and Old West history, the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains embody the American frontier.

Yellowstone National Park

1 The country's oldest national park is full of geysers, hot springs and a wealth of megafauna – grizzly bears, bison, elk and more – that range across North America's largest intact natural ecosystem (p744).

Rocky Mountain National Park

2 At the top of the Continental Divide, jagged mountain peaks are just the tip of the iceberg at this park, speckled with more than 150 lakes and 450 miles of streams running through aromatic pine forests (p722).

Glacier National Park

3 Fly along the high-altitude Going-to-the-Sun Road, which appears to defy gravity as it winds for 50 miles through the mountain landscape of what Native Americans called 'The Backbone of the World' (p761).

Badlands National Park

4 In the midst of native prairie grasslands, where bison and bighorn sheep leave hoofprints, this alarmingly named park is an outdoor museum of ancient geology, with fossil beds that reveal traces of North America's prehistoric past (p626).

Mesa Verde National Park

5 Clamber onto the edge of the Colorado Plateau to visit the well-preserved Native American cliff dwellings of Ancestral Puebloans who inhabited the little-explored Four Corners area for generations (p740).

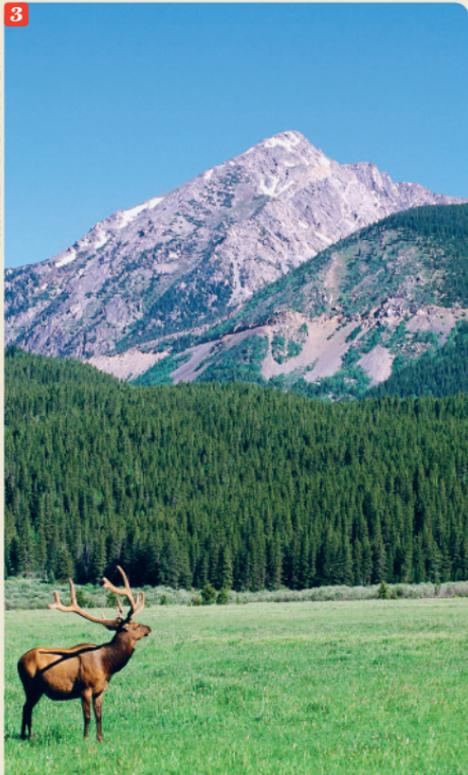
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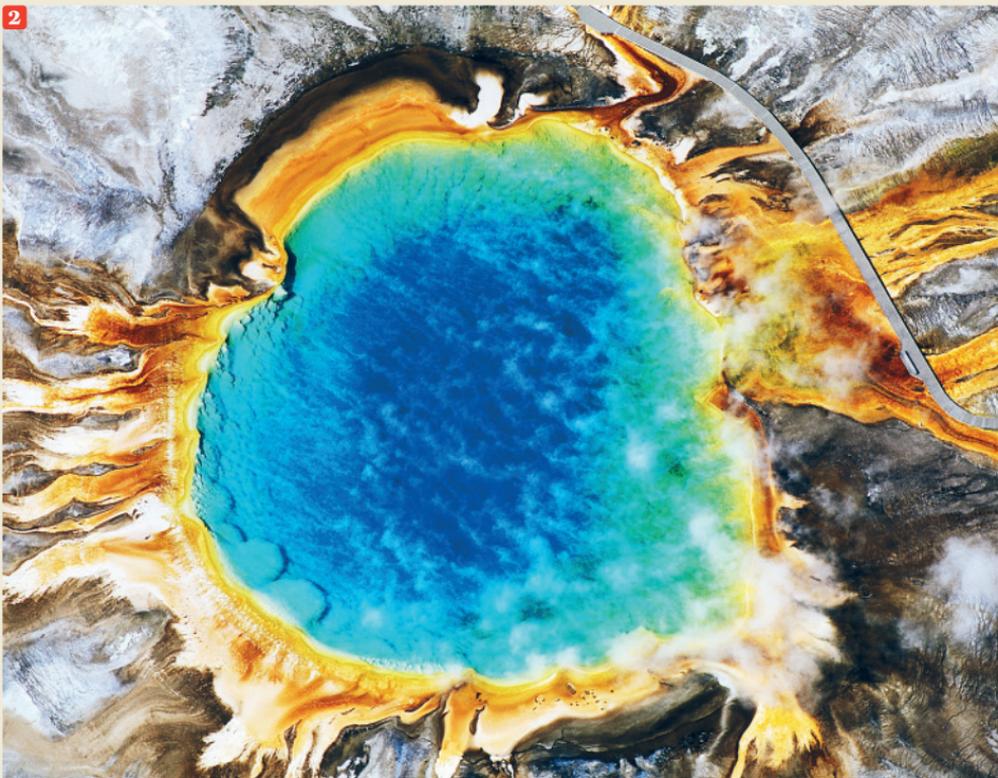
1. St Mary's Lake, Glacier National Park
2. Grand Prismatic Spring (p745), Yellowstone National Park
3. Elk, Rocky Mountain National Park.

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Southwest USA

It takes time to explore the Southwest's meandering canyon country, epic deserts and Native American archaeological ruins. An ancient, colorful chasm carved by one of the USA's most powerful rivers is just the beginning. Meander down backcountry byways to uncover ancient sand dunes, twisting slot canyons, giant cacti and more.

Grand Canyon National Park

1 Arguably the USA's best-known natural attraction, the Grand Canyon is an incredible spectacle of colored rock strata, with many buttes and peaks spiring into a landscape that's always changing with the flow of the mighty Colorado River (p823).

Zion National Park

2 Pioneers almost believed they'd reached the promised land at this desert oasis, run through by a life-giving river. Get a thrill by rappelling down a slot canyon or pulling yourself up the cables to Angels Landing lookout (p855).

Bryce Canyon National Park

3 On of the same geological 'Grand Staircase' as the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon shows off a whimsical landscape of totem-shaped hoodoo rock formations, some rising as tall as a 10-story building! (p854)

Arches National Park

4 Just outside the four-seasons outdoor adventure hub of Moab, Utah, this iconic landscape of over 2000 naturally formed sandstone arches is mesmerizing at sunrise and sunset, when the gorgeously eroded desert rocks seem to glow (p850).

Saguaro National Park

5 An icon of the American West, spiky saguaro cacti stretch toward the sky in this Arizona desert park, where coyotes howl, Mexican spotted owls hoot and desert tortoises slowly make their way through the sere landscape (p832).

Clockwise from top left

1. Grand Canyon National Park **2.** Double Arch, Arches National Park **3.** Cactus, Saguaro National Park.

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West Coast

Thunderous waterfalls, the sirens' call of glacier-carved peaks and the world's tallest, biggest *and* oldest trees are just some of the natural wonders that California offers. Meanwhile, smoking volcanic mountains, misty rain forests and untamed beaches meet in the Pacific Northwest.

Yosemite National Park

1 Explore the glaciated valleys, alpine wildflower meadows, groves of giant sequoias (the world's largest trees) and earth-shaking waterfalls that tumble over sheer granite cliffs in the USA's second-oldest national park (p989).

Olympic National Park

2 Lose yourself in the primeval rain forests, mist-clouded mountains carved by glaciers and lonely, wild Pacific Coast beaches, then watch salmon swim free in the recently restored Elwha River, site of the USA's largest dam removal (p1022).

Death Valley & Joshua Tree National Parks

3 Slide down sand dunes and stroll across salt flats at Badwater, the USA's lowest elevation, in hellishly hot Death Valley, then hop between boulders, native fan palm oases and forests of crooked Joshua trees in Southern California (p933 and p930).

Mt Rainier National Park

4 Meet a glacier-covered, rumbling giant that last erupted only 150 years ago and still reigns over the Pacific Northwest's volcanic Cascades Range. Day hike among wildflower meadows or tramp across high-elevation snow fields in mid-summer (p1031).

Redwood National Park

5 Be awed by towering ancient stands of coast redwoods, the tallest trees on earth, along the often foggy Northern California coast. Spot shaggy Roosevelt elk foraging in woodland prairies, then go tide-pooling along 40 miles of rugged beaches (p984).

Clockwise from top left

1. Yosemite Valley (p991), Yosemite National Park
2. Death Valley National Park
3. Mt Rainier National Park.

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RICHARD CUMMINS/LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©



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Beyond the Parks

The federal government protects so much more than just the USA's 58 national parks, although those usually leap to mind first.

Other NPS places for nature lovers include wilderness areas and national preserves. If it's scenery and adventure you're after, head for a national recreation area or national seashore. The NPS offers a lot for history buffs, too, from national memorials, monuments and battlefields to unique historic sites. Road trippers can drive national parkways, while hikers trek national scenic trails. Finally, there are a dozen or so miscellaneous NPS lands, including the White House in Washington, DC.

Thousands more natural areas are overseen by other federal land management agencies, including the US Forest Service

FINAL FRONTIERS

Part of the USA for just more than 50 years, the far-flung states of Alaska and Hawaii offer some unforgettable wilderness experiences you just can't get in the 'Lower 48' or on 'da mainland.' You can trek volcanoes or possibly see lava flow at Hawaii's national parks. Meanwhile, Alaska's national parks give you a chance to watch glacial icebergs calve, witness majestic wildlife and summit the USA's highest peak, Mt McKinley (Denali).

(USFS; www.fs.fed.us), US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS; www.fws.gov) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM; www.blm.gov). Much like the NPS system, all of these public lands have uniquely valuable properties that justify putting them into the country's wilderness treasure chest.

Lava flow, Kilauea Volcano (p1091), Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park



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