Palm Springs & the Deserts .... 280
Palm Springs .... 280
Joshua Tree National Park .... 283
Anza-Borrego Desert State Park .... 284
Mojave National Preserve .... 285
Death Valley National Park .... 286
Central Coast .... 287
Santa Barbara .... 287
Santa Barbara to San Luis Obispo .... 290
San Luis Obispo .... 290
Morro Bay to Hearst Castle .... 292
Big Sur .... 293
Carmel .... 294
Monterey .... 295
Santa Cruz .... 297
San Francisco & the Bay Area .... 299
San Francisco .... 299
Marin County .... 325
Berkeley .... 326
Northern California .... 328
Wine Country .... 328
North Coast .... 333
Sacramento .... 338
Gold Country .... 339
California’s Northern Mountains .... 341
Sierra Nevada .... 343
Yosemite National Park .... 344
Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks .... 347
Eastern Sierra .... 349
Lake Tahoe .... 351
Pacific Northwest .... 353
Washington .... 357
Seattle .... 357
Olympia .... 371
Olympic Peninsula .... 372
Northwest Washington .... 375
San Juan Islands .... 377
North Cascades .... 379
Northeastern Washington .... 381
South Cascades .... 382
Central & Southeastern Washington .... 383
Oregon .... 385
Portland .... 385
Willamette Valley .... 395
Columbia River Gorge .... 397
Oregon Cascades .... 398
Oregon Coast .... 402
Southern Oregon .... 407
Eastern Oregon .... 409
Western USA Today .... 412
History .... 414
The Way of Life .... 424
Native Americans .... 427
Arts & Architecture .... 431
The Land & Wildlife .... 437
Directory A–Z .... 446
Transportation .... 457
Index .... 468
Map Legend .... 477
Route 66 & Scenic Drives .... 35
Outdoor Activities .... 44
Western USA’s National Parks .... 136
West Coast Beaches .... 138
Alcatraz 3D Illustration .... 312
Itineraries

2 WEEKS

Best of the Southwest

Cameras get a workout on this tour, which spotlights the most iconic sites in the Southwest. You’ll loop past the region’s most famous city, its biggest canyon and its most breathtaking red-rock scenery.

Start in Las Vegas and spend a few days traveling the world on the Strip. Partied out? Swoop east past Hoover Dam, then say hello to the Grand Canyon. Spend two days exploring America’s most famous park. For a once-in-a-lifetime experience, descend from the South Rim into the chasm on a mule and spend the night at Phantom Ranch on the canyon floor. From the Grand Canyon head northeast to Monument Valley, with scenery straight out of a Hollywood Western, and then to the national parks in Utah’s southeast corner – they’re some of the most visually stunning in the country. Hike the shape-shifting canyons of Canyonlands National Park, mountain bike slickrock outside Moab, or take a photo of Balanced Rock in Arches National Park. Drive west along a spectacular stretch of pavement, Hwy 12, until it hooks up with I-15. Swing south for a sunset meditation at Valley of Fire State Park, before heading back to Las Vegas.
Hug a tree, surf a wave and taste the fresh deliciousness of West Coast fare on this nature-lover’s trip, which ribbons from Seattle to San Diego. Kick off with fresh-roasted coffee in java-loving Seattle and check out the city’s sprawling food markets, microbreweries and waterfront. Heading south, visit Mt Rainier National Park, where superb hiking trails and relaxing inns nestle beneath the snow-covered peak. Continue to the cutting-edge city of Portland, known for its sprawling parks, eco-minded residents and progressive urbanism – plus food carts, coffeehouse culture and great nightlife. Wonder at waterfalls and indulge in fresh roadside produce with a scenic drive east along the Columbia River Gorge, then turn south to get to Mt Hood for winter skiing or summer hiking. Further adventures await at 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 stroll through the magnificent old-growth forests in Redwood National and State Parks. Hug the coast as it meanders south through funky Arcata and seaside Eureka, lose yourself on the Lost Coast, and catch Hwy 1 through quaint Mendocino, where the scenic headlands and rugged shoreline make a wander mandatory. For wine tasting with a photogenic backdrop, travel inland to the rolling vineyards of the Napa and Sonoma Valleys, then continue south to romantically hilly San Francisco. Return to scenic Hwy 1 through surf-loving Santa Cruz, stately bayfront Monterey and beatnik-flavored Big Sur. In no time, you’ll reach the surreal Hearst Castle and laid-back, collegiate San Luis Obispo. Roll into Mediterranean-esque Santa Barbara for shopping and wine tasting then hop aboard a ferry in Ventura to the wildlife-rich Channel Islands. The pull from Los Angeles is strong. Go ahead – indulge your Hollywood fantasies then stroll the rugged hills of Griffith Park, followed by a cruise through LA’s palm-lined neighborhoods. After racking up a few sins in the City of Angels, move south to wander the bluffs of Laguna Beach then cruise into picture-perfect San Diego.
Pack your bathing suit, mountain bike and hiking boots for this high-altitude cruise atop the Continental Divide; it’s big skies, big peaks and big wildlife the whole way.

Spend your first two days enjoying craft beers and singletrack mountain-biking trails in Durango, a fine mountain town. From here, take the Million Dollar Hwy (Hwy 550) north through the San Juan Mountains, sightseeing in Silverton and dipping into hot springs in Ouray. Take a side trip to Telluride for a festival – there’s one almost every weekend in summer. From Montrose, drive east on Hwy 50 to the Arkansas River Valley and white-water rafting through Brown’s Canyon National Monument in Salida. Hwy 24 continues past Colorado’s tallest peaks; finish your first week in style with an overnight stay in historic Breckenridge.

Enjoy tubing, happy hour and people-watching in funky Boulder then twist up to Rocky Mountain National Park to hike and horseback ride. While here, drive the thrilling Trail Ridge Rd up above the treeline. Continue north on I-25. In Wyoming, take I-80 west to Hwy 287; follow this highway to Lander for rock climbing.

Continue north to Jackson Hole, another fun gateway town. Anchored by a central park surrounded by chic stores and cowboy bars, it’s a good place to relax, indulge in a gourmet meal or spend the night before rafting the Snake River. From here, it’s an easy glide north into Grand Teton National Park, a scenic spot for a lazy lake day and bison photo-ops. Next up is mighty Yellowstone National Park, where geysers, bears and hiking are highlights.

Start your last week with a drive on the gorgeous Beartooth Hwy, following it into Montana then hooking onto I-90 west to Bozeman and Missoula; both are good places to stock up before the final push. Serious wilderness awaits in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, while Glacier National Park is a place to visit now – there are still some 26 glaciers hanging tight, but they may not be there for long. Scan for wildlife on a hike, then end with a drive on the stunning Going-to-the-Sun Road.
This lasso loop corrals the best of the West as it rolls north along the California coast, cruises through the lush landscapes of the Pacific Northwest, the alpine towns of the Rockies and the glowing red-rock beauty of the Southwest, with a final swing back into California for a hit-parade tour of the state’s national parks.

From sunny San Diego, follow Hwy 1 north through the surf-loving coastal villages of Orange County, detouring to Disneyland before driving into shiny Los Angeles. Continue up the coast on scenic Hwy 1, stopping to shop and sample wine in glossy Santa Barbara. Gawk at gawdy Hearst Castle then continue north through woodsy Big Sur. Dine and shop then wander through Alcatraz in bohemian San Francisco. Return to Hwy 1 for the quirky towns dotting the northern California coast.

View the big trees in Redwood National and State Parks and continue into Oregon, taking time for outdoor fun in Bend. Soak in the greenery while traveling west along the Columbia River Gorge, then spend a few days savoring brews and views in Portland. Zip up the Space Needle in Seattle and drive east into wide-open Montana, heading for the outdoor wonders of Glacier National Park. Continue south into Yellowstone National Park where Old Faithful blasts regularly beside its namesake lodge, and sightseers brake for buffalo. Swoosh below majestic peaks in Grand Teton National Park before swinging southeast through Wyoming’s vast cowboy plains.

In Colorado, breathe deep in outdoorsy Boulder then uncover current hot spots in burgeoning Denver. The mining towns of central Colorado are next, followed by Mesa Verde National Park. Just south in New Mexico, artist meccas Taos and Santa Fe are fab stops for one-of-a-kind gifts. Slurp green chile in Albuquerque and follow Route 66 west into Arizona, stopping at Meteor Crater before detouring north for Grand Canyon National Park. Continue west to Las Vegas, then drive into central California for Death Valley National Park, and Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks, concluding with Yosemite National Park. Complete the loop with a glass of Californian wine in San Francisco.
Index

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park 284-5
Apache people 427
aquariums
Aquarium of the Bay 315
Aquarium of the Pacific 254
Birch Aquarium at Scripps 275
 Monterey Bay Aquarium 295
Oregon Coast Aquarium 405
Seattle Aquarium 364
Seymour Marine Discovery Center 297
Shark Reef Aquarium 147
Arcata 336
Arches National Park 207, 23
architecture 435-6
Bradbury Building 242-3
Earthships 227
Gamble House 255
Talesin West 162-3
Area 51 160
area codes 454
Arizona 160-93
Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve 332
art museums & galleries, see also museums
Adobe Gallery 219
Albuquerque Museum of Art & History 214
Arts Factory 147
Asian Art Museum 300
Aspen Art Museum 92
Balmy Alley 307
Boise Art Museum 131
Chihuly Garden & Glass 359
Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center 95
Crocker Art Museum 338
de Young Museum 309
Diego Rivera Gallery 303
Economos/ Hampton Galleries 219
Frederick R Weisman Art Foundation 251
Gallery of Fine Art 143
Georgia O’Keeffe Museum 218
Gerald Peters Gallery 219
Getty Center 251
Getty Villa 251
GF Contemporary 219
Hallie Ford Museum of Art 396
Hammer Museum 251
Harwood Museum of Art 277
Hauser & Wirth 241
Laguna Art Museum 268
Los Angeles County Museum of Art 250
Marc Navarro Gallery 219
MOCA Grand 245
Morning Star Gallery 219
Museum of Church History & Art 195
Museum of Contemporary Art 269
Museum of International Folk Art 221
Museum of Latin American Art 254
Nedra Matteucci Gallerie 219
New Mexico Museum of Art 157
New Mexico Museum of Art 221
Norton Simon Museum 255
Palm Springs Art Museum 280
Phoenix Art Museum 162
Portland Art Museum 387
San Diego Museum of Art 273
Schneider Museum of Art 407
Seattle Art Museum 358
Taos Art Museum & Fechin Institute 227
Timken Museum of Art 273
Tucson Museum of Art 187-8
arts 429-30, 436, see also literature, music
Ashland 407-8
Aspen 92-3, 18
Astoria 403-4
ATMs 452
Auburn State Recreation Area 340
Avenue of the Giants 335
Avila Beach 290
Aztec Ruins National Monument 230

B
Badwater 286
bald eagles 441-2
Balmy Alley 307
Bandelier National Monument 225-6
basketry 429-30
bathrooms 454
Battleship Iowa 254
beaches 46, 138-9
Baker Beach 307
Balboa Peninsula 268
Cannon Beach 404
Huntington Beach 268, 139
La Jolla 275-6, 139
Laguna Beach 268
Mission Beach 273-4, 275
Natural Bridges State Beach 297
Newport Beach 268
Ocean Beach 309
Orange County 267-9
Pacific Beach 273-4, 275
Pfeiffer Beach’ 293
Rodeo Beach 325
San Diego 273-4

A
Abiquiu 226
accommodations 446, see also individual locations
Acoma Pueblo 217-18
activities 26-9, see also individual activities
air travel 457-8, 460
Ajo Mountain Drive 191-2
Alamogordo 234
Albuquerque 214-17, 32
Alcatraz 312-13
Albuquerque 265-6
Alamogordo 234
Alvord Desert 410
ambibians 441
amusement parks
Belmont Park 275
Disney California Adventure 17, 265-6, 17
Disneyland 17, 265-7
Epic Discovery 63
Knott’s Berry Farm 266
Legoland 63
Musée Méméranie 307
Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk 297
Stratosphere 147
Utah Olympic Park 200
Wet n’ Wild Phoenix 169
Anaheim 265-7
Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest 349
Andrew Molera State Park 294
Angels Camp 340
Angels Landing 212
animals 435-7, see also individual species
Antelope Canyon 184
Antelope Island State Park 202

Map Pages 000
Photo Pages 000
cross-country skiing 52, see also skiing & snowboarding
Crater Lake National Park 402
Methow Valley 380
Royal Gorge 352
Winter Park 88-9
culture 424-6
currency 20
customs regulations 448
cycling 45-6, see also bicycle travel
Albuquerque 215
Bellingham 376
Grand Canyon National Park 179
Grand Teton National Park 118
Los Angeles 255
Monterey 296
Olympic Discovery Trail 374
Portland 389
San Francisco 311
Santa Barbara 288
Steamboat Springs 87
Sun Valley 133
Trail of the Coeur d’Alenes 135
Vail 90
Yellowstone National Park 115-16
dangers, see safety
Dead Horse Point State Park 208
Death Valley National Park 286-7, 40
Denver 70-81, 76-7
accommodations 71-5
drinking & nightlife 75-7
entertainment 77-9
festivals & events 71
food 75
shopping 79
sights 70-1
tavel to/from 80
travel within 80-1
Desolation Wilderness 351
Devils Postpile National Monument 349
Dinosaur National Monument 204
disabilities, travelers with 455
Disney California Adventure 17, 265-6, 17
Disneyland 17, 265-7
distilleries
Breckenridge Distillery 90
Santa Fe Spirits 223
diving 53, 296
Dolby Theatre 248
Donner Summit 352
drinks 60-1, see also beer, coffee, wine
driver’s licenses 462
driving, see car travel
Dunsmuir 342
Durango 103-4
DVDs 448

economy 413
El Morro National Monument 218
electricity 449
elk 442
Eli 160
Ellensburg 383-4
embassies 449
emergencies 449
Empire Mine State Historic Park 340
environmental issues 412-13, 443-4
Escalante 210
Estes Park 86-7
etiquette 428, 449
Eugene 396-7
events, see festivals & events
exchange rates 21, 453

farmers markets
Arcata 336
Boulder County Farmers Market 84
Los Angeles 257, 296
Olympia Farmers Market 372
Phoenix 168
San Francisco 316
Santa Fe 223
Farmington 230
Ferry Building 299
festivals & events 26-9
film studios 250
films 412, 422, 433-5

fishing
Cimarron Canyon State Park 231
Olympic National Park 373
Sawtooth National Recreation Area 134
Steamboat Springs 87
Flagstaff 19, 172-6, 19
Flamingo Gorge National Recreation Area 204
Flathead Lake 126-7
food 23, 55-61, 58
breakfast burritos 57
buffets 154
Californian cuisine 56-7
etiquette 55
farm-grown produce 56
fish 56
Mexican food 59
Native American food 59
Pacific Northwest food 57
regional specialties 55-6
Southwest cuisine 57-9
vegetarians & vegans 59-60
wild food 56
Forks 375
Fort Ross State Historic Park 333
Fort Worden State Park 373-4
free-tailed bats 442
Fremont Street Experience 147
Fremont Troll 362

Gallatin Valley 122-3
galleries, see art museums & galleries
Gamble House 255
gardens, see parks & gardens
Garnet Ghost Town 125
gay travelers 449
Los Angeles 262
San Francisco 321
General Sherman Tree 347
geology 22, 437-41
Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument 233
Gila National Forest 233
Glacier National Park 19, 128-30, 19
Going-to-the-Sun Road 42, 128
Gold Country 339-41

Golden Gate Bridge 309, 32
Golden Gate Park 309
Grand Canyon National Park 10, 176-83, 178-9, 10, 48
Grand Coulee Dam 383
Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument 210
Grand Teton National Park 117-21, 119
Grass Valley 340
Great American Beer Festival 28, 71
Great Basin 160
Great Basin National Park 160
Great Sand Dunes National Park 104-5
Green River 204-5
Guerneville 331-2

Havasupai Canyon 183
Havasupai people 427
Healdsburg 332
health 449-51
Hearst Castle 292, 435
Helena 124
Hells Canyon 410
Highway 12 41
Highway 89/89A 38
hiking 24, 45, 49
Albuquerque 215
Boise 131
Camelback Mountain 163
Canyonlands National Park 207-8
Cape Perpetua Scenic Area 406
Capitol Reef National Park 209
Chiricahua National Monument 193
Cimarron Canyon State Park 231
Crater Lake National Park 402
Denver 80
Eldorado Canyon State Park 81
Galen Creek Recreation Area 157
Garden of the Gods 95
Glacier National Park 129
Golden Gate Bridge 309
State Park 80
Grand Canyon National Park 177-9, 182
INDEX L-H

L

La Purísima Mission State Historic Park 290
Lake Chelan 380
Lake Tahoe 351-2
Lander 108-9
Laramie 106-8
Las Cruces 232-3
Las Vegas 15, 142-56, 149, 15
accommodations 148-51
activities 148
children 146
drinking & nightlife 153-4
emergencies 155
entertainment 154-5
food 152-3
medical services 155
shopping 155
sights 143-8
travel information 156
travel to/from 156
travel within 156
Las Vegas (New Mexico) 225
Lassen Volcanic National Park 343
Lava Beds National Monument 343
Leavenworth 379-80
legal matters 452
lesbian travelers 449
Los Angeles 262
San Francisco 321
Lewis, Meriwether 403, 416-17
Lincoln 235
literature 431-2, see also
books
Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument 125
Living Desert State Park 236
Lombard Street 303
Lopez Island 379
Los Alamos 225
Los Angeles 10, 240-65, 242-3, 10, 23
accommodations 256-51
activities 256-5
Beverly Hills 251, 257-8
children 258
Downtown 241-3, 256, 259, 246-7
drinking & eating 261-2
El Pueblo de Los Angeles 243-4
entertainment 262-3
festivals & events 256
food 259-61
gay & lesbian travelers 262
Griffith Park 248-50, 259-60
Los Angeles continued
Hollywood 248, 249, 250-1, 256-7, 259-60, 252-3
itineraries 245
Long Beach 253-4, 258, 261
Malibu 251
medical services 264
Mid-City 250-1, 260, 252-3
Pasadena 254-5, 258, 261
Presidio 306-7
Santa Monica 252, 258, 260, 254
shopping 263-4
sights 241-55
South Park 245-6
tourist information 264
tours 256
tavel to/from 264-5
tavel within 265
Venice 253, 260
Los Olivos 290
Lost Coast 335

M
magazines 448
margaritas 60-1
marijuana 413
Marin County 325-6
Marin Headlands 325-6
Maritime National Historical Park 303
marriage equality 425
measures 448
Mendocino 333
Mesa Verde National Park 102-3
Methow Valley 380
microbreweries 19, 61
Accomplice Brewing Company 106
Angel City Brewery 261
Avery Brewery Company 83, 19
Black Shirt Brewing Co 75-6
Bridger Brewing 122
Cloudburst Brewing 368
Culmination Brewing 393
Elysian Brewing Company 368
Fremont Brewing Company 367
June Lake Brewing 350
Mountain Sun 83
Six Rivers Brewery 338
Snake River Brewing Co 111
Terminal Gravity Brewing 410
Three Rivers Eatery & Brewhouse 230
Thunder Canyon Brewery 190
Überbrew 123-4
Million Dollar Highway 39, 98
Mission San Xavier del Bac 192
Missoula 124-6
Moab 16, 205-7, 16
mobile phones 20, 454
Mojave National Preserve 285-6
Mokelumne Hill 340
money 20, 21, 448-9, 452-3
Mono Lake 349
Montana 121-30
Monterey 295-7
Monterey State Historic Park 295
Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park 17, 185, 17
Morro Bay State Park 292
Morro Rock 292
motorcycle travel 458-9, 461-4
mountain biking 50
Bend 401
Buffalo Creek Mountain Bike Area 80
Crested Butte 97
Flagstaff 173-4
Helena 124
Lander 108
Leavenworth 379
Moab 16, 205, 16
Monarch Crest Trail 94
Phoenix 163
Portland 389
Santa Fe 219
Sawtooth National Recreation Area 134
Whitefish 127
Winter Park 88-9
Mt Baker 379
Mt Hood 398-400
Mt Rainier National Park 382
Mt Shasta 342
Mt Shasta city 342
Mt St Helens National Volcanic Monument 383
Mt Tamalpais State Park 326
Murphys 340
museums 24
American International Rattlesnake Museum 214
Anasazi State Park Museum 209-10
Arizona Museum of Natural History 163
Arizona Science Center 169
Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum 187
Arizona State Museum 187
Autry Museum of the American West 249
Avila Adobe 243
Barney Ford Museum 89
Battleship Iowa 254
Bay Area Discovery Museum 325-6
Beat Museum 303
Blair-Caldwell African American Museum 71
Blumenschein Home & Museum 227
Bradbury Science Museum 225
Broad 244
Buffalo Bill Center of the West 112
Burke Museum 362-3
Cable Car Museum 303
California Academy of Sciences 315
California Museum 338
California Science Center 247
Chapin Mesa Museum 102
Children’s Creativity Museum 315
Children’s Museum of Phoenix 169
Chinese Historical Society of America 303
Clark Planetarium 195
Clifford Still Museum 71
Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum 95
Columbia River Maritime Museum 403
Courthouse Museum 235
Denver Museum of Nature & Science 71
Discovery 157
Exploratorium 299-300
Fremont County Pioneer Museum 108
Frontier Days Old West Museum 105-6
Geological Museum 107
Giant Forest Museum 347
Grammy Museum 246
Griffith Observatory 249
Heard Museum 161-2
High Desert Museum 400
History Colorado Center 71
Hollywood Museum 248
Hopi Museum 187
Hubbard Museum of the American West 234-5
Huntington Library, Art Collections & Botanical Gardens 255
Idaho State Historical Museum 131
Indian Pueblo Cultural Center 214-15
Japanese American National Museum 245
John Wesley Powell River History Museum 204
Juniper Serra Museum 274
La Brea Tar Pits & Museum 250-1
LA Plaza 243
Los Alamos Historical Museum 225
Madame Tussauds 147
Makah Museum 375
Maritime Museum (San Diego) 269
Maritime Museum (San Francisco) 306
Martinez Hacienda 226-7
Meow Wolf 218
Millicents Rogers Museum 226
Mingei International Museum 271
Mini Time Machine of Museum of Miniatures 190
Miracle of America Museum 126
Mob Museum 148
Mora Park Museum 85
MOXI 287
Museum of Ancient Life 197
Museum of Indian Arts & Culture 221
Museum of Northern Arizona 173
Museum of Pop Culture 359
Museum of the Rockies 121
Museum of Tolerance 251
Museum of Western Film History 349
Musical Instrument Museum 162
National Atomic Testing Museum 148
National Automobile Museum 157
National Museum of Wildlife Art 109
Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County 248
Natural History Museum of Utah 195
Neon Museum – Neon Boneyard 148
Nevada State Railroad Museum 364
New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum 232
New Mexico Museum of Space History 234-6
Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture 381
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park 274
Oregon Historical Society 387
Pacific Science Center 364
Palace of the Governors & New Mexico History Museum 221
Park City Museum 200
Portland Children’s Museum 388
Reuben H Fleet Science Center 272
San Diego Air & Space Museum 273
San Diego Museum of Man 272
San Diego Natural History Museum 272
Santa Barbara Maritime Museum 287-8
Seymour Marine Discovery Center 297
Smokejumper Visitor Center 125
Thomas Condon Paleontology Center 409
Titan Missile Museum 192
Tucson Children’s Museum 188
Turtle Bay Exploration Park 341
USS Midway Museum 269
Utah Field House of Natural History State Park Museum 203
Western Folklife Center 160
Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian 218-19
White Sands Missile Test Center Museum 232
Wyoming Territorial Prison 106-7
music 368, 432-3

N
Napa Valley 12, 328-30, 12
national parks 24, 47, 451, 136-7, see also parks & gardens, state parks, wildlife reserves
Arches National Park 206, 23
Bryce Canyon National Park 210-11
Canyonlands National Park 207-8, 137
Capitol Reef National Park 209
Channel Islands National Park 288
Crater Lake National Park 402
Death Valley National Park 286-7, 40
Glacier National Park 19, 128-30, 19
Grand Canyon National Park 10, 176-83, 178-9, 10, 48
Grand Teton National Park 117-21, 119
Great Basin National Park 160
Great Sand Dunes National Park 104-5
Joshua Tree National Park 283-4
Kings Canyon National Park 347-8
Lassen Volcanic National Park 343
Mesa Verde National Park 102-3
Mt Rainier National Park 382
North Cascades National Park 380-1
Olympic National Park 372-3
Petrified Forest National Park 186
Rocky Mountain National Park 84-6
Saguaro National Park 11, 190-1, 11
Sequoia National Park 347
Yellowstone National Park 9, 112-17, 114, 8-9, 137
Yosemite National Park 13, 137
Zion National Park 15, 211-12, 15, 48
Native American people 427-30
art 429-30
etiquette 428
food 59
history 414-15, 418-19
museums 218-19, 221, 375
Native American sites 12, 24-5
Acoma Pueblo 217-18
Aztec Ruins National Monument 230
Bandelier National Monument 225-6
Bears Ears National Monument 201
Canyon de Chelly National Monument 184-5
Chaco Culture National Historical Park 230
El Morro National Monument 218
Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument 233
Hovenweep National Monument 208-9
Lava Beds National Monument 343
Mesa Verde National Park 102
Navajo National Monument 184
Newspaper Rock State Historic Monument 211
Petroglyph National Monument 215
Puéblito Cliff Dwellings 225
San Ildefonso Pueblo 225
Taos Pueblo 228
Valley of Fire State Park 157
Walnut Canyon 175
Natural Bridges National Monument 209
Navajo Nation 184-5
Navajo National Monument 184
Navajo people 429
Neah Bay 375
Nevada 142-60
New Mexico 213-36
Newberry National Volcanic Monument 402
Newport 405
Newspaper Rock State Historic Monument 211
newspapers 448
Nike Missile Site SF-88 325
North Cascades 379-81
North Umpqua River 409
Northern California (California) 341-3
Northern Mountains (Rocky Mountains) 84-8
Northwest Peninsula 375

O
observatories 249
Griffith Observatory 249
Kitt Peak National Observatory 191
Lowell Observatory 173
Very Large Array 234
Ojo Caliente 226
OK Corral 193
Olympia 371-2
Olympic National Park 372-3
Olympic Peninsula 372-5
opening hours 21, 453
Orange County 267-9
Orcas Island 378-9
Oregon 385-410
Oregon Cascades 398-402
Oregon Caves National Monument & Preserve 409
Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area 406-7
Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument 191
Ouray 98-9
474

INDEX P-S

P
Pacific Coast Highway 11, 37-8, 11, 354-5
Pacific Northwest 353-410, 354-5
accommodations 353
climates 353
culture 424-5
food 57, 353
geology 440-1
highlights 354-5
itineraries 356
travel seasons 353
travel to/from 357
travel within 357
Palm Springs 280-3
Paradise Valley 122-3
paragliding 109
Paradise Valley 198-203
parks & gardens, see also national parks, state parks, wildlife reserves
Alamo Square Park 308-9
Alton Baker Park 396
Audrey Headframe Park 170
Bartholomew Park 330
Boise River Float 131
Boise River Greenbelt 131
Chautauqua Park 81
Confluence Park 70-1
Crispy Field 306-7
Desert Botanical Garden 162
Discovery Park 369
Dolores Park 307-8
Forest Park 388
Garden of the Gods 95
Golden Gate Park 309, 311
Griffith Park 248-9
Huntington Botanical Gardens 255
Jack London State Historic Park 330
Lithia Park 407
Los Angeles Botanical Gardens 249-50
Olympic Sculpture Park 358
Red Butte Garden 195
Riverfront Park 381
Rose Garden 247
San Francisco Botanical Garden 309
Sunnylands Center & Gardens 280-1
Tom McCall Waterfront Park 385
Washington Park 388
passports 457
Patagonia-Sonora Preserve 192
Petrified Forest National Park 186
Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park 293
Phoenix 161-9, 166-7
phone cards 454
photography 452, 453
Pike Place Market 358, 13
Pinnacles National Park 293
Pioneer Square 366
Pioneertown 188
planning
calendar of events 26-9
children 62-4
itineraries 30-4
travel seasons 26-9
Western USA basics 20-1
plants 440
Plymouth 340
Point Lobos State Natural Reserve 294-5
Point Reyes National Seashore 326
Port Townsend 373-4
Portland 16, 385-95, 386, 16
accommodations 390-1
activities 388-9
drinking & nightlife 393
emergencies 394
entertainment 393-4
festivals & events 389-90
food 391-2
medical services 394
shopping 394
sights 385-8
tourist information 394-5
tours 389
travel to/from 395
travel within 395
pottery 429-30
Powell St Cable Car Turnaround 300
Prescott 170
pronk horn antelope 443
public holidays 454
Pueblo people 429
Joshua Tree National Park 283
Moab 205
Mt Rainier National Park 382
Pinnacles National Park 293
Smith Rock State Park 400-1
Yosemite National Park 345
Rocky Mountain National Park 14, 84-6, 14
Rocky Mountains 66, 68-135, 72-3
accommodations 68
climate 425
food 68
highlights 72-3
itineraries 74
travel seasons 68
travel to/from 69-70
travel within 69-70
Roswell 236
Route 66 18, 35-7, 188, 18
Ruidoso 234-5
Russian River Valley 331-2
Sacramento 338-9
Saguaro National Park 11, 190-1, 11
Saguaroos 441
Salem 395-6
Salida 94-5
Salmon River 74, 51
Salt Lake City 194-8
accommodations 195-6
children 199
drinking & nightlife 197
emergencies 198
entertainment 197-8
food 196-7
medical services 198
shopping 198
sights 194-5
tourist information 198
Salt River Recreation 163
Salton Sea 285
Salvation Mountain 285
San Diego 269-80, 270
accommodations 276-7
activities 275-6
drinking & nightlife 278-9
entertainment 279
food 277-8
Seattle 13, 357-71, 360-1, 13 accommodations 364-5 activities 363 children 364 drinking & nightlife 367-8 emergencies 370 entertainment 369 festivals & events 364 medical services 370 shopping 370 sights 358-63 tourist information 370 tours 363-4 travel to/from 370-1 travel within 371 Sebastopol 331 Sedona 171-2 senior travelers 448-9 Sequoia National Park 347 Shasta Dam 341 Shipprock 230 Sierra Nevada 343-52 Silver City 233 Silverton 101-2 Sisters 400 skiing & snowboarding 18, 50-3, 51, see also cross-country skiing Alta 199 Arizona Snowbowl 174 Aspen 92, 18 Big Sky Resort 122-3 Breckenridge 89-90 Bridger Bowl Ski Area 121 Brighton 199 Canyons Village at Park City 200 Crested Butte 97 Deer Valley 200 Heavenly 351 Hurricane Ridge Ski & Snowboard Area 373 Jackson Hole 109 Mammoth Mountain 349 Mt Bachelor Ski Resort 401 Mt Baker 379 Mt Hood 399 Northstar California 352 Park City Mountain Resort 201 Purgatory 103 Schweitzer Mountain Resort 135 Silverton 101 Ski Apache 235 Ski Santa Fe 219-20 Snowbird 199 Solitude 199 Squaw Valley USA 352 Steamboat Mountain Resort 87 Sugar Bowl 352 Sun Valley Resort 133 Sundance Resort 205 Taos 227-8 Telluride 99 Vail 90 Whitefish 127 Winter Park 88-9 Slide Rock State Park 171 Smith Rock State Park 400-1 snowshoeing 52, see also cross-country skiing Solvang 290 Sonoma Coast State Park 333 Sonoma Valley 12, 330-1, 12 Southwest 66, 140-236, 142-3 accommodations 140 climate 140 culture 425-6 food 57-9, 140 geology 438-40 highlights 142-3 itineraries 141 travel seasons 140 travel to/from 141-2 travel within 141-2 spas, see hot springs & spas Space Needle 359 Spokane 381-2 sports 426 Springdale 212-13 Standish-Hickey State Recreation Area 335 Stanley 134-5 state parks 451, see also national parks, parks & gardens, wildlife reserves Andrew Molera State Park 294 Antelope Island State Park 202 Anza-Borrego Desert State Park 284-5 Cape Blanco State Park 407 Castle Crags State Park 342 Cathedral Gorge State Park 163 Cimarron Canyon State Park 231 City of Rocks State Park 233 Crystal Cove State Park 268 Dead Horse Point State Park 208 Deception Pass State Park 375 Ecola State Park 404 Eldorado Canyon State Park 81 Emerald Bay State Park 352 Fort Stevens State Park 403 Fort Worden State Park 373-4 Golden Gate Canyon State Park 80 Humboldt Redwoods State Park 335 Humbbug Mountain State Park 407 Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park 337 Jerome State Historic Park 170 Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park 293 Kartchner Caverns State Park 192 Lake Chelan State Park 380 Lime Kiln Point State Park 377 Living Desert State Park 236 Malibu Creek State Park 251 Moran State Park 378 Morro Bay State Park 292 Mt Tamalpais State Park 326 Old Town San Diego State Historic Park 274 Oliver Lee State Park 234 Patrick’s Point State Park 336 Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park 293 Point Lobos State Natural Reserve 294-5 Point Sur Historic Park 294
state parks continued
- Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park 337
- Red Rock State Park 171
- Richardson Grove State Park 335
- Salt Point State Park 333
- Sinks Canyon State Park 108
- Slide Rock State Park 171
- Smith Rock State Park 400-1
- Sonoma Coast State Park 256
- Staunton State Park 80
- Topanga Canyon State Park 256
- Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve 275
- Valley of Fire State Park 157
- Steamboat Springs 87-8
- Steens Mountain 410
- Steinbeck, John 431
- Sun Valley 132-4
- Sundance Film Festival 26, 201
- Sundial Bridge 341
- Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument 177
- surfing 46, 139
  - Los Angeles 256
  - San Diego 276
  - Santa Cruz 297-8
  - Santa Cruz Surfing Museum 297
- Surfrider Beach 256
- Sutter Creek 340
- swimming
  - Auburn State Recreation Area 340
  - Los Angeles 256
  - Slide Rock State Park 171
  - Standish-Hickey State Recreation Area 335
- Zephyr Cove 351

Telluride Bluegrass Festival 27, 99-100
time 20
tipping 453
toilets 454
Tombstone 192-3
Torrey 209
Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve 275
tourist information 455
train travel 459, 464
to/from Western USA 457-60
travel within Western USA 460-4
traveller’s checks 453
trekking, see hiking
Trinidad 336
Truckee 352
Trump, Donald 423
Truth or Consequences 231
Tucson 186-90
Tulelake 343
TV 422, 434-5, 448

U
- Ukiah 335
- universities
  - Arizona State University 163
  - Humboldt State University 336
  - University of California, Berkeley 327
  - University of Oregon 396
  - University of Washington 362
  - US Midway Museum 269
  - Utah 193-213

V
- vacations 454
- Vail 90-2
- Valley of Fire State Park 157
- vegetarian & vegan travelers 59-60
- Vernal 203
- Very Large Array 234
- Virginia City 159-60
- visas 20, 455-6
- Volcano 340

W
- walking, see hiking
- walking tours 318
- Walla Walla 384-5
- Wallowa Mountains Area 410
- Walnut Canyon 175
- Wasatch Mountains 198-203, 51
- Washington 357-85
  - weather 20, 26-9
  - weaving 430
- websites, see internet resources
- weights 448
- whale-watching 52, 295-6, see also wildlife-watching
- Whidbey Island 375-6
- Whiskeytown National Recreation Area 341
- White Sands National Monument 233-4
- white-water rafting 46, 51
- Arkansas River 98
- Bluff 208
- Colorado River 185
- Durango 103
- Green River 204-5
- John Day River 409
- Middle Fork of the Salmon 134
- Moab 205
- Salida 94
- Santa Fe 219
- Snake River 109-10, 410
- Steamboat Springs 87
- Taos 227-8
- Vernal 203
- Whitefish 127-8
- wildlife reserves, see also national parks, parks & gardens, state parks
- Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge 231
- World Center for Birds of Prey 131
- wildlife-watching
  - Antelope Island State Park 202
  - Grand Teton National Park 118
  - Monterey 295-6
  - National Elk Refuge 109
  - Point Lobos State Natural Reserve 294-5
  - Point Piedras Blancas 292-3
  - San Francisco 307
  - Yellowstone National Park 113
- Willamette Valley 395-7
- Williams 176
- windsurfing
  - Hood River 398
  - wine 60
- wine regions 12, 23, 60
- Healdsburg 332
- Napa Valley 328-30
- Paso Robles 292
- Russian River Valley 331-2
- Santa Maria Valley 290
- Santa Ynez Valley 290
- Sonoma Valley 330-1
- Verde Valley 173
- Walla Walla 384-5, 58
- Winter Park 88-9
- women travelers 456
- Wyoming 105-21

Y
- Yachats 405-6
- Yakima 383-4
- Yellowstone National Park 9, 112-17, 114, 8-9, 137
- Yosemite National Park 13, 343-6, 13, 137

Z
- Zion National Park 15, 211-12, 15, 48
- ziplining 147
- zoos
  - Living Desert Zoo & Gardens 281
  - Los Angeles Zoo 249-50
  - Oregon Zoo 388
  - Reid Park Zoo 187
  - San Diego Zoo 271
  - Woodland Park Zoo 364
- Zuni Pueblo 218
Map Legend

Sights
- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours
- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkeling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping
- Sleeping
- Camping

Eating
- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife
- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment
- Entertainment

Shopping
- Shopping

Information
- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic
- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population
- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport
- Airport
- BART station
- Border crossing
- Boston T station
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro/Muni station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Subway/SkyTrain station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

Routes
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries
- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography
- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas
- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book
Becky Ohlsen
Pacific Northwest
Becky is a freelance writer, editor and critic based in Portland, Oregon. She writes guidebooks and travel stories about Scandinavia, Portland and elsewhere for Lonely Planet. When she’s not covering ground for Lonely Planet, Becky is working on a book about motorcycles and the paradoxical appeal of risk.

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Chris’s first expedition in life ended in failure when he tried to dig from Pennsylvania to China at the age of six. He went on to study Chinese in university, living for several years in China. He spent more than a decade in Paris with his wife and two children before the lure of Colorado’s sunny skies and outdoor adventure proved too great to resist.

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Liza has been a travel writer since 2003, when she made a move from corporate lawyering to travel writing. She’s written dozens of guidebooks and articles to destinations throughout the Americas. She lives very happily in Denver, Colorado, with her husband and fellow writer, Gary Chandler, and their two kids.

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California’s North Coast & Redwoods
Josephine first got her taste of not-so-serious travel when she slung a guitar on her back and traveled in Europe in the early ’70s, along the way working on a kibbutz in Israel and meeting her husband. She primarily covers Spain and Italy for Lonely Planet.

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Nevada
Berlin-based Ben grew up in the ‘burbs of Australia, spending weekends and long summers by the beach, and while he’s magnetically drawn to big mountains, beach life is in his blood. Ben thinks that the best thing about travel isn’t as much about where you go as who you meet: living vicariously through the stories of kind strangers really adds to one’s own experience.

Clifton Wilkinson
Santa Barbara County
Clifton has been in love with California since first visiting in 1995. Christmases spent near Sacramento, bike rides across the Golden Gate Bridge and hiking in Yosemite National Park have all reinforced Clifton’s opinion that the Golden State is the best state in the whole US, and Santa Barbara is one of its most beautiful corners. Having worked for Lonely Planet for more than 11 years, he’s now based in the London office, but hoping for the call back to CA’s Sideways country and the chance to show that Merlot isn’t all that bad.
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Marin County & the Bay Area, Coastal California  
The author of more than 70 travel and non-fiction books, Sara’s writing has featured in national and international newspapers and magazines, including numerous Lonely Planet titles, CNN and National Geographic Adventure, as well as on popular travel websites such as Jetsetter.

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California’s Northern Mountains  
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Carolyn McCarthy  
Colorado  
Specializing in travel, culture and adventure in the Americas, Carolyn has has contributed to forty guidebooks and anthologies for Lonely Planet, and written or National Geographic, Outside, BBC Magazine, Sierra Magazine, Boston Globe and other publications.
OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

OUR WRITERS

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A former English lecturer, Hugh swapped grant applications for visa applications and turned his love of travel into a full-time thing. He’s never happier than when on the road with his two daughters. Except perhaps on the cricket field...

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California’s Central Coast
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Rocky Mountains, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming
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