



# Explore AMERICA

250 PLACES TO GO IN 2026

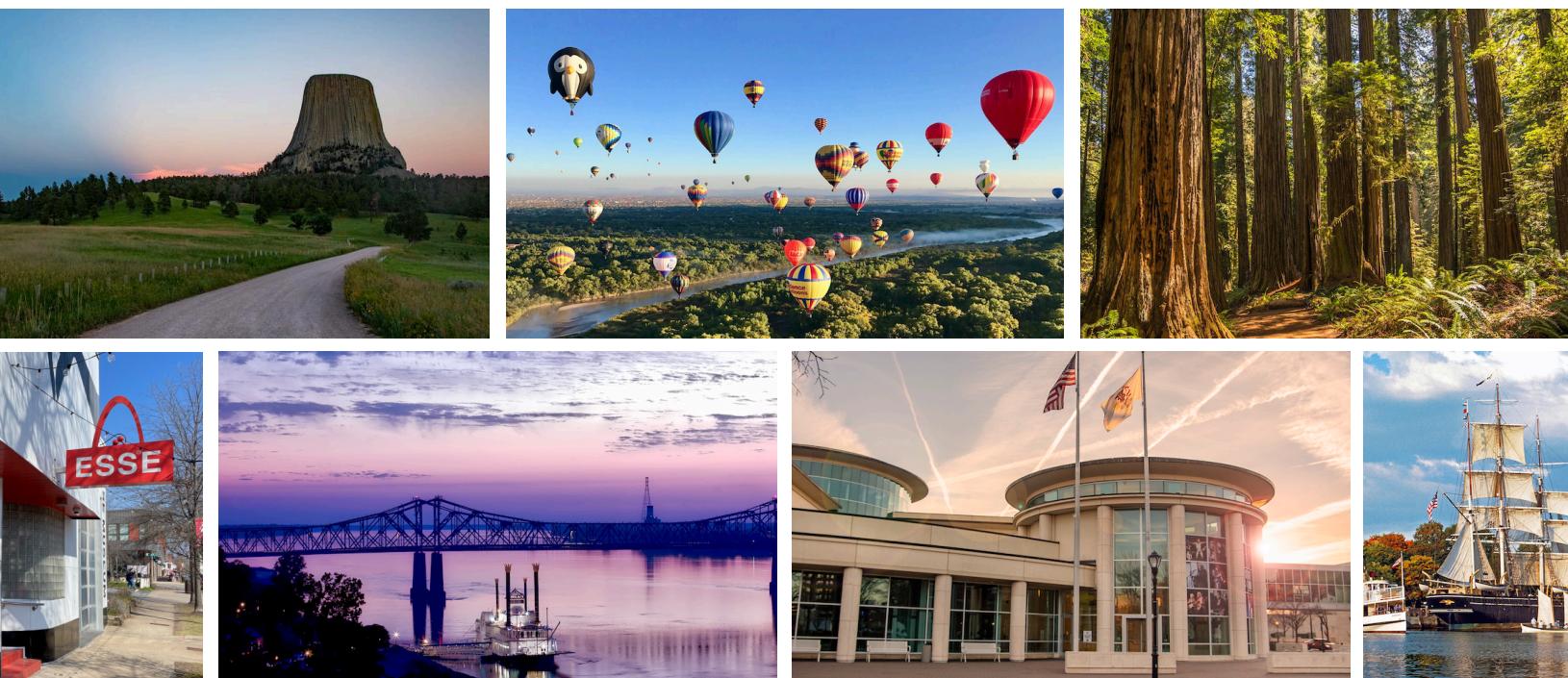


# About the Author

Erin Gifford is an avid road tripper who has criss-crossed the U.S. many times, both on her own and with her family in tow. She has also explored the globe, collecting passport stamps in India, Norway, Israel, France, and Ireland, to name a few of her favorite international destinations.

A long-time travel writer, her work has appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, AFAR.com, Lonely Planet, *Costco Connection*, Thrillist, *Outside*, and *USA Today's GoEscape*, among others.

When she's not on the road, Erin enjoys hiking and pedaling rail-trails. She writes about hiking in Virginia at [www.gohikevirginia.com](http://www.gohikevirginia.com) and is the author of three hiking guidebooks for Falcon Guides, including [\*Hiking with Kids Virginia\*](#) and [\*Virginia Summits\*](#).



# An Important Note to Readers

A quick note: the places in this digital travel guide can—and will—change. Restaurants close, museums switch hours, parks adjust their policies, and sometimes prices seem to change just because it's Tuesday. In other words, a lot of things are out of my control. So before you go, give each place a quick Google check to make sure it's open and ready for you.

In a few spots—like Antelope Canyon, Rocky Mountain National Park, and Taliesin—you'll need advance reservations, timed-entry tickets, or a guided tour to get in. Some experiences sell out days (or weeks, sometimes months) ahead. I've flagged these for you throughout the guide, and I promise I'm not being dramatic. Please take those notes seriously so you don't miss out.

## Advertising, Sponsored Content & Affiliate Links

As you explore this guide, you may notice there are display ads and affiliate links sprinkled throughout. Since I spent many, many (many) hours creating this free resource, any support—whether visiting my advertisers or clicking a helpful link—is genuinely appreciated. For full transparency: if you book a tour through Viator or purchase a guidebook on Amazon, for example, I may earn a small commission. You're never required to buy anything, but if you do, it helps me keep this guide free and lets advertisers know readers love what I'm doing.

You should also know that the tours, experiences, and accommodations featured in this guide have been vetted to the best of my abilities. I've read reviews, asked around, and tried my best to make sure the extras I recommend really do make your trip better. I would be absolutely mortified if you had a poor experience because of something I suggested. I'm not a paid spokesperson, nor am I officially endorsing any brand, but based on research and feedback, these are experiences I think you will genuinely enjoy.

If you see something in a red-outlined box at the bottom of a must-do checklist, there may be an affiliate link included. Just something to keep in mind as you explore.





# Introduction



## Why These 250 Places?

In 2026, the United States turns 250 — a milestone that feels like an open invitation to get out and see the country. The U.S. has always been one of my favorite places to roam, and my hope is that this guide helps you explore the spots that spark your curiosity.

This PDF-style guide highlights 100 places: two must-see destinations in each of the 50 states. Naturally, you may be wondering: *Isn't this supposed to be 250 places?* It is — but as the guide grew, the format couldn't hold everything without becoming unwieldy. So the remaining 150 places, including all five must-sees for Washington, D.C., live on the companion site [USABucketList.com](http://USABucketList.com), where you can explore the full collection anytime.



## Why these particular places — and have I personally visited them all?

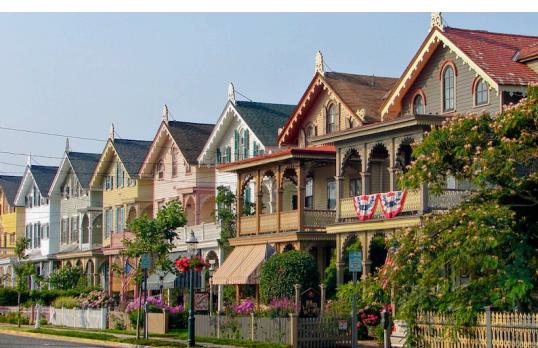
Not quite, though more than you might expect. This project is rooted in years of road-tripping, both with my kids and on my own: a 7.5-week cross-country journey, a loop around Lake Michigan, and a sweep across South Dakota that included Wall Drug, Badlands National Park, and even the Corn Palace.

For the destinations I haven't yet explored firsthand, I turned to a network of trusted, U.S.-obsessed travelers who eagerly shared their must-dos and most memorable stops. Their insights helped shape this guide into what you see today.

Choosing where to go is only half the fun — but knowing what not to miss is often what makes a trip truly memorable. Few things sting more than returning home and realizing you overlooked something amazing. To help avoid that, each destination includes a straightforward five-item must-do checklist designed to highlight the very best of each place.



This collection reaches far beyond the traditional “founding fathers circuit.” You'll find sites connected to the Louisiana Purchase, Lewis & Clark, the Civil War, World War II, the civil rights movement, the space race, 9/11, and the digital age. National and state parks sit alongside museums, cultural centers, small towns, quirky roadside stops, and uniquely American icons from Harley-Davidson to Hershey.



**This guide - and the [full 250-place list online](#) - is here to inspire exploration. Here's to discovering the best of America, one unforgettable stop at a time.**



**Let's go!**

# ALASKA: ALASKA NATIVE HERITAGE CENTER



The Alaska Native Heritage Center celebrates the living cultures of Alaska's Indigenous peoples. Representing 11 major cultural groups, the center offers a deeper understanding of Alaska's first peoples through authentic experiences, traditional village sites, and daily cultural demonstrations.

 **Anchorage, Alaska**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Tour the Village Sites** – Walk around Lake Tiulana to explore six life-sized traditional dwellings, guided by Culture Bearers sharing Indigenous history and lifeways.
- Watch Performances at the Gathering Place** – Enjoy traditional dance, storytelling, and athletic demonstrations showcasing strength, artistry, and heritage passed through generations.
- Explore the Hall of Cultures** – View artifacts, multimedia exhibits, and historical displays illuminating the traditions, technologies, and artistry of Alaska's five major culture groups.
- Join Cultural Workshops** – Participate in storytelling, language lessons, or art demonstrations led by Alaska Native artists and elders for a hands-on learning experience.
- Shop Indigenous Art** – Support local artisans by purchasing handmade jewelry, carvings, and textiles at the Ch'k'iqadi Gallery or outdoor artist market.



Skip the line and [reserve your ticket](#) now for the Alaska Native Heritage Center. It's an easy way to jump right into Alaska's diverse cultures and one less thing to juggle when you arrive in Anchorage.

# ALASKA: FAIRBANK'S NORTHERN LIGHTS

## Must-Do Checklist

- Sleep Beneath the Sky at Borealis Basecamp** – Watch the aurora dance overhead from clear-roofed igloos nestled in the boreal forest, far from light pollution.
- Join a Guided Aurora Tour** – Head into the wilderness with local experts who track forecasts, share photography tips, and help you capture perfect aurora shots.
- Soak at Chena Hot Springs** – Slip into steaming geothermal pools as the Northern Lights ripple overhead. It's one of Alaska's most unforgettable and quintessential aurora experiences.
- View from Cleary Summit** – Drive 20 miles north of Fairbanks to this free, high-elevation spot favored by locals for its wide, unobstructed night-sky views.
- Relax at Aurora Pointe Lodge** – Cozy up indoors between viewing sessions at this comfortable lodge designed specifically for late-night aurora watching.



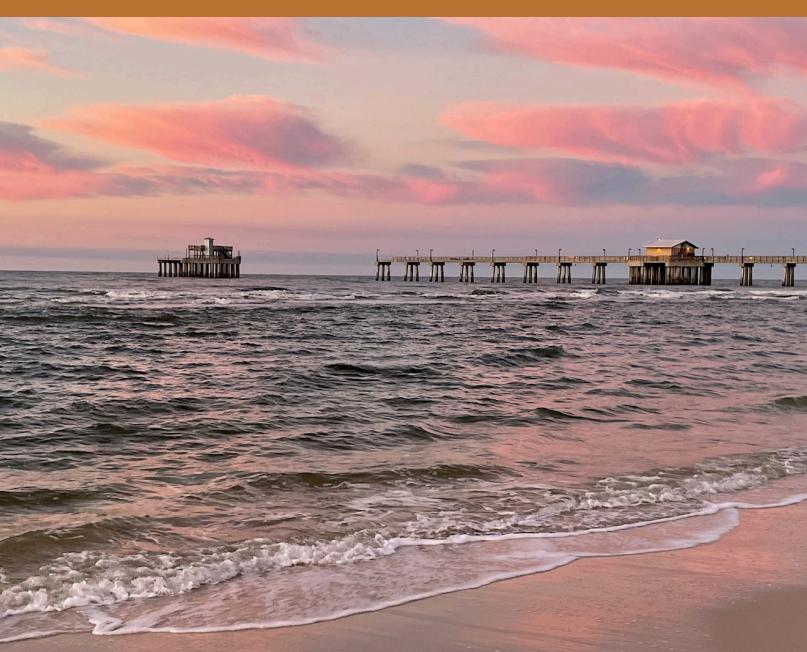
Follow ribbons of color across Alaska's night sky on a guided Northern Lights tour. [Book your four-hour aurora adventure now](#). These once-in-a-lifetime tours fill quickly, especially near new moons, so plan ahead.



Fairbanks is one of the world's best places to see the Northern Lights, sitting directly beneath the Auroral Oval, Earth's most active aurora zone. With clear, dark skies and a long viewing season from late August to April, the city offers unforgettable ways to witness nature's light show.

 **Fairbanks, Alaska**

# ALABAMA: GULF STATE PARK



Gulf State Park spans 6,150 acres along Alabama's coast, where white-sand beaches, freshwater lakes, and coastal forests meet. A free park tram connects trails, the pier, and nature attractions, making it easy to explore without moving your car.

 **Gulf Shores, Alabama**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Explore the Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail** – Pedal or stroll 28 miles of paved trails through nine ecosystems, from pine forests to marshes. There is a free bike-sharing program.
- Relax on White Sand Beaches** – Enjoy 3.5 miles of pristine coastline perfect for swimming, shelling, and sunbathing. Catch both sunrise and sunset on this south-facing shore.
- Fish from the Gulf State Park Pier** – Stretching 1,540 feet, it's one of the longest piers on the Gulf. Look for covered seating areas, wheelchair-accessible rail fishing, and a retail tackle shop.
- Visit the Nature Center** – Meet native wildlife like alligators and turtles, explore interactive exhibits, and stroll the butterfly garden at this free hands-on coastal "living museum."
- Swim or Paddle at Lake Shelby** – Take a break at this calm, freshwater lake with a roped-off swim area, plus kayak, canoe and stand-up paddleboard rentals. There are picnic tables and a playground.



Stay inside the park at **The Lodge at Gulf State Park**, a Hilton Hotel. With beach access, a pool, and Gulf views, it's the perfect eco-friendly base for your adventures. [Book your stay today.](#)

# ALABAMA: THE LEGACY SITES

## Must-Do Checklist

- Experience the Legacy Museum** – Explore multimedia exhibits, first-person narratives, and powerful art illuminating the lives of enslaved people and the ongoing impact of racial inequality.
- View the Soil Collection Exhibit** – See more than 800 jars of soil collected from lynching sites nationwide, a moving tribute to victims of racial terror.
- Reflect at Legacy Plaza** – Pause for reflection in this 2.5-acre park featuring statues honoring civil rights icons like Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., and John Lewis.
- Visit the National Memorial for Peace and Justice** – On a Montgomery hilltop, walk among monuments honoring victims of racial terror lynchings throughout the United States.
- Explore Freedom Monument Sculpture Park** – Take a short boat ride to this 17-acre park, where large-scale sculptures and art installations honor the resilience of enslaved Black people.



Extend your visit and explore The Legacy Sites at a relaxed pace. [Book a stay at the museum's sister property](#), Elevation Convening Center & Hotel, which opened in October 2025.



The Legacy Sites explore America's history of racial injustice, tracing the journey from slavery to segregation to mass incarceration. Created by the Equal Justice Initiative, these spaces blend storytelling, art, and interactive exhibits to foster reflection and understanding.

 **Montgomery, Alabama**

# ARIZONA: GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK



The South Rim of the Grand Canyon showcases some of the world's most breathtaking vistas and is easy to explore using the free seasonal in-park shuttle. For more than a day trip, book a hotel in Tusayan just outside the entrance. A free shuttle connects the town and the park.

 **Grand Canyon, Arizona**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Watch the Park Movie** - At the Visitor Center, catch "Grand Canyon: A Journey of Wonder," a 24-minute orientation film that features a dawn to dusk journey across this wonder.
- Walk the Rim Trail** - This easy, paved path is wheelchair- and stroller-friendly. The 0.7-mile stretch between Mather Point and Yavapai Point affords incredible views.
- Visit the Yavapai Geology Museum** - Explore geology exhibits that explain the canyon's formation alongside sweeping canyon views.
- Attend a Ranger-led Program** - Engaging walks and talks educate on the canyon's geology, ecology, and cultural history.
- Consider the Grand Canyon Railway** - Ride a vintage diesel locomotive to the South Rim, arriving at the train depot steps from the historic El Tovar Hotel. Get your tickets now.



In [\*A Walk in the Park: The True Story of a Spectacular Misadventure in the Grand Canyon\*](#), follow along as seasoned author Kevin Fedarko and photographer Pete McBride hike the length of the Grand Canyon.

# ARIZONA: LOWELL OBSERVATORY

## Must-Do Checklist

- See the Clark Refractor Telescope** - It's the very instrument Clyde Tombaugh used to discover Pluto in 1930.
- Join a Stargazing Program** - Daily solar viewings and guided telescope sessions let visitors explore planets and galaxies, even the sun.
- Explore the Astronomy Discovery Center** - Engage with hands-on exhibits, including the Orbit's Curiosity Zone for astronomers-in-training.
- Watch a Show in the Lowell Universe Theater** - Be awed by an immersive astronomy presentation on a massive 25-foot LED screen.
- Stargaze from the Rooftop Viewing Area** - Relax in heated seats while taking in Flagstaff's brilliant nightscape, perfect for colder months.



Make the most of your visit by staying just minutes away at the [High Country Motor Lodge](#). This hip, pet-friendly motel offers comfy rooms, a cozy mountain vibe, and Arizona's first Nordic Spa!



Founded in 1894, Lowell Observatory is where Pluto was discovered using the iconic 24-inch Clark refractor telescope. Explore interactive exhibits and stargaze under Flagstaff's famously dark skies. This is a must-visit for astronomy lovers.

 **Flagstaff, Arizona**

# ARKANSAS: CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART



Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art blends world-class art with the beauty of the Ozarks. Founded by Alice Walton, the glass-and-wood structure houses works from colonial times to contemporary pieces. Outside, miles of sculpture trails wind through natural landscapes.

 **Bentonville, Arkansas**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Wander the Galleries** – This free museum showcases a vast collection spanning five centuries of American art, from early works to modern masterpieces.
- Explore Nature Trails** – With more than five miles of paths, the grounds invite immersion in the natural landscape. The 0.5-mile Art Trail features native plants and outdoor sculptures.
- Visit Frank Lloyd Wright's Bachman-Wilson House** – Explore this relocated Usonian-style home on the museum grounds showcasing Wright's signature mid-century modern design.
- Take a Guided Tour** – Drop-in tours are free, offering insights into the museum's permanent collection and the architectural design of its campus buildings.
- Make Your Own Art** – Visit the Studio, a hands-on space for all ages to get creative. Equipped with art supplies, the studio is open to guests throughout museum hours.



Keep the art inspiration going with a stay at [21c Museum Hotel](#), where gallery spaces, contemporary works, and airy rooms mirror the creative spirit of Crystal Bridges. It's the perfect art-forward base for your Bentonville stay.

# ARKANSAS: ESSE PURSE MUSEUM

## Must-Do Checklist

- See the Permanent Collection** – Explore 250+ purses in "A Century of Women and Handbags 1900-1999," reflecting women's evolving style, identity, and changing social roles.
- Discover Temporary Exhibits** – Rotating quarterly exhibitions showcase pop culture, milestones, and history. These displays ensure every visit feels new, engaging, and inspiring.
- Learn about Anita Davis** – This visionary founder transformed her collection into a museum celebrating handbags as powerful storytelling artifacts of women's history.
- Browse the ESSE Store** – Shop eco-conscious handbags, compact mirrors, brooches, and more. Modern pieces and vintage-inspired designs make this store a fashion-lover's destination.
- Explore SoMa in Little Rock** – Wander South Main's artsy neighborhood with trendy restaurants, quirky shops, distilleries, and ice cream stops.



Keep the fashion inspiration flowing with this [gorgeous coffee table book](#) showcasing 400 handbags that shaped the style world. Filled with striking visuals and designer backstories, it's for anyone who loves iconic accessories.



The ESSE Purse Museum, one of only two purse museums in the world, tells women's stories through handbags. Founded by Anita Davis, whose collection includes more than 2,000 purses, the museum explores women's evolving roles, fashion, and culture throughout the 20th century.

 **Little Rock, Arkansas**

# CALIFORNIA: HEARST CASTLE



Hearst Castle is the lavish one-time estate of newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst. This opulent retreat is celebrated for its extravagant architecture, meticulously manicured grounds, and impressive art collection. Outside, the Neptune Pool boasts postcard-perfect views.

 **San Simeon, California**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Take a Guided Tour** – The only way to see this estate, including its ornate rooms, pools, and gardens, is on a guided tour. The 70-minute Grand Rooms Tour is ideal for first-time visitors.
- Admire the Art Collection** – Discover Hearst Castle's collection of art, antiquities, and artifacts, from ancient sculptures to Tiffany silver, all showcased on the guided tour.
- Watch the Companion Film** – In the Hearst Castle Theater, view the 40-minute film, "Hearst Castle – Building the Dream", on a five-story screen. The film is included with your tour ticket.
- Ogle Playful Elephant Seals** – A few miles north, stop at Elephant Seal Vista Point to see hundreds of chunky elephant seals lounging, playing, and vocalizing on the beach.
- Take in Views from the Pier** – Just across Highway 1, stroll the 850-foot-long fishing pier at William Randolph Hearst Memorial Beach for spectacular Pacific Ocean vistas.



Wake up to sweeping Pacific views at the [Cavalier Oceanfront Resort](#), where coastal charm meets easy comfort. Enjoy poolside lounging, evening s'mores, and a laid-back vibe. Clicking "book now" feels practically effortless.

# CALIFORNIA: REDWOOD NATIONAL & STATE PARKS

## Must-Do Checklist

- Walk Among Giant Trees** – Step beneath massive old-growth redwoods. In a hurry? Stop at the Big Tree Wayside. Have more time? Set out on the 3.6-mile Tall Trees Grove Trail.
- Take a Scenic Drive** – Cruise winding roads that lead beneath towering redwoods and along rugged coastline. Top picks include Howland Hill Road and Newton B. Drury Scenic Parkway.
- Explore Fern Canyon** – Marvel at canyon walls covered in lush ferns, rising up to 30 feet high. Made famous by films like "The Lost World: Jurassic Park", reservations are required in peak season.
- Spot Roosevelt Elk** – Keep an eye out for herds of Roosevelt elk grazing in the meadows and along park roads. Top viewing spots include Elk Prairie and Gold Bluffs Beach.
- Visit Crescent Beach** – Take in dramatic ocean views from a high vantage point at Crescent Beach Overlook, then stroll along the sandy shoreline for a relaxing coastal walk.



[Hike the Parks: Redwood National & State Parks](#) is designed for on-the-go exploring. It's a perfect companion for discovering the giant trees that have stood here since long before the dinosaurs disappeared.



Home to the tallest trees on Earth, Redwood National & State Parks offer a humbling experience among ancient giants that can soar to more than 350 feet. Beyond majestic forests, the parks protect rugged coastlines, rolling prairies, and winding rivers.

 **Crescent City, California**

# COLORADO: MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK



Mesa Verde National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, preserves the cliff dwellings and cultural heritage of the Ancestral Pueblo people who lived here more than 700 years ago. Guided tours, scenic drives, and overlooks reveal their ingenuity, artistry, and connection to the land.

 **Montezuma County, Colorado**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Take a Guided Tour of a Cliff Dwelling** – Reserve a ranger-led tour at Recreation.gov to explore Cliff Palace or Balcony House and see these ancient cliffside homes up close.
- Go on a Backcountry Tour** – Visit lesser-seen cliff dwellings like Square Tower House or Oak Tree House on special ranger-guided excursions through Mesa Verde's backcountry.
- Drive the Mesa Top Loop Road** – Follow this 6-mile scenic loop with overlooks, interpretive sites, and sweeping views of Cliff Palace and Square Tower House.
- Hike the Park's Trails** – Explore nearly 30 miles of trails, including the Knife Edge Trail and Soda Canyon Overlook Trail, with vistas of mesas and canyons.
- Explore the Mesa Verde Museum** – Discover exhibits and artifacts that reveal Ancestral Pueblo life. Watch a short orientation film, then step outside for views of Spruce Tree House.



Explore Mesa Verde's cliff dwellings and canyon vistas with a [self-guided audio tour](#) that weaves history and geology into every stop. It's an easy, go-at-your-own-pace adventure that gives both first-timers and returning visitors fresh insights into the park.

# COLORADO: PIKES PEAK

## Must-Do Checklist

- Ride to the Summit** – Travel nine miles aboard the historic cog railway, reaching the summit in roughly 70 minutes, with 40 minutes to explore at the top.
- Motor Along the Pikes Peak Highway** – Drive or take a shuttle 19 miles to the summit. Timed-entry permits are required during summer months. An audio driving tour is available.
- Explore the Summit Visitor Center** – Enjoy 360-degree views and learn about the mountain's history, geography, and climate through interpretive exhibits.
- Eat a World-Famous Donut** – Pikes Peak serves the only donuts in the world made above 14,000 feet, crafted with a special altitude-based recipe by a donut-making robot.
- Spot Wildlife** – Pikes Peak is full of wildlife, including elk, deer, and yellow-bellied marmot. Pikes Peak is also home to one of Colorado's largest bighorn sheep herds.



Give your Pikes Peak getaway a timeless feel with a stay at [Cliff House at Pikes Peak](#). Its cozy, 1800s-inspired rooms and refined on-site dining create a warm, elegant basecamp for every adventure.



Pikes Peak, one of Colorado's most famous mountains, soars to 14,115 feet and wows with stunning views of the Rockies. Visitors can reach the summit by the historic cog railway, hiking, biking, or driving, taking in alpine forests, tumbling waterfalls, and native wildlife along the way.

 **Cascade, Colorado**

# CONNECTICUT: MARK TWAIN HOUSE & MUSEUM



The Mark Twain House & Museum preserves the Victorian Gothic mansion where Samuel Clemens—better known as Mark Twain—lived and wrote many of his classic works. The home can only be explored by guided tour, offering a glimpse into the author's family life and creativity.

 **Hartford, Connecticut**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Take a Guided House Tour** – Step inside Twain's 25-room mansion on a guided tour filled with stories about his family, inspirations, and Gilded Age innovations.
- Consider a Ghost Tour** – Join the Graveyard Shift Ghost Tour to explore the mansion's eerie legends, Victorian séance traditions, and Twain's fascination with the supernatural.
- Explore the Museum Center** – Visit exhibits about Twain's life and career, and don't miss the six-foot LEGO sculpture of the author greeting visitors.
- Watch the Orientation Film** – View the 23-minute Ken Burns film for an insightful introduction to Twain, his family, and the Hartford home he adored.
- Visit the Stowe Center for Literary Activism** – Next door, tour Harriet Beecher Stowe's home to learn about abolitionism, Black freedom builders, and the legacy of Uncle Tom's Cabin.



[Mark Twain Quotes of Wit and Wisdom](#) gathers some of the author's sharpest, funniest, and most enduring lines. His words still ring true today, making this a perfect companion for anyone inspired to visit the Mark Twain House & Museum.

# CONNECTICUT: MYSTIC

## Must-Do Checklist

- Explore the Mystic Seaport Museum** – Wander a recreated 19th-century maritime village with costumed interpreters demonstrating shipbuilding and blacksmithing. Get all-day entry.
- Board the Charles W. Morgan** – Step aboard the world's last wooden whaling ship, a National Historic Landmark from 1841, and discover America's rich maritime heritage.
- Stroll Olde Mistick Village** – Browse 50+ local shops and eateries housed in 18th-century-style buildings featuring artisan goods, craft coffee, and sweet New England treats.
- Take a River Cruise on the Sabino** – Cruise aboard the last operating coal-fired steamboat in the U.S. for sweeping views along the Mystic River.
- Visit the Mashantucket Pequot Museum** – A short drive away, explore Native American history through immersive exhibits and a recreated 16th-century Pequot village.



See Mystic in a whole new light. [Book a nighttime ghost tour](#) that blends maritime charm with the town's eeriest colonial and Victorian legends. With every story your guide shares, the familiar waterfront transforms into something irresistibly haunting.



Set along the scenic Mystic River, this quintessential New England town blends maritime heritage with coastal charm. From the world-famous Mystic Seaport Museum to historic ships, boutique shopping, and waterfront dining, Mystic is a year-round destination for history lovers, families, and seaside wanderers alike.

 **Mystic, Connecticut**

# DELAWARE: CAPE HENOPEN STATE PARK



Located where the Delaware Bay meets the Atlantic Ocean, Cape Henlopen State Park blends natural beauty with rich history. With beaches, trails, and the historic Fort Miles complex, this scenic coastal escape offers something for everyone.

 **Lewes, Delaware**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Explore the Trails** – Pedal the 3-mile Bike Loop for views of dunes, towers, and Fort Miles. The 4.7-mile Gordons Pond Trail is a favorite for scenic overlooks and spotting migratory birds.
- Visit Fort Miles Historic Area** – Step into WWII history at this restored coastal fort, tour Battery 519, and climb to the top of an observation tower for sweeping ocean views.
- Go to the Beach** – Swim, sunbathe, or comb the wide, sandy shore. Visit the ocean side for waves or the bay side for calmer waters.
- Watch Sunset from The Point** – Visit Delaware's dramatic curved tip, where bay meets ocean. Spot birds and seals while the sun sets over the horizon.
- Visit the Seaside Nature Center** – Explore marine life in touch tanks, watch ospreys on a live cam, and borrow a free bike to explore the park.



Unwind at the adults-only [Hotel Blue](#), where stylish, comfortable rooms sit just steps from the beach, canal, and Lewes' best dining. With everything within walking distance, it's the ideal home base for exploring this charming coastal town.

# DELAWARE: NEMOURS ESTATE

## Must-Do Checklist

- Tour the 77-Room Mansion** – Stroll this lavish French-style estate, built by the prominent du Pont family, on a self-guided tour. Ornate European antiques and artworks bring the rooms to life.
- Explore the Formal Gardens** – Meander across 200 acres of Versailles-inspired grounds filled with fountains, mazes, monuments, towers, and peaceful nature trails.
- Seek Out Hidden Surprises** – Keep an eye out for whimsical touches, from ever-moving garden gnomes to historic treasures like the Temple of Love and the Statue of Achievement.
- Step Inside the Chauffeur's Garage** – Admire gleaming vintage automobiles, including du Pont-owned Rolls-Royces and Cadillacs, in the original 1914 garage.
- Discover Seasonal Programs** – Try something new with unique offerings like yoga, forest bathing, seed collecting, or sketch walks with naturalists.



If the estate's manicured grounds leave you wanting more, continue your garden tour at [Longwood Gardens](#), complete with vibrant fountains, glass conservatories, and beautifully designed landscapes. [Get your admission tickets.](#)



Built in 1910, Nemours Estate features a 77-room French château set amid lavish gardens, sparkling fountains, and ornate sculptures. Designed by celebrated architects Carrère and Hastings, the mansion showcases fine art, furnishings, and early technological innovations.

 **Wilmington, Delaware**

# FLORIDA: CASTILLO DE SAN MARCOS NATIONAL MONUMENT

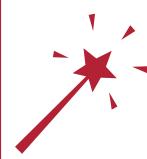


Built by the Spanish in the late 1600s, Castillo de San Marcos is the oldest masonry fort in the continental United States. Its coquina stone walls have withstood centuries of sieges and empires, offering a fascinating glimpse into 450 years of colonial and cultural history.

 **St. Augustine, Florida**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Explore the Fortress Rooms** – Take a self-guided tour through chambers once used as barracks, a chapel, and powder magazine to learn about daily military life.
- Walk the Ramparts and See the Cannons** – Climb to the gun deck for panoramic bay views and an up-close look at over 60 historic cannons.
- Watch a Cannon or Musket Demonstration** – On most weekends, rangers in period dress fire historic weapons, bringing the fort's 18th-century battles vividly to life.
- Listen to a Ranger Talk** – Join interpretive talks throughout the day to uncover stories of the fort's sieges, soldiers, and centuries of cultural exchange.
- Visit Fort Matanzas** – Drive 25 minutes south to explore this 1742 Spanish watchtower and its surrounding dunes, marshes, and maritime forest teeming with wildlife.



Step back in time with a [private tour through St. Augustine](#). Your 1920s-style guide drives you past landmarks like Castillo de San Marcos, Flagler College, and the Old City Gate for a nostalgic spin through America's oldest city.

# FLORIDA: KENNEDY SPACE CENTER VISITOR COMPLEX

## Must-Do Checklist

- Take the Kennedy Space Center Bus Tour** – Go behind NASA's gates to see the Vehicle Assembly Building and walk beneath a real Saturn V moon rocket.
- See the Space Shuttle Atlantis** – Stand face-to-face with the actual shuttle Atlantis, surrounded by 60 interactive exhibits, including a thrilling shuttle launch simulator.
- Explore Heroes & Legends** – Discover the early pioneers of spaceflight at the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame and view historic rockets like the Gemini 9 capsule.
- Meet an Astronaut** – Hear firsthand stories from a veteran NASA astronaut during daily presentations, small-group chats, or autograph sessions at The Space Shop.
- Walk Through the Rocket Garden** – Stroll among towering rockets that launched America's earliest missions, exploring the milestones that made modern space travel possible.



[Get your Kennedy Space Center tickets online](#) to skip the lines and head straight in. Use the extra time to explore your favorite exhibits, meet real astronauts, and dive into a full day of out-of-this-world experiences.



At the Kennedy Space Center, experience the past, present, and future of space exploration. From towering rockets to real-life astronauts, this one-of-a-kind destination offers an inspiring look at NASA's greatest achievements and humankind's ongoing quest to explore the cosmos.

 **Merritt Island, Florida**

# GEORGIA: JEKYLL ISLAND



Pristine beaches, weathered driftwood, and centuries of history make Jekyll Island a coastal gem. Bike scenic trails, tour Gilded Age cottages, and explore sites significant to African and African American history while soaking in the island's natural beauty and welcoming charm.

 **Jekyll Island, Georgia**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Stroll Driftwood Beach** – Wander among sculpted driftwood trees on the shoreline, where weathered forms create hauntingly beautiful, photogenic scenes unique to the Georgia coast.
- Visit Mosaic, Jekyll Island Museum** – Explore exhibits on Native American heritage, Gilded Age retreats, conservation, and the island's role in early 20th-century innovation.
- Walk the Wanderer Memory Trail** – Follow a moving memorial path honoring the enslaved Africans rescued from the ship *Wanderer*. Interpretive signage shares their stories.
- Rent Bikes** – Pedal scenic trails or ride the wide, hard-packed shoreline, including St. Andrews Beach, once the only Georgia beach accessible to African Americans.
- Hop on the Landmark Trolley Tour** – Discover historic cottages and landmarks, including the Jekyll Island Club, famed for hosting America's first coast-to-coast conference call in 1915.



Cruise the waters around Jekyll Island. [Book a dolphin tour](#) and watch pods play in their natural habitat. Keep your eyes peeled along the way. Sea turtles, manatees, and roseate spoonbills often make an appearance.

# GEORGIA: MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

## Must-Do Checklist

- Stop at the Visitor Center** – Begin your visit here with a map and park brochure. Pause outside in the International World Peace Garden to enjoy the tiered fountain and roses.
- Explore Ebenezer Baptist Church** – Visit the historic church where Dr. King co-pastored with his father and delivered powerful messages that helped shape the civil rights movement.
- Tour Dr. King's Birth Home** – Join a guided tour of the house where Dr. King was born and raised, offering a window into his early family life and upbringing.
- Visit The King Center and Dr. King's Crypt** – Walk the campus, see the Eternal Flame, and reflect at the tombs of Dr. and Coretta Scott King.
- Attend a Ranger-Led Program** – Join a 30-minute ranger talk at Ebenezer Baptist Church or Dr. King's Birth Home for a captivating look into Dr. King's life and legacy.



Explore the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. on a [historical walking tour](#) that follows his life, his work, and pivotal moments of the civil rights movement. Wear comfortable shoes—this meaningful route covers plenty of ground.



Celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at this historic Atlanta site. From his childhood home to Ebenezer Baptist Church and the King Center, visitors can explore the roots of the civil rights movement and reflect on Dr. King's enduring message of peace and equality.

 **Atlanta, Georgia**

# HAWAII: HAWAII VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK



Hawaii Volcanoes National Park showcases the raw power of nature, where Kīlauea and Mauna Loa continually reshape the land. Explore volcanic craters, steaming vents, and lush rainforests that reveal the island's living geology and deep cultural roots.



## Must-Do Checklist

- Drive the Chain of Craters Road** – Travel 18 miles from Kīlauea's summit to the sea, ending at the dramatic Hōlei Sea Arch formed by ancient lava flows.
- Hike the Kīlauea Iki Trail** – Descend through rainforest onto a solidified lava lake still steaming from below, surrounded by rugged volcanic terrain and surreal beauty.
- Walk Through Thurston Lava Tube (Nāhuku)** – Follow a short forested trail into a 500-year-old lava tunnel for a glimpse inside Earth's molten past.
- Visit the Steam Vents and Sulphur Banks** – Stroll the boardwalk near Kīlauea Visitor Center to see vents releasing volcanic gases and colorful sulfur deposits.
- View the Pu'u Loa Petroglyphs** – Hike to one of Hawaii's largest petroglyph fields, where early Hawaiians carved thousands of symbols into hardened lava rock.



After a full day in the park, unwind at [Volcano Inn](#), located just five minutes from the entrance. Enjoy a complimentary breakfast and calming views of the property's native rainforest garden. It's an ideal setting to relax and recharge.

# HAWAII: PEARL HARBOR NATIONAL MEMORIAL

## Must-Do Checklist

- Visit the USS Arizona Memorial** – Take a Navy-operated boat to the memorial built over the sunken battleship. Make reservations at Recreation.gov for access to this unforgettable site.
- Tour the Battleship Missouri** – Step aboard the "Mighty Mo," where Japan surrendered, ending WWII. Explore the decks, officers' quarters, and massive gun turrets.
- Explore the Pearl Harbor Aviation Museum** – Located on Ford Island, this museum showcases vintage aircraft and powerful exhibits inside hangars damaged during the attack.
- Board the USS Bowfin Submarine** – Nicknamed the "Pearl Harbor Avenger," this WWII sub offers a glimpse into life underwater through a detailed audio-guided tour.
- Stroll the Visitor Center Exhibits** – Discover powerful galleries and outdoor memorials that trace the events leading up to, during, and after the attack on Pearl Harbor.



Honolulu isn't just surf and sunshine. It also witnessed one of the most pivotal moments in world history. [Reserve your tickets](#) to visit Pearl Harbor, including a boat ride to the USS Arizona Memorial.



Visiting Pearl Harbor offers a reflection on a pivotal event in American history, honoring those who lost their lives on December 7, 1941. Explore memorials, museums, and preserved vessels that tell the story of America's entry into World War II and its enduring legacy.



# IDAHO: MINIDOKA NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



The Minidoka National Historic Site honors the 13,000 Japanese-Americans incarcerated here during World War II. Through preserved landscapes and moving exhibits, gain insight into the hardships and resilience, reflecting on lessons of justice, identity, and the strength of democracy.

 Jerome, Idaho

## Must-Do Checklist

- Walk the 1.6-Mile Interpretive Trail** – Follow a self-guided path past barracks foundations, mess halls, and 25 panels detailing daily life in the incarceration camp.
- Watch the Park Film** – Narrated by actor and incarceration survivor George Takei, the 30-minute documentary offers a powerful introduction to the site's history and human stories.
- Tour the Visitor Center and Exhibits** – Explore artifacts, photos, and interactive displays that reveal the experiences of Japanese-Americans imprisoned at Minidoka during wartime.
- Reflect at the Guard Tower and Honor Roll** – Stand beneath the reconstructed guard tower and see the monument honoring more than 840 incarcerated men who served in World War II.
- Visit Block 22** – Wander the remains of this residential block, where incarcerated men built rock gardens and personal touches amid the harsh desert environment.



In [\*Looking After Minidoka: An American Memoir\*](#), Neil Nakadate weaves together family stories, history, and poetry to reflect on three generations of his family's experience—especially their lives during World War II.

# IDAHO: SHOSHONE FALLS

## Must-Do Checklist

- View the Falls from Observation Decks** – Enjoy panoramas from multiple viewing platforms, including an easily accessible overlook offering close-up views of the roaring cascades.
- Hike the Canyon Rim Trail** – Follow this scenic 8-mile (one-way) paved path for stunning overlooks of the falls and Snake River Canyon from various vantage points.
- Paddle to the Base of the Falls** – Kayak or paddleboard along the Snake River with AWOL Adventure Sports to experience the towering beauty of Shoshone Falls from below.
- See the Evel Knievel Jump Site** – Visit the spot where daredevil Evel Knievel attempted his famous 1974 rocket-powered leap across the Snake River Canyon.
- Explore Nearby Waterfalls** – Discover more gems nearby, including Perrine Coulee and Pillar Falls. Explore Thousand Springs State Park for cascades like Box Canyon Falls.



See Shoshone Falls on a [half-day guided tour](#) that brings you right to the roar of the "Niagara of the West." You'll cross the soaring Perrine Bridge, hear the stories that shaped Twin Falls, and stop at viewpoints that beg for photos.



Known as the "Niagara of the West," Shoshone Falls is a breathtaking natural wonder standing 212 feet tall. That's 45 feet taller than Niagara Falls. Fed by the Snake River, its thunderous cascades and misty rainbows offer a spectacular sight, especially during peak spring snowmelt.

 Twin Falls, Idaho

# ILLINOIS: ABRAHAM LINCOLN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY & MUSEUM



The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum offers an unparalleled journey through the life and legacy of America's 16th president. Combining priceless artifacts, immersive exhibits, and cinematic storytelling, it transforms history into an emotional, interactive experience.

 **Springfield, Illinois**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Walk Through the Immersive Exhibits** - Trace Lincoln's life from log cabin to White House through lifelike dioramas and original artifacts.
- Download Lincoln Unlocked** - Lincoln Unlocked, the museum's digital companion, uses augmented reality, animation, and interactive storytelling to bring Lincoln's legacy to life.
- Watch a Film in the Mr. Lincoln Theater** - Rotating short films complement current exhibits or cultural themes. Special talks by historians and educators take place throughout the year.
- Tour Lincoln's Home** - Just a few blocks from the museum, visit the only house Lincoln ever owned. Free ranger-led tours reveal insights into his family life and early career.
- Pay Respects at Lincoln's Tomb** - At Oak Ridge Cemetery, honor the president and his family at their final resting place. Follow tradition by rubbing Lincoln's bronze nose for luck.



Stay a short stroll from the presidential library at the [President Abraham Lincoln Springfield](#) - a DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel. An indoor pool and an on-site restaurant make it a comfortable place to wrap your day.



Murals, Wayside Exhibits, Culinary Delights and so much more await you in legendary Springfield! Visit the new Bob Waldmire Art Exhibition, on display thru December 2026 and walk a quarter-mile stretch of uncovered original Route 66 pavement at the Carpenter Park Alignment along the Sangamon River! All this along with world-class Abraham Lincoln sites.

## LEGENDARY SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS



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# ILLINOIS: CAHOKIA MOUNDS STATE HISTORIC SITE



Once home to a thriving Mississippian civilization of 20,000 people, Cahokia Mounds preserves the remains of the largest pre-Columbian city north of Mexico. This UNESCO World Heritage Site uncovers ancient urban planning, monumental earthworks, and early Native American culture.

 **Collinsville, Illinois**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Climb Monks Mound** – Ascend 156 steps to the top of North America's largest earthen structure for sweeping views of the mounds and St. Louis skyline.
- Walk the Trails** – Explore miles of scenic paths among dozens of mounds, learning about their ceremonial, residential, and burial purposes through interpretive signs and QR codes.
- Visit the Interpretive Center** – Discover artifacts, dioramas, and videos that bring the daily life and culture of the Mississippian people vividly to life.
- See Woodhenge** – Visit the reconstructed circular post arrangement used as an ancient solar calendar to mark solstices, equinoxes, and ceremonial events.
- Take a Guided Tour** – Join interpretive staff for in-depth tours of Monks Mound, the Grand Plaza, and other key archaeological sites.



*[Cahokia: Ancient America's Great City on the Mississippi](#)* unpacks the story of a once-thriving civilization in what's now Illinois. This lost city enriches our understanding of early American history.

# INDIANA: INDIANA DUNES NATIONAL PARK

## Must-Do Checklist

- Go Beach-hopping** – Swim, sunbathe, or picnic along 15 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. Top spots include West Beach, Porter Beach, and Central Beach.
- Hike the Dune Succession Trail** – At West Beach, explore the Dune Succession Trail and boardwalk to learn about shifting dunes and native plants.
- See Historic Homes** – Motor along Lake Front Drive in Beverly Shores to view five "Century of Progress" homes from the 1933 Chicago World's Fair.
- Become a Trash Trekker** – Join the drop-in litter clean-up program, collect trash along trails or beaches, and receive a free reusable water bottle as a thank you.
- Take the 3 Dune Challenge** – Climb Mt. Tom, Mt. Jackson, and Mt. Holden at the adjacent Indiana Dunes State Park, enjoying stunning Lake Michigan views.



Spark your junior ranger's curiosity with [A Guide to Exploring Indiana Dunes National Park](#). Designed for kids ages 7-12, it's packed with mazes, word games, and puzzles that teach them about the park's plants and animals.



Indiana Dunes National Park boasts towering sand dunes along Lake Michigan's southern shore, blending beach, forest, and prairie landscapes. Visitors can enjoy swimming, sunbathing, hiking, birdwatching, and exploring diverse ecosystems, including oak forests and wetlands.

 **Porter, Indiana**

# INDIANA: INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEEDWAY



The Indianapolis Motor Speedway (IMS), home of “The Greatest Spectacle in Racing,” is a must-visit for motorsports fans. Tour the legendary track, explore historic exhibits, experience thrilling rides, and get immersed in racing culture at this world-famous American landmark.

 **Indianapolis, Indiana**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Visit the IMS Museum** – Explore exhibits showcasing racing history, iconic cars, and historic artifacts for a multi-sensory journey through the legacy, culture, and innovation of the speedway.
- Take a Track Tour** – Go behind the scenes of the legendary “Brickyard” on a guided track tour to see the iconic 2.5-mile oval from a racer’s perspective.
- Attend a Race or Event** – Experience the roar of engines and high-speed thrills at the Indy 500 or other motorsports events. Feel the unmatched adrenaline of live IndyCar racing.
- Ride in a Race Car** – Buckle up for a high-speed ride with an IndyCar driver around the famed oval, experiencing speeds up to 180 mph and the excitement of professional racing.
- Celebrate with Milk** – Visit the museum store to see the giant milk bottle chandelier and pick up a commemorative milk carton to honor the Indy 500 tradition started by Lou Meyer in 1936.



Before you go, pick up [The Indianapolis 500: Inside the Greatest Spectacle in Racing](#) for a fascinating look at how a modest 1911 race became a global icon. Discover why drivers kiss the bricks and how milk became the signature victory drink.

# IOWA: FIELD OF DREAMS MOVIE SITE

## Must-Do Checklist

- Play Catch on the Iconic Field** – Bring your glove, run the bases, or relax in the bleachers where baseball’s enduring magic comes alive daily.
- Tour the Famous Farmhouse** – Step inside the Kinsella home on a 30-minute guided tour as Ghost Players share stories of its history and film legacy. Stay overnight for the full experience.
- Walk into the Cornfield** – Recreate the movie’s most memorable moment by disappearing into towering stalks of corn, perfect for photos and cinematic nostalgia.
- Explore the If You Build It Exhibit** – Learn behind-the-scenes stories, view movie memorabilia, and enjoy interactive displays celebrating the film’s lasting cultural impact.
- Meet the Ghost Players** – On select summer days, costumed ballplayers appear to play catch, pose for photos, and share stories, keeping the film’s spirit alive.



Explore [Shoeless Joe](#) by W. P. Kinsella, the novel that inspired the famous film. Its moving mix of family, memory, and baseball appeals to readers of all kinds.



Few places capture the magic of America’s favorite pastime like the Field of Dreams Movie Site. This beloved site lets visitors relive cinematic history while celebrating the timeless tradition of playing catch, running the bases, and experiencing the nostalgia of small-town Iowa.

 **Dyersville, Iowa**

# IOWA: NATIONAL MISSISSIPPI RIVER MUSEUM



Blending history, culture, and nature, the National Mississippi River Museum explores America's great rivers through interactive exhibits, aquariums, historic vessels, and archives. The museum offers a fascinating look at how waterways shaped the nation.

 **Dubuque, Iowa**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Trace the Mississippi River's Journey** – Interactive exhibits follow the river from source to sea, explaining erosion, flooding, locks, dams, and their effects on ecosystems and wildlife.
- Board the Historic William M. Black** – Explore this sidewheeler dredge boat, a designated National Historic Landmark. Step inside its engine rooms, crew quarters, and pilot house.
- Visit the National Rivers Hall of Fame** – Get to know the river people whose legacies shaped America, including pathfinders, artists, writers, musicians, builders, and inventors.
- Explore the Boatyard** – Discover traditional boatbuilding and blacksmithing demonstrations, plus hands-on displays that highlight historic river life, trade, and daily work along the Mississippi.
- Step Aboard a Historic Towboat** – Tour the Logsdon Sand & Gravel Barge and experience what daily life was like working and living on the Mississippi River.



Set out on a [90-minute sightseeing cruise](#) aboard the Riverboat Twilight, gliding along the Mississippi River from LeClaire. Cruises operate from late May through August, offering an easy, scenic way to experience the river's charm.

# KANSAS: AMELIA EARHART HANGAR MUSEUM

## Must-Do Checklist

- See Muriel, the Lockheed Electra 10-E** – Marvel at Muriel, the museum's crown jewel and last remaining Lockheed Electra 10-E—identical to Earhart's 1937 aircraft.
- Pilot a Virtual Reality Flight** – This immersive VR experience recreates Earhart's 14-hour journey across the Atlantic, challenging you to navigate weather, fatigue, and the open skies.
- Engage with Interactive STEM Exhibits** – Explore 14 hands-on exhibit zones that trace Earhart's journey to becoming the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic.
- Discover Trailblazing Women Aviators** – Explore "Feminine Feats," celebrating Amelia and other pioneering women who redefined possibilities in aviation history.
- Visit the Amelia Earhart Birthplace Museum** – Just minutes away, tour Amelia's childhood home overlooking the Missouri River to see personal artifacts and family memorabilia.



Add [Amelia Lost](#) to your reading list. It's a compelling, deeply researched portrait of Earhart's record-setting flights, fearless ambition, and the disappearance that has sparked fascination for nearly a century.



Located at Amelia Earhart Memorial Airport, this museum celebrates the fearless aviator's life and legacy. At its heart is Muriel, the world's last remaining Lockheed Electra 10-E, surrounded by interactive exhibits that bring Amelia's daring flights and inspiring story vividly to life.

 **Atchison, Kansas**

# KANSAS: OZ MUSEUM



The Oz Museum celebrates The Wizard of Oz, one of America's most cherished films. Featuring thousands of artifacts, interactive exhibits, and even Dorothy's farmhouse, the museum honors the timeless story, iconic characters, and lasting cultural impact of this cinematic classic.

 **Wamego, Kansas**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Explore 2,000+ Artifacts** – Step into Oz history through rare books, movie props, costumes, and memorabilia spanning over 120 years, showcasing the enduring legacy of this timeless tale.
- Follow the Yellow Brick Road** – Stroll the two-block path just outside the museum. A short walk leads to the colorful Emerald City Playground for children and families.
- Play at Emerald City Playground** – Kids can climb, slide, and explore three themed play areas for different ages, with picnic tables nearby offering a perfect spot for lunch.
- Sip at Oz Winery** – Just down the street, taste Oz-themed wines, like Squished Witch and Emerald City Lights or shop chocolates, cheeses, and whimsical gifts at this family-friendly stop.
- Find All the Totos** – Embark on a scavenger hunt to spot 19 unique Toto statues around Wamego, each painted by Kansas artists. Maps are available at the museum.



Before you go, pick up [The Road to Oz](#), a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at how the 1939 film was created. It also offers an engaging look at the wider Oz universe—from the original books to early radio shows and silent films.

# KENTUCKY: KENTUCKY DERBY MUSEUM

## Must-Do Checklist

- Experience "The Greatest Race"** – This 360-degree film captures the heart-pounding excitement, history, and pageantry of the Kentucky Derby from a thoroughbred's point of view.
- Take a Guided Walking Tour** – Included with admission, this 30-minute tour explores the paddock, grandstand, and racetrack while sharing fascinating insights into Derby traditions.
- Upgrade to a Special Access Tour** – Go behind the scenes on the 90-minute Superstars and Spires Tour for access to exclusive areas like Millionaire's Row and the Turf Club.
- Explore Interactive Exhibits** – Discover the Derby's Black heritage, view winner memorabilia and iconic fashions, and hop on the jockey simulator to feel the thrill of the race.
- Enjoy Kentucky Cuisine and Bourbon** – Visit the Derby Café and Bourbon Bar to savor a Hot Brown or sip a Mint Julep—true Louisville classics in an iconic setting.



Reserve your ticket to breeze into the [Kentucky Derby Museum](#), where every day feels like Derby Day. Say hello to the resident retired Thoroughbred in the Museum Stable.



At historic Churchill Downs, the Kentucky Derby Museum invites you to experience "The Most Exciting Two Minutes in Sports." Immersive exhibits, behind-the-scenes tours, and classic Kentucky flavors allow you to feel the Derby's history, pageantry, and excitement all year long.

 **Louisville, Kentucky**

# KENTUCKY: MAMMOTH CAVE NATIONAL PARK



Mammoth Cave National Park, the world's longest known cave system, offers underground adventures and scenic surface trails. From family-friendly tours to crawling expeditions, this UNESCO World Heritage Site reveals the geological wonders of Kentucky's underground world.

 **Mammoth Cave, Kentucky**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Take a Cave Tour** – Explore the world's longest cave system on ranger-led or self-guided tours ranging from easy walks to strenuous multi-hour adventures.
- Hike the Surface Trails** – Stroll 18 miles of trails showcasing sinkholes, wildflowers, and river overlooks. Don't miss the 1-mile Cedar Sink Trail for stunning views.
- Try a Headlamp Tour** – For a hands-on caving challenge, join the 3.5-hour Introduction to Caving or the kids-only Trog Tour for young explorers.
- Do an Above-Ground Tour** – Follow the Beneath Your Feet trail program to learn about the cave's geology via interpretive signs and ranger-led videos along the paths.
- Visit Nearby Diamond Caverns** – Just outside the park, explore this "wet cave" filled with intricate stalactites and stalagmites on smaller, more intimate guided tours.



Make your cave adventure even more memorable with an overnight stay in a teepee at [Wigwam Village No. 2](#), just minutes from the park. Be sure to relax by the fire pit afterward—it's a fun, nostalgic way to wrap up the day.

# LOUISIANA: FRENCH QUARTER

## Must-Do Checklist

- Explore Jackson Square** – Take in the grandeur of St. Louis Cathedral, the Presbytère, and the Cabildo, where the Louisiana Purchase transfer officially took place.
- Eat Beignets** – Savor New Orleans' signature powdered-sugar pastries with a café au lait at Café du Monde, a beloved icon since 1862—or try Café Beignet on Royal Street.
- Delve Into Local History** – Explore the New Orleans Jazz Museum and The Historic New Orleans Collection, a museum devoted to the city's people, culture, and Gulf South heritage.
- Listen to Jazz on Frenchmen Street** – Step beyond Bourbon Street to find intimate clubs and open-air venues where locals gather for soulful, world-class jazz played with true passion.
- Visit Mardi Gras World** – Go behind-the-scenes to see massive parade floats and learn how artisans create the magic of Carnival season.



On a [French Quarter walking and storytelling tour](#), stroll past Jackson Square, St. Louis Cathedral, and the Mississippi River, while your guide shares the architecture, legends, and lesser-known stories that shape this iconic district.



The French Quarter, New Orleans' oldest neighborhood, brims with French, Spanish, and Creole influences. From ornate balconies to jazz-filled streets, it's a feast for the senses. Explore historic landmarks, savor beignets, and immerse yourself in the culture, cuisine, and music.

 **New Orleans, Louisiana**

# LOUISIANA: JEAN LAFITTE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK & PRESERVE



Spanning six sites, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park & Preserve showcases the state's wild wetlands, deep-rooted Cajun traditions, and pivotal history. From the bayous to the Battle of New Orleans, the park captures Louisiana's spirit and ever-changing landscape.

 **Southern Louisiana**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Walk the Trails at Barataria Preserve** – Explore boardwalks and dirt paths through bayous, swamps, and marshes where you can spot alligators, turtles, and wading birds.
- Explore the Chalmette Battlefield** – Visit the site of the 1815 Battle of New Orleans, see the 100-foot-tall Chalmette Monument, and walk the peaceful Chalmette National Cemetery.
- Take a Swamp Boat Tour** – Glide through the bayou on a guided swamp boat or airboat tour to see cypress trees, Spanish moss, and Louisiana's iconic wildlife up close.
- Experience Cajun Culture** – Visit Acadian Cultural Centers in Lafayette, Thibodaux, and Eunice for exhibits, cooking demos, live music, and stories of Cajun heritage.
- Stop by the French Quarter Visitor Center** – Learn about New Orleans' history and music through interactive exhibits and ranger programs in the heart of the French Quarter.



Glide through Jean Lafitte National Historical Park on a shaded [90-minute pontoon boat tour](#) led by a bayou-born guide. Enjoy towering cypress trees, gators, and egrets on this relaxed, close-to-downtown adventure

# MAINE: ACADIA NATIONAL PARK

## Must-Do Checklist

- Summit Cadillac Mountain** – Hike or drive to the summit of the tallest peak on the North Atlantic seaboard. It's the first place in the U.S. to see the sunrise from October to early-March.
- Drive the Park Loop Road** – Cruise this 27-mile scenic drive, stopping for such highlights as Sand Beach, Thunder Hole, and Otter Cliffs for postcard-worthy views.
- Explore Historic Carriage Roads** – Walk, bike, or ride horseback along John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s 45 miles of car-free carriage roads, or opt for a scenic journey by horse-drawn carriage.
- Hike the Beehive Trail** – This iconic hike uses iron rungs and ladders to scale a cliff, rewarding intrepid climbers with breathtaking views of Sand Beach and Frenchman Bay.
- Visit Jordan Pond** – Stroll the shoreline trail or paddle the glassy water, then head to Jordan Pond House for a classic treat: afternoon tea and warm, fluffy popovers.



See the best of Acadia National Park and Bar Harbor without doing the driving on a [narrated half-day bus tour](#). Book a seat to relax, enjoy the views, and soak up the stories as you visit highlights like Cadillac Mountain, Sieur de Monts Spring, and Thunder Hole.



Acadia National Park blends granite peaks, rocky shores, and spruce-fir forests. Hike iron rung trails, drive the scenic Park Loop Road, and catch vibrantly-colored Cadillac Mountain sunrises. Don't miss fall foliage or popovers at Jordan Pond, a cherished park tradition.

 **Bar Harbor, Maine**

# MAINE: PORTLAND HEAD LIGHT



First lit in 1791, Portland Head Light is Maine's oldest lighthouse and one of the most photographed in America. Perched on a rocky promontory within Fort Williams Park, it's one of 65 historic lighthouses in Maine and a must-visit for anyone exploring Maine's scenic coastline.

 **Cape Elizabeth, Maine**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Join a Guided Walking Tour** – Join a free 35-minute tour along the Cliff Walk Trail to learn about shipwrecks, native plants, and Fort Williams' maritime and military past.
- Explore Fort Williams Park** – Wander 90 acres of coastal beauty featuring picnic areas, cliffside trails, a rocky beach, and the delightful 1.5-acre Children's Garden and Arboretum.
- Tour the Lighthouse Museum** – Step inside the 1891 Keeper's House to see exhibits, artifacts, and Fresnel lenses illuminating centuries of Maine lighthouse history and innovation.
- Climb the Tower on Maine Open Lighthouse Day** – On one special September day, climb the spiral stairs for rare panoramic views. Tickets are first come, first served the day of the event.
- See Nearby Lighthouses** – Visit Portland's other iconic lights—Spring Point Ledge and Bug Light—both easily accessible for photos, walks, and oceanfront sightseeing year-round.



Take in Portland's highlights on a [narrated trolley tour](#), rolling past landmarks like the Portland Observatory, Victoria Mansion, and the Eastern Promenade. Wrap up with a stop at Portland Head Light—perfect for photos and a bit of exploring.

*Classic Maine, Fresh Adventure*

— Plan Your Visit —

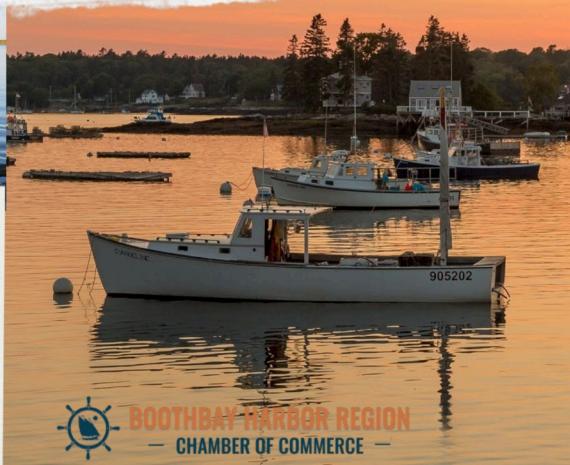
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# MARYLAND: ANNAPOLIS



Steeped in history and maritime tradition, Annapolis is Maryland's charming capital city. Known as "America's Sailing Capital," enjoy a lively mix of historic landmarks, museums, and cultural attractions alongside modern shops, restaurants, and sailing adventures.

 **Annapolis, Maryland**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Sample World-Famous Blue Crabs** – Savor sweet, succulent Chesapeake Bay blue crabs at local crab houses. This signature seafood is best enjoyed steamed with Old Bay seasoning.
- Get Out on the Water** – It's an absolute must to explore Annapolis by boat. Join a harbor cruise, take a sailing lesson, attend a boat show, or hop on a water taxi.
- Stroll the Historic District** – Explore 18th-century brick homes and landmarks where the Treaty of Paris was ratified in 1784, ending the Revolutionary War.
- Tour the Maryland State House** – Walk the halls of America's oldest state capitol and see where George Washington resigned as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army in 1783.
- Visit the Banneker-Douglass-Tubman Museum** – Discover African American history and heritage in Maryland. Exhibits highlight such figures as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman.



See Annapolis from the water on a relaxed 40-minute cruise that glides past the U.S. Naval Academy and along the city's historic harbor. [Book your spot](#) to enjoy recorded narration highlighting local history and waterfront life.

# MARYLAND: FORT MCHENRY NATIONAL MONUMENT

## Must-Do Checklist

- Tour the Historic Star Fort** – Explore the star-shaped fort's grounds. Learn about its unique architecture, military history, and vital role defending Baltimore during the War of 1812.
- Watch the Short Film** – View a captivating film covering Fort McHenry's history, the 1814 bombardment, and how it inspired Francis Scott Key to write the national anthem.
- Walk the Seawall Trail** – Stroll the waterfront trail along the fort's peninsula. Take in sweeping harbor views while reflecting on its strategic role in defending Baltimore.
- Visit the Star Fort Historic Zone** – Discover exhibits and preserved areas showing soldiers' daily life, fort defenses, and historic artifacts, plus the story behind "The Star-Spangled Banner."
- Attend a Ranger Program** – Join a flag change, flag talk, or Fife and Drum demonstration to experience Fort McHenry's history in an interactive, memorable way.



See Fort McHenry from above on a short, [scenic helicopter tour](#). Along the way, you'll catch aerial views of city landmarks including the Domino Sugar Factory, the Bromo Seltzer Arts Tower, and the Baltimore skyline.



Fort McHenry, celebrated for defending Baltimore during the War of 1812, inspired Francis Scott Key to pen "The Star-Spangled Banner." Tour historic fortifications, stroll scenic trails, and join engaging programs that bring the story of this iconic American landmark to life.

 **Baltimore, Maryland**

# MASSACHUSETTS: BOSTON'S FREEDOM TRAIL



Follow Boston's 2.5-mile Freedom Trail to step back into the birth of the American Revolution. This red-brick path connects 16 historic sites, from churches and meeting halls to battlefields and burial grounds—each one telling a story of courage, protest, and independence.

 **Boston, Massachusetts**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Visit the Paul Revere House** – Tour the patriot's 1680 home, the oldest in downtown Boston, for an intimate glimpse of colonial life and Revolutionary history.
- Explore the Granary Burying Ground** – Walk among the graves of notable figures like Paul Revere, Samuel Adams, and John Hancock in this storied 17th-century cemetery.
- Stand at the Boston Massacre Site** – See the cobblestone circle marking where British soldiers fired on colonists in 1770, igniting revolutionary fervor across the colonies.
- Board the USS Constitution** – Step aboard "Old Ironsides," the world's oldest commissioned warship still afloat, and visit the nearby USS Constitution Museum.
- Climb the Bunker Hill Monument** – Ascend 294 steps to the top of this 221-foot granite obelisk commemorating the first major battle of the Revolution.



Walk the Freedom Trail on a [historian-led, 2.5-hour tour](#) that visits landmarks like the Paul Revere House, Faneuil Hall, the Boston Massacre site, and King's Chapel. With groups limited to 16, you'll have time for questions and deeper insight into Boston's past.

# MASSACHUSETTS: FENWAY PARK

## Must-Do Checklist

- See a Boston Red Sox Game** – Experience the electric atmosphere of game day, complete with Fenway Franks, "Sweet Caroline," and a souvenir ice cream served in a mini helmet.
- Take a Guided Tour** – Enjoy a 60-minute behind-the-scenes tour with stories about Fenway's history, legendary players, and quirks—including a stop at the 37-foot-tall Green Monster.
- Sign Pesky's Pole** – Head to the right-field foul pole named for Red Sox legend Johnny Pesky. Bring a Sharpie and add your signature to baseball history.
- Soak Up Jersey Street** – Before first pitch, stroll this pedestrian-only street lined with food vendors, live performers, and fans grabbing Italian sausages, Fenway Franks, and cold drinks.
- Find the Red Seat** – In Section 42, Row 37, Seat 21, spot the lone red seat marking Ted Williams' record-breaking 502-foot home run from 1946.



Go beyond baseball with a guided tour of [The Sports Museum](#), featuring a half-mile collection celebrating Boston's athletic history. Video footage, memorabilia, and interactive displays highlight the teams and athletes who helped define New England sports.



Opened in 1912, Fenway Park is Major League Baseball's oldest ballpark still in use. Its intimate "jewel box" design, passionate fans, and iconic Green Monster make it a shrine to America's pastime—and an essential stop for anyone visiting Boston.

 **Boston, Massachusetts**

# MICHIGAN: THE HENRY FORD



The Henry Ford is three incredible attractions in one: the Museum of American Innovation, Greenfield Village, and the Ford Rouge Factory Tour. From presidential limousines to Rosa Parks' bus, get ready to step inside iconic moments and explore groundbreaking ingenuity.

 **Dearborn, Michigan**

## Must-Do Checklist

- See the Presidential Limousine of John F. Kennedy** – View the 1961 Lincoln Continental Kennedy rode in when assassinated, later rebuilt and in service for more than a decade.
- Explore the Rosa Parks Bus** – Step inside the Montgomery bus where Rosa Parks made history by refusing to give up her seat in 1955.
- Tour the Ford Rouge Factory** – Ride a bus to see the Ford F-150 built at the Rouge Factory, with exhibits on modern automotive innovation.
- Visit Greenfield Village** – Wander this outdoor museum with historic buildings, artisan workshops, Model T rides, train rides, and interactive living history experiences.
- Explore Iconic Artifacts** – Spot treasures like Lincoln's Ford's Theatre chair, Edison's laboratory, the Wright brothers' bicycle shop, and even a 1952 Oscar Mayer Wienermobile.



Explore Detroit's hidden history. [Book a guided walking tour](#) showcasing striking architecture and lesser-known stories, including a few tied to Henry Ford. A local guide leads you to such landmarks as the Spirit of Detroit and Campus Martius Park.

# MICHIGAN: MACKINAC ISLAND

## Must-Do Checklist

- Rent Bicycles** – Pedal the paved 8.2-mile loop around Mackinac Island for breathtaking lake views. Known as M-185, this is the only highway in the country without motor vehicles.
- See Arch Rock** – Climb 207 steps along the Spring Hill Trail to Arch Rock, a dramatic limestone formation offering crystal-clear Lake Huron views and sweeping island panoramas.
- Visit Fort Mackinac** – Step back in time at this 18th-century military fort, explore historic buildings, witness reenactments, and uncover its role in Great Lakes history (Open May-Oct).
- Take a Horse-Drawn Carriage Ride** – Travel the island's streets in a horse-drawn carriage, enjoying narrated stories, historic architecture, and the leisurely charm of a car-free haven.
- Sample Fudge** – Enjoy world-famous Mackinac Island fudge at more than a dozen shops, tasting such flavors as classic chocolate, creamy butterscotch, and maple walnut.



[Reserve your Fort Mackinac tickets online](#). Watch "The Heritage of Mackinac" and enjoy daily programs led by costumed interpreters, including walking tours, demonstrations, and soldier-life presentations.



Mackinac Island, set in Lake Huron between Michigan's Upper and Lower Peninsulas, is a charming car-free escape accessible only by ferry. With the historic Grand Hotel, scenic streets, and timeless 19th-century charm, it's a truly unforgettable destination.



**Mackinac Island, Michigan**



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## MINNESOTA: MALL OF AMERICA

### Must-Do Checklist

- Explore Nickelodeon Universe** – This seven-acre indoor amusement park wows with rides and roller coasters themed around Nickelodeon characters, like SpongeBob SquarePants.
- Visit SEA LIFE Minnesota Aquarium** – Stroll underwater tunnels, touch stingrays, and marvel at 10,000+ creatures, including sharks, turtles, and exotic fish.
- Discover the Crayola Experience** – Create art, design personalized crayons, and explore color-themed exhibits at this 60,000-square-foot interactive space for kids and families.
- Play the Great Big Game Show** – Step on stage for trivia, props, speed challenges, and teamwork. Compete live with lights, audience cheers, and all the fun of a TV game show.
- Experience FlyOver America** – Soar over iconic U.S. landscapes in a 4D flight simulation with motion seats, wind, mist, scents, and stunning aerial views for a fully immersive adventure.



If the kids or grandkids are eager for the rides at Nickelodeon Universe, purchase [an unlimited ride wristband](#) in advance. It costs less than buying individual tickets and lets them enjoy the country's largest indoor theme park from open to close.



The Mall of America is America's ultimate playground, blending shopping, dining, and attractions for all ages. With over 520 stores, 60 restaurants, mini-golf, and immersive experiences, it's a non-stop mix of fun, entertainment, and family adventure, all under one roof.

 **Bloomington, Minnesota**

# MINNESOTA: SPAM MUSEUM



The SPAM Museum celebrates one of America's most iconic—and surprisingly global—foods. This free attraction blends humor, history, and interactive fun to tell the story of SPAM's invention during the Great Depression, its wartime significance, and its role in cuisines and pop culture.

 **Austin, Minnesota**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Try a "SPAMple"** – Sample creative SPAM bites offered by friendly "SPAMBassadors," who serve different varieties of the world's most famous canned meat.
- Work the Can Central Line** – Test your factory skills in this hands-on exhibit where you virtually pack SPAM cans at lightning-fast production speeds.
- Explore the World Market** – Discover SPAM's unexpected global reach, from Hawaiian musubi to Korean budea jjigae, through colorful cultural displays and recipes.
- Step into the WWII Exhibit** – Learn how SPAM fueled Allied soldiers, feeding troops and shaping its legacy as a trusted global food source.
- Shop the SPAM Store** – Bring home playful souvenirs, from logo tees and kitchen gadgets to every SPAM flavor imaginable. It's perfect for fans and foodies alike.



Experiment with SPAM-inspired dishes at home. [The Ultimate SPAM Cookbook Expanded Edition](#) features more than 140 one-of-a-kind recipes—from breakfast skillets to musubi to pierogies—showing how versatile this iconic ingredient can be.

# MISSISSIPPI: DELTA BLUES MUSEUM

## Must-Do Checklist

- Trace the Roots of the Blues** – Discover the evolution of Delta blues through rare instruments, original recordings, and displays that connect local sounds to global music history.
- Explore the Muddy Waters Exhibit** – Step inside the preserved remains of this blues musician's cabin, view a life-size statue, and see the "Muddywood" guitar crafted from its wood.
- See "Blue Portraits in Steel"** – Admire Scott Cawood's striking metal sculptures honoring blues legends, a permanent exhibit celebrating the music's enduring power and artistry.
- Follow the Juke Joint Trail** – Visit authentic clubs across the Delta where live blues still thrives, from Red's Lounge to Ground Zero Blues Club.
- Visit the B.B. King Museum** – Make a side trip to Indianola to explore the life and legacy of the King of the Blues through interactive exhibits and performances.



[King of the Delta Blues: The Life and Music of Charlie Patton](#) traces the story of the musician who helped shape the Delta Blues. This updated edition highlights Patton's lasting influence across generations of artists.



Located in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, the Delta Blues Museum celebrates America's most influential musical art form. Inside a former freight depot, visitors can explore instruments, recordings, photos, and artifacts that tell the story of the blues and the musicians who defined it.

 **Clarksdale, Mississippi**

# MISSISSIPPI: UNDER-THE-HILL DISTRICT



Once a bustling riverfront port and notorious 19th-century red-light district, Natchez's Under-the-Hill district now blends history and charm with riverfront dining, blues bars, and striking views of the Mississippi. It's a place where echoes of the past still linger in the humid evening air.

 **Natchez, Mississippi**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Visit the Under-the-Hill Saloon** – Step inside this 200-year-old watering hole to experience Natchez's wilder past. Expect live music, cold drinks, and colorful characters most nights.
- Explore Smoot's Grocery** – A converted 1930s grocery store turned blues lounge on the riverfront. Sip cocktails, sway to local tunes, and feel the Delta's soul.
- Walk the Natchez Bluff Trail** – Take in sweeping Mississippi River vistas from the scenic walking trail. Sunset here paints the water and bluffs in gold and crimson.
- Browse Silver Street Gallery & Gifts** – Discover local art, handmade jewelry, and one-of-a-kind souvenirs that capture the creative spirit of this historic district.
- Take a Guided or Audio Tour** – Dive deeper into the area's colorful history—from steamboats to saloons—on a self-guided audio walk or private local tour.



Pick up [Guide to the Natchez Trace Parkway](#) before your trip for practical tips, 100+ destination highlights, and milepost stops along the 444-mile route. It's a useful companion for finding food, historical sites, lodging, and must-see attractions along the way.

# MISSOURI: GATEWAY ARCH NATIONAL PARK

## Must-Do Checklist

- Ride the Tram to the Top** – Step into a futuristic pod for a four-minute ride up to the top of the arch, where 16 east- and west-facing windows offer sweeping city and river views.
- Explore the Museum at the Gateway Arch** – Wander exhibits beneath the Arch that trace America's westward expansion and St. Louis's transformation into a thriving frontier city.
- Visit the Old Courthouse** – Walk through the beautifully restored landmark that hosted early proceedings of the Dred Scott case and learn about the fight for freedom and equality.
- Stroll the St. Louis Riverfront Trail** – Enjoy a scenic walk along the Mississippi River, explore the Explorer Garden, and pause at the peaceful reflection ponds flanking the Arch.
- Watch the Park Film** – View "Monument to the Dream," a 28-minute documentary that captures the vision, engineering ingenuity, and determination behind building the Gateway Arch.



Explore [Gateway Arch National Park](#) starting with a guided tram ride to the top. Visit the Museum at the Gateway Arch and enjoy stops at key St. Louis landmarks for a deep dive into the city's past.



Rising 630 feet above the Mississippi River, Gateway Arch commemorates America's westward expansion and St. Louis's role as the "Gateway to the West." Beneath the stainless-steel arch, discover inspiring stories of exploration, innovation, and determination that shaped the nation.

 **St. Louis, Missouri**

# MISSOURI: WALT DISNEY HOMETOWN MUSEUM



The Walt Disney Hometown Museum offers a heartwarming look into Walt Disney's early life and small-town roots that inspired Main Street, U.S.A. Housed in a beautifully restored railway depot, the museum celebrates Walt's lifelong connection to Marceline.

 **Marceline, Missouri**

## Must-Do Checklist

- See the Disney Family Artifacts** – Browse more than 4,000 treasures, from personal letters and family photos to rare collectibles donated or loaned by Disney enthusiasts worldwide.
- Visit the Disney Family Farm** – Walk to the site of Walt's "Dreaming Tree" and leave your message inside the restored barn where his imagination first bloomed.
- Discover Railroad History** – Learn how Marceline's Santa Fe Railway Depot and its trains inspired Walt's lifelong love of locomotives and his later park attractions.
- Find Midget Autopia Relics** – See pieces of the original Midget Autopia ride that Walt gifted to Marceline in 1966 after retiring the attraction from Disneyland.
- See the Park School** – Visit the recreated version of Walt Disney's childhood school, then stop by the Walt Disney Post Office, renamed in his honor in 2003.



*I Am Walt Disney* is a kid-friendly, illustrated biography that highlights the childhood experiences—especially his years in Marceline—that shaped his imagination and the creative path that ultimately brought Mickey Mouse to life.

# MONTANA/WYOMING: BEARTOOTH SCENIC BYWAY

## Must-Do Checklist

- Stop at Scenic Overlooks** – Pull over at spots like Rock Creek Vista or Pilot and Index Peaks Overlook for sweeping views of snow-capped mountains and shimmering lakes.
- Hike to Gardner Lake** – Stretch your legs on the 1.6-mile round-trip Little Rock Creek Trail, an easy alpine hike with breathtaking views and a tranquil mountain lake.
- See Spectacular Waterfalls** – Make quick stops to admire Lake Creek Falls and Crazy Creek Falls, where cascading waters tumble through rocky gorges surrounded by evergreens.
- Visit the Clay Butte Lookout Tower** – Drive up to this historic fire lookout for panoramic 360-degree views of the Absaroka and Beartooth Mountains and distant Wyoming peaks.
- Explore Red Lodge and Cooke City** – Bookend your drive with small-town charm—browse local shops and refuel at diners. Mid-route, stop at the quirky Top of the World Resort.



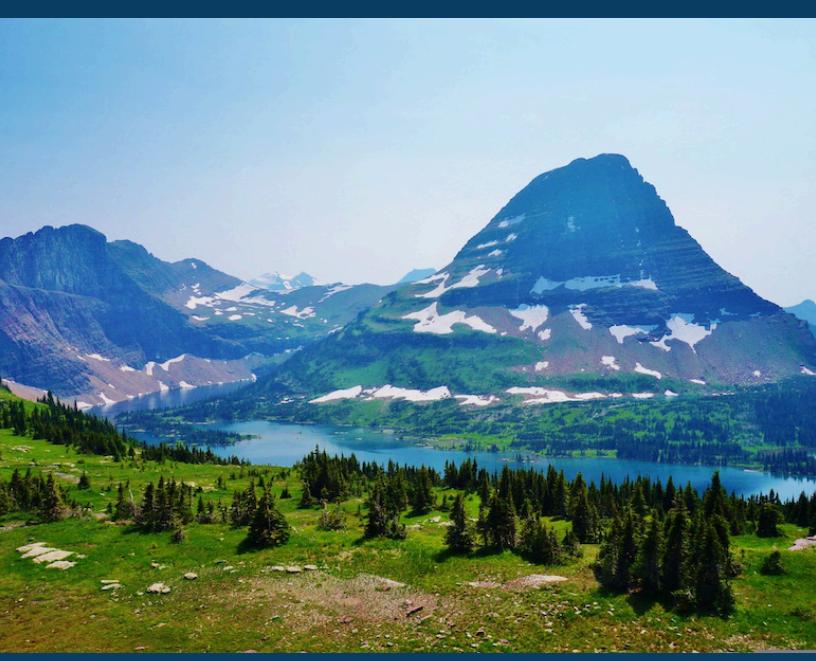
Explore the Beartooth Scenic Byway with a local guide. [Book a driving tour](#) that stops at Rock Creek Vista Point, Beartooth Pass, Beartooth Lake, Lake Creek Falls, and Top of the World Store while keeping an eye out for mountain goats, elk, and bears.



Winding 64 miles between Red Lodge and Cooke City, Montana—east of Yellowstone's northeast entrance—the Beartooth Scenic Byway ascends nearly 11,000 feet through hairpin turns, alpine meadows, and glacier-carved valleys. Many call it "the most beautiful drive in America."

 **Montana/Wyoming**

# MONTANA: GLACIER NATIONAL PARK



Glacier National Park captivates with rugged peaks, azure lakes, and expansive valleys. Hike scenic trails, cruise pristine waters, observe abundant wildlife, and traverse iconic routes through the breathtaking landscapes of the “Crown of the Continent.”

 **West Glacier, Montana**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Cruise Lake McDonald** – Take a guided boat tour across Lake McDonald, enjoying turquoise waters, forested shores, and mountain reflections in one of the park’s most scenic settings.
- Drive Going-to-the-Sun Road** – Travel this iconic 50-mile route by car or Red Bus Tour for breathtaking views of glacial valleys, alpine peaks, waterfalls, and historic stone bridges.
- Go for a Hike** – Explore easy hikes to Avalanche Lake or Hidden Lake, or tackle the Highline Trail for dramatic alpine scenery and panoramic vistas.
- Explore Many Glacier** – Wander scenic lakes, spot abundant wildlife, and enjoy hiking trails in this section of the park. Don’t miss Swiftcurrent Lake for unforgettable alpine views.
- Taste Fresh Huckleberries** – Sample wild huckleberries in season. Visit the Huckleberry Hut in West Glacier Village for jams, candies, teas, and Montana huckleberry-infused products.



[Book an easy-going rafting trip](#) along the Middle Fork of the Flathead River, where you’ll take in Glacier National Park’s scenery, watch for wildlife like bears and moose, and learn about the area’s history, culture, and natural features. Ideal for all ages.

# NEBRASKA: PLATTE RIVER VALLEY

## Must-Do Checklist

- Take a Guided Blind Tour** – Watch tens of thousands of sandhill cranes fly in at dusk or lift off at dawn from a blind on the river’s edge at Rowe Sanctuary.
- Listen to the “Crane Concert”** – Experience the chorus of rattles, trumpets, and croaks echoing across the valley, particularly from Hike-Bike Trail Bridge at Fort Kearney State Park.
- Drive the Viewing Routes by Day** – Follow marked routes to see cranes feeding in cornfields and performing graceful, acrobatic courtship dances under the wide Nebraska sky.
- Visit the Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center** – Explore exhibits, climb the 35-foot-tall observation tower, and walk trails offering panoramic views of cranes and river habitats.
- Spot Other Migrating Birds** – Watch for snow geese, shorebirds, and the highly endangered whooping crane sharing this essential migratory stopover along the Central Flyway.



To deepen your understanding of these remarkable birds, the [Sandhill Crane Display Dictionary](#) offers a beautifully photographed, laminated guide to the cranes’ complex behaviors—from courtship rituals to territorial signals.



Each spring, Nebraska’s Platte River Valley transforms into a stage for one of Earth’s most awe-inspiring wildlife spectacles. Nearly a million sandhill cranes—80% of the world’s population—gather here to rest and refuel, filling the skies with timeless natural wonder.

 **Wood River & Gibbon, Nebraska**

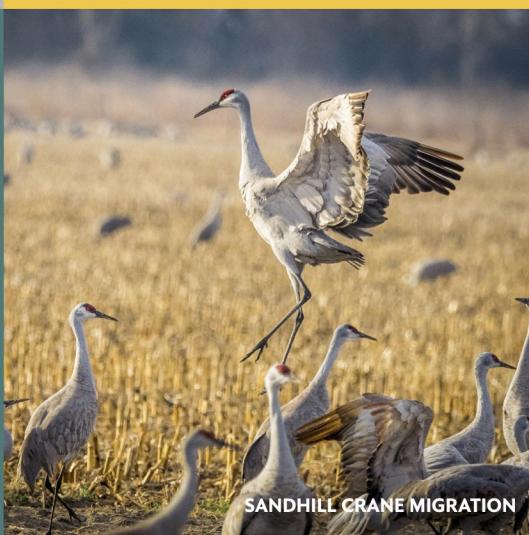


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## NEBRASKA: SCOTTS BLUFF NATIONAL MONUMENT

### Must-Do Checklist

- Drive the Summit Road** – Travel 1.6 miles on Nebraska's oldest concrete road through three tunnels to the bluff's summit for sweeping views of the North Platte River Valley.
- Walk the Oregon Trail Pathway** – Follow an easy, 0.5-mile route (one-way) beside real wagon ruts left by 19th-century emigrants heading west across the Great Plains.
- Hike the Saddle Rock Trail** – Ascend 1.6 miles from the visitor center to the summit of Scotts Bluff, passing striking rock formations and desert plants along the way.
- Visit the Legacy of the Plains Museum** – Just a mile away, this museum highlights pioneer life, agriculture, and local history with exhibits and a working 80-acre farm.
- Side Trip to Chimney Rock** – Drive 25 minutes to see this iconic spire, the most mentioned landmark in pioneer diaries along the Oregon Trail.



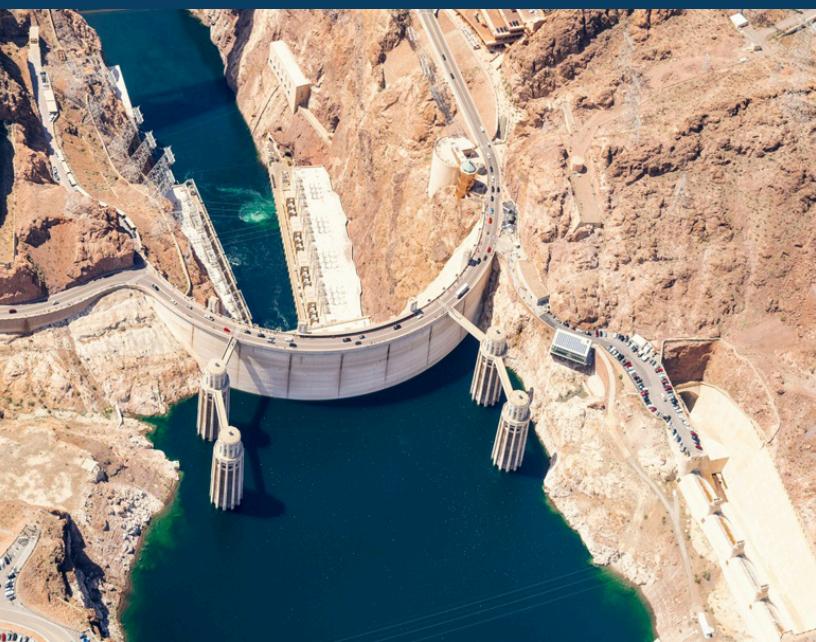
[Oregon Trail Road Trip](#) is a comprehensive guide for tracing the historic route from Missouri to Oregon, highlighting pioneer sites, Native American history, natural landmarks, and classic Wild West towns.



Scotts Bluff National Monument rises high above the plains, a defining landmark for pioneers traveling the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails. Explore scenic trails, historic ruts, and panoramic overlooks, gaining insight into the journey west and Nebraska's geological landscape.

*Gering, Nebraska*

# NEVADA: HOOVER DAM



Hoover Dam is an engineering marvel on the Colorado River, linking Nevada and Arizona. Completed in 1936, this iconic structure offers breathtaking views, fascinating history, and a glimpse into one of America's greatest public works projects.

 **Boulder City, Nevada**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Take a Guided Tour** – Join the Guided Dam Tour or Guided Power Plant Tour to explore historic tunnels, see commercial generators, and learn about the Hoover Dam's construction.
- Explore the Visitor Center** – Take a self-guided tour of narrated exhibits, informative displays, and interactive models explaining the dam's design, history, and impact on the region.
- Stand in Two States at Once** – Walk across the top of the Hoover Dam to place one foot in Arizona and the other in Nevada, straddling two states—and two time zones—at the same time.
- Drive Across the Dam** – Cross over the Hoover Dam by car, then continue on to the Hoover Dam Overlook on the Arizona side for panoramic views of Lake Mead and Black Canyon
- Visit the Boulder City/Hoover Dam Museum** – Step inside this free museum in historic Boulder City for stories, artifacts, and exhibits about the workers and families who built the dam.

 See the Hoover Dam from a new angle on a [90-minute sightseeing cruise](#) aboard the *Desert Princess*, a three-level paddle-wheeler. Enjoy 360-degree Lake Mead views and learn about the dam's history.

# NEVADA: VALLEY OF FIRE STATE PARK

## Must-Do Checklist

- Begin at the New Visitor Center** – Discover exhibits on the park's geology, wildlife, and human history, including 2,000-year-old petroglyphs, and catch the brand-new park film.
- Hike the Fire Wave Trail** – Trek 1.5 miles across swirling, multicolored sandstone resembling ocean waves. Unlike The Wave hike in Arizona, no permit is needed here.
- See Elephant Rock** – Visit this natural sandstone arch shaped like an elephant, one of Valley of Fire's most photographed and recognizable formations. It's an easy walk from the road.
- Explore Atlatl Rock Petroglyphs** – A set of metal stairs leads to a viewing platform to see ancient petroglyphs, offering a glimpse into the lives of early inhabitants thousands of years ago.
- Drive Fire Canyon Road** – Take a scenic drive showcasing the park's most vibrant landscapes. Stop at overlooks to admire fiery sandstone formations and sweeping desert views.



Escape the crowds of Las Vegas. [Book a small-group hike](#) in Valley of Fire State Park, choosing from routes for all levels. Enjoy quiet desert scenery, striking red sandstone formations, and ancient petroglyphs.



Nevada's oldest and largest state park covers 40,000 acres of fiery sandstone, petrified logs, and ancient petroglyphs. Its surreal terrain feels other-worldly. For safety reasons, several popular hiking trails close annually from May 15 to September 30 due to extreme desert heat.

 **Overton, Nevada**

# NEW HAMPSHIRE: GRANITE STATE RAILWAY



Step aboard for a nostalgic journey through New Hampshire's Lakes Region. The Granite State Railway combines vintage rail excursions, scenic rail bike rides, and fine dining on the rails—all along historic tracks dating back to the 1800s and surrounded by mountain and lakeside views.

 **Lincoln, New Hampshire**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Ride a Scenic Excursion** – Board in Meredith or Weirs Beach for a 1-to 2-hour journey on the Winnipesaukee Scenic Railroad, soaking up mountain and lakeshore views.
- Pedal Rail Bikes Along Lake Winnisquam** – Enjoy a five-mile round-trip ride from Laconia Station, pedaling a four-person rail bike through forested stretches and along calm lakeshores.
- Catch Fall Foliage from the Rails** – Join the four-hour Fall Foliage Special to Plymouth, passing trestle bridges and farms framed by dazzling red, orange, and gold autumn leaves.
- Dine Aboard the Café Lafayette Dinner Train** – In nearby North Woodstock, savor a five-course meal while rolling through the Pemigewasset River Valley in restored 1950s railcars.
- Visit the Contoocook Railroad Museum** – Make a side trip to Contoocook to explore the historic depot, vintage passenger coach, and the world's oldest surviving covered railroad bridge.



Pair your rail adventures with the [Colors of Fall Road Trip Guide](#), which features 25 scenic New England drives during peak foliage season. Maps, itineraries, and easy hike suggestions make this a great travel companion.

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# NEW HAMPSHIRE: MOUNT WASHINGTON



Mount Washington, the Northeast's tallest peak, is renowned for 360-degree views and extreme weather, including a record-setting surface wind. Reach the summit via the historic cog railway or drive the Mount Washington Auto Road, America's oldest man-made tourist attraction.

 **North Conway, New Hampshire**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Ride the Mount Washington Cog Railway** – Ascend Mount Washington aboard the historic cog railway, climbing 6,288 feet in 45 minutes while enjoying spectacular far-reaching views.
- Tour the Mount Washington Observatory Weather Station** – Go behind the scenes at the summit, meet meteorologists, and see instruments that capture extreme weather conditions.
- Drive the Mount Washington Auto Road** – Travel to the summit by car or guided tour, navigating hairpin turns and enjoying close-up views of the mountain's rugged terrain.
- Visit the Weather Discovery Center** – In North Conway, meet a live scientist at the summit via video chat and engage with hands-on weather science activities for all ages.
- Take the SnowCoach** – In winter, ride a tracked SnowCoach up the snow-covered Auto Road to the tree line, safely reveling in stunning views of Mount Washington's winter landscape.



The [Mount Washington Cog Railway](#) recounts the unlikely creation of this mountain railway and the inventor behind it. It's a must-read for anyone eager to learn how this ambitious climb became one of New Hampshire's most enduring icons.

# NEW JERSEY: CAPE MAY HISTORIC DISTRICT

## Must-Do Checklist

- Go on a Walking or Trolley Tour** – Explore the Historic District's streets on a guided tour, admiring colorful Victorian architecture and beautifully preserved 19th-century homes.
- See the Emlen Physick Estate** – Step into Cape May's only Victorian house museum. Tours showcase the Victorian design, daily life, and Gilded Age elegance of this 18-room mansion.
- Explore Historic Cold Spring Village** – Step back to the 1800s at this living history museum, where interpreters in period dress demonstrate trades, crafts, and early American life.
- Climb the Cape May Lighthouse** – Ascend 199 steps to the top of this 1859 lighthouse for panoramic views of the Atlantic Ocean, Delaware Bay, and surrounding coastline.
- Attend the Sunset Beach Flag Ceremony** – At dusk, honor veterans as casket flags are lowered to taps. Families may reserve a night to participate in this moving tradition.



[Set sail on a sunset cruise](#) aboard the Cape May Whale Watcher. Spot dolphins, see the Cape May Lighthouse from the water, and enjoy a Delaware Bay sunset—all with complimentary pizza and hot dogs on board.



Cape May, the nation's oldest seaside resort, charms with Victorian cottages, pristine beaches, and maritime heritage. Designated a National Historic Landmark in 1976, its Historic District boasts one of America's largest collections of 19th-century seaside homes.

 **Cape May, New Jersey**

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## NEW JERSEY: THOMAS EDISON NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

### Must-Do Checklist

- Experience the Main Laboratory Complex** – An audio tour guides through Edison's preserved labs to explore where groundbreaking innovations first took shape.
- See the Famous "Junk Pile" Stock Room** – See an extraordinary collection of odd materials Edison kept on hand, from elephant hide to tortoise shell, fueling his endless experimentation.
- Tour Glenmont** – Visit the grand 29-room mansion, complete with original furnishings, where Edison lived with his wife Mina, for a unique glimpse into his family life.
- Explore Edison's Inventions** – Marvel at early prototypes of the phonograph, motion picture camera, and storage batteries. Demonstrations bring Edison's most famous creations to life.
- See the World's First Motion Picture Studio** – Visit the Black Maria replica, reopened in 2024, featuring interpretive panels, a replica kinetograph, and films created on-site.



***Edison*** offers a detailed look at Thomas Edison's life beyond the lightbulb, exploring his major inventions, experiments, collaborations, and personal world. It's a well-researched portrait of one of America's most influential innovators.



Step into the laboratory and estate of Thomas Edison, America's most prolific inventor. From the light bulb to the phonograph, his genius shaped modern life. This National Historical Park offers a rare look at both his groundbreaking work and his family's private world.

 **West Orange, New Jersey**

# NEW MEXICO: ALBUQUERQUE INTERNATIONAL BALLOON FIESTA



Each October, the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta transforms the desert sky into a canvas of color as hundreds of balloons lift off at sunrise. Set against the Sandia Mountains, this nine-day celebration of flight, art, and community is equal parts breathtaking and unforgettable.

 **Albuquerque, New Mexico**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Experience the Dawn Patrol** – Arrive before sunrise to watch illuminated balloons ascend in the dark, testing winds and glowing like lanterns against the night sky.
- Watch a Mass Ascension** – Witness hundreds of balloons launch in waves after sunrise, filling the sky with brilliant colors and whimsical shapes. It's an iconic fiesta highlight.
- Take a Hot Air Balloon Ride** – Soar above the launch field with a licensed pilot for a once-in-a-lifetime view of hundreds of colorful balloons.
- See the Evening Balloon Glow** – Stay after dark to see tethered balloons light up in unison, followed by a dazzling fireworks finale under the desert stars.
- Explore the Balloon Museum** – Visit the Anderson Abruzzo International Balloon Museum for exhibits on ballooning history, science, and art, plus observation deck views of the field.



Rainbow Ryders is the official balloon company of the Balloon Fiesta—and they fly year-round. [Book a sunrise hot air balloon ride](#) to watch the Sandia Mountains light up and take in wide desert views from above.

# NEW MEXICO: WHITE SANDS NATIONAL PARK

## Must-Do Checklist

- Go Sand Sledding** – Glide down soft gypsum dunes on a saucer sled, available for rent or purchase at the park's gift shop. Wax up for speed and sled near the Roadrunner picnic area.
- Drive the Scenic Dunes Drive** – Follow the 16-mile round-trip route deep into the dunes for trail access, photo stops, and mesmerizing light shows at sunrise or sunset.
- Hike the Dune Life Nature Trail** – Follow blue trail markers along this one-mile loop where desert scrub meets gypsum dunes, revealing one of the park's most diverse ecosystems.
- Watch the Sunset** – Catch fiery skies and dramatic shadows across the dunes. On weekends, join a ranger-led Sunset Stroll timed perfectly with the day's last light.
- Join a Ranger Program** – Explore deeper with ranger-led moonlight hikes or take a tour to Lake Lucero, where you'll see sparkling selenite crystals that form the gypsum sands.



Explore White Sands National Park with a [self-guided driving and walking tour](#) that covers its rolling dunes, mountain views, and unique ecosystem. Learn about the area's history—from prehistoric animals to Apache stories.



White Sands National Park, the world's largest gypsum dune field, dazzles with brilliant white sands that stretch for miles. Whether sledding, hiking, or watching the sun dip behind the San Andres Mountains, this surreal landscape promises unforgettable photo moments.

 **Alamogordo, New Mexico**

# NEW YORK: NIAGARA FALLS



Witness the roar and mist of Niagara Falls, where millions of gallons plunge over dramatic cliffs each minute. Curiously, this natural wonder isn't one single waterfall, but three: American Falls, Bridal Veil Falls, and Horseshoe Falls.

 **Niagara Falls, New York**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Ride Maid of the Mist** – This classic boat tour takes you into the mist at the base of Horseshoe Falls for a thrilling perspective. Rain ponchos on for this bucket-list experience.
- Experience Cave of the Winds** – Wooden walkways hug the base of Bridal Veil Falls. On the Hurricane Deck, prepare to get soaked, even with a poncho. Bring sandals or water shoes.
- Visit Niagara Power Vista** – Explore more than 50 interactive exhibits on electricity and hydroelectric power, including a virtual roller coaster, at this free, family-friendly attraction.
- Explore Niagara Falls State Park** – Use the hop-on, hop-off trolley to access hiking trails, picnic spots, and Terrapin Point, the closest and most dramatic viewpoint of Horseshoe Falls
- Watch the Niagara Falls Illumination** – Each night, the three waterfalls of Niagara Falls are lit in vibrant colors, creating a breathtaking spectacle visible from multiple viewpoints.



Discover Niagara Falls State Park on a guided walking tour capped with a [Maid of the Mist boat ride](#). Feel the spray from American Falls, cruise into the basin of Horseshoe Falls, and hear stories that bring the region's history and landscape to life.

# NEW YORK: STATUE OF LIBERTY

## Must-Do Checklist

- Explore the Statue of Liberty Museum** – Discover interactive exhibits, artifacts, an immersive theater, and the 1886 original torch inside this 26,000-square-foot museum.
- Visit the Pedestal** – Ride the elevator or climb 215 steps to the observation deck for sweeping harbor views. A separate pedestal ticket is required.
- Ascend to the Crown** – Climb 162 spiral steps above the pedestal for breathtaking views from Lady Liberty's crown. Reserve early—tickets are limited and highly coveted.
- Explore Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration** – Wander the Great Hall and exhibits tracing America's immigration story from its earliest days through modern times.
- Join a Ranger-Guided Tour** – Learn about Liberty Island, how and why the statue was made, and symbolism of Lady Liberty on ranger-led walks covering construction and restoration.



The [New York Explorer Pass](#) offers a simple way to bundle admissions while visiting the city's major sights. Access more than 100 attractions, including icons like the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building.



The Statue of Liberty, gifted by France in 1886, is a universal symbol of freedom and democracy. Standing tall in New York Harbor, this national monument welcomes visitors with unforgettable views and stirring history.

 **New York, New York**

# NORTH CAROLINA: BILTMORE ESTATE



Built by George Vanderbilt in 1895, the Biltmore Estate is America's largest private home, set amid 8,000 acres of gardens, trails, and wineries. Visitors can tour the 250-room mansion, stroll Olmsted-designed landscapes, and enjoy award-winning wines at this Gilded Age masterpiece.

 **Asheville, North Carolina**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Tour America's Largest Private Home** – See the Vanderbilt family's opulent mansion with its banquet hall, library, and bowling alley. Their Saint Bernard narrates a kid-friendly audio guide.
- Wander the Historic Gardens** – See Olmsted's landscapes, from the vibrant Rose Garden to the lush Conservatory, plus miles of hiking and biking trails across the estate.
- Take the Rooftop Tour** – Enjoy exclusive access to the house's rooftop and balconies, where rare views of the Blue Ridge Mountains make for unforgettable photos.
- Sample Award-Winning Wines** – Enjoy complimentary tastings of award-winning wine at Biltmore Winery. Settle in with charcuterie and locally-made truffles.
- Relax at Antler Hill Village** – Shop, dine, and explore exhibits, farm animals, and seasonal live music in this lively hub that connects the estate's past and present.



Before or after visiting Biltmore Estate, take an [insider walking tour](#) in Asheville. Explore the Masonic Temple, admire the Basilica of St. Lawrence's dome, and see Art Deco landmarks like City Hall and the city's first skyscraper, the Jackson Building.

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# NORTH CAROLINA: WRIGHT BROTHERS NATIONAL MEMORIAL



Wright Brothers National Memorial commemorates Wilbur and Orville Wright's groundbreaking 1903 flight. Tour exhibits, explore historic grounds, and admire monuments that honor and celebrate the moment aviation began and forever reshaped travel and exploration.

 **Asheville, North Carolina**

## Must-Do Checklist

- See the 60-Foot Granite Monument** – Climb Big Kill Devil Hill for panoramic views and to admire the tribute to the Wright Brothers' first successful powered flight.
- Explore the Visitor Center and Museum** – Discover interactive exhibits on the Wrights' experiments, then marvel at a full-size reproduction of the 1903 Wright Flyer in the Flight Room.
- See the First Flight Boulder and Flight Line** – Stand where history lifted off. Granite markers trace the Wrights' four flights, including the longest, covering 852 feet in 59 seconds.
- View the 1903 Commemorative Sculpture** – Admire a bronze-and-steel artwork reenacting the Wright brothers' historic first flight, then explore reconstructed living quarters and a hangar.
- Attend a Wind and Sand Program** – Join a seasonal ranger-led talk to explore the Wrights' journey from bicycle makers to aviation pioneers, retracing the historic first flights.

 Explore the Carolina Dunes with a [self-guided driving audio tour](#) tracing the Wright Brothers' journey from bike mechanics to aviation pioneers. Visit the Wright Brothers National Memorial, then continue north to Corolla, home to the region's famed wild ponies.

# NORTH DAKOTA: ENCHANTED HIGHWAY

## Must-Do Checklist

- See All the Sculptures** – Drive the 32-mile route from Gladstone to Regent to admire seven massive artworks like Geese in Flight, Deer Crossing, and Tin Family.
- Stay at the Enchanted Castle** – Spend the night in Regent's medieval-themed hotel, converted from a high school, complete with a tavern and a steakhouse.
- Visit the Gift Shop in Regent** – Browse for souvenirs, coffee, snacks, and ice cream. You may even meet artist Gary Greff as he works on his next giant knight-and-dragon sculpture.
- Explore the Whirligig Display** – Push a button to bring whimsical wind-powered sculptures to life in downtown Regent, adding a kinetic twist to your art-filled journey.
- Take a Side Trip to Salem Sue** – Detour to New Salem to photograph Salem Sue, the world's largest Holstein cow, overlooking the prairie from her scenic hilltop.



For more out-of-the-ordinary Dakota experiences, [The Dakotas Off the Beaten Path](#) highlights caves, powwows, festivals, and hidden historic sites. It's a helpful guide for travelers seeking lesser-known adventures beyond the region's usual tourist stops.



The Enchanted Highway transforms a quiet 32-mile stretch of prairie road into an open-air art gallery of giant metal sculptures. Created by local artist Gary Greff, this whimsical roadside attraction celebrates small-town creativity, prairie life, and the power of imagination.

 **Regent, North Dakota**

# NORTH DAKOTA: THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL PARK



Theodore Roosevelt National Park celebrates the 26th president's legacy and the badlands' striking landscapes. Enjoy scenic drives, wildlife viewing, historic sites, and dramatic vistas across the park's North and South Units, capturing the pioneering spirit of the American frontier.

 **Medora, North Dakota**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Drive Scenic Loop Drive** – In the South Unit, travel the 36-mile loop, stopping at pullouts and interpretive signs. Painted Canyon Visitor Center boasts rugged badlands landscapes.
- Go Wildlife Watching** – Observe bison, elk, pronghorns, and mule deer in their natural habitats. Always maintain distance to respect wildlife and ensure a safe viewing experience.
- Visit Prairie Dog Town** – Stop near Skyline Vista to see the park's prairie dog town. Watch these social animals communicate with barks and yelps in their bustling colonies.
- Hike the Trails** – Explore the Coal Vein Trail and Painted Canyon Nature Trail for dramatic overlooks, wind-sculpted canyons, and insights into the region's early coal mining activities.
- Explore Medora** – Visit the park's gateway town for dining, historic sites, and theaters. In the evening, enjoy Medora Musical, a lively Broadway-style show celebrating western heritage.



[\*\*101 Travel Bits: Theodore Roosevelt National Park\*\*](#) offers fun facts, stories, and lesser-known insights. Deepen your understanding of this scenic, wildlife-rich North Dakota park and its connection to Roosevelt's conservation legacy.

## OHIO: AMERICAN SIGN MUSEUM

### Must-Do Checklist

- Walk "Main Street" at Night** – Stroll through "Signsville," a recreated American street illuminated by vintage neon signs from motels, diners, and bowling alleys.
- Take a Guided Tour** – On Saturdays and Sundays, join a 45-minute tour led by museum staff to uncover the stories, techniques, and history behind the museum's most iconic signs.
- See a Neon-Bending Demonstration** – Watch skilled artisans at Neonworks shape glowing glass tubes into custom signs during live demonstrations held each Saturday afternoon.
- Explore the Collection Chronologically** – Trace 100 years of American signage, from hand-painted wood and porcelain enamel to postwar neon and mid-century plastic.
- Look for Famous and Unique Signs** – Spot nostalgic icons like the 1963 McDonald's 'Speedee' single-arch sign, a towering Frisch's Big Boy, and a 20-foot fiberglass genie.



Explore Cincinnati above and below the surface on a [guided walking tour](#) that uncovers hidden history, underground tunnels, even a historic crypt. Wander Over-the-Rhine, hear surprising stories, and see parts of the Queen City most visitors never experience.



The largest public sign museum in the United States, this 20,000-square-foot space glows with the color and creativity of American advertising history. With over 800 signs and 4,000 artifacts, it's a vibrant journey through more than a century of design, culture, and craftsmanship.

 **Cincinnati, Ohio**

# OHIO: PRO FOOTBALL HALL OF FAME



The Pro Football Hall of Fame celebrates America's most beloved sport, honoring players, coaches, and pioneers who shaped the game. Opened in 1963 in football's birthplace, Canton, the museum brings fans closer to the gridiron's greatest moments and legendary figures.

 **Canton, Ohio**

## Must-Do Checklist

- See the Bronze Busts Gallery** – Stand "face to bronze face" with football immortals and explore inductees' stories through interactive touchscreens and multimedia exhibits.
- Experience A Game for Life** – Step into a holographic locker room where legends like Vince Lombardi and Joe Namath share timeless lessons learned on the field.
- Explore the Super Bowl Gallery** – Trace the championship's evolution, view every Super Bowl ring, and admire the gleaming Vince Lombardi Trophy up close.
- Test Your Skills in the Replay Booth** – Make tough calls like an NFL referee as you review real game footage and decide whether to confirm or overturn plays.
- Shop the Museum Store** – Browse team gear, collectibles, and memorabilia for every franchise in the Hall's sprawling 4,000-square-foot retail space.



The [Most Incredible Football Stories Ever Told](#) shares moments from decades of NFL and college play. From iconic finishes to unforgettable catches and players overcoming challenges, explore how the game has evolved and the stories that shaped it.

# OKLAHOMA: CHICKASAW CULTURAL CENTER

## Must-Do Checklist

- Walk Through the Traditional Village** – Cross the Sky Bridge to explore a recreated 1700s Chickasaw village with houses, a council house, and cultural demonstrations.
- Explore Interactive Exhibits** – Journey through Chickasaw history at the Chikasha Poya Exhibit Center with multimedia displays highlighting resilience, artistry, and modern identity.
- See a Stomp Dance** – Witness this powerful spiritual and musical tradition performed in colorful attire, and join in the Friendship Dance to experience its rhythm firsthand.
- Explore the Honor Garden** – Stroll through the serene Aaholiitobli' Honor Garden, featuring stone paths, copper accents, and monuments honoring Chickasaw Hall of Fame inductees.
- Enjoy a Meal at the Aaimpa' Café** – Taste traditional dishes like pashofa, venison stew, and buffalo burgers that celebrate the enduring culinary heritage of the Chickasaw people.



Learn about the Chickasaw people with [Spotlight on Native Americans: Chickasaw](#). This accessible overview traces their deep history in the Southeastern Woodlands, explores cultural traditions, and highlights the present-day Chickasaw Nation.



This world-class cultural destination offers immersive exhibits, traditional architecture, live demonstrations, and scenic grounds. Explore Chickasaw history from ancient times to today through art, storytelling, dance, and food that honor a living and thriving culture.

 **Sulphur, Oklahoma**

# OKLAHOMA: NATIONAL ROUTE 66 MUSEUM



Located in western Oklahoma, this museum brings the spirit of the Mother Road to life with immersive exhibits, vintage cars, and nostalgic roadside flair. It's a must-stop along the state's 400-plus miles of historic Route 66—the longest drivable stretch in the nation.

 **Sulphur, Oklahoma**

## Must-Do Checklist

- “Drive” a Pink Cadillac** – Climb into a 1955 pink Cadillac and “cruise” Route 66 through a fun, interactive video experience that feels like the open road.
- Watch a Film at the Mock Drive-In** – Relax inside a vintage Chevy Impala at the museum’s recreated drive-in theater and enjoy a black-and-white movie classic.
- Journey Through Eight States** – Travel from Illinois to California through themed exhibits featuring classic cars, motorcycles, and roadside scenes that tell the Route 66 story.
- Snap a Photo with Myrtle** – Meet Myrtle, the towering two-story kachina doll at the museum entrance—a quirky Route 66 icon and favorite photo op.
- Explore Oklahoma’s Route 66 Heritage** – The Oklahoma Route 66 Museum in Clinton showcases decades of highway history—from Dust Bowl migrations to 1950s family road trips.



If you’re planning to drive historic Route 66, the [EZ66 Guide for Travelers](#) is a practical resource. It offers turn-by-turn directions, updated maps, and helpful notes to navigate many original sections of the route that are no longer well-marked.

# OREGON: CANNON BEACH

## Must-Do Checklist

- See Haystack Rock** – Stroll the sandy shoreline to marvel at this 235-foot sea stack, home to vibrant tide pools, nesting seabirds, and breathtaking sunset photo opportunities.
- Visit Ecola State Park** – Enjoy ocean views from Ecola Point, hike forested trails, and relax at scenic Indian Beach. An eight-mile stretch of the Oregon Coast Trail winds through the park.
- Go Whale Watching** – Spot gray whales migrating along the coast, especially in early-winter and early-spring. Binoculars help, but some days you’ll see them right from the beach.
- Explore Downtown Cannon Beach** – Check out art galleries, boutiques, and coffee shops. Don’t miss Bruce’s Candy Kitchen for saltwater taffy and Icefire Glassworks for glass art pieces.
- Discover Hug Point State Recreation Area** – Walk along the beach to explore sea caves, waterfalls, and the historic stagecoach road carved into the headland at low tide.



Explore Oregon’s coastline on a [full-day guided tour](#) from Portland. Visit Cannon Beach, take in Haystack Rock, and stop at wildlife-rich state parks. Enjoy sweeping ocean views and insights into the region’s nature, history, and culture.



Cannon Beach is famed for its stunning shoreline, coastal landscapes, and artsy small-town vibe. Iconic Haystack Rock anchors adventures in tide pooling, hiking, whale watching, and exploring galleries and shops, offering a postcard-perfect slice of Oregon Coast beauty.

 **Cannon Beach, Oregon**

# OREGON: CRATER LAKE NATIONAL PARK



Crater Lake National Park is home to the deepest lake in the United States, formed in a collapsed volcano. Brilliant blue waters, dramatic cliffs, and forested ridges offer incredible views, epic hikes, and a chance to explore one of Oregon's most iconic natural wonders.

 **Cannon Beach, Oregon**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Drive Rim Drive** – Circle the 33-mile Rim Drive for stunning views of Crater Lake and the Cascade mountain range. Stop for photos at Watchman Overlook and Phantom Ship Overlook.
- Visit Sinnott Memorial Overlook** – Opened in 1931, this trailside museum highlights the lake's geology. Explore exhibits, join a ranger program, and reflect on the memorial dedication.
- Take a Trolley Tour** – From July to mid-September, hop on the narrated Crater Lake Trolley. Enjoy ranger insights and scenic stops without the hassle of driving.
- Hike to a Summit** – Trek to Watchman Peak or Mount Scott for panoramic views of Crater Lake, sheer caldera cliffs, and the surrounding Cascade mountains.
- Explore Rim Village** – Stroll from the Rim Visitor Center past historic Crater Lake Lodge, Rim Campground, and Mather Bay. Don't miss the Community House's rustic charm.



Consider an [America the Beautiful annual pass](#) for unlimited access to 2,000+ national parks and federal lands. It's an easy way to explore more places year-round with one convenient, budget-friendly pass.

# PENNSYLVANIA: FALLINGWATER

## Must-Do Checklist

- Take a Guided Tour** – Step inside Wright's masterpiece with a Fallingwater educator as your guide. Explore the interiors and stand on the home's iconic cantilevered terraces.
- Dine at Fallingwater Café** – Enjoy a seasonal menu crafted with locally sourced ingredients from the Laurel Highlands. Fresh regional flavors highlight the area's Appalachian roots.
- Explore the Grounds** – Stroll woodland trails, cross stone bridges, and take in breathtaking views of the house as it integrates seamlessly into its natural surroundings.
- Visit the Speyer Gallery** – Located at the Visitor Center, this gallery showcases rotating exhibitions highlighting art, architecture, and the creative legacy of Frank Lloyd Wright.
- Stay at Polymath Park** – Spend the night in a Wright-designed home. Four homes are open for overnight stays, as well as guided tours, offering a rare chance to live inside his vision.



If Fallingwater captured your imagination, explore [Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater: The House and Its History](#). This book reveals the vision behind the iconic home perched over Bear Run and offers deeper insight into the masterpiece.



Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1935, Fallingwater is a modern architectural masterpiece built over a waterfall. Blending seamlessly with nature, it remains a celebrated icon of organic architecture and one of the most visited private homes ever constructed.

 **Mill Run, Pennsylvania**

# PENNSYLVANIA: GETTYSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK



Gettysburg National Military Park protects and preserves the site of the Civil War's bloodiest battle. Explore battlefields, visit museums, and see memorials that honor those who fought and mark pivotal moments in American history.

 **Gettysburg, Pennsylvania**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Visit the Museum and Visitor Center** – Pick up a map and seasonal guidebook, then check out the orientation film, cyclorama painting, and museum exhibits focused on the Civil War.
- Tour the Battlefield** – Drive the self-guided auto tour or hire a licensed battlefield guide to see iconic battle locations like Little Round Top, Pickett's Charge, and Devil's Den.
- Attend a Ranger Program** – Join ranger-led talks, guided battlefield walks, or living history presentations that bring Gettysburg's people, strategies, historic sites, and sacrifices to life.
- Visit Gettysburg National Cemetery** – Stroll among the graves of fallen soldiers and reflect at the historic site where Abraham Lincoln delivered the iconic Gettysburg Address.
- Explore the Shriver House Museum** – Step inside this restored 1860 home to learn the civilian perspective and how the battle transformed daily life for Gettysburg residents.



Explore key sites of the Battle of Gettysburg on a [two-hour guided bus tour](#). A national park guide explains the pivotal moments of the three-day conflict as you visit Devil's Den, Little Round Top, Pickett's Charge, and other significant landmarks.



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# RHODE ISLAND: BRISTOL



Settled in 1680, Bristol brims with New England charm, maritime heritage, and patriotic pride. Known for hosting America's oldest Fourth of July celebration, this historic harbor town also delights visitors with grand estates, scenic trails, and nautical treasures along Narragansett Bay.

 **Bristol, Rhode Island**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Tour Blithewold Mansion and Gardens** – Stroll through 33 acres of waterfront gardens and the elegant 1895 estate overlooking Narragansett Bay for a tranquil, scenic escape.
- Explore the East Bay Bike Path** – Cycle or walk this 14.5-mile coastal trail connecting Bristol to Providence with stunning views, quiet coves, native wildlife, and waterfront breezes.
- Visit the Herreshoff Marine Museum** – Discover America's Cup history and the legendary yacht builders who revolutionized sailing at this museum on the original Herreshoff yard site.
- Stroll Through Linden Place Mansion** – Tour the 1810 Federal-style mansion and gardens, known for its architecture, family history, and lively events like the Autumn Artisan Market.
- Attend the Fourth of July Parade** – Celebrate America's birthday at the nation's oldest continuous Independence Day parade featuring marching bands, floats, and patriotic fanfare.



Rhode Island may be small, but there's plenty to explore. [Rhode Island Bucket List: 100 Best Places to Visit](#) highlights top landmarks, hidden gems, and practical tips. It's a must-have guide for anyone eager to experience the Ocean State

# RHODE ISLAND: CLIFF WALK

## Must-Do Checklist

- Walk the Different Sections** – Enjoy both the paved northern stretch near The Breakers and the rugged southern half, where rocky cliffs meet crashing Atlantic waves.
- Find the Forty Steps** – Descend this historic stone staircase at the end of Narragansett Avenue for sweeping ocean views and a classic Newport photo op.
- Tour The Breakers Mansion** – Step inside the Vanderbilt family's opulent summer home, where marble halls and oceanfront lawns capture the splendor of Newport's Gilded Age.
- Visit Other Gilded Age Mansions** – Stroll nearby Bellevue Avenue to explore Marble House, Rosecliff, and The Elms—each showcasing unique architecture and lavish décor.
- Go at Christmas** – Visit The Breakers and other mansions aglow with lights, garlands, and holiday cheer during Newport's spectacular seasonal celebrations.

 Soak in Newport's coastal beauty and Gilded Age elegance on a [narrated trolley tour](#) covering 150+ sights along Ocean Drive, Bellevue Avenue, and the Cliff Walk, then step inside The Breakers for an unforgettable look at Vanderbilt-era opulence.



Newport's iconic 3.5-mile Cliff Walk pairs natural beauty with Gilded Age grandeur. This National Recreation Trail traces the rocky shoreline, passing elegant mansions, wild coastal vistas, and historic landmarks. Whether you stroll a section or walk it all, the views are simply unforgettable.

 **Newport, Rhode Island**

# SOUTH CAROLINA: CHARLESTON'S RAINBOW ROW



A pastel-perfect postcard come to life, Rainbow Row is Charleston's most iconic stretch of historic homes. The 13 Georgian-style houses, painted in cheerful hues of pink, blue, and yellow, date to the 18th century and reflect the city's vibrant blend of history, charm, and Southern grace.

 **Charleston, South Carolina**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Stroll Rainbow Row at Sunrise** – Walk along East Bay Street early in the morning to admire the pastel facades in soft light—before the crowds arrive.
- Explore Hidden Alleyways** – Wander nearby St. Michael's and Philadelphia Alleys, quiet cobblestone paths lined with ivy, gas lamps, and glimpses of Charleston's colonial past.
- Walk to The Battery and White Point Garden** – Continue south for harbor views, historic cannons, and shady oaks along one of Charleston's most picturesque promenades.
- Dine at Magnolias** – Treat yourself to elevated Lowcountry fare like shrimp and grits or fried green tomatoes at this Charleston dining classic of 30+ years.
- Visit the Pineapple Fountain** – A short walk to Waterfront Park rewards with riverside swings, sea breezes, and Charleston's most welcoming photo op.



Explore Charleston's rich history on a [90-minute guided sightseeing tour](#) featuring more than 100 landmarks. Pass Rainbow Row, the Aiken-Rhett House, and the City Market. Stories span from the Revolutionary era through the Civil War.

# SOUTH CAROLINA: GULLAH MUSEUM OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND

## Must-Do Checklist

- Tour Historic Homes and Artifacts** – Explore restored buildings like the "Dewey House" and view 500+ artifacts illustrating Gullah craftsmanship, daily life, and community resilience.
- Hear Stories and Presentations** – Attend storytelling sessions and educational talks that bring Gullah history, traditions, and language to life through community voices and experiences.
- Join a Gullah Heritage Trail Tour** – Take a guided tour led by Gullah descendants highlighting key island sites that trace the culture's deep roots and lasting influence.
- Explore the Gullah Geechee Corridor** – Discover the multi-state corridor that honors Gullah Geechee heritage, language, and African traditions preserved along the coastal lowlands.
- Visit Daufuskie Island** – Take a ferry to Daufuskie Islands to meet local artists, see sweetgrass basket weaving, and explore sites central to Gullah island life.



Pair your museum visit with a [guided Gullah heritage tour](#). Explore St. Helena's landmarks, plantation sites, cemeteries, and praise houses. Powerful stories illuminate Gullah culture, island life, and Lowcountry history.



The Gullah Museum of Hilton Head Island preserves and shares the culture, history, and language of the Gullah people—descendants of West Africans enslaved on coastal plantations who maintained many of their ancestral traditions through art, food, and storytelling.

 **Hilton Head, South Carolina**

# SOUTH DAKOTA: MOUNT RUSHMORE NATIONAL MEMORIAL



Mount Rushmore National Memorial honors four U.S. presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. The massive granite carvings provide breathtaking views and a powerful glimpse into American history.

📍 **Keystone, South Dakota**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Take a Photo at the Grand View Terrace** – You won't want to miss this vantage point for capturing the full memorial and the sweeping beauty of the surrounding Black Hills.
- Walk the Presidential Trail** – Stroll the paved path for ever-changing views of the presidents as you walk among granite outcrops and towering ponderosa pine trees.
- Visit the Sculptor's Studio** – A 15-minute ranger talk explores how Gutzon Borglum and his team brought the monument to life. See the original scale model used to plan Mount Rushmore.
- Taste America's First Vanilla Ice Cream** – Enjoy a classic cone made from Thomas Jefferson's original vanilla ice cream recipe that dates to the 1780s.
- Attend the Evening Lighting Ceremony** – This seasonal program includes a ranger talk, a short film called "Freedom: America's Lasting Legacy," and the dramatic lighting of the memorial.

Explore the Black Hills on a [full-day guided tour](#) from Rapid City, visiting Mount Rushmore, Crazy Horse Memorial, and Custer State Park. Enjoy wildlife viewing, Sylvan Lake, and a scenic drive along the Needles Highway.



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SO MUCH  
*South Dakota*  
SO LITTLE TIME

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# SOUTH DAKOTA: WALL DRUG



What started as a small-town pharmacy offering “free ice water” to weary travelers has grown into one of America’s most-loved roadside attractions. Just 10 minutes from Badlands National Park, Wall Drug is a sprawling mix of shops, eateries, and oddities that’s well worth a stop.

📍 **Wall, South Dakota**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Sip a 5-Cent Coffee** – The price hasn’t changed since 1931. No gimmicks, just a nickel for a hot cup of joe. Pair it with Wall Drug’s famous free ice water and a dose of retro charm.
- Pose with the Jackalope** – Climb onto the six-foot-tall mythical creature described as a jackrabbit with antelope horns for a photo op that’s pure Americana.
- Visit the Back Yard** – Beyond the Jackalope, check out the mini-Mount Rushmore, an animatronic T-Rex, and the Jumping Jets Water Show.
- Explore the Western Art Gallery** – Check out more than 300 original oil paintings of western and illustration art. It’s considered one of the country’s largest collections of its kind.
- Shop for Souvenirs** – Browse novelties and handcrafted goods at such shops as Little Britches Emporium, Hole in the Wall Bookstore, and Calamity Jane’s Jewelry Emporium.



South Dakota offers a lot to explore, so make [Moon South Dakota's Black Hills](#) your guide. Navigating the region's iconic landscapes with flexible itineraries, outdoor adventures, and practical planning tips.

# TENNESSEE: HONKY TONK HIGHWAY

## Must-Do Checklist

- Experience Live Music** – Wander Lower Broadway and enjoy free, nonstop live music at legendary honky tonk bars, like Tootsie’s Orchid Lounge and Robert’s Western World.
- Visit the Johnny Cash Museum** – Explore artifacts, costumes, and instruments, offering a look at the life and legacy of the country music superstar known as the “Man in Black.”
- Explore the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum** – Immerse yourself in exhibits that showcase iconic artists, recordings, and memorabilia that celebrate the genre’s rich evolution.
- Tour the Ryman Auditorium** – Enter the “Mother Church of Country Music” to experience incredible acoustics, explore historic exhibits, and learn about legendary performances.
- Make a Side Trip to the Grand Ole Opry** – Visit the world-famous performance venue, take a backstage tour, and stand on the iconic wooden circle where countless stars have stood.



Nashville’s Honky Tonk Highway buzzes with live music, neon lights, and legendary venues. This iconic district immerses visitors in country music history, energy, and charm, showcasing the traditions and excitement that have made Music City a world-renowned cultural destination.

📍 **Nashville, Tennessee**

Explore Nashville at your own pace. [Book a hop-on hop-off trolley tour](#). Visit landmarks like the Country Music Hall of Fame, Belmont Mansion, and the Ryman Auditorium. More than a dozen stops highlight the city's music, history, and culture.



# TENNESSEE: NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM



Built around the former Lorraine Motel, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, the National Civil Rights Museum chronicles America's ongoing struggle for justice through immersive exhibits, oral histories, and powerful artifacts.

 **Memphis, Tennessee**

## Must-Do Checklist

- View the Lorraine Motel** – Stand before Room 306 and the preserved balcony where Dr. King was assassinated, offering a powerful, somber connection to American history.
- Experience the Bus Exhibit** – Sit inside a replica segregated bus. Hear Rosa Parks' defiant stand during the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott through a stirring first-person audio narrative.
- Explore Resistance to Slavery** – The "Culture of Resistance" gallery traces three centuries, from the Atlantic slave trade to Jim Crow, through artifacts, oral histories, and interactive media.
- See the Freedom Riders Bus** – View a replica of the burned-out bus from 1961, with oral histories and film recounting the Riders' bravery amid violent opposition.
- Explore the Lunch Counter** – Sit at the original segregated counter, where life-size figures, projected film, and interactive displays immerse you in sit-ins, protests, and boycott stories.



Explore Memphis on a [guided city tour](#) that includes Beale Street, Victorian Village, and a barbecue tasting before visiting the National Civil Rights Museum. Get to know the city's musical roots, civil rights history, and cultural landmarks.

# TEXAS: THE ALAMO

## Must-Do Checklist

- Visit Alamo Church** – Also called the Shrine of Texas Liberty, this iconic building is the centerpiece of the Alamo grounds and the site of the legendary 1836 Battle of the Alamo.
- Explore Long Barrack** – Step inside the Alamo's oldest building, a defensive stronghold during the 1836 battle. An augmented reality experience brings the historic site to life.
- Engage in Living History** – Step back into 1836 at the Alamo's living history encampment. Watch hands-on demonstrations of daily life during the Texas Revolution.
- Watch the Short Film** – Take a break in the shade at Long Barrack and view "Crossroads of History," a 17-minute film that spans 300 years of Alamo history.
- Meet the Alamo Cat** – Since the 1980s, the Alamo has had an Official Alamo Cat. Spot the current feline as it patrols the grounds and welcomes visitors to the Shrine of Texas Liberty.



The [San Antonio CityPASS](#) can help trim costs while hitting major highlights. With one bundled ticket, you can visit the Alamo, take a river cruise, enjoy views from the Tower of the Americas, and explore the Witte Museum at a lower combined price.



The Alamo is a symbol of Texas independence and a key site in U.S. history. This historic mission and fortress is where a small group of Texan defenders made their stand against Mexican forces in 1836. Explore the church, gardens, exhibits, and military barracks.

 **San Antonio, Texas**

# TEXAS: CADILLAC RANCH



Ten Cadillacs jut nose-first from a dusty Texas field, their tailfins reaching skyward like colorful sculptures. Cadillac Ranch is a Route 66 icon where everyone's an artist. Visitors are encouraged to grab a can of spray paint and leave their own mark.

 **Amarillo, Texas**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Spray Paint the Cars** – Bring your own paint or snag a can from the on-site vendor (or half-used leftover ones nearby) to add your colors to the graffiti-covered Cadillacs.
- Create Your Own Art** – Go beyond simple spray painting by using stencils, bold colors, or custom designs to make your mark on this ever-changing roadside masterpiece.
- Snap a Sunrise or Sunset Photo** – Golden light makes the neon colors pop and casts dramatic shadows across the prairie for unforgettable shots.
- Walk the Row of Cadillacs** – Admire each of the ten classic models, buried nose-first at the same 60-degree angle as the Great Pyramid of Giza.
- Learn the Backstory** – Created in 1974 by art collective Ant Farm, Cadillac Ranch celebrates America's love affair with the open road.



Make the most of the Texas stretch of Route 66 with [Moon Route 66 Road Trip](#). This guide covers historic stops, retro roadside gems, scenic detours, maps, driving tools, and classic Americana highlights.

# UTAH: ARCHES NATIONAL PARK

## Must-Do Checklist

- Hike to Delicate Arch** – See Utah's most famous arch, which glows spectacularly at sunrise and sunset. Note that this is the park's busiest hike, and the parking lot fills up fast.
- Explore the Windows Section** – A short hike allows access to such arches as North Window, South Window, Turret Arch, and Double Arch. You can scramble under some arches.
- Drive Arches Scenic Drive** – Wind through the park's scenic 18-mile (one-way) main road, stopping for overlooks and pull-offs to revel in the striking views.
- Go on a Ranger-led Hike to Fiery Furnace** – From late-spring to early-fall, rangers lead this challenging hike across maze-like terrain. Reserve tickets at Recreation.gov.
- Enjoy Stargazing** – Moab has some of the darkest skies in the U.S. Top stargazing spots in the park include Balanced Rock picnic area, the Windows Section, and Panorama Point.



Watch the sun set over Arches National Park. [Book a spot on a top-rated guided tour](#) to photograph Delicate Arch and glowing red-rock vistas as the La Sal Mountains come alive with vibrant evening colors.



Arches National Park is a wonderland of natural stone formations, boasting over 2,000 arches set against a backdrop of red rock and desert sky. Sunrise and sunset bring these sandstone sculptures to life. Timed entry tickets are required from Recreation.gov in peak season.

 **Moab, Utah**

# UTAH: GOLDEN SPIKE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK



Golden Spike National Historical Park marks where the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads met in 1869, completing America's first transcontinental railroad. Experience history with steam locomotives, interpretive trails, and exhibits celebrating this engineering triumph.

 **Corinne, Utah**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Watch the Locomotive Demonstrations** – See replica steam engines Jupiter and No. 119 reenact the historic meeting of the rails, complete with ranger-led interpretive programs.
- Take the Engine House Tour** – Go behind-the-scenes during winter months to see how the locomotives are maintained and learn about 19th-century rail technology.
- Hike the Big Fill Loop Trail** – Walk 1.5 miles along the original railroad grades and view fills, cuts, and traces of the monumental rail construction effort.
- Drive the Historic Railroad Grades** – Follow two auto tours that trace the original rail lines, with interpretive stops showcasing where the Central Pacific laid 10 miles in one day.
- Visit the Last Spike Site** – Stand at the exact location where the final “golden spike” was driven, marking the moment the nation was finally connected coast to coast.



[The American Railway](#) offers a beautifully reproduced 1893 classic featuring 200+ illustrations of locomotives, engineers, brakemen, and rail tycoons. It's a fascinating look at how 19th-century railroads were built, managed, and operated.

# VERMONT: BEN & JERRY'S FACTORY

## Must-Do Checklist

- Take a Factory Tour** – This 30-minute guided tour begins with a short film on Ben & Jerry's culture before a guide walks through how the ice cream pints are made.
- Sample Ice Cream** – Enjoy a sample of one of Ben & Jerry's signature ice cream flavors in the Flavor Room at the end of the guided tour.
- Visit the Flavor Graveyard** – Say goodbye to retired flavors, like Sugar Plum and Rainforest Crunch. Playful headstones feature humorous epitaphs marking each flavor's final scoop.
- Indulge in the Scoop Shop** – Treat yourself to a scoop, pint, sundae, or shake. Choose from 30 flavors, including non-dairy options and sorbets. They even offer two flavors made for dogs.
- Revel in Mountain Views** – Enjoy a scoop—maybe a flavor you've never tried—on the patio and soak in the stunning vistas of Vermont's Green Mountains.



[Ben & Jerry's Homemade Ice Cream & Dessert Book](#) is your go-to guide for re-creating legendary flavors at home. With simple ingredients and easy steps, you can whip up classics like Heath Bar Crunch and New York Super Fudge Chunk.



The Ben & Jerry's Factory offers a behind-the-scenes look at one of Vermont's—and perhaps the nation's—most beloved ice cream brands. Discover how their iconic flavors are made, uncover quirky facts about each creation, and celebrate the company's whimsical personality.

 **Waterbury, Vermont**

# VERMONT: MORSE FARM MAPLE SUGARWORKS



There are more than 1,500 sugarhouses operating in Vermont, including Morse Farm Maple Sugarworks. Sample maple delights, explore nature trails, meet farm goats, and discover the craft of sugaring at this family-run sugar shack just minutes from the state capital.

 **Montpelier, Vermont**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Indulge in Maple Treats** – Taste pure Vermont maple syrup, candies, and a maple creemee, the state's signature soft-serve ice cream treat. It's an irresistible sweet experience.
- Learn How Maple Syrup is Made** – In the Woodshed Theatre, catch a fun, informative film that explains the process, offering a peek into Vermont's most famous natural craft.
- Sample Sugar on Snow** – In winter, enjoy hot maple syrup drizzled over packed snow to create chewy, sweet taffy-like bites. Locals balance out the sweetness with a dill pickle.
- Walk the Maple Trail** – Stroll this wooded nature path, learn about maple production, and meet Rex and James, the farm's playful goats, who charm visitors of all ages.
- Step Inside the Sugarhouse** – During sugaring season (mid-February to mid-April), the rustic sugarhouse opens its doors to the public for a first-hand look at maple-making magic.



Bring home the flavors of your trip with the [Maple Syrup Cookbook](#), featuring 100+ sweet and savory recipes. From maple cream scones to crispy maple spareribs, it's the perfect companion for all that syrup you'll likely bring back.

# VIRGINIA: EDGAR ALLAN POE MUSEUM

## Must-Do Checklist

- See Poe's Personal Artifacts** – View rare possessions like his silk waistcoat, walking stick, pocket watch, and lock of hair, all connecting visitors directly to Poe's legacy.
- Explore the Enchanted Garden** – Step into a garden inspired by Poe's poetry, designed from "To Helen" and "To One in Paradise," and meet resident cats Edgar and Tib.
- Visit the Old Stone House** – Explore Richmond's oldest standing residence, home to an exhibit on Poe's childhood years in Richmond and the influences that shaped his early life.
- Experience the Poe Shrine** – Encounter a bust of Poe in the shrine. Scan a QR code and watch Poe eerily recite "The Raven" through augmented reality.
- Stay at the Linden Row Inn** – Spend the night in a boutique hotel linked to Poe's romance with Elmira Royster, whose garden inspired his iconic poem "To Helen."



Explore Poe's dark, mesmerizing world with [Greatest Works of Edgar Allan Poe](#), featuring iconic poems and short stories like "The Raven" and "The Tell-Tale Heart." It's an ideal primer before your visit or a deeper dive once you return.



Founded in 1922, the Edgar Allan Poe Museum preserves the world's largest public collection of Poe artifacts, manuscripts, and memorabilia. Enjoy complimentary audio tours, immersive exhibits, and enchanting gardens, all dedicated to "illuminating Poe for everyone, evermore."

 **Richmond, Virginia**

# VIRGINIA: VIRGINIA'S HISTORIC TRIANGLE



Get to know the birthplace of this nation at Virginia's Historic Triangle, where colonial life, Revolutionary history, and early settlements come alive. Explore iconic sites that showcase America's birth story through living history, museums, and preserved battlefields.

 **Williamsburg, Jamestown & Yorktown, Virginia**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Explore Colonial Williamsburg** – Wander historic streets, meet costumed interpreters, and experience 18th-century life through demonstrations, workshops, and interactive programs.
- Visit Jamestown Settlement** – Board 17th-century ships, explore re-creations of James Fort and a Pasahegh village, and learn about early colonial life through hands-on exhibits.
- Uncover Historic Jamestowne** – Walk the site of the 1607 English settlement, view archaeological remains, and learn about the struggles and triumphs of America's first colonists.
- Take in the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown** – Explore indoor galleries with over 500 artifacts, a recreated Continental Army camp, and a working Revolution-era farm.
- Walk Yorktown Battlefield** – Stand where America won its independence in 1781. Explore with a free self-guided app or hop aboard a replica Stanley Steamer wagon for a narrated tour.

See Jamestown and Yorktown on a [full-day guide-led tour](#), visiting Yorktown Battlefield, the American Revolution Museum, and Jamestown Settlement. Enjoy a Colonial-style lunch while following early American history in chronological order.

# WASHINGTON: OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK

## Must-Do Checklist

- Explore the Hoh Rain Forest** – Walk the 0.8-mile Hall of Mosses loop beneath towering trees draped in green moss for a true fairy-tale forest experience.
- See the Views from Hurricane Ridge** – Drive the scenic ridge road or hike the paved 3.4-mile Hurricane Hill Trail for sweeping mountain and sea vistas that stretch to Canada.
- Visit the Coastal Beaches** – Explore Rialto or Ruby Beach at low tide for tide pools, sea stacks, and the famous Hole-in-the-Wall rock formation.
- Hike to Sol Duc Falls and Hot Springs** – Trek through lush old-growth forest to a triple cascade, then unwind in the rejuvenating Sol Duc Hot Springs pools.
- Relax at Lake Crescent Lodge** – Dine or stay lakeside at this 1915 lodge, where calm, crystal-clear waters reflect the Olympic Mountains in perfect stillness.



Discover Olympic National Park on a [guided half-day minivan tour](#) from Port Angeles. Enjoy Lake Crescent's glacier-carved views, then hike three miles through ancient forest to Marymere Falls, one of the park's most beloved natural highlights.



Where glacier-capped peaks meet mossy rainforests and wild Pacific shores, Olympic National Park is one of the most diverse landscapes in America. From tide pools to alpine meadows, this UNESCO World Heritage Site offers endless opportunities for exploration and awe.

 **Port Angeles, Washington**

# WASHINGTON: SPACE NEEDLE



Built for the 1962 World's Fair, the 605-foot-tall Space Needle is an iconic Seattle landmark. Located in the Lower Queen Anne neighborhood, it offers stunning city views and ranks among the world's most photographed and recognizable structures.

 **Seattle, Washington**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Ride the Skyliner 1 Elevator** – Step into North America's only all-glass double-deck elevator and ascend to the observation deck, enjoying city views on a 50-second spaceship-style ride.
- Take in 360-Degree Views** – Gaze across Seattle, Lake Union, Puget Sound, even Mount Rainier on a clear day. Free, powerful telescopes let you zoom in on distant landmarks.
- Float Over the Seattle Skyline** – Lean back on one of 24 glass Skyriser benches on the outdoor deck, feeling like you're hovering 520 feet above the city below.
- Experience the Glass Floor** – Step onto The Loupe, the world's first revolving glass floor, rotating 360 degrees over 45 minutes for stunning downward city views.
- Visit at Night** – Seattle transforms as the Space Needle glows. Enjoy hand pies at TipTop Café or sip cocktails while taking in sparkling nighttime cityscapes.



With the Seattle CityPASS, [save nearly 50% on top attractions](#) like the Space Needle, Seattle Aquarium, and Chihuly Garden and Glass.

# WEST VIRGINIA: BERKELEY SPRINGS

## Must-Do Checklist

- Swim in the Spring-Fed Pool** – Cool off in a unique outdoor pool, naturally filled with mineral-rich spring water that has refreshed visitors for hundreds of years.
- Relax at the Bathhouse Spa** – Step into the historic Bathhouse Spa, where warm mineral waters and soothing treatments honor Berkeley Springs' centuries-old wellness tradition.
- Visit the Museum of Berkeley Springs** – Explore exhibits detailing the town's history, from Native American use of the springs to early tourism and George Washington's frequent visits.
- See George Washington's Bathtub** – At Berkeley Springs State Park, view the stone tub honoring America's first president, who famously soaked in the healing mineral waters here.
- Attend the International Water Tasting** – Sample waters alongside judges at the world's premier competition, celebrating the purity and taste of waters from around the globe.



Bring a bit of Berkeley Springs home with [Ancient Minerals magnesium bath flakes](#). Designed to mimic the soothing feel of mineral-rich hot springs, they're an easy way to enjoy a spa-like soak in your own tub.



Dubbed "America's First Spa," Berkeley Springs has drawn visitors for centuries with its warm mineral waters. This mountain town blends relaxation, history, and charm. Outdoor pools, historic bathhouses, modern spas, and historic museums make it a rejuvenating destination.

 **Berkeley Springs, West Virginia**

# WEST VIRGINIA: NEW RIVER GORGE NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE



New River Gorge National Park & Preserve overflows with natural beauty, featuring dramatic sandstone cliffs, rushing rapids, and sweeping vistas. Experience outdoor adventures, coal mining history, and vibrant cultural heritage.

 **Glen Jean, West Virginia**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Go Whitewater Rafting** – Paddle Class II-V rapids on the New River, combining adrenaline-pumping waves, scenic canyon views, and unforgettable thrills.
- Hike Long Point Trail** – This easy 3.2-mile hike leads to a rocky overlook with sweeping views of the New River Gorge Bridge, especially stunning as the sun goes down.
- Explore Thurmond** – Once a booming coal town, Thurmond features preserved historic buildings, interpretive exhibits, and a restored depot still serving Amtrak's Cardinal line.
- Visit Sandstone Falls** – Spanning 1,500 feet across the river, the park's largest waterfall impresses with cascading tiers, boardwalk overlooks, and short trails to scenic vantage points.
- Tackle the Bridge Walk** – Harness up for a thrilling catwalk tour beneath the longest single-span steel arch bridge in the United States, suspended 876 feet above the New River.



Spend six hours [rafting the Lower New River](#) in New River Gorge National Park, tackling fun Class III and IV rapids with an expert guide. Take in the scenery as you paddle and refuel with a riverside build-your-own-sandwich lunch.

# WISCONSIN: DOOR COUNTY

## Must-Do Checklist

- Drive the Door County Coastal Byway** – Travel this scenic 66-mile loop along Green Bay and Lake Michigan, stopping in charming waterfront towns like Ephraim and Sister Bay.
- Attend a Traditional Fish Boil** – Experience this classic Door County culinary tradition featuring freshly-caught whitefish, potatoes, and onions boiled over an open fire.
- Climb the Tallest Sand Dune** – Hike to the top of 93-foot "Old Baldy" at Whitefish Dunes State Park in Sturgeon Bay for sweeping views of Lake Michigan and the surrounding shoreline.
- Pick Fresh Cherries** – The region is renowned for its cherries, and a dozen orchards welcome visitors to pick their own during harvest season, typically from mid-July to mid-August.
- Visit a Lighthouse** – Door County is home to 11 lighthouses and range lights, including the 89-foot-tall Cana Island Lighthouse. Climb its 97 steps for sweeping views of Lake Michigan.



Paddle along the shores of Whitefish Dunes State Park and Cave Point County Park for a fresh perspective on Door County's cliffs, caves, and clear waters. [Book a guided kayak tour](#) for scenic views you can't fully appreciate from land.



Situated on a scenic peninsula between Green Bay and Lake Michigan, Door County is a charming escape known for its quaint towns, scenic shoreline, and maritime heritage. Enjoy outdoor adventures, local culinary traditions, and waterfront views.

 **Door County, Wisconsin**

# WISCONSIN: HARLEY-DAVIDSON MUSEUM



The Harley-Davidson Museum celebrates more than a century of motorcycle culture, innovation, and freedom on two wheels. Explore legendary bikes, hands-on exhibits, and immersive stories that capture the history, craftsmanship, and spirit of America's most iconic motorcycle brand.

 **Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Experience Interactive Exhibits** – Check out multimedia displays, legendary motorcycles, and hands-on activities that immerse you in the culture of the open road.
- Design Your Own Motorcycle** – Use digital tools to customize your dream Harley with paint colors, accessories, and finishes, then share or save your one-of-a-kind creation.
- Take a Guided or Audio Tour** – Explore the museum's highlights at your own pace or dive deeper with expert-led tours full of stories and insider knowledge.
- Walk the Museum Campus** – Stroll the 20-acre waterfront site featuring outdoor exhibits, park-like spaces, and scenic views that make the campus a destination in its own right.
- See the Assembly Line in Action** – Head 30 minutes northwest to Menomonee Falls for a behind-the-scenes factory tour showcasing Harley-Davidson's legendary engineering.

 [Book a small group tour](#) in an open-air, five-seat electric vehicle, visiting major landmarks and hidden gems like the Milwaukee Public Market and Villa Terrace Museum. Enjoy a relaxed, crowd-free look at the city's history and character.

# BORN TO RIDE, BREWED TO SHARE, *Made to Celebrate*

Discover Milwaukee, birthplace of Harley-Davidson, home of America's beer heritage and the undisputed City of Festivals. Authentic traditions, one-of-a-kind culture and a warm Midwestern welcome await.



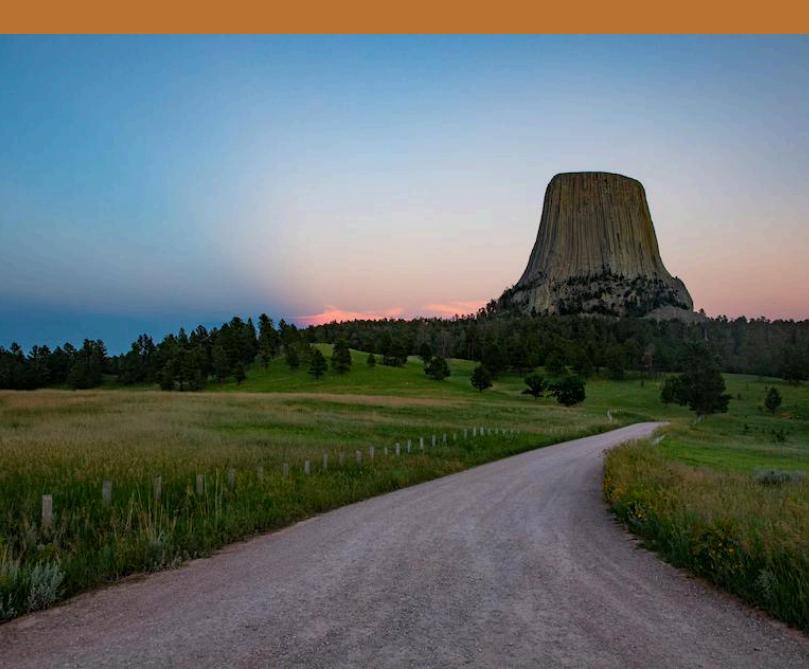
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# WYOMING: DEVILS TOWER NATIONAL MONUMENT



America's first national monument, Devil's Tower is both a sacred site and geological marvel. This dramatic butte, made famous in Steven Spielberg's 1977 sci-fi classic, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, offers incredible opportunities for hiking, climbing, and stargazing.

📍 **Devils Tower, Wyoming**

## Must-Do Checklist

- Hike the Tower Trail** – This 1.3-mile paved loop circles the base of Devil's Tower, offering awe-inspiring views. Interpretive signs share the park's natural and cultural history.
- Stop in the Visitor Center** – Built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps using ponderosa pine logs, this historic building is as fascinating as the exhibits inside.
- Join a Ranger Program** – From Memorial Day to Labor Day, evening talks at the amphitheater range from prairie dogs and night skies to the history of Devil's Tower.
- See the Prairie Dogs** – Around 600 black-tailed prairie dogs make their home here, popping in and out of burrows. They're fun to watch, but give them space to keep them safe and wild.
- Check Out the Sculpture** – The Circle of Sacred Smoke, symbolizing the first puff of smoke from a newly lit pipe, honors Devil's Tower's spiritual meaning for more than 20 affiliated tribes.



Stay just steps from Devil's Tower at [Devils Tower KOA](#), where cabins, tent sites, and RV sites offer unbeatable monument views. Gather under the stars for an outdoor screening of "*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*"—with the real Devil's Tower as the backdrop.

# WYOMING/MONTANA/IDAHO: YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

## Must-Do Checklist

- Watch Old Faithful Erupt** – Witness the world's most iconic geyser erupt with precision, then follow the boardwalk through Upper Geyser Basin to discover more geothermal wonders.
- Hike to Grand Prismatic Overlook** – Take the short trail for a breathtaking aerial view of the park's largest hot spring, radiating with vivid rainbow-colored microbial rings.
- Explore the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone** – Marvel at 308-foot Lower Falls from Artist Point and Brink of the Falls, where mist and color fill the dramatic canyon.
- Spot Wildlife in Lamar Valley** – Cruise this scenic corridor at sunrise or sunset to spot Yellowstone's "Big Five": bison, elk, grizzly bears, gray wolves, and moose.
- Wander Mammoth Hot Springs** – Stroll the boardwalks among steaming terraces of calcium carbonate that shift daily in shape and color. Keep your eyes open for grazing elk.



Explore Yellowstone's Lamar Valley on a [guided safari-style hike](#), venturing to quieter areas ideal for spotting wildlife like bison, wolves, and eagles. Enjoy a small-group experience, expert guidance, and a lunch along one of the park's most scenic river valleys.



Yellowstone National Park is home to erupting geysers, technicolor hot springs, thundering waterfalls, and abundant wildlife. As the world's first national park, it offers a front-row seat to the planet's raw power and timeless beauty. It's an unforgettable experience in every season.



**Wyoming / Montana / Idaho**

# Keep Exploring: All 250 Places Are Waiting

You've reached the end of this guide—but not the end of the journey.

*Explore America: 250 Places to Go in 2026* is an introduction to a much bigger adventure. Here, I've shared 100 destinations—two from each state—chosen to showcase the variety, history, and surprise of traveling across the U.S. as the nation approaches its 250th birthday.

The complete list of all 250 places lives online at [USABucketList.com](http://USABucketList.com), the companion website to this guide. There, you'll find every destination organized by state, each with a five-item must-do checklist to help you understand what makes each special and plan a visit without missing the highlights.

Think of this guide as your starting point—and the website as your ongoing planning tool. For new finds and seasonal ideas, join the conversation on [Facebook](#).

The next chapter of your travels is waiting online.

*Erin*

[www.USABucketList.com](http://www.USABucketList.com)

