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*Traveller*

SPECIAL  
EDITION

# AMERICA

YOURS TO DISCOVER

## Top American Trips 2018

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# AMERICA

YOURS TO DISCOVER

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## It's your call

**WILL ADMIT:** CREATING A MAGAZINE ABOUT TRAVELLING to the U.S. in a time when our trade relationship is in question; when migrants seeking refuge are being turned away or detained; when the reproductive rights of women are once again endangered – well, it has not been easy.

For our publisher and I, the political, economic and ethical challenges in the U.S. at the moment have had us struggling, at times, to justify a publication that is ultimately intended to inspire you, the Canadian traveller, to spend your hard-earned dollars in a country whose values are not aligned with ours; at least, not on the surface.

But then we're reminded that the news we hear and the individuals covered typify only a small portion of the population. There are people



across the United States who are eager to welcome visitors of all backgrounds to explore and experience their country – the best parts of it. There are communities that rely on a healthy tourism industry to thrive. And ultimately, there are some of the most magnificent landscapes and destinations in the world to be enjoyed. This is why we're taking the opportunity to showcase a few of these vast expanses and the people who truly represent the places in which they live.

Travel, to the U.S. or otherwise, is all about connection, discovery and open-mindedness. It's about seeing different places and meeting different people. It's

about understanding that as much power as a destination has in influencing our perspectives, we also have on the destination.

Is now the right time to be visiting the U.S.? I think that's a very personal decision. There will be Canadians who go regardless of the political climate – for business, for pleasure, or simply because they always have. For everyone else, the motivation must be in learning, in educating and in adventure. We hope that this issue of *America: Yours to Discover* can be part of your journey.

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**SUBSCRIPTION RATES:**

One year \$17.95 (taxes vary by province).  
US: \$27.95 per year. International: \$47.95.

Send Name & Address Along With Payment To:

Canadian Traveller, PO Box 57096,  
Vancouver, BC V5K 5G6 Canada

Canadian Traveller is published four times per year:

Spring (February), Summer (May),  
Fall (August), Winter (November)

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ISSN 0030-8986

MY  PASSION MEDIA

PO Box 57096  
Vancouver, BC Canada V5K 5G6  
Tel: 1-888-924-7524 Fax: (604) 620-0245

**PRINTED IN CANADA**

Canadian Publications Mail Product  
Sales Agreement No. 42720012.

Postage paid at Vancouver, BC. Return undeliverable  
Canadian addresses to Circulation Dept.,  
PO Box 57096, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6E 3Z3.



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# SNAPSHOTS



## TOURS & ATTRACTIONS

### **This is America**

Three new trips are featured in **Trafalgar's** recently launched *2019 USA & Canada* program, which is compiled of 39 hand-crafted itineraries that visit 81 cities across North America including Alaska, Hawaii and Central America. As a sampling, travellers can taste delicious Po'Boys with locals in New Orleans, or hear stories about Muhammad Ali from the icon's family members in Louisville, Kentucky. Among the new tours is a 14-day *Alaska and the Yukon* adventure, whereby travellers will enjoy Klondike tales, frontier landscapes and Denali National Park. A unique Trafalgar 'Local Specialist' experience will give you the chance to meet a local gold miner who will reveal the past and present value of gold in its influence of the region in Dawson City. For an especially memorable experience, travel during the summer to enjoy the rare opportunity of the midnight sun.

## TOURS & ATTRACTIONS

### Park pass

Make your way across the most popular national parks, historic landmarks and scenic grandeur of the U.S. by joining **Insight Vacations** on its 15-day *America's Magnificent National Parks* tour. Not only will you have the chance to join a Local Expert at the Grand Canyon and stay at the Grand Canyon National Parks Lodges, a tour through the vistas of Navajo Tribal Park in Monument Valley, accompanied by a Navajo guide, is also on the itinerary. View the Upper Geyser Basin in Yellowstone National Park, where you'll be immersed in the highest concentration of geysers, hot springs and fumaroles in the world. Go horseback riding in the stunning surroundings of Ucross, relax at the beautiful Zion Lodge and unwind at Grand Teton National Park. All this is part of Insight's 2019 *USA & Canada Premium Escorted Journeys* collection, which features 15 itineraries through the landscapes and destinations of the U.S.



Grand Canyon

## TRENDS

### Not all bad

In a time when many an international traveller might expect arrival numbers to the U.S. to be slipping, the **U.S. Travel Association's** latest Travel Trends Index (TTI) suggests that travel to and within the U.S. grew 3.6 per cent year-over-year in April. In fact, the organization expects to see three per cent growth through to early fall. "Caution remains, though," according to the report, "as negative perceptions abroad of President Trump's rhetoric and policies continue to pose risks to international traveler sentiment. Additionally, the downside risks to the U.S. economy, including mounting trade tensions and higher oil prices, have the potential to also hinder global activity." Interestingly, Statistics Canada data shows Canadian residents made 3.8 million trips to the United States in April 2018 – an increase of 8.7 per cent over April 2017. Data also shows that visitation to the U.S. by Canadians via automobile was up nearly 20 per cent in May 2018, compared to a year earlier.

Four Seasons Oahu, Weaver Multimedia Group/Matt Inden

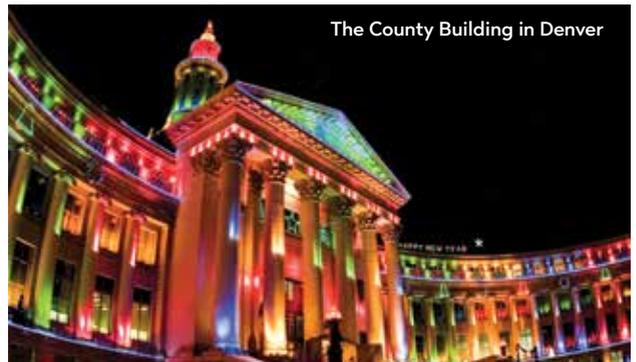


Helicopter tour of the coast of Molokai

## HOTELS

### Earth, wind & fire

Beautiful views are not hard to come by in the U.S., though few can rival those from a bird's eye view in Hawaii. Guests of the **Four Seasons Resort Oahu at Ko Olina** can now take part in what's been dubbed an "Earth, Wind & Fire Day," which is a helicopter tour that showcases the cliffs on the coast of Molokai, the black sand beaches in Kona, waterfalls on the lush Hamakua Coast, Pu'uuhonua O Honaunau National Historical Park, Papakolea green sand beach and Kilauea's blistering lava flows. In partnership with Paradise Helicopters Hawaii and Hawaiian Legacy Reforestation, the tour also takes guests to the Hawaiian Legacy Forest above the historic Umikoa Village, where they will participate in a legacy tree planting experience accompanied by a gourmet five-course Chef's Table with wine pairings. But be warned – the price tag is not small; the Earth, Wind & Fire day charter starts at US \$16,800.



The County Building in Denver

## DESTINATIONS

### No surprise here

Insights from **KAYAK.com** show that Las Vegas, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Orlando continue to be the "top trending" U.S. destinations. The cities are no strangers to Canucks, each with robust air access from various Canadian gateways. For travellers seeking a good deal, Orlando, Denver, Fort Myers, Tampa, Salt Lake City, Minneapolis and Baltimore are all among KAYAK's 2018 "Wallet-Friendly" destinations as per its 2018 Travel Hacker Guide; Houston, Minneapolis and Oahu are U.S. destinations on the list of "KAYAK picks."



BE INSPIRED



*A journey through*

# IDAHO'S VOLCANIC PAST

BY SARA SHEEHY

**T**HE SETTING SUN CASTS a delicate glow over this small Idaho town as I push open the gate to its namesake world-famous Lava Hot Springs. Mist rises into the cool evening air, and crystal clear mineral water bubbles from the gravel bottom of the nearest pool. I test the water with my toe before sinking in, my muscles relaxing after a day of exploration.

Lava Hot Springs has kept me moving, from a morning tour of the historic buildings at Chesterfield Town Site to an afternoon ziplining across a spring-green canyon. The pools are busy despite the late hour; children learn to float on their backs and couples talk and laugh as stars emerge in the darkening sky.

The thermal activity heating the 2.5 million gallons of water that flow through Lava Hot Springs each day is connected to the volcanic hotspot

underneath Yellowstone National Park. A line of volcanic eruptions that began 12 million years ago strings out to the east across southern Idaho's Snake River Plain, each eruption pointing to the giant caldera of present-day Yellowstone National Park.

In the morning, rested and relaxed, I embark on a trip north and west toward Craters of the Moon National Monument to trace the route of those ancient volcanoes. The rolling hills of Pocatello give way to a flat expanse of sagebrush steppe, broken only by three large lava buttes standing sentinel on either side of the two-lane highway. This land, beautiful in its loneliness, caught the eye of nuclear scientists from the Argonne National Laboratory in Chicago in 1949; following World War II, a group turned their attention from weaponry to power generation. I can easily imagine why they chose this stretch of remote

land to experiment instead of the busy outskirts of Chicago: it is vast and sparsely populated, a place where you're more likely to see an antelope than a person. The experimental reactor, EBR-1, succeeded in generating atomic power in 1955 and is now open for tours as a National Historic Landmark. I pull in to explore and climb the stairs to the top of the now-defunct nuclear reactor before pressing buttons in the control room and manipulating robotic arms.

I continue on the road to Craters of the Moon national preserve, past miles of sagebrush with rays of the early summer sun dancing off their pale green leaves. I roll my windows down, letting the warmth and sweet smell of wildflowers rush into the car. The road is flat and straight, stretching as far as the eye can see – and it seems as though I have it all to myself. Suddenly the iridescent glimmer of lava rises out of the sage, and I'm



L to R: Lava Springs Zipline, Mountain Village Hot Springs, Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve

surrounded on all sides by broken chunks of the dark rock.

The piles of lava grow taller and wilder, until the sagebrush recedes completely and all that is left is miles of black rock. Astronauts trained here for the moon landings of the 1960s, which I determine makes perfect sense, as I pull into the Visitor Center at Craters of the Moon. A well-designed interpretive display outlines the volcanic origins of the park, where the latest lava flows were a mere 2,000 years ago.

Craters of the Moon, uniquely beautiful in all seasons, erupts in a riot of colour for a few short weeks in early summer. Wildflowers, some no taller than an inch, paint the landscape in vibrant shades of pink, yellow and red. The stark contrast between black lava and colourful flowers is a sight to behold on the 11-kilometre Loop Road. I stop to explore Inferno Cone, a 1,884-metre mountain of cinder, and make the short but steep hike to its summit.

Returning to my car, I drive the short distance to the Craters of the Moon's

caves. I pull on my backpack and start walking the bumpy line of asphalt poured as a trail. All I see is hardened waves of lava until a small opening appears to my right. I quickly realize the caves are underneath my feet. I switch on a flashlight and make my way down a metal ladder into Indian Tunnel, the largest of the caves.

Indian Tunnel is spacious yet dark, the jagged lava walls smeared occasionally with bat droppings and downy feathers. I think about the hotspot that pushed this lava to the surface, and the series of volcanoes that formed a path from Craters of the Moon to Lava Hot Springs. I breathe the cold, heavy air deep into my lungs. Indian Tunnel ends at a narrow opening, and after a bit of scrambling and wriggling I emerge through the gap, blinking into the warm summer air. ✪

## When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** The **Lava Hot Springs World Famous Hot Pools** are open for soaking year-round, and the Lava Hot Springs Olympic Swimming Complex (with diving platforms and waterslides) offers endless aquatic fun during the summer. Drive to nearby historic **Chesterfield** for a tour through the lovingly maintained remains of a pioneer town, and join Lava Zipline for an afternoon of "riding the lines." **Craters of the Moon National Monument** is open year-round as well, and no trip

here is complete without a hike on the cinder-trail up Inferno Cone and a visit to partially collapsed Indian Tunnel. Be sure to bring your camera to capture the National Monument's otherworldly landscape.

**WHERE TO DINE:** **The Portneuf Grill and Lounge**, located at the Riverside Hot Springs Inn in Lava Hot Springs, serves upscale meals featuring local ingredients paired with Idaho wines. Chef Alonzo Thomas prepares generous portions from his seasonally relevant menu. For a more casual atmosphere, local favourite Riverwalk Thai offers authentic Thai cuisine and a delightfully sweet Thai tea. On the way to Craters of the Moon National Monument, stop at **Pickle's Place** for its famous fried pickles and hamburgers served without fuss.

**WHERE TO STAY:** The charming downtown of Lava Hot Springs offers accommodations that are within easy walking distance of the hot pools. Stay at the **Home Hotel**, built in 1918, for comfortable rooms and baths that fill with mineral water from the nearby hot springs. Campers can take their pick of one of the many RV parks in town, including the **Lava Hot Springs KOA** with campsites along the Portneuf River. At Craters of the Moon National Monument a newly renovated campground offers 42 campsites for tents and small RVs. For less rustic accommodations, book a reservation at **The Silver Creek Hotel**, located 50 minutes west in Bellevue.



*Find your way in*

# BIG SUR

BY **JAY FLEMING**

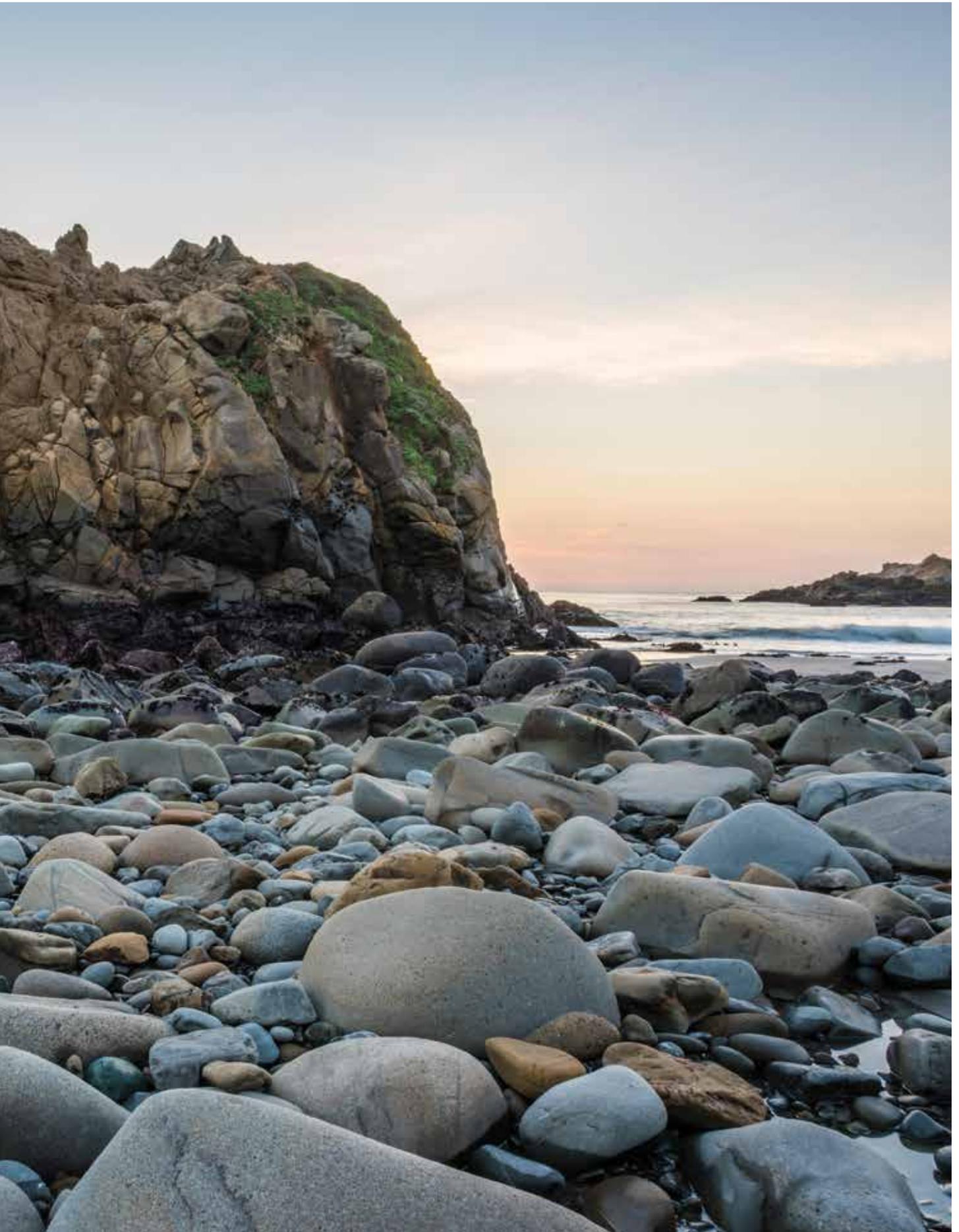
**A**SI DRIVE MY RENTAL car into the twists and turns of Highway 1, it is easy to see why writers, painters, musicians and other artists of past and present chose, and still choose, this destination as their place of creative stimulation.

Hunter S. Thompson published his first article while in Big Sur, and world-famous author Henry Miller was a long-time resident. Connections to contemporary musicians like the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Trent Reznor and Alanis Morissette all add to the reputation as a place for creative souls.

But whether you're a Hollywood star or not, when it comes to seclusion, Big Sur is tough to beat. Dense forest lines the highway, giving a sense of natural, earthy insulation. Occasionally, the road bursts through the forest to the exposed coastline, filling my windshield with glimpses of a seemingly infinite ocean to the west. The two-lane highway acts as an asphalt divider between the St. Lucia Mountain Range to the east and the wild Pacific Ocean below, both directions providing superb views. I can't help but stop the car every few minutes for photos and quiet moments of reflection. ➤



Julia Pfeiffer State Park





Clockwise: Bixby Bridge, painting the Big Sur coastline, Pfeiffer Beach

Development restrictions have kept new builds to a minimum, keeping 'Big Sur feeling small, as its population of 1,000 would suggest. As a result, there are not many lodging options in the area. I set up camp at the Big Sur River Inn, one of the largest hotels in the area, but decidedly intimate by big city standards. My room looks out onto the Big Sur River, its rushing water offering a soothing soundtrack. This feels more like a cabin than a hotel room, and the simplicity of it all is a welcome contrast to the frills of typical hotels elsewhere in California.

Many of Big Sur's natural wonders are hidden just beneath the surface, so a bit of digging is required to find them. I learn of a few secluded spots from a server in a local restaurant and suddenly I'm in-the-know. So I make my way to Pfeiffer Beach as he suggests (not to be confused with Julia Pfeiffer

State Park), a vast blanket of dark, purplish sand and rock pools. This is not a beach for swimming, but for the photographically-inclined it is a paradise. The natural rock formations rise defiantly from the water as the Pacific Ocean crashes violently into their backside. I observe, mesmerized, and before I know it, hours have passed, with very few others enjoying this sedentary spot around me.

Just south of Pfeiffer Beach is McWay Falls, another unmarked gem that some say provides the best sunset experience in all of Big Sur. I pull the car over and venture forth on the 10-minute hike down to the viewing platform. It's the golden hour just before sunset, and the beach below is warmed by the sun's rays. I meet a couple who happens to live in Big Sur; I never would have guessed, judging by the way they are appreciating

the scene before us, given that they may have seen it hundreds of times before.

Some of Big Sur's most interesting backstories are tied to its role as a coastal community; the Point Sur Lighthouse is at the centre of much of the history, as it was first constructed in the late 1800s in response to several shipwrecks along the coast. Tours run on Saturdays and Wednesdays in the summer and are provided by passionate volunteers who know the types of informational tidbits that don't make their way into digital records but provide for an entertaining tour (things like: how did lighthouse-keepers go to the bathroom in the 1800s?). I hike up to the point to be rewarded with incredible views, and my guide tells tales of old shipwrecks, blimp crashes, and naval spying – only adding to the mysterious allure that I've come to expect from Big Sur. ▶

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Cyclists on Highway 1, Big Sur

Upon reflecting on my coastal experience once I return home, I find myself inspired by the written words of Big Sur's most famous resident, Hunter S. Thompson. In his novel *Proud Highway: Saga of a Desperate Southern Gentleman 1955-1967*, Hunter captures his state of being:

*"This is the way life goes in Big Sur. Waiting for the mail, watching the sea-lions in the surf or the freighters on the horizon, sitting in the tubs at Hot Springs, once in a while a bit of drink – and, most of the time, working at whatever it is that you came here to work on, whether it be painting, writing, gardening or the simple art of living your own life."*

I feel Hunter's words more deeply having had my own time in Big Sur. Whether you have weeks, a few days, or even just a few hours – passing through this place provides you with a unique opportunity: a chance to get lost in the art of nature itself. ✪

**When You Go**

**FEATURED ITINERARY:** To see Monterey County & beyond, opt for **Insight Vacations' Best of California tour**. Take in the lush landscapes of the Sierras before you are swept through the fertile San Joaquin Valley to Carmel-by-the-Sea. There you will have the opportunity to browse a range of art galleries, local shops and the chance to stock up on souvenirs. Enjoy a relaxing drive across the Monterey Peninsula and along 17-Mile Drive, where you can take in the stunning ocean views, Pebble Beach Golf Links and multi-million dollar mansions, before arriving in the city of Monterey. Enjoy a delightful Highlight Dinner this evening.

**WHAT TO DO:** The famous **Bixby Bridge** spans a crevasse along Highway 1, most recently highlighted in the television series, "Big Little Lies." Be sure to pull off on the east side of the road to find the best panoramic view of the bridge. Hosting local artists and musicians in a quaint museum environment, the **Henry Miller Museum** is perfect for a shady retreat between outings.

**WHERE TO DINE:** Plan for a breakfast at **Big Sur Roadhouse**, a traditional diner-style roadhouse nestled into the Redwoods. It's quiet and cozy, and the perfect place for planning or reflection before you hit the road. Enjoy dinner in one of the four unique candle-lit rooms at **Deetjen's Big Sur Inn's** restaurant. Meals are made with local, organic ingredients – it'll be hard to decide whether the lamb or the warm bread and hummus is the better choice, so opt for both.



# THE NATURE OF THE FEAST

BY BRITNEY HOPE

Kualoa Ranch

IT'S A MEAL THAT BEGINS LIKE any other: With a simple blessing.

"E 'ai ana me Ke Aloha," my host, Monica Toguchi, says before we start. "Eat with love."

I'm dining at Honolulu's Highway Inn, staring down at a plank piled with raw onion, *kalua* (slow-roasted pig), and *lau lau* (butterfish steamed in taro leaves). All around me, diners – mostly locals, I'm told – are "grinding" (Hawaiian slang, my menu reads, for "chowing down") on incredible-smelling dishes I don't recognize. It begins to dawn on me how little I actually know about Hawaiian

cuisine outside of pineapples and poke.

Then, someone passes me a bowl of creamy, purple paste I mistake for blueberry yogurt.

"It's *poi*," Monica says, explaining that the starchy staple is made from fermented and mashed taro root – just one of the many "canoe plants" brought to the islands by Polynesian voyagers in the fifth century.

*Poi* apparently tastes different depending on how long it ferments, but to me, it's sort of sour, much like yogurt. Monica admits that although it's a love-it-or-hate-it kind of food, they'd

never dream of taking it off the menu at Highway Inn, which has been dishing up traditional Hawaiian cuisine ever since her grandparents, Seiichi and Sachiko, opened the doors in 1947; Monica is its third-generation owner.

I mix *poi* in with my *lomi salmon* (diced tomatoes, onion and raw fish), and slice into my butter-soft *lau lau* to reveal its meaty, melt-in-your-mouth filling. For dessert, I try *haupia*, a gelatinous square of coconut milk, sugar and cornstarch.

"In Hawai'i, some will say eating is better than sex," Monica jokes as I extol a particularly exquisite coconut-y



Horseback riding in O'ahu

mouthful. "It's seen as a higher form of pleasure."

While food is a sensory representation of culture in nearly every corner of the globe, there's something special about Hawaiian cuisine. Perhaps it's because every ingredient – save for the fish – has come from someplace else. Or perhaps it's because Hawai'i's history is comprised of many cultures coming together, from its sugarcane and pineapple plantation era of the 19th and 20th centuries, when the Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Portuguese, Filipino and Hawaiian workers shared their meals – and cooking methods – so the stories go.

Jim Gusukuma, the owner of Honolulu's Rainbow Drive-In and its new sister spot, Hawaii's Favorite Kitchens, knows all about it. His grandparents worked on those plantations before opening the now-iconic Rainbow Drive-In in 1961.

"The workers needed high-energy meals," he says during lunch on day two of my visit, handing me a styrofoam container the size of a shoebox. "And so, the plate lunch was born."

He's ordered me an HFK Mixed Plate, which turns out to be a stunning combination of macaroni salad, beef teriyaki, Huli chicken and poke, arguably weighing more than a newborn baby.

As I tuck into the multicultural medley, Gusukuma explains that his grandparents' vision was to provide the working person with generous portions of hearty food at a reasonable price. But the Rainbow Drive-In is more than just a great place to grab a classic plate lunch; to some locals, it's a lifelong institution – and customers have been returning for generations.

Formerly an independent nation until it was illegally annexed by the U.S. in the 1890s, the Hawai'i of today represents generations of cultural evolution – and its

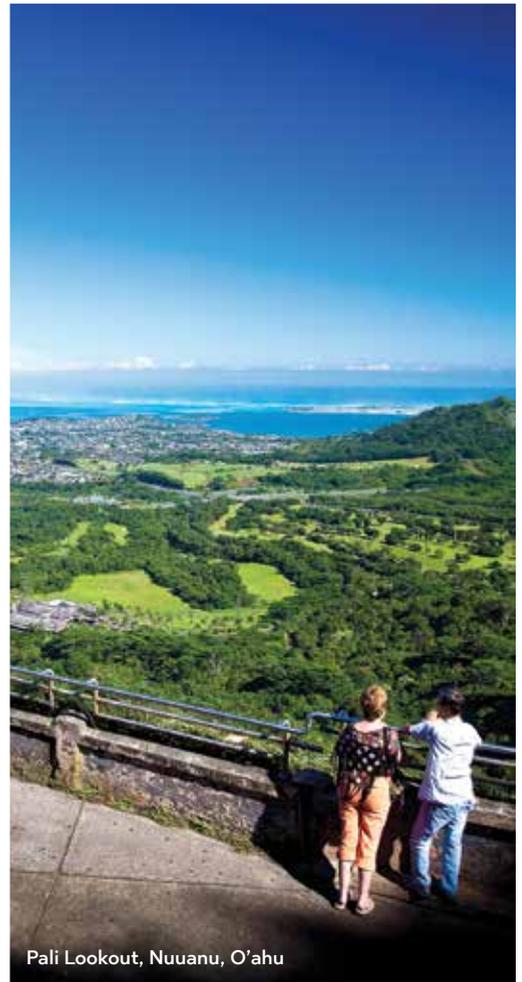
cuisine tells that story. But the state also struggles with food security; O'ahu imports 90 per cent of its fare, and the issue of sustainability versus land development has become a hot topic on the island.

"It's a tough sell to choose agriculture over real estate here," Taylor Kellerman, director of diversified agriculture and land stewardship at O'ahu's Kualoa Private Nature Reserve, as we climb aboard a bus to the 1,617 hectare reserve's working ranch. "So local food production has suffered somewhat."

Kualoa has long been a place of fascination for the outside world, and it's no wonder; made of three stunning mountainous valleys, the region is considered one of the most sacred places on O'ahu. It's also popular with tourists, having appeared in Hollywood classics such as "Jurassic Park."

Taylor, however, has found other uses for the land, or *'āina*, as he calls it. Using Kualoa's abundance of natural resources, he and his team have been steadily working toward sustainable food production by way of agriculture, aquaculture and livestock, with some success: Kualoa is the largest grass-fed and finished beef producer on O'ahu, cultivates its own shrimp, and continues an 800-year-old Hawaiian tradition of oyster aquaculture. Now, with the introduction of a new Taste of Kualoa tour, he is hoping to parlay those successes into agritourism.

"How do we preserve open space? How do we feed our friends and neighbours?" Taylor rhymes off his most pressing concerns as we drive by orchards of pineapple,



Pali Lookout, Nuuanu, O'ahu

papaya and banana. "[Prioritizing] things with a small footprint allows guests to enjoy what the land really is."

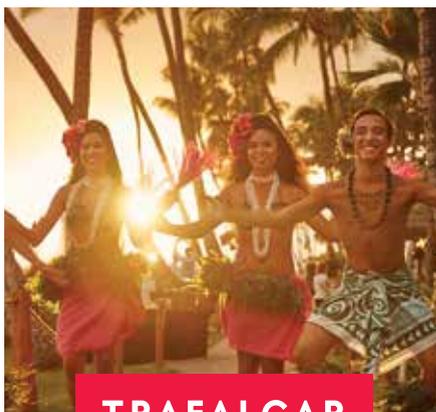
In the distance, Black Angus cattle gaze at us from their grassy pastures in the cradle of Hakipu'u Valley. Chickens forage freely in the grass. We stop by the oyster farm, where the mollusks are harvested from a tree-rimmed pond. We sample raw cacao, which tastes like persimmon. We visit fields of taro and breadfruit, or *'ulu*, which Taylor says is a complete source of nutrition – a good comestible to have on an island dependant on container ships.

The tour concludes on a quiet patio overlooking a mountain ridge, ➤

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where we're able to taste the fruits – and oysters, shrimp, 'ulu and beef – of Kualoa's labour. It's the perfect complement to a crash course on holistic horticulture, and although the seven-course meal appears effortlessly elegant, every bite is significant: the product of hundreds of hours of tenacity, toil and revitalized tradition.

"It's a labour of love," Taylor admits. "But it's possible to revitalize our ag industry this way."

After "grinding" my way through O'ahu's indigenous cuisine, plantation-inspired lunch plates and sustainable fare, I feel I have a better understanding of Hawaiian identity – beyond the luau-laden tourist perspective. En route to the Four Seasons O'ahu, I'm dubious about whether a luxury hotel can offer truly authentic cuisine, as its clientele likely expect more than a "plate lunch."

Then I meet Jared Chang, a former bus boy-turned-fish sommelier for the hotel's new restaurant, Mina's Fish House. Based on his lifelong background in fishing, Chang is using what he calls the "whole fish experience" to educate guests on sustainable fishing principles.

"Whole fish is the heart and soul of our menu," Jared says. As a fish sommelier, he works directly with local fisherman to supply the restaurant, then advises guests on dishes according to their flavour, texture and preparation preferences.

"We prepare the fish with the head and tail on, we filet it tableside, we tell them where it came from, who caught the fish – all of it," he says, adding that this engaging dining experience conveys the importance of O'ahu's fish – and the conservation of their habitats – to a major source of income and influence for the island.

The Kampachi that Jared is cradling as we speak serves as my final dinner on O'ahu. As he filets and carves it before me, it's impossible to ignore the weight of the meal's meaning. Of course, it has, as Chang promised, "a rich, savoury flavour that pierces the palate like an oaky wine," but it's also resonant of something deeper. It's a modern reflection of taking from the *aina* with awareness and gratitude, of connecting to and respecting the efforts of others – and, of course, of eating with love. ★



Fish sommelier, Jared Chang

## When You Go

**FEATURED ITINERARY:** Modern American lifestyle meets Polynesian seafaring tradition on Trafalgar's **Hawai'i Four Island Adventure**. This epic adventure across Hawaii's picture-perfect islands where you'll discover Pele's volcanic landscapes, tales of World War II bravery and share crystal clear waters with green sea turtles and water-sports enthusiasts – all on Hawaiian time, of course.

**WHAT TO DO:** History buffs can learn about the lives of Hawaiian royalty by visiting **Iolani Palace**, while art and bean friends will love the artisanal coffee and graffiti scene at **SALT at Our Kaka'ako**. Travellers in touch with nature should take an ATV and horseback tour through **Kualoa Private Nature Reserve's** epic natural landscapes.

**WHERE TO STAY:** For an affordable oceanfront spot steps from Waikiki, **New Otani Kaimana Beach Hotel** is a classic option with unbeatable views and a fantastic breakfast patio.

**WHERE TO DINE:** The Portuguese malasadas at the legendary **Leonard's Bakery** are a to-die-for decadence, while foodies can treat themselves with high-end haute Hawaiian cuisine at Chef Mavro. Meanwhile, **La Hiki Kitchen** at the **Four Seasons O'ahu** is serving up some incredible Caribbean-inspired farm-to-table brunch action, courtesy of Bahamian-born Chef Simeon Hall.





Family fun in Frederick County

# MARYLAND'S QUIET APPEAL

BY SAMANTHA FACCILO

**A**S I DRIVE THE WINDING roads of Cecil County, Maryland, the wide sky and fields are a welcome contrast to the familiar, steel-and-concrete busyness of Manhattan. The fields are dotted with buttercups and framed by the darker green of forests, and peeking around nearly every bend is a farm. Agriculture is at the heart of this part of the Eastern Shore, and the landscape is spread with nearly every variety of farm I can imagine. For a country-girl-at-heart-turned-city-girl like me, this weekend adventure is just what I need.

Five rivers bisect Cecil County on their way to the Chesapeake Bay, making the area ideal not just for farming but for marine life, too. In the mid-1600s, port towns popped up along these rivers, and today, these towns retain both their link

to the water and their historical charm. These are communities where the fire stations hold Bingo nights and hand-painted signs advertise a strawberry festival every June. Houses are well-kept, with pots of flowers hanging from porch eaves and prominently displayed flags. Locals are happy to talk, whether it's about the Eagles finally winning a Super Bowl, or what is the best place for cider donuts, or their favourite spot to waterski.

Crossing the two-lane bridge into the waterfront town of North East, I see a clapboard house where a birthday party is unfolding. Little girls pull each other across the lawn in a wagon while balloons and paper streamers flutter in the breeze. Nearby, family members look on from a picnic table. Cecil County seems unaffected by the hectic weekend travel impacting other parts of the country this

Memorial Day weekend, and I have no trouble finding parking in town.

Walking down Main Street, I pass families and couples out for an early ice cream or a pre-dinner stroll. People are friendly when I stop into the Turkey Point Tasting Room for a wine tasting, but there are none of the crowds I'd expect in other shore towns on this official first weekend of summer. I browse through the antique décor, toys, and books at 5&10 Antiques, pick up a marine-themed bracelet at Kathy's Corner Shop, and can't resist a box of sea salt caramels at North East Chocolates.

For dinner, I choose Unwined, a family owned restaurant and shop featuring more than 100 different wines. I start with a baked brie appetizer drizzled with raspberry puree and a 2015 Albariño from Bodegas Gonzalez Ruggiero in nearby Rising Sun, and ▶



Drum Point Lighthouse, Chesapeake Bay

order salmon in a lemon-butter dill sauce with local asparagus and cheddar scalloped potatoes as an entrée. Knowing I'll be stopping tomorrow at Kilby Cream, I pass on Unwined's tempting desserts.

Soon, it's off to Fairwinds Bed & Breakfast, a moment I've been looking forward to for weeks. JoAnn and Ted Dawson have been horse people in Cecil County for decades, and 19 years ago, they recognized their dream of opening a B&B on their farm. When I arrive, husband and wife are dressed in top hats and tuxedo shirts, preparing to escort a bride to her wedding in a horse-drawn carriage. After an introduction that includes everything from a tour of the farmhouse kitchen and antiques-decorated bedrooms to pitching hay to the resident donkey and goat, I'm invited to, "Help yourself to whatever you need," as my hosts have an appointment with a carriage and a bride. After a long day that started this morning with the excitement of the Fair Hill Races, Fairwinds' front porch is inviting. As the clouds roll in bringing sheets of rain, I'm perfectly content to curl up with a book from JoAnn's collection and watch the storm.

JoAnn may wear 15 hats at once, switching gears from wedding planner to barn manager to hostess, but she always makes time for breakfast. And I'm glad she does. She serves up poached eggs with Hollandaise sauce atop toasted English muffins, and as an extra treat, homemade biscuits with fresh strawberries and milk – DIY strawberry shortcake. She even has honey from Fairwinds' bees for my tea. Ted joins us, and our conversation turns from the dairy industry to boating to JoAnn's film career and animal wrangling. We

continue talking as we set out on a trail ride, arriving back at the barn just as heavy, grey clouds gather overhead.

Swapping my planned water taxi and paddleboard excursion for something not so weather-dependent, I drive east to Mount Harmon Plantation for a tour of one of the county's oldest homes, then, as the rain starts, have lunch at the Chesapeake Inn. From here, it's a short drive to Chateau Bu-De Vineyard on the historic Bohemia Manor Farm. The vineyard and winery, which overlooks a curve of the Bohemia River, strives to offer wines cultivated from East coast grapes. Their newly-built tasting room and summer concert series allow visitors to spend the afternoon sipping local wine and relaxing in Adirondack chairs.

For dinner, I opt for The Wellwood in historic Charlestown. The site, which originated in the late 1800s and has hosted presidents including Teddy Roosevelt and Calvin Coolidge, has transformed into a waterfront experience offering everything from fine club dining to outdoor seating to more casual fare in the aptly-named River Shack. As with many Maryland restaurants, The Wellwood offers an abundance of seafood dishes ranging from crabs to lobster to Oysters Rockefeller and shrimp scampi. For dessert, I make the trek to Kilby Cream, located on a dairy farm in Rising Sun. There's no substitute for fresh, homemade ice cream, and Kilby's variety of standard and seasonal flavours doesn't disappoint.

All too soon, it's time to pack my bags, thank the Dawsons for their hospitality, and head north, promising to return soon. My time here has been bookended by rural experiences, starting with the races at Fair Hill and ending at

Fairwinds. In the heart of farm country, this seems appropriate. There's a kind of delight in spending time in a place where a covered bridge or a field of horses might be waiting around the next bend; where small surprises remind us that sometimes, the simplest pleasures are the best ones, after all. ✦

## When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** If you're looking to spend time on the water during your stay, **Bay Venture Outfitters** is the place to visit. Bay Venture offers kayak and paddleboard rentals, paddleboard yoga and a summer kayak camp for kids. They also partner with Wellwood Restaurant for Sunday brunch and paddle excursions. Outdoor enthusiasts will also enjoy a hike through **Elk Neck State Park**. Climb the stairs at **Turkey Point Light Station** for a lantern room view of the Chesapeake Bay. You can also learn about the history of the light station and visit the gift shop for souvenirs.

**WHERE TO STAY:** Run by JoAnn and Ted Dawson, **Fairwinds Bed & Breakfast**, a rustic B&B, operates on a working horse farm. Spend the night in an antique-decorated guest room and enjoy JoAnn's delicious home-made breakfast the next day. From here, you can take a trail ride around the property, get to know the farm's animals or head off on a short ride into town. Another great choice is **The Blue Max Inn Bed & Breakfast**. Built in 1854 and newly acquired by Christine Mullen, this elegant B&B is situated in the heart of historic Chesapeake City. Here, you can choose between seven rooms and two suites and enjoy a wide front porch, afternoon tea, and views of the waterfront.

**WHERE TO DINE: Woody's Crab House** is a perennial favourite among visitors and locals alike. This family-friendly restaurant offers fresh seafood, friendly service and plenty of famous Maryland crabs, all in the heart of downtown North East. Those wishing for an upscale dining experience might want to consider **The Fair Hill Inn**, a farm-to-table restaurant located in an 18th-century inn on a working farm. The Inn now offers brick oven pizza, an extensive beer list and more casual fare in its Greenhaus.

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# SOUTH PADRE ISLAND

BY LORI A MAY



Surfing on South Padre Island

IT'S EASY ENOUGH TO FLY INTO South Padre Island, but I'm a road-tripper at heart, so I revel in the sense of accomplishment that comes with crossing the Queen Isabella Causeway from mainland Texas to this beachgoers paradise. I've been on the road for days, taking in southern heat and pit barbecue, but my mouth now waters for fresh seafood. The focus of my journey comes into view as I crest the causeway and pass the welcome sign. This visit to South Padre Island is all about enjoying a few days of surf, sun and sand between the toes.

Anytime is a good time to visit this slim slice of land that kisses the Gulf of Mexico, but I've opted for a somewhat off-peak visit to relish quiet days and casual evenings. Local residents tell me this is the time they live for; the luscious lulls between summer breakers and snow birds. That's when islanders get a chance to roam their backyard free from traffic backups and busy beaches. I'm hoping to experience a bit of the same this time around, and when I see those waves building up along the shore, my mind plots out adventurous possibilities.

Year-round, South Padre has the best surf waves on the Texas Gulf Coast and I plan to hang ten at least once during my visit. I'm not the most graceful, nor all that skilled, but I still get a rush riding water. Plus, one of the things I love about South Padre is how welcoming the community is to beginners; kids and adults alike can sample surfing gentle waves with knowledgeable instructors leading the way. And even land-lovers can feel the adrenaline of the sport with so many championship competitors visiting the island each year. ▶



L to R: South Padre Island beach, Sandcastle Capital of The World



## When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** Visit **South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center** for an intimate introduction to the wildlife of South Texas. Follow the boardwalk nature trails, then climb the five-storey tower for incredible views of the beaches and dunes. Feeling adventurous? Sign up for surf school with **South Padre Surf Company**. You'll experience an hour of instructor-led surfing at Isla Blanca Beach Park and earn bragging rights for surfing in Texas. Or spend a day at **Schlitterbahn Water**

**Park** enjoying waterslides suitable for all ages. Cap off the evening with a ride on the 1950s style carousel.

**WHERE TO STAY:** Every suite at **Pearl South Padre** guarantees an ocean view, plus there's an inviting swim-up bar to keep you chill in the afternoon sunshine. With a free supervised kids camp and complimentary sand castle lessons, this is also a great venue for families. If the point of your vacation is to enjoy full service luxury, book a stay at **Isla Grand Beach Resort**. With two massive pools, hot tubs, oceanfront tennis courts and direct beach access, this resort offers a true slice of paradise. For fun-seekers, **Wanna Wanna Inn** is the place to stay for casual accommodations paired with a party vibe. Rooms are equipped with a kitchenette, but you'll probably spend most of your time socializing at the beachfront bar and grill.

**WHERE TO DINE:** Start the day at **Yummies Bistro** for a hearty omelette, fruit platter and other breakfast classics. There's usually a waiting line at this popular eatery, but it's so worth it – and the service is super friendly. For the best fish tacos in town, visit **Barry's Tacos & Margaritas** food trailer parked near Hilton Garden Inn. They also have amazing breakfast tacos and aren't shy about loading up the guacamole. For sit-down dinners in a family-friendly venue, head to **Daddy's Seafood & Cajun Kitchen**. Its seafood boil is packed with a seasoned mix of fresh local shellfish, sausage, potatoes and corn.

On this early autumn afternoon, I see the beach is barely populated as I navigate my way to the hotel for midweek check-in. A few cars cruise up and down Padre Boulevard, but no one is in a hurry. The sun breaks through the sparse clouds, I hear seagulls crying out in the distance, and towering palm trees lining the road dance in the breeze. It's a beautiful day.

South Padre is known for its year-round inviting temperatures. More than 300 days of sunshine grace this coastal town, and clear warm waters make it ever so easy to spend a day lazing at the beach. Even so, there are many things to do inland; I know my time here will pass too quickly. I love visiting the barrier island's sand dunes and hiking the grooved surface. Most days, you'll find a few people riding horses along the dunes and exploring the north end of the island.

The sand is so packed with richness, South Padre Island prides itself as the Sandcastle Capital of The World. Sand Castle Days is an annual free festival celebrating the moldable power of South Padre's sand and its importance in protecting the shores. Year-round, a fun activity for families is visiting the largest outdoor sandcastle in the U.S., where people watch master sculptors at work and offer lessons on sand-building. On any given day at the beach, you'll find kids constructing their own grainy mansions.

But the beach doesn't seem to be in the cards for my first night in town. After settling into the hotel and stretching out

after hours on the road, the weather unexpectedly turns. Even with South Padre's seemingly endless days of sunshine, there's bound to be an occasional break in the weather. Tonight, it seems, there's a little rain coming in, but that doesn't stop the warmth of this small community.

Padre Boulevard is active with locals and a few tourists finding their way to favourite watering holes and eateries. As I detour along Laguna Boulevard, the rain gradually letting up, I spot a few brown pelicans perched on posts dotting Laguna Madre, the slender body of water embracing the west side of the island. That's when I come upon Louie's Backyard, arguably one of the best restaurants in South Padre.

Louie's Backyard has a large patio docked above the bay, so it's easy to grab a table with a view. The restaurant is famous for its all-you-can-eat buffet featuring prime rib and local seafood, and that's exactly why I'm here. The peel and eat shrimp are monstrous and the crab legs are sweet and meaty. As usual, the place is packed but I'm lucky to be seated along the waterfront, within earshot of the nightly entertainment. Much like the beach, there's a low-key and friendly vibe here as everyone gathers to welcome the sunset now that the light rain has vanished.

As Jimmy Buffet covers play on in the distance, I check the weather forecast for the next morning. Blue skies and sunshine are in my future. It looks like I'll catch those waves after all. ☼



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L to R: Ventura beach, Cyndae and Megan

## Adventures in VENTURA

BY MEGAN HONAN

**T**HE GENTLE, HAZY WATER lapped at my feet. A mirage of pastels illuminated the sky; blush pink, buttercup yellow and tangerine orange melted together, rather popsicle-like, as the water line faded into wispy clouds.

A wrinkled hand wrapped languidly around my shoulder, resting softly. I glanced over to meet sharp, observant green eyes. She smiled at me – she’s always smiling. The towering 6’1 woman standing next to me is my great-aunt Cyndae. We’ve been spending a few days together after meeting for the first time at ages 71 and 21. With a 50-year gap, what better place to connect than in laid-back Ventura, California?

I HAD SENT OUT AN E-MAIL TO family members just six months earlier, looking for a couch to crash on in California. I would soon be departing on an eight-month exchange program in Perth,

Australia and wanted to extend my Los Angeles layover to soak up the Golden State.

Cyndae, a distant relative through marriage, was the first to offer a kind hand. Better yet, she was retired with a timeshare and wanted to explore more of her beautiful state with me. And so, we mapped out a 10-day road trip along the coast with plans to stop wherever the wind – and our stomachs – would take us.

From first meeting, it was apparent we shared a love of good food and Cyndae is a fount of local dining knowledge. Want to know what the best breakfast in San Francisco is? Why, the Yukon Gold Potato Hash at Rose’s Café of course! How about drinks in Carmel? The Alexander Smith Wine Tasting Room is to die for, she’d gush.

And so the gastronomy tour began, from upscale Mexican at Zocalo in Sacramento to good ole’ American classics at Wayfare Tavern in San

Francisco. We indulged in gooey, peanut butter-stuffed donuts from California Donuts and sipped on cold tea at Alfred’s Tea Room in L.A., giggling at the sign out front that displays, “tea, yes. you, maybe,” scrawled in curvy letters.

But it was in Ventura, the quiet coastal city known for its sugar-like sandy beaches and sleepy, surf town vibes where we bonded. We nestled into a small, one-bedroom apartment with sweeping ocean views and watched as California put on one spectacular sunset after another.

THE NEXT MORNING, WE WOKE TO the sound of waves crashing against the shore, the surf calling my name. I strolled down to Ventura Surf Shop and browsed row upon row of cheery, neon surfboards. After much deliberation, I settled on a mint 2.4-metre board and found myself standing at the water’s edge of Surfer’s Point at Seaside Park. Cyndae and I had agreed to meet at the beach and I could see her lounging in a pink and white striped chair, feet up, nose in a book. She waved wildly as I approached and yelled, “Go get it girl!” from across the beach. She didn’t have to tell me twice; I was soon paddling out towards the horizon.

We fell into an easy routine in Ventura. I would surf from dusk until dawn and Cyndae would lounge on the beach, while filling gaps in her afternoons with shopping. The evenings were dedicated to satisfying our inner wine snobs and food whims.

On our last night, we found ourselves sitting on the patio at Beach House Fish, a tapas bar located on the pier. When deciding what to drink, a couple next to us recommended the California Salty Dog. We went for it. It seemed rude not to, after all. We delighted in the tang

of the citrus notes of grapefruit and scrunched our noses as we licked the rims, crusted with black lava salt.

Our conversation flowed as easily as the drinks. Cyndae told me about her worldwide trip at the age of 18, and I looked on with starry eyes of admiration. She talked about raising her family in Hawai'i and regaled her and her husband's love story. I laid out all my hopes and dreams of marriage, motherhood and exploring more of the world through the lens of a writer. It's funny, regardless of age, status or place; we, as humans, always seem to find a way to connect. Watching as the stars began to twinkle above Ventura, I was certain this connection was solidified for life. ✪

## When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** If you're all about Surf City, USA, you've come to the right place, with Ventura offering great breaks year-round. Head to **Surfer's Point** to catch a wave alongside the pros or visit **Mondo's Beach** for **Ventura's Surf School** to learn the basics. This sleepy beach town has a surprisingly vibrant food scene on offer. **Ventura Food Tours** will guide you through a 3.5-hour tour to satisfy all your #foodie whims. Other crowd pleasers for both the young and old include **Ventura Botanical Gardens** and the **Ventura Pier**.

**WHERE TO STAY:** For Palm Springs vibes at an affordable price, **Amanzi Hotel** is steps from the beach and offers spacious rooms and a pool shaded by palm trees to lounge far from the crowds. While Ventura isn't exactly known for luxury, the **Crowne Plaza Hotel** offers stunning beach views, an on-site Mexican restaurant and modern amenities.

**WHERE TO DINE:** Seafood lovers will fall in love with Ventura after sampling the abundance of fresh lobster, oysters and clams. **Lure Fish House** is renowned for its daily menu based on the catch of the day, promising local and organic meals. For brunch, **Pete's Breakfast House** is not to be missed, especially its homemade corned beef hash. For a mid-day indulgence, stop by **MadeWest Brewing Company** where a fun and spacious tasting room awaits decked out in twinkle lights. They also have food trucks and live music to boot.



# Friends in FORT MYERS

BY **MAGGIE GILMOUR**



Boca Grande

ARRIVE IN FORT MYERS, Florida and quickly realize two things: my driver's license is expired and the only bathing suit I have with me (and own) is a shapeless black Speedo. The first discovery turns out to be an unexpected boon; even in a beach town where a car rental would have been ideal, my Ubers will show up in minutes and savvy local drivers will give me gossip and tips. Also, being chauffeured around means I'm free to gawk at the scenery without having to squint at GPS screens.

It is the shapeless black Speedo that will turn out to be problematic. For most of the time over the next few days, it will be a source of self-doubt and insecurity. It will also be the only hiccup in an otherwise perfect visit to the state Americans have long considered "the Great Escape."

I'm here in late April and it's off season, so everything is oddly quiet

and tranquil. The trip from the airport, through the city of Fort Myers and then along Estero Boulevard to my hotel, takes a fraction of the time it would if I had come only a few weeks earlier, when the strip was bumper to bumper with Spring Break partiers. I am well past my tequila-pounding-salt-licking-dancing-on-table-tops years so I'm grateful at the timing.

Still, I can't travel to a Florida beach town and act like a nun, so my first night in Fort Myers Beach, I start out at the Tikki Bar downstairs from my hotel room. I drink a pina colada out of a metal straw (the whole island has banned plastic straws because of the environmental impact, particularly on sea life) and listen to a cover of Jimmy Buffet's "Margaritaville." The sun melts down into the ocean in that technicolour way it always does in the tropics, and a man comes out to salute the scene with a massive conch shell. I befriend a couple visiting from Minnesota; the wife of the duo pounds ▶



Fort Myers sunset

vodkas on ice in a plastic cup and tells me I can't leave Florida without going to Boca Grande. She's a well-travelled stewardess and swears it's one of the prettiest spots in the world. The party is picking up as I leave for my next nightspot; at last sight, the Midwesterners are swaying to another Jimmy Buffet tune and the tiki torches are glowing brightly in the darkness.

A quick cab ride away is Matanzas, a delightfully unpretentious spot where tanned servers in jean short cutoffs and running shoes cheerfully wait on a rowdy crowd of tourists and locals. A sardonic musician joins me at the bar and tells me he makes his living doing gigs around town and in Vail, Colorado; when he hears I am Canadian, he also tells (warns?) me that most of the folks down here voted for Trump.

"He's the real deal," he says. "He's going to kick the insiders out of Washington." I never know what to say when I hear this kind of rhetoric because it's not my country and I'm a guest in his; so I nod mutely and eat my grouper. After a few more margaritas (when in Rome), the musician and I manage to move off politics to favourite bands and I start to relax. It seems as though no one at the bar has read the memo about SPF or smoking; the sunburns are plentiful and so are the clouds of cigarette smoke. It's raucous, it's not subtle; it's Fort Myers Beach – kind of hard not to like.

My trip the following day to Sanibel and Captiva islands show me a different side of the Florida beach scene entirely. If Fort Myers feels like a hub for young Spring Break revellers, Sanibel and Captiva feel like the place their rich and

established parents stay. There are no tacky tourist stores or fast food chains; the vegetation is thick and lush and seems to press upon the main road that snakes through both islands. Conservation is the main religion here: Sanibel is where you'll find Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, home to 200 bird species (many of them endangered), and the Sanibel Sea School, which teaches kids and adults about the importance of protecting the ocean. Homeowners with beachfront properties who keep their lights on after 5 p.m. can be fined and even face jail time, because nighttime lighting lures hatchling turtles to crawl inland instead of seaward after emerging from their beach nests (if they don't make it to sea, they die of dehydration or get eaten by raccoons, crabs or ants).

I board a boat in the Captiva Harbour and sit with three best friends in their sixties who met doing volunteer work at a church in Sanibel and who now regularly do day trips together. They are funny, smart and deeply tanned, kind of like the Golden Girls, minus Sophia. They urge me to skip the Cayo Costa State Park, ("It's a strip of sand with bikes and not much to do," says one of the ladies) and get off at Boca Grande ("It's just the sweetest"). It's where the Midwesterners from the previous night suggested I visit, so I'm in.

Located on Gasparilla Island, the village of Boca Grande is a charming little clutch of tiny boutiques, and long stretches of powdery white sand and turquoise water – the kind of beaches postcards are made of. City ordinances prohibit cars on all but two roads and there is no gas station on the island, so most of the residents zip around on golf carts. I poke around some clothing stores to find a replacement for the Speedo; one shop owner tells me Laura Bush is a regular (allegedly the Bushes winter on the island and stay in the nearby Gasparilla Inn), and that Laura's security guard can often be seen following her in a golf cart at a discrete distance wearing a floral shirt. The bathing suits are beautiful and costly, like everything on this gorgeous little island. As such, I pass on any new purchase and leave with my sad Speedo.

On the boat back to Captiva, a family of dolphins starts to follow us, their shiny grey bodies arcing in the air and then slipping under the waves. My new friends, the trio of ladies from Sanibel, show me

pictures of their kids and grandkids and I manage to keep the conversation on family instead of politics. On the way back to my hotel, I stop in at a tacky store in Fort Myers to look for a cheaper bathing suit, but all are miniscule triangles of cloth more suited to a me of two decades ago.

It's at this point that I realize I have to shift my perspective about the sad Speedo. It has served me well for many years. When I get home to Toronto and return to my routine of daily lap swim, it will continue to serve me well. There are two kinds of bathing suits: bathing suits for real life and bathing suits for Florida. Next time, I won't expect one to do double duty. 🍷

## When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** Escape the crowds at **Lovers Key State Park**, a stretch of sand in Fort Myers that used to be accessible only by boat. Now, you can park and walk a few hundred yards to the beach; but it still has the feel of an isolated and secret spot that, even in peak season, is a respite from the Fort Myers Beach party scene. Head to **Sanibel** and board a tram for a tour through the sprawling **J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge**. Exceedingly knowledgeable guides in the Refuge will point out spoonbills, storks and ospreys; a kayak trip by Tarpon Bay explorers will hopefully bring you up close with a dolphin, or maybe even an alligator.

**WHERE TO DINE:** **The Mucky Duck** on Captiva Island is a cute one-room family spot with good seafood dishes (all of the grouper dishes are solid choices) and a frozen key lime pie mousse that's a yummy twist on a classic Florida dish.

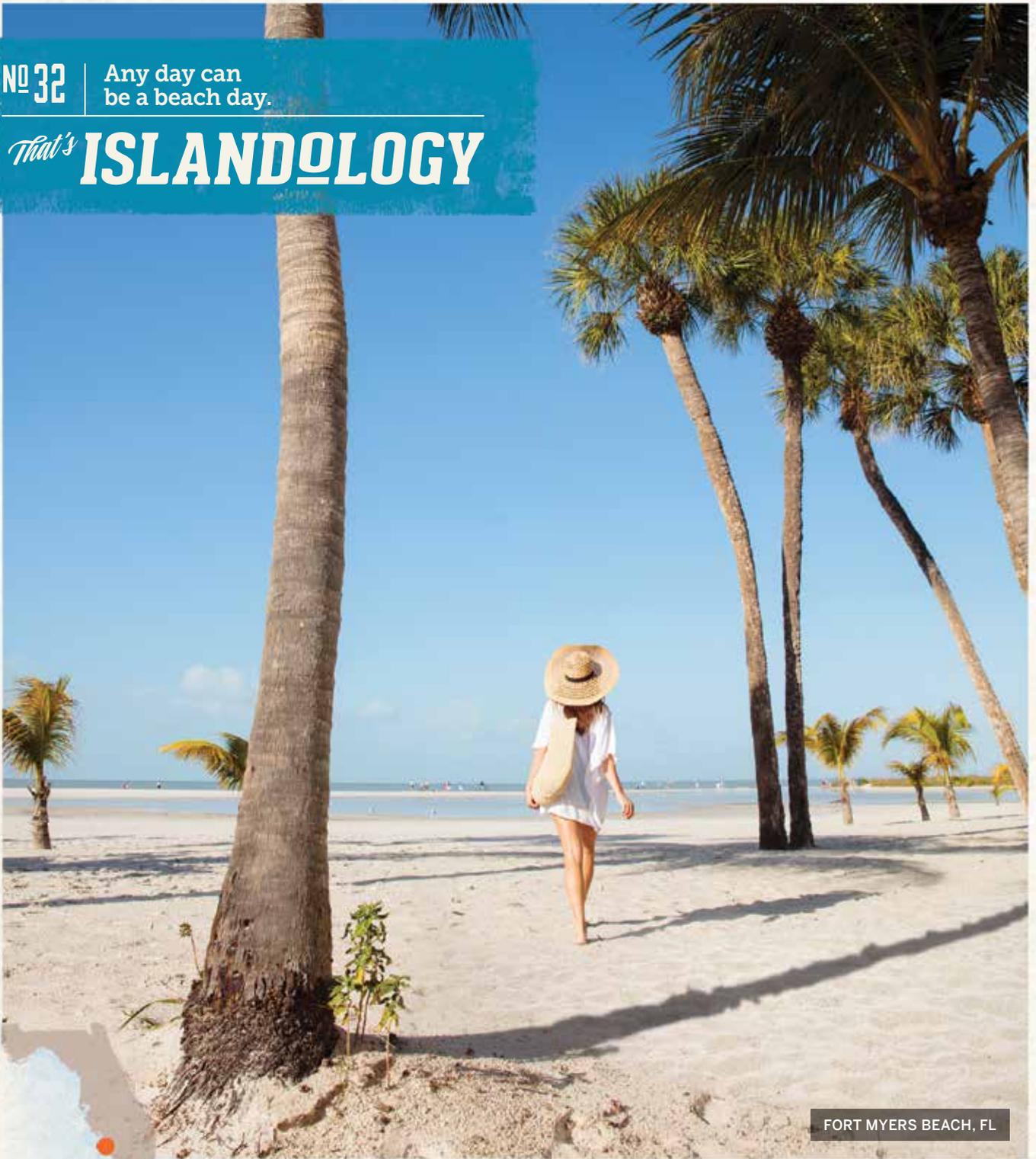
**Pinchers Crab Shack** near the Ford Edisons Museum in Fort Myers boasts a big wraparound patio that looks out onto the ocean, and serves blue crab claws swimming in garlic and white wine butter that are salty and delicious.

**WHERE TO STAY:** **The Outrigger Beach Resort** is cheerful and unpretentious, has beachfront rooms that look out onto white sand beaches and crashing surf, a friendly café with a great breakfast buffet and best of all, a tiki bar that opens at 11 a.m. and serves a mean margarita. For a completely different experience, the **Gasparilla Inn** on Gasparilla Island, with its private golf course, stately rooms and guests in perfectly pressed chinos playing backgammon, is more blue blood than blue collar.

NO 32

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## NATURE & OUTDOORS

*The Ozarks:*

# WHERE MEMORIES ARE MADE

BY **REBECCA BINGHAM**



Sunrise in the Ozark Mountains

**G**IANT CUMULUS CLOUDS – like the ones we used to draw in elementary school – kept me company during the three-hour scenic drive north from central Arkansas to the cooler climes of the Ozark Mountains. One of my dearest elderly friends, George, recently passed away, and twinges of grief suggest a mountain hug might do me some good. Granted, the diminutive Ozarks aren't draped in purple mountain majesty like the Rockies or heather-hued haze like the Smokies. Instead, these intimate rolling ridges are "Aux Arcs," meaning "with bows," a name chosen by early French settlers to describe their gentle arch against the sky.

Lost in reverie on a winding two-lane highway, I recall family vacations of my childhood to nearby Stone County, where Blanchard Springs Caverns sprawls underground in a series of interconnected rooms glistening with crystalline stalactites and stalagmites. A tour guide there once told me, "It's good luck when water drips on you. It's called a cave kiss!" A little further on, I'm lured to a lush picnic area along the banks of the Buffalo River. Dubbed "America's first National River," it courses like a main artery through 220 kilometres of soaring cliffs and sun-soaked sand bars. A gaggle of paddlers waves as they float by in canoes and kayaks.

Suddenly, the clouds morph into a menacing eggplant-coloured thunderhead. To avoid the downpour, I whip into a gravel parking lot at Rock-N-Java, a new-to-me, pint-sized

coffee shop/restaurant/art gallery perched at the rim of the valley. Giant picture windows make it the perfect place to watch a summer storm dance across lime green fields of rice, corn and soybeans. Standing at the pastry counter, I gawk at cinnamon rolls big as baseballs and Rice Krispie bars drizzled in dark chocolate. To the right, a coffee and tea menu elaborate as any big city counterpart covers the wall. My barista – articulate like a museum guide – tells me about the artist who fashions the classic hand-thrown pottery displayed on the opposite wall. “And by the way,” she adds, “we have a rotating lunch menu that ranges from vegetable ratatouille to crawfish pie and salmon cake salad. Wednesdays, we serve homemade Chinese food, and it always sells out.”

As the storm subsides, I refill my coffee mug for the last few miles’ drive to Lakeview (population 725), where I hope to see Clint Gaston, owner of Gaston’s White River Resort. In 1958, Clint’s great-grandfather, Al, bought

six cottages and six boats on eight hectares of river frontage as the humble beginning of a place in what many people now consider the Triple Crown of Arkansas tourist destinations, along with the Clinton Presidential Library in Little Rock and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville. A world-class trout fishing destination, Gaston’s is so popular, it even has its own 975-metre airstrip, as well as 79 cottages with up to 10 bedrooms each, plus a fleet of 70 boats.

Free-range peacocks greet me as I round the corner onto Gaston’s campus. Gauzy mist hovers like a bridal veil over the cold-water river, which can rise as much as nearly 2.5 metres in a day, depending on the power generation schedule at Bull Shoals Dam. And Clint is outside, watering red geraniums. “I’m glad I caught you,” I began, reminding him of my name, as tears pooled in my eyes. “The last time I was a guest here, I brought my 88-year-old friend and mentor, Dr. George Monta, to enjoy a little quiet time on the river.” I tell him

how George loved looking at all the antiques in the restaurant and how he thought the breakfast buffet was one of the best anywhere. I tell him of the hours we spent talking on the porch here – some of the richest conversations we had before he passed away. “I just wanted to stop by to thank you and your family for being such good stewards of your business and the natural resources here. Gaston’s will always hold a special place in my heart.” Just before I get back into the car, Clint gives me the hug I came for – a simple gesture characteristic of the genuine hospitality in the Ozarks.

Across the dam at Bull Shoals Lake Boat Dock, I meet second-generation owner Ricky Eastwold, who has lured me to his full-service marina to try out one of his luxury houseboat rentals. “We’ve got everything anybody could want,” he explains, gesturing past dozens of humongous carp swirling near us, hoping to snag a handful of feeder food. “From wave ▶

f t @

# IN 1957, STUDENTS BECAME THE TEACHERS.

*Little Rock Nine Memorial - Arkansas State Capitol, Little Rock*

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runners and ski boats, to bass boats and pontoon boats, it's all here for rent on a 130 kilometre long lake, where there's room for everybody."

Ricky helps me settle in to my houseboat in plenty of time to watch the sun set from the top deck. Crimson, coral and carnation pink coat the horizon, and a chorus of cicadas accompanies a crescent moon rising over the indigo waves. The boat's gentle swaying reminds me of the hours I rocked on the porch with George. Off in the distance, heat lightening blinks behind gathering clouds. Soon, I'm in my bunk, ready to sleep. Smiling, I decide the lightening is really George winking goodnight at me, while he gets everything set for my guided fishing trip tomorrow morning. 🍷

## When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** Start with the **Gaston's Visitor Center** at the **Bull Shoals Dam**, an educational hub that offers insights to the river, dam and

lake, and their histories. Nature lovers should also check out the **Norfolk National Fish Hatchery**, which is responsible for raising rainbow, brown and cutthroat trout. Home to Dry Run Creek, this is open year round to anglers

or for those simply eager to learn more about trout.

**WHERE TO STAY:** With beautiful lake views and year-round lodging, **Blue Lady Resort** on Lake Norfolk comes highly recommended to travellers in the Ozarks. Enjoy the local flora and fauna or get out on the water – either way, venture off the beaten path. As an alternative, some might opt for **Stetson's on the White**, where you can pick a spot by the river-side pool or lounge on your deck. This scenic reprieve offers trout fishing on White River, beautiful cabins and picturesque views.

**WHERE TO EAT:** Extensive lunch and dinner menus are prepared by European-trained Chef Richard Quiblier at **The Grill at Whispering Woods**, where views of Lake Norfolk make for a fabulous backdrop to your dining experience. **PJ's River Run** at PJ's Resort also comes highly recommended, serving up what they call "the best of West Coast and Southern cuisine."



## Polk County:

# FINDING THE REAL FLORIDA

BY ERIKA HUENEKE



Bull Shoals Dam



Polk County sunrise

**W**HEN WE PULL UP TO the small parking lot of Allen David Broussard Catfish Creek Preserve State Park in Polk County, Florida, there is only one other car and a trail leading off into the scrub. In lieu of a ranger station, a lone interpretive sign explains that the park offers three hiking loops: long, medium and short. My husband and I raise our eyebrows at each other. It's summer – not exactly hiking season in the Sunshine State – and we have our three-year-old in tow. Still, we've come all this way to immerse ourselves in "the real Florida," and the short route is a doable



Allen David Broussard Catfish Creek State Park

three kilometres. So, we slather on sunscreen, grab a map from the postbox, sling our daughter into a carrier on my husband's back, and head off down the trail less travelled.

Hiking in Florida is in its own category. Flat, sandy and often swampy, the state isn't going to deliver gushing waterfalls, thick deciduous woods or lofty viewpoints. Its natural beauty is subtler – tiny wildflowers quivering

*We slather on sunscreen, grab a map from the postbox, sling our daughter into a carrier on my husband's back, and head off down the trail less travelled.*



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## Beyond Polk County

Not far from Central Florida is Kissimmee, a top tourism destination for Canadian travellers because of the theme parks Florida is so well-known for. But did you know that there is a wealth of outdoor experiences to be had in the region as well? Here are a few ideas to complement your Central Florida escape:

- Explore the headwaters of the **Central Florida Everglades** by canoe, kayak or hiking trail. Wild Florida Airboats & Gator Park takes guests through the swamps, marshes and rivers of these wetlands, offering an up-close-and-personal look at the gators, birds, eagles, trees and plants.

- Kissimmee is also frequently rated one of the top **freshwater fishing** destinations in the world. Pristine lakes throughout the area provide bountiful habitats for favourites like largemouth bass, crappie and speck. Fish camps, charters and boat ramps dot the shorelines of Lake Toho and other local water bodies.

- Go on an **active adventure**, whether ziplining at Orlando Tree Trek Adventure Park, pedalling through the picturesque streets of Celebration, enjoying the area from the vantage point of a sunrise hot air balloon ride, or paddling through the moss-draped cypress trees at Shingle Creek.



in the warm breeze, a lizard darting across the path, a glassy pond reflecting the cyan sky. You have to keep your eyes – and mind – open, appreciating that every virgin parcel of land here is practically a miracle: a full one-third of Florida is projected to be covered in development by 2070.

It also helps if you really love to hike, which we do.

The 3,240-hectare preserve is set along the Lake Wales Ridge, a series of ancient dunes that stretch for 240 kilometres. What that means for us on this increasingly warm, cloudless day: hills – relatively steep, shadeless hills. Up and down we go, our hearts quickening from the effort and sweat glistening on our skin. Elevation is such a rarity in Florida, and these rises – some as tall as 91 metres or more – are the tallest in the county.

Along the way, we're among some of Florida's oldest and most endangered plant species, including pygmy fringe trees and purple scrub morning glories. The park also sustains a variety of birds, including bald eagles, but they remain hidden from us today – save one large white heron that takes flight as we round a bend.

Our destination, the apex of the short loop, is marked simply "Statue" on the map, but I'm not sure if I can trust this primitive printout; it seems so unlikely that a statue would be out here, in the middle of the Florida desert. Still, we march on. We're following coloured signposts and are getting close to our target – just one final climb up a sandy slope, and we're there.

Near the top, the statue comes into view – it's a black granite pillar topped with a bronze bust of the park's namesake, Allen David Broussard, who died in 1990 at age 29. The memorial bears inspirational quotes, as well as tributes from his family. "Wildlife biologist, ecologist, a birder with few peers," reads a quote by his father, "Allen had remarkable insight into the workings of nature." We linger for a few moments, struck by this touching monument out in the bush, then start the journey back to the truck.

Round-trip, the trek takes us two hours, and the day is still young. We have plenty of time to head to our next stop – Lake Kissimmee State Park, 40 minutes east. Where Allen David

Top to bottom: Bok Tower Gardens, fishing on Lake Tohopekaliga

Broussard Catfish Creek Preserve is a wilderness, Lake Kissimmee is flush with infrastructure; full-facility campsites, a boat ramp, picnic pavilions. After paying the \$5 per vehicle fee, we're not far down the main road when my husband spots a gopher tortoise sidling through the grass. We hop out of the truck to film this fascinating creature, a threatened keystone species.

More than 20 kilometres of trails meander through this park. Eagle-eyes spy white-tailed deer, bobcats and gray foxes, but alas, we are hiked-out for the day. In the main use area, studded with sprawling scrub oaks, my daughter makes a beeline for the playground, so that's where we linger for the next hour or so. Adjacent to the swings and slides is an observation tower; we climb the steps to the top to gaze at Lake Kissimmee, Florida's third-largest lake and part of the headwaters to the Everglades.

On our way out, we stop at the ranger station to collect stamps for our dog-eared Passport to Florida State

Parks book; the Lake Kissimmee office has stamps for both itself and Catfish Creek. We press the stampers down proudly, creating inky souvenirs of the memories we made today – and proof that we were really here. The park ranger tells us that in the winter months, Lake Kissimmee State Park hosts living-history demonstrations of a circa-1876 cow camp. It doesn't get much more "real Florida" than that; sounds like we'll definitely have to return. ✪

## When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** **Colt Creek** rounds out Polk County's trifecta of state parks; travel between October 1 and May 1 for the best weather. Peak bloom at **Bok Tower Gardens** is mid-January through early April; hear the "singing tower" daily at 1 and 3 p.m. If you do travel during the summer, **Safari Wilderness** offers seasonal sunset safaris that showcase the ranch's zebras, lemurs, kudus and more.

**WHERE TO DINE:** To refuel after a morning hike, have a burger and fried



pickles at **Jay Bees Restaurant & Lounge** in Lake Wales. Up the road, **Crazy Fish Bar & Grill** serves up fresh seafood in a convivial atmosphere.

**WHERE TO STAY:** Book a villa with its own pool at **Balmoral Resort Florida**, a gated community in Haines City that encompasses gardens, parks, walkways and lakes. In Winter Haven, **LEGOLAND Florida Resort** features a zero-entry pool, themed rooms and a boardwalk overlooking Lake Eloise.



Harborside Restaurant

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*South Dakota:*

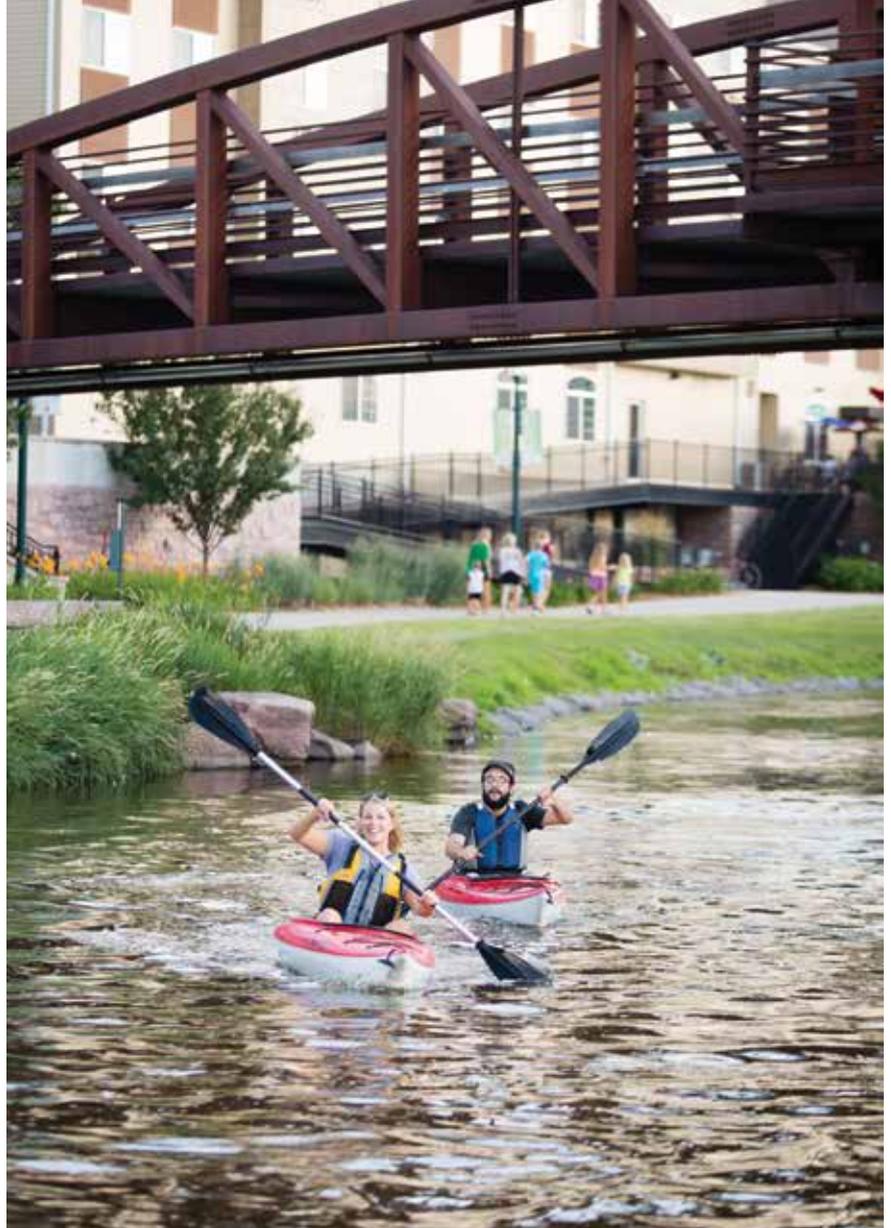
# GO BIG OR GO HOME

BY **JILL GLEESON**

**O**NE THING I NOTICED pretty quickly about South Dakota was how monumental everything there seems. Whether I was peering up at the Crazy Horse Memorial, or standing within the brutal, beautiful moonscape of the Badlands, or posing for photos in front of those 18-metre-high faces at Rushmore, everything around me was either sprawling or soaring. Even motoring west from Sioux Falls to Rapid City, I was struck by the size of the state itself. It only took about five hours to drive almost the width of it, but it was a timespan that seemed longer thanks to the endless expanses of corn and soybean fields.

South Dakota is all about big.

Luckily, I have a strange fondness for feeling small, maybe because I'm



Big Sioux River kayaking

somewhat Amazonian myself – 1.8 metres tall, with shoulders like a linebacker. More likely, it's simply that I find it inspirational. Big things, whether part of nature or man-made, instill a sense of wonder and something like peace. What, ultimately, do all my problems matter in the face of the 98,743 hectares of buttes, pinnacles, spires and prairie grass that is the Badlands National Park?

I remember thinking something along those lines as I stood on an overlook there, the August air so hot it almost hurt to breathe, gazing out at the broken landscape of eroded rock in deep shades of purple and red, brown and gold. I wanted to dive into it, no matter the temperature, to camp in the backcountry and hike the trails. The longest, I'd learned, is Castle Trail, about 16 kilometres round trip, though off-trail

trekking is allowed in the park. There's ranger-led night star gazing at the Cedar Pass Campground Amphitheater in summer, too. I imagine I'd have felt very small indeed under the 7,500 or so celestial bodies visible in clear weather thanks to the area's low levels of light pollution.

But I didn't have enough time to stick around and find out. There's so much to see in South Dakota's Black Hills. Mount Rushmore beckoned, a place I had wanted to visit since I was a kid. As an adult, I admit to wondering if perhaps it might disappoint – be just a little cheesy, those big granite heads of U.S. presidents Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Roosevelt (Teddy, not FDR) gazing out impassively from the mountainside. Instead, I was awestruck. The dedication, artistry and engineering know-how it must have taken to create that sculpture



L to R: Mount Rushmore, Black Hills motorcycling

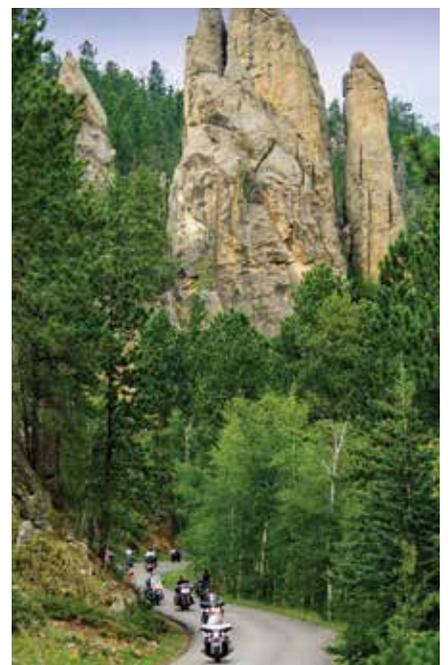
– and the sheer nerve of even attempting it – is glorious.

After snapping a few pictures of the uncanny stone likenesses from the Grand View Terrace – I managed a forced perspective shot that made it look like I was kissing Abe’s cheek, a photo I still cherish – I took to the Presidential Trail. Less than a kilometre long and paved, it puts you as close to the non-talking heads as you’re going to get. I loved how they would appear suddenly in the midst of the foliage every now and then, almost like they were playing hide and seek, each vantage point providing a better peek at them than the last.

For sheer size, the Crazy Horse Memorial has got Mount Rushmore beat, even though the only completed section of what will be the world’s largest sculpture is the legendary Lakota warrior’s head, which was finished

in 1998. The rest of it, which will depict him astride his horse, pointing southeast, to the land of his people, has yet to be carved out of the mountain. When it is, it will measure an astounding 195 metres long and 171 metres high. No completion date has been so much as hypothesized, although 2018 marks the 70th anniversary of the dynamite blast that commenced work on the project. Turning a mountain into a man is painstaking work, particularly when the venture is proudly independent, accepting no government funding.

There is a lot to do at the Crazy Horse Memorial along with simply gazing at the wonderfully detailed granite face, which is three stories higher than those at Rushmore. The Indian Museum of North America and the Native American Educational and Cultural Center are



both located in the visitor complex, which stands about a kilometre away from the mountain. But I wanted to get closer to Crazy Horse; I was missing the feeling of being dwarfed I'd experienced in the Badlands and at Rushmore, and the ensuing awe that overcame me there, too. So I paid an extra four dollars and hopped aboard a bus that took me to the base of the mountain.

And there it was again, that same sensation. As I craned my neck upwards, staring up at the visage of the great Lakota Chief – so big I could barely take it in all at once – I got chills along my arms and the hair raised at the back of my neck. Respect, wonder, even a little fear at how grand it was – and how insignificant I am – blasted through my head and heart. In the end, I think gratitude was the emotion that lingered the longest; gratitude for the chance to feel over and over during the time I was in South Dakota, a small part of a big and very beautiful universe. ☺

## When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** Perhaps South Dakota's most unique annual event, the **Buffalo Roundup** in Custer State Park will take place this year on September 28, beginning at 9:30 a.m. With some 60 cowfolk driving nearly 1,300 thundering bison across the park, the whole thing's about as thrillingly wild west as it comes, and it's free to the public. For families, **Rush Mountain Adventure Park** has added new adrenaline-charged experiences to go along with their tours of Rushmore Cave, including a nifty mountain roller coaster with one- and two-person carts and the Wingwalker aerial ropes obstacle course.

**WHERE TO STAY:** **Historic Hotel Alex Johnson** opened back in 1928, when Rapid City was a railroad town. The stately, two-storey lobby pays tribute to its locale with details like Native American art and mounted bison heads, but the guest rooms are sleek and modern. Upstairs, the rooftop bar is

the city's best place to tinkle in warmer weather, and it's only open to guests.

For an experience somewhere between a stay at Alex Johnson and roughing it in the great outdoors, consider booking accommodations at the brand-new **Under Canvas** "glampground" overlooking Mount Rushmore. With beds, electricity, showers and on-site restaurant, this mash-up of glamour and camping definitely leans more toward the former.

**WHERE TO DINE:** Almost since the day **Wall Drug Store** opened in 1931 not far from Badlands National Park, it's been a roadside fixture. Today, it offers not just a massive souvenir shop, but a downhome restaurant renowned for vittles like made-in-house ice cream and hot roast beef sandwiches with mashed potatoes and homemade gravy. Rapid City's go-to fine dining choice since 2007, steakhouse **Delmonico Grill**, serves not just phenomenal cuts of beef, but also dishes like bison tartare and "foie gras of the moment."

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## CITY ESCAPES



Lake Merritt

# Transformative OAKLAND

BY KRISTIN HANES

IT'S CLEAR WHEN I SIT DOWN at an al fresco patio restaurant near Lake Merritt in Oakland, California that this isn't your average brunch spot. The place is packed with the full splendour of humanity on this sunny afternoon: tattooed hipsters, retirees with small dogs, young couples, a perfectly-coiffed white-haired gentleman who may have just stepped off the pages of *GQ*.

But it's the food – the mouth-watering food! – at Grand Lake Kitchen that captivates me. Waiters rush past with plates loaded with thick, crusty bread and oozing eggs, heaping baby kale salads shimmering with light dressing, and pieces of bright pink lox. I order the salmon benedict; my cousin picks the tartine, an astonishing plate that's more reminiscent of artwork than food. One slice of country levain bread is topped with fresh ricotta cheese, sliced avocado, summer berries, a drizzle of honey and

a smattering of delicate flowers. It's the perfect meal for a perfect day in the Grand Lake area of Oakland.

Over the past few years, Oakland has undergone a transformation: People and businesses trying to escape expensive San Francisco rents have flocked to the city across the bay, turning it into a trendy smorgasbord of restaurants and boutiques. What I love about Oakland is its diversity; while San Francisco is arguably becoming more about the "haves" and "have nots," Oakland feels proudly global and inclusive.

The food scene is one in which the diversity is especially evident, attracting top chefs interested in starting new restaurant concepts. There's Bakesale Betty, which has revitalized the chicken sandwich, and Souley Vegan, which is a vegan soul food restaurant. No matter your taste buds or price point, there's a meal for everyone in Oakland.

Before sitting down to brunch at

Grand Lake Kitchen, my cousin and I first met at Lake Merritt, where we'd enjoyed the five-kilometre paved path that winds around this tidal lagoon. Joggers take a moment out of their busy workday to exercise there; parents play with babies in the fresh cut green grass. The lake smells like the sea and rises and falls with the tide. It feels like the heart of Oakland, where people of all ages and walks of life go to enjoy the fresh air, the trees, the flocks of geese. Every city needs a soul – a place where people gather to enjoy nature and each other.

Oakland not only has nature interspersed with its urbanity, but forests, creeks and meadows. Just a short jaunt into the Oakland hills reveals a network of hiking trails for people wanting to escape the crush of humanity. I've taken many a solitary walk within the trees, breathing deeply, centering myself in one of the biggest metropolitan areas in the United States.

When in Oakland, the city pride is evident. It may be sometimes thought of as San Francisco's little sister, but Oakland has its own sense of self; its own music, its own food, its own people. Oakland is a treasure, a unique oasis along the glistening bay. ✪

### When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** Discover the diverse neighbourhoods of Oakland, from the Bay views of **Jack London District**, the eclectic cultural mix of **KONO** or the preserved late century architecture of **Old Oakland**.

**WHERE TO DINE:** For an awesome dining experience in a venue dedicated to sourcing local, responsibly-raised animals, plan a meal at **Clove & Hoof**. Enjoy a good drink? Look into the Oakland Ale Trail or Oakland's Urban Wine Trail for some tasty inspo.

**WHERE TO STAY:** For quick access to downtown Oakland paired with a comfortable stay, lay your head at **Oakland Marriott City Center**. The 47-room **Washington Inn** is another reliable option, located in the Old Oakland area.



Casa De Balboa at sunset, Balboa Park

# SAN DIEGO DELIVERS

BY SUZANNE MORPHET

IT'S THE THIRD DAY OF OUR long weekend in San Diego when my husband, Kit, looks at me plaintively and says, "I've got to rest at some point."

In his defense, we have been busy – mostly because there's so much to do.

From hiking the trails and hitting the beach at Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve, to kayaking in La Jolla cove and exploring the neighbourhood of La Jolla on foot, our time has flown by.

Just earlier today, Kit played 18 holes at the city's most sought after golf course – Torrey Pines – where the pros have kicked off the PGA Tour every year since 1968.

Now, I've dragged the poor man to Balboa Park: with 17 museums, several performing arts venues, a botanical garden, walking trails and even a zoo, it's considered the crown jewel of San Diego and worthy of a weekend all by itself.

Climbing Balboa's iconic California Tower rounds out our – perhaps I should say *my* – weekend wish list. Leading us up seven storeys on a dizzying

spiral staircase, our young guide, Jose Gonzales, explains the tower was built for the 1915 Panama-California Exhibition.

He tells us that San Diego had originally hoped to be chosen as the host city for a different expo – the prestigious Panama-Pacific International Exposition. But that opportunity was awarded to San Francisco instead, partly to help San Fran show the world it had recovered from the disastrous earthquake and fires of 1906.

San Diegans could have simply shelved their own expo dreams, but they didn't, Jose says. They forged ahead, even without the finances or federal backing of their northern neighbour.

When we emerge into the bright sunshine at the top of the 60-metre tower, we can see much of what those early 20th century civic leaders accomplished. Manicured gardens sprawled before us with soaring palm trees, boxwood hedges and flowering sub-tropical trees. Buildings recall the early Spanish missions and churches with their domes and arches, bells and pergolas.

Some of the buildings we look over were originally temporary structures,

Jose tells us, made with inexpensive materials to last only the lifetime of the expo. "But everyone was so impressed," he adds, "that they were re-built."

Today, Balboa Park is an enduring testimony to the pluck and perseverance of those early San Diegans. So when we finish our tower tour and my husband pleads fatigue, I'm not particularly sympathetic; this place deserves to be seen.

Jose has also mentioned that this very weekend is the 12th annual Cherry Blossom Festival in Balboa's Japanese Friendship Garden. There's nothing I like better in spring than seeing cherry trees in full bloom. I convince Kit to hang in a little longer.

We stop for coffee in the Plaza de Panama and watch street performers entertain an audience before we head to the Friendship Garden. The festival is so popular that people are lined up and down the street. Waiting for the crowd to ease, we find a seat at the nearby Spreckels Organ Pavilion, where the free Sunday concert is just finishing.

Eventually we make our way into the Japanese garden. It's exquisitely beautiful, and not just with cherry trees. Pink azaleas and rhododendrons edge a shallow pool where colourful koi glide past. Water drips rhythmically from a bamboo pipe into a stone basin, spreading ripples across its surface.

Maybe it's this serene setting that makes me feel it's OK to return to our hotel now and relax by the pool before dinner. We've seen and done enough. And what better way to leave a place you've loved than content in the knowledge there's a lot more to come back for? 🌟

## When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** Plan a visit to **SeaWorld San Diego**, which has recently introduced the "Electric Eel," the city's tallest and fastest roller coaster. Accelerate to more than 100 kilometres per hour in mere seconds, then rocket skyward nearly 50 metres. This isn't for the faint of heart: brave an inverted "heartline" roll and a twisting loop as you crest the top before breathlessly returning to the station. Complementing this ride of a lifetime is a hypnotic live eel habitat, featuring large viewing windows to the delight of guests.



*Of cocktails  
& jazz:*

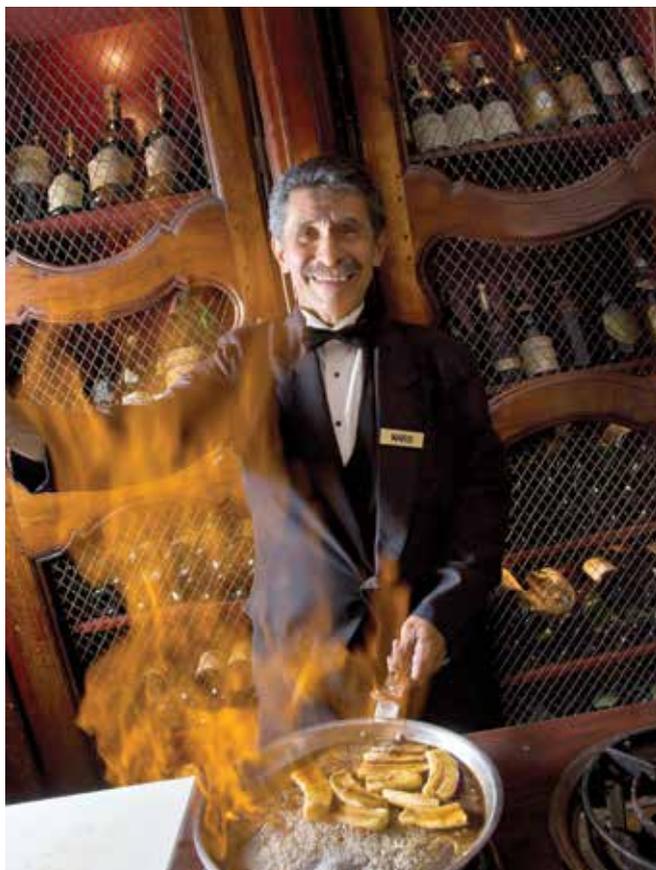
# HOW TO FALL IN LOVE WITH THE BIG EASY

BY **CANDICE WALSH**

**I**T'S 8 A.M. ON SUNDAY MORNING and I'm sitting at Café du Monde in the French Quarter, digging into beignets (fried donuts) covered in powdered sugar. This is one of those "must do" things in the Big Easy – something I'm always inclined to be skeptical about, but in this case, I'm pleasantly surprised it's not just another tourist trap. There's powdered sugar on my nose and all down my shirt but that's OK – as Bourbon Street revellers sleep off their hangovers, I'm enjoying a quintessential travel experience in my new favourite city. ➤

Todd Coleman, Zack Smith





Clockwise: Bananas Foster, Hotel Monteleone, Café du Monde, St. Charles Streetcar

I'm on a work trip with a few fellow journalists, and we've been eating a lot since we got here. On my first night, I stuffed myself at Drago's Seafood Restaurant with charbroiled oysters, followed by plates of blackened alligator tacos with pico de gallo, shrimp gumbo, crawfish étouffée served in a dark roux, and alligator nuggets.

The owner, Drago's son Tommy Cvitanovich, encouraged me and my colleagues to have brunch at Brennan's (on Royal Street), and so that's where we went later. The Brennans are a legendary restaurateur family in New Orleans, specializing in Louisiana Creole cuisine. This place is swank. We sat in the Chanteclair Room, where the colours are all pastels, and gorgeous gouache murals depict scenes from carnival's earliest days. I can say with some confidence that the Eggs Cardinal was one of the best brunches I've ever had: crispy shrimp boudin, spinach and lobster cardinal,

topped with black truffle hollandaise. We ordered the Bananas Foster to share, a dessert invented right there at Brennan's. The server wheeled out a Bunsen burner, tossed together some bananas, butter, brown sugar, cinnamon, rum and vanilla ice cream, and then set the whole thing on fire. Et voila! Bananas Foster.

But it was the hands-on experience at the New Orleans School of Cooking that really made an impression upon arrival in the city. I'm a terrible cook, so I quickly claimed my most skilled colleague as my partner, and we got to work whipping up alligator piquant, crab ravigote, meat pies and bread pudding for dessert. Somehow, I pulled it off just fine; even our instructor, the swarthy Chef Ricardo, was pleased. The alligator meat was easy to work with (it's true what they say – it's just like chicken!), and the wine poured freely. At the end, all 10 of us – including new friends – sat down at a large table to break bread.

Later, I embarked on a Drink & Learn cocktail tour with drinks historian Elizabeth Pearce (yes, that's her official job title). We meandered through the French Quarter as Elizabeth discussed NOLA's boozy history and how it shaped the city. Bourbon Street became a seedy spot after WWII, which most people avoided, until someone had the brilliant idea to start selling alcohol through a window. Thus, the street became an alcohol thoroughfare, and it's been one ever since. This "devil may care" attitude is what lures so many folks here.

Elizabeth pointed to noteworthy places as we went along, like Pat O'Brien's Bar, the home of NOLA's famous hurricane drink, and the Old Absinthe House, "a great place for day drinking!" We stopped for a cocktail at the Carousel Bar in Hotel Monteleone – a venue with literally a rotating carousel bar – and Elizabeth gave us each a Sazerac; she told us it's the city's official



cocktail: rye, bitters, and sugar. I'm not much of a rye person, but when in NOLA...

And though the boozy concoctions are enough to write home about, I'm

most enamoured with the music. It's everywhere, and even the buskers are jaw-droppingly talented. After walking through chaotic Bourbon Street one evening, I popped into the much quieter Jazz Playhouse at the Royal Sonesta Hotel to hear Nayo Jones enthrall the packed room with her unbelievable vocals. I didn't know I loved jazz until then.

Even back at The Jung Hotel, my bedside radio was constantly playing WWOZ New Orleans. In the rare moments I get to appreciate my lavish hotel room, I crank up the music, dance around the room, drink wine and prepare for another thrilling night out.

I love a good artsy neighbourhood, and New Orleans is full of them. On my second day in the city, I mowed down on a tasty brunch at the very hipsteresque Paloma Café and then headed out to explore the Faubourg Marigny and Bywater area. The place is packed with bright Creole architecture – sunflower-yellow homes with lime green shutters, and cozy cafés. I was drawn to the hot pink Euclid Records shop, and the eccentric Elizabeth's Café. It's covered in paintings, and the sign out front says "Real Food Done Real Good."

Later, we rode the old St. Charles Avenue Streetcar. Its elegant mahogany seats and exposed ceiling light bulbs invoke a bygone era. Mostly all I did was gawk at mansions; it never ceases to amuse me how every front porch in Louisiana seems to have a rocking chair or two. We got off to dine at Jack Rose

inside the Pontchartrain Hotel (seriously, all we've done is eat), which is another delightfully quirky spot where I was greeted with a giant portrait of 'Lil Wayne, complete with gold grillz, upon arrival. There was just enough time for a drink with a view over the city atop the hotel's Hot Tin Rooftop Bar (OK, so maybe all we've done is eat *and* drink).

I ended up at Frenchmen Street, watching big jazz bands play on street corners while happy locals and vacationers danced around them. The atmosphere there is pure joy. It's a delightfully weird place; there was a girl with a faraway gaze writing poetry at a table on the sidewalk, and a trail of glitter leading off to some unmarked door. I stepped into the night market and perused the wares, from handmade jewelry to dog sketches to steampunk furniture. I kept coming back to a ceramics booth, and some eye-catching mugs. Perfect to take home. Finally, I inquired about the price. "It's original art," says the young lady. "Just \$80!"

Maybe I'll go back on my next visit. But it's the last thing on my mind as I convince myself that one more beignet never hurt anyone, so I reach for another. The city is stirring; the line-up outside Café du Monde is growing, and a gentleman sits down out front entertaining passersby with his enormous tuba. I'd stay all day to listen to him play, but instead I finish my beignet, brush the powdered sugar from my pants, and set out for one last day of Big Easy adventure. ☺

## Beyond New Orleans

- Experience Louisiana's best seafood in **Jefferson Parish on the Oyster Trail**, a culinary and fine arts endeavour allowing visitors to view local oyster sculptures while sampling unique oyster dishes. Must try: Drago's charbroiled oysters, or the oyster po-boy at Short Stop.
- Make time to enjoy the stillness and the green beauty of the bayou. From Houma, head to **Cajun Man's Swamp Tours** for a cruise through the Bayou Black/Gibson area. Captain Billy will regale you with tales of growing up on the swamp, and you'll get up close to alligators and other wildlife. Ask Billy about his alligator hunting experiences.

- You might be surprised by just how fun a hot sauce factory can be, but the **TABASCO Pepper Sauce Factory Tour** is a fascinating glimpse at 150 years of hot sauce history. Swing by the Jungle Gardens afterwards, and visit the Giant Buddha and the bird sanctuary.
- Tour the **Frogmore Plantation**, which contrasts a working cotton plantation of the early 1800s with a modern cotton plantation and gin of today. You'll visit the slave quarters and learn the darker side of plantation history as well. The beautifully restored Shadows-on-the-Teche plantation home in New Iberia is also worth your time.



On the Oyster Trail



## HISTORY, ARTS & CULTURE



# TAMPA TIME

BY JAMES LITSTON

I'M SITTING ON A WATERFRONT deck looking down the lazy Hillsborough River, watching the sun sink slowly towards a cluster of downtown high-rises; it's hard to imagine an end-of-day moment more satisfying than this. Condensation is glistening on my glass of chilled craft beer and I'm surrounded by the chatter and laughter of an upbeat, post-work crowd. The sky is ablaze, there's a palpable buzz and it's all turning into a rather memorable urban experience.

What makes this particularly special is that up until a few years ago, this sort of thing was almost unthinkable here. I'm in Tampa, Florida – a city that rarely appears on travellers' bucket lists. True, it offers an enviable lifestyle and headline

attractions such as Busch Gardens theme park, but its visitor appeal has long been rooted in the mainstream. Until now, that is: because things have changed, and recently this unsung Gulf Coast city has quietly evolved an authentic credibility that's finally seeing it sit up and be noticed.

Tampa's new-found urban edge is particularly interesting in that to find it, you've got to steer clear of the ordinary and expected. In fact, the city's most engaging elements are generally so out-of-the-way that a little local knowledge is needed to find them. The waterfront deck where I'm sitting, for example, is in leafy Tampa Heights, an inner suburb upriver from the downtown core. Its remarkable renaissance from rundown district to hipster hub has

made it emblematic of Tampa's nascent, contemporary appeal.

My current viewpoint is part of Ulele, a restaurant occupying a renovated, century-old waterworks building directly on the riverbank. As well as serving a menu that's loaded with local ingredients, Ulele has its own microbrewery that produced the beer that I'm drinking. Like all its fresh-brewed lagers and ales, my Green Cannonball IPA is proudly preservative-free and tastes all the better for having been crafted literally just feet away.

Ulele's arrival was the start of Tampa Heights' reinvention. Since opening in 2014, the restaurant has been joined by the landscaped expanse of adjacent Water Works Park and, as of this year, Armature Works – another landmark



L to R: Yoga at Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park in downtown Tampa, Riverwalk Canopy, Florida Aquarium

development in a heritage building. Formerly a tram shed for servicing Tampa's long-lost streetcars, the historic structure now houses Heights Public Market, a foodie hub that celebrates the best of the Tampa Bay area.

Essentially a step-up from the food truck phenomenon, Heights Public Market is a collection of innovative, small-scale restaurants spanning everything from empanadas and sushi to cocktails, coffee and Cuban sandwiches, with a communal-seating format that lends itself to leisurely grazing. Combined with a co-working space and frequent events such as cookery classes, it's a completely new concept for Tampa that's on point with its fresh, cosmopolitan feel.

Contributing to the area's success is

the newly completed Tampa Riverwalk, a recreational trail that connects Tampa Heights to Downtown. Credited with helping Tampanians rediscover their river, the route has proved a massive hit with walkers, bikers and joggers. I joined them earlier today and followed the snaking trail from the Florida Aquarium to the Tampa Bay History Center and Tampa Museum of Art, via Curtis Hixon Park – a setting for festivals and events.

Of course, not all of Tampa's key attractions are brand new. Directly opposite Curtis Hixon stands the Tampa Bay Hotel, an elegant and fanciful structure that's now the University of Tampa. Its Moorish Revival architecture and distinctive, silver-topped minarets are the city's most iconic landmark. I couldn't resist taking a closer look. ▶

Crossing the river, I found a taste of the hotel's Gilded Age heyday. With original furnishings intact, the Henry B Plant Museum (named after the railroad magnate who built the hotel) breathes life into the opulence enjoyed by wealthy turn-of-the-century snowbirds. Guests (including such notable names as Thomas Edison and Sir Winston Churchill) had access to telephones, electricity, private baths and Florida's first elevators, all of which would have been outrageous luxuries at the time.

Across the street – and again, off the beaten track – lies another gem in what used to be the hotel's carriage house. Oxford Exchange combines a concept store and stylish lifestyle boutique with a bright, airy restaurant serving simple meals made with seasonal ingredients. A late lunch of veggie burger with a side of sweet potato fries set me up for further Riverwalk explorations that have culminated here and now, with a chilled beer and watching the sunset.

But my day is not ending here. With the sun hitting the horizon, I relocate past Bayshore Boulevard's multi-million-dollar homes and head for cocktails on the SoHo Strip. In true Tampa style, this nightlife hotspot is unexpectedly located among streets lined with antebellum homes in the city's most upscale neighbourhood. SoHo's restaurants and rooftop bars attract a fun-loving crowd, but – true to form – the place I'm seeking requires local know-how to find.

Hidden away behind an unmarked door in a nondescript apartment building, *Ciro's Speakeasy & Supper Club* epitomises Tampa's new-found cool. The emphasis here is on cocktails with a nod to the Prohibition era and, staying on-theme, a password is needed to get past the front door. But which of the unadorned entryways in front of me is that? Like so many of Tampa's stylish spots, you just have to know where to look. 🍸



## Beyond Tampa



Top to bottom: Salvador Dali Museum, The Chihuly Collection

On the other side of Tampa Bay in the seaside city of St. Petersburg, there's another urban revolution – only this time, the focus is art. Headlining the list of arty attractions is the Salvador Dali Museum, whose collection – famously one of the most comprehensive gatherings of the surrealist's works – is housed in a purpose-built (and purposefully quirky) landmark building whose smooth, poured concrete merges with an eye-catching glass "Enigma." The space allows all 96 of the collection's oil paintings to remain on permanent display along with sketches, sculptures, watercolours and colourful objets d'art.

St. Pete's other cultural big hitter is The Chihuly Collection, which recently upgraded to larger premises at the Morean Arts Center. It's the world's first permanent exhibition of the daringly different glass artist's work and includes some of the maxi-scale pieces for which he made his name. Highlights of the collection – said to be worth around \$6 million – include Ruby Red Icicle Chandelier, which was made specifically for this location. There's even more glass art at the Imagine Museum, which (along with the James Museum of Western & Wildlife Art) opened earlier this year, further cementing St. Petersburg's world-class cultural appeal.

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*Rochester:*

# THE HER-STORY & HISTORY

BY TERRILYN KUNOPASKI

There's hardly anyone else around as we walk through the Mount Hope Cemetery – it's quiet and somber, as a graveyard typically is, with overgrown grass, ancient trees and wildflowers offering life to an area otherwise representative of death. It's difficult to imagine this space as it was on November 8, 2016 – a day when thousands of Rochesterians showed up to celebrate voting for a female presidential candidate for the first time in American history.

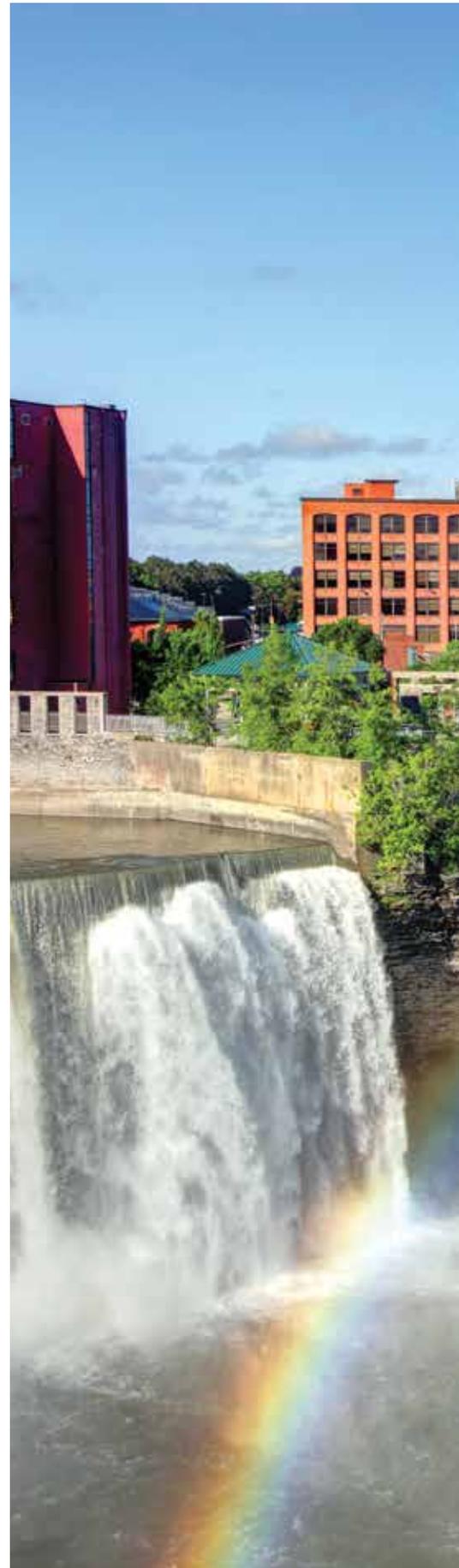
An odd choice for a party, you might think, but this is the final resting place of Susan B. Anthony, a local icon who led the suffrage movement in the U.S. throughout the 1800s, so it seems only fitting. Though her grave stone stands in front of me crooked and worn by the elements, on Election Day nearly two years ago, it was covered by thousands of "I Voted" stickers; people travelled from across Rochester and the surrounding area to pay tribute to an individual who, nearly 150 years past, laid the groundwork to make that moment possible.

I'm not sure I realized Rochester's importance in U.S. history, but my

ignorance is being turned on its head as I get to know more of the city; it was not only home to Susan B., but also to abolitionist and social reformer Frederick Douglass, collector and philanthropist Margaret Woodbury Strong, and Kodak founder George Eastman. Each individual has left a lasting legacy here, which seems to be a point of pride for residents. Perhaps that's why so many were drawn here on Nov. 8, when Mount Hope Cemetery represented just that, if only for a moment.

We've just come from the Susan B. Anthony Museum & House, which is about three miles down the road. I can only imagine the stories to be told if walls could talk, but lucky for us, Deborah L. Hughes, president & CEO, does the life and times of Susan B. justice.

She walked us through the place where Susan B. lived for more than four decades, sharing stories about what was done there and the people who passed through its doors: It was there that Susan B. worked with other women to think, write and plan for "The Cause," and where she'd have tea with guests like Frederick Douglass. It was also there that she was famously arrested in 1872 for doing as no American woman had done before her: voting. ▶





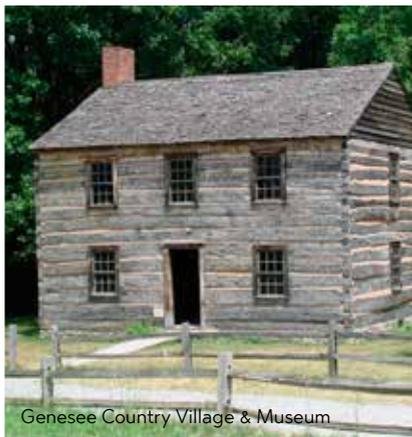
High Falls on Genesee River, downtown Rochester



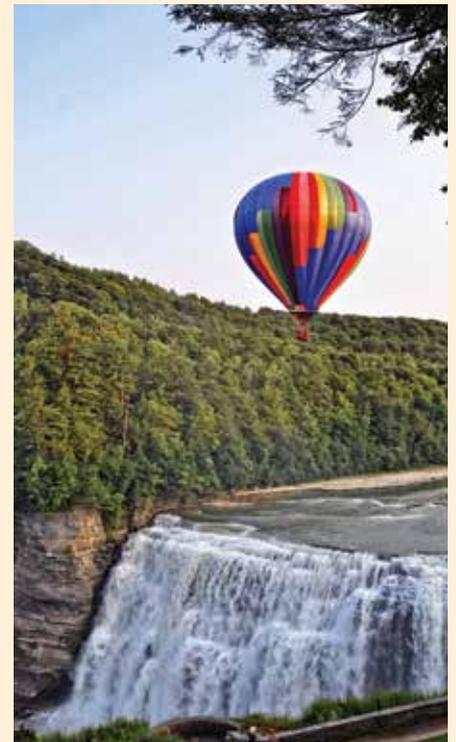
Susan B. Anthony



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Finger Lakes Travel

Deborah glows as she tells the story of how the police showed up on the doorstep from which we entered, and how Susan B. protested the arrest. She ultimately never went to jail or paid a fine, but it was in this action that the name of Susan B. became one to reckon with.

There are pieces of Susan B. on display throughout the house, like the alligator purse in the study, which she wore not as a fashion statement but one of a woman's financial independence; remember, Deborah explained, that in the 1800s, any income a woman earned became the property of her husband. Then there's the dress on display in her bedroom, which was made of black-silk brocade gifted to her for her 80th birthday by a group of Mormon women from Utah as a symbol of thanks.

I could feel the weight of Susan B.'s experience on my shoulders as the tour came to an end, thinking of the challenges facing women in the U.S. under a controversial administration.

When I asked Deborah about her thoughts on the 2016 election, she admitted that, despite her beliefs, she wasn't as confident in Hillary Clinton's chances as others around her; she said that she expected the resulting outcome given the news she read leading up to the vote.

Still, in her own way, Deborah persists, working to share Susan B.'s story and educate people on the roots of progress, how far we've come, and consequently, how far there is to go.

I'LL ADMIT THAT SUSAN B. IS my favourite historic Rochesterian, though the intersection of history, art and culture defines the essence of this city. Enjoy more of it with these local attractions:

**THE STRONG MUSEUM OF PLAY:**

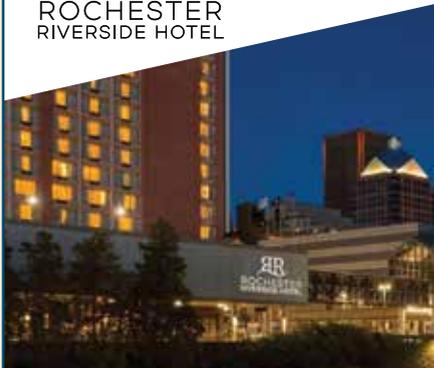
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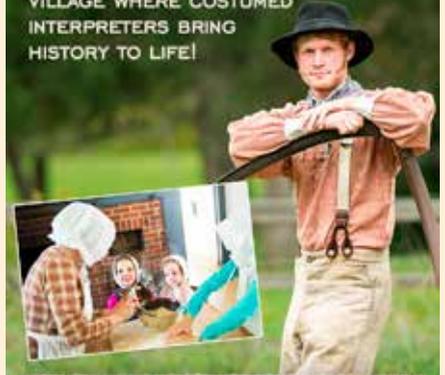


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George Eastman Museum



Rochester Public Market



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### THE GEORGE EASTMAN MUSEUM:

Explore the home in which George Eastman, founder of Kodak, spent his adult life, while opening your eyes to the world of photography and cinema through various exhibits and collections. But give yourself some time; the museum encompasses several million objects in the fields of photography, cinema, photographic and cinematographic technology, and photographically illustrated books. Take a docent tour (ask for Maureen!) through the exhibitions, mansion and gardens, or schedule your visit around a weekly Sunday afternoon music recital.

### MEMORIAL ART GALLERY:

More than 5,000 years of art history are on display at the Memorial Art Gallery, from the relics of antiquity to works in the vanguard of contemporary movements. With the completion of Centennial Sculpture Park, the Gallery's 14-acre campus has been transformed into a spectacular urban space that is a destination for Rochesterians and visitors alike. The Gallery has a permanent collection of more than 12,000 objects, and offers a year-round schedule of temporary exhibitions, lectures, concerts, tours and family activities.

### GENESEE COUNTRY VILLAGE & MUSEUM:

About 30 minutes from downtown Rochester, travellers will find Genesee Country Village & Museum, the largest living history museum in New York State. With 68 buildings showcasing the way of life from the late 1700s to early 1900s, visitors can enjoy various demonstrations, attractions and activities, with special events also taking place throughout the year. 📍

### When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** Start any Saturday in Rochester with a visit to the **Rochester Public Market**, where you can grab a coffee and stroll through fresh food and goods from local merchants. It's also worth considering a visit during Rochester's annual **Lilac Festival**, the largest free festival of its kind in Upstate New York. Take in the magnificent gardens, live music, great food and local exhibitors on display. If your timing is right, you'll be able to catch a show at

the **Geva Theatre Center**, the most attended professional regional theatre in the Northeast United States outside Manhattan. Located in a building that dates back more than 140 years, it's long been a local gathering place.

**WHERE TO DINE:** Do yourself a favour and spend an evening at the new **Radio Social**, which serves up great eats from executive chef Steve Eakins. Indulge in a few cocktails and dishes before working it all off at the bowling alley. Corn hole, giant jenga and shuffleboard are only a sampling of the various other games there to be enjoyed, for an especially fun night out on the town. Given Rochester's rich wine region, it's definitely worth working a visit to **Living Roots Winery** into your itinerary, where you'll find blends of locally-grown grapes with those from Adelaide, South Australia. **Good Luck** is another must-do restaurant, with eclectic design, fantastic service and delicious eats.

**WHERE TO STAY:** For a comfortable stay in a great location, opt for **The Strathallan**, which is walking distance to attractions like Memorial Art Gallery and The George Eastman Museum. Its rooftop bar, Hattie's, is a long-time favourite for locals and visitors alike, thanks to 360-degree views of the city. The **Rochester Riverside Hotel** is another popular choice, located in the downtown area. This pet-friendly property boasts a heated outdoor pool, free airport shuttle service and is a quick jaunt to great dining. The newly-renovated **Hyatt Regency Rochester** is situated along the Genesee River, offering stunning views, luxury rooms and nearby entertainment and shopping.

For travel information, go to [www.visitrochester.com](http://www.visitrochester.com).



*Desert dreaming:*

# COLOUR & CULTURE DEFY BORDERS IN EL PASO

BY **CORRINA ALLEN KIERSONS**



The Wyler Aerial Tramway at Franklin Mountains State Park

**T**HE CLOSER YOU GET TO any line meant to distinguish one place from another, the blurrier that line becomes. That's how it felt to arrive in El Paso, where I was greeted at the airport with Texan hospitality and a classic Mexican margarita featuring just the right amount of tequila for two o'clock in the afternoon. Over the next few days, I'd learn that some things are too powerful, too beautiful and too important to be contained by geopolitics – a heartening lesson, courtesy of this small West Texas town.

Separated by nothing more – and nothing less – than a line inked across a map at the end of the Mexican-American war, El Paso maintains close ties with its south-of-the-border Chihuahuan sister city, Juárez. One of busiest border crossings on the continent divides them, but El Pasoans think of the people on the Mexican side of the bridge as a natural part of their community.

El Paso isn't Blue or Red, but a more complicated shade of purple. Living along the border makes the people here experts on the situation between Mexico and the U.S.; everyone from the city's First Lady to the Uber driver who said that a Trump-mandated barrier between El Paso and Juárez would hurt people on the American side more – and not just economically. ▶



Clockwise: El Paso Street, Rock climbing at Heuco Tanks, Southwest University Park

Approximately 22,000 Mexican citizens cross over into the West Texas city every day – for work, for school, to shop and dine, and to cheer on the local minor league baseball team, the El Paso Chihuahuas. It’s that cross-border ebb and flow that’s responsible for the city’s diverse cultural heritage and a vibrancy that’s obvious to everyone who visits.

As the second largest state in the U.S., one part of Texas can feel worlds away from another. In Dallas, dozens of swimming pools dot flat, green backyards in the suburbs that ring the city centre, a cluster of glass towers concealed in mist. But move on to El Paso, and a completely different side of Texas reveals itself.

Here, at its westernmost point, the state morphs into a cactus-and-palm-tree-spotted desert that stretches out towards the Franklin Mountains (which can be thought of as either the beginning or the end of the Rockies). Flat-top Adobe buildings come in colours like lemon yellow, aquamarine and carnation pink.

For my first dinner in Texas, I travelled southeast along the highway that eventually leads to Marfa. I was headed for a ranch about 40 minutes outside El Paso where, back in 1982, Jack Nicholson and Harvey Keitel filmed *The Border*. As I got further and further away from the city, the desert asserted itself as a place ruled by the elements alone. Looking out into the wide open spaces at the city’s edges made borders, as a concept, seem unfathomable.

El Paso has many of the characteristics of a typical American city: billboards advertise burger joints and the services of personal injury lawyers, and big box stores line the freeways the same way they do in Michigan or Florida. But this is a city that hasn’t allowed itself to be divided the way much of the country has – and that on its own makes it unique.

As soon as I’d dropped my bags, I headed to Segundo, the historically Hispanic neighbourhood known for its painted public murals. From ‘La Virgen De Guadalupe’ on Ochoa Street

to ‘Entelequia’ on Florence, each work radiates a Mexican influence. At the El Paso Museum of Art (admission: free, air conditioning: sublime) Cheech Marin’s collection of Chicano paintings were on display, more evidence of the cultural crossover.

And during a visit to the Italian-founded Lucchese boot factory, I met Hispanic artisans hand-crafting Texan cowboy boots that were themselves works of art. Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry was born in El Paso, Stevie Nicks spent her pre-teen years here, Tom Lea captured the desert landscapes of his hometown on canvas, and Cormac McCarthy came here to write his epic anti-Western, *Blood Meridian*. It’s easy to see how life in this multicultural border town could serve as a well of inspiration for artists of every stripe.

The city’s culinary scene is just as culturally intertwined. El Pasoans like sweet wines and spicy food, steak and margaritas are on almost every menu,

and their barbecue holds its own against any city in the South. Brisket, sausage, turkey legs and ribs are all served with tangy sauce, baked beans, and at Cattleman's Steakhouse, a restaurant and working ranch just outside the city limits, they make a perfect coleslaw with chunks of pineapple. But it's in the restaurants where El Pasoan Tex meets Chihuahuan Mex that the city's chefs make an indelible mark: with offerings like chile relleno burritos and a kind of stacked enchilada – dishes known as "border food."

When night fell on my first day in Texas, I found myself back at the hotel, gazing out over a city shaped by lights. A local pointed out a subtle divide: on one side of an impossibly fine line, the lights shon yellow-orange; on the other, they gave off a slight greenish glow. Nestled right up against the orange bulbs of El Paso, green ones emanated from Juárez. Unless you knew to look for it, the difference was invisible. ✪



Cheese enchiladas

## When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** Catch an **El Paso Chihuahuas** minor league baseball game. The San Diego Padres farm team's stadium is state of the art. A two-level open-air park incorporates the city's beautiful old clock tower at its centre and great seats can be had for as little as four bucks. Not a sports fan? Go for the ballpark snacks: dog bowl steak nachos, fiery Cheetos with queso, and a Michelada to outdo all other beer-based cocktails. An early morning stop at **Franklin Mountains State Park** is

also a must: the sun coming up over the mountains is rivalled only by the sunsets that turn the city a half-dozen shades of pink each night.

**WHERE TO DINE:** Fans of Mexican food will find no shortage of places to eat, including **Segundo Barrio's Jalisco Cafe**, **Los Bandidos De Carlos & Mickey's** (get the prickly pear margarita), **L&J Cafe**, and the legendary **H&H Car Wash** where you can get your truck scrubbed while you refuel with huevos rancheros, chile relleno or cheese enchiladas.

**WHERE TO STAY:** Coming with family? Check into the **Doubletree Downtown Hilton** and be greeted with a fresh chocolate chip cookie and get access to the hotel's rooftop pool which boasts views of **Southwest University Park**, home of the Chihuahuas. For a cool couples weekend, book a room in mid-century modern heaven at **Hotel Indigo** (which also has a rooftop pool – this is hot, hot El Paso, after all).

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## ROAD TRIPS

Foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains

### *Meandering through the Mother Lode:*

# CALIFORNIA'S GOLDEN CHAIN HIGHWAY 49

BY MELANIE HAIKEN

**D**EEP INSIDE THE GOLD Bug Park & Mine just outside of Placerville, California, hardhat on my head, I peered at the pick-chiseled rock curving above me. "Is there still gold in there?" pipes up a 10-year-old boy to my left, echoing what we were all thinking and – let's be honest – hoping. After all, the area's yield during the height of the Gold Rush was in the tens of billions in today's U.S. dollars. The answer is yes – nuggets turn up regularly (though locations are a closely guarded secret) and in 2015, road crews

unearthed gold while repaving Placerville's main street.

But gold is not the only lure bringing visitors to California's gold country today. The foothills of the Sierra Nevada have proven rich for wine-making as well, and the historic mining towns strung like gems along the Golden Chain Highway bustle with beautifully restored hotels, cleverly outfitted shops, and restaurants helmed by award-winning chefs.

A perfect example is Placerville's Smith Flat House, where we enjoyed wood-fired pizzas on their sunny patio and visited The Cellar. It's here that you

can peek into an old mine and down a pint at the tall oak bar where Mark Twain is said to have drunk. Next, we explored downtown Placerville – once known as Hangtown for its colourful history – where a surprising highlight was the plank-floored Placerville Hardware Store, oldest continuously operating supply house west of the Mississippi.

Practically every gold rush town boasts an excellent local museum, and Placerville's El Dorado Museum, housed in a stone-walled soda works, is no exception; another we loved was Nevada City's to the north, housed in



Downtown Placerville



Old Sacramento



Yosemite National Park

a vintage firehouse. More immersive gold rush experiences are available at Columbia State Historic Park, where you can ride a stagecoach and spend a day among costumed shopkeepers, miners and even outlaws, or opt to pan for the glittery flakes yourself at Marshall Gold Discovery State Park in Coloma.

From there, we continued south on Highway 49 (aka the Golden Chain), named for the miners known as “49ers,” drawn by the 1849 discovery of gold. Passing through five counties and more than 20 significant gold rush-era towns, the route also follows or crosses the Yuba, American and Tuolumne rivers. You’ll

find it hard not to pull over for every swimming hole and photogenic main street, with characteristic two-storey hotels, false fronts, wooden sidewalks, and tempting artisanal bakeries and ice cream shops.

Amador County, our next stop, has become synonymous with wine, thanks to the Italian miners who gave up on the gold fields to plant vineyards of zinfandel and syrah. Tasting rooms dot the Shenandoah Valley east of 49; highly recommended are Sangiovese specialist Vino Noceto, with its bocce ball courts and iconic giant dog head rescued from San Francisco’s long-gone Doggie Diner

chain, and Paul J Wines, which just opened its airy new tasting room in June.

Dinner our first night was an easy choice, as we’d heard rave reviews about brand new Small Town Wine Bar in tiny Amador City, where the multi-generational Budrick family serves up hearty made-from-scratch soups and to-die-for desserts.

We overnighted at Bradford Place Inn, a Victorian bed and breakfast just off Sonora’s Main Street; also recommended are the Riverside Inn in Downieville, which marked the northernmost point of our journey, and Plymouth’s new boutique Rest Hotel. While in

Sonora, we made sure to visit Legends, a book and antique shop where you can sip a root beer float at the restored mahogany soda counter and peer deep into rock tunnels that once secretly connected businesses on both sides of main street.

Sonora and nearby Jackson make a great home base from which to explore the southern end of Highway 49, including Railtown 1897 State Historic Park, where you can see – and on weekends, ride – antique steam trains, including the one Michael J. Fox rode in *Back to the Future III*. Also not to be missed is Indigenuity Reserve, where we sampled prize-winning hard ciders and brandy pressed from the bounty of the surrounding orchards. Sonora has gained popularity as an affordable and uncrowded home base from which to explore Yosemite National Park, just an hour east up Highway 120.

On our final day, we stocked up on coconut scones from Eighty One, the newest addition to Sonora's artisanal food scene, and headed west, ticking off ideas for a return trip. ☺

## SUGGESTED GOLDEN CHAIN ROUTE:



State Capitol building, Sacramento

### DAY 1: Sacramento Area

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Old Sacramento Historic District including the Railroad Museum, State Capitol building, Capitol Park, Crocker Art Museum

### DAY 2: Sacramento to Placerville (70 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Old Town Folsom, Coloma State Park

### DAY 3: Placerville to Murphys (109 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Sutter Creek, Merced Caverns, Angeles Camp "Frog Town USA", Ironstone Winery and Gem Museum, Moaning Cavern

### DAY 4: Murphys to Mariposa (140 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Colombia State Park, Railtown 1897 State Park, Coulterville, Mariposa History Museum, CA State Mineral and Mining Museum

### DAY 5: Mariposa to Yosemite National Park (66.5 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Yosemite Valley, Yosemite Falls, Majestic Hotel, Half Dome, Bridal Veil Falls, Glacier Point, Tuolumne Meadows, Mariposa Grove

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## Finding Frank:

# ROAD-TRIPPING ACROSS OKLAHOMA'S US 60

BY ANDREW COLLINS



Frank Lloyd Wright's Price Tower

**T**HE STRETCH OF TWO-LANE blacktop (the surface is actually more pale gray in most places) extends some 560 kilometres across northern Oklahoma, on a gradual upward slope from the emerald prairies in the east to the sweeping, virtually treeless plains in the west – through a handful of small cities and towns that fills their coffers mostly with revenue from oil production, wheat farming and cattle ranching. I've driven the entire route a couple of times over the past

two decades, and shorter stretches more recently. It's a journey of admittedly modest charms, but it continues to deliver bold surprises and off-beat brushes with serendipity.

I first drove this route nearly 20 years ago during an annual road trip from the East Coast – where I have family – and my then home in Santa Fe, New Mexico. A story I'd read in a magazine on historic preservation led me to choose US 60, specifically to visit the small city of Bartlesville, where there stood a skyscraper – in much need of repair –

designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

By this time, I'd visited several Wright creations, from residences in the Midwest and California to his sprawling masterpiece in the Arizona desert, Taliesin West. A skyscraper, really? I pondered, recalling the linear, low-slung quality of every Wright design I'd ever seen. And so in late July 1999, I set out to visit this seeming architectural unicorn.

Upon entering Bartlesville from the east on US 60 and gazing just north a block up Dewey Avenue, I beheld Wright's curious-looking masterpiece, the 67-metre-high Price Tower. It loomed oddly but gracefully over the modest downtown skyline, but it also looked nearly deserted. Since 1981, it had been owned by Phillips Petroleum Company, the giant oil corporation headquartered a few blocks away. Phillips relegated it to a storage facility, unopen to the public.

Several years after my first encounter with the Price Tower, the building underwent a dramatic restoration, and on a more recent visit, much to my satisfaction, the copper-and-concrete beacon hummed with visitor activity.

Now a mixed-use structure, it contains a ground-floor art gallery, a second-floor Architectural Study Center, the upscale Inn at Price Tower hotel – with 19 rooms set among the building's upper floors – and the Copper Restaurant + Bar, which occupies the 15th floor and is festooned with shiny copper light fixtures and decorative accents.

During an hour-long tour that led me through several areas of the building that retain Wright's original interiors, my guide mentioned how Wright called Price Tower his "tree that escaped the crowded forest." Indeed, it turns out Wright had designed the building in the 1920s for a site in Lower Manhattan, where it would have stood in a dense forest of other towers. The plans were scrapped until 1956, when local oil magnate Harold Price commissioned Wright to construct his solitary "tree" high above the level Oklahoma prairie.

It felt gratifying to see a once-overlooked, if idiosyncratic, Wright ►

masterpiece restored to full glory. And during my visit to Bartlesville, I discovered a couple of additional compelling attractions related to a guy named Frank, in this case the late oil industrialist Frank Phillips, who cofounded Phillips Petroleum (which later merged with Conoco Oil Company) a century ago with his brother. I stopped for a stroll across the front lawn of the gracious Frank Phillips Historic Home, a 26-room neoclassical stunner decorated with many of his belongings.

But on a tight schedule, I decided to devote the rest of my time to visiting Woolaroc Museum and Wildlife Preserve, which Phillips built in 1925 about 16 kilometres southwest of town as a country ranch. This compound comprising a 4,600-square-metre museum of beautifully arranged Western and Native American art and artifacts gives the Price Tower a run for its money as the most memorable attraction in the US 60 corridor. I felt lucky to have spied bison, longhorn cattle and a few Sitka deer among the 30 odd native and exotic creatures who roam freely amid the Woolaroc's verdant grounds. 📍

## SUGGESTED HIGHWAY 60 ROUTE:



Marland Mansion

### DAY 1: Ponca City

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Marland Mansion, Pioneer Woman Statue & Museum, Poncan Theatre

### DAY 2: Ponca City - Pawhuska (71 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Joseph H. Williams Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, Osage Hills State Park, The Pioneer Woman Mercantile

### DAY 3: Pawhuska - Bartlesville (40 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Woolaroc Museum & Wildlife Preserve, Frank Lloyd Wright's Price Tower & Price Tower Arts Center, Phillips Petroleum Company Museum



US Route 50 near Fallon

# Good company ON AMERICA'S "LONELIEST ROAD"

BY LORI A MAY

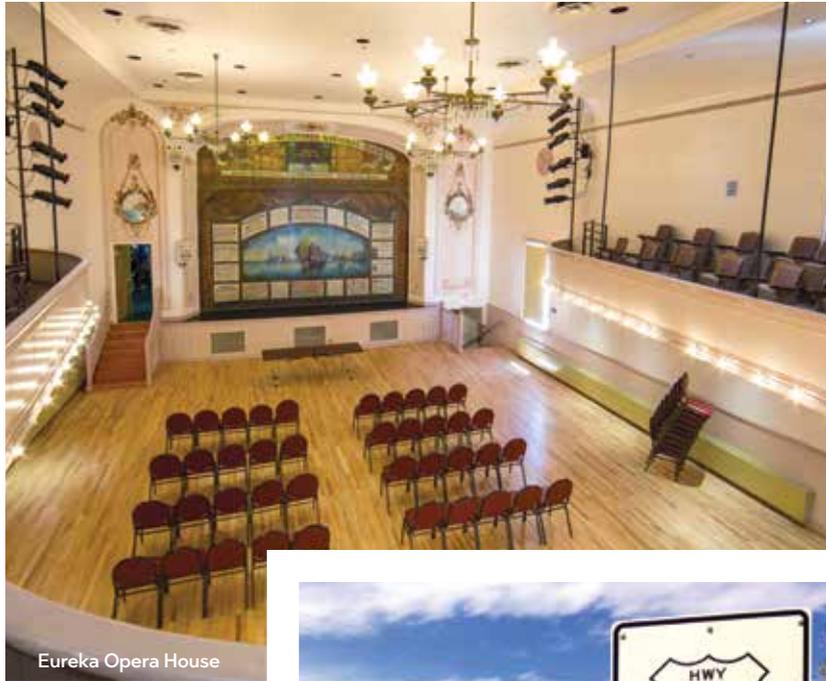
**T**HE SHOPPING LIST WAS light but precautionary: a few bottles of water, a mix of protein-rich snacks, a full tank of gas, and an old-school roadmap. I wasn't expecting desert cell service to offer GPS assistance on this particular

route. I've traversed most of Nevada's less populated county roads, but I wasn't sure what to expect on US Route 50 – also known as "The Loneliest Road in America."

Years ago, a writer declared this stretch of rural highway the loneliest there is, and Nevada didn't skip a beat. Reclaiming ownership of that moniker, the state proudly began to offer cheeky survival guides and tourism passports for those who make the journey,

encouraging drivers to take the road less travelled. For each landmark visited along the route, local venues hand out a passport stamp. But I didn't need such proof of survival; my intent was to see what I hadn't seen and experience what I hadn't before.

When I heard of this lonely route, I knew it was a necessary part of my Nevada exploration. I'd travelled a stretch of US Route 50 before, weaving my way through Carson City on down to Stateline and South Lake Tahoe. Others may find themselves on the eastern portion, detouring en route to Great Basin National Park. But the largest terrain, with the road winding from Fallon to Ely, is the gold mine; literally, it seems, as that stretch of road was home to silver and gold mining camps during the rush.



Eureka Opera House



An hour east of Reno, the real journey begins in Fallon. I'm travelling with my spouse and we opt to drive without music, as we usually do, so we'll pay better attention to what surrounds us. We fuel up on coffee, knowing there won't be any roadside eateries during the two hour drive to Austin. As we circle the town, historic signs note former Pony Express territory and we encounter wild horses, mustangs likely, roaming grassy hills.

The route gives way to fields of cattle, with passing cars becoming less of an occurrence. Our two-lane highway grooves through salt flats the size of cities as we pass Salt Wells. With the sun shining overhead, those salt patches can sometimes look like mirages promising a crisp cool dip in a lake, but that's far from the case. It's dry out here, but the

view is incredible. The sky seems bigger, the valleys deeper, kissing mountains just in the distance.

We look toward Austin, with a population of less than two hundred, where we stop for a stretch and visit the Toiyabe Café for a coffee refill. Here we encounter a family ready to hike scenic trails, and two other drivers taking a break from the road. The woman at the counter chats with everyone in the small restaurant, and when she hands me my coffee she says, "Safe travels," knowing we're either coming or going.

After Austin, there's a series of switchbacks on our mountain road before the path opens up into big blue skies and more salt basins. Whatever traffic there was is obviously headed west, as our path eastward to Eureka is quiet and

## SUGGESTED LONELIEST ROAD ROUTE:



Nevada State Railroad Museum

### Day 1: Reno to Carson City & Dayton (50 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Nevada State Railroad Museum, Nevada State Museum, V&T Railroad, Carson River Canyon, Dayton Museum, Dayton State Park

### DAY 2: Dayton to Fernley & Fallon (80 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Lahontan State Recreation Area, Pyramid Lake, Fort Churchill, Grimes Point/Hidden Cave, Sand Mountain

### DAY 3: Fallon to Austin (179 km)

**Highlights:** St. George's Episcopal Church, Stokes Castle, Gridley Stone, Historic Pony Express and Overland Stagecoach sites

### DAY 4: Austin to Eureka & Ely (241 km)

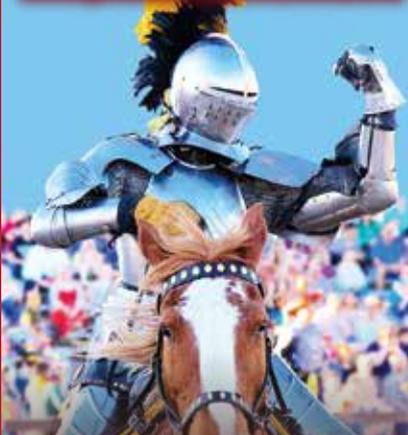
**HIGHLIGHTS:** Eureka Opera House, Eureka Sentinel Museum, Nevada Northern Railway, White Pine County Public Museum, Ward Charcoal Ovens State Park

### DAY 5: Ely to Baker/ Great Basin National Park (106 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Lehman Caves, Wheeler Peak

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The International Cafe and Bar in Austin

unaccompanied. Yet with Wildcat Peak and Summit Mountain in view, we take in the gorgeous natural scenery and, before we know it, an hour passes and we're pulling into our next destination.

"I love these old mining towns," my partner says, as we pull up for a gas refill. Eureka seems like a metropolis after Austin, with 600 residents and an opera house dating back to the 1880s. The main road is dotted with historic buildings, while the few side roads are populated with small museums and The Roost, a coffee shop that unfortunately

closes too early for our afternoon visit.

Eureka calls itself "The Friendliest Town on The Loneliest Road in America," yet our entire trip is met with friendly faces and welcoming communities. Our 10-hour round-trip detour along US 50, from Reno to Ely and back to Reno, is mostly quiet and sometimes there's a 30 minute gap between passing cars. But whenever we pause for a break, there always seems to be someone offering a friendly hello.

It turns out, this road isn't so lonely after all. ☺

Chris Moran/TravelNevada



# WELCOME TO THE ROAD EVEN LESS TRAVELLED

Nevada's Highway 50 is wide and open. But isn't that part of the fun? As it happens, the route is also one of the state's most scenic and historic corridors. You'll find that much of the surprising natural beauty and scenic splendor of Nevada remains unspoiled by crowds, yearning to be experienced and enjoyed...

*Maybe even all to yourself.*

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# ONE NIGHT IN MONUMENT VALLEY

BY JENNIFER HUBBERT

**O**N A TEPID EVENING IN late spring, I tilt my head skyward and watch the stars slowly pierce the night sky. The full moon is a welcome visitor, casting a silvery veil across Monument Valley's desert landscape. It's a breathless night and the wide-open space echoes with silence. I don't need to change my frequency to pick up on the Valley's desert vibes; this place emotes spirituality. I treasure the moment, knowing that tonight, we might be the only tourists in Monument Valley.

By day, Monument Valley attracts a steady flow of coach buses and Grand Circle road-trippers. Camera-toting crowds flock to the lip of the ridge that offers that iconic three-butte view. By dusk, the Valley empties of tourists and tucks in for the night. This is why, as I peer into the heavens, I am permeated with a sense of mischief; it's the feeling of sneaking into a pool after-hours or stowing away in a museum for the night. But we are not interlopers; we are paying guests. My friends and I are spending the evening in a *hogan* – a traditional, single-room Navajo dwelling.

From the outside, the hogan is something of a hardpacked dirt dome. Inside, four beds are dressed in colourful fleece blankets and woven art adorns the walls. A stove stands in the centre, its chimney stretching through a hole in the ceiling. Creature comforts like running water are noticeably absent. There's no electricity either – at least not in the

traditional sense. In the gentle glow of a kerosene lamp, I sift through a guestbook. The pages are filled with the words of people who describe their stay with spiritually-charged candor – a far cry from your typical TripAdvisor review.

We won't meet our host until the following day so we have little context with which to interpret the hogan. Despite this, I feel strangely enamored to it, though I can't say why. There are more questions than answers. Who built it? And for what purpose? For now, we sit beneath the stars, content to admire the supernatural setting that envelops us.

The next morning we meet Verna, a soft-spoken Navajo woman. We gather inside the hogan, where I hang on her every word as she explains the dwelling's significance.

"This particular hogan is a female hogan," she explains. "A round-shaped hogan represents the womb of Mother Earth. The chimney hole signifies the bellybutton and the door is the way out of our mother's womb. As her children, this is where she protects us from outside forces. This is where we get our rest: spiritually, emotionally and physically. We don't cover our floor because this is our connection to her."

Verna's words inspire an "aha" moment. I give my belly a small squeeze, secretively acknowledging the little light that grows in my own womb. Without a doubt, it's the reason I feel connected to this space.

When I ask her, Verna reports mostly positive guest experiences, but

## SUGGESTED HIGHWAY 60 ROUTE:

**DAY 1: Las Vegas to**

**Zion National Park** (270 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Hike Canyon Overlook Trail, Springdale

**DAY 2: Zion National Park**

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Zion Canyon, including Court of the Patriarchs, Zion Lodge, Weeping Rock, Big Bend & Temple of Sinawava

**DAY 3: Zion to Bryce Canyon**

**National Park** (138 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Red Canyon, Inspiration Point and Scenic Loop

**DAY 4: Bryce Canyon National Park & Highway 12** (130 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Bryce Canyon (sunrise), Navajo Loop Trail, Highway 12, Boulder Mountain

**DAY 5: Capitol Reef National Park**

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Grand Wash, Capitol Gorge

**DAY 6: Capitol Reef National Park to Moab** (232 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Arches National Park, Dead Horse Point, Canyonlands National Park

**DAY 7: Moab to Monument Valley** (241 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Monument Valley including East and West Mitten Buttes, Merrick Butte, Wildcat Trail

**DAY 8: Monument Valley to Lake Powell** (212 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Rainbow Bridge, Page Arizona

**DAY 9: Lake Powell to Kanab & the North Rim of Grand Canyon National Park** (177 km)

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Ponderosa Pines, Point Imperial, Bright Angel Point, Cape Royal

**DAY 10: Home!**

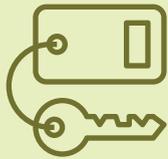
Find the full itinerary at [Utah.com](http://Utah.com)

she stresses that the hogan is not for everyone.

"We're not anything like a hotel," Verna answers with a laugh. "I once had some guests who didn't realize it was primitive. They left."

I'm hit with a small pang of hurt. Given my newly-realized personal connection and the splendid setting, it's hard for me to understand how this experience could be rebuked. Hotel amenities are the exact *opposite* of what made the hogan stay so special. Our visit was indelibly authentic; comfortable, *not* catered.

It was the most memorable night I didn't spend in a hotel. 🌟



## ALL-ACCESS VACATIONS

# Myrtle Beach: GRANDSTANDING FOR ALL THE RIGHT REASONS

BY LAUREN MONITZ

**T**HE EARLY MORNING AIR is chilly for late March and the water even colder. It's too frigid for traditional water-sports so we're exploring the salt marshes by kayak.

"Do you see that stretch of land out there? That's Huntington Beach State Park," our guide points off in the distance. "We're sandwiched between two protected wilderness areas, but you technically can't own water so this is just for everyone to enjoy."

The water idyllically reflects the early morning beams, causing a glassy, urethral halo as it laps at the shore. Waterfowl playfully dip and dive, breaking the rhythmic ripples, completely unphased by us humans. I briefly debate whether they were doing an elaborate mating ritual or simply hunting for breakfast; likely, they're hungry like me. Either way, they are moving too fast to catch them on camera. After a few blurry snaps, I give up and put the phone down, intently watching their interaction.

The turn to get here was a little pull off

from the highway that looked like nothing more than deep woods. I had little confidence in Google, but still, I followed the instructions, driving right up to the water's edge and Black River Outdoors' van was waiting like promised.

"Is it safe to park here?" I asked.

"When you're with us," they laughed.

They strategically schedule their tours throughout the day, timed to the tides. Half the time, the water levels are so high the tiny strip of sand doesn't even exist. Anyone breezing by would be none the wiser, making this place feel that much more like a well-kept secret.

The area is called Murrells Inlet, a sleepy fishing village just 16 kilometres from the hustle and bustle of the boardwalk. "When people say Myrtle Beach, they're generally referencing the Grand Strand, but the area actually runs from the North Carolina border 35 miles south to Winyah Bay," said Anna Lovell of Brookgreen Gardens. "More often than not, they're picturing the beach, golf courses and amusement parks, but in reality, each community has its own unique set of things to do."

"Even in the middle of the summer,

it's possible to find a quiet spot for yourself, whether that's the woods or the beach as long as you know where to look," added Ann Wilson, interpretive ranger at Myrtle Beach State Park.

A haven for naturalists, Murrells Inlet boasts both saltwater and freshwater pursuits. Pack a picnic to enjoy under the Spanish moss of Wacca Wache Marina or get lost under the live twisting oaks at Brookgreen Gardens. The site is home to the largest outdoor sculpture garden in the world with a visitor's centre that's keen on telling you absolutely everything about the area's antebellum history. While I arrived in a harried state keen on capturing a few photos and heading on my way, it didn't take long to see that things move at a slower pace around here. The volunteers are so proud of their garden, it would simply break their heart if visitors were not to listen to their stories.

You can ride a pontoon boat ride across the rice fields, dance through the butterfly gardens or embrace the popular pastime of porch (bench) sitting with a sweet tea. The gardens are one of a few places in the U.S. to have earned accreditation from the American Alliance

of Museums, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, as well as being designated a National Historic Landmark and on the National Register of Historic Places.

Feeling famished from the midday sun, I politely excuse myself from the history lesson and head up the road to Wicked Tuna. The restaurant is one of just a handful in the country to offer “hook-to-plate” cuisine, meaning they employ their own fishermen to reel in the day’s fresh catch. Their bounty is served a number of ways from raw sushi to grilled. Gluttonously devouring a completely overindulgent lobster lunch, I stare out at the choppy waves as a little sigh of contentment slipped out.

Yeah, I could snowbird here.

Myrtle Beach has a lot of stereotypes associated with it from spring break destination to mini golf capital of the world. But venture beyond the discount beachwear and diners and you’ll discover a world that extends well beyond the boardwalk. Life’s less complicated here, which means it’s high time to pay a visit to low country. 📍

## Where to Go From Here

**MURRELLS INLET:** Part of a larger conglomerate of coastal Carolina cities, the Myrtle Beach area encompasses 14 cities and towns, one of the standouts being Murrells Inlet. You may opt to parasail, ride a banana boat or drive a jet ski, or perhaps you’d rather just eat your heart out here; it is now



widely known as the “Seafood Capital of South Carolina,” after all.

**SOCASTEE:** Socastee is home to Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge and one of the state’s 10 swing bridges, which was originally built in 1935. T.I.G.E.R.S. Myrtle Beach Safari is another popular attraction in the area – a world-renowned wildlife preserve, home to more than 130 endangered animals.

**PAWLEYS ISLAND:** A barrier island separated from the mainland by a salt marsh that also happens to be one of the oldest resort towns on the East Coast, Pawleys Island has a history that dates back to the 1700s. Soak in the barefoot, laid-back vibe while enjoying the beach and sand dunes, going out on

the water or, if you dare, participating in a local ghost tour.

**ATLANTIC BEACH:** Known as the “Black Pearl,” Atlantic Beach once a popular getaway for African-Americans pre-Jim Crowe era. It was the first (and still is) the only black-owned oceanfront town in the world.



**OTHER NEARBY ESCAPES:** Woods Bay State Park in

Olanta and Lee State Park in Bishopville are two lesser-known natural areas with exceptional wildlife viewing opportunities. Whether it’s a trip to the city for shopping and lunch on King Street or a jaunt along the pier, a visit to Folly Beach in Charleston is another easy 90-minute drive. You could also get to Wilmington on a scenic drive along the coast. Further afield, Columbia offers a spot of culture. Or, hightail it to Asheville if the mountains are calling. Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Savannah and Charlotte are also easy weekend trips within five-hours’ drive time.

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Green Bay Packers Hall of Fame

Getaway to, and from,

# GREEN BAY

BY SARAH STAPLES

**L**AMBEAU FIELD, THE HOME of the Green Bay Packers, soars up seemingly out of nowhere, imposing in green steel. The stadium occupies several blocks of an entertainment district and, for maximum contrast, is surrounded by squat, compact homes of an earlier industrial age. It offers seating for 81,441 – four-fifths of the population of Green Bay, which was founded by French-Canadian fur traders along Lake Michigan. Inside is an atrium that’s basically a wall of sunlight refracted through glass five storeys high, a massive gift shop, and a museum that tells how the Packers came to be, in 1919.

By then, Green Bay had grown rich from meatpacking and paper-milling. It was “the toilet paper capital of the world,” a rival to neighbouring

Milwaukee, “the machine shop of the world.” Football was a factory worker’s release valve. “Games often degenerated into brutal, bloody contests,” one display reads, “but Green Bay embraced the game like no other, maybe because of its own reputation as a hard-living, hardscrabble town.”

Although in the last half-century, industrial hubs like Green Bay and Milwaukee have gone through hard times, it never stopped the Packers. They’ve won 13 league championships and four Super Bowls so far. They’re the only NFL team owned by shareholders in a public, non-profit corporation. Let’s think about that for a moment: the team with the most wins in NFL history doesn’t belong to some billionaire or big corporation, but to 360,760 badass fans from the smallest city in the league, and across the blue-collar Midwest. The lesson

here is that Wisconsinites punch above their weight, often in unexpected ways.

Green Bay isn’t just an emotional compass for the state; it’s a geographic midpoint from which tourists can easily pivot north on weekend getaways to Door County, Wisconsin’s answer to Cape Cod, or south to the largest city, Milwaukee.

Bucking culinary tradition and the mostly male kitchen culture, women are opening some of Milwaukee’s best restaurants – Lisa Kirkpatrick’s Goodkind, Nell Benton’s National Café, Peggy Magister’s Crazy Water, A.J. Dixon’s Lazy Susan, to name a few.

On the hunt for something other than German or Polish brats washed down with Miller on tap, I stumble on Tandem, where chef-owner Caitlin Cullen lays out spicy Memphis fried chicken from her southern homestyle menu. The next day, it’s lunch at Bavette, whose chef (and Cullen’s former boss and mentor) is two-time James Beard nominee Karen Bell. Her restaurant-cum-butcher shop takes a whole-animal approach, so I order the signature Reuben sandwich made with velvety-smooth beef tongue instead of traditional corned beef.

Bavette is in the trendy Third Ward; from there, I follow the Milwaukee River’s lengthy boardwalk, known as “River-



Watching boats on the Milwaukee River

walk," through historic neighbourhoods dotted with tourist attractions (such as the Milwaukee Public Market, Usinger's Sausages, and various breweries).

Along a different waterway, the Menomonee River, there's a museum dedicated to one of the city's enduring employers, Harley-Davidson. It's "Bike Night," a show-and-shine featuring live music, and the parking lot is jammed with choppers. Attendees are rocking studded black leathers for an LGBTQ-themed PrideFest concert – not what I'd instantly associate with rough-and-tumble biker culture, but that's the beauty of this place. "People may have one image of Harley-Davidson in their heads, of burly bikers, this sort of thing," company PR representative Tim McCormick explains, "but the reality is, bikers are people from all walks of life who enjoy life from behind the bars of a Harley."

The highway to Door County climbs a narrow peninsula separating the waters of Green Bay from the rest of Lake Michigan. It takes less than a two-hour drive to get there, through a quilt-style patchwork of dairy farms – longer, if you pause midway at the Kohler Design Center in the factory town of Kohler, WI. Decades

before Disney Imagineers envisioned "Celebration, Florida" as a model Small-Town USA, John Michael Kohler had already immigrated from Austria to rural Wisconsin, invented the first enameled bathtub, founded Kohler Co., and designed the town of Kohler as his own version of the American Dream; it's been the headquarters of the kitchen-and-bath juggernaut since 1900.

The town enforces a strict speed limit, and I cruise slowly past immaculate front lawns leading to expansive Craftsman homes. These are interspersed neatly with parks, schools, police and fire departments, a mall, and The American Club, one of Kohler Co.'s handful of luxury hotels (another is Lodge Kohler, the best hotel and spa in Green Bay).

Door County turns out to be a destination to putter around. I drive from one whitewashed lakeside village to the next, enjoying simple pleasures – art galleries, a classic drive-in movie theatre and roadside stands brimming with cheese curds, cherry pies and locally-grown lavender. Near Ephraim, I let ice cream slide down my chin while checking out sailboats in the harbour. In Sister Bay, I photograph goats that spend summers munching lazily on the grassy roof of Al Johnson's Swedish Restaurant.

An annual Lighthouse Festival is in full swing, so I continue eastward across the peninsula to Cana Island Lighthouse. From its 1800s observation deck, Lake Michigan appears transformed: not the still blue of the bayside, but a white-tipped turquoise churn. Gulls are pressing their bodies into a strong headwind, practically at a standstill in flight. It reminds me of a Harley at the museum that had been lost in Japan's 2011 tsunami: the bike drifted across the Pacific, eventually washing ashore on British Columbia's Graham Island. This water feels like an ocean, too. And somewhere out there, not too far, is home. ✪

### Where to Go From Here

**DOOR COUNTY:** To emphasize our love for it, Door County is home to state parks with stunning views including Peninsula State Park and Whitefish Dunes. Adjacent to Cave Point County Park, Whitefish Bay preserves the largest and most significant sand dunes in Wisconsin. Peninsula State Park is home to high bluffs and sandy beaches, an 1860s lighthouse, a challenging 18-hole golf course, and a professional summer theater. Don't miss the Door County Wine Trail, featuring eight distinct wineries, each serving up unique wines.

**SHEBOYGAN:** Kohler-Andrae State Park in Sheboygan is the home to majestic sand dunes, miles of golden beach and beautiful Lake Michigan water. The park is one of the last nature preserves along the Lake Michigan shore and is open for everyone to explore and enjoy. Plus, one of the greatest championship courses in the U.S., the Straits at Whistling Straits, is located here.

**MARINETTE:** Known as the "Waterfalls Capitol of Wisconsin," Marinette County features 14 waterfalls along the Pike, Peshtigo, Thunder and Menominee rivers. In fact, no other Wisconsin river, based on length, has more or bigger rapids than the Peshtigo. Whitewater rafting on the Peshtigo and Menominee rivers is guaranteed to get your heart rate up. Consider taking along a picnic basket and enjoying a leisurely lunch alongside Marinette's rushing waters.

**MANITOWOC:** The Wisconsin Maritime Museum, a Smithsonian Affiliated museum, is the largest maritime museum on the Great Lakes. This museum offers the opportunity to operate a real steam engine, time-travel back to a 19th century shipbuilding town and let kids sail their own boat in the Children's Waterways room. Moored along the Manitowoc River, adjacent to the Wisconsin Maritime Museum, is the World War II submarine USS Cobia. The Cobia is the nation's most fully-restored WWII submarine and home to the oldest working radar in the world.

# 300 miles & plenty in between: HOUSTON & LAFAYETTE



## PART 1: HOUSTON BY DOUG O'NEILL

### EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN

distinct travel DNA; an innate, internal wiring that kicks into gear whenever we travel and which ultimately determines how we explore a new destination. My travel DNA baffles my friends. On the one hand, I'm a small-town country boy at heart (I grew up in a rural hamlet of 158 people) so I invariably seek out a down-home, unfussy experience when travelling – but at the same time I'm also addicted to the cosmopolitan trappings of big city living (which is why I live smack downtown in the largest city in Canada.) That's how I'm wired. There's no fighting it.

Not every destination satisfies my double-sided travel DNA – but Houston delivered on both counts. I simply chose to explore two very distinct neighbourhoods: River Oaks District and Houston Heights.

### RIVER OAKS DISTRICT

Noon is a respectable (enough) time for a cocktail, so my third day in Houston found me nursing a Revolver Julep (bourbon, turbinado syrup and mint) in the lobby bar at the hip Hotel Derek, located in the tiny River Oaks District of Houston. For travellers with sophisticated tastes – in food or fashion – who also like urbane glam and glitter, this neighbourhood nails it. I spotted Cartier, Dior, Hermes and Tom Ford everywhere

I looked at River Oaks Shopping Centre – where I also found the award-winning Sicily-inspired eatery, La Griglia Restaurant. And of course there's the iconic Galleria Mall – the fourth-largest shopping centre in the U.S.: the 400 shops include Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom, Tiffany & Co. and Gucci. My favourite cultural hot spot in River Oaks? The 80-year-old Landmarks River Oaks Theatre, which has retained its baroque touches of red velvet curtains and ornate architecture. River Oaks is also where I enjoyed my favourite Asian meal in Houston: Mid-day dum sum at the contemporary-styled upscale Yauatcha tea house.

### HOUSTON HEIGHTS

When my Uber driver suggested the Porch Swing Pub, I knew right away that Houston Heights would give me that down-home, casual, relaxed vibe I needed. The Heights, incorporated into the city of Houston in 1918, still feels like a separate village. My immediate impressions: casual dining, thrift shops, antique stores, funky architecture and mom-and-pop shops – with an innovative edge. Take 14 Pews, for example.

What was once known as “the old white wooden church down the street” is now a “microcinema,” screening documentaries and independent films for small crowds. Shopping is a tad different from River Oaks. Time your Houston Heights

visit for the First Saturday Arts Market where you can pick your way through crafts, artwork and plants. Looking to bed down for the night? The most popular place to stay is Sara's Bed & Breakfast, a renovated 12-room Queen Anne's Mansion from the 1800s. While TLC in River Oaks could mean a massage or pedicure, here in the Heights your best bet is Bird's Barbershop, which provides “affordable high-quality haircuts with a free Shiner beer thrown in as a bonus.” Can't beat that. On the food front, chow down at Onion Creek, which proudly bills itself as “The Houston Heights Original Bad Ass Since 2002.”

Works for me.

### Where to Go From Here

**GALVESTON:** Just a hop, skip and a jump from Houston lies an island boasting 51 kilometres of sandy beachfront. But perhaps what Galveston is most known for is its unique historical architecture, with Bishop's Palace being the crown jewel. Make sure you book a tour in advance, as the mansion draws large crowds for daily tours.

**SUGAR LAND:** If you want to escape the downtown bustle of Houston but retain that Texan charm, give Sugar Land a try. In just 20 minutes, you can find a wide variety of family-friendly activities. Sugar Land Town Square will dazzle with dining options like Fish City Grill, where you can feast on Southern-style seafood – after you've shopped till you've dropped. Grab a pillow and blanket and snuggle up in the plaza with Movies Under the Moon.

**THE WOODLANDS:** Only 30 minutes north of Houston lies a town nestled among 28,000 acres of forest preserve – The Woodlands. But don't let the name fool you; The Woodlands is home to award-winning restaurants, upscale shopping and a rowdy nightlife.

**AUSTIN:** If you're looking for a bit more of a road trip – two hours and 30 minutes, to be exact – Austin is the city for you. Lady Bird Lake is an outdoor playground with biking and hiking trails abound, plus stand-up-paddleboards are available for rent. Or, simply pick a venue and enjoy the live music scene this Texas town is known for.

**SAN ANTONIO:** Drive with the windows down to San Antonio and you'll reap the rewards of a city where culture and history intersect. The Alamo is the most popular destination for visitors – and for good reason. Architecture lovers and history buffs alike will revel in seeing the battlefield as it was in 1836. Find yourself transported to Mexico at El Mercado, a market square bursting with fresh produce and trinkets to take home.

## PART 2: LAFAYETTE BY JILL GLEESON



Cajun culture

### IT'S A SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT

Vermilionville, Lafayette, Louisiana's folklife park. The attraction replicates an early Cajun village, with seven homes dating to between 1765 and 1890 and gifted artisans demonstrating the crafts of the place and time, like woodworking and sewing. It all provides a fascinating peek at the workaday lives of the Acadians deported during The Great Expulsion who settled in the area.

But I can't give it the attention it deserves. After all, there's a Bal du Dimanche (Sunday dance) happening at Vermilionville's performance center.

The barn-like space is hot, noisy and packed with people. Most are two-stepping around the dance floor. The band, including an accordionist and a fiddler, is playing propulsively, as their vocalist warbles just as fervently in French. Everyone who isn't dancing is hooting, hollering and stamping their feet in time with the music.

I watch the ebullient scene open-mouthed, realizing that although most of Vermilionville's visitors must be tourists like me, those inside this hall are largely local folk. They move with too much joyous assurance to be anything else. This isn't a reproduction of Cajun culture, but instead a living, vibrant example of it; so vibrant, in fact, that I'm quickly pulled onto the dance floor, where I laugh out loud as I fumble my way through a Cajun waltz.

Vermilionville isn't an anomaly. Lafayette, the fourth-largest city in Louisiana, is in effect the capital of Acadiana, or Cajun Country, a place where the importance of fine food, great music and serious fun has been immortalized with the famed exclamation, "laissez les bon temps rouler!"

If you're a foodie, it's easy to let the good times roll in Lafayette, which has more restaurants per capita than New Orleans. What's difficult is choosing where to dine. But at least Prejean's, which has been dishing out legendary Cajun cuisine for almost four decades, is a no-brainer. So is my order: the "Gold Medal" crawfish étouffée. It's made the right way – spicy with cayenne pepper, dense with crawfish – and served with perfectly sticky white rice.

There's live Cajun music every evening at Prejean's, although I discover the next night that the best establishment for dancing, drinking and dining in Lafayette is Randol's Restaurant and Cajun Dancehall. It's a homey place, about as old as Prejean's, boasting an enormous dance floor and epic platters of fresh crawfish, boiled or fried.

After tackling one of the platters with my friends, I have just enough energy to drag myself to the Blue Moon Saloon, a beloved honky tonk distinguished by its funky, open-air warren of rooms. There isn't a Cajun band playing on this night, but the roots rock I hear is plenty fine, and so is the friendly, energetic crowd.

There is much to experience in Lafayette that doesn't have a thing to do with Cajun culture – the historic Borden's Ice Cream Shoppe is a great stop on a sultry Louisiana day. But the city's biggest charms comes courtesy of the Cajuns, who, of course, come courtesy of Canada.

### Where to Go From Here

**LAKE CHARLES:** Lake Charles offers up a unique blend of Southern hospitality, mixed with Cajun culture. If you're looking to get your boogie on, jive to a local dance hall for authentic two-stepping. Delight in the county's natural beauty on the Creole Nature Trail, taking in the sight of a marshland teeming with life including: alligators, 400 species of birds and abundant fishing.

**BATON ROUGE:** A quick one-hour jaunt from Lafayette, Baton Rouge is filled to the brim with gothic architecture, African-American art and historic plantations. Find the South's largest standing antebellum mansion, Nottoway, where you can rest your head and enjoy a fine dining experience. Delight in year-round Red Stick Farmers Market, a vibrant scene of seasonal veggies, delectable homemade pies, artisan bread and native plants.

**ALEXANDRIA:** Follow the Red River and you'll stumble across the city known as Alexandria. Delve into the past at the Louisiana History Museum or find yourself enchanted with the city's fine arts scene. A robust sportsman's culture is on full display between annual bass tournaments and boat tours, highlighting the river's key role in shaping the state.

**HOUMA:** Houma is not only fun to say, but is a city teeming with stunning views of the bayou. Start your tour at the Bayou Terrebonne Waterlife Museum that preserves and promotes seafood and water transportation industries. The museum features a charming back porch overlooking the serene bayou-side park where you'll want to linger a little longer. Southdown Plantation House is a 19th-century sugar manor house, home of the Minor family who once saved Louisiana's sugar industry.

**MONROE:** Relish the local's favourite craft beer and wine, explore hardwood forests and hear the tale of the man who first bottled Coca-Cola in Monroe. For adult fun, visit the Ouachita Brewing Company for their specialty drink, a Bourbon Barrel Stoute, titled Uncle Matt's Time Travel Sauce. Entertainment for kids of all ages can be found at the Excalibur Family Fun Center featuring a rock wall, old-school arcade games and two go-kart tracks to pump your adrenaline. ☼



# PACK YOUR BAGS

Whatever the theme of your next trip to the U.S., *Canadian Traveller* has a few ideas for what you should take with you on the journey

BY MEGAN HONAN



## BE INSPIRED:

Regardless of your destination, you'll want to chase and capture those moments that inspire. Bring along the **Nikon D7500** as your travel companion, shooting in 4K Ultra HD video and featuring top-tier image quality. This mighty camera is lightweight, making it ideal for sightseeing and packing. Visit [en.nikon.ca](http://en.nikon.ca) for the body-only configuration for \$1,699.95.

## BEACH VACATION:

Enjoy the sun, sand and views of the ocean lounging from your **Dock and Bay Cabana Beach Towel**. Available in a rainbow of pastels, this microfiber towel dries quickly after enjoying a dip in the water. It's also made to prevent sand from sticking, leaving more sand at the beach for castles. Better yet, its compact size will leave plenty of room in the suitcase. Get it at [dockandbay.com](http://dockandbay.com) for \$25.

## NATURE & OUTDOORS:

Enjoy the great outdoors without sacrificing style. **Tilley's Hiker's Hat** is ready for the trail with features like certified UPF 50+ sun protection and cooling material to break the mid-day heat. A wide brim will protect you from unforeseen rain showers, and the brim loop allows you to clip it on your bag to maintain its durable shape. Purchase it at [Tilley.com](http://Tilley.com) for \$115.

## CITY ESCAPES:

If you're in the market for the perfect duffel bag to accompany your next jaunt to the city, try **Herschel's Strand Duffel Sprout**. With a highly versatile design featuring a shoulder strap and top handles, you'll be ready for anything. Plus, it comes in a multitude of colours to go with your city slicker wardrobe. Find it for \$99.99 at [Herschel.ca](http://Herschel.ca).

## HISTORY, ARTS & CULTURE:

Don't miss a thing on your next journey with **Historypin**, an interactive mapping platform that curates and structures stories to bring communities together. Explore by either searching for a specific neighbourhood or discovering brilliant history collections created by locals. Prepare for your next trip by finding the history guide of your chosen city at [historypin.org](http://historypin.org) for free access.

## ROAD TRIP:

The bags are packed and you're ready to hit the great open road, but not without a killer pair of sunglasses. **Serengetti's** classic aviators, the Carrara, are perfect for trippin' to the mountain, desert or beach. Find them at your nearest optometrist; prices vary.

## ALL-ACCESS VACATIONS:

Since you're always on the move, take care of your feet and look good doing it. The **Keen Elsa II Crochet Sneakers** are perfect for taking in the sights with metatomical footbed cushions, allowing you to see more. Plus, the breathable mesh guarantees your feet will stay cool and comfortable all day long. Men should opt for the **Glenhaven**. Discover your dream travel sneaker at [keenfootwear.com](http://keenfootwear.com) for \$100-\$150.

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