

Magnificent seven: classic American road trips

From New England to the Pacific, drive through some of the US's most stunning scenery

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Drive time ... Explore the States by road. Photograph: Image Source/Corbis

Going-to-the Sun road, Montana

A thin strip of tarmac that snakes across one of the most rugged corners of the Rockies, the Going-to-the-Sun road carves through solid rock at the heart of the breathtaking Glacier national park. Climbing up between the Great Plains on the east and pristine forests around Lake McDonald in the west, with more than 15 "scenic viewpoint" lay-bys on its 50-odd miles, it takes you as close to heaven as one can get in a car. Glacier national park has three grand but rustic hotels that evoke the romantic 1920s heyday of the railroads, with opulent dining rooms and five-foot-wide, 75-foot-tall fir trees holding up the roof.

Jamie Jensen, author of Road Trip USA: Cross-Country Adventures on America's Two-Lane Highways

The Old Spanish Trail, Texas

If your American road trip is inspired by the wild west, the desert southwest is the place for you. Head out from historic San Antonio and make your way to the existential emptiness of Big Bend national park on the Texas-Mexico borderlands. Made famous by films including No Country for Old Men, this sun-burned landscape exerts a fascinating draw, best experienced in air-conditioned comfort, cruising down Highway 90, the "Old Spanish Trail". The landscape stays stunningly harsh all the way across to the Apache Indian homelands of southern Arizona, where the mining camp-cum-artists' community of Bisbee adds another take on this classic American melange. **JJ**

Highway 61, Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico

Also known as the Great River Road, Highway 61 runs along the banks of Mississippi, offering a full-spectrum slice of just about any aspect of American culture: food, fun, music, literature – you name it. In the north, the choices are more literary (Mark Twain and Laura Ingalls Wilder both lived and wrote about life along the riverside). Head downstream from St Louis, and things get tastier: the music gets bluesier, and the food more exciting, from smoky barbecue to spicy Cajun. By the time you hit New Orleans, you'll have earned yourself a PhD in American Studies. **JJ**

Route 100, Vermont

All your picture-postcard impressions of rural New England – village greens, white-steeped wooden church spires and roadside diners – can be enjoyed along Vermont's Route 100, which runs the length of the Green Mountains. It's a leisurely cruise, winding over covered bridges and past meadows, and it parallels two of the state's great hiking trails, the Long Trail and Appalachian Trail, offering easy access to waterfalls, ancient forests and mountain scenery, as well as the pastoral beauty of Granville Gulf, where Moss Glen Falls drops into the Mad river. Continuing south towards Massachusetts, the towns get bigger and you can tuck into pancakes coated in thick maple syrup, roast dinners and slabs of apple pie served up at homespun cafes and classic stainless steel-sided diners. **JJ**

Strait of Juan de Fuca Highway, Washington state

With bald eagles above and grey whales in the water a few hundred metres away, the Strait of Juan de Fuca highway in Washington offers one of the best drives in the Pacific northwest, stretching 60 miles from Port Angeles out to Neah Bay. Visitors can stop to climb the Pysht Forestry Trail, then spend the night at the nearby Winter Summer Inn B&B in Clallam Bay (doubles from \$85 B&B).

Max Grinnell, contributor to *The Rough Guide to the USA* (roughguides.com, £16.99)

Blue Ridge Parkway, North Carolina to Virginia

Wandering for almost 500 miles along the Blue Ridge mountain chain from the Great Smoky Mountains national park in North Carolina to the Shenandoah national park in Virginia, this is a trip to take over several days. Be sure to stop in the Southern Highland Folk Art Center for hands-on demonstrations, and make a turn off the parkway to Asheville for fried green tomatoes and goat's cheese grits at the Tupelo Honey Cafe, to prepare you for the next leg. **MG**

North shore scenic drive, Lake Superior

From a formal faux-English style mansion to a precariously perched lighthouse, the north shore has the kind of attractions that make driving along the world's largest freshwater lake even more enjoyable. The 140-mile drive starts in Duluth, Minnesota, and moves north to the tiny town of Grand Portage, with outstanding views of the craggy shoreline and waterfalls along the way. Save time for Grand Portage state park which has Minnesota's highest waterfall. **MG**