



AUNZ REPORT

MARCH 2026

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ABOUT TSUSA

Global Partner Programming

Visitation to the USA. February 2026 i-94 arrival data (released March)

Australia:

- 59,822 arrivals in February, down -2% YoY, a strong improvement on January's -12% decline, driven in large part by demand for the NRL games played in Las Vegas.
- Australia ranked 10th among long-haul markets for the month.

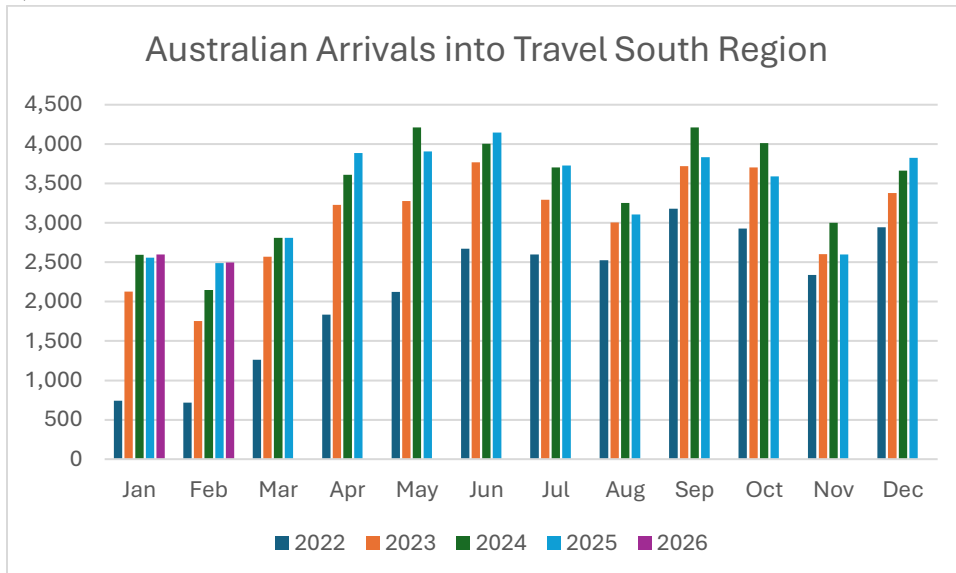
Ports of Entry – Australia to the USA:

- Texas continues to outperform other regions on a year-on-year basis, supported by increased airlift, comparatively stronger value, and ongoing interest in cowboy and Western culture.

Port of entry	December arrivals	YOY Difference
California	32,049	-2%
Hawaii	5,268	-22%
New York	3,012	-11%
Texas	9,239	18%
Florida	2,064	-16%
All other ports	8,190	-1%

First intended address – Travel South

- 2,496 Australians listed a Travel South state as their first intended address in February flat YoY.





New Zealand:

- 8,859 arrivals in February, down 43% YoY. This sharp decline reflects a strong comparison period last year, when visitation was boosted by the inclusion of the Warriors in the Las Vegas NRL fixtures. With no New Zealand teams participating this year, demand has normalized, highlighting a broader softening trend out of the NZ market.

The impact of the NRL games in Las Vegas:

12,645 Australians listed Las Vegas as their first intended address in February, up 32% YoY. This is a record result and sits well above the typical monthly average of ~3,300, highlighting the outsized impact of the event.

Now in its third consecutive year in Las Vegas, the National Rugby League (NRL) has firmly established itself as a major international drawcard. As one of Australia’s most popular sporting codes, it commands a highly engaged fan base willing to travel long-haul for marquee, once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Importantly, this reinforces that for milestone sporting events, Australian travelers are less sensitive to cost or broader external factors, because the experience itself drives demand. Airlines responded to this surge with additional capacity, including dedicated services to support the event.

The sustained success of the NRL in Las Vegas is also translating into longer-term aviation confidence, with Qantas announcing its first-ever direct flights to Las Vegas, signaling a structural shift in access that will support ongoing growth beyond event-led travel.

Global Travel Demand from Australia.

January 2026 data has been released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) showing where returning residents spent most time abroad.

The top 10 countries as follows:

- Value, close to home, and VFR ties driving demand for NZ, Japan, India, Vietnam and China.
- USA has slipped in rankings since 2019 being surpassed by Japan, China and India.
- Thailand has lost market share to Vietnam, as low-cost carrier VietJet has increased airlift to Vietnam driving demand and effectively positioning Vietnam as the alternate to Thailand.

Rank	Country	January Visits	Percentage growth YOY
1	New Zealand	205,710	2%
2	Indonesia	164,730	-4%
3	Japan	159,090	17%
4	India	133,580	5%
5	China	120,490	36%
6	USA	79,390	-7%
7	UK	76,250	3%
8	Vietnam	72,620	23%
9	Thailand	72,180	-10%
10	Philippines	50,690	9%





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Travel South Mission Planning
- April Newsletter
- International Showcase Invites
- Newcastle training event for May
- Global Week Media and Creators coordination, deliverables and contracts
- Innovation Challenge
- March Social Content





		Q1 TOTAL	Q2 TOTAL	Jan	Feb	Mar
9 partners AL/KY/LA /MS/MO/ NC/SC/TN /ROTS	Australia					
	Trade					
	Trade Meetings/Trainings	69	178	7	8	16
	Number of Agents Trained	114	226	0	16	12
	Travel Trade Newsletter Recipient	4068	15,920	3811	3788	3770
	Trade Newsletter Open Rate	28.37%	27.27%	25.85%	26.40%	39.42%
	Managed Media					
	Media Meetings	15	39	6	23	6
	Total number of articles published	38	36	5	7	15
	Impressions	41,719,406	6,136,659	1,408,038	8,994,902	7,863,647
	PR Newsletter Recipient	364	1,057	346	363	362
	PR Newsletter Open Rate	47.80%	43.82%	49%	45.18%	47.51%
	Social Posts					
	Facebook Page					
	Followers	9,200	9,200	9,192	9,200	9,161
	Likes	9,200	27,600	9,192	9,200	9,161
	Facebook Posts					
	Reach	515	1,113	135,600	35,600	607
	Views	1,073	2,069	47,004	20,800	391
	Likes	8	14	0	0	0
	Comments	0	0	0	0	0
	Shares	0	0	0	0	0
	Instagram					





Reach	21	18	9,300	2,300	8
Views	527	762	24,600	4,500	44
Followers	18	32	25	26	26
Likes	25	20	5	7	6
Comments	0	0	0	0	0
Shares	0	0	0	0	0





II. COMMUNICATIONS & PR

- Global Week Media and Creators coordination
- Innovation Challenge
- March Social Content
- Earned media [Coverage Book](#)
- Global Market Media Place 25 media [Coverage Book](#)





COVERAGE:

The New Zealand Herald

32 | Tuesday, March 17, 2020

travel

TRAVEL HOT TAKES

I'm not skipping the US

In this week's Travel Hot Take, travel writer Ash Jurberg shares why the US is still on his list of favourite travel destinations

"I love all my guests," Nino tells me, topping up my glass with homemade limoncello. "But I love the ones from far away even more." He pulls up a chair beside me at his bed and breakfast in Savannah, Georgia, his dog settling at his feet. Most of his guests are Americans. The occasional European. Getting someone from the other side of the world has made his evening, and he wants to hear everything about our lives.

Across Australia and New Zealand, there's growing hesitancy around US travel. People are choosing Japan or Europe instead. Waiting for a different political climate. Back home, people don't understand why I'd choose to visit America when there are so many other options. I've travelled to 110 countries and spent years running a tourism business. I've seen this pattern before. Governments make decisions that tank a destination's reputation. Meanwhile, people relying on tourists still show up for work, hoping someone books. The people who lose out aren't the politicians. It's the tour guide who depends on the summer season. The Broadway dancer whose show sells fewer seats when tourists stay away. The B&B owner who still has to pay their mortgage.

I'll admit I'm a little biased. My wife is American. But I've been to the US plenty of times without her, and the welcome is the same. For anyone hesitant about the border, I understand. In 2022, jet-lagged and travelling with my family, I made a sarcastic remark to a border agent. He escorted my teenagers and me to a processing room where we waited for more than an hour. It was stressful and humbling. My wife sailed through on her US passport while we sat there, unable to contact her.

Every entry since has been smooth. When I visited LA in June last year, solo, I tried the new Mobile Passport Control (MPC) app. It is available for Australian and New Zealand passport holders travelling on an electronic system for travel authorisation (Eata). I downloaded it before flying, connected to airport Wi-Fi after landing, and entered the MPC queue. There was only one person ahead of me. The agent smiled, checked my phone, and welcomed me in. Under two minutes from queue to clearance.

My advice? Get your data early, have your accommodation and return flight details ready, download the MPC app, and don't be a smart-arse. Something my wife reminds me of regularly.

Getting in is the part people worry about. What happens after is the part they're missing. That same trip, my cousin and I took a road trip through Alaska. Everywhere we went, we were welcomed like locals by seasonal workers who make Alaska home each summer. Katia, a kayaking guide we'd just met, invited us to a midnight beach bonfire on the summer solstice. The midnights sun hung low on the horizon while



From top, Nino's homemade limoncello and warm welcome in Savannah made the trip unforgettable, paddling among glaciers in Alaska – the kind of moment that makes travel worthwhile, from Broadway to deep-dish pizza. Chicago greets every visitor who shows up. Photos / Unplash, supplied

we sat around the fire swapping stories. We talked about favourite trails, wildlife encounters, the best fishing spots. Everything except politics. In the small town of Cody, Wyoming, I spent a July 4 celebration drinking with locals wearing T-shirts supporting candidates I don't agree with. We talked about Yellowstone National Park, where I'd just spent three days. Which trails had the best wildlife. Whether I'd seen wolves. Later at the Cody Rodeo, a bloke in a red cap sitting beside me explained rodeo rules for two hours. The difference between bareback and saddle bronc, how scoring works, and which riders to watch. Politics never came up.

Back in Savannah, Nino prepares a feast each morning and tells us how to make the most of our time in his town. He wants us to love his city the way he does. We spend an hour hearing his stories about the neighbourhood, the restaurants locals actually eat at, which historic



homes to visit. His enthusiasm is genuine. It's his livelihood, but it's also his home, and he wants us to see it properly.

I travel to countries with governments I disagree with. Everyone does. I was in China four months ago on a walking tour with a guide who used to work for TikTok. She shared her views about the company and the Government. She didn't agree with either, but she was still proud of her city and glad we'd come.

You don't take responsibility for everything your Government does. Neither do I. We still travel to countries with policies we find troubling. We separate the people from the politics when it suits us. Why not do the same with America? I'll be back in the US later this year. Not because of the politics. Because of Nino, Katia, my rodeo friend, and the countless others like them who just want to share their country.



ESCAPE

Busting Southern myths

Kirk Owers finds America's many-layered South isn't quite as he thought

America's South is broadly familiar to outsiders based on a set of well-worn stereotypes. Many perceptions are positive: gracious hospitality, genre-defining music, community values and a fondness for strong cocktails and mouth-watering Creole food. But its historical dark side is as well-known and includes centuries of slavery and segregation, a bloody Civil War and the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan.

So when I was invited to Louisiana, Tennessee, and Mississippi on a recent press trip, I was eager but had concerns. Like many outsiders, my perceptions have largely been shaped by news headlines, pop culture and second-hand narratives. Also – how to say this? – I had a vague unease that the conservative South's ideation of the past might make it starkly different from modern Australia.

Clearing customs in New Orleans was a breeze. No queues, no interrogation, no social media search. I even got a smile. The Big Easy is famous for its melting pot of French, Spanish, African, Choctaw, and Caribbean influences. The spoils can be seen, tasted and heard: refined architecture in the French Quarter, African rhythms in the jazz and blues clubs, and a range of mouth-watering dishes that blend Creole, Cajun and European flavours.

New Orleans is geographically about as south as you can get, but it's a proudly multicultural and progressive city in a deeply conservative state. Across the South city folk tend to lean left, rural folk and suburbanites to the right. America isn't as cleanly divided into red and blue states as we're led to believe. Visitors may find themselves in a progressive bubble if they stick to the cities and tourist spots.

The daily life I saw felt far more welcoming and unremarkable than the divisive caricatures I'd been primed to expect.

Unexpected sightings included a chic regional yoga studio (Saint Francisville), a racy drag queen show (New Orleans), a café supporting neurodivergent staff (Clarksdale), an organic buffalo farm (Bayou Sarah Farms), a wind farm next to a cotton field (Mississippi). Expected things I didn't see in the Deep South: Maga merch, guns, street crime, confederate flags, confronting homelessness.

Poverty and crime rates remain high in parts but meaningful progress, including a roughly 20 per cent reduction in poverty, is lessening their impacts. Usually crime and gun violence occur in specific areas, like outer suburbs, away



Above: Bourbon Street in New Orleans' French Quarter. From left: Louisiana State Capitol; National Guards in Memphis.



from tourist zones. I felt safe walking inner-city Memphis, New Orleans and Baton Rouge late at night, saw very little homelessness and was only panhandled once. The National Guard were helping keep the peace in Memphis but looked reassuringly bored.

And as for my own misconceptions? I partly blame America's film and TV industry. Popular culture has long relied on exaggerated Southern characters as narrative shorthand, flattening a complex place into a handful of familiar tropes. Important historical films like *Twelve Years a Slave* or *Mississippi Burning* can reveal much darker stereotypes when viewed in isolation.

In fact, negative tropes about the "Deep South" are killing it – at least as a marketing

handle. It is currently considered a "context sensitive" term and my media group were encouraged not to use it in our stories (although it's still in common usage).

Australians who are uncomfortable with the South's history would perhaps benefit the most from visiting. They would gain a fuller understanding of how slave history has shaped modern America but also how much the South has changed. They might even reflect – after visiting the excellent Civil Rights Museum in Memphis – that the South does a better job of acknowledging, and hopefully learning from, its very worst history than Australia does.

Kirk Owers was a guest of *Memphis Tourism*, *Explore Louisiana* and *Visit Clarksdale*.

TAKE TWO...

AUTUMN FOLIAGE



1 TASMANIA

Australia's only native deciduous tree puts on its autumn show in April and May in a phenomenon known as the Turning of the Fagus. Tiny leaves of the *Nothofagus gunnii* turn from gold to rust and orange. Pack your camera and visit Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park and Mount Field National Park in a road trip.



2 NEW SOUTH WALES

Plan an autumn drive to the Blue Mountains from next month to take in the colour of cool-climate gardens. Key stops for leaf peeping include 28ha Blue Mountains Botanic Garden Mount Tomah where Japanese maples star, and the heritage village of Mount Wilson where plane trees, elms and beeches turn to gold.

leantelli





Tempo by Hilton Louisville Downtown NuLu: a top Kentucky Derby pick for good reason

 Alexis Buxton-Collins © March 2, 2026 Hotel Reviews Travel & Lifestyle Hilton



Forget any preconceptions you might have of Louisville as a sleepy southern town.

Many of the bars here are open until 4am and it doesn't take long to see why Kentucky's largest metropolis bills itself as Whiskey City. With close to a dozen downtown distilleries (and more on the way), bourbon and rye lovers will find themselves spoiled for choice. And while most of them are clustered around the convention centre, it's no surprise that there's a somewhat corporate feel to that part of town.

Fortunately, the rapidly gentrifying NuLu and character-filled Butchertown neighbourhoods lie less than a mile to the east.

There are plenty of distilleries and bars to be found here as well (including a former church that now pours 1500 American whiskeys), but you'll also find an array of small family-owned businesses and some great spots to eat. Given the almost unlimited options for whiskey tourism, it makes sense to enjoy this pedestrian-friendly area on foot, and **Tempo By Hilton** makes the ideal base.





Location

With keen fans lining up for distillery tours as early as 10 am, and more than 30 bars that qualify for the Urban Bourbon Trail (which requires them to have at least 60 bourbons on pour), it's important to have plenty of options within walking distance. Fortunately, NuLu overdelivers on this count.

Tempo By Hilton is one block over from Market Street, a thoroughfare lined with locally-owned businesses like Quills Coffee, Please & Thankyou Cookies and Butchertown Grocery. Before you reach them, you'll smell the malt and see the grain silos of Rabbit Hole distillery, which is literally across the road from Tempo By Hilton's front door. Head up to the sixth-floor rooftop, and you can orient yourself with views over the broad Ohio River that skirts the city to the north (and separates Kentucky from Indiana), as well as the taller buildings of downtown Louisville to the west.

Design

Tempo by Hilton is one of Hilton's newer brands, and it positions itself as a lifestyle choice for the modern traveller. In practice, that means an uncluttered design scheme that features plenty of natural textures and local reference points, with wellness features woven seamlessly throughout.

The wellness aspect is unobtrusive but welcome – plants are scattered throughout the hotel, breakfast includes options like smoothies and grain bowls, and water refill stations have still, sparkling and alkaline options. There's also a metronome symbol that appears throughout the hotel and encourages guests to think about the rhythm of the day.

The lobby is filled with public art, including several "look up" moments like the floating timber ceiling that nods to the horse and tobacco barns dotting the surrounding countryside, while a white and orange resin piece looks like bourbon pouring off the street and leading to the elevators.





Rooms

This is a new build hotel (it opened on May 1, 2024, just in time for the 150 th Kentucky Derby), and it shows in the 130 up-to-date rooms. They're divided into four classes (with either a king or two queen beds – there are no suites), and the emphasis on financial accessibility shows in rates that start at US\$169.

My uncluttered room is comfortable and makes excellent use of the space. Rather than being divided into nooks, the open plan layout means there's plenty of room for a clothes rack, armchair and small work desk. Plenty of lamps and downlights let me tailor the mood, while the bathroom has a large shower stall and an enormous mirrored door that amplifies the space.

In keeping with the wellness theme, the bedroom is called the Power Down Zone, and wireless chargers encourage guests to let go of their devices and relax. Bluetooth speakers in the bathroom mirror allow me to wake up with music while I shower, and when I step out of the bathroom, I enter a Get Ready zone with a backlit mirror where I can slowly power up for the day.

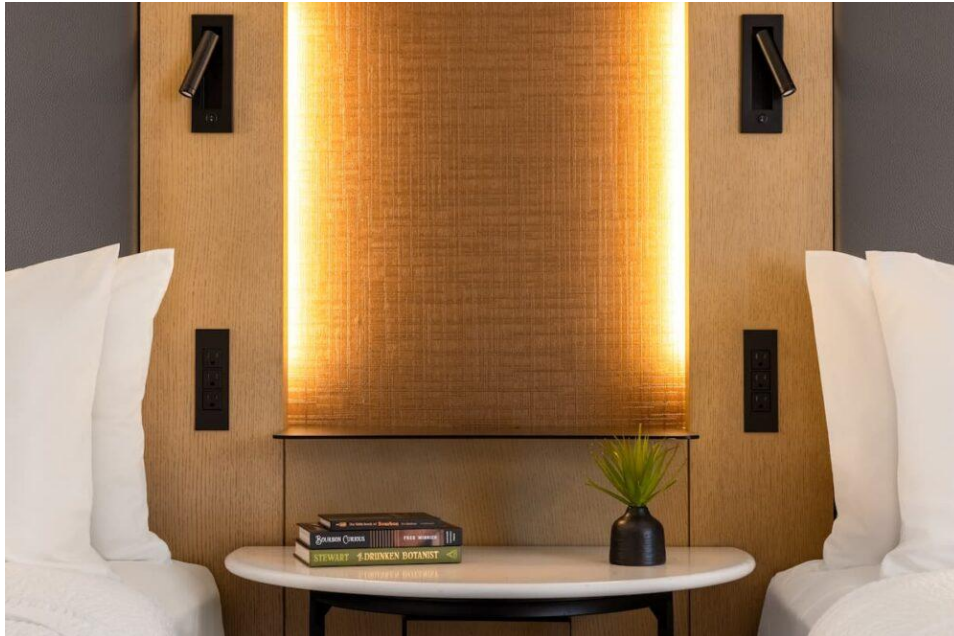
Food & Drink

The lobby cafe Moonsong is inspired by the Australian-influenced Bluestone Lane, so you'll find decent coffee, breakfast bowls and avocado toast in the mornings, as well as light meals later on. There's also a small bar area with a dozen whiskies, but it's not trying to compete with the serious contenders nearby.

Head up to the sixth-floor rooftop restaurant High Stakes, and you'll find a dining room decorated with classic sporting moments and a menu that offers a modern take on American classics. Classic bistro options like steak tartare sit alongside crispy Brussels sprouts with bourbon beurre blanc, Dijon acorn squash and pumpkin seed brittle. And don't sleep on the flaky potato roll served in a hot skillet that's stuffed with potato, cheddar and bacon and served with a pot of chive sour cream.

The drinks list offers a similar take on classics with a slight twist – think barrel-aged boulevardiers and flavourful local beers like the Falls City corn, barley and rye ale.

Indoor and outdoor areas allow guests to enjoy the views of Louisville in all seasons, and in addition to Saturday brunches with live music and Friday night DJs, the space hosts regular events like cocktail classes and bourbon dinners.





Travel



Clockwise from left: Dolly at the Country Music Hall of Fame exhibition; the Home on Wheels tour bus; Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. Opposite, from top: Dolly's childhood home has been recreated; her statue outside the Sevierville courthouse.

Hello, Dollywood

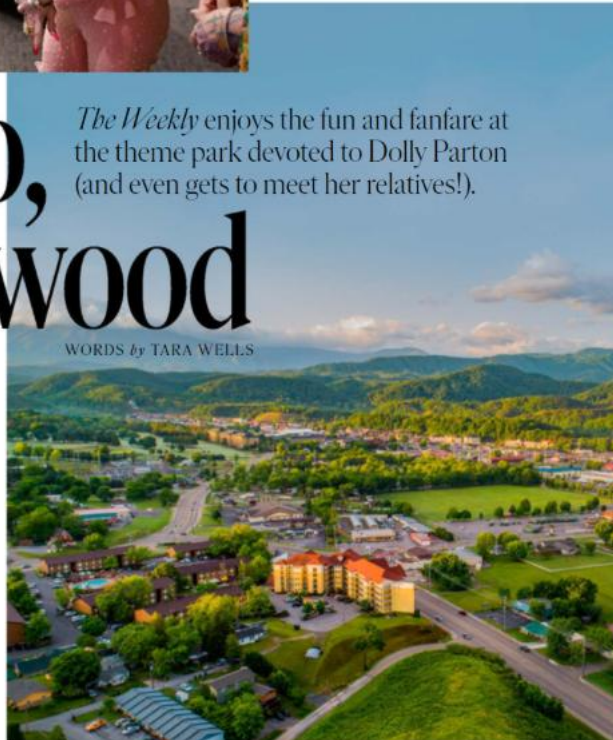
The Weekly enjoys the fun and fanfare at the theme park devoted to Dolly Parton (and even gets to meet her relatives!).

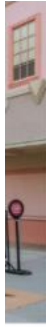
WORDS by TARA WELLS

Standing on the front porch of Dolly Parton's Tennessee mountain home is not quite as peaceful as a baby's sigh. The rumble of a triple-loop roller-coaster is a telltale sign that, while the log cabin looks identical to Dolly's compact childhood home, it is not the same.

This is Dollywood, a theme park devoted to the queen of country music in Pigeon Forge, four hours' drive east of Nashville. Alongside thrill rides, the park celebrates the musician's early days in the Great Smoky Mountains.

The Parton family's two-room cabin has newspaper-lined walls, a modest table set for 10 (Dolly is the fourth of





12 children) and not nearly enough beds to go around. Avie Lee, Dolly's mother, decorated the replica with items said to be original family treasures when the park opened 40 years ago.

From Dolly's humble beginnings, she developed a personal style she describes as costing "a lot of money to look this cheap" (her big wigs, bejewelled boots and sparkly outfits are on display in Dollywood). The look was inspired by a woman she saw around Sevierville, the small town closest to their mountain cabin.

Sevierville's historic centre pays homage to its most famous former resident. A statue of young Dolly playing guitar sits outside the county courthouse.

The Pines, site of Dolly's first paid gig as a 10-year-old, is now an entertainment venue, where nostalgic diners play duckpin bowling (a smaller version of tenpin) and board games.

Back to the fifties

Dollywood, 10 kilometres to the south, celebrates Appalachia with hearty southern-style food, including fried chicken with okra. The 1950s Sevierville of Dolly's childhood is revived for current-day visitors. The Pines makes a reappearance, this time as a theatre hosting live shows. There's a white-washed timber chapel boasting a century-old piano, and a recreation of the one-room school where Dolly and her siblings learnt their three Rs.

Dollywood is divided into 11 themed areas and can be explored on one- and two-day passes. The nearby Dollywood's DreamMore Resort & Spa offers easy

transfers to the theme park. dollywood.com

Meet the Partons

With Dolly's 11 siblings, it's hard to visit the area without bumping into a Parton relative.

Niece Heidi Parton has been performing at Dollywood since she was four, and like her father before her, now headlines her own show. Allow time to enjoy this and other live music throughout the day.

Continuing a family tradition of making moonshine (illegal during Prohibition days), another niece, Danielle Parton, is behind Shine Girl at Sevierville. shinegirl.com and visitsevierville.com

The Nashville connection

The day after her high-school graduation, Dolly was on the bus to Nashville. "Music City's" iconic venues



have all been touched by her sparkle: Countless performances at the Grand Ole Opry (the first aged 13), recording hits like *Coat Of Many Colors* at the historic RCA Studio B (now open for tours) and leaving an indelible mark on the Country Music Hall of Fame. Despite the glitz, Dolly keeps returning to the Great Smoky Mountains, both through her songwriting, and an annual visit to Dollywood.

Dolly Parton's SongTeller Hotel opens in Nashville in June. Within it, the Life of Many Colors Museum will display masses of memorabilia, more than at Dollywood's Dolly Parton Experience or Nashville's Country Music Hall of Fame. **AWW** songtellerhotel.com

Don't miss ...

Dinner shows are a uniquely American experience. Pigeon Forge offers many, but Dolly Parton's Stampede sets the bar. More than 30 horses and riders perform rodeo stunts and trick riding accompanied by Dolly's distinctive vocals. dpstampede.com



womensweekly.com.au 187



ALAMY, COURTESY OF DOLLYWOOD, GETTY IMAGES, INSTAGRAM





20 BEST THINGS TO DO IN TOWNSEND TN NEAR THE SMOKY MOUNTAINS

By [Jessica Shaw](#) - 11 March 2026 | Updated on Mar 11th, 2026 - This post may contain affiliate links. Read our [disclosure](#).

Tucked away beneath the shadows of the Great Smoky Mountains in eastern Tennessee, the small town of Townsend serves as the unofficial gateway to a staggering amount of attractions. Despite a population of less than 1,000 people, Townsend is home to historic landmarks and leading cultural institutions that wouldn't feel out of place in large Tennessee metros such as Nashville or Memphis.

Minutes from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the serenity of Cades Cove and the captivating formations of the Tuckaleechee Caverns, Townsend is the perfect travel destination for avid outdoor enthusiasts while also looking out for travellers looking to soak up small-town charm, a slice of eastern Tennessee culture and a lively festival scene that keeps this humble Southern town entertaining and worthwhile to visit.





TOP TOURS

- [Cades Cove Sightseeing](#) – Self-Guided Driving Audio Tour
- [Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Cades Cove](#) – Self-Driving Bundle Tours
- [Small-Group Jeep Tour of Smoky Mountains Foothills Parkway](#)

20 THINGS TO DO IN TOWNSEND

1- EXPERIENCE THE ALLURE OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK



Visiting the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is one of the top things to do in Townsend TN.

Shared by Tennessee and North Carolina, [the Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#) is one of the most visited national parks in the United States, attracting well over 14 million visitors on average every year.

The entire park covers an area of more than 522,419 acres (211,415 ha) and boasts a staggering amount of wildlife and picturesque lush mountains which are usually hidden behind a veil of mist, giving the national park its smoky appearance.

For the [ultimate Smoky Mountains experience](#), consider hiking a portion of the famous Appalachian Trail, which cuts right through the national park as it winds its way down south from Maine to Georgia.





20 BEST THINGS TO DO IN DUCK NC ON THE OUTER BANKS

By [Jessica Shaw](#) - 12 March 2020 | Updated on Mar 12th, 2020 - This post may contain affiliate links. [Read our disclosure.](#)

In North Carolina's Outer Banks, the small town of Duck is a low-key coastal dream destination that turns into one of the busiest places in the Outer Banks when Tar Heels from across the state descent onto its shores to escape North Carolina's warm summer months. Surrounded by miles upon miles of pristine white sandy beaches, large summer homes and shops, Duck treats visitors to food, fishing and wildlife-watching adventures, with a healthy dose of history and culture. Named after the region's duck hunting roots, the town of Duck is just a stone's throw away from where the Wright Brothers first took flight and where the first English colony was established on North American soil, making this popular East Coast vacation destination an Outer Banks favourite that's got a lot more going for it than first meets the eye.





DUCK, NORTH CAROLINA



Looking for things to do in Duck, NC?

20 THINGS TO DO IN DUCK

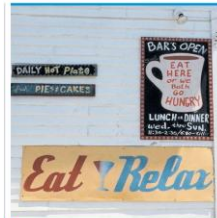
1- SEE WHERE HISTORY WAS MADE AT THE WRIGHT BROTHERS NATIONAL MEMORIAL

Situated just 11 miles (26 km) south of downtown Duck in nearby Kitty Hawk, the Wright Brothers National Memorial is the ultimate tribute to brothers Wilbur and Orville Wright, who in 1903 became the first people to successfully take to the skies in a manned aircraft.





explore



More top NOLA spots

Here are four more New Orleans brunch eateries to add to your itinerary.

Antoine's

This is the oldest family-run restaurant in the city, having flung open its doors in 1840. It's also responsible for inventing famous NOLA dishes, including oysters Rockefeller. Of course, they're on the jazz brunch menu. Be sure to also order the soufflé potatoes, puffy, fried tubers served with bernaise sauce.

Explore more: antoines.com

Gris-Gris

Not all brunches involve jazz. This more casual, neighbourhood affair has a sunny balcony and plays indie rock like Nirvana, Beastie Boys and Beck. The brunch menu has real crowd-pleasers, including shrimp and grits. But carnivores - especially those who've laissez les bons temps rouler a little too hard the night before - should order the carbacious open-faced pot roast, a huge plate of beef debris, smothered potatoes and gravy on thick toast.

Explore more: grisgrisoala.com

Elizabeth's Restaurant

If bacon is your one true love, then brunch at Elizabeth's (pictured above) is a must. Here the chefs serve praline bacon, which lacquers the original in pecan and sugar (insert drool emoji). Get set for other classic southern dishes - biscuits and gravy, boudin balls, fried catfish with eggs - as well as excellent bananas foster French toast. Breakfast, as they call it here, is served every day, too.

Explore more: elizabethsrestaurantnola.com

Atchafalaya

Take a seat in this Uptown creole cabin and embrace NOLA gems, like crab cake benedict and crispy oyster salad. There's no other place to be if you're a Bloody Mary aficionado. There are three kinds available, all made with the special house mix. Add bacon or absinthe to the classic or choose a Bywater Bloody made with green chilli vodka and a mix with added tomatillo, apple, lemon, ginger and jalapeno. There's a South-East Asian version, too.

Explore more: atchafalayarestaurant.com





20 AMAZING THINGS TO DO IN CHARLESTON SC

By [Jordan Donahue](#) - 21 March 2020 | Updated on Mar 21st, 2020 - This post may contain affiliate links. Read our [disclosure](#).

South Carolina has a rich history as one of the original Thirteen Colonies. In 1861, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union and the site of the first shots that were fired during the Civil War, near what is easily one of the most famous cities in the state – Charleston. Also known as C-Town or Chucktown, Charleston is a charming and historic city with so much to offer. The city was founded in 1670 and is sprinkled with historic landmarks such as mature oak-lined cobblestone streets and Victorian architecture.

Charleston is perfect for a romantic getaway, an educational family vacation, or simply enjoying the slower Low Country lifestyle. The city is filled with fascinating museums, beautiful plantations to wander and connect with nature, and restaurants that highlight the Southern hospitality and comfort you'll only find in the South.

You can find yourself in a local city market exploring handmade goods, visiting one of the county's oldest museums, or even driving to the nearby beach to take in the coastal breezes. These are the top 20 things to do in Charleston, South Carolina.





CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

TOP TOURS



A horse and carriage ride is one of the best things to do in Charleston.

- [Charleston's Old South Carriage Historic Horse and Carriage Tour](#) – explore 300 years of history on this guided carriage tour of Charleston across 30 blocks.
- [Charleston Harbor History Day-Time or Sunset Boat Cruise](#) – float along the Cooper River to Fort Sumter National Monument.
- [Haunted Evening Horse and Carriage Tour](#) of Charleston – go on a ghost tour without any walking on this haunted horse and carriage ride!





THE AUSTRALIAN

EXPLORE



Back to the beginning

America's northernmost 'southern' state played a big part in US history

KATRINA LOBLEY

Summarising history into something that can fit on a souvenir or bumper sticker isn't easy. For the US's upcoming big birthday – the 250th anniversary of independence, which officially severed political ties with Great Britain – one state's copywriters came up with the goods: America. Made in Virginia.

Much of the July 4 anniversary hoopla is focused on Philadelphia and Boston as cradles of the American Revolution. But mid-Atlantic Virginia, which adjoins Washington DC and is one of the northernmost 'southern' states, is where the country's first permanent English settlement was established. In 1607, a gaggle of 105 Englishmen and boys set up a base – Jamestown, named for King James I – on low-lying, swampy river frontage, land that would later be naturally scooped into an island. For the 'beginning of America', it's a spot that feels oddly modest and tucked away, but that was precisely its appeal, as the inland location kept it from view of other marauding European ships, clear sightlines made it highly defensible, and deep anchorage allowed the pioneers' vessels to be moored right at its shoreline.

Jamestown's perfect structural bones permitted the

ragtag settlement to eventually evolve into a successful colony. As it expanded, Virginia Indians were pushed from their homelands. Jamestown also recorded the arrival of Africans in 1619, making it ground zero for slavery in English North America. It's hard not to think of the blood, sweat and tears mingled with the earth beneath my feet.

It's a complex, multi-layered story; a rich tapestry of many threads that historian Mark Summers, director of public and youth programs at Historic Jamestowne (as the archaeological site, part of Colonial National Historical Park, is called), thoughtfully unpicks as he leads a tour exploring the nuances.

Another reason this spot was selected, says Summers, was "you can't pick a place to live where you see the 'naturals' [Native Americans]". "The thing is, all the better places were occupied," he says. Summers colourfully recounts how he imagines the two groups' first deadly skirmish went down: how it was enough, despite the yawning gap in weaponry, to jolt the pioneers (or more likely, the sailors with carpentry skills) into completing a triangular-shaped fort in just 19 days.

"The English actually built a good fort," Summers says. "Our replica is not as strong – we're not worried about being invaded. Because of archaeology, we can

Colonial Williamsburg living-history museum, above left; Stone Tower Winery, top right; The Historic Cavalier Hotel in Virginia Beach, above

tell you that the James Fort was actually a very good fort and that's going to have the Powhatan [the area's Indigenous people] adjust their strategy." Chief Powhatan was the father of Pocahontas, whose fate became entwined with that of the Jamestown colonists. Her legend today has spread well beyond US borders, with Disney also immortalising her as an animated princess.

The site's handsome 1907 Memorial Church (built over the foundations of previous churches) and fort, thought to have eroded into the river only to be unearthed in 1994, are places of quiet reflection and curiosity (archaeological digs at the site are ongoing). Nearby Colonial Williamsburg, on the other hand, is like a giant theme park for history needs.

Known as the world's largest living-history museum, the 12ha site includes 600-plus restored or reconstructed 18th-century buildings, costumed interpreters (of real historical figures) in breeches and bonnets, rare-breed animals such as Leicester Longwool sheep, Cleveland Bay horses and Dominique chickens, demonstrations of historic trades (bookbinding, blacksmithing and the like), dozens of gardens and five hotels, including the Williamsburg Inn, where the late Queen Elizabeth II stayed twice. The interpreters so fully inhabit their roles that you can, for instance, ask "Thomas





TRAVEL+LUXURY



IN THE KNOW

On July 4, Colonial Williamsburg will mark the US's Semiquincentennial – America's 250th birthday – with public readings of the Declaration of Independence, musical performances and fireworks.

Virginia's Historic Triangle, comprising Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown and Yorktown (a Revolutionary War victory site), is a 2½-hour drive south of Washington DC. All three can be visited using a five-day America's Historic Triangle ticket, \$US126 (\$180) adult.

Over June 12-14 and June 16-23, as part of birthday celebrations, a flotilla of 60-plus tall ships and military vessels will call at Virginia affiliate harbours (including Yorktown) and the host city of Norfolk (near Virginia Beach). The flotilla's tour starts from New Orleans (May 28-June 1), visits New York City to salute the Statue of Liberty (July 4-8) and concludes in Boston (July 11-16).

soil250virginia.com
virginia.org
historicjamestowne.org
colonialwilliamsburg.org



Jamestown fort, above; re-enactment of Colonial Williamsburg, top right; dining area at The Historic Cavalier Hotel, below right

Jefferson" what he thinks of his combative peer, Alexander Hamilton. (On top of all its other superlatives, Virginia is also known as The Mother of Presidents because eight US presidents, including Jefferson and Washington, were born here.)

But wait – there's more to Colonial Williamsburg, which is why a one-day visit is insufficient. You can traverse its streets in a horse-drawn carriage (as the Queen also did, in 1957 and 2007) and tie a napkin as big as a tablecloth around your neck at the old-world King's Arms Tavern before slurping peanut soup, tucking into game or onion pie and raising a mug of Pocahontas beer. At a site so sprawling, there's also delight in noting small details such as the absence of stained-glass windows – a feature that would have been deemed "too Catholic" for this Anglican community.

Any presentation of colonial and revolutionary history is vexed, of course. In 1963, architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable wrote in the New York Times that the re-created former colonial capital was a "superbly executed vacuum". From 1978, interpreters started portraying ordinary folk – white and black – and expanding narratives to include minorities who were part of the fabric of Williamsburg. This has led to recent accusations of "whiteness".

You can't keep everyone happy, but the state isn't only for history aficionados. Virginia, as declared on many numberplates, is for lovers – a 1969 marketing phrase so enduring and versatile it can apply to anything from golf to wine to beaches. Golf lovers can test themselves at Lansdowne Resort, which fronts the mist-wreathed Potomac River at Leesburg, 20km north of Dulles International Airport, the Virginia-based gateway to Washington DC. Greg Norman designed two of the three courses, with his 18-hole course home to a challenging four-hole stretch he dubbed "the hardest mile in golf". At dusk and dawn, deer nibble its greens.

The resort is in Loudoun County, part of the Northern Virginia wine country that's been called the Napa of the East. Loudoun often ranks as America's richest county, thanks to the residents' high-flying, extraordinarily well-paid jobs in DC and in the state's Data Centre Alley (more than 70 per cent of global internet traffic flows through Loudoun and neighbouring Fairfax counties).

You can almost inhale the scent of money at Stone

After your crash course in local wines, order a bottle in Virginia Beach



Tower Winery. The grand mountain-top vineyard offers panoramic views over forest-thatched countryside – not a data centre in sight. Its barrel room features doors that were once part of Al Capone's prison cell. A half-hour drive away is a more intimate experience at Fabbioni Cellars' yurt-shaped tasting room. Owner Doug Fabbioni, the "godfather" of Loudoun wine who honed his craft in California before heading east, is renowned for his cabernet franc and a pear wine featuring a fruit grown inside the bottle.

After your crash course in local wines, order a bottle when you hit the state's southern playground of Virginia Beach. The best-looking accommodation here is The Historic Cavalier, a 1927 Georgian revival landmark that's turned its former basement laundry into the country's first distillery operating within a hotel (the wonderfully named Tarnished Truth Distilling Co produces bourbon, rye whiskey and other spirits). The hotel's dining room is chic but for impressive views over the world's longest pleasure beach (60km) and its busy boardwalk, grab an early Italian dinner at the sixth-floor Isle of Capri, incongruously located inside a Holiday Inn. The restaurant's throwback old-school vibe includes a website plea for "Proper Dress Attire", elevated booths and Caesar salads tossed tableside. Australians might not be keen for the dolphin-watching cruises popular here – we have those at home – but it's worth exploring the Military Aviation Museum, home to one of the world's largest collections of flyable warbirds. If you'd still like to get wet after all of that, head to Atlantic Park Surf – a \$US350m wave pool backed by home-grown music mogul Pharrell Williams that opened last year. As one surfing publication put it, "Virginia Beach finally gets good waves (that aren't from a hurricane)". Pop that on a bumper sticker.

Katrina Lobley was a guest of Travel South.
travelsouth.visittheusa.com





COMMUNICATIONS & PR

Media Contacts (phone calls, emails, personal meetings)

Contacts	Interest/Status	Follow-up/Next step
Are Media - New Idea, Elizabeth Gracie	<p>There has been a change in Are Media's famil policy – previously ad spend was a requirement, but this has changed now, and they are open to famils for print.</p> <p>Focus across food, aspirational holidays, value driven (budget-friendly narratives).</p> <p>Open to updating shopping gallery features for travel sections for things like best couples accommodation, or best hotels for families etc. Worth exploring round ups online that they our destinations might work for.</p>	<p>They have conducted research with Roy Morgan about readers behaviours, demos etc. Elizabeth will share once received.</p>
Are Media – WHO, Sophie Coghill	<p>Previously at Yahoo, has just joined the team as digital editor (2 months into the role).</p> <p>Really interested in building the travel section of WHO online.</p> <p>Currently exploring ideas for girls trips, and any destinations where readers can get an insiders look at celeb lifestyle/taste of that lifestyle.</p>	<p>Seems like both media titles are reprioritising travel content so it will be a good time to share pitch ideas.</p>
Stuff NZ, Emma Stanford	<p>Currently being very selective on what US stories she is covering. i.e. she was pitched a story about Celebrity Spotting in Santa Barbara and doesn't want to cover that type of thing right now given everything that's going on.</p> <p>Will only write about destinations if she has been and experienced, although famils are more difficult to get approval from currently.</p> <p>Famil lead times preferred min of 2 months and mmo longer than a week.</p>	<p>Put out a poll to see which destinations people are visiting this year to see if NZ are travelling to the US. She's happy to share results of this.</p>
Cole Dickson, Creator	<p>Cole Dickson is a Melbourne-based fashion, lifestyle and travel content creator. With a background as a wildlife scientist and rescuer, he brings a grounded, purpose-driven perspective to his work, combining</p>	<p>Secured for Global Week.</p>





	editorial-style visuals with authentic, in-the-moment storytelling.	
Kirk Owers, Freelance, Explore	Had worked with Kirk on an advocacy piece on the South.	Published.
Samantha Cheney, The Great Outdoors	<p>Late-stage opportunity from The Great Outdoors for one additional USA partner to feature in its upcoming North America shoot in May.</p> <p>Filming would take place from Thursday, May 28, following Palm Springs, with all travel covered. The segment investment is AUD \$25,000, making it a relatively efficient way to secure broadcast exposure.</p> <p>Due to strong demand, additional November episodes have been added, with flexibility to invoice into FY26–27 if required.</p>	May timing isn't viable, will explore for FY26.





III. TRAVEL TRADE

Trade Contacts (phone calls, emails, personal meetings).

Contacts	Interest/Status	Follow-up /Next step
<p>Kay Gregan</p> <p>The Travel Designer Ltd</p>	<p>Training with Kay & Debbie on travel South region. Support with Kays trip through the South. North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Kay is planning a group tour for 2027 to Nashville and New Orleans.</p>	Ongoing
<p>Lee- Anne Hosking Product Manager</p> <p>Envoyage Australia</p>	<p>Update on Travel South product and Envoyages network. They are now prioritising their partnership with Infinity Holidays as their preferred booking platform, but as it's a franchise system, their 700ish members will use the system they prefer. Invited to Travel South Mission in Sydney.</p>	Ongoing updates
<p>Alexis Cunningham Partnerships and Contracting Manager</p> <p>Luxury Escapes</p>	<p>Alexia is very interested in more product around the South and getting mor direct deals as they have been very successful with New Orleans. Invitation to Travel South Mission in June.</p>	N/A
<p>Jodie Collins Partnerships Manager</p> <p>Luxury Escapes</p>	<p>Update on the California activation and request for a proposal and costings.</p>	Ongoing
<p>Teena Hollwell Strategic Development Manager</p> <p>Rate Hawke</p>	<p>Accommodation, Tours, experiences, car hire and touring. USA contracting from the global team. Aggregator and direct contractor. USA is number 2 (behind Italy). Will be introducing destination campaigns in the next 6 months.</p>	N/A
<p>Karryn Papenfus Owner & MD</p> <p>Adventure Destinations</p>	<p>USA is currently very slow, but she is keen have the team up to date for when sales return. Destination Adventures do complex itineraries as both B2B & B2C.</p>	N/A
<p>Barry Downs GM Marketing & Product</p> <p>Hunter Travel Group</p>	<p>Update on Travel South product and pre-post cruising options for Mississippi river cruising. Info on touring product in the region and follow up itineraries. Setting up a group training event in</p>	Ongoing





	<p>may. Hunter Travel Group (HTG), a multi-award-winning travel agency group and the largest branded member of the Helloworld Travel Network. HTG is one of Australia's largest privately owned, family-managed travel groups, with over 175 travel professionals across 35 locations nationwide.</p>	
<p>Sara Winfield Partnerships Manager Flight Centre Travel Group</p>	<p>Creating a new USA brochure that will be distributed worldwide and offer opportunity for great coverage. Tennessee 8th and Louisiana 12th are two southern states in their top 15. Invite to her or Tim to mission in may.</p>	Ongoing
<p>Monique Roos Senir Commercial Specialist US Commercial Services</p>	<p>Discussion on Consul General's residence event and contract. We are meeting in early April to work on the finer details.</p>	Ongoing
<p>Mary-Anne Guest Product Manager Phil Hoffman Travel</p>	<p>Update on Travel South & info on touring product in the region and follow up itineraries. Mary-Anne visited NOLA in 2024 with the leadership team, post helloworld Owner/manager conference.</p>	Ongoing
<p>Flight Centre Event</p>	<p>Website opportunities with Travel Associates Gamification/points as prizes with World 360 Rewards, the new travel-focused loyalty program by Flight Centre Travel Group Flight Centre running a USA campaign from 9 March – 19 April Envoyage Travel has bought Liberty Travel in the US Infinity Holidays now has 6,000 agents signed up with 2,500 agent portal visits per month and 30 reservations specialists based in NZ</p>	N/A
<p>Kristy Prince North American Product Manager Adventure World</p>	<p>Route 66 Itinerary – with inclusions from IS Kansas City Created a brand new Route 66 itinerary, which mentions almost everything she covered on her IS post fam. Refreshed and expanded Ultimate Barbecue Road Trip. Pre pandemic this was only 2 weeks, and has been lengthened to include a taste of Alabama white BBQ sauce, a bit more of North Carolina, and now extends down to Charleston, along with a lot more detail and inclusions. It also highlights taking a section of Route 66 between OKC and KC.</p>	Ongoing





Klook Creator Awards	Attendance at Klook created awards. Klook is a online marketplace for travel experiences and heavily invested in the creator space to market and grow bookings. They are based out of Hong Kong, incredibly strong in Asia and growing rapidly out of Australia.	N/A
Sharon Godden Travel Designer	Southern USA training with Sharon and her team of 3.	N/A
Luxe by itravel		
Flight Centre Balgowlah	Southern USA training with Flight Centre Balgowlah and team of 3.	N/A
Time Fly's Travel	Southern USA training with Time Flys Trave and team of 4.	N/A





CAMPAIGNS & ACTIVITY

Adventure World – New Itineraries

Road Trippin’ Route 66

From **\$8,125**

Day by day itinerary



Day 4	Springfield – St. Louis	↑
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Springfield – St. Louis

Take some time for final sightseeing in Springfield this morning before hitting the road to St. Louis.

One of the most famous surviving segments of hand-laid brick Route 66, the Auburn Brick Road allows travellers to experience the road as it was in the 1930s.

Perhaps take a slight detour to Carlinsville for a charming courthouse square and the Standard Oil "Big Brick" gas station, a restored 1920s Tudor-style station.

Ariston Cafe, opened in 1924 in Litchfield is one of the oldest continuously operated dining spots on Route 66. This family-owned cafe offers classic comfort food and a warm, old-school vibe.

Stop to meet Elly the Pink Elephant in Livingston. Elly is a giant bubblegum-pink fiberglass elephant that stands outside the Pink Elephant Antique Mall, a classic Route 66 stop known for its oversized roadside statues and retro Americana charm.

In Collinsville, stop for a photo of The World's Largest Catsup Bottle. Over 50m tall, it was originally built in 1949 as a water tower for the Brooks catsup factory. It was saved from demolition and restored by a passionate group of locals in the 1990s.

Take a slight detour to visit Cahokia Mounds, a UNESCO World Heritage site. These are the remains of a pre-Columbian city, older than the pyramids of Giza. At its peak, around 1100, this metropolis stretched over 1,620 hectares, encompassed about 120 earthen mounds and hosted a population of nearly 20,000.

Just before reaching St. Louis, pull up at the Chain of Rocks Bridge, one of Route 66's most iconic structures. Built in 1929, this 1.6km steel truss bridge spans the Mississippi River with a distinctive 22 degree bend at its centre. It once carried Mother Road traffic between Illinois and Missouri, but today it's open to pedestrians and cyclists. The bridge offers sweeping river views, historic interpretive signs and a wonderfully atmospheric walk that maintains the feel of the golden age of American road travel.

Ted Drewes Frozen Custard is a place where the line stretches out the door on summer nights, the neon glows just right and the custard is so thick they hand it to you upside down. Ted Drewes opened his first stand in the 1920s, right as Route 66 was coming to life. The Chippewa Street location became a must-stop for travellers heading west, and it still feels like a time capsule of classic roadside Americana.





Day 5 St Louis ↑

St Louis

St. Louis is where the Midwest starts to feel like the gateway to the West - a city shaped by riverboats, jazz clubs, immigrant neighbourhoods and the restless spirit of travellers heading toward new horizons. It's a place where historic Route 66, Mississippi River lore and modern urban energy all collide in a way that feels purely American.

Begin your day at St Louis's most famous landmark, Gateway Arch National Park. The almost 200m stainless-steel Arch is the park's centrepiece - an engineering and architectural icon designed by Eero Saarinen and completed in 1965. Visitors can ride the unique tram system to the top for sweeping views of the Mississippi River and downtown St. Louis (cost additional) or spend time exploring the park grounds. It's one of the few urban national parks in the US, blending monumental architecture with meaningful history.

Perhaps visit Soulard Neighbourhood, one of the oldest in the city for a relaxed brunch/lunch vibe, or head to The Hill, St. Louis' Italian neighbourhood, for something heartier.

Next, we recommend a visit to the Anheuser-Busch Brewery. Founded in the mid-1800s, the St. Louis brewery is the original home of Budweiser beer and the heart of the Anheuser-Busch story. The campus is huge, historic and beautiful - red-brick buildings, ornate architecture and a sense of old-world craftsmanship. There are a number of entertaining ways to tour the campus (cost additional). One of the highlights is visiting the historic stables where the world-famous Clydesdales are kept. They're enormous, gentle, and incredibly photogenic.

This afternoon, visit Forest Park, one of the largest urban parks in the US - bigger than Central Park. Here you can find the free St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri History Museum and St. Louis Zoo, or simply stroll the park's lakes and trails.

This evening, perhaps head to the Central West End - trendy, walkable and full of restaurants and patios. Or visit the Delmar Loop, a lively entertainment district with music venues, restaurants and the St. Louis Walk of Fame. Or if you're a sports fan, check out Downtown/Ballpark Village for a game if the timing is right.

Day 6 St. Louis - Springfield, MO ↑

St. Louis - Springfield, MO

The stretch of Route 66 from St. Louis to Springfield offers a mix of small-town Americana, roadside nostalgia and a few quirky detours that make the drive a true adventure. This leg takes you southwest out of St. Louis and quickly drops you into classic Route 66 country.

Meramec Caverns is one of the most famous attractions on the entire route. Set in the rolling hills near Stanton, the caverns are a massive limestone cave system carved out over millions of years. Inside, you'll find towering formations, underground "rooms" and dramatic lighting that highlights the natural shapes and colours. The guided tour (cost additional) is about 1.5 hours and takes you through features like the "Wine Table" and the "Stage Curtain," one of the largest cave formations of its kind. Meramec Caverns leans into its legend: it's famously tied to Jesse James, who supposedly used the caves as a hideout.

Farther along, the town of Cuba, nicknamed "Route 66 Mural City", is worth a slow roll or a short walk to admire its colourful outdoor art celebrating local history.

Fanning offers the giant Route 66 Rocker, a perfect photo stop, and Devils Elbow gives you a scenic detour through the Ozark foothills with a historic steel truss bridge and dramatic river views. As you enter Pulaski County, enhance your drive by downloading their free Route 66 audio tour of the region.

If your sweet tooth's calling as you roll through Rolla, be sure to stop at A Slice of Pie - a shop so iconic that travellers have been known to detour just to get a fork in one of their creations. This unassuming little bakeshop has been serving homemade pies since 1986, with rows of fresh pies cooling on display, from American apple to Boston cream to red velvet.

One of the most delightfully over-the-top stops on the Missouri stretch of Route 66 is Uranus Fudge Factory - a place that leans fully into roadside humour while still delivering genuinely good treats and a fun experience.

The Route 66 of old lights up St Robert's Neon Park, an open-air collection of restored vintage neon signs from classic highway businesses in the region. Many of these signs once lit up motels, diners, and roadside stops that have long since disappeared. Ideally visit at dusk when the neon comes alive.

As you approach Springfield, the road passes through Lebanon, home to the Route 66 Museum inside the local library, a surprisingly charming stop filled with memorabilia and vintage displays.

Springfield, Missouri is one of the most important cities on the entire Mother Road. Not just a stop, but the birthplace of the name "Route 66." It was here in 1926 that local leaders first proposed the now-legendary number for the Chicago-to-Los Angeles highway, cementing Springfield's place in road-trip history.

Springfield blends genuine history with pure roadside Americana. It's big enough to offer museums, restaurants and attractions, but small enough that the old alignments of Route 66 still feel close. You can drive original stretches of pavement, visit vintage service stations and explore neighbourhoods that grew up around the highway. Highlights worth visiting include the Route 66 Car Museum, Birthplace of Route 66 Roadside Park, Gillioz Theatre and the Historic Downtown and Commercial Street.

This evening, perhaps dine at Black Sheep Burgers and Shakes, for creative burgers, delicious fries and boozy shakes. Or visit Civil Kitchen for a made-from-scratch menu featuring modern twists of Midwestern classics.





Springfield – Tulsa

Explore Springfield this morning before continuing southwest through the Ozarks.

Located near Ash Grove, Gary's Gay Parita is a lovingly recreated 1930s Sinclair gas station built by the late Gary Turner, a Route 66 legend known for his warmth, humour and generosity toward travellers. After Gary passed away in 2015, his daughter Barb and her husband George continued the tradition, keeping the station alive as a welcoming stop for road-trippers from around the world.

Travel through Carthage, home to the beautifully restored Route 66 Drive-in Theatre and the ornate Jasper County Courthouse. A little further along is Red Oak II, an open-air "ghost town" art project by Lowell Davis – a quirky, photogenic collection of relocated buildings, sculptures and Americana that feels like stepping into a dream version of rural Missouri.

For a sweet treat mixed with nostalgia, stop at Supertam on 66, a family-owned ice cream parlour and Superman museum in Carterville. The shop features over 30 years of collected Superman memorabilia and a brightly coloured ice cream flavour inspired by the Man of Steel.

Next up is Joplin, a place where mining history, neon-era nostalgia and a lively modern downtown all blend into a stop that feels both authentic and full of energy. Route 66 ran right through the heart of town, bringing travellers, motels, diners and neon with it. Much of that mid-century character still lingers in the architecture and layout of the city. The Route 66 Mural Park is a must-see – two giant postcard-style murals and a red mock-Corvette make for a perfect photo stop. Schifferdecker Park has become a fun little surprise for Route 66 travellers thanks to its 3D street art, which adds a splash of colour and whimsy to one of Joplin's most historic green spaces.

Kansas features the shortest stretch of Route 66 at just over 20km cutting through the state's southeastern corner and passing through Galena, Riverton and Baxter Springs – three towns that have embraced their Route 66 heritage with pride and personality.

Galena, a former mining boomtown with rugged charm is where you will find Cars on the Route, a restored 1930's gas station, home to Tow Mater, the rusty tow truck that inspired Tow Mater from Pixar's Cars.

Riverton is home to Elsler Brothers Old Riverton Store. Operating since 1925, this is one of the oldest continuously running businesses on Route 66. Not far from Riverton is the Rainbow Curve Bridge, the only remaining Marsh Arch Bridge on Route 66.

The final Kansas town on the route is Baxter Springs, a place with deep Civil War roots and a strong sense of identity. Visit the Baxter Springs Heritage Center & Museum and the Baxter Springs Independent Oil & Gas Station, which now serves as a visitor centre.

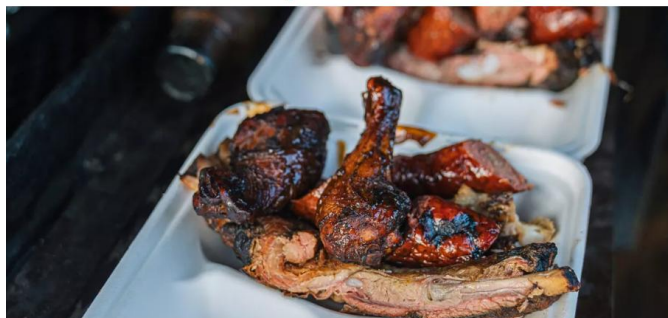
As you cross into Oklahoma, the landscape opens up and the road becomes smoother and more relaxed. Miami and Commerce offer classic stops like the Coleman Theatre and Mickey Mantle's boyhood home, while Vinita is home to the enormous Will Rogers Archway, a mid-century marvel that literally spans the interstate.

As you approach Tulsa, don't miss Claremore, with its Will Rogers Museum, or Catoosa, home of the iconic Blue Whale, one of the most beloved photo ops on the entire route.

Tulsa blends Art Deco glamour, deep musical roots and a thriving modern culture. Rolling in from the northeast, you feel the landscape open up and the skyline rise, crowned with gorgeous 1920s and 30s towers that make Tulsa one of the best Art Deco cities in the country. Route 66 threads right through its heart, passing neon-era motels, classic diners and restored landmarks that celebrate the road's heyday. But Tulsa isn't just about nostalgia. It's a city with a creative pulse – vibrant districts like the Blue Dome and Kendall-Whittier, a world-class music scene shaped by legends from Woody Guthrie to modern indie acts, and a food culture that ranges from old-school barbecue to inventive new restaurants. Add in the Arkansas River, leafy parks and museums like the Woody Guthrie Center and the Gathering Place, and Tulsa becomes a place where you can easily spend a day soaking in history, culture and that unmistakable Route 66 energy.

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Ultimate Barbecue Road Trip

Day by day itinerary



Day 8 | Kansas City

Kansas City

Kansas City has a way of easing up to you rather than shouting for attention. It's a place where jazz drifts out of old clubs, fountains line the streets and the smell of barbecue seems to follow you from one neighbourhood to the next. Straddling the Missouri-Kansas state line, the city unfolds in a patchwork of lively neighbourhoods, each with its own personality, connected by grand boulevards and leafy parks. There's a sense of pride here that's easy to feel: in the music that shaped American culture, in the food that draws pilgrims from across the country and in the welcoming Midwestern spirit that makes visitors feel like they've stumbled into a community rather than just a destination.

Today is at leisure to explore the city. Kansas City's free streetcar makes it easy to get around the central part of the city, connecting many of the city's highlights.

Perhaps visit the National WWI Museum and Memorial or Union Station, which stands as one of the most beautiful historic train stations in the country. The American Jazz Museum and the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, both located in the 18th & Vine Jazz District, tell stories central to American culture. Country Club Plaza blends Spanish-inspired architecture with fountains, shops and restaurants, or explore City Market, one of the largest and oldest public farmers markets in the Midwest.

Of course, a visit to the Immersive Museum of BBQ is a must for any barbecue enthusiasts. The world's first museum dedicated entirely to barbecue, it blends history, culture, science and a bit of playful weirdness into a very Kansas City-style experience. Located in the same building, the Crown Center, is the Hallmark Visitors Center – a free, interactive museum that tells the story of Hallmark, from its beginnings as a small postcard business in 1910 to becoming one of the most recognisable creative brands in the world.

This evening, enjoy dinner at another of the city's renowned barbecue joints. Consider spots like Arthur Bryant's, Q39, Gates', Slap's, or for a more upscale option, Jack Stack Barbecue. Each will have their own twist featuring mouthwatering ribs, brisket, burnt ends and other barbecue specialties.

Kansas City jazz has a pulse that's impossible to miss. It grew out of the city's late-night culture in the 1920s and '30s, when clubs stayed open until dawn and musicians pushed boundaries with long, improvised jam sessions. This is the city that shaped legends like Count Basie, Charlie Parker, Mary Lou Williams and Big Joe Turner; their loose, soulful spirit still defines Kansas City's sound today. Kansas City jazz is improvisational, blues-infused and built on the idea that music should be played, not just performed. Check out The Blue Room, Green Lady Lounge or the Mutual Musicians Foundation.





Day 9 Kansas City – St. Louis ↑

Kansas City – St. Louis

Farewell Kansas City this morning as you head east to St. Louis. It's an easy straight drive along the interstate, but there are some interesting detours if you're up for an adventure. Perhaps stop in Independence to see Historic Independence Square, the Frontier Trails Museum and the Harry S Truman Presidential Library and Museum. For Civil War history buffs, visit the Battle of Lexington State Historic Site in the charming river town of Lexington.

Halfway between Kansas City and St. Louis, you'll find Columbia, home to the University of Missouri and Rock Bridge Memorial State Park. Explore the natural beauty of this state park, which features hiking trails, caves and the famous Devil's Icebox cave.

Rocheport offers one of the most scenic detours, with Les Bourgeois Vineyards offering bluff-top views over the Missouri River.

St. Louis, known as the River City, sits right on the Mississippi River, just south of where it converges with the Missouri River, the two largest moving bodies of water on the continent. You can sense that river-town spirit everywhere, historic brick buildings, old breweries, leafy parks and a mix of cultures that shaped the city over generations.

The Gateway Arch is the iconic symbol of the city, and it's worth taking some time to visit this National Park site.

Visiting the Budweiser Brewery in St. Louis is a classic experience that blends history, architecture and beer culture in a way few places can match. Even if you're not a big beer drinker, the scale and heritage of the place make it a genuinely memorable stop. The brewery sits in the historic Souldard neighbourhood, and the moment you arrive you're surrounded by beautiful red-brick buildings, cobblestone streets and that unmistakable smell of brewing grains. The campus dates back to the 1800s, and much of it still looks and feels like old St. Louis. One of the highlights is visiting the Budweiser Clydesdale stables to meet the iconic symbols of the brand.

St. Louis-style barbecue generally refers to spare ribs, which are usually grilled (rather than slow cooked in a smoker) and smothered in sauce. It's said that St. Louis residents consume more barbecue sauce per capita than any other city in the country. Popular options to sample include Pappy's Smokehouse, Salt + Smoke and Sugarfire Smoke House.

Day 10 St. Louis – Memphis ↑

St. Louis – Memphis

Driving from St. Louis to Memphis is one of those classic mid-South road trips where the scenery shifts from rolling Missouri farmland to the flat, sun-baked fields of the Mississippi Delta.

Before you leave the city, stop by the iconic Ted Drewes Frozen Custard. One of St. Louis' most beloved institutions, it's been around since 1929, and the current Route 66 location has become a landmark drawing locals and road-trippers alike. Ted Drewes is best known for inventing the Concrete, a thick, blended custard treat so dense it's served upside-down.

Consider a stop in Cape Girardeau, a charming river town located along the Mississippi River. Its historic downtown area features quaint shops, restaurants and historic landmarks such as the Old St. Vincent's Church and the Cape River Heritage Museum. It's a pleasant place to stretch your legs and explore a bit of local history.

For music lovers, a quick detour to Dyess, Arkansas lets you visit Johnny Cash's boyhood home. The site offers a rare, authentic look at the rural environment that shaped one of America's most influential musicians.

Memphis is a city built on music, soul and stories. Where the Mississippi River bends wide and slow, and the air feels thick with history and rhythm. This is the birthplace of blues, the crucible of rock 'n' roll and a place where soul music found its voice. Walk down Beale Street in the evening and you'll hear it - guitars spilling out of open doors, horns drifting through the air and that unmistakable Memphis groove that seems to rise straight from the pavement.

But Memphis isn't just music. It's barbecue smoke curling from old brick buildings, civil rights history that still resonates deeply and neighbourhoods full of character - from the artsy vibe of Cooper-Young to the stately homes of Midtown. The city feels lived-in and real, with a warmth that comes from people proud of where they're from. Whether you're up for barbecue, Graceland, Sun Studio, the National Civil Rights Museum or simply to soak up the atmosphere, Memphis offers a mix of grit, charm and soul that's hard to forget.





Day 11 | Memphis ↑

Memphis

This morning is yours to explore the city at your leisure.

This afternoon, 'The Home of the Blues' comes alive with a city tour aboard the nation's only music bus. Your tour guide will be a professional Beale Street musician who will perform songs from the city's rich musical heritage while entertaining you with comedy, history and behind-the-scenes stories of your favourite Memphis personalities. Along the way you'll see many of the city's sites, including Sun Studio and the Lorraine Motel.

Memphis barbecue is all about dry rubs. Delicious baby back ribs are slow smoked over a low hickory fire coated in a paprika based spice rub. If there's sauce, it's on the side. There are over 100 barbecue joints in Memphis, so the tasting options are endless. Try Central BBQ, a local favourite, or Charlie Vergos' Rendezvous with its distinctive charcoal-grilled style. For some more unique choices, visit The Bar-B-Q Shop, the originators of barbecue spaghetti – pasta tossed with tangy barbecue sauce, tender pork, onions and capsicum – or Cozy Corner, known for their Cornish game hen, smoked until the skin is crisp and the meat is tender, glazed with their signature sauce.

The Memphis in May World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest is one of the crown jewels of American barbecue – a larger-than-life celebration where smoke, competition, and Southern culture collide right on the banks of the Mississippi River. If the American Royal is the Super Bowl, Memphis in May is the Mardi Gras of BBQ: loud, festive, and absolutely obsessed with pork.

Finish the evening with a visit to Beale Street, the beating heart of Memphis nightlife and one of the most storied streets in American music. It's only about three blocks long, but those blocks carry more history, sound and swagger than entire neighbourhoods in other cities. If you want to feel the essence of Memphis – its blues, its grit, its joy – this is where you go.

Beale Street is considered the 'Home of the Blues', and that's not just a slogan. In the early 1900s, it was a hub for Black musicians, entrepreneurs and culture. Legends like W.C. Handy, B.B. King, Muddy Waters and Louis Armstrong played here, shaping the sound that would influence jazz, soul and rock 'n' roll. Even today, music spills out of nearly every doorway. You'll hear blues, soul, R&B, rock, and sometimes a brass band marching right down the street.

Day 12 | Memphis – Muscle Shoals – Decatur – Huntsville ↑

Memphis – Muscle Shoals - Decatur - Huntsville

No visit to Memphis is complete without visiting Graceland, the former home of Elvis Presley. Take a tour of the mansion, explore the Elvis Presley Car Museum and stroll through the Elvis Presley Memphis Complex, which features exhibits on the life and career of the King of Rock 'n' Roll.

As you bid farewell to Memphis, drive through Northern Mississippi and into Alabama, the Muscle Shoals region is worth a stop.

Visiting Muscle Shoals feels a bit like stepping into the hidden engine room of American music. The towns of Muscle Shoals, Florence, Sheffield and Tuscumbia look quiet at first glance, but inside their unassuming studios, some of the most iconic songs of the last 60 years were born. At FAME Studios and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, you can stand in the very rooms where Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, the Rolling Stones and so many others shaped their sound. If time permits, this region is worth staying an extra day or two.

Decatur sits right on the Tennessee River, with a mix of historic neighbourhoods, a revitalised downtown and easy access to nature. The city has a relaxed, friendly feel, and its food scene punches above its weight, thanks in part to one of Alabama's most iconic contributions to Southern cooking: white barbecue sauce.

Decatur is the birthplace of Alabama white sauce, and that alone makes it a pilgrimage spot for barbecue fans. Invented in 1925 by Big Bob Gibson, a railroad worker turned pitmaster, the sauce was a way to keep smoked chicken moist during long cooking sessions in the Alabama heat. Alabama white sauce is unlike any other regional barbecue sauce: mayonnaise-based rather than tomato, it's tangy from lemon and vinegar, peppery, slightly spicy and surprisingly light.

The original restaurant, Big Bob Gibson Bar-B-Q, is still in Decatur and still serves the classic recipe.

After dinner, continue to nearby Huntsville for the evening.





Day 13

Huntsville – Nashville



Huntsville – Nashville

Huntsville is one of the most fascinating cities in the South, blending rocket science, Southern charm and a fast-growing tech culture in a way that feels completely its own. People call it "Rocket City" for a reason - this is where NASA engineers designed and tested the Saturn V rocket that sent astronauts to the moon.

Take some time to visit the US Space & Rocket Center (cost additional) this morning. One of the most impressive space museums in the world, it's home to a full Saturn V rocket, interactive exhibits, simulators and artifacts from the Apollo era.

Travelling back north today, take a small detour into Tennessee Whiskey Country to visit the Jack Daniel's Distillery in Lynchburg.

Franklin, one of the most charming towns in the state, is just south of Nashville and worth a stop to explore its beautiful historic downtown and Civil War history.

Near Franklin, you can detour onto the Natchez Trace Parkway for a slower, scenic route into Nashville offering stunning overlooks, hiking spots and historic pull-offs.

Nashville hits you with a mix of energy and warmth the moment you arrive. It's a city built on music and storytelling, where neon lights glow along Broadway and live bands spill out of every honky-tonk from midday to midnight. But beyond the country-music image, Nashville has grown into a vibrant, creative city with a booming food scene, stylish neighbourhoods and a welcoming Southern spirit.

Walk its streets and you'll feel the blend of old and new - historic venues like the Ryman Auditorium and Grand Ole Opry standing alongside modern restaurants, murals and bustling markets.

This evening you'll experience the true heart of Nashville aboard the Soul of Music City Tour. It's an evening filled with music, history and fun and a close-up view of some of the most legendary spots in town. From the city's honky-tonks to its famous music venues, uncover insider stories and intriguing facts about the people, places and events responsible for Nashville's iconic reputation.

Nashville

Today you can explore on a trolley tour, a convenient way to discover the city with stops at must-visit attractions such as the Ryman Auditorium, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Music Row.

Nashville has long been known as a music city, but its food scene is emerging as one of the best in the region. Aside from the local staple of hot chicken, Nashville's barbecue restaurants are booming. Two of the best are Peg Leg Porker and Martin's Bar-B-Que Joint.

While in Nashville, perhaps needing a break from barbecue, be sure to sample the city's signature dish: hot chicken. Head to one of the many local eateries specializing in this spicy fried chicken dish, such as Prince's Hot Chicken Shack (the original), Hattie B's Hot Chicken or Bolton's Spicy Chicken & Fish.

Day 15

Nashville – Asheville



Nashville – Asheville

As you drive from Nashville to Asheville, take some time to explore Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg. These neighbouring towns are popular destinations known for their entertainment attractions, shopping and outdoor activities.

Visit Dolly Parton's Dollywood theme park in Pigeon Forge, explore the shops and restaurants along the Parkway in Gatlinburg or take a scenic drive through Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Also pay a visit to Ole Smoky Distillery, one of the most famous moonshine distilleries in the US, known for its rustic atmosphere, copper stills and wide range of flavoured moonshines.

Tucked into the Blue Ridge Mountains, Asheville is a great place to get out in nature and work off some of the delicious barbecue you've sampled along the way. Of course, Asheville is home to plenty of great dining options, including 12 Bones Smokehouse, a favourite of President Obama, and Luellas.





Day 16

Asheville – Lexington – Winston-Salem



Asheville – Lexington – Winston-Salem

Before leaving Asheville this morning, consider a visit to the Biltmore Estate, the largest privately-owned home in the United States. It feels a little like stepping into an American fairytale, with the entire property designed to impress, from the grand architecture to the sweeping mountain views.

Or perhaps take a hike in the nearby Pisgah National Forest for some classic Appalachian scenery with rhododendron tunnels, mossy streams, old-growth forests and some of the best waterfalls in the region.

Leaving Asheville, you'll roll east through the foothills before the landscape flattens into the Piedmont. It's an easy, pretty drive with plenty of small-town scenery.

Lexington is the capital of North Carolina's western-style barbecue. Every October, Lexington's Barbecue Festival draws over 100,000 visitors and transforms downtown Lexington into a lively celebration of Piedmont-style pork shoulder, red slaw and all the traditions that make this region's barbecue unique. Lexington Barbecue (aka 'The Honeymonk') is the optimal dining choice, but Smokey Joe's and the Barbecue Center are notable mentions.

After your pork and slaw feast, it's a short drive to nearby Winston-Salem, a city that blends arts, history and food with a relaxed, walkable downtown.

Day 17

Winston-Salem – Raleigh



Winston-Salem – Raleigh

Old Salem is one of the most beautifully preserved historic districts in the United States, and a visit is like a trip back to the late 1700s. It was founded by Moravian settlers, a Protestant group from Central Europe known for their craftsmanship, music and community-focused way of life. Today, Old Salem functions as a living history museum right in the heart of Winston-Salem, with costumed interpreters, working trades and restored buildings that bring the past to life.

You can visit the Reynolda House Museum of American Art, which offers a rare blend of art, history and nature. It's the richness of a major American art museum inside a beautifully preserved historic home.

Travelling towards Raleigh, make a slight detour to visit Greensboro, where you can visit the International Civil Rights Center & Museum located in the original Woolworth's where the 1960's sit-ins began.

Perhaps stop to visit Hillsborough - historic, artsy and full of character. Explore the Riverwalk along the Eno or visit the Ayr Mount Historic Site. Durham is another option worth considering. Visit the historic American Tobacco Campus, a network of old factories and warehouses transformed for the modern era, or the beautiful and sprawling 22 hectare Duke Gardens.

You'll next arrive in Raleigh, the capital city of North Carolina, and explore its vibrant downtown area. Visit historic landmarks including the North Carolina State Capitol and the Governor's Mansion, or stroll through the shops, restaurants and galleries in the Warehouse District or Fayetteville Street.





Day 18 Raleigh – Ayden – Greenville – Raleigh ↑

Raleigh – Ayden – Greenville – Raleigh

Make your way to Ayden this morning. It's tiny, but for barbecue lovers it's sacred ground. This is Eastern North Carolina whole-hog territory, where the sauce is vinegar-based, the pork is chopped fine and the tradition runs deep. It's home to a legendary barbecue institution, Skylight Inn BBQ, often called the "Capital of BBQ" famous for whole hog cooked over wood, chopped with crispy skin mixed in.

Nearby, Greenville is a lively college town, and B's Barbecue offers another option to sample Eastern North Carolina style barbecue. It's rustic and old-school, the kind of spot where the smoke hits you before you even pull into the gravel lot. Locals line up before opening, and you'll see the pitmasters working as you wait. When you're full, head back to Raleigh for the evening.

Day 19 Raleigh – Charleston ↑

Raleigh – Charleston

From North Carolina to South Carolina, today's road trip will take you through pine forests, small towns and the Lowcountry.

A couple of notable stops to consider along the way include Fayetteville, where you can visit Cape Fear Botanical Garden or the Airborne & Special Operations Museum. Dillon, just south of the border offers a kitschy, iconic roadside attraction with giant neon signs, quirky shops and photo ops – pure Americana. Lake Marion/Santee is where the landscape starts shifting towards the Lowcountry and offers a nature-based stop, with Santee State Park and Santee Copper Lakes. Summerville is known as the "Birthplace of Sweet Tea" and offers a charming downtown, beautiful old homes and shady streets.

Charleston is one of those cities where history, food, architecture and coastal beauty all blend into a slow, elegant rhythm that feels distinctly its own. It's a Lowcountry port city with more than 300 years of history, and it shows: cobblestone streets, pastel-coloured homes, wrought-iron balconies and live oaks draped in Spanish moss. But it's not frozen in time. The city has a vibrant creative energy, a nationally acclaimed food scene and a warm, welcoming personality.

Day 20 Charleston ↑

Charleston

Join a guided small group tour this morning to savour the flavours of Charleston. At this point you may be glad to learn it's not a restaurant crawl or a heavy, indulgent feast, but a guided walk through the historic district that blends local history, culinary traditions and tastings into a relaxed and flavourful experience. Stroll through some of Charleston's most charming streets with a guide who knows the city's foodways inside and out. Along the way, stop at a curated mix of local eateries, specialty shops, bakeries and markets, each offering a small tasting that highlights a different piece of Lowcountry cuisine. The storytelling ties everything together – how ingredients arrived through the port, how Gullah-Geechee traditions shaped the region and how Charleston became a modern culinary destination.

South Carolina is historically divided into sauce regions, and Charleston sits right where mustard, vinegar-pepper and tomato-based styles all overlap. That means you'll find everything from whole-hog to brisket to ribs, depending on where you go.

Charleston's barbecue scene is a fascinating blend of old Lowcountry traditions, South Carolina's famous mustard-based ("Carolina Gold") sauces and a wave of newer pitmasters who've brought in influences from Texas, Tennessee and beyond. Charleston is like a crossroads where several Southern barbecue identities meet, and a great place to end your sweet and smoky journey.

Rodney Scott's Whole Hog BBQ is the top recommendation here. James Beard winner Rodney Scott helped put Charleston on the modern barbecue map. They feature whole hog cooked over hardwood embers, legendary ribs and chicken and a vinegar-pepper sauce with a kick. For classic mustard-based South Carolina barbecue, head to Bessinger's Barbecue, a local institution with an old-school vibe. Swig & Swine is a great option to sample multiple sauce styles at once, offering excellent pork belly and ribs along with creative sides.

 Meals: Lunch

Day 21 Charleston ↑

Charleston

As your barbecue adventure ends, and you return your hire car, we hope your stretchy pants are holding together and your taste buds are still tingling with the incredible flavours of this one-of-a-kind culinary odyssey.

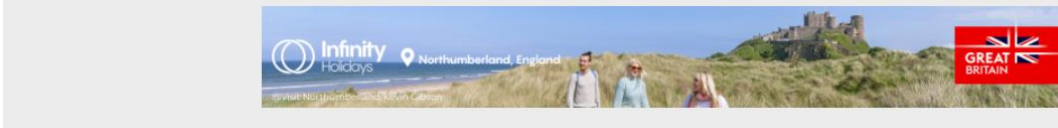




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Travel Inspiration

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Music, BBQ & the authentic American spirit awaits with Viva's new Missouri packages

With a rich history, iconic music scene, adventure activities, and out-of-this-world barbecue, touring Missouri is the stop your clients need on their next USA road trip. Tapping into the true heart of America, Viva Holidays has curated self-drive packages for your convenience, and North America Product Manager Alysha Hughes shares her recent trip highlights.



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Add Missouri to your client's USA road trip with Viva Holidays' curated packages





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Defined by its authentic American spirit, vibrant music scene, and award-winning barbecue, Missouri offers a surprising variety of modern experiences when you know what to book.

Viva Holidays, in partnership with Brand USA and Visit Missouri, has curated [self-drive packages](#) that reveal the best of the state.

Across the Show-Me State, your clients can tour vibrant arts districts, architectural landmarks, and explore the Ozarks' breathtaking natural landscapes.

Inviting communities, charming towns, and easy connections make Missouri a stand-out destination, easily woven into USA travel plans. Especially in 2026, with the milestone of Route 66's 100-year anniversary.

Why Missouri?



Route 66 celebrates 100 years in 2026





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Route 66 celebrates 100 years in 2026

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Here are 7 must-visit experiences to share with your Missouri-bound clients:

- 7. Kansas City jazz: Jazz may have been born in [New Orleans](#), but it grew up in Kansas City, Missouri, where musicians relocated during prohibition. That camaraderie remains today, as discovered in live performances and at the American Jazz Museum.
- 6. St. Louis blues: Soulful, fusion blues of the 1920s and '30s made their way to St. Louis, making it the blues epicentre. Travellers can experience this history at live shows, music venues and festivals across the city.
- 5. Branson: In the heart of the Ozarks, over 9 million annual visitors flock to Branson – the 'Live Entertainment Capital of Missouri'. They love to watch country, rock, pop, gospel, and bluegrass shows, and visit an 1880s-themed amusement park, amazing museums, and outdoor recreation.
- 4. Barbecue: Travellers have ample opportunities to taste why Missouri loves its barbecue. Discover Kansas City's 100-plus establishments to find the best burnt ends. Then, make your way across the state to savour St. Louis-style spare ribs.
- 3. Route 66: Missouri is celebrating Route 66's centennial all year. Across 450 kilometres, your clients will love the mom-and-pop diners, roadside attractions, vintage motor courts, and local stories.
- 2. Gateway Arch: The United States' tallest man-made monument, the Gateway Arch offers a tram ride to the top for sweeping views of downtown St. Louis and the Mississippi River.
- 1. Outdoors: A million-plus acres of public lands and conservation areas make Missouri a paradise for outdoor enthusiasts. Highlights include climbing billion-year-old boulders at Elephant Rocks State Park, biking the Katy Trail State Park, or hiking alongside Ha Ha Tonka State Park's ruins.





Missouri's magic moments



Alysha Hughes says Kansas City, Missouri has so much to offer Australian travellers

Viva Holidays' North American Product Manager, Alysha Hughes, shared her favourite moments on a recent visit to Kansas City, Missouri.

"One standout was the historic 18th & Vine district, one of the true cradles of jazz music and a longstanding hub for African American culture and business."

Alysha continued, "Travellers can visit both the American Jazz Museum and the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. Warm Southern hospitality greets you from the volunteers, who reveal the lively streets and community spirit that defined 18th & Vine."

Alysha also visited the Museum of Kansas City, "Once the home of the Long family, key figures in the city's development, the estate offers an immersive museum experience, perfect for learning about Kansas City's heritage and growth."

"I also treated myself to Kansas City's world-famous barbecue, known for its slow-smoked meats, generous portions, and thick, tangy sauces. My favourite dish was the local specialty, burnt end: smoky, tender, and absolutely delicious."

She concluded, "Together, the food, music, history, and easy accessibility make Kansas City a genuinely welcoming destination, full of character and charm."





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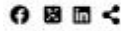
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Book Missouri with Viva Holidays

Connect your clients to the heart of America with Viva Holiday's tailor-made packages. These include:

Meet Me in St. Louis



(Getting St. Louis' famous Gateway Arch is a must-do) #Shutterstock

Discover St. Louis' rich blend of history, culture, and iconic architecture on this 6-day adventure. The famed Gateway Arch, a scenic riverboat cruise, and a charming St. Louis tour celebrate the city's live music, craft breweries, and fascinating museums.

Meet Me in St. Louis includes:

- 5 nights at the 5-star Magnolia Hotel St. Louis, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel in a King Room
- A 4-hour Best of St. Louis Tour with Gateway Arch tram ride, Mississippi River cruise, and stops at Kiener Plaza, City Garden, and the National Blues Museum

From \$945* per person twin share. [Find out more here.](#)

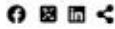




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Kansas City Highlights



Arthur Bryant's Barbeque is a Kansas City institution.

Across this 5-day itinerary, your clients can ride the free Kansas City Streetcar to explore neighbourhoods, taste the renowned barbeque burnt ends, wander the historic River Market neighbourhood, and visit the Museum of Kansas City.

Kansas City Highlights include:

- 4 nights at the 4-star Kansas City Marriott Downtown in a Standard Room
- Complimentary city activities, including the KC Streetcar and Museum of Kansas City

From \$865* per person twin share. [Learn more here.](#)

Missouri: Iconic Sites & Bites Self Drive



Branson's famous Baldknobbers

This 7-day self-drive journey from Kansas City to St. Louis via Branson offers the flexibility to experience the best of Missouri. Discover Kansas City's traditions, rich history and jazz greats. In Branson, immerse yourself in the Ozarks with plenty of options for entertainment.





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Once in St. Louis, the Gateway Arch and Gateway Arch Riverboats are must-dos, as is the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis with the largest mosaic collection in the Western Hemisphere.

This package includes:

- 2 nights at the 4-star Hilton President Kansas City in a Guest Room
- 2 nights at the 4-star Hilton Promenade at Branson Landing in a Guest Room
- 2 nights at the 3-star Best Western St. Louis Inn in a Standard Room
- 8 days Alamo USA car hire in a Toyota Corolla (or similar*)

From \$2,075* per person twin share. [Discover more here.](#)

Agents, read this



Branson serves up epic barbecue, too! ©Dennis' Bar, B-Que & Burger Shop

Discover more about these [Missouri packages](#) and access marketing assets on Viva Holidays' [dedicated agent platform](#).

To book, head to their online reservation system, [Mango](#).

This article is brought to you by Viva Holidays, Visit Missouri, and Visit The USA.





RESOURCE CENTRE UPDATES

What's New:



Kentucky African American Heritage Trail

Kentucky has launched the new African American Heritage Trail, connecting more than 50 meaningful sites that honour the resilience, creativity and lasting impact of Black Kentuckians. From the historic grounds of Camp Nelson to Paducah's iconic Hotel Metropolitan and the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, this powerful trail brings history to life through museums, landmarks and stories of achievement across the state.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Newsletters – Sports Scores Big with Foodies: Tailgating to Stadiums

TRADE Newsletter – Recipients: **3770** Open Rate: 1486 (**39.4%**)

PR Newsletter – Recipients: **362** Open Rate: 172 (**47.51%**)





TravelSouth USA



Sports Scores Big With Foodies: Tailgating To Stadiums

From stadiums to racetracks, game day is a celebration of food, community, and tradition. Tailgates, craft beer, barbecue, and regional favorites bring fans together long before the first whistle. Every match, race, and kickoff is paired with unforgettable flavors, showing that across the South, the spirit of sport is always served with a side of hospitality and the joy of sharing food with friends and family.

[Learn More](#)

KENTUCKY

Tailgating at the Track: Kentucky's Winning Flavour
In Kentucky, tailgating meets thoroughbred tradition. At Keeneland in Lexington, "The Hill" transforms race days into lively culinary celebrations, with burgoo simmering, food trucks serving local favourites, and bourbon bread pudding waiting inside the track. In Franklin, Kentucky Downs offers turf side tailgates where grills fire just steps from the action. Here, fans savor barbecue spreads and trackside excitement in true Bluegrass style.



[Read More](#)

MISSISSIPPI

Game Day Flavour Across Mississippi
In Mississippi, tailgating is as much about the food as the game. At Ole Miss in Oxford, fans gather under the oaks to serve sliders, fried chicken, pimento cheese spreads, and homemade desserts. At Mississippi State in Starkville and Southern Miss in Hattiesburg, grills smoke with ribs, pulled pork, and classic Southern sides. Across the state, every bite reflects tradition, hospitality, and the spirited pride that defines game day.



[Read More](#)





NORTH CAROLINA

Game Day Feasts Across North Carolina
In North Carolina, sports and food go hand in hand. At Charlotte Motor Speedway, fans fire up grills and smokers filled with barbecue and regional favourites. In Raleigh, hockey fans gather at local food halls and Sam Jones BBQ for whole hog barbecue. Durham Bulls Athletic Park serves gourmet stadium bites alongside craft beer. From college games to soccer and basketball tailgates, every game day in the Tar Heel State scores big on flavour.

[Read More](#)



SOUTH CAROLINA

Where Sports Meet Flavour
In South Carolina, game day is a full culinary experience. From SEC football to minor league baseball, tailgating turns parking lots into lively food festivals. Fans fire up smokers, host oyster roasts, share craft beer and chef prepared spreads, showcasing culinary pride alongside the competition. At Williams Brice Stadium in Columbia, tens of thousands of pounds of barbecue sizzle during a single home game, proving the heat is just as strong off the field.

[Read More](#)



TENNESSEE

Game Night Bites at GEODIS Park
Experience the excitement of game night in Nashville at GEODIS Park, home to the city's high energy Major League Soccer action. Start the evening with pre game tailgating before heading inside to enjoy local food favourites and craft beer that reflect the city's vibrant flavour. Feel the roar of the crowd and the electric stadium atmosphere, or elevate the experience with a behind the scenes stadium tour before kickoff for the ultimate fan night out.

[Read More](#)



LOUISIANA

Louisiana Tailgates: Big Flavour, Big Fun
In Louisiana, tailgating is a full culinary celebration. Share a crowd-pleasing pot of jambalaya with friends or grab classic chicken tenders from the original Raising Cane's outside LSU. In Ruston, pick up a pint or growler from Utility Brewing, or watch the Rajun Cajuns with your pup at Adopted Dog Brewery. After the game, explore Lafayette's Poboy Trail for iconic sandwiches and local flavours, making every tailgate a true taste of Louisiana.

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ALABAMA

More Than a Game

In Alabama, tailgating is a full-blown cultural ritual. From the University of Alabama to Auburn, quads and parking lots transform into open-air kitchens with hickory-smoked barbecue, Conecuh sausage, mac and cheese, and banana pudding. Fans share food, stories, and hospitality before stepping into stadiums alive with bands, mascots, and flyovers. Every Saturday blends Southern tradition, pride, and flavour, making game day an unforgettable communal experience.



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RHYTHMS OF THE SOUTH

Atlanta, Nashville, New Orleans

In Atlanta, Mercedes-Benz Stadium and State Farm Arena serve classic favorites and chef-driven dishes, while Truist Park and The Home Depot Backyard offer tailgates, craft beer, and local eats. Nashville blends sports with world-class flavor, from GEODIS Park soccer energy to hot chicken, barbecue, and Michelin-starred dining. In New Orleans, Saints and Pelicans games feature Gulf seafood, tailgates in Champions Square, and local dishes, showing the city's culinary spirit scores big each game.



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SOCIAL CONTENT UPDATE

Gate 7 Private AU/NZ Travel Trade Community – 662 Members





 Sandrine LG
Admin · · March 20 at 10:09 AM · 🌐

Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion music festival voted among the very best in the USA.

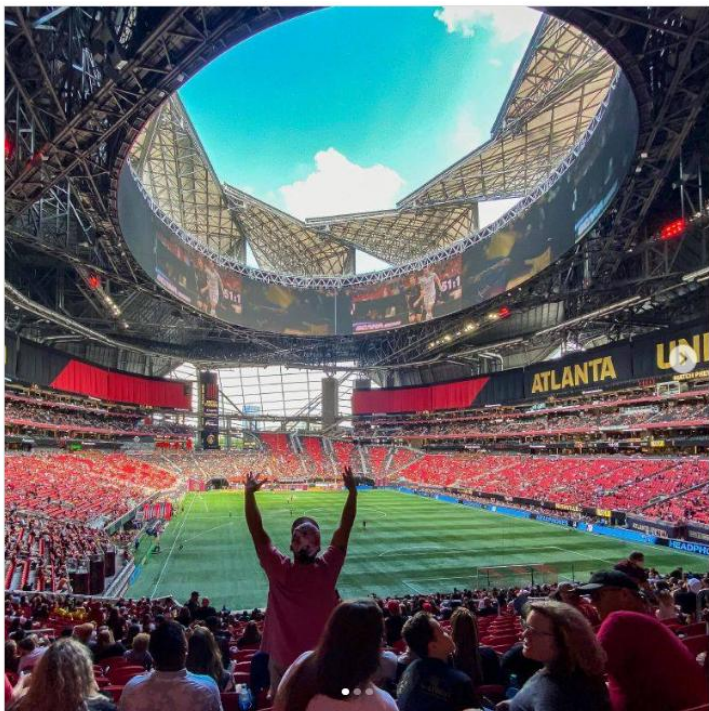
The Birthplace of Country Music is pleased to report that USA TODAY 10BEST voted Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion as #5 nationally in the 2026 Readers' Choice Award for Best Music Festival.


Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion is the only music festival to win in either Tennessee or Virginia, ranking it as the best for both states.


[See more](#)



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🌐 Atlanta, Nashville & New Orleans: Where Game Day Meets Flavour

In Atlanta, Mercedes-Benz Stadium and State Farm Arena serve everything from \$2 classics to chef-driven dishes 🍴, while Truist Park and The Home Depot Backyard offer tailgates, craft beer, and local eats.

Nashville combines sports with world-class flavour, from GEODIS Park soccer energy to Michelin-starred dining at Bastion, plus hot chicken and barbecue at iconic local spots.

In New Orleans, Saints and Pelicans games come with Gulf seafood, tailgates in Champions Square, and beignets, muffulettas, and award-winning restaurants nearby—proving

👍 1 🗨️ 📌

March 26

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Alabama: More Than a Game

In Alabama, tailgating is a full-blown cultural ritual 🌿. From the University of Alabama to Auburn, quads and parking lots transform into open-air kitchens with hickory-smoked barbecue, Conecuh sausage, mac and cheese, and banana pudding. Fans share food, stories, and hospitality before stepping into stadiums alive with bands, mascots, and flyovers. Here, every Saturday blends Southern tradition, pride, and flavour—making game day an unforgettable communal experience.

@alabamatravel

#SweetHomeAlabama #TravelSouth

1 March 24

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Louisiana Tailgates: Big Flavour, Big Fun

In Louisiana, tailgating is a culinary celebration. Whip up a crowd-pleasing pot of jambalaya to share with friends 🍲. At LSU, grab classic chicken tenders from the original Raising Cane's outside the gates. Head to Ruston for a pint and a growler to go from Utility Brewing, or watch the Rajun Cajuns with your pup at Adopted Dog Brewery 🐕. After the game, explore Lafayette's Poboy Trail for iconic sandwiches and local flavour 🥪.

1 March 18

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🍷🍔 Game Day Flavour Across Mississippi

In Mississippi, tailgating is as much about the food as the game. At Ole Miss in Oxford, fans serve sliders, fried chicken, pimento cheese spreads, and desserts under the oaks 🌳. At Mississippi State in Starkville and Southern Miss in Hattiesburg, grills smoke ribs, pulled pork, and classic sides, while Jackson and coastal ballparks offer bold flavours and Michelin-level dining nearby. Every bite

🍷 1 💬 🍷 📌

March 11

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🍷🍔 Tailgating at the Track: Kentucky's Winning Flavor

In Kentucky, tailgating meets thoroughbred tradition. At Keeneland in Lexington, "The Hill" turns race days into culinary celebrations with burgoo simmering, food trucks rolling, and bourbon bread pudding waiting inside the track 🍷. In Franklin, Kentucky Downs offers turf-side tailgates where grills fire just steps from the action. Here, sports fans savor BBQ spreads and trackside thrills in true Bluegrass

🍷 1 💬 🍷 📌

March 9

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🌐 🍷 Game Night Bites at GEODIS Park

Score a thrilling night in Music City at GEODIS Park, home to Nashville's high-energy Major League Soccer action. Start with pre-game tailgating, then head inside for local eats and craft beer that showcase the city's flavour 🍷. Feel the crowd roar, soak in the electric atmosphere, and even book a behind-the-scenes tour before kickoff for the ultimate fan experience.

📍 @tnvacation

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March 2

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🍷 🍷 Game Day Feasts Across North Carolina

In North Carolina, sports and food go hand in hand. At Charlotte Motor Speedway, fans fire up grills and smokers with barbecue and regional favorites 🍷. Raleigh hockey fans hit food halls and Sam Jones BBQ for Michelin Bib Gourmand whole-hog barbecue. Durham Bulls Athletic Park serves gourmet stadium bites with craft beer. College, soccer, and basketball tailgates add local flavour, proving that

📍 @tnvacation

📍 @tnvacation

March 16

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🔥 South Carolina: Where Sports Meet Flavour

In South Carolina, game day is a full culinary experience. From SEC football to minor league baseball, tailgating turns parking lots into food festivals 🍷. Fans bring professional smokers, oyster roasts, craft beer, and chef-prepared spreads, showing off culinary pride alongside the competition. At Williams-Brice Stadium in Columbia, tens of thousands of pounds of barbecue sizzle during a single home game, proving that in South Carolina, the heat isn't just on the field.

📍 @discover_sc

#DiscoverSouthCarolina #TravelSouth

March 4

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Travel South USA's post



Travel South USA (AU, NZ)

26 March at 10:00 · 🌐



📍 Atlanta, Nashville & New Orleans: Where Game Day Meets Flavour

In Atlanta, Mercedes-Benz Stadium and State Farm Arena serve everything from \$2 classics to chef-driven dishes 🍴, while Truist Park and The Home Depot Backyard offer tailgates, craft beer, and local eats.

Nashville combines sports with world-class flavour, from GEODIS Park soccer energy to Michelin-starred dining at Bastion, plus hot chicken and barbecue at iconic local spots.

In New Orleans, Saints and Pelicans games come with Gulf seafood, tailgates in Champions Square, and beignets, muffulettas, and award-winning restaurants nearby—proving the city's culinary spirit scores big alongside every win.

📍 @discoveratlanta @visitmusiccity @neworleans





Travel South USA's post



Travel South USA (AU, NZ)

10 March · 🌐



🔥🍷 Tailgating at the Track: Kentucky's Winning Flavor

In Kentucky, tailgating meets thoroughbred tradition. At Keeneland in Lexington, "The Hill" turns race days into culinary celebrations with burgoo simmering, food trucks rolling, and bourbon bread pudding waiting inside the track 🍷. In Franklin, Kentucky Downs offers turf-side tailgates where grills fire just steps from the action. Here, sports fans savor BBQ spreads and trackside thrills in true Bluegrass style.

📍 @kytourism

#KentuckyTourism #TravelSouth





Travel South USA's post



Travel South USA (AU, NZ)

5 March · 🌐



🔥 South Carolina: Where Sports Meet Flavour

In South Carolina, game day is a full culinary experience. From SEC football to minor league baseball, tailgating turns parking lots into food festivals 🍷. Fans bring professional smokers, oyster roasts, craft beer, and chef-prepared spreads, showing off culinary pride alongside the competition. At Williams-Brice Stadium in Columbia, tens of thousands of pounds of barbecue sizzle during a single home game, proving that in South Carolina, the heat isn't just on the field.

📍 @discover_sc

#DiscoverSouthCarolina #TravelSouth





Travel South USA's post



Travel South USA (AU, NZ)

19 March at 10:00

🍷 Louisiana Tailgates: Big Flavour, Big Fun

In Louisiana, tailgating is a culinary celebration. Whip up a crowd-pleasing pot of jambalaya to share with friends 🍷. At LSU, grab classic chicken tenders from the original Raising Cane's outside the gates. Head to Ruston for a pint and a growler to go from Utility Brewing, or watch the Rajun Cajuns with your pup at Adopted Dog Brewery 🍺. After the game, explore Lafayette's Poboy Trail for iconic sandwiches and local flavour.

📍 @explore.louisiana

#ExploreLouisiana #TravelSouth



Travel South USA's post



Travel South USA (AU, NZ)

17 March at 10:00

🍷 Game Day Feasts Across North Carolina

In North Carolina, sports and food go hand in hand. At Charlotte Motor Speedway, fans fire up grills and smokers with barbecue and regional favorites 🍷. Raleigh hockey fans hit food halls and Sam Jones BBQ for Michelin Bib Gourmand whole-hog barbecue. Durham Bulls Athletic Park serves gourmet stadium bites with craft beer. College, soccer, and basketball tailgates add local flavour, proving that in the Tar Heel State, every game day scores big on taste.

📍 @visitnc

#VisitNorthCarolina #TravelSouth





Travel South USA's post



Travel South USA (AU, NZ)

24 March at 10:00 · 🌐



🍷 Alabama: More Than a Game

In Alabama, tailgating is a full-blown cultural ritual 🍷. From the University of Alabama to Auburn, quads and parking lots transform into open-air kitchens with hickory-smoked barbecue, Conecuh sausage, mac and cheese, and banana pudding. Fans share food, stories, and hospitality before stepping into stadiums alive with bands, mascots, and flyovers. Here, every Saturday blends Southern tradition, pride, and flavour—making game day an unforgettable communal experience.

📍 @alabamatravel

#SweetHomeAlabama #TravelSouth





Travel South USA's post



Travel South USA (AU, NZ)
12 March at 10:01 · 🌐



🍷 Game Day Flavour Across Mississippi

In Mississippi, tailgating is as much about the food as the game. At Ole Miss in Oxford, fans serve sliders, fried chicken, pimento cheese spreads, and desserts under the oaks 🌳. At Mississippi State in Starkville and Southern Miss in Hattiesburg, grills smoke ribs, pulled pork, and classic sides, while Jackson and coastal ballparks offer bold flavours and Michelin-level dining nearby. Every bite celebrates tradition, hospitality, and game-day pride.

📍 @visitms

#VisitMississippi #TravelSouth



Travel South USA's post



Travel South USA (AU, NZ)
3 March · 🌐



🍷 Game Night Bites at GEODIS Park

Score a thrilling night in Music City at GEODIS Park, home to Nashville's high-energy Major League Soccer action. Start with pre-game tailgating, then head inside for local eats and craft beer that showcase the city's flavour 🍷. Feel the crowd roar, soak in the electric atmosphere, and even book a behind-the-scenes tour before kickoff for the ultimate fan experience.

📍 @tnvacation

#MadeInTennessee #TravelSouth





Market Update

Economic & Market Update

The following economic announcements were made in March:

- **Australian GDP grew 0.8% in the December quarter (4 Mar):** The ABS reported that the Australian economy grew by 0.8% in the December quarter 2025, with annual growth of 2.6%, pointing to stronger economic momentum at the end of the year and a fourth consecutive quarter of GDP per capita growth. [Source](#).
- **RBA raises cash rate to 4.10% (17 Mar):** The Reserve Bank of Australia increased the cash rate by 25 basis points to 4.10%, citing a material risk that inflation will remain above target for longer, alongside tighter labour market conditions and renewed global inflation risks linked to the Middle East conflict. [Source](#).
- **Unemployment rate rises to 4.3% (19 Mar):** The ABS reported that the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate rose to 4.3% in February, up from 4.1%, as the number of unemployed people increased by 35,000, although employment also grew and participation lifted to 66.9%, indicating the labour market remains relatively resilient but is showing some softening. [Source](#).
- **Inflation eases to 3.7% (25 Mar):** The ABS reported that Inflation rose 3.7% in the 12 months to February 2026, down from 3.8% in the 12 months to January, suggesting inflation pressures eased slightly but remain above the RBA's 2-3% target band. [Source](#).
- **Household wealth rose 2.5% in the December quarter (26 Mar):** The ABS reported that total household wealth increased by 2.5% or \$453.7 billion in the December quarter 2025, largely driven by rising residential land and dwelling values, indicating household balance sheets remain supported by asset growth. [Source](#).
- **Australian dollar weakened against the USD in March:** The AUD briefly strengthened above ~US\$0.70 in early March (its highest level in recent years), supported by higher interest rates and improved sentiment, before easing back to around ~US\$0.68 by the end of the month. [Source](#).

Visitation to the USA.

February 2026 i-94 arrival data (released in March)

Australia:

- 59,822 arrivals in February, down -2% YoY, a strong improvement on January's -12% decline, driven in large part by demand for the NRL games played in Las Vegas.
- Australia ranked 10th among long-haul markets for the month.

Top 10 countries in 2025

Rank	Country	Visits	Percentage growth YOY
1	New Zealand	205,710	2%
2	Indonesia	164,730	-4%
3	Japan	159,090	17%
4	India	133,580	5%
5	China	120,490	36%





6	USA	79,390	-7%
7	UK	76,250	3%
8	Vietnam	72,620	23%
9	Thailand	72,180	-10%
10	Philippines	50,690	9%

Tour Operators & Travel Agencies

- **Qantas Loyalty recorded underlying EBIT of \$286 million, up 12% on the previous corresponding period:** Driven by what Qantas Group called “the strength of the Frequent Flyer program through member engagement and a growing list of partners, as well as continued revenue growth from Qantas Business Rewards, Hotels and Holidays, and TripADeal”. [Source.](#)
- **Intrepid Travel posts record revenue in best year in 37 years:** The Melbourne-based B Corp has delivered its strongest financial, customer and impact results in 37 years, with the company forecasting it is now on track to hit \$1 billion in bookings for the first time in 2026. [Source.](#)
- **Bedsonline platform evolves:** B2B travel-tech marketplace HBX Group has relaunched its retail platform Bedsonline, now powered by AI to make it easier for agents to sell travel. Rather than just displaying inventory, Bedsonline now analyses booking intent, making searches more intuitive and reducing the time needed to compare product options. [Source, page 2.](#)
- **Travel Associates launches new luxury business model under Ben Monaghan:** Travel Associates has launched a new head-office-based business aimed at a more digitally engaged luxury traveller, with luxury consultant Ben Monaghan appointed to lead the venture under the name Monaghan & Turner Travel Associates. The move marks an expansion beyond the brand’s traditional bricks-and-mortar model and reflects changing expectations on both sides of the luxury travel equation. [Source.](#)
- **Skyscanner now lets travellers compare and book flights and trains in one search:** The new feature displays train options alongside flights for journeys under eight hours or with a single connection, helping travellers make informed decisions on time, cost, and convenience. The update responds to research showing 25% of travellers want to see train options alongside flights, with plans to expand the feature further, including to its app. [Source.](#)

Traveler Insights

- **Hilton’s 2025 Trends Report found 71 per cent of Australian parents say Gen Alpha (children aged under 15 years) and Gen Z are key decision makers when it comes to travel:** These kids are no longer just along for the ride; they’re steering the journey. “Our research shows young decision-makers are motivated by experiences rather than simply destinations,” says Paul Hutton, area vice president and head of Australasia at Hilton. [Source.](#)
- **Virtuoso ANZ Forum 2026: Only 7% of clients cancelling travel despite Middle East crisis:** Asked about the current Middle East crisis, 71 per cent of respondents said clients are changing to





another destination or routing altogether, while 21 per cent are postponing travel to a later date. Only 7 per cent indicated outright cancellations. [Source.](#)

Air Lift

- **Qantas Reports \$1.46 Billion Profit, Launches Sydney-Vegas Direct Flights:** Qantas has today announced an underlying profit before tax of \$1.46 billion, a \$71 million increase compared to the corresponding period in 2025. Meanwhile, the group announced it would “launch the first direct flight between Sydney and Las Vegas” from 29 December on a Boeing 787. [Source.](#)
- **Travellers could face higher airfares in the coming years:** A new report from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) revealing that airports will be looking to recover the money they have poured into infrastructure in 2024-25. [Source, page 4.](#)
- **Air New Zealand increases airfares:** Massive jumps in the price of jet fuel has already led one airline to increase airfares in a bid to offset challenging operating costs. Air New Zealand confirmed this morning that it has implemented initial fare changes, cautioning that if the conflict in the Middle East continued, it would take further pricing action. [Source, page 1.](#)
- **Qantas USA & Canada Red Tail Sale – 17 – 23 March** qantas.com
- **United Airlines cuts capacity as fuel costs soar, CEO warns of ‘\$11B hit’:** The airline will trim less profitable flying, including midweek and overnight routes, alongside reductions at Chicago O’Hare and the suspension of services to Tel Aviv and Dubai. United expects to restore its full schedule in the fall. [Source.](#)
- **Etihad has boosted its US network despite ongoing disruptions caused by the Middle East conflict:** According to Simple Flying, the carrier has scheduled an average of 7.1 daily departures from Abu Dhabi in Jun 2026, signalling a 42% uplift year-on-year. Etihad also just launched three times weekly flights to Charlotte, North Carolina. [Source, page 4.](#)
- **United Airlines is modernising its fleet with 250+ new aircraft and upgraded passenger experiences.** Highlights include the “Relax Row” in Economy, transforming three seats into a lie-flat space with mattress pads, pillows and plush toys; Starlink Wi-Fi with Spotify and Apple TV access; and expanded Polaris business class with all-aisle access lie-flat seats. These innovations, starting in 2027, aim to increase comfort, connectivity, and choice for travellers while strengthening United’s premium positioning. [Source.](#)

Media

- Seven West Media’s acquisition by Southern Cross Media Group completed on 7 January 2026; a \$385 million all-scrip deal creating a combined entity across TV (Seven Network, 7plus), audio (Hit Network, Triple M, LiSTNR) and publishing (The West Australian, The Nightly). The combined group offers new cross-platform storytelling packages for advertisers, spanning broadcast, streaming, radio and publishing under one sales team. [Source](#)
- Nine Entertainment made equally bold moves: it sold its talkback radio network (2GB, 3AW, 4BC, 6PR) to the Laundry Family Office for \$56 million (a fraction of the \$275 million paid in 2019) and simultaneously acquired digital outdoor advertising platform QMS Media for \$850 million. [Source](#)





- Sky News Australia announced it will rebrand as News24 later in 2026 after Comcast's licensing agreement expires, Sky is owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp and the new brand was revealed at a launch event at News Corp headquarters in Sydney.
- News Corp reached 17.67 million Australians in February 2026 (78% of the online population) with digital subscribers across all mastheads growing 15% to 1,126,000, showing that paid digital audiences are expanding even as print contracts. [Source](#)
- Independent publisher KK Press entered voluntary liquidation, shuttering Cosmopolitan Australia after its 2024 relaunch and closing T: Australia. [Source](#)
- ThinkNewsBrands' inaugural "News Nation" report (Roy Morgan, March 2026) launched. [Source](#). Key findings include:
 - 9 in 10 Australians engage with news monthly; 43% actively trust it and news publishers are rated trustworthy by 78% of Australians versus just 36% for content creators.
 - Almost 2 in 5 Australians turn to news media specifically to fact-check information seen on social platforms - journalism is functioning as an active verification layer, not just a content category.
 - More than half of Gen Z regularly follow five or more news sources -countering the narrative that younger Australians are abandoning journalism.
 - For advertisers: 85% of Australians report greater confidence in a brand encountered in a journalistic environment; news content is 6.4x more likely to be remembered; and advertising in news environments drives 3.5x greater intent to act.
- Australia's world-first under-16 social media ban entered enforcement in Q1. By January 2026, 4.7 million accounts had been deactivated or restricted across platforms. eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant's 31 March compliance report raised significant concerns citing repeated age-verification workarounds and inadequate controls and formal investigations are underway, with penalties of up to \$49.5 million per platform. Two High Court challenges are proceeding (Digital Freedom Project and Reddit), with a preliminary hearing set for 21 May 2026. [Source](#)
- The News Media Bargaining Code faces a critical moment: Meta's publisher deals have been expiring since mid-2024, and Google's five-year News Showcase deals with Seven West Media and Nine expire in May 2026. The government's proposed replacement, the 'News Bargaining Incentive' has not been enacted, and former ACCC Chair Rod Sims warned it could take 18-24 months to become operational. Neither the NMBC nor the NBI currently addresses AI answer engines like ChatGPT and Claude that draw on news content without providing links or payment. [Source](#).
- Australian influencer marketing spend reached A\$830 million in the 12 months to early 2026, a 13.5% year-on-year increase, forecast to surpass A\$1 billion in 2026 and reach A\$2.46 billion by 2030. The 2026 Australian Open was the quarter's standout case study in creator-media convergence: Tennis Australia accredited 200+ content creators, established a dedicated Creator Lounge inside the media headquarters, and the tournament generated 3.47 million media mentions (up from 2.63 million in 2025). [Source](#).
- Podcasting crossed a significant milestone in Q1: 52% of Australians now listen to or watch a podcast monthly with listenership up 15.9% over two years. The format skews strongly young:





72% of 18–34 year-olds listen monthly, and 95.4% of consumption is on mobile devices. Video podcasts are growing rapidly alongside audio, with 40%+ of listeners already consuming video formats and 77% alternating between audio and video. [Source](#).

- The Medianet 2026 Australian Media Landscape Report (803 journalists, published 31 March) found AI adoption has crossed the majority line for the first time. [Source](#). Key findings:
 - 54% of Australian journalists now use generative AI in their work, up from 37% in 2024 showing adaptation of it as a tool.
 - Primary uses are pragmatic efficiency tools: summarising documents (50%), transcription (46%), background research (45%) and proofreading (39%) - not content creation.
 - 93% express concern about AI's impact on journalistic integrity - a record high.
 - Press releases have overtaken personal contacts as the #1 story source for the first time – used by 86% of journalists; 66% rate PR professionals as an important source
 - 78% of journalists say AI-written pitches decrease their trust in PR; 48% say they can almost always detect AI-generated material
 - 9% of journalists are running or considering alternative platforms like Substack, newsletters or podcasts - the journalist-as-creator trend is accelerating, opening new channels for earned media beyond traditional mastheads.

- On the regulatory front, ACMA registered a new Commercial Radio Code of Practice 2026 in February requiring on-air disclosure when a synthetic voice hosts a regularly scheduled program or news broadcast, the first time AI has been addressed in an Australian broadcasting code. [Source](#)

- Anthropic signed an MOU with the Australian Government on 31 March, announcing A\$3 million in research partnerships and plans to open a Sydney office in 2026, a signal of growing government engagement with AI governance. [Source](#).

- Travel Monitor is launching a new series of Specialised Monthly EDMs for 2026, giving advertisers a more targeted way to connect with the Australian travel trade: Each issue is built around a dedicated theme, helping your brand, product, or destination appear in front of agents, wholesalers and industry professionals when they are already focused on that category. [Source](#).





Actions

- Mission Planning
- Hunter Travel Group Training Event
- Newcastle MTA Expo planning
- Trade & PR Newsletter
- Global Week
- Innovation Challenge

