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SCENERY & STAMINA!

# 9 robust road trips across America

By Carole Jacobs

**A PLANE WILL GET YOU THERE FASTER...AND YOU CAN ALWAYS BOARD A BUS AND LEAVE THE DRIVING TO SOMEONE ELSE.** But why bother when the best vehicle for seeing America's wonders is parked right in your driveway? All you need is a good map and a reliable ride to cruise through some of the country's most beautiful national parks and fascinating scenic byways: From Washington's towering forests to the sun-washed shores of North Carolina's Outer Banks. In between, visit the sleepy hollows in New York state, where our forefathers wined and dined—or escape to a hot springs retreat near Glacier National Park where you can take a soak while gazing at stars, the Hollywood as well as the twinkling kind.

**BEFORE WE DEPART, HERE IS A QUICK REMINDER OF THE DANGER THAT COULD LIE AHEAD:** Long hours behind the wheel, fueled by super-sized chowing and trucker-size portions of high-fat roadside snacks, could add a lot of mileage to your derriere. So, unless you get your rear into gear, by the time you reach your next hotel mirror, you could be staring at a human-turned-Winnebago. To avoid such trappings, we have developed nine stunningly scenic drives with built-in "fit stops" designed to get you out of your car and moving on your own horsepower. So check the oil, fill the tank and throw your daypack and hiking boots in the back seat. *travelgirls*, start your engines. It's time to burn some serious rubber—and calories.

## 1. ACADIA NATIONAL PARK, MAINE

AT THE END OF THE LAND AND THE EDGE OF THE SHINING SEA.

Distance: 80 miles, 2 days

Directions: From Bangor, take U.S. 1 south to Rte. 3/Park Loop Road. Follow around Mount Desert Island to Somesville. Take Rte. 102 south to Bass Harbor. Backtrack to Bangor.

As Rte. 1A winds east from Bangor, the scent of evergreen woods shifts to an ocean tang. Cross the bridge over Mount Desert Narrow and enter a world of craggy, windswept shorelines and shady sanctuaries. Mount Desert Island is shaped like a lobster claw, with the eastern half home to the resort town of Bar Harbor as well as Acadia National Park.

Past the Hulls Cove Visitor Center, Summit Trail climbs two miles to the jagged summit of Cadillac Mountain.

**Fit stop! The steep, rocky trail ascends to the boulder-strewn summit for striking views of a vast expanse of sea dotted with isles. Across the island, the Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse perches on a rocky, sea-washed ledge. If you start at 4 a.m., you can reach the summit as the first rays of sunshine light up the peak. At 1,530 feet, Cadillac Mountain is the highest point on the East Coast and the first place in the continental U.S. to greet the dawn.**

Past the Wild Gardens of Acadia, a jewel-box park planted with native flowers, grasses, ferns and trees, is Sand Beach, a tiny pink beach backed by mountains. From the beach, a trail winds to views of Great Head, a volcanic rock jutting 150 feet into the ocean. Unless you're a member of the Polar Bear Club, you probably won't put more than a toe in the water. The route hugs the shoreline to Thunder Hole, a narrow chasm where waves explode into spray at high tide, then veers inland to woods that shelter gurgling brooks, idyllic ponds and carriage roads graced by 17 hand-built granite bridges, each a unique work of art. The roads were built in the 1900's when the island was a summer resort for high society.

**Fit stop! Hike the carriage road around Jordan Pond, a looking-glass wonder. Then head to the Jordan Pond Teahouse for fresh-baked popovers with strawberry jam, homemade ice cream and lemonade that's as tart as a New Englander's tongue.**

The highway winds to Northeast Harbor, where a 20-minute ferry chugs across the choppy sea to Little Cranberry Island. With rocky shores, spruce trees, quiet country lanes and just 75 year-round residents (most of whom can trace their ancestry back to the 18th century) it's a chip off the old block—only quieter.

**Fit stop! Take a hike around the island and explore the village of Islesford, where the Blue Duck Ships' Store (wooden and gabled) and the Islesford Historical Museum (a brick Georgian Revival) have fascinating exhibits showcasing turn-of-the-century dolls, toys, tools, photographs and navigational equipment that tell the story of the five Cranberry Isles and the region's seafaring people.**

Rte. 3 exits the park along Somes Sound, a deep gorge that is one of America's few fjords. At the end of the sound is Somesville, the oldest settlement on the island.

**Fit stop! Take a walk around this pretty colonial era town past white-clapboard houses, steeple churches, tree-lined brooks and quiet ponds.**

On the other side of the sound, you'll find villages like Southwest Harbor, Seal Cove and Bass Harbor, which are home to lobstermen and comfortable inns. There, you'll be lulled to sleep by the slap of the waves and the far-off hoot of a foghorn.

Info: Acadia National Park, 207.288.3338 or go to [www.nps.gov/acad](http://www.nps.gov/acad).

## 2. RHODE ISLAND COAST

### WEEKEND WITH THE ROCKEFELLERS

Distance: 100 miles, 2 days

Directions: From Watch Hill, take Rte. 1 east to Rte. 138, which crosses Narragansett Bay to Aquidneck Island and Newport. Backtrack to Watch Hill.

Rhode Island's coast proves that good things come in small packages. Start at Watch Hill on the Connecticut border, a pretty Victorian seaside town built on a series of cliffs.

**Fit stop! Hike the town's steep streets past turn-of-the-century summer cottages and the grande-dame hotel, follow the beach path to Napatree Point, the westernmost tip of Rhode Island, and walk Lighthouse Road to The Watch Hill Coast Guard Station for sensational panoramic vistas.**

From Watch Hill, Rte. 1 heads east through quaint ocean-side communities like Weekapaug, where gingerbread-style homes dot the rocky shoreline as you drive through a string of state parks and wildlife refuges.

**Fit stop! Swans glide and ospreys swoop and soar at Trustum Pond National Wildlife Preserve, a 640-acre farm whose glimmering pond, abandoned orchards, scrub forest and alfalfa fields are a transitory home to some 300 species of birds.**

Route 1 cuts through the rolling farmland of Rhode Island's "plantation country," the colonial term for the great agricultural estates that once thrived in this area. Near Saunterstown, the Silas Casey Farm, set on 300 acres overlooking Narragansett Bay, has been preserved as a living history museum and working organic farm.

**Fit stop! Roam around the 1750 clapboard farmhouse, barns, fields and family cemetery. The beautiful original stone walls surrounding the farmstead are a testament to the days when things were built to last.**

North of Narragansett, soaring bridges skip across Narragansett Bay to Aquidneck Island and the town of Newport, best known for the ornate "cottages" (which look like mansions to ordinary folk) built by such robber barons as the Vanderbilts and Belmonts in the late 19th century, and memorialized in the film *The Age of Innocence*.

**Fit stop! Hike the three-and-a-half-mile Cliff Walk along rocky bluffs for a look at how the other half lives. Each "cottage" is more lavish than the last. The Breakers, a four-storey, 70-room limestone mansion built as a summer home for Cornelius Vanderbilt II, would cost more than \$400 million to construct today. Rent a bike for a spin along Ocean Drive, where gracious estates dot a jagged coastline.**

At journey's end, sink into an armchair on the generous veranda at Castle Hill Inn in Newport and watch the sailboats scudding home at sunset.

**Info: Rhode Island Tourism Division  
[www.visitrhodeisland.com](http://www.visitrhodeisland.com)**

**1.800.556.2484**

*Lighthouse at Castle Hill, Rhode Island*

### 3. THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY, NEW YORK

#### SLEEPY HOLLOW REVISITED

Distance: 180 miles, 2 days

Directions: From Yonkers, go north on U.S. 9 to Interstate 287 and cross the Tappan Zee Bridge. Follow U.S. 9W to Rte. 9D and north on U.S.9 to Rhinebeck and cross the Rip Van Winkle Bridge. Follow U.S. 9W to Catskill, Rte. 23A to Palenville, Rte.23 to Saugerties and Rte. 212 to Woodstock. To return to Yonkers, go south on Rte. 375, Rte. 28 and The New York Thruway.

If Rip Van Winkle were alive, he wouldn't sleep a wink for fear of missing this drive through the storybook hollows immortalized by author Washington Irving. Route 9 begins at the foot of the George Washington Bridge, at the northern tip of New York City, and heads up the east bank of the Hudson River past historic inns and estates where our country's forefathers wined and dined. George Washington as well as Samuel Morse, Franklin D. Roosevelt and four generations of Rockefellers slept here.

**Fit stop! Brush up on American literature and history at four legendary estates sprawled on grassy bluffs above the Hudson: Sunnyside, the 19th century home where Washington Irving penned *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip Van Winkle*; Kykuit, the lavish estate that housed four generations of the Rockefeller family; Locust Grove, with Samuel F.B. Morse's 150-acre blufftop Italian villa; and the Franklin Delano Roosevelt National Historic Site, where you can tour the estate's lovely rose gardens surrounding the gravesites of FDR and Eleanor Roosevelt.**

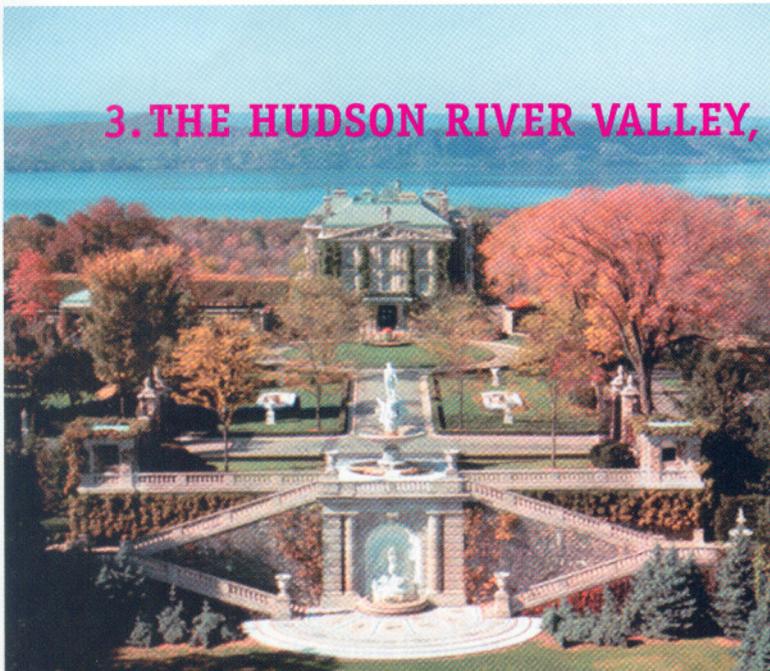
All that walking is likely to build up an appetite, so hunker down to a four-star meal at the world-famous Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, where four student-staffed restaurants and a casual café are open to the public. After lunch, head to Rhinebeck, one of America's oldest villages and home to Beekman Arms, the oldest inn in the U.S. and a popular watering hole for presidents George Washington and FDR. In August, Dutchess County hosts the state's largest county fair outside Rhinebeck, where everything from pigs to pies vies for blue ribbons.

**Fit stop! At The Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome, check out the barnstorming relics from the Lindbergh era, then buckle your seatbelt for a thrilling barnstorming ride over the Hudson River (weekends only from June through October).**

Across the Rip Van Winkle Bridge, the route veers into orchard and vineyard country, interspersed with farm hamlets such as Palenville and Woodstock, both of which became artists' colonies, then weekend magnets for greenery-starved city dwellers. Saugerties is another popular small town that has evolved into an antique mecca with a dash of fine dining. The result of all this "upstate urbanization": summer-long arts festivals, theater, intriguing galleries, good restaurants and the only decent bagels west of the Hudson. (Editor's note: New Yorkers consider anything above NYC upstate.) For a unique overnight experience, spend the night in the historic Saugerties Lighthouse.

**Info: Historic Hudson River Valley Lodging Association, 845.471.6115 or go to [www.hudsonvalleylodging.com](http://www.hudsonvalleylodging.com); Beekman Arms, 845.876.7077 or go to [www.beekmandelamaterinn.com](http://www.beekmandelamaterinn.com); Saugerties Lighthouse, 845.247.0656 or go to [www.saugertieslighthouse.com](http://www.saugertieslighthouse.com).**

*photos from above: Kykuit, the lavish estate that housed four generations of the Rockefeller family; the gardens at Sunnyside; an antique car show at the Montgomery Place estate.*



photos courtesy of the Hudson River Valley Institute.

## 4. OUTER BANKS AND CAPE HATTERAS NATIONAL SEASHORE, NORTH CAROLINA

### ISLAND-HOPPING IN THE ATLANTIC

Distance: 200 miles, 3 days

Directions: From Point Harbor, take Rte. 158 across the Wright Memorial Bridge to Kitty Hawk and go south on Rte. 12 from Kitty Hawk to Ocracoke. Bridges and ferries connect the islands.



The pirates are gone but the treasures remain on these breezy and beautiful islands just off the North Carolina coastline. With sun-kissed beaches, rolling blue surf and undulating sand dunes, these islands are a vacation paradise whose offshore waters once spelled doom for sailors. Buffeted by high winds and treacherous cross-currents, the waters are littered with 500 shipwrecks and are called "The Graveyard of the Atlantic."

From the mainland, the highway drifts through farmland and salt marshes to The Wright Memorial Bridge, which skims across the silvery sound, past miles of clapboard farmhouses and soybean fields and on to a vast expanse of sea edged by blinding white beaches.

At Kill Devil Hills near Kitty Hawk, the Wright Brothers National Memorial pays tribute to the two bicycle mechanics from Ohio who, in December of 1903, took their homemade craft on the first powered flight in history — 120 feet in 12 seconds!

**Fit stop! At Jockey's Ridge State Park, scramble to the top of a 130-foot sand dune (the highest on the East Coast) and watch hang gliders take leaps of faith from the top. Then hike through an ancient maritime forest at Nags Head Woods Preserve, where trails tunnel through moss-draped woodlands and past sparkling freshwater ponds.**

A ferry plies to Roanoke and its unsolved mystery. In 1587, English settlers came to colonize the island but inexplicably vanished. The only clue left behind was an enigmatic word carved in a tree: CROATOAN. At Fort Raleigh, you can witness the outdoor symphonic drama *The Lost Colony*, explore the reconstructed fort of The Lost Colonists and roam the carefully tended Elizabethan Gardens that were planted in their honor.

The drive pushes south into Cape Hatteras National Seashore, an expanse of undeveloped coastline that in some places is so narrow you can see the Atlantic on one side and Pamlico Sound on the other.

**Fit stop! An arched bridge spans over Oregon Inlet to Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge where you can stretch your legs on boardwalk trails and observation platforms that deliver a bird's**

**eye view of hundreds of snow geese and egrets.** Just south, the 1874 Chicamacomico Lifesaving Station honors the brave men who rescued mariners from this nautical graveyard. Nearby is the 208-foot Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, which for more than a century warned sailors away from the treacherous shoals.

**Fit stop! In summer, you can climb to the top and wave at surfer dudes riding the rolling swells that crash at the base of the lighthouse. Or head to Canadian Hole and watch windsurfers waltz across the waves with their colorful sails billowing in the wind. Even better, take some lessons. Even if you never get up you'll get a hell of a workout trying.**

At the end of Hatteras Island, a half-hour ferry goes to Ocracoke Island. The island was isolated for so many years that many natives still speak with a hint of an Elizabethan accent.

**Fit stop! Go swimming or bodysurfing, then beachcomb for sea snails and whelks along 14 miles of pristine beaches with ultra-fine sand. Or, go crabbing in the sound. No luck? You can always feast on fresh crab cakes and homemade clam chowder in Ocracoke, a pretty village lined with seafood eateries that overlooks Silver Lake harbor.**

**Info: Cape Hatteras National Seashore, 252.473.2111 or go to [www.nps.gov/caha](http://www.nps.gov/caha) or [www.outerbanks.org](http://www.outerbanks.org).**

## 5. DOOR COUNTY LOOP, WISCONSIN

### CAPE COD OF THE MIDWEST

**Distance:** 120 miles, 2-3 days

**Directions:** From Sturgeon, take Rte. 57 north to Rte. 42. Go northwest to Gills Rock and then south on Rte. 42 back to Sturgeon Bay. Door County, four hours due north of Chicago, is aptly nicknamed the Cape Cod of the Midwest because of its quaint villages and maritime atmosphere. Routes 42 and 57 bracket the Door (as natives call it) and showcase its dramatic coastlines and gentle interior.

**Fit stop!** If you love to cycle, you may want to do this tour on two wheels instead of four. Call the number below for info on inn-to-inn cycling tours around the Door.

Route 57 follows the eastern shore north past cozy harbors and fishing villages from Sturgeon Bay to Cave Point County Park, where waves thunder through limestone caves framing dramatic Lake Michigan views. Just west at Potawatomi State Park, sugar maples, pines and birches march to a pretty beach scattered with granite boulders.

**Fit stop!** Climb the 75-foot observation tower for a scenic overview of the park and Door County. Back on Rte. 57, head north to Whitefish Dunes State Park.

**Fit stop!** Hike to the top of Old Baldy, a 93-foot dune that towers above Clark Lake.

At Cave Point County Park, park the car and walk out to see gigantic waves pound 50-foot cliffs. Then drive to Ridges Sanctuary, one of the country's largest wildflower preserves.

**Fit stop!** Hike trails through 1,200 acres of flowers, forests, bogs, beaches and up ridges. You'll see 25 different kinds of orchids, as well as carnivorous pitcher plants. (Don't worry, they prefer bugs to people.)

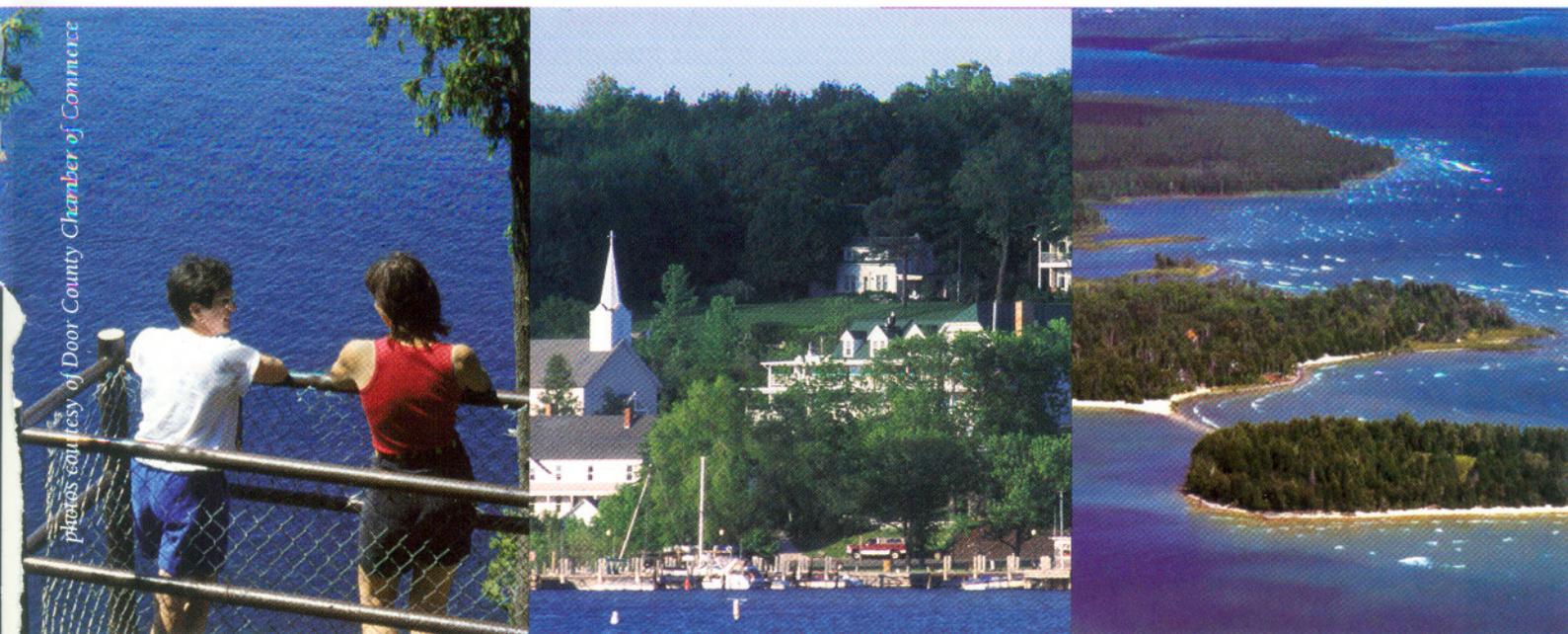
About 15 miles north, a 200-foot-high escarpment guards the entrance to Ellison Bay, a storybook town where artists and potters ply their trades on downtown sidewalks. Take a dip at Europe Lake, one of the few lakes on the Door Loop with invitingly warm water. At the very top of the peninsula, the small seaport of Gills Rock overlooks miles of secluded beaches as well as the "Door of Death," a treacherous channel where, between 1837 and 1914, more than 64 sailing vessels sank.

**Fit stop!** Catch the half-hour ferry to Washington Island, the oldest Icelandic community in the U.S. You can rent a bicycle at the island's ferry landing and set out on 100 miles of meandering back roads. Then, as long as you're island-hopping, board the 15-minute Washington Island ferry to Rock Island State Park, the former estate of a millionaire investor, and pedal past several striking stone homes he left behind, including a castle-like boathouse and Viking Hall— now both museums.

Back in Gills Rock, head to Charlie's Smokehouse and chow down on a traditional Door County boil, a wood-fired stew of red potatoes and whitefish steak made from a secret, century-old recipe. From Gills Rock, the route winds south along Green Bay, lined with dairy farms and orchards, storybook villages and white churches, all hemmed in by rock walls. Be sure to stop at one of the many farm stands for a slice of homemade cherry pie.

Egg Harbor, a quaint town perched on a bluff overlooking the bay, is lined with antique shops. The Cupola House, a crafts store listed on the National Register of Historic Places, has more quilts than your grandmother's attic.

**Info:** Door County Chamber of Commerce, 920.743.4456 or go to [www.doorcounty.com](http://www.doorcounty.com).



photos courtesy of Door County Chamber of Commerce



## 6. Roaming the Arkansas Ozarks

### HOT SPRINGS AND COOL CAVERNS

**Distance:** 150 miles, 2 days

**Directions:** From Hot Springs, take Rte. 7 north to Harrison. Take U.S. 65 south to Leslie, Rte. 66 east to Mountain View, Rte. 9 south to Morrilton and Rte. 154 west to Petit Jean State Park. Take Rte. 9 south to Crows and Routes 5 and 128 back to Hot Springs.

This drive starts an hour southwest of Little Rock in Hot Springs, a turn-of-the-century hot springs town whose various establishments and hotels are fed by 47 steaming springs that bubble up among the cool lakes of the Ouachita Mountains above town.

Bathhouse Row, a series of ornate and historic hot springs resorts, recalls the early 1900's when health-seekers traveled to the springs in search of "the cure."

**Fit stop! Okay, so maybe all that cure stuff is bunk, but there's no dismissing the relaxing qualities of soaking in springs. At Buckstaff Bathhouse, the only one of the oldies still in operation, you can unwind with old-time soaks, scrubs and massages that'll cost you a fraction of what you'd pay at most modern spa centers.**

From Hot Springs, the highway winds through the Ouachita and Ozark National Forests, where mountains are reflected in countless lakes, and pine groves give the air a clean, refreshing fragrance. Soon after entering these wooded wilds, the drive parallels Trace Creek, where thousands of wildflowers—lilies, orchids and irises—thrive along the roadside. Further along at Alum Cove Natural Bridge Area, walk across a 130-foot-long natural bridge carved by the combined forces of wind, water and gravity, then just north, pull into Arkansas' own Grand Canyon, a deep wide valley carved by the Buffalo River, which is popular with canoeists.

**Fit stop! Explore Cliff House on a crag overlooking the gorge and hike trails that wander through wildflower valleys overlooking the river. Or paddle down the river on a guided canoe tour.**

Route 7 winds into the town of Harrison, a historic hub lined with crafts shops, galleries, pretty bed-and-breakfasts and outdoor sports shops and outfitters of every stripe.

**Fit stop! Just west of town is Baker Prairie where you can hike through waving grasslands dotted with wildflowers March through October.**

From Harrison, head southeast on Rte. 65, then cut over to Rte. 14, crossing the multicolored bluffs of the Buffalo River and going through villages with names like Big Flat and Fifty-Six. At Blanchard Springs Cavern, you can tour an underground cave that glows with minerals and stalactites. Another back road curves through forests to Mountain View, where the renowned Ozark Folk Center hosts year-round crafts shows and theatrical and musical performances. From Mountain View, back roads lead to Petit Jean State Park, a mountaintop preserve where a self-guided auto tour leads past canyons, palisades, coves, natural bridges and Cedar Falls, which tumbles 93 feet.

**Info:** Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism, 800-NATURAL or go to [www.arkansas.com](http://www.arkansas.com).

## 7. Peak-to-Peak Scenic Highway, Colorado

ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH

Distance: 110 miles, 2 days

**Directions:** From Central City, go north on Rte. 119 to Nederland, continue north on Rte. 72 to Allenspark and follow Rte. 7 north to Estes Park. Backtrack to Central City.

If the altitude doesn't leave you breathless, the scenery with its kamikaze hills will on this rollercoaster-like scenic highway. You'll climb through shady groves of aspen to razor gorges filled with rushing rivers, then spiral above timberline into silent tundra alight with wildflowers. Marmots, the self-appointed keepers of the summits, let out shrill whistles as you approach, and you may even see a bear lumber by. Mostly you're alone in a fleeting spring that comes and goes with few admirers.

The rush for gold is still on in Central City, where slot machines have breathed new life into the former mining town once called "the richest square mile on earth." A Tinkertoy-like train alternately chugs and wheezes up to the old mining district.

**Fit stop! Better yet, get a good workout by walking the nearly vertical Victorian neighborhoods past a restored opera house frequented by Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde and up to the ghost town of Nevada (population 15, including the dogs). Tumbledown houses and a general store cling to precipitous cliffs that still bear scars of long-ago mining.**

As the route winds through Roosevelt National Forest and Golden Gate Canyon State Park, you can see the lights of downtown Denver twinkling at night. Just past "blink-or-you'll-miss-it" Nederland, the highway coils up to the Indian Peaks Wilderness Area, a mile-high wonderland of deep pine forests and alpine lakes where snowdrifts often linger until July.

**Fit stop! At Brainard Lake Recreation Area, follow well-trod fishing paths that hug the shorelines of two mirror lakes or hike the short paved trail to Long Lake Trailhead for views of peaks that are often haloed in clouds.**

Rte. 72 descends into a valley along hairpin curves to a tunnel-like canyon hemmed in by granite walls and links to Rte. 7, which passes through lush valleys where creeks tinkle through wooded ravines and willow thickets. Just ahead, a scenic overlook offers a view of Rocky Mountain National Park, where 114 peaks soar higher than 10,000 feet and 60 top out above 12,000 feet. About four miles north of Allenspark, the flat-topped summit of 14,255-foot Longs Peak looms into view. The peak was once a landmark to west-bound pioneers.

**Fit stop! Follow the spur road to Longs Peak Trail and hike in a few miles for gorgeous scenery and outstanding views. You'll need 15 hours, plus strong legs and lungs to hike to the peak and back. A few miles along Rte. 7 is the Enos Mills monument, honoring the conservationist often called "the father of Rocky Mountain National Park." Mills's one-room cabin is nestled in pines and houses a collection of his books, photographs, climbing equipment and other memorabilia. You can also hike along three self-guided nature trails.**

The route passes Lily Lake, a haven for mallards and Canada geese (the lilies died long ago when pioneer homesteaders drained the lake for water) and continues to Estes Park, a bustling mountain town cradled in the center of 50-plus massive peaks surrounded by thousands of miles of trail-laced wilderness.

**Fit stop! Ride the aerial tramway to the top of 8,000-foot Prospect Mountain for eye-popping panoramas, then hike down. In summer, the slopes and meadows are blanketed with luminescent alpine buttercups, shooting stars and forget-me-nots and the streams swell with snowmelt. You can catch the blooms and views on trails that spoke out in all directions from town.**

The historic Stanley Hotel, a sugarwhite grande dame with a red roof, is a great place to fuel up after a long day on the trail.

Info: 800-COLORADO or [www.colorado.com](http://www.colorado.com)

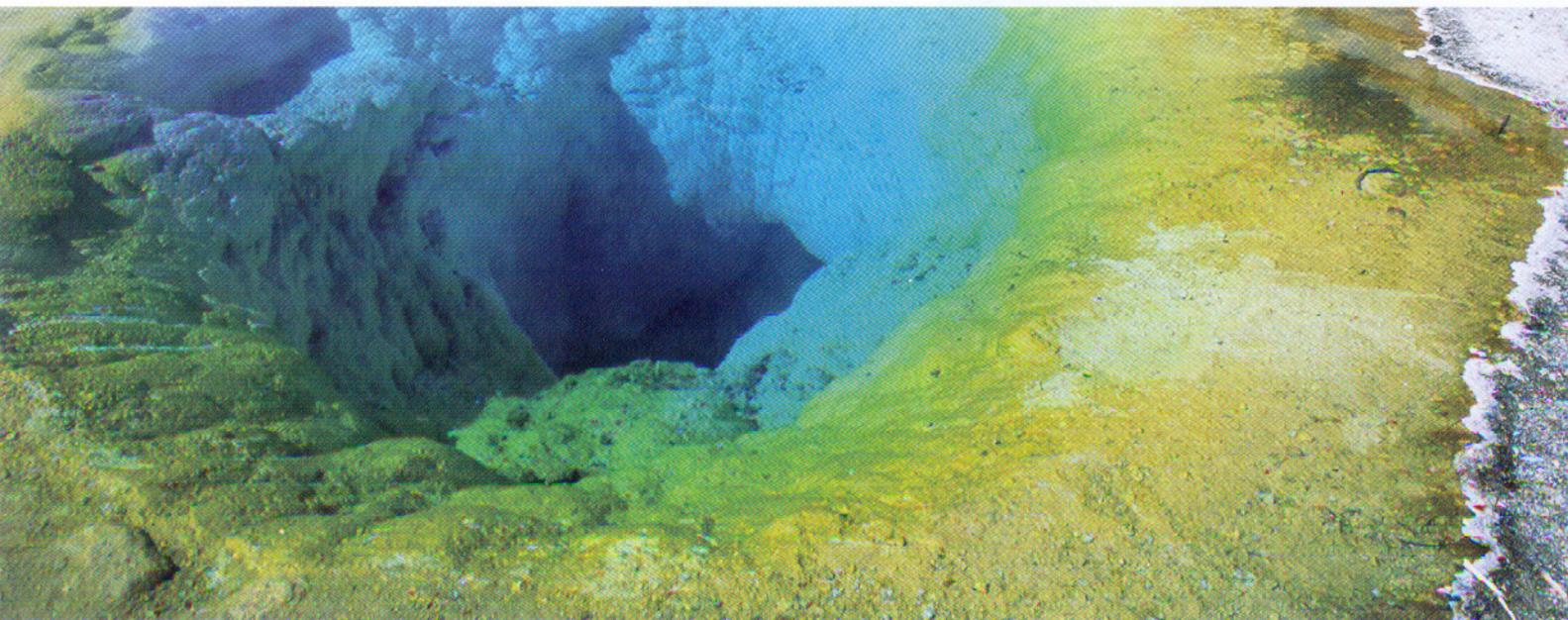
## 8. Yellowstone to Glacier National Parks

### FROM GEYSERS TO GLACIERS

**Distance:** 400 miles, 4 days

**Directions:** From Yellowstone National Park, take U.S. 89 north to Glacier National Park.

Oceans of grain and open range stretch to the east, while jagged peaks wall off the west as you follow this drive along the cusp of the Rocky Mountains from southern to northern Montana.



The drive starts with a day along Yellowstone's Grand Loop drive, where boardwalk trails wind around a witch's brew of gurgling mudpots, bubbling hot springs and shooting geysers.

The Loop continues past Old Faithful Inn, a rustic-elegant hotel with lodgepole pine pillars that overlooks Old Faithful (which has become less so following a 1983 earthquake that lengthened the average eruption interval to a patriotic 76 minutes).

**Fit stop! Hike the one-mile Upper Geyser Trail to the world's greatest concentration of hot springs and geysers, and keep an eye peeled for elk and bison.**

Route 89 borders the Yellowstone River as it leaves the national park for the sagebrush-covered flats and golden knolls of cattle country, passing dusty cow towns with weatherworn churches and saloons facing off from opposing corners. About 25 miles along is Chico Hot Springs, a Wild West restaurant, saloon and hot springs resort nestled at the base of the Absaroka Mountains that's become a popular hideout for celebrities.

**Fit stop! Take a hike around the grounds and enjoy a soak in the hot springs.**

U.S. 89 heaves and sighs through miles of Big Sky Country bounded by small mountain ranges and dotted with ragged and rugged towns comprised of general stores, houses and taverns. Great Falls hosts the Montana Roundup Days in July, complete with a bullchip-throwing contest, and the Montana County Fair in August.

From Great Falls, the highway rolls from golden plains to foothills. St. Mary is the entrance to Glacier National Park, a wilderness of spires, ridges and gorges where streams tumble over stony staircases and freefall thousands of feet. Inside the park, the Going-to-the-Sun Road spirals from dense forests up to the Continental Divide, where the view opens up to reveal mountains marching off to Canada.

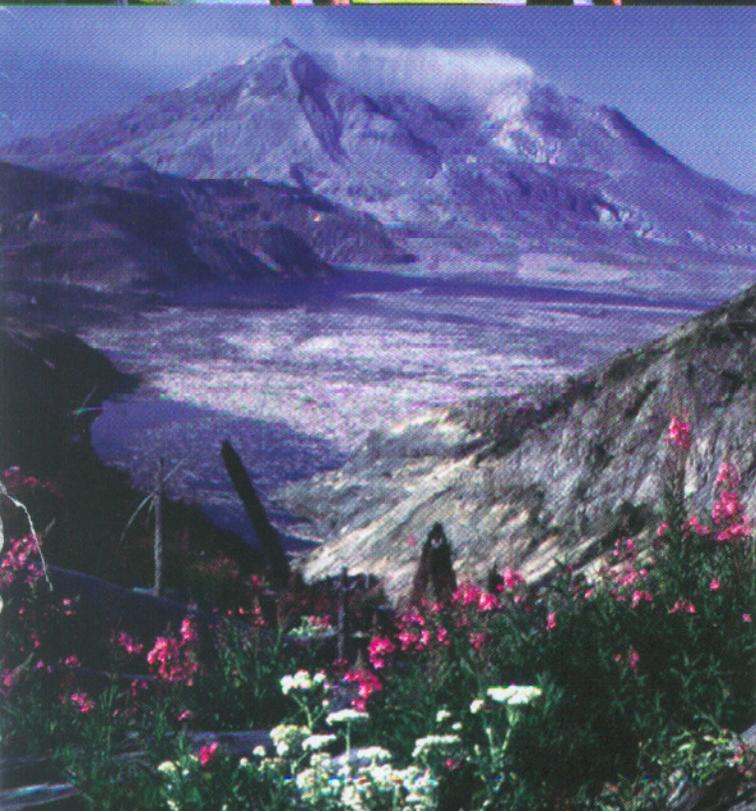
**Fit stop! At 6,680-foot Logan Pass, the summit of the Continental Divide, there's a spectacular visitor center and several trails. Hidden Lake Nature Trail begins on a boardwalk and wanders three miles into a high alpine meadow. Miniscule flowers sprout from granite outcroppings and yellow glacier lilies bloom from the snow in an unlikely show of spring.**

From the summit, the road loops down past waterfalls and tunnels through forests towards Lake McDonald, an aquamarine jewel surrounded by pines and hemlocks.

**Fit stop! At Avalanche Creek Campground, climb the two-mile Avalanche Creek Trail through cedar/hemlock forests and past tumbling waterfalls to Avalanche Lake, a mirror lake fed by glaciers dotting the surrounding peaks.**

**Info:** Yellowstone National Park; 307.344.7381 or go to [www.nps.gov/yell](http://www.nps.gov/yell); Glacier National Park, 406.888.7800 or go to [www.nps.gov/glac](http://www.nps.gov/glac).

## 9. Mount St. Helens, Washington



### RING AROUND A VOLCANO

Distance: 300 miles, 2 days

**Directions:** From Portland, go north on Interstate 5 to the Castle Road exit. Take Spirit Lake Memorial Highway to the end. Backtrack to I-5 and go north to U.S. 12 and Morton. Go east to Randle and south on routes 25 and 99. Backtrack to Rte. 25 and go south to Rte. 90, west to Rte. 83 and north to Trail of Two Forests and Ape Cave. Backtrack to Rte. 90, go west to Rte. 503 and south on I-5 back to Portland.

Mother Nature is slowly reclaiming Mount St. Helens following the most violent volcanic explosion ever recorded in the lower 48 states. Now, 24 years later, flowers bloom in the mangled landscape, and the shattered mountain, once a symmetrical peak, periodically spews vapors. This loop from Portland circles Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument and follows spiraling back roads to within five miles of the center of the eruption.

Follow The Spirit Lake Memorial Highway to The Mount St. Helens Visitors Center. Stop to check out the fascinating interpretive displays and get the latest on trail openings and guided tours. From here, the highway pushes up through dreamy forests to Hoffstadt Canyon Bridge, which soars 370 feet over the canyon to the edge of the blast zone.

Felled trees mingle with new growth and the five-mile lake was created when a massive avalanche triggered by the blast dammed a stream.

**Fit stop! Hike The Winds of Change Interpretive Trail to learn how some plants and animals survived the natural holocaust.**

North in Morton, the highway climbs through thick woods to Windy Ridge, overlooking a moonscape of ashen rock and felled trees. Nearby is Spirit Lake Overview, with views of a former looking-glass lake that became log-jammed when the blast splintered trees on the hillside above. It's a magnificent monument to nature's power to destroy—but the emerging greenery, accompanied by sounds of birds and visions of elk, is an equally reassuring reminder of natural renaissance. From Windy Ridge, forest roads weave to Rte. 83 and the Trail of Two Forests.

**Fit stop! A boardwalk trail leads among the lava casts of an ancient forest engulfed by molten lava 2,000 years ago. Nearby at Ape Cave, you can explore one of the longest continuous lava tubes in the continental U.S.**

**Info:** Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, 360.274.2103 or go to [www.fs.fed.us/gpnf/mshnvm](http://www.fs.fed.us/gpnf/mshnvm).

*From above: View from Mt. St. Helens observatory; view of Mt. St. Helens and Spirit Lake; Ape Cave, near Mt. St. Helens.*