



of the BEST



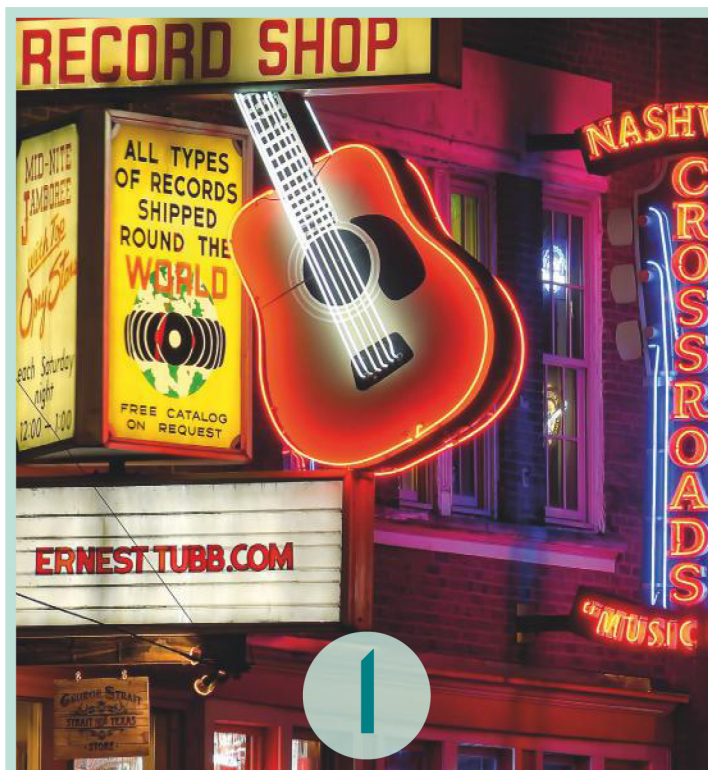
US GATEWAYS

Brush up on America's most interesting entry points with **David Whitley's** guide

1 Transatlantic travel was on a seemingly unstoppable upward trajectory, with more direct services to more US cities making us better connected than ever before to our friends across the pond – until the coronavirus crisis called a halt to all that.

For now, aircraft fleets are grounded and once-packed airports virtually empty. But when travel resumes, the aviation sector is going to play a crucial role in getting the industry back on its feet, with direct flights even more appealing as travellers look to minimise time spent in transit.

Here we look beyond major gateways such as New York and Atlanta to our pick of the most interesting cities with direct services from Heathrow or Gatwick, so you can help your customers see a different side of the US.



NASHVILLE

The country music capital of the world is much cooler and less cheesy than you might reasonably expect, and it sure does love its music. Attractions include the historic RCA Studio B, where Elvis, Roy Orbison, Jack White and the Kings of Leon have recorded, plus specialist museums devoted to Patsy Cline and Johnny Cash. If you want a taste of the sound your clients can expect, The Grand Ole Opry is live-streaming gigs each Saturday evening during lockdown, while the Country Music Hall of Fame is hosting songwriting programmes via Instagram Live. On the history front, the Tennessee State Museum reopened in 2018 with impressive exhibitions about the state and nation's history. A hotel boom in the city includes the planned opening this year of the 240-room Virgin Hotels Nashville, with rooms from about £200 a night.



CHARLESTON

For southern charm, the South Carolina port city of Charleston is hard to beat. Cobble streets, handsome old houses, and verandas designed for rocking back and forth with a fresh lemonade are a key part of the formula. Joseph Manigault House and Aiken-Rhett House are two of the best to visit for the polished version of southern heritage, while the Old Slave Mart Museum tells the true story of the plantations. Outside Charleston, there's a whole lot of South Carolina coastline to explore, with Myrtle Beach to the north ticking boxes for amusement parks, and the less rowdy Hilton Head to the south popular with golfers.

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PORTLAND

Oregon's largest city has a hipster reputation, but don't let that fool you into thinking it's all style and no substance. The brewing and urban winery scenes are phenomenal, with several craft distilleries competing for attention too. On the food side, lots of experimental restaurateurs have moved from other states to take advantage of cheaper rent and open their own places serving innovative dishes, plus the city is dotted with food truck pods. It's easy to plot your own tasting tour around Portland, although you could direct your clients straight to the most interesting spots with Urban Adventures' craft brewery tour by bike (from £61) or a tasting tour downtown from Viator (£75). Top day trips out of the city include the photogenic, highly prominent Mount Hood volcano, the wineries of the Willamette Valley and the waterfalls of the Columbia River.



4

SALT LAKE CITY

The capital of Utah is a fantastic gateway to the American West, with the state boasting five of the most impressive national parks. Seeing the likes of Zion, Bryce Canyon and Canyonlands makes Salt Lake City a perfect entry point for a self-drive trip, especially now that Delta's route from Heathrow has become a year-round service. Access to the ski fields is important too. Park City, which hosted most of the 2002 Winter Olympics, is less than an hour's drive from the airport, and has seriously impressive facilities. The city itself is usually seen as a weird oddity, with the grandiose Temple Square (pictured) – headquarters of the Mormon religion – being the highlight. But it has been becoming quietly cool, with a restaurant boom and a whole host of cocktail bars opening up in the trendy Central Ninth district.



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Clients who don't want to fly from a London airport can book direct routes from Manchester, such as Houston with Singapore Airlines, or consider flying via Dublin, which offers pre-clearance for US customs

PITTSBURGH

Nobody expects Pittsburgh to be as beautiful as it is: from the top of the Duquesne Incline, dozens of yellow bridges spread out over a river confluence. It's also a city with plenty of heart – Pittsburgh goes mad over its black and yellow-clad sports teams – and the Strip brims with unpretentious, family-run, multicultural places to eat. The arts scene is impressive too, with the six-floor Warhol Museum the pick of the bunch. Dedicated to local lad Andy Warhol, it's home to many of his classic pop art works, but it's most fascinating when it gets biographical and looks at the impact of the pop art movement. The most delightful attraction, however, is the Cathedral of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh. The gigantic 42-storey Gothic behemoth is home to a series of Nationality Rooms styled on everything from a Ghanaian village courtyard to an Indian monastery.



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AUSTIN

The Texan capital is way cooler than bigger rivals Dallas and Houston. There's a phenomenal live music scene, for which the annual SXSW festival is merely the tip of the iceberg, and locals will seriously fight over which is the best among dozens of fantastic barbecue joints. Attraction-wise, the Bullock Texas State History Museum offers a fascinating trawl through the Lone Star State's heritage, while the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum makes for a fascinating snapshot into the 1960s and the Civil Rights battle. Outdoors, the spring-fed Barton Springs Pool is one of the greatest urban swims on Earth, and the evening spectacle at the Congress Avenue Bridge – where hundreds of thousands of bats take flight – is astonishing.

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SAN JOSE

When British Airways launched its direct flights from Heathrow to San Jose, it was primarily designed as a business route. San Jose is the largest city in California's Silicon Valley, a fact reflected at the Tech Interactive, which is great fun while being suitably educational. The other star attraction is History Park, where historic buildings from across the city have been brought together. But San Jose is arguably best used as the gateway to Monterey Bay, which has one of the world's greatest aquariums in the town of Monterey itself, and numerous whale and orca-watching tours. Santa Cruz, with its ride-covered Boardwalk, is another great base if you're into nostalgic Spielberg-esque Americana.

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NEW ORLEANS

There are few cities as distinctive as New Orleans, which swings to its own beat and combines its moody heritage with a sense of the good times. The Mardi Gras in February is one of the world's great parties, but there's plenty of raucousness at other times too. This is particularly the case on bar-lined Bourbon Street at the heart of the historic French Quarter. Yet there's more to New Orleans than handsome churches and potent cocktails. The Ogden Museum of Southern Art and National WWII Museum are generally riveting, while the Lafayette Cemetery No 1 has an atmospheric sense of Southern Gothic.



BEST OF THE REST



Baltimore: The National Aquarium (pictured) is the big hitter in this Maryland city, but Baltimore does a nice line in cobbled streets, historic buildings and seafood. BA flies direct from Heathrow.

Denver: Colorado's Mile High City has some good-quality art museums and a strong craft beer scene, but it's of most interest as a gateway to Rocky Mountain ski resorts such as Aspen. BA flies direct from Heathrow.

Tampa: The quieter side of Florida has plenty of excellent hotels and resorts, a laid-back beach lifestyle, and easy access to both the Everglades and manatee-sighting hotspots. BA and Norwegian fly direct from Gatwick.