

In the driving seat



Self-drive holidays are on the rise, and where better to kick-start your engines than the home of the road trip, the US? **Katie McGonagle** reports

With the wind ruffling your hair, classic country on the radio and nothing but open road stretching out ahead, road trips are the ultimate way to explore the US.

Even if the reality turns out to be less romantic than *Thelma and Louise* made it seem – kids squabbling in the backseat or couples arguing over directions might be more accurate – you can't beat the freedom and flexibility of a self-drive holiday, especially as self-contained styles of travel surge in popularity.

So for clients itching for an epic adventure, from driving the Mother Road (aka Route 66) cross-country to hugging California's coast on Highway 1, we've picked out some of the States' most popular routes.

BEST FOR...CALIFORNIA COOL

The road zigzags along an undulating coastline, looking almost as though it has been carved into sheer sea cliffs, with nothing but crashing waves to one side and rock-strewn hills to the other – and that's just Big Sur, one of the highlights along the Pacific Coast Highway, a route that epitomises scenic road-tripping.

One thing is for sure, clients will appreciate being able to stop as often as they wish – one of the benefits of travelling under your own steam – given the number of incredible sights along the famous central Californian coast. They can take their time to soak in the cool surfer vibes of Santa Cruz, pause to appreciate the majesty of Bixby Creek Bridge, spot sea otters off Morro Bay, taste wine in super-cool San Luis Obispo or enjoy the beach-chic vibes of classy Santa Barbara. It's all sandwiched between must-see cities San Francisco and Los Angeles (or for those who want to go a little farther, Spanish-influenced San Diego), though with plenty of diversions – to the unspoilt landscapes of Yosemite National Park, for example – for those with time to stray from the coast and explore inland.

Book it: Premier Holidays' California Motorhome holiday starts at £1,099 from Heathrow or £1,299 from Manchester based on travel in April 2021, including flights, motorhome hire for 10 nights and a night on arrival in a Best Western in San Francisco. trade.premierholidays.co.uk ➤

Bixby Creek Bridge, Pacific Coast Highway, California



fast fact

Don't fancy driving? Abercrombie & Kent has released a new series of Great American Road Trips with driver-guides, including US national parks, Alaska and California wine country



FROM FAR LEFT: (top) Santa Barbara, California; Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse, Maine; statue of Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama; Glacier National Park, Montana PICTURES: Shutterstock

BEST FOR... SEAFOOD AND SCENERY

New England is a place to take things at your own pace, pootling through quiet harbour towns, stopping off for fresh lobster at a fraction of the price of a fancy restaurant, and hiking at leisure through its scenic national parks.

Most journeys start in Boston, where visitors can trace the city's history along the two-and-a-half-mile Freedom Trail, a self-guided walk starting from Boston Common and linking 16 sites that played a key role in the American Revolution.

From there, head south to Cape Cod to meander along the clam shack-dotted peninsula much beloved by the Kennedys and myriad celebs since, or turn north for a coastal drive that passes through historic Salem, artsy Kennebunkport

and colourful Bar Harbor, the gateway to Acadia National Park. Here, having a car comes into its own as visitors can drive the 27-mile loop to the summit of Cadillac Mountain before sweeping down again towards a stretch of rock-edged coastline at Sand Beach – all without breaking a sweat.

This area isn't just about its gorgeous coast views, though; loop back inland to enjoy New England's sweeping scenery and laid-back vibe. Clients can compare the dramatic landscapes of the White Mountains of New Hampshire and the Green Mountains of Vermont, and along the way, discover small towns where unassuming art galleries and B&Bs are the order of the day.

Book it: First Class Holidays offers a 12-day Best of New England

Alabama preserves key moments from the civil rights movement for people to truly understand what happened in the fight for human rights and how it continues to this day

self-drive starting at £1,209 land-only in 2021, including 11 nights' accommodation, 12 days' intermediate car hire with unlimited mileage and two drivers. fcholidays.com

BEST FOR...CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY

The Black Lives Matter movement has captured the public imagination in recent weeks, and nowhere does the struggle for political representation and social equality become clearer than along the Civil

Rights Trail in the southern states of the US. The full trail covers more than 100 sites across 14 states, so narrow it down to a more manageable portion with a self-drive journey.

Venessa Alexander, managing director of Global Travel Marketing and UK representative for Alabama Tourism, says: "Alabama was at the heart of the civil rights movement in the US. Many of the key moments in the movement that occurred in Alabama have been very well preserved for people to truly understand the importance of what

happened there in the fight for human rights and how it continues to this day."

Fly into Atlanta and head to state capital Montgomery to visit the Rosa Parks Museum, dedicated to the woman who famously refused to give up her seat on a city bus.

Next, head to Selma, starting point for the landmark civil rights march that changed the course of the campaign, and Birmingham, a centre for the civil rights movement where a whole district is dedicated to its history. **Book it:** America As You Like It offers an Alabama Civil Rights Trail self-drive journey starting at £1,084 for a seven-night trip including flights, accommodation and car hire. americaasyoulikeit.com

BEST FOR...THE GREAT OUTDOORS

One of the many trends being tipped for post-coronavirus travel is a rise in outdoor adventures, giving travellers all the social distancing they want as they eschew crowds in favour of wide open spaces and wildlife-filled

plains. The western US has its pick of parks, stretching from Utah's Mighty Five (Arches, Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands, Capitol Reef and Zion) to the country's oldest national park in Yellowstone, a landscape so extraordinary it was the first to be granted protected park status back in 1872.

Those might be the most famous, but there's plenty to discover in the parks that aren't as well-known on this side of the pond. In Grand Teton, just south of Yellowstone, you can see black bears, grizzlies, elk, moose and bison, all with the jagged backdrop of the Teton Range behind; while the pine-edged turquoise lakes and snow-dusted peaks of Glacier National Park in Montana could give the Rockies a run for their money.

Book it: Pettitts Travel offers a Self-Drive: Yellowstone and National Parks of Western USA itinerary from Seattle to Las Vegas, starting at £2,100 for 17 days, including flights, accommodation and car hire. pettitts.co.uk **TW**

HOW TO
sell

US SELF-DRIVES

DRIVING IS EASY

"Driving in America is easy with wide open roads. Our routes include all the main attractions of the areas, allowing ample time for sightseeing en route. Clients like the fact they can do this at their own pace, with extra days in certain places and the freedom of a self-drive."

Jo Glick, reservations manager, First Class Holidays

IT OFFERS FREEDOM

"We're seeing self-drive holidays prove really popular because it gives people the freedom to choose where they want to go and explore at their own pace. Route 66, Florida and California self-drives are the most popular by far. In the current climate, motorhome or campervan holidays offer the added benefits of seclusion and the option to veer away from tourist hotspots."

Debbie Goffin, sales and marketing director, Premier Holidays

BIG OPEN SPACES

"The state parks, national parks and open spaces make for great road-trip experiences, RV or motorhome holidays. With tourism such a large employer in the US, the industry is striving to be innovative in the way it offers its products, adhering to all the latest health and safety guidelines to offer guests a safe and enjoyable holiday."

Cath Pusey, product director, America As You Like It

YOU'RE IN CONTROL

"Self-drive in your own vehicle is one of the safer ways to travel in the current climate. Book arrangements on a flexible basis – it may cost a little more but the client will be thankful. Consider using small motels and B&Bs, which mean clients will be sharing space with fewer people while experiencing true American hospitality."

David Pettitt, head of product, Pettitts Travel