

# Into the wild

From dramatic cliffs to tranquil woodlands, these US wilderness spots offer an escape from the hustle and bustle of the modern world, says **Lina Molloholli**

**T**he call of the wild is stronger than ever, with operators reporting a rise in demand for US nature trips.

Escorted tours specialist The Travel Corporation, for example, says US wilderness tours are booming across its range of touring operators. Bookings with premium provider Insight Vacations this year are up 82% on 2022; mainstream brand Trafalgar has recorded an 80% increase in US national parks tours compared with last year – and up 8% on 2019; and budget brand Cost saver reports a 115% rise in bookings this year for its tours that take in US national parks, wildlife and remote scenery.

From the majestic peaks of Denali National Park in Alaska to the rugged coastlines of Acadia National Park in Maine, here's our pick of where to send clients seeking an escape in the raw, unfiltered beauty of America's great outdoors. ➤

Grand Canyon  
National Park

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Pat Tr

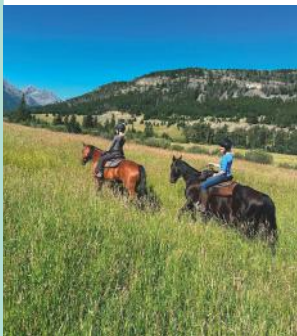
# DESTINATIONS

## THE US | WILDERNESS TRIPS

### MY COWGIRL EXPERIENCE IN MONTANA

By Lucy Huxley

I spent my 50th birthday this year at Sweet Grass Ranch in Big Timber, Montana, deep in what locals call 'big sky country' – with its wide open plains, alpine forests, crystal-clear creeks, high breezy ridges and steep rocky outcrops – living out my dream of being a cowgirl. My husband had booked the trip for me and my daughter through Designer Travel, which had used North American Travel Service to get us out to the ranch, a three-hour minibus ride from Bozeman. We had a cosy cabin tucked under the trees, and ate delicious and hearty family-style meals each night with other guests. By day, we chose the type of ride we wanted. Some enabled us to 'lope' (canter) across the rolling foothills. On other days we'd take a packed lunch and our swim stuff for an all-day excursion to the next valley and to the waterfalls and natural rock slide. We could even take an overnight 'pack trip' to camp on the shores of the glacial lake. Other highlights included swimming with our horses in the cold creek and taking part in games such as barrel racing. I loved the freedom, simplicity and camaraderie that this kind of holiday offered. Turning 50 wasn't so bad after all.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: View of the Milky Way from Yosemite National Park; the Grand Canyon; Acadia National Park

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Pung, Nikolas\_jkd, Jason Busa



### ARIZONA: HIKE IN GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK

There's a reason why the Grand Canyon features on so many people's US bucket lists. Carved over millions of years by the relentless forces of the Colorado River, the geological wonder of the Grand Canyon National Park stretches for 277 miles. Its breathtaking vistas and vivid layers of red, orange and gold-hued rock provide a visual spectacle that has captured the imagination of adventurers and nature enthusiasts for generations.

And it offers the ultimate playground for hikers, with trails that dare visitors to explore its depths. Whether it's the challenging terrain of the South Kaibab Trail or the iconic Bright Angel Trail leading to the ethereal Phantom Ranch, there are options for all fitness levels.

**Book it:** The Grand Canyon is included in Audley Travel's 22-day National Parks Explored trip, from £8,440, including flights, accommodation and excursions. [audleytravel.com](http://audleytravel.com)

### CALIFORNIA: STARGAZE IN YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Enchanting Yosemite National Park is home to iconic natural landmarks, including the vertical rock formation of El Capitan and Bridalveil Fall. It's a national treasure that has long been a source of inspiration for adventurers, artists and nature enthusiasts.

As darkness descends, the park transforms into a

haven for stargazers, thanks to minimal light pollution and its high elevation. And from the famed Glacier Point to the serene Mirror Lake, every corner of this park offers a front-row seat to the wonders of the cosmos.

**Book it:** G-Adventures offers a 13-day USA Road Trip from £2,384, including campsite and hotel accommodation, access to various parks and a surfing lesson in Hermosa Beach, departing on June 6, 2024. [gadventures.com](http://gadventures.com)

### MAINE: CYCLE THE RUGGED ACADIA NATIONAL PARK

Tucked along the rugged Atlantic coast of Maine, Acadia National Park is a beacon of natural beauty, with dramatic granite peaks, lush woodlands and sweeping ocean vistas.

Amid its serene landscapes, the park boasts an extensive network of trails that cater to hikers and cyclists of all fitness levels, from leisurely strolls by the rocky shoreline to challenging paths to panoramic summit views. Along the way, visitors will discover tranquil lakes, cascading waterfalls and Cadillac Mountain, the highest point on the eastern seaboard.

**Book it:** Exodus Adventure Travels offers an eight-day Cycling Maine's Coast & National Park trip from £4,019, including flights, accommodation and bike hire, departing on June 1, 2024. [exodus.co.uk](http://exodus.co.uk)

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## THE US | WILDERNESS TRIPS

### ASK THE experts



**Hazel McGuire,**  
UK general manager,  
Intrepid

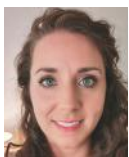
“Consider selling off-season as it’s a great way to see a different side to the national parks. We have seen a 79% rise in shoulder-season travel to the US this year, and are increasing departures into 2024 to meet demand.”



**Kelly Jackson,**  
managing director –  
EMEA,

#### TTC Tour Brands

“With customers looking for more-immersive and meaningful experiences, my tip to agents would be to work with a provider that can offer a host of local and authentic experiences, as well as central accommodation that embodies that destination and environment. For example, stays inside national parks and Indigenous tourism that puts communities at the forefront.”



**Emma Cambers,**  
product manager –  
Americas,

#### Exodus Adventure Travels

“The key to selling the US wilderness is to ensure your clients are willing to go with the flow. Following a set itinerary exactly can sometimes go out the window – but tour leaders are skilled at changing plans at short notice, including to spot wildlife they’ve heard is nearby.”



ABOVE: Rafting on Middle Fork Salmon River in Idaho PICTURE: Shutterstock/melissamn

#### TENNESSEE AND NORTH CAROLINA: SEE BEARS IN THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS

On the border between North Carolina and Tennessee, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, famous for its rolling peaks draped in blue haze, is symbolic of the raw and untamed beauty of the Appalachian region.

Among the wildlife that calls this biodiverse wilderness – a Unesco World Heritage Site – home is the elusive black bear. About 1,900 of the majestic creatures roam freely in the park, along with playful otters, shy deer and more than 240 species of bird.

**Book it:** Intrepid Travel offers a four-day Hike the Great Smoky Mountains: Fall Foliage trip from £2,575, including accommodation, meals and several hike trail entrances, departing on October 16, 2024. [intrepidtravel.com](http://intrepidtravel.com)

#### ALASKA: SNOWSHOE IN DENALI NATIONAL PARK

In the heart of Alaska lies Denali National Park, home to towering Mount Denali, North America’s highest mountain. When winter sets in, a whole new adventure awaits. Visitors can snowshoe through this hushed backcountry where the only sound is the soft crunch of snow underfoot. Amid the stillness, they’ll be treated to a breathtaking panorama of snow-draped forests and fast-moving creeks and rivers, peppered with free-roaming moose, bears and other

wildlife. With minimal light pollution, lucky visitors will also have the opportunity to witness the aurora borealis.

**Book it:** Trafalgar includes a visit to the Alaska Native Heritage Center on its 10-day Alaska Tour, with prices from £3,686, including accommodation and some meals, departing on June 4, 2024. [trafalgar.com](http://trafalgar.com)

#### IDAHO: RAFT ON THE RIVERS IN MIDDLE FORK SALMON RIVER

In the rugged heart of central Idaho, the Middle Fork Salmon River flows through one of the largest wilderness areas in the country – the dramatically named Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area.

Adventure-seekers can embark on exhilarating river-rafting expeditions, navigating through the challenging rapids and serene stretches of this untamed waterway, amid a stunning backdrop of towering cliffs, pristine forests and breathtaking canyons.

In addition to river-rafting, the area also offers hiking on backcountry trails, where visitors can discover panoramic vistas and observe the diverse wildlife including bighorn sheep, elk and gray wolves.

**Book it:** Responsible Travel offers a six-day Salmon River Rafting trip from £2,762, including a guide, all rafting and camping gear and meals, departing on June 1, 2024. [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com)