NEWS RELEASE

Maximize Your Next U.S. Vacation with Budget-Friendly Tips from Brand USA

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WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 2, 2025) — Traveling to the United States doesn't have to break the bank. Dozens of destinations and experiences across the country are both affordable (or even free!) and, of course, unforgettable.

"Unforgettable experiences don't have to come with a high price tag," says Fred Dixon, president and CEO of Brand USA. "Whether it's a breathtaking road trip along scenic coastlines, immersing yourself in the rhythm of a lively cultural festival, exploring walkable cities rich in history, or enjoying world-class museums on free admission days, the USA offers endless adventures at an incredible value. No matter the season or your budget, there's always a way to discover something extraordinary."

From coast to coast and beyond (including U.S. territories like Puerto Rico) here are ways to maximize your travel budget and make the most of every dime and dollar while planning a vacation to the U.S.

Explore Detour Destinations or Travel During the Off-season

Consider visiting a detour destination — an unexpected, off-the-beaten-path gem — or planning your trip during a destination's off-season to enjoy lower airfares and hotel rates, fewer crowds, and better access to key attractions.

Autumn in San Francisco features clear and sunny weather with fewer crowds at favorite attractions like The Golden Gate Bridge and Pier 39.

Moab, Utah, home to Arches National Park and Canyonlands is less crowded after mid-October, boasting comfortable daily temperatures and no need to make a reservation to enter Arches National Park. Other National Parks that don't require a reservation to enter, following certain autumn dates include Mount Rainier National Park, Glacier National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, Shenandoah National Park, and Acadia National Park (check their individual websites for park-specific timing and information).

And in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, history fans can enjoy easy, free access to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park which features sites interspersed within the area, along the quaint, cobblestone streets of lower downtown. This educational national historic site is surrounded by the picturesque local shops of the city, with an array of outdoor recreational activities like hiking and biking paths nearby for those who want to get some time the trails in.

Sun Valley, Idaho in fall features less crowds and prime leaf peeping — paired with a unique opportunity to become immersed in an unforgettable cultural experience, the iconic Trailing of the Sheep festival.

In Lake Tahoe, between late March to June there are plenty of outdoor adventures such as late spring skiing, hiking, and beach-going without the winter and summer seasonal crowds

Santa Fe, New Mexico in autumn or spring means less crowds at destinations like the legendary Santa Fe Plaza and lower hotel prices.

Beyond experiencing the great wines of Sonoma or Napa Valley, check out Paso Robles on California's Central Coast, which features world-class wine with lower prices and less foot traffic.

country, which can oftentimes be overlooked but is more affordable (and less crowded), and the Willamette Valley region of Oregon.

Lower Cost Transportation Options

Major cities like New York City, San Francisco, and Chicago offer daily or weekly transit passes or city travel cards for unlimited use of public transportation (subways, buses, and light rail) within a specific time frame (and oftentimes discounts for military, children, or student tickets).

Amtrak routes like the California Zephyr and Empire Builder offer scenic, long-distance trips that combine travel with lodging onboard the train. Take advantage of Amtrak's discounts, including student, senior, and military discounts.

For those seeking an unforgettable Alaskan adventure the Alaska Railroad reaches popular travel destinations such as Anchorage, Talkeetna, and Fairbanks all in one trip — with options to add off-train excursions onto each ride.

Skip the hassle of driving to the mountains in Colorado — from Denver, take the Bustang for as low as $25 round trip — or, during ski season, try Amtrak's seasonal Winter Park Resort service up to the mountains for as low as $19 each way.

Many destinations offer public bike-share programs for short-distance travel within the area — great for bike-friendly cities like Portland, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. Gulf State Park in Alabama also offers a free bike-share program to explore one of Alabama's most beautiful beach areas.

In Virginia Beach navigate with the city's free Wave Trolley service boasting daily service every 15 minutes from 8 a.m. to 2 a.m. from May through September.

In Kansas City, the KC Streetcar is free to ride to some of the area's most popular free experiences, including the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Hallmark's Kaleidoscope, and First Fridays in the Crossroads Arts District.

Bellevue, Washington's BellHop program is a free, on-demand shuttle service to travel across the city.

Or, plan a visit to a walkable city like Las Vegas, Nevada and visit free attractions like the Bellagio Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, the Fountains of Bellagio, the Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas Sign and the Flamingo Wildlife Habitat (without ever needing to pay for a rental car).

Tips for Saving Money at Big Attractions

Visit San Diego in the fall to enjoy plenty of attractions for children and families with October's "kids eat, stay, and play for free" promotion, featuring opportunities to save money, including complimentary admission at local attractions, free meals at restaurants, and welcome amenities and experiences at area hotels.

Those planning to visit more than two national parks or federal recreation lands that charge entrance fees within a year should invest in the "America the Beautiful" pass, which costs $80 and offers access to more than 2,000 federal recreation sites nationwide.

Multi-attractions passes offer discounts on attractions, activities, and public transport, allowing travelers to see major landmarks at a reduced price. The Go City attractions pass provides access to multiple attractions in major cities across the U.S. and discounted access to attractions like museums, observation decks, and zoo tickets. This is a great option for travelers who want to explore more than one attraction in a city at a lower cost. CityPASS features discounted tickets to top attractions in destinations like New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Typically, travelers with this pass can get admission to 4–5 major attractions — even with perks like "skip-the-line privileges."

Many individual cities also offer individual attractions passes, such as the Key to the City Attractions Pass in Alexandria, Virginia. It serves as a ticket for access to nine historic sites, along with 40% off other attractions, including George Washington's Mount Vernon and a City Cruises Alexandria roundtrip Potomac Wate

Winter Sports enthusiasts can invest in annual internationally available ski passes like the Epic Pass and the Ikon Pass give access to more than one mountain resort for a flat rate (ideal for a trip to a destination like Colorado or Utah, which has many mountains within driving distance of a single city).

Raleigh, North Carolina, dubs itself the "Smithsonian of the South" due to the abundance of high-quality, free museums and cultural attractions, such as the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences and the North Carolina Museum of Art.

Off the mainland of America, Puerto Rico offers many free things to do, such as walking around and exploring the colorful, historic streets of Old San Juan and spending time on one of the free, public beaches.

Enjoy free admission to museums, botanical gardens, and cultural institutions across the United States on select days throughout the year. From world-class art museums to fascinating history exhibits, many destinations offer special opportunities to explore for free. To make the most of your visit, check museum websites in advance to learn more about free admission days, special exhibitions, and any reservation requirements.

Free Tours for Budget-Friendly Exploring

One of the best ways to experience a city is by joining a free walking tour. Many destinations across the U.S. offer guided tours led by knowledgeable locals, providing insight into history, architecture, and culture.

History lovers in Boston can follow the Freedom Trail, a 2.5-mile route connecting 16 historic sites, including the Massachusetts State House and Paul Revere's House. In New Orleans, the French Quarter walking tour with NOLA Tour Guy brings to life the district's rich history, jazz culture, and architectural charm.

Exploring New York City on foot is a must, and Free Tours by Foot offers pay-what-you-wish walking tours of Lower Manhattan, Central Park, and the Financial District. Over on the West Coast, San Francisco City Guides provide free tours of diverse neighborhoods and landmarks, from Chinatown to the Golden Gate Bridge.

For those fascinated by architecture, Free Chicago Walking Tours highlight the city's famous skyline, Millennium Park, and The Loop. Meanwhile, in the nation's capital, a National Mall walking tour offers a deep dive into the monuments and memorials that define Washington, D.C.

Dining on a budget

Enjoy eating fresh, local and affordable food at local American markets.

The weekly downtown San Luis Obispo Farmers Market takes place on Thursday nights and is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2025. It's the nation's longest-running year-round night market, encompassing five blocks of downtown SLO with goods including street food vendors, local artists, and fresh produce, meat, and dairy from California's Central Coast showcasing more than 100 vendors.

The Riverside Arts Market in Jacksonville, Florida is a weekly market taking place every Saturday under the Fuller Warren Bridge featuring fresh produce, local crafts like handmade jewelry, and live entertainment from local bands and performers.

Daily markets like Pike Place Market in Seattle, Washington, which is one of the oldest continuously operating public markets in the U.S., feature a consistent array of artisans, fresh food, and entertainment (the "fish throwing" is a can't-miss experience).

In San Antonio, Texas, San Antonio Market Square is known as the largest Mexican market in the U.S., featuring a spirited atmosphere with local food, arts, and crafts.

Restaurant weeks are another great way to experience [illegible] fixe menus at discounted prices.

New York City Restaurant Week takes place twice a year, in winter and summer, offering discounted multi-course meals at hundreds of restaurants across the five boroughs.

Dine LA highlights the diverse culinary scene in Los Angeles with two weeks of specially priced menus at some of the city's best restaurants. The event happens twice a year, typically in January and July.

COOLinary New Orleans, held each summer, showcases the city's vibrant food culture with discounted prix-fixe menus at participating restaurants throughout August and early September.

Santa Fe Restaurant Week brings together top restaurants in New Mexico's capital for a week of budget-friendly dining, typically in late winter, with special menus highlighting regional flavors.

Free entertainment including Festivals & Cultural Events

Visit Minneapolis on a first Thursday or any Saturday and get the chance to explore select art studios and galleries in the Northeast Minneapolis Arts District, like The Northrup King building (a 101-year-old former seed warehouse that's transformed into home to 300 artists and creative small businesses) which hosts "Open Saturdays" every week from noon to 4 p.m. And don't miss the city's annual, free Art-A-Whirl festival, which takes place the third weekend of May featuring artists demonstrations, interactive activities, live music, and the works of over 1,600 Northeast Minneapolis Arts Association member artists, galleries and businesses across 100 locations.

The legendary Mardi Gras New Orleans festival is free to attend. This event takes place in February or March (depending on the year) and is known for its vibrant parades with spectacular floats, costumes and masks, and is a celebration of music, culture, and local traditions.

The National Cherry Blossom Festival takes place from March to early April, celebrating the beauty of the blooming of cherry blossoms on trees in Washington, D.C., with free events, including cultural performances, parades, and fireworks. Washington, D.C. also features plenty of free attractions, like the National Mall and the Smithsonian Museum institutions. While in town, try a self-guided walking tour of the National Mall and the monuments at no cost.

The Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta in Albuquerque, New Mexico, held in early October is the world's largest hot-air balloon festival. Visitors can watch the spectacular morning "Mass Ascension" and enjoy other free events from the surrounding fields — though there are some ticketed experiences for those who want a closer look.

Public art enthusiasts can't miss the free SHINE Mural Festival every October, which transforms downtown St. Petersburg, Florida into an artists' canvas. Since 2015, nearly 170 murals have been painted across the arts districts due to this unique annual 10-day event, which showcases a lineup of free public art created by renowned local, national and international mural artists.

The free, community-driven Historic Athens Porchfest festival in October is one of the most unique fall events in the Southeast, bringing together an average of 200 live performances to 150 porches in a single afternoon when six historic neighborhoods into an open-air stage, celebrating Athens' rich music scene with an intimate, grassroots feel.

Free Outdoor Adventures and Attractions

Red Rocks Park & Amphitheatre outside of Denver is free to explore while ticketed events aren't in session. Inside the venue, the Red Rocks Performers' Hall of Fame in the Visitor Center is a free museum any music lover will enjoy. The land surrounding the amphitheater offers miles of hiking trails to explore a beautiful, serene environment.

In Martin County, a region in South Florida within a two-hour driving distance of four international airports (Palm Beach International, Fort Lauderdale, Miami and Orlando), the local, beloved beaches are always entirely free to visit (including parking and entry!).

And fun fact: all of Hawaii's beautiful beaches are free to access for the public — no one can "own" or restrict beach access (just make sure to use public access points and not cross private property to get to the sand!).

Niagara Falls State Park in New York is free and open to the public 365 days a year, boasting multiple vantage points to experience the breathtaking views of the Falls, as well as Niagara Region Park Interpretive Programs offering free guided hikes and educational programming.

Road Trips & Scenic Routes

Renting a car can mean exploring the freedom of the open road, and enjoying flexibility in getting access to more off-the-beaten-path experiences.

Explore The Country Music Highway — a 144-mile stretch of the U.S. Route 23 in eastern Kentucky, which celebrates the region's deep musical heritage with museums, live music venues and cultural events.

America's Mother Road, the iconic Route 66, celebrates its Centennial in 2026—100 years of legendary road trip adventures spanning 2,448 miles from Chicago to Santa Monica.

Start in Chicago, visiting landmarks like Willis Tower, the Chicago Architecture River Cruise, and The Art Institute of Chicago. In Missouri, stop by The Gateway Arch in St. Louis and explore Route 66 State Park. Kansas offers a nostalgic stop in Galena, home to the tow truck that inspired Cars' Mater at Cars on the Route.

In Oklahoma, Tulsa's vibrant Route 66 Neon Sign and the Meadow Gold Neon Sign light up the journey. Texas features Amarillo's Route 66 Sixth Street Historic District, a hub of preserved vintage charm. New Mexico invites travelers to stay in newly renovated roadside motels and dine at classics like 66 Diner.

Arizona is home to adventure towns like Flagstaff and the famous "Standin' on the Corner" Park in Winslow. Finally, in California, Route 66 winds through Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, and ends at the Santa Monica Pier, where a commemorative sign marks the "end of the road."

In California, drive down the iconic Pacific Coast Highway which explores charming destinations ranging from the quaint European-inspired village, Carmel-by-the-Sea, to the untamed lands of Big Sur — with unparalleled views of the Pacific Ocean throughout the ride.

Smart Booking Strategies

Smart booking strategies can make all the difference when stretching your travel budget. Booking accommodations early often unlocks the best rates, while flexible travel dates can help you score lower prices.

Don't miss money-saving perks like the free breakfast at many chain hotels including Embassy Suites, Springhill Suites, Hampton Inn by Hilton hotels and many Limelight hotel locations.

For travelers seeking budget-friendly accommodations, the United States offers a variety of options that cater to both comfort and affordability. Embracing the great outdoors, camping and glamping sites provide unique experiences amidst nature. Platforms like Glamping Hub and Airbnb's glamping section offer a range of options, from cozy cabins to safari tents, allowing travelers to connect with nature without compromising on comfort. For traditional camping enthusiasts, Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park Camp-Resorts provide family-friendly campgrounds across the country, offering amenities like pools and playgrounds.?

Or get a more local perspective and a home cooked meal at a traditional bed and breakfast. The California Association of Boutique & Breakfast Inns (CABBI) is a great place to find a top-notch local B&B property if you're visiting somewhere in the Golden State.

Start planning your visit today at VisitTheUSA.com.

Note to the Editor
Accompanying high-resolution images can be found here.

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About Brand USA
Brand USA is the nation's destination marketing organization, dedicated to attracting legitimate international inbound travel to strengthen the U.S. economy, increase exports, create quality jobs, and promote community prosperity. By running data-driven campaigns and unifying messaging across industry and government, Brand USA positions the United States as a top global destination while providing current visa and entry information.

Over the past 13 years Brand USA has driven 11.3 million additional international visitors who spent $38.1 billion in the United States, leading to $82.9 billion in total economic impact and sustaining an average of more than 40,000 jobs each year. These efforts have generated nearly $11 billion in attributable tax receipts at the federal, state, and local levels.

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