BRAND USA

NEWS RELEASE

# AMERICA THE BREATHTAKING: ADVENTURE AWAITS ACROSS THE USA

*May 18, 2026*

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (May 18, 2026) —** For the final installment in a five-part series celebrating 250 years of the United States, Brand USA today released a collection of 50 outdoor experiences that showcase the country's landscapes, natural wonders, and spirit of exploration. From world-famous landmarks and remote islands to dramatic hiking trails, scenic bike routes, cliffside walks, and immersive nature experiences, the collection highlights the many ways travelers can connect with the outdoors across the USA.

"When it comes to outdoor recreation and exploration experiences, there are few places on Earth that can match the variety, quality and magnitude found across the USA," said Fred Dixon, president and CEO of Brand USA. "As travelers increasingly seek experiences rooted in nature, discovery, and personal connection, we welcome travelers to enjoy the endless opportunities for discovery found across every region of the country."

Note: Previous releases offer deeper dives into national and state parks and star-gazing.

## THRILL-SEEKING ADVENTURES

**Hike the "hardest mile" at Mahoosuc Notch – Maine**
Widely recognized as the "hardest mile" of the Appalachian Trail, this rugged stretch challenges hikers with a chaotic jumble of massive boulders, cave-like squeezes, and noticeably cooler climates that keep ice lingering between rocks well into summer.

**Wild caving in TAG Country – Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia**
The limestone-rich areas of Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia are some of the world's premier caving destinations, with subterranean rivers, underground waterfalls, and complex vertical pits, with opportunities ranging from beginner cave tours to highly technical expeditions. A standout stop and bucket-list item for the most experienced cavers is Ellison's Cave, which contains the deepest vertical cave pit in the United States (586 feet).

**Longest zipline in the U.S. at WildSide Zipline – Pigeon Forge, Tennessee**
Opened in 2025 with one 5,771-foot cable, a 1,000 foot vertical drop, and the possibility of reaching speeds of up to 55 miles per hour, the new MegaZip attraction at WildSide park is the longest zipline ride in North America. Four side-by-side lines let groups organize a race against the scenic backdrop of the Smoky Mountains.

**OZ Trails Bike Park – Bella Vista, Arkansas**
Opening June 12, 2026, this lift-served mountain bike park brings 20 miles of gravity trails to the Ozarks, ranging from beginner flow lines to double-black descents. A high-speed chairlift provides repeated access to the ridge, while a central base area includes food, bike services, and gathering spaces.

**Maah Daah Hey Trail – North Dakota**
A rugged, 150-mile backcountry hiking trail traversing the Badlands of western North Dakota, the trail connects isolated buttes, grassy plateaus, and eroded canyons in a challenging landscape shaped by wind and time. In 2026, it will be formally integrated into the expanded Theodore Roosevelt Trail system.

**Telluride Via Ferrata – Telluride, Colorado**
A 2-3 mile traverse on a fixed-route via ferrata ("iron road") features cables, ladders, and bolted rungs along exposed cliffside terrain roughly 500–600 feet above the valley floor. The deeply challenging 4-5 hour journey includes sweeping views of Bridal Veil Falls and the surrounding San Juan Mountains.

**White-water Rafting in Hells Canyon – Idaho**
Jet boat tours and rafting take visitors through Hells Canyon, which is the deepest river gorge in North America – deeper than the Grand Canyon at its deepest point! The state boasts the most whitewater rafting in the contiguous United States, with routes ranging from family-friendly Class II rivers to advanced multi-day expeditions.

**Redwood Sky Walk – Eureka, California**
Inside Sequoia Park Zoo, this nearly quarter-mile-long elevated pathway winds through mature coastal redwoods more than 100 feet above the forest floor. Considered the longest skywalk in the western United States, much of the experience is ADA accessible, making it one of the most inclusive ways to experience Northern California's redwood canopy.

**Glacier Central – Anchorage, Seward & Chugach/Matanuska regions**
Think of this region as an all-in-one glacier adventure hub, where helicopters unlock access to remote icefields and an all-you-can-eat-buffet of alpine adventures. With departures from Anchorage or Seward, helicopter glacier landings in areas like Chugach State Park allow travelers to step directly onto ancient ice, with crevasses, melt pools, and shifting blue formations in a vast glacial ecosystem. Many operators pair these landings with year-round dog sledding on snowpacks and adrenaline-fueled off-road snowmobiling. Ice climbing, with guided ascents on vertical ice walls, is popular in nearby areas like the Matanuska Glacier.

**Exotic-Car Jet-Ski – St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands**
What looks like a sports car skimming on the ocean surface is actually a jet ski that has side-by-side seating and is designed to look like a car – an unforgettable vehicle for an hourlong joy ride in the calm waters near Frederiksted.

## UNFORGETTABLE LANDSCAPES

**Cape Lookout National Seashore - Harkers Island, North Carolina** – A remote coastal preserve of undeveloped barrier islands in the Outer Banks, with wild beaches that allow for kayaking and canoeing, shore fishing and shelling, camping and the historic Cape Lookout Lighthouse and its distinctive diamond pattern.

**Atchafalaya Basin – Breaux Bridge, Louisiana** – The largest swamp in the United States, defined by slow-moving waterways formed by the Mississippi River, cypress forests draped in Spanish moss, and rich wetland biodiversity with many birding opportunities. Guided boat and kayak tours also highlight Cajun cultural ties to the surrounding landscape.

**Palo Duro Canyon State Park – Canyon, Texas** – Known as the "Grand Canyon of Texas," this vast canyon – the second largest in the U.S. – offers canyon hiking and horseback riding through red rock, mesas, and eroded formations.

**Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore – Michigan** – Vividly colored sandstone cliffs rise above Lake Superior in an area with sea caves, waterfalls, and long stretches of shoreline. Hiking trails line the bluffs, boat tours abound, and the kayaking is world-class.

**Apostle Islands National Lakeshore – Wisconsin** – A collection of forested islands and rugged shoreline cliffs along Lake Superior, known for sea caves, historic lighthouses, and kayaking routes. In winter, freezing conditions create famous ice caves along the mainland cliffs, forming one of the most striking seasonal natural phenomena in the Midwest.

**Climb a Fourteener (also known as the 14ers) - Colorado** – Of the 96 "fourteeners" ("14ers"), or peaks above 14,000 feet, in the United States, a whopping 58 (!) are in Colorado, offering varying degrees of difficulty that attract mountain climbers from all over the world. Mount Elbert reigns as the tallest mountain in the Rockies.

**Steamboat Geyser – Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming** – Located in Yellowstone's Norris Geyser Basin, this geyser holds the distinction of being the world's tallest active geyser when it erupts, with water that shoots more than 300 feet into the air. Eruptions are irregular and can be separated by years, making each event a rare geological occurrence. Looking for more predictable aquatic activities? The area is very popular for fly-fishing.

**Historic hikes through Navajo Nation – Arizona/Utah** – Owned and managed by Navajo Nation, the Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park offers desert landscapes with towering red sandstone buttes rising from a vast, flat basin. Jeep tours and guided backcountry hikes bring visitors through most photographed deserts in the world. A two-hour drive west is Antelope Canyon, a narrow sandstone slot canyon with smooth, wave-like walls and dramatic beams of light that filter into narrow passages. Accessed only through guided tours, it is one of the most photographed natural formations in the region.

**Taos Pueblo – New Mexico** – One of the oldest continuously inhabited communities in North America and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, featuring multi-story adobe structures set against the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. It remains a living Indigenous community, where traditional architecture, ceremonies, and cultural practices are still actively maintained.

**White Sands National Park – New Mexico** – This surreal landscape of brilliant white gypsum dunes shifts constantly with the wind, creating a vast, wave-like desert. Visitors can sled down massive sand dunes, hike across open terrain, and experience striking sunsets and try their hand at night photography at some of the darkest night skies in the United States.

**Valley of Fire State Park – Nevada** – With some of the most visually-striking desert terrain near Las Vegas, the park features vivid red Aztec sandstone formations and ancient petroglyphs.

**Big Sur – California** – A dramatic stretch of coastline with redwood groves where steep cliffs plunge into the Pacific Ocean creates one of the most scenic drives in the United States along Highway 1.

**Death Valley – California/Nevada** – The hottest, driest, and lowest national park in the U.S. is a land of extremes, where salt flats, sand dunes, badlands, and colorful canyons stretch across a vast desert basin. Highlights include Badwater Basin, Zabriskie Point, and spring wildflower blooms.

## WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

**Moosehead Lake – Greenville, Maine** – With the forests and mountains of Maine's famed North Woods, the largest lake in the state is one of best places in the Northeast to spot moose, with guided safaris in vans and boats and a "Moose Mainea" moose-spotting festival in May/June.

**Wolf Preserves – New Jersey and Pennsylvania** – A duo of preserves offers up-close encounters with wolves: In New Jersey, the Lakota Wolf Preserve is a Native American-managed wildlife conservation site that also has foxes and bobcats in the Appalachian foothills. In Lancaster County in Lititz, Pennsylvania, the long-running Wolf Sanctuary of PA is a permanent home for displaced wolves and wolf-dogs, many of which were once kept as exotic pets. Guided tours lead visitors through enclosures where packs can be observed at a distance.

**Assateague Island – Maryland/Virginia** – A windswept barrier island known for its wild horses, expansive beaches, and shifting dunes along the Atlantic coast, this quieter, rugged alternative to more developed beach resorts offers kayaking, birdwatching, and coastal camping.

**Crystal River – Crystal River, Florida** – One of the few places in the United States where visitors can legally swim with manatees, thanks to protected winter refuge zones in the warm, spring-fed waters. The exceptionally clear river system also supports kayaking, paddleboarding, and wildlife viewing in a highly accessible coastal ecosystem.

**Blowing Rocks Preserve – Jupiter Island, Florida** – The area is the shark diving capital of the United States, with caged and free dives options for those who dare. On land, this rare stretch of limestone shoreline where Atlantic waves surge through eroded rock formations, sending dramatic plumes of seawater into the air. At high tide, the site teems, with tide pools, coastal scrub habitat, and some of the most unusual rock formations on Florida's east coast.

**Egmont Key State Park – Florida** – Dolphin sightings are frequent at this remote island near Tampa Bay. Quiet beaches offer easy snorkeling, saltwater fishing, shelling excursions, and the ruins of historic Fort Dade alongside the Egmont Key Lighthouse.

**Carlsbad Caverns National Park – New Mexico** – A vast underground network of limestone caves, including massive chambers like the Big Room, and famed for nightly bat flights in the summer months, when thousands of bats emerge from the cave entrance.

**Padre Island National Seashore – Corpus Christi, Texas** – Recognized as the longest barrier island in the world, these stunning shores are lined with dunes, tidal flats, and coastal prairies, and known for beach camping, seasonal sea turtle nesting (especially Kemp's ridley turtles), and exceptional birdwatching along one of North America's key migratory flyways.

**Bison Safaris – South Dakota** — Join guided safari tours through herds of roaming bison across the rolling prairie of Custer State Park , home to one of the largest publicly-owned bison herds in the world. The 18-mile Wildlife Loop offers one of the best chances to spot hundreds – and sometimes more than a thousand – bison alongside antelope, donkeys, and prairie dogs, especially during seasonal migrations.

**Ice Fishing at Lake of the Woods – Minnesota / Ontario Border** – With over 14,500 islands dispersed across 1,700 square miles and over, this premier ice fishing destination is often called the "Walleye Capital of the World." Its extreme northern location and consistent winter ice cover supports one of the longest and most productive ice fishing seasons in the country.

**San Juan Islands – Washington** – A scenic archipelago of coastal landscapes, quiet harbors, and shoreline parks, and from April through October, one of the best places in the country to spot orcas, whether by kayak or ferry.

**Molokini Crater – Maui, Hawaii –** Accessible only by boat, this partially submerged volcanic crescent is one of Hawaii's premier snorkeling and diving destinations, with exceptionally clear water, vibrant coral reefs, and abundant tropical fish, including occasional rays and reef sharks. Nearby stops often include a seabird sanctuary and "Turtle Town," where Hawaiian green sea turtles are frequently spotted.

**Night Snorkeling with Manta Rays – Big Island, Hawai?i**
Float off the shores of Kona after dark, drifting above manta rays gliding beneath the surface. Though available year-round,

bioluminescent plankton glow from April to November, creating one of the most surreal ocean encounters in the islands.

**Mosquito Bay – Vieques, Puerto Rico** – By day, wild horses roam the beaches and roads of this island. Once the sun sets, the waters transform into the brightest bioluminescent bay in the United States, as microscopic organisms called dinoflagellates create a glow that's best experienced via kayak on dark moonless nights.

## QUIET ESCAPES

**Cliff Walk – Newport, Rhode Island** – The 3.5-mile scenic coastal path combines dramatic cliffside views of the Atlantic Ocean, close-up looks at Gilded Age mansions, and the Forty Steps, a historic stone staircase built in the 1800's. Some of the paved, flat paths meet ADA standards, while others areas require light rock climbing.

**Vermont Huts Association – Vermont** – A network of 19 backcountry accommodations ranging from rustic cabins with wood-burning stoves to off-grid yurts to working dairy farms, these bases allow for exploring attractions like the Kingdom Trails, Bread Loaf Mountain, and cultural sites of the local Abenaki tribe.

**Greater Indy Trailways – Indianapolis, Indiana** – Launched April 2026, nearly 800 miles of bike trails link downtown Indianapolis with surrounding greenways and regional destinations. Highlights include the 10.3-mile Nickel Plate Trail, a 40+ mile regional loop, illuminated trail features on the Henry Street Bridge, glow trails for evening cycling, and expanded access through adaptive bike rentals and free e-bike programs.

**McDowell Sonoran Preserve – Scottsdale, Arizona** – The largest city park in the United States, this protected desert expanse safeguards more than 30,000 acres of Sonoran Desert just outside metropolitan Phoenix. A dense network of trails winds through granite formations, desert washes, and saguaro-studded slopes with frequent views of the McDowell Mountains.

**Silver Falls State Park – Oregon** – Often called the "crown jewel" of Oregon's state parks, Silver Falls State Park is best known for the Trail of Ten Falls, a scenic loop that passes ten waterfalls in a lush temperate forest. The highlight of the route is the rare ability to walk behind several of the falls, where mist-filled alcoves, mossy basalt cliffs, and dense greenery create one of the most photogenic hiking experiences in the Pacific Northwest.

**Big Four Ice Caves – Washington** – An easy day trip from Seattle, this short, family-friendly hike leads to a spot beneath the Big Four Mountain, where snowmelt carves out striking blue ice caves each spring and summer. While the caves themselves are unstable and off-limits, the trail offers close-up views of waterfalls, alpine scenery, and lingering snowfields in a manageable outing.

**Chena Hot Springs – Fairbanks, Alaska** – A remote geothermal resort where visitors can soak in naturally heated mineral pools while viewing the northern lights in the dark of winter. The site also features the Aurora Ice Museum, which has ice sculptures inside the world's largest year-round ice environment, and offers backcountry access into the surrounding boreal forest.

## OFF THE BEATEN PATH

**Tybee Island – Georgia** – At the mouth of the Savannah River, this laid-back barrier island combines broad Atlantic beaches with tidal marshes and a well-preserved lighthouse dating to the 18th century. Its claim to fame: guided shark tooth excursions, where fossil hunting in tidal flats and nearshore waters connects visitors to the region's prehistoric past.

**Loess Hills – Iowa** – Known for their deep soils, unique prairie ecosystems, and sharply sculpted terrain, this rare geological formation of wind-deposited silt form steep, narrow ridges and one of the most concentrated loess landscapes in the world.

**Mesa Verde National Park – Colorado** – This UNESCO World Heritage Site is known for its remarkably preserved cliff dwellings built by the Ancestral Puebloans. Attractions include Cliff Palace and hiking through mesa-top and canyon landscapes with centuries of human history.

**San Antonio Missions National Historical Park – Texas** – The San Antonio Missions preserve a collection of 18th-century Spanish colonial missions along the San Antonio River, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Mission Reach section of the river links these historic sites with restored natural river corridors, bike trails, and lush riparian habitats in the heart of the city.

**Aunu'u Island – American Samoa** – Reachable by water taxi, this small volcanic island offers traditional village life against a backdrop of wetlands, mangroves, rainforests, and black sand beaches. It is home to Pala Lake, a freshwater lake in a volcanic depression, along with taro plantations that support subsistence farming. After exploring nature, try Aunu?u fa'ausi, which combines taro, tapioca, coconut cream and caramelized sugar in a pudding-like dessert.

**The Grotto – Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands** – A mile past the iconic "Saipan" road sign, an underwater cave system that opens into the ocean make this one of the most striking dive sites in the Pacific. Advanced divers who brave strong entry currents are rewarded

with underwater light effects and remarkable visibility of the rich marine life.

**BONUS SPOT: Capture the American flag!**

**Apra Harbor – Guam –** With an active U.S. Naval Base and a port, the harbor includes a sunken World War II barge with an artificial reef that attracts coral and marine life. Calm conditions make this a popular dive site for both beginners and experienced divers, who make an adventure of photographing the submerged claim to fame: the underwater American flag that's attached to the ship.

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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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