

COMMENTS ON *IT'S A MAD, MAD, MAD, MAD TRIP*

“Fascinating. Do you and your kids still speak?”

– **Samantha Brown**, host, Travel Channel, PBS

“A fine example of the classic road trip genre – more *National Lampoon’s Vacation* than Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*. A family adventure written in the style of Bill Bryson, with loads of well-researched factoids and an incredible appendix of facts and figures.”

– **Tom Hillegass**, founder, USCampgrounds.info, SwimmingHoles.org

“Never fails to entertain with fun facts, pictures, and candid commentary by teenage Preston and his younger sister, McKenna. A valuable resource full of locations, addresses, websites, phone numbers, descriptions, fun facts, and even GPS warnings. You’ll want a copy to read, research, and remind you that life is always a voyage of discovery.”

– **Laine Crosby**, author, *Investigative Medium – the Awakening*

“There’s a movie in here somewhere.”

– **Jenn Wark**, World RecordSetter editor

“A hoot!”

– **Lindsay Baronoskie**, *Lake Highlands Today*

“Lots of fun!”

– **Jennifer Gilroy**, photographer, shader/robotics camera operator,
CBS Studio Center, Los Angeles

“Funny in parts. Very informative. Even touching. Doesn't make me want to drive across the country with kids or anyone else.”

– **Goodreads** reader

“Entertaining and informative. I’m loving this book.”

– **Jennifer Simmons Kuzbary**, counselor, Texas

“Like many road warriors, Kevin Shay experienced his first taste of highway travels through his family, piling into a station wagon at a young age to journey several thousand miles in a week or so. He learned how to entertain himself for long hours without an iPod or cellphone. In the summer of 2013, he wanted to take his kids on a trip they would really remember. The book attempts to humorously recall that odyssey, while offering historical references, tips, resources, and other information.”

– **Shepherd’s Best Books**

“Chronicles the adventures of a single Dad taking his two kids on a 6,950-mile odyssey across the USA and back during his two-week vacation... Lends tips, websites and other info on attractions, fun facts, and more resources, so you can take your own Great American Adventure.”

– **Fireside Books**, Palmer, Alaska

“Delightful.”

– **Susan Allison**, former director, Richardson Public Library, Tx.

“Sounds like a fun trip.”

– **Judi Smith**, assistant to **Dave Barry**, author of *Dave Barry’s Only Travel Guide You’ll Ever Need*

“An awesome book!”

– **Daniel**, who the Shays helped jump-start his car near Gatlinburg, Tn.

RANDOM PUBLISHERS



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IT'S A MAD, MAD,
MAD, MAD TRIP

*On the Road
of the Longest Two-Week
Family Road Trip in History*

KEVIN JAMES SHAY

PRESTON SHAY

McKENNA SHAY

ALSO by KEVIN JAMES SHAY

Still Searching for Utopia

Mad Trip Tips, Trivia, and Tourist Attractions

Death of the Rising Sun: A Search for Truth in the JFK Assassination

Operation Chaos

Walking through the Wall

A Parent's Guide to Dallas/Fort Worth

And Justice for All: The Untold History of Dallas [with Roy H. Williams]

ALSO by PRESTON SHAY AND MCKENNA SHAY

Rainbow Zebra

Mad Trip Tips, Trivia, and Tourist Attractions

Front cover illustration by Kevin Shay, map from Nations Online Project

Thought bubbles in photos from Super Lame, PhraseIt, or MS Paint

Back cover photo by a random visitor near the Hollywood sign

Published by Random Publishers

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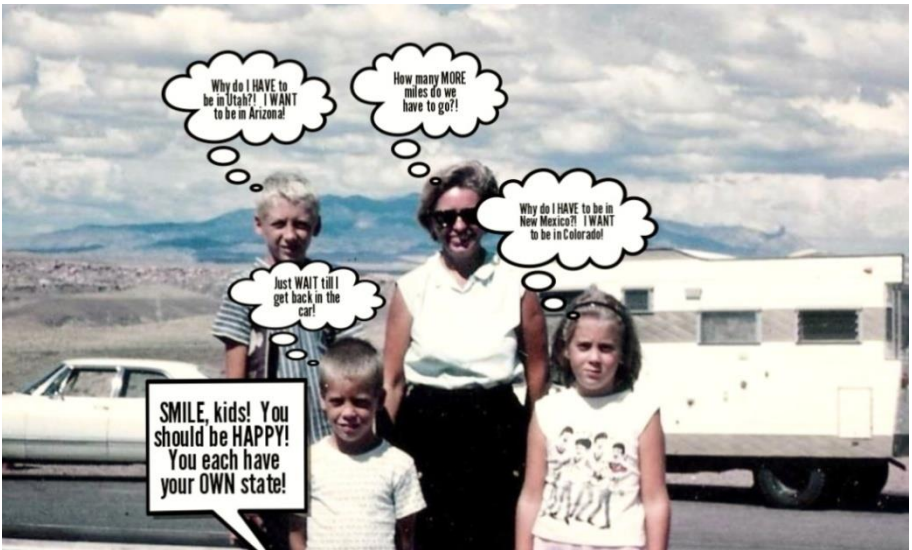
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Film, *Searching for Something in the Middle of Nowhere*, based on this book,
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To Mom and Dad,

who whet our appetite
for insanely long
road trips



During a family road trip in 1970, we stop at Four Corners, where Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah meet. Photo by James Shay

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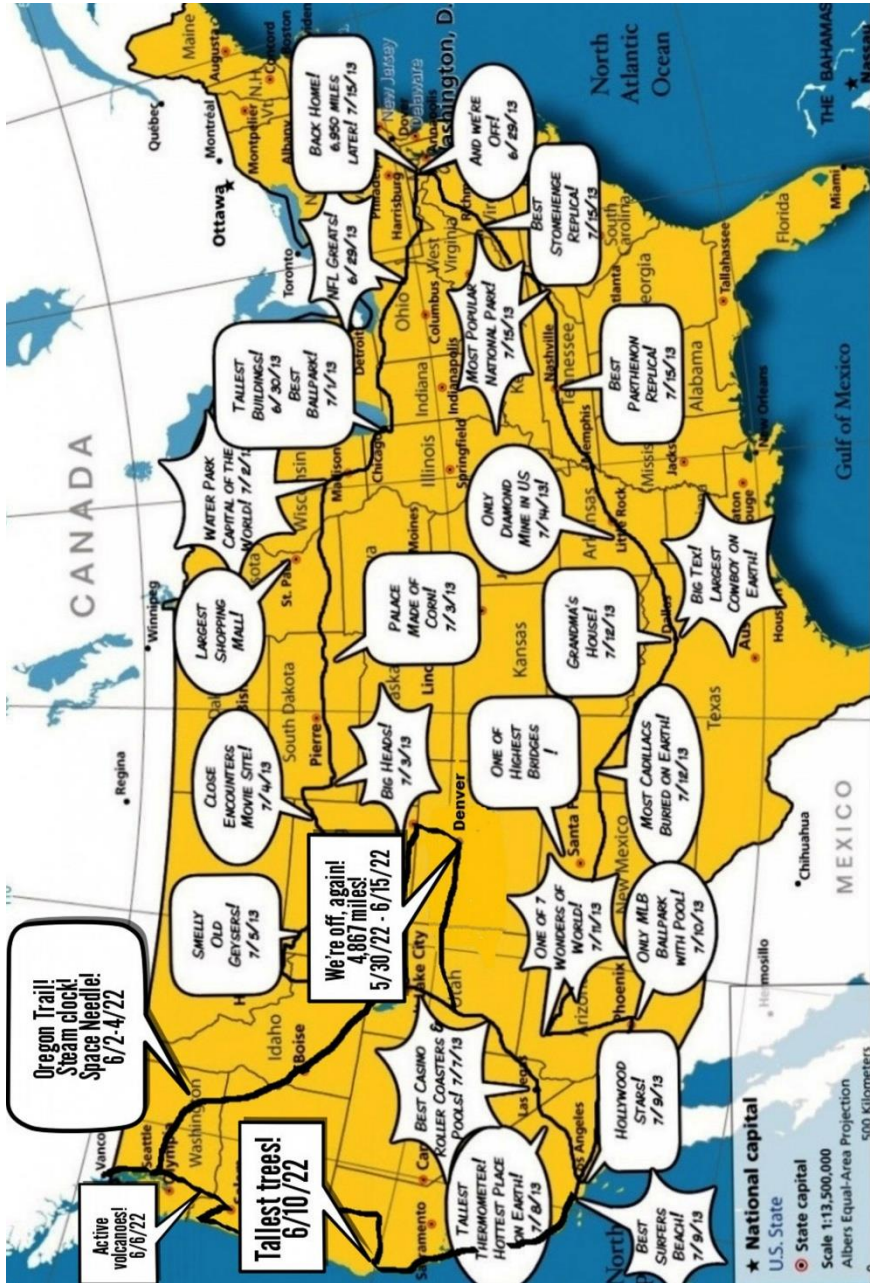
Trusty Rusty is a candidate for the Road Trip Hall of Fame. Photo by Kevin Shay

***Y**ou got to be very careful
if you don't know where you're going,
because you might not get there.*

– **Yogi Berra,**

Hall of Fame baseball player and manager

Our route



Map from Nations Online Project, comic bubbles from Super Lame, MS Paint

Introduction

Much has occurred since the original version of this book was first published in 2014. Preston earned a degree in sports management/psychology from West Virginia University in 2022 and works coaching and counseling jobs. McKenna took two years of college courses in high school, then graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor's degree in information sciences from the University of Maryland in 2023. She now works on a master's degree in library sciences.

McKenna drives Trusty Rusty, the Honda CR-V that spent time with Preston at WVU. A younger Ford that gets better gas mileage takes over for the long road trips. Until the 17-day journey in 2022 detailed in Chapter Fourteen, we hadn't embarked on a trip nearly as comprehensive as the 17-day trek in 2013. We had made it all the way to Southern California again, breaking up that excursion with a longer stay in Dallas.

We also visited Canada, including Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Ottawa, broadening our knowledge of North America. McKenna traveled to London with her Girl Scout troop, though by plane, not car.

The book attracted relatively positive reviews, though some questioned whether we really drove almost 7,000 miles in 17 days, visiting everywhere from Mount Rushmore to the Grand Canyon. Travel Channel and PBS host Samantha Brown, who I met at a convention, wondered if my kids and I still spoke. Others guessed that my children spent more time with their mother after our adventure. Some thought the book was a hoot and should be made into a movie, which I tried to do with the aid of some friends through Amazon Video. It's not exactly Academy Award material, but

some found the documentary entertaining, if a bit too long. Like this drive.

So what drove me to this journey? In the summer of 2013, I sought a different kind of two-week vacation with my kids. Divorced since 2006, I had driven them a few times from our home near Washington, D.C., to Dallas, Texas, where their grandma and other relatives lived. I had driven them to New York City and other destinations. We had flown to Disney World and Dallas a few other times.

As the Griswold's of *National Lampoon's Vacation* and others have discovered, nothing quite bonds a family like sitting in a vehicle together for seemingly endless hours barreling down some God-forsaken stretch of road in the middle of nowhere. It's the American equivalent of Family Nirvana. Or Family Something Else That We Won't Say Here Because We Are Trying To Be Polite.

Places like Mount Rushmore, Hollywood, the Grand Canyon, Vegas, and Walley World become our Mecca. Most families are content to make it to one of those destinations in a single drive during their annual vacations. Not us. Not on this trip. We had to make it to all of them and more. Except for Walley World. We tried to find that place but failed. Maybe it had been closed permanently after Clark Griswold's little BB gun incident.

Why do we have to cram so much in our journey? Perhaps I chase an extraordinary family bonding moment in the sun, one worthy of being immortalized in a Norman Rockwell painting – or at least Mad Magazine. And as the title of this book suggests, I can be a bit mad. It's in my genes or jeans.

If I had to give a more concrete answer as to why I drove 6,950 miles in 17 days alone with my teen-age son and pre-teen daughter who seem to gain joy from teasing each other, I would probably say something along the lines of because when I'm back working at the Daily Grind, I want to feel like I really did something on my vacation. A road trip can be a metaphor for your life, showcasing what you could be as you live in the present and drive around while figuring out

your next move. I've never been content with lying around some beach or mountain cabin for too long during a vacation. That is fine for a day or two, but not a week or two. On these adventures, I seem to enter a special dimension I call the *Mad Trip Zone*, where my dwindling energy level receives a boost to continue these quests to broaden our horizons. Then late at night, I collapse and wake up a few hours later to do it all over again.

The truth is I enjoy showing the kids parts of the country they haven't been. Mom and Dad did that with Kathy, Patrick, and me when we were growing up. So I have to return the favor. Look it up - it's in *The Parenting Bible* on page 313. Or is that page 666?

As a bonus, we set the World Record for the Longest Family Road Trip by a Single-Parent Driver in 17 Days or Less in a Vehicle with at least 165,000 Miles. That was verified by RecordSetter, a Las Vegas-based company that is the Wikipedia generation's version of the longtime Guinness World Records outfit. At times, it seemed like it was the longest roughly two-week family vacation in history.

Besides telling a story through words and photos filled with thought bubbles, we provide *Mad Trip* Tips and *Mad Trip* Fun Facts in the special shaded boxes to inform and amuse you. In the back of the book, there are lists of *really* important trivia, such as the most popular theme parks in North America and most dangerous U.S. national parks. There are details and websites on attractions - most of which we visited and a few we want to reach - apps and websites to aid your road trip, and more surprises.

This book is more than a stab at entertainment; we are Scouts and seek to be helpful, informative, courteous, kind, brave, clean, and reverent. Well, maybe just relatively clean and not too reverent. And not quite as helpful, kind, and courteous as we used to be.

But then, who is?

Even Martha Stewart, whose prison name was "M. Diddy," was locked up for doing some unkind things, such as supposedly lying to the gummint. The nerve of that woman. I will never look at a

chocolate crepe soufflé that Stewart makes in the same way again. I will still eat it, though.

So, sit tight. Buckle up.

It's a mad, mad, mad, *mad* trip.

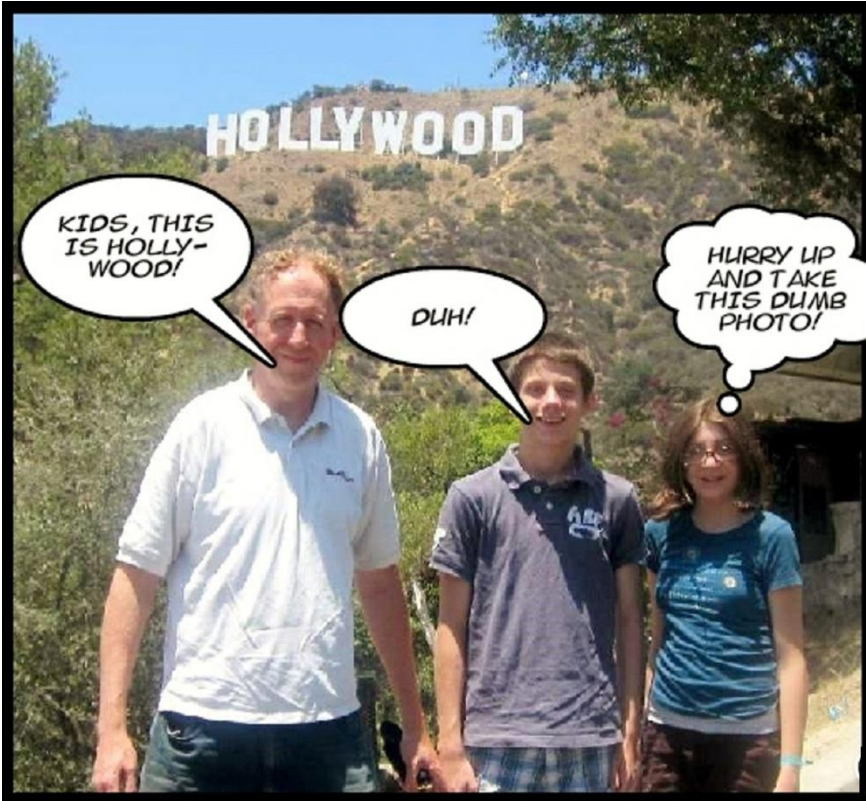


Photo by a random visitor near the Hollywood sign in 2013

Chapter One

Are we There yet?

Forget the apples. Slap some bacon on a biscuit and let's go. We're burning daylight!

– JOHN WAYNE, *The Cowboys*, 1972

7:30 a.m. Saturday, June 29, 2013

The first mile is down, as we depart from close to the easternmost 18-foot high Madonna of the Trail statue. In the 1920s, the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution funded a dozen statues that were placed from Bethesda, Md., to Upland, Calif., honoring the pioneering women who traveled west with their mad husbands.

Our goal, like those pioneers, is to reach Western territory that we haven't seen, though we don't plan to start anew there. But as we motor towards Frederick, which holds the title as the second largest city in Maryland, I can't remember what the first is. I can't even remember where California is. I pray we are driving in the right direction.

McKenna looks up from reading *The Reinvention of Moxie Roosevelt*.

"Daddy," she asks, "how far are we driving today?"

It's a fair question. McKenna is a bright, inquisitive student of life, 10 going on 20. With a kind, yet adventurous, spirit, she had been born a rambling girl, moving halfway across the country before she was even one year old and traveling through almost half the states by the time she was six. She does her homework without me even asking and makes straight A's on school work beyond her grade level. She helps me with chores, sometimes even with a smile on her face.

But her smile and voracious book reading mask a determined, competitive nature; she had been a scoring machine for her city basketball team, the Gaithersburg Mystics, in her younger days. She also won awards for academics, Girl Scouts, and art projects. She once seemingly knew all three *High School*

Musical movies by heart, though she does not admit to watching any of those Disney flicks these days.

Still, I can't be completely honest and say, "Oh, just 400 miles." Even McKenna the Adventurous Traveler will want to bail out right there.

So I say, "Just down the road a bit." Then I point to an imaginary animal on the side of the road to try to divert attention from my non-answer. "Look! There's Toby!"

"I miss Toby," McKenna says of her mixed-breed doggie the kids and their mom rescued from a local pound a few years back. That will become one of the most popular statements on this trip.

Somehow Preston hears McKenna's voice while listening to Bruno Mars, Macklemore, Nickelback, and more through earbuds attached to his MP3 player. "You're stupid, McKenna!" he roars from the passenger side seat.

It's a good thing Preston can sit up front and not have to sit in the back seat with McKenna, as he did on previous long road trips. *Thank God for the barrier between front and back seats*, I think.

When motivated, Preston can conquer worlds. Almost 6 feet tall, his frame is stronger and more athletic than mine was at age 13. He is coming off breakout seasons in the Rockville Baseball Association, where he made the league All-Star Game while leading his team in home runs, and the Rockville city basketball league, where he led his team in rebounding and blocked shots.

He is not happy about missing Boy Scout summer camp for the first time in three years, as I want to use the Fourth of July holiday for part of this vacation. He has worked hard to keep his grades up and made the honor roll for numerous semesters. He won awards for scouting, photography, writing, and athletics. He has acted in church, school, and civic plays before large crowds.

Though not as physically strong as Preston, McKenna refuses to back down. "You're stupid!" she retorts.

"Okay! No one is stupid!" I interject, before wondering whether I'm stupid for taking on this trip.

Am I really driving my kids by myself all the way across the country and back in about two weeks in our beat-up but tough 2001 Honda CR-V with 165,000 miles on it? Have I bit off more than I can chew this time?

Preston tries to hit McKenna, and she sends a foot his way. It's on.

"Okay, okay! Stop fighting!" I yell, finding by experience that shouting louder than they yell is the quickest way to get them to stop shoving each other. It maybe wasn't the best way, but when you're driving 400 or so miles a day with no other adult to help, you have to nip the fight in the bud before it gets out of hand. You don't have the time, energy, or format to conduct a Dr. Phil-type counseling session.

That had been Mom’s technique when she took us along these roads. She would usually jump into the sibling arguments well before Dad. When Dad had to yell, we had really gone too far.

Another technique to respond to the kids yelling is to *turn up* the radio louder than they screamed. I barely have to dial up the radio before their argument quiets down. Preston then changes the station from my favorite classic-rock one to an outfit that plays more modern hits. I sigh and try to tune out Icona Pop singing about crashing a car into a bridge before I somehow twist that idea into a good one.

Gonna be a long trip, I think. *And it has barely started.*

McKenna soon interrupts the song. “Daddy,” she begins, and I gladly turn down the radio, “why are we driving again all the way to Mount Rushmore and maybe California? Why didn’t we fly out there?”

“Because Daddy’s too cheap to fly,” Preston chips in.

“No, Preston, that’s not it,” I sigh. I try to explain about what I learned during the long road trips of my youthful summers and how I seek to recreate that experience. “You can see and learn about the country a lot more by driving than by flying.”

“Why on earth would we want to do that?” Preston asks.

I ignore his query. There is another reason that I want to drive, rather than fly. A long road trip helps develop mental toughness that my kids will need throughout life. You are cooped up for long hours, forced to retrain your mind away from the temptations of instant gratification all around you.

Some parents deprive their kids of television and video games for much the same reason; that’s not me, though. As a single father, I need some help to divert their attention from bothering each other.

I use these types of road trips as a symbolic and direct lesson that teaches patience, resourcefulness, and flexibility, not to mention helps retain our human nature. And I’m not alone.

Mad Trip Tip from Preston: When going on a long road trip, make sure you control the radio. You don’t want to listen to some old-fashioned music the whole time.

Mad Trip Tip from McKenna: On a road trip, bring lots of books, an e-reader like the Kindle, phone, and other things to occupy your time. Have multiple pairs of earbuds so you can tune out your brother and dad. If your brother takes one pair, you always have another. Don’t EVER use a pair that your brother used.

About 41 million Americans took a road trip of at least 50 miles over the July 4th holiday in 2013; that number will rise to more than 50 million by 2024. More than 17 million Americans take a trip of more than 1,000 miles in a car during an average summer, according to surveys with names that are hard to remember.

But I can't explain all that to the kids. The only way I can do that is to show them. Onward.

Football Mecca

We pull into the parking lot of the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, a little after 3 p.m. Somehow, we are pretty much on our rough schedule.

"I don't want to go to a football hall of fame," McKenna announces. "It's boooooorrrring."

"You're boring," responds Preston, as big a sports fan as I was in my teen years. "This is the football hall of fame. Show some respect."

"C'mon, it'll be fun," I interject. "It's a museum. You can always find something interesting in a museum."

McKenna has a point that some halls of fame can be boring. If the museums honoring a sport, industry, or avocation – from the U.S. Bicycling Hall of Fame in Davis, Calif., to the Robot Hall of Fame in Pittsburgh – aren't a dime a dozen, they have to be a dollar a dozen.

Most sports-themed venues have seen attendance declines in recent years. The National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., only attracted about 260,000 in 2012, the lowest since the mid-1980s. That figure will remain about the same through 2019, then drop off a cliff as visitation at most indoor attractions do during the COVID-19 pandemic before they recover somewhat in 2023. The NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte, N.C., welcomed some 185,000 visitors in 2012, about 33 percent fewer than in 2010. The Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass., and the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto also reported attendance declines from the previous decade. Others like the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland saw steady increases.

Even the prestigious Smithsonian institutions in Washington, D.C. – which had four of the 15 most visited museums in the world in 2013 – saw overall attendance down from 31.7 million visitors in 2001 to about 30 million in 2013. That will continue to fall to 22 million in 2019, then really drop during the pandemic before rebounding to about 18 million in 2023. The most popular museum in the world – The Louvre in Paris – will also record a decline in

visitors to 2.8 million in 2021 from 9.6 million in 2019, then rebound to 8.9 million in 2023.

The pro football hall saw the number of visitors rise from about 63,000 in its first full year in 1964 to some 330,000 by 1973. Attendance dwindled to as low as 165,000 in 2001, though it increased to 208,000 in 2013 and will continue to rise slightly in ensuing years until the pandemic. Some experts say one problem with stagnant attendance is that a lot of young people supposedly aren't that interested in the past, though it could have more to do with competing interests in the Internet Age.

Preston devotes about an equal amount of time on historic memorabilia from past NFL greats like Jim Thorpe as he does on modern-day artifacts, such as a jersey worn by one of his favorite players, Russell Wilson. There is also the actual 2014 Super Bowl trophy that will be won by one of his favorite teams, the Seattle Seahawks.

He learns that Thorpe started with the Canton Bulldogs, an early-day football power that played in the Ohio League starting in 1903 and in the APFA, which became the NFL, beginning in 1920. He learns that the NFL itself started with meetings in Canton, which like many Midwestern cities had diversified from largely manufacturing into health care, technology, tourism, and the likes in recent decades. Those links to pro football's formation helped this city of about 75,000 people land this museum.

"Look at those old uniforms," I point out.

"There is not that much protection with those helmets," Preston notes.

"No, but they did have funny nose guards."

Mad Trip Fun Facts

* In 1920, **Frederick "Fritz" Pollard** [Akron Pros] and **Robert "Bobby" Marshall** [Rock Island Independents] were the first black players in the American Professional Football Association, which became the NFL.

* Decades before **Jackie Robinson** joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, **Moses Walker** became the first black player in the major league baseball American Association in 1884. He played for an Ohio team.

* Three black athletes were pioneers in the NBA in 1950: **Earl Lloyd** [Washington Capitols], **Chuck Cooper** [Boston Celtics], and **Nat Clifton** [New York Knicks].

* **Willie O'Ree** [Boston Bruins] was the first African American in the NHL in 1958.

The Hall of Fame Gallery, which houses bronze busts of inductees in a dimly-lit room eerily staring at visitors, is a focal point. I wonder how former Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach feels having his bust placed directly under former Bills runner O.J. Simpson, and how former Jets quarterback Joe Namath likes being right next to Simpson. The busts are grouped by induction year, and that trio was honored in 1985.

McKenna doesn't seem overly bored as she learns how the cast bronze busts of players are made through a sculptural method that originated in ancient Greece involving clay models. She eats pizza, plays interactive games, and picks out a colorful souvenir water-filled paperweight.

Outside, she joins us in throwing a football I buy for Preston on the hall's adjacent FieldTurf recreation field. The turf on the 20,000-square-foot field replicates a natural grass surface and is used in an escalating number of stadiums.

Preston is pumped as we leave the parking lot. "That was awesome!" he exclaims. "Maybe one day, I will get here, somehow."

He will play organized tackle football for the first time in the fall and become a star wide receiver. He will make his varsity football team, playing defensive back in his senior year. He will keep a dream alive to play in college, then pursue coaching.

I had interviewed a few NFL receivers, including the late great Peter Gent, who became a best-selling author after leaving the Dallas Cowboys. Gent's descriptions of his painful days after football in *The Last Magic Summer* – a poignant memoir of coaching his son's baseball team for the final season – did not leave me wanting that life for Preston. Gent himself steered his son away from football to the less violent sports of baseball and basketball.

I don't speak about my reservations. "Sure, maybe you will." I look in the mirror at McKenna. "Was that so boring?"

"Yes," McKenna says, before going back to another book.

Mad Trip Tip from Preston: When visiting the Pro Football Hall of Fame, bring a football or buy one at the gift shop so you can play on the awesome outdoor field. Go there with someone other than your sister, unless she agrees to respect the place.

Mad Trip Tip from McKenna: When visiting the Pro Football Hall of Fame, bring your phone or a book inside to look at while your brother and dad are taking too much time here.



Some appreciate the Pro Football Hall of Fame more than others.



Chapter Fourteen

Mad Trip 2.0

The trouble with traveling back later on is that you can never repeat the same experience.

– MICHAEL PALIN, *Full Circle*, 1997

11 a.m. Monday, May 30, 2022

Almost nine years after I dropped off the kids at their mom’s home following that mad marathon trip, we are back on the road on another 17-day quest. Preston had just graduated from the University of West Virginia, while McKenna completed her first year at the University of Maryland, though she earned enough college credits in high school to enter that institution as a sophomore. They had worked jobs while attending classes, and both decided to take well-deserved breaks this summer. I am mostly off as well for the summer, having retired a few months before.

The stars align for another long road trip, mostly through areas we have yet to see in the Northwest and along the Pacific Coast. It might be our last chance to do a lengthy trek like this before the kids move on to career pursuits.

In the wee Memorial Day morning hours on the day after my 63rd birthday, Preston’s friend, Mike, had driven us to Reagan National Airport to wait for our 7 a.m. flight to Denver. We hadn’t gotten much sleep on some uncomfortable chairs near the security checkpoint or on the three-hour Frontier Airlines flight. At the Hertz rental car station, we had chosen a white 2022 Toyota Corolla Cross with more bells and whistles, particularly safety features, than the Honda. With gas prices climbing above even 2008 and 2012 inflation-adjusted prices, that vehicle getting 33 miles per gallon is a bonus.

“Look at those mountains!” I announce. “Those are real mountains, not like the hills in Maryland and Virginia.”

“Quiet!” Preston demands from the front passenger seat. Behind me, McKenna is silent, trying to ignore me. I feel slightly nauseous due to the mile-high altitude and lack of sleep and food. We look for a grocery store to purchase needed supplies like doughnuts, cereal, and ear plugs, finding only a Walmart, which is better than nothing. Its sandwiches and salads aren’t too bad.

Driving around Colorado’s capital is fairly easy on Memorial Day, with little traffic. Despite Denver growing by 19 percent between 2010 and 2020 to emerge among the country’s largest 20 cities for the first time, residents seem less frenzied, more laidback, than Washingtonians. Maybe there is something soothing in the clearer mountain air. There still seems to be plenty of space here.

At a red light, I study a Google Maps app on how to get to the neighborhood of new Broncos quarterback Russell Wilson. A motorist behind me waits patiently when I do not hit the gas pedal the moment the light turns green. Back home, I would have been honked off the road.

Wilson is Preston’s favorite football player, causing him to follow the Seattle Seahawks almost as religiously as the Baltimore Ravens. A great role model who doesn’t shy from exhibiting his faith, Wilson had led the Seahawks to a Super Bowl title and made nine Pro Bowls. But after a decade with the same team, he was ready for a change.

The southern Denver burbs where Wilson and wife-singer Ciara bought a secluded home are the region’s nicer ones. Many cities, including Dallas, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, concentrate their better neighborhoods to the north of downtown. Denver breaks that mold.

I don’t expect to pass by Wilson’s home, but I’m usually up for trying to gain access to places I’m not welcome. The gated neighborhood has a guard, but I turn there anyway. “Sorry, I made a wrong turn,” I say. He waves me around, friendly enough.

A country club and golf course are just across the road from the guard station. The multimillion-dollar residences don’t seem as pretentious as similar ones in Dallas or Washington, D.C. Nearby public parks with plenty of hiking trails offer access. We check out the Broncos’ practice facility, then hit the country roads for Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre and the Colorado Music Hall of Fame about ten miles west of Denver.

The open-air concert venue was built into some gigantic red sandstone boulders jutting out of the mountains that serve not only as a phenomenal visual element that has existed for some 160 million years, but as an acoustical aid. Performances date back more than a century, with the most notable early one by opera singer Mary Garden in 1911. A more developed version opened in 1941, and the Beatles put it on the map with a 1964 concert. Since then, acts from Bruce Springsteen and U2, to the Grateful Dead and Blues Brothers rocked the rocks.



You can see downtown Denver from the Red Rocks Amphitheatre. Photo by Kevin

As we walk along trails to the Red Rocks Trading Post, which has hosted the hall of fame since 2015, McKenna expresses amazement. “Look how those big rocks are balancing on the small edges of others,” she notes. “It seems like they would fall.” Some have fallen, including in 2011, when seven concert goers were injured by falling rocks. At other times, some had been killed tumbling from the rocks during unauthorized climbs.

Inside the museum, Preston lights up and takes a phone photo of a copy of first honoree John Denver’s popular “Country Roads” song among exhibits. The tune had been adopted by West Virginia University, sung at football games since 1972, including by Denver himself at a 1980 Mountaineers contest. The Baltimore Orioles played another of Denver’s songs, “Thank God I’m a Country Boy,” during games starting in 1975. Eight years later, Denver performed the ditty in person during the seventh inning of Game One of the World Series while standing on the dugout roof in an Orioles jacket. Baltimore lost that game but then won four straight over the Phillies to win what would be their last championship, as of 2023. Born in Roswell, N.M., as Henry John Deutschendorf Jr., Denver embraced these random connections to sports teams. He had the hall’s lone indoor bust and a larger-than-life outdoors statue. Judy Collins, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Dan Fogelberg, and Joe Walsh are among other honorees.

We cruise to the amphitheatre parking lot and climb more steps. I become short-winded, not yet used to the altitude, which hits 6,450 feet at the top of the concert facility. But the climb is worthwhile; the Denver downtown skyline opens before us as a band prepares to play. “The best things in life are not things,” says the shirt of a guy gazing down from the top of the venue. An indoor museum and film reveals more local history, showcasing spectacular photography.

We have to move on, since our first night’s rest is not in Colorado, but at an Airbnb ranch near Wyoming’s capital, Cheyenne, some 100 miles away. Deborah and her husband are retired but spend much of their time maintaining the ranch, which includes a friendly cow, goats, and show dogs like Afghan Hounds and Skye Terriers.

The Airbnb system usually works well, though you sometimes have to account for hefty cleaning and miscellaneous fees. Occasionally, you can discover a place that doesn’t charge too much in fees. The \$112 for us each to have our own comfortable bed at an authentic, quiet Wyoming ranch is well worth it. I will pay more for a noisy Motel 6 with holes in the wall and no breakfast in a California coastal city.

“You think those stuffed bears outside our room are real?” I ask. McKenna and Preston shrug. Our hosts are avid hunters so I assume the life-sized mammals are. No need to lock the doors with them around.

Supporting local small businesses

Like many small business managers, Pam Haynes has navigated through more than challenging times the past two years. The COVID-19 pandemic started impacting businesses such as Tynsky’s Rock Shop of Rock Springs, Wyo., in March 2020, forcing 23 percent of similar small and medium enterprises nationwide to close by that May, according to a Small Business Roundtable survey.

In February 2021, Tynsky’s owner Bari Sines passed away. Haynes, his partner, had kept the century-old family business afloat since then, not a small feat in this coal-mining town of some 23,000 folks in seemingly the middle of nowhere. It’s a tough town filled with survivors. In 1885, a mob of white miners killed 28 Chinese coworkers who the Union Pacific coal mining company brought in to help break strikes conducted for better working conditions. My grandfather died in a coal-mining accident in Pennsylvania in 1934, and other relatives succumbed to black lung disease. We often forget the human costs of our pursuits for progress.

On this Tuesday afternoon, we are the only customers in the shop. Haynes patiently answers our questions about the different types of rocks and gems for sale. I started a rock collection as a kid, even keeping part of it in 1960s egg cartons that somehow survive to this day. The ages, textures, colors, and shapes of stones have long fascinated me for whatever nerdy reasons. Many have survived much longer than most living creatures, with certain microorganisms perhaps outlasting them. Some, particularly those around springs and other bodies of water, can still grow larger. The elements often shape them into natural artistic sculptures.

I've continued to collect them, along with coins and sports cards. Perhaps such pursuits rekindle something in my childhood, takes me back to a simpler time. I don't smoke or gamble. I pretty much left drinking in my 20s. Collecting stuff is a more wholesome vice, though you tend to question your sanity every time you move around with boxes of rocks, cards, and coins.

McKenna is drawn to the richly colorful agate slices from Brazil and sparkling jade specimens found locally. She also appreciates a Southwestern scene painted on a rock by Haynes. Preston likes a fish fossil unearthed from a nearby creek. "It's a relative of Jesus," he notes, referring to his hardy blue betta pet that has survived in an often-cloudy tank on our kitchen counter for more than a year. Toby is still around, though he lost his teeth. Another small, more active terrier-chihuahua mix named Myles had joined the household.

I settle on a fossilized gastropod dug up in Sweetwater County, paying for the treasures. As McKenna remains to purchase a few more items herself, I return to the car to retrieve a flier about the *Mad Trip* book. On my way back inside, I spy some banded flint and a large agate piece from one of several outdoor piles. "How much are these?" I ask.

"Don't worry about paying for those," Haynes offers.

Mad Trip Tips from Kevin

* Break up rest stops in the daytime by stopping at public libraries in towns and cities along your way. They often display photo exhibits and sell used books, including on local history, for a low price. You learn more about the area that way. Check directions and even hours on **Google Maps**.

* If the library is closed, you can find a **Little Free Library** through its website at **littlefreelibrary.org**. These community boxes are in all 50 states and some 115 countries. Many are on private property, but some libraries and other public buildings have the 24-hour boxes outside.

We visit the nearby library to use the restroom. The facility not only is well-stocked with books and a children's section that includes a hands-on discovery center, but features an art gallery and book sale with sports and rock magazines.

I gas up at a town near the Utah border. In many mountainous areas, regular gas only carries an 85 octane level, not the usual 87. Most vehicles need at least 87 octane so I pay a little more for the mid-grade version. Soon, we reach another state.

At a Utah rest area, McKenna and I spy a prairie dog colony along with some majestic sandstone formations and railroad tracks in the background. "They're so cute," she exclaims. "I've never seen them in the wild before, only in a zoo. They remind me of Toby and Myles." One approaches me, seeming to ask for a treat. I try to find something to feed them in the car and can only locate a banana. Sure enough, the little guys love those banana pieces. We laugh as we film them chomping on the fruit. Some rest areas can be more memorable than others.

We hit a deserted stretch of Utah and Idaho. The mountains and stars are our guides as night approaches. I don't locate a mom-and-pop motel off the highway. I can usually negotiate a lower rate with those using my AARP card than through apps with the chain hotels and motels. And I like supporting the local businesses when possible. We end up scoring the lowest rate camping in the car at a well-lit rest area. Others do the same, using the restroom when needed. It feels safe so we stay there till daybreak.

Twin Falls is among Idaho's most scenic towns. We cross the immortalized Snake River via the 350-foot high Hansen Bridge on Highway 50, stopping to snap a few photos. From there, it's a short jaunt to Shoshone Falls, which some call the "Niagara Falls of the West" due to its water flow that averages 3,530 cubic feet per second – faster than most western falls. It's 45 feet higher than Niagara's 167-foot Horseshoe Falls, though the latter is 1,775 feet wider and flows much, much, *much* faster at an average of 85,000 cubic feet per second.

Shoshone still is powerful enough to support an array of hydroelectric power stations that help develop the area. Natives long depended on the falls' rich salmon fishing grounds. European-American explorers Lewis and Clark passed a bit north of the falls in 1805, with helpful Shoshone tribe guides like Sacagawea. The latter native wasn't honored with a dollar coin until 2000, almost a century after Lewis and Clark received that tribute.

We are early enough to beat the guards to the Shoshone park, which became a popular tourist attraction in the 1860s, even before Yellowstone. We cruise past the gate since the road is not blocked.



Prairie dogs play a pretty good welcoming committee at a Utah rest area.

Photo by Kevin Shay

“It’s scary,” says McKenna, as she gingerly steps on the metallic balcony overlooking Shoshone Falls. “I don’t want to be on this ledge too long.” Since the weather has been largely dry, the flow does not approach its average. But the canyon scenes are still amazing. After we hike around to obtain more shots, Preston finally wakes up enough to join us.

Back on the road, we spy a McDonald’s and eat some pancakes and sausage. Breakfast is the best time to eat at this fast food joint. As we near the

well-photographed, arched Perrine Bridge, we stop at an overlook to take a few shots of the 13th highest bridge in the U.S. at 486 feet. Dating to 1927, it's one of the few bridges where you can legally jump and parachute from the structure if you're insane enough to do that. No one is jumping at this hour; it's way too early for the crazy types, except for me.

Strung out from car camping, I decide to support another local business, Miracle Hot Springs, which dates to 1920 and offers a discount to those older than 60, not just 65 like many places. The four pools of mineral spring water, which bubble from the earth at 138 degrees and are cooled by cold spring water from the Snake River, differ in temperature. We find a moderately-hot one to reinvigorate us. I also locate a shade tree and use a Dollar Tree sheet and blow-up pillow to catch a nap. An alligator naps nearby in an enclosed area, but we don't bother each other.

Idaho's capital, Boise, grew by about 15 percent in the previous decade to reach 236,000 residents in 2020 and ranked 11th in Money magazine's 2022 Best Places to Live list. The low unemployment rate and cost of living, along with outdoor recreation and cultural amenities, are a draw. Preston enjoys stopping to see the signature blue turf at Boise State's Albertsons Stadium, defended by the small-market football team that has finished as high as fourth nationally. McKenna likes Freak Alley, a sidestreet filled with public art and colorful murals.

While the kids finish some pizza, I find a restroom in a nearby gas station. After years of waving futilely at the automatic faucets trying to get the water to work, I figure out that you have to place your hands close to the sensor near the spigot's base, not just wave your hands around like a madman under the faucet. I'm not sure what helped me finally reach that breakthrough, and I return to tell the kids.

They laugh. "You're just figuring that out now, Daddy?" McKenna notes. "Most of us knew how to do it right away."

49th and 50th states

"I'm 63, and this is my first visit to Oregon," I tell the employees working the tourism center at the Oregon Trail Rest Stop on Interstate 84. "It's the 49th state I've visited."

"Well, it's about time," replies one. "What is the last state you have left?"

"It's a difficult one – Alaska." A 2022 YouGov survey found the country's largest state – more than twice the size of Number Two Texas – to be Americans' least visited state. Only 13 percent had traveled to Alaska, with

North Dakota next lowest at 15 percent. Florida [61%], New York [55%], and California [54%] were most popular.

“Ah. That is a hard one.”



Reaching the 49th state Photo by McKenna Shay

She offers me not just free travel guides, postcards, and maps, but a nice, colorful poster. There are six versions to choose from, so I need help. “I’ll go get my daughter,” I say. McKenna likes the waterfalls best, while I choose one of Portland. The staffer offers us both. I’ve been at many a state welcome center, and it’s the first time I’ve emerged with a couple of free, full-sized posters.

In August 2023, I will reach the 50th state with the aid of girlfriend Christy Baker, who suggests the trip to the United States’ Last Frontier, along with visiting her son, Matt, in Seattle. Alaska seems like a state of dreams, a scenic, natural paradise with wonders virtually everywhere you look. Yet, it also has the most powerful earthquakes and some of the more active volcanoes in the U.S., along with long, cold winters. Summers have lengthy, warm days but plenty of mosquitoes. Everything is a tradeoff.

Choices for top wonder we will see include Beluga Point, where you can view Beluga whales swimming in the day and the famed Northern Lights at night; the glaciers and jaw-dropping peaks along the Seward Highway; Chena Hot Springs Resort near Fairbanks, which dates to 1905 when gold-mining brothers who sought to ease rheumatism pain discovered the springs; and Denali, formerly called Mount McKinley and the highest and most prominent mountain in North America.

Like many, I will have to go with Denali National Park, which features excellent visitor centers, with guides who can tell you where best to spot the moose, elk, bears, and other wildlife that occupy the park. The peak of Denali is

impressive even from 40 miles away, about the closest most people get to that peak from a viewing area along Alaska Highway 3. Some obtain a closer glimpse by taking a tour bus, backpacking into the wild, or finding an obscure dirt road. It's a hard peak to catch since the weather conditions are often cloudy, but we will spot the majestic scene around sunset on our final day in the park after clouds obscure the view earlier that day.

A few people visit all 50 states in less than one week, according to the All Fifty States Club. And yes, that is a real club that formed in 2006. And no, I haven't formally joined because I'm not a joiner, especially with any club that will have me as a member. With only some two percent of people informally in that club and the average U.S. citizen reaching 17 states, it is fairly exclusive.

On this trip, I will ignore my rule to not let the gas tank slide near empty, as I'm trying to catch Denali before the sun sets. I will forget that Alaska is so big that geographic scientists can't even agree how many square miles it encompasses – one estimate says 665,384, another 663,268, while noting that almost 100,000 square miles is water.

I don't realize that gas stations close early and are farther apart than they appear on Google Maps. I will put our rented SUV in neutral and coast down secluded mountainous roads while the near-midnight sun sinks, before reaching a station miles after the vehicle gas tank's empty light shines in my face like a doomsday warning.

Perhaps subconsciously, I will play that game once more for Dad's sake, though Christy didn't seem to enjoy the experience. I have to admit that it really wasn't much fun. There are better ways to get the adrenaline flowing than to risk being stranded on a back road in Alaska.

At Byron Glacier, I will observe some teens and their parents in the distance rip off melting ice chunks and throw glacial balls for their amusement. I will hike to the glacier and glare at them, thinking of verbally reprimanding their lack of respect for a dying glacier. But I decide not to channel Larry David this time.

Christy will arrange some nice stays, including at the Chena resort, where we will soak in the springs and be too tired to stay up to attempt to catch the Aurora Borealis, and in a backwoods cabin. We will see some faint Northern Lights at Beluga Point. We will connect with some of her relatives. All in all, a pretty, pretty good visit.



Photo by Rockies fan at Coors Field, Denver

Checkout at Hertz goes smoothly enough. We scramble to make sure we haven't left anything in a side pocket or nook, while making the shuttle to the airport. The only thing I overlook is an air pressure gauge.

Safely on the bus, I gaze at the emailed rental car receipt. "We drove 4,867 miles on this trip!" I exclaim. "Wow! I expected about 3,500." It's not 6,950 miles like nine years earlier, but it's enough. Those side trips to Vancouver and Mount Shasta add up. At least the kids this time could help drive at certain points.

We try to eat the rest of the banana bread and other food we bought, giving some away to perplexed travelers. Security goes fine, and the plane seats this time are not reserved, so my knees are close to my face. "Are you going to be okay with that?" the kids ask simultaneously.

"Yeah, it's only a three-hour flight. I've been through worse," I smile. "I prefer to drive, though. Don't you?"

"No!" they both quickly respond. Later, they will cherish their photographs and mementos of this odyssey. But it's hard to do that when you're in the middle of the good, bad, and ugly experiences.

I laugh. "Well, maybe next time, we won't drive so far."

“That’s what you said last time,” McKenna reminds.

Mad Trip Tip from Preston: If you are having a picnic on the San Francisco Bay or near any windy body of water, make sure you hold onto your food. You don’t want it dumped on your lap by wind gusts.

Mad Trip Tip from McKenna: My main tip hasn’t changed much from nine years earlier. Bring lots of books, a Kindle, a phone, and other things to occupy your time. I don’t use an iPod anymore, but I can often read books on my phone.



Watch for wind gusts from the San Francisco Bay.

Appendix

The Miscellaneous Stuff at the End of a Book, not the Human Organ!

Mad Trip Fun Facts in Lists

While riding all those miles in your vehicle, you can impress and stump your parents, siblings, kids, friends, or travel partners with these fun facts. If you are driving, please wait until you take a break to read these. No driving and reading!

Most Visited Cities, North America, 2023			
City	Visitors [mil]		
1. Orlando	74.0*	9. Cancun, Mx.	33.7
2. New York City	62.2	10. Seattle	33.3*
3. Los Angeles	50.0	11. San Diego	30.5
4. Chicago	48.9*	12. Indianapolis	30.0
5. Philadelphia	42.9	13. Austin	27.4*
6. Las Vegas	40.8	14. Atlantic City	27.0
7. San Antonio	39.0	15. Dallas	25.7
8. Denver	36.3*	16. Anaheim	24.9*
		17. San Francisco	23.3

* 2022 figure

Sources: Area tourism bureaus. Estimates often include visitors from 50 miles or so away, including on day trips.

* The 2020-21 COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted tourism. For example, **Orlando** reported a more than 50 percent visitation decline in 2020 from 2019 to about 35 million, though that rebounded in 2022 to almost 2019 levels.

Most Scenic Road Trips, North America

1. **Pacific Coast Highway or Big Sur**, Monterey, Calif., to Morro Bay, Calif., 123 miles

Chosen by many road warriors as not only the most scenic drive in the United States, but in the world. California Route 1 along the Pacific Ocean features majestic cliffs, redwood groves, narrow shoulders, breath-taking vistas that words and photos don't do justice. Stop at **Garrapata State Park, Bixby Creek Bridge, Pfeiffer Beach, Elephant Seal Visitor Center, Moonstone Beach, Morro Rock**, or anywhere along this route. You can't go wrong, unless the road is closed due to mud slides.

Others on this list are unranked since they can be up for greater debate on where exactly they rate.

* **Baja California**, Tijuana to Los Cabos, Mexico, 1,011 miles

Be aware that Los Cabos and Tijuana have some of the highest crime rates in Mexico, even worse than New Orleans and St. Louis. A real scenic drive once you get out of cities and by the ocean. Can see whales at times.

* **High Road to Taos**, Santa Fe, N.M., to Taos to Ojo Caliente, N.M., 195 miles

Go in October to see the largest hot-air balloon festival in the world in Albuquerque.

* **Great Smoky Mountains National Park**, Asheville, N.C., to Pigeon Forge, Tenn., 92 miles

The most popular U.S. national park by far and one of the few that is free to enter. Has some of the highest mountains east of the Mississippi River, a Native American village, and enough touristy towns to satisfy any kid.

* **Blue Ridge Parkway/Skyline Drive**, Cherokee, N.C., to Front Royal, Va., 574 miles

Some call these mountains, but compared to the West they are more like large hills.

* **Florida Keys Scenic Highway**, Everglades National Park to Key West, Fla. 137 miles

Ride a glass-bottom boat, go scuba diving, visit a dolphin research center and Hemingway's old home.

* **US 89**, Yellowstone National Park to Glacier National Park, 377 miles

The **Going-to-the-Sun** road can seem like you are driving into the sun at certain times.

* **Seward Highway**, Anchorage, Alaska, to Seward, 127 miles

Be sure to stop at **Beluga Point** to see whales swimming. There is an easy hike to **Byron Glacier** from near the **Begich, Boggs Visitor Center** in Portage Valley. **Seward** is a scenic coastal town with nice shops and restaurants.

* **Icefields Parkway**, Lake Louise to Jasper, Alberta, 145 miles

Winds through **Banff National Park** and **Jasper National Park** along the Continental Divide, passing towering mountain peaks, icefields, ancient glaciers, and picturesque turquoise lakes.

Sources: Reader's Digest, Road Trip USA, Travel + Leisure, Lonely Planet

Most and Least Expensive U.S. Vacation Destinations

Destination	Cost/day/person, 2024		
Aspen, Colo.	\$761.39	Jackson Hole, Wyo.	\$489.67
Park City, Utah	\$710.08	Monument Valley, Utah	\$218.00
Maui, Hawaii	\$680.24	Bend, Ore.	\$214.00
Montauk, N.Y.	\$617.65	Cape Cod, Mass.	\$207.00
Santa Monica, Calif.	\$592.62	Sedona, Ariz.	\$198.00
Key West, Fla.	\$536.67	Gatlinburg, Tenn.	\$193.00
Charleston, S.C.	\$535.68	Tybee Island, Ga.	\$186.00
New York City	\$511.74	Helen, Ga.	\$185.00
Martha's Vineyard, Mass.	\$499.25	Outer Banks, N.C.	\$177.00
		Charleston, W.V.	\$177.00

Source: Optimos Travel

Average Annual U.S. Price, Regular Gasoline

Year	Price in 2022 dollars		
1929	\$3.31	2008	\$4.09
1939	\$3.68	2012	\$4.27
1959	\$2.87	2013	\$4.08
1979	\$3.19	2020	\$2.26
1999	\$1.89	2022	\$3.95
		2023	\$3.52

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration. Price is average that year for regular leaded gasoline until 1990 and for regular unleaded afterwards.

Highest Traffic Congestion, North American Cities, 2022

City	Annual hours in traffic/motorist		
1. Chicago	155	5. Philadelphia	114
2. Boston	134	6. Miami	105
3. Toronto	118	7. San Francisco	97
4. New York	117	8. Los Angeles	95
		9. D.C.	83

Source: INRIX

* **New York City** collected the most parking ticket revenue in 2017 at about \$545 million, according to city budgets and TopView Sightseeing. **Chicago** [\$264 million] was next, followed by **Los Angeles** [\$148], **San Francisco** [88.3], **Philadelphia** [\$72.3], **Washington, D.C.**, [\$68.2], **Baltimore** [\$61.7], and **Boston** [\$57.8].

***Looooong* List of North American Attractions, including Websites and Phone Numbers**

Sometimes when you travel, your Internet won't work so well due to being out in the boon docks. But your phone still works. Weird, huh? So we included old-fashioned phone numbers, not just websites, with many of these attractions. If your phone doesn't work, well, not much we can do. You might have to try finding one of those old-fashioned pay phones.

We visited most of these attractions in person, while some are merely on our bucket list. U.S. states are first in the order in which they were admitted or ratified [Delaware first in 1787, Hawaii last in 1959], then Canada and Mexico.

Delaware

Ratified: December 7, 1787

Rehoboth Beach Boardwalk, 302-227-6181, cityofrehoboth.com/beach-and-boardwalk
Beaches can get crowded in the summer months with an estimated 10 million visitors. The mile-long boardwalk has nice restaurants, rides, arcades, shops, and a bandstand with free concerts in summer. Nearby **Dewey Beach** [townofdeweybeach.com] is a little less crowded.

Browseabout Books, Rehoboth Beach, 302-226-2665, browseaboutbooks.com
Family-owned independent bookstore founded in 1975. Located on the main street of this beach town. Attracts appearances of nationally-known authors, such as **David Sedaris**.

Dover Motor Speedway, 800-441-RACE, dovermotorspeedway.com
Hosts regular NASCAR and other major auto races. Near **Dover Mall** and **Bally's Dover Casino Resort** [casinos.ballys.com/dover]

Pennsylvania

Ratified: December 12, 1787

Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, 215-965-2305, nps.gov/inde
The home of the **Liberty Bell** and **Independence Hall**, where the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution were signed. Close to the **Philadelphia Museum of Art** [215-763-8100, philamuseum.org], which has artwork as old as three centuries.

Philadelphia Mint, 151 N. Independence Mall East, 215-408-0112, usmint.gov/about/mint-tours-facilities/philadelphia
Reservations are not necessary for free tours, which resumed on weekdays in 2023. The tours are self-guided and take about 45 minutes. The **Denver Mint** also offers tours, and there are gift shops

where you can buy newly-minted coins. There is also a mint coin shop in **Washington, D.C.** Other production facilities in **San Francisco** and **West Point, N.Y.**, do not offer tours or shops.

Gettysburg National Military Park, 717-334-1124, nps.gov/gett

Go on a ghost tour near Halloween for a special twist.

Hershey Park, Hershey, 800-437-7439, hersheypark.com

Theme park founded in 1906 for chocolate factory employees that grew into a public attraction.

Nearby is the **Hershey Story Museum**, where you can see what it's like to work in the plant. Some factories are still in Pennsylvania, as well as other states and countries.

Knoebels Amusement Park, Elysburg, 800-487-4386, knoebels.com

Billed as America's largest free amusement park, the pool, rides, and mini golf are paid for separately. Parking and some entertainment are free. Dates to 1926, when the author's mom was born and soon started going here with family.

Pennsylvania Anthracite Miner's Memorial, Shenandoah, 570-462-2060,

downtownshenandoah.com

Memorial honoring the area's coal miners, especially those who died like the author's grandfather.

Near the headquarters of **Mrs. T's Pierogies** and **Kowalonek's Kielbasy Shop**.

Flight 93 National Memorial, Shanksville, 814-893-6322, nps.gov/flni

Memorial at the site where **Flight 93** went down on Sept. 11, 2001.

Fallingwater, Mill Run, fallingwater.org

National Historic Landmark house designed by noted architect **Frank Lloyd Wright**. Located about 60 miles southeast of Pittsburgh.

Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh, 412-622-3131, carnegiemuseums.org

Four distinctive museums. **Carnegie Science Center** [carnegiesciencecenter.org] houses **Robot Hall of Fame**, meteors, and a nice planetarium.. The **Andy Warhol Museum** [warhol.org] features his stuffed great dane.

PNC Park, Pittsburgh, 800-BUY-BUCS, mlb.com/pirates/ballpark

Regularly gets top marks in best MLB ballpark lists. About a mile from the home of the **Penguins** and six miles from the **Steelers'** house. Don't go the wrong way down a one-way street or your car might get towed.

Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, Bost Building, Homestead, 412-464-4020,

riversofsteel.com

Exhibits on region's history as the steelmaking capital of the world for more than a century.

America's Steepest Street, 1625 Canton Avenue, roadsideamerica.com/tip/38651

With a 38 percent grade, this is likely the steepest drivable street in the world as well. Drive up, but not down.

Mount Washington Grandview Overlook, visitpittsburgh.com/neighborhoods/mount-washington

Some think this is a better view than Seattle's Kerry Park, and others don't. Many drive up a steep hill and walk around to eat in restaurants overlooking downtown Pittsburgh.



Mount Washington Grandview Overlook in Pittsburgh Photo by random visitor

New Jersey

Ratified: December 18, 1787

Atlantic City Boardwalk, 609-449-7100, atlanticcitynj.com/explore/beaches-boardwalk

The oldest boardwalk in North America, dating to 1870. Beaches along the four-mile walk were still free, as of 2023. Many visitors check out the nearby casinos, restaurants, arcades, and more.

Asbury Park Boardwalk, apboardwalk.com

Probably the second oldest boardwalk in North America, built in 1871. Had a carousel as long ago as 1888. A reconstruction project was completed in 2020, adding new hotels and restaurants.

Stone Pony, Asbury Park, 732-502-0600, stoneponyonline.com

Legendary nightclub that Bruce Springsteen and Jon Bon Jovi made famous.

Alaska

Admitted: January 3, 1959

Earthquake Park, Anchorage, 907-343-4355, anchorage.net/outdoors/trails-and-local-parks/earthquake-park

Park featuring monuments and displays on the 1964 earthquake, which was the largest in magnitude in North America at 9.2 and second worldwide since 1900, to a 1960 quake in Chile. Collapsed buildings and tsunamis led to about 131 deaths, with all but 17 casualties in Alaska. Near **Point**

Woronzof Park, another good place to watch airplanes land and take off from the airport and perhaps see the **Northern Lights** at night.

Denali National Park, 907-683-9532, nps.gov/dena

One of most dangerous national parks. Contains North America's tallest peak, 20,310-foot **Denali**, formerly called **Mt. McKinley**, and wild animals such as grizzly bears, moose, elk, and wolves. The visitor center, which has numerous exhibits and films, is well worth seeing. Bus tours along the peak's northern side can take you closer, but it can be hard to see since many days are cloudy. If you don't want to take a bus, try viewing the peak at the **Denali State Park South** viewing area [dnr.alaska.gov/parks/aspunits/matsu/denaliviewso.htm] at mile marker 135. Even from 40 miles away, it's a stunning sight.



Even from 40 miles away, Denali is a stunning sight. Photo by Kevin Shay

Talkeetna Riverfront Park, alaska.org/detail/talkeetna-riverfront-park

Scenic park on the edge of this town that dates to 1917 and was an inspiration for the drama, *Northern Exposure*. Look for the Denali peak on a relatively clear day. The town has interesting shops and eateries.

Iditarod Headquarters, Wasila, 907-376-5155, iditarod.com

Exhibits, a film, and items related to this almost 1,000-mile dog sled race from Anchorage to Nome each March since 1973. Some have called for an end to the race due to numerous dogs dying.

Canada

Ontario

Admitted: July 1, 1867

Toronto Island Park, 416-396-7378, toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/parks-gardens-beaches/toronto-island-park

Take the ferry to **Centre Island** to be closest to the better restaurants. **Ward's Island** has a boardwalk. Great views of downtown from ferry.

Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, 416-586-8000, rom.on.ca

The largest and most popular museum in Canada. Contains a memorable fossil and gem collection.

CN Tower, 416-868-6937, cntower.ca

The tallest building in the world for decades after it opened in 1976. Has the highest observation deck in a building in North America, with a revolving restaurant.



Preston, Sam, Mike, Enrique, and Old Guy at CN Tower. Photo by Sam Alborta

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