

The Best Places To Travel In The U.S. In 2023, According To The Experts

[FORBES](#)

[Laura Begley Bloom](#)

Senior Contributor

Transformative Travel: I look at how travel can change lives.

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For the past three years, with borders closed around the globe, U.S. travel has provided Americans with much-needed solace—a tonic during a time of uncertainty and fear. We rediscovered national parks, we explored this country’s hidden shores and we found new appreciation for America’s wide open spaces.

Despite the fact that many international countries have reopened to travelers, domestic travel remains strong, [according to the U.S. Travel Association](#)—proving that there’s still a lot to discover close to home.



A VIEW OF AVILA BEACH, ALONG THE CENTRAL COAST OF CALIFORNIA. | CHRISTOPHER PETRO | CALIFORNIST PHOTOGRAPHY | COURTESY OF VISIT SLO CAL

So what are the best places to travel right now? Every year, I round up the best places to visit in America. Once again, I tapped into leading women travel experts and influencers to find out their favorite places to travel in the U.S. in 2023. I also opened my own little black book to reveal the destinations that are on my radar.

This year, the top choices for where to go span the country from coast to coast, ranging from seaside escapes to mountain hideaways to urban hot spots, with some surprises thrown in along the way. Compare these choices to 2022's list of the [best places to travel in America](#), and it's clear that the U.S. is the travel gift that keeps on giving.



ROAD TRIPPING IN PHOENIX, WHICH IS ONE OF THE BEST PLACES TO TRAVEL IN THE US IN 2023. | GETTY

Where to Go: Phoenix, Arizona

Chosen By: Lucee Santini is a travel writer and lifestyle blogger who has contributed to [Huffington Post](#), [SheBuysTravels](#) and [Newsbreak](#) and is the chief editor and writer for MomJunky.com. She shares her adventures and tips on Instagram [@momjunky.com](#) and [@familytraveldestinations](#).

Why: Phoenix made headlines recently as the host of Superbowl LVII, the kickoff location of Taylor Swift’s tour and the home of the MLB Spring Training. But there’s so much to experience in Greater Phoenix in 2023—one of the [fastest growing cities](#) in the U.S.—not to mention the natural beauty that made it a must-visit destination in the first place. “The Valley of the Sun is known for sunny weather all year around, beautiful hikes and scenic landscapes,” says Lucee Santini, who is a big fan of spots like the [Desert Botanical Garden](#), a 144-acre oasis in the middle of the desert.

The city is in the midst of a [\\$23 million redesign](#) of South Mountain Park and Preserve—America’s biggest urban park—that will culminate with the park’s 100th anniversary in 2024. “Stay at [WorldMark Phoenix - South Mountain Preserve](#),” says Santini. “It’s the perfect home base to explore nearby trails and catch an amazing show or exhibition.”

Over the next year, Phoenix will see the opening of several major resorts, including [Moxy Phoenix Downtown](#) (set in a 1920’s Luhrs building), [The Ritz-Carlton Paradise Valley](#), [The Palmeraie](#) (overlooking Camelback Mountain) and the \$1 billion [VAI](#) (complete with white-sand beaches, a 52,000-square-foot party island and the Mattel Adventure Park).

Some iconic properties are also getting overhauled. [The Wigwam](#), an historic resort with luxury casitas and suites in the West Valley, will undergo a comprehensive renovation in 2023. Look for two expansive swimming pools, bocce and tennis courts, as well as an enhanced golf club with 54 holes of championship golf including

two courses designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr. Meanwhile, [JW Marriott Phoenix Desert Ridge Resort & Spa](#) recently debuted an \$80 million transformation and will soon be unveiling a reimagined AquaRidge Water Park, as well as a new Pan-Asian restaurant concept, Kembara.

The Phoenix metropolitan area's food and wine scene is also exploding, with exciting entries like [Chic Chef 77](#) (Arizona's first Black-owned wine bar from celebrity chef Nik Fields) and [Chilte](#) (Mexican street food at the Grand Avenue Arts District's new Egyptian Motor Hotel). The drinks scene is also [making global headlines](#), thanks to trend-defining spots like [Platform 18](#) and [UnderTow](#), which have established a new brand of cocktail theater.



TALLEY FARMS VINEYARD IN SAN LUIS OBISPO ON THE CENTRAL COAST OF CALIFORNIA. COURTESY OF VISIT SLO CAL

Where to Go: Central Coast, California

Chosen By: [Molly O'Brien](#) is a freelance journalist.

Why: The Central Coast of California—stretching from Santa Barbara to San Luis Obispo—is undergoing a renaissance, with new and renovated hotels, expanded wine offerings and a burgeoning culinary scene, not to mention a unique vibe. “Something special just opens up inside of you when you're on the Central Coast,” says Molly O’Brien. “Perhaps it’s the warmth of the community that welcomes you, or the abundance of open space to explore, or maybe it’s the freshness of the ingredients used in the local dining and drinks scene—you can feel yourself almost instantly relax and let go of your stresses.”

In Santa Barbara—which is also known as America’s very own Riviera—the new tech-driven boutique hotel, [Drift Santa Barbara](#), officially opened its doors in early 2023 in a restored 1920s building, offering contactless check-in, a third-wave coffee shop and eatery (Dawn) and a craft bar (Dusk) inspired by Mexican heritage. [The Steward](#), a new Tribute Portfolio Marriott Hotel, is set to make its debut in May. Set on nearly five acres of beautifully landscaped gardens, this all-suite boutique hotel has a deep commitment to sustainability, from eliminating single-use plastics to using staff uniforms made of vegan materials.

The area’s art and food scene is also buzzing. The former [Bellosguardo](#) estate will open to the public for the first time later in 2023, while the [Urban Wine Trail](#) is welcoming numerous new tasting rooms, including [La Lief Wines](#) and [Frequency Wine Co.](#) Among Santa Barbara's culinary newcomers are the Rosewood Miramar Beach's [AMA](#) restaurant (which serves authentic Japanese sushi in a beautiful setting) and [Augie's](#) tequila bar and restaurant (which features the largest selection of tequilas and mezcals on the West Coast, including local agave spirits).

There’s lots of other exciting news in 2023 throughout the Central Coast—from the latest [American Viticultural Area](#), which is growing in size, to new restaurants like the Italian-inspired [Cielo](#) (opening in Atascadero) and [Antigua Brewing Company](#) (set to

open in San Luis Obispo). The wine-tasting destination of Paso Robles now boasts a new Michelin star at [Six Test Kitchen](#) and the town will soon be home to two [Nomada Hotel Group](#) properties: the Farmhouse and River Lodge, offering easy access to the quaint downtown area. What's old is also new: In the once forgotten frontier town of Pozo, the Nomada Hotel Group is transforming the iconic [Pozo Saloon](#) into a modern day travel escape with Airstreams, glamping tents, RV hookups for sprinter vans, outdoor soaking tubs and a distillery.



EXPLORING SAN FRANCISCO. GETTY

Where to Go: San Francisco, California

Chosen By: Emily Carmichael is the managing editor of [Fifty Grande](#).

Why: The City by the Bay is buzzing this year, thanks to an array of fresh concepts in hospitality, food, technology, green spaces and sustainability. “With all the Silicon Valley distress, people may be tired of hearing about SF at this point, but if there’s

one thing they should pay attention to, it's the city's leadership in sustainability. It made our sustainability-slanted list of best destinations in 2023," says Emily Carmichael.

Exciting openings include the [Hearst Hotel](#) from Auberge Resorts (which is transforming an iconic building into a lavish space that blends tradition and innovation) and the [LINE Hotel San Francisco](#) (a contemporary interpretation of the area's historic architecture with a landscaped rooftop solarium that has panoramic city views).

Additionally, the recently opened [Presidio Tunnel Tops](#), designed by James Corner Field Operations (the firm behind New York City's High Line), is providing the city with an abundance of space to explore and relax among 14 acres of new national park land and panoramic views of the Bay.

The culinary scene is also red-hot. "It's not hard to find really delicious food here that emphasizes sustainability or local sourcing like that of Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese or Lolo," says Carmichael. "There's also the Japanese Tea Garden and picnics in Dolores Park. San Francisco is just a great place to eat and be outdoors, fog be damned."

Then there's the influence of technology. Joining the growing NFT phenomenon is [SHŌ](#), a two-story culinary and entertainment nightlife experience that will debut in downtown San Francisco in fall 2023. The concept will include a restaurant and rooftop Sky Lounge, as well as a private membership club with the purchase of an NFT.



OVERLOOKING THE HEATED OUTDOOR POOL AT THE GRAND HYATT VAIL | GRAND HYATT VAIL

Where to Go: Vail, Colorado

Chosen By: Laura Begley Bloom is a [travel expert](#) and the author of this column.

Why: Sixty years ago, a group of visionaries decided to open a ski resort at [Vail Mountain](#) that would eventually revolutionize the industry and help make this former mining town a must-visit not only for the jet set but for nature lovers looking for year-round adventures. As the mountain hits its 60th anniversary, Vail has a lot to celebrate in 2023.

A big headliner is [Camp Hale](#), President Biden's first national monument. The groundbreaking new monument on the outskirts of town honors this area's original

dwellers, the Ute people, as well as the Army's 10th Mountain Division, which helped liberate Europe in World War II and used to train here. Plus, there are 53,804 acres to explore with mountain biking, guided hiking, rock climbing, fly fishing and overnight excursions to the nearby 10th Mountain Division Huts. (Delaware North recently announced the acquisition of [Nova Guides](#), an outdoor recreation and adventure tour company based at Camp Hale.)

In other feel-good news, [Vail Resorts](#) has reached 100% renewable electricity not only in Vail itself, but across all of its North American ski resorts. It's part of this trailblazing company's *Commitment to Zero* effort to reach a zero net operating footprint by 2030. Vail has also built [two new lifts](#) at Wildwood and paired up with the local [10th Mountain Whiskey](#) distillery to create a pair of limited-edition bourbons in honor of the anniversary.

In a town where restaurants, lounges and hotels are always innovating, the hot dining reservation is the private gondola experience at [Alpenrose](#), while [Chasing Rabbits](#) is shaking things up with its a unique entertainment venue that includes dining, an arthouse cinema, a cocktail-forward speakeasy and more.

Set at the base of Vail Mountain along the revered fly-fishing waters of Gore Creek, [Grand Hyatt Vail](#) is also pulling out all the stops for its own milestone 40th anniversary. New executive chef Pascal Coudouy is reimagining the alpine menu at the fine dining restaurant Gessner, while the Yoshimi pop-up restaurant has been so popular that it will soon be replaced with a new permanent sushi restaurant. And the hotel has introduced plenty of memorable moments, from an après ski Moët Yurt to Colorado's first and only Moët & Chandon champagne vending machine. Even dogs get spoiled at the summertime Yappy Hour.



SKYTOP MOUNTAIN HOUSE IN BAILEY, COLORADO | SKYTOP MOUNTAIN HOUSE

Where to Go: Bailey, Colorado

Chosen By: Kathryn O’Shea-Evans is a travel and design writer and co-author of the new book *Lodge: An Indoorsy Tour of America’s National Parks* (Gibbs Smith, April 2023), with a foreword by Ken Burns.

Why: “Colorado locals like me know the truth: Sometimes, you’ll get stuck in crazy-making, Los Angeles-worthy traffic on 1-70 for hours just trying to get into the mountains for a ski day or alpine hiking adventure,” says Kathryn O’Shea-Evans.

But O’Shea-Evans and her husband recently discovered a dreamy alternative far from the madding crowds: Bailey, Colorado. “It’s an easy one hour drive from downtown Denver on Highway 285 and chockablock with so many mountain thrills that it feels like you’re in an undiscovered corner of Europe,” says O’Shea-Evans.

To get into nature, O’Shea-Evans recommends [Deer Creek Trail](#). “If you want to soak up a peaceful mountain forest and take a short, easy stroll along a rushing creek, this is the spot,” she says. Another favorite location: [Wellington Lake](#). “Open year-round and a go-to for the region’s anglers, it’s stocked twice a year with fish like rainbow and palomino trout,” she says. To delve into regional history, [McGraw Memorial Park](#) is a must. “The 20-acre creekside park is home to a historic homestead from the 1870s, Keystone railroad bridge and Shawnee School,” says O’Shea-Evans.

Other top vacation spots include [Aspen Peak Cellars](#), set on the banks of the South Platte River (“don’t miss the charcuterie board, fresh-baked baguette with Tuscan olive oil and authentic Swiss Cheese fondue”) and the [PCCP Resale Boutique](#) (“an entirely volunteer-run shop that’s a treasure trove of secondhand finds, all at amazing prices—whether you’re looking for wardrobe staples or fun kids toys”).

In fact, O’Shea-Evans loves Bailey so much that she and her husband bought a modern vacation house and turned it into a luxe short term rental, [Skytop Mountain House](#). “It’s got a prime panorama over Bandit Peak and Rosalie Peak,” she says. “When we’re vacationing with our son up there, we always, always see wildlife—from elk to moose—and never experience a traffic jam. It’s Colorado the way it was meant to be...just don’t tell anybody about it.”



THE CLEAR WATERS OF FLORIDA'S HENDERSON STATE PARK. | DESTIN-FORT WALTON BEACH

Where: Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida

Chosen By: Kate Schweitzer is a Chicago-based freelance travel writer and mom of two. Follow her on Instagram [@kateschweitzer](https://www.instagram.com/kateschweitzer).

Why: Family-friendly Destin-Fort Walton Beach offers near-perfect weather year-round, a growing hotel scene, rich ecotourism that the destination is working hard to protect, plus “a fishing community so vibrant that the beach town has come to be known as ‘the world’s luckiest fishing village,’” says Kate Schweitzer.

Set on the Gulf of Mexico, Destin provides travelers with an array of immersive and educational activities such as artificial reefs for snorkeling and diving, educational beach walks to learn more about sea turtles and emerald green waters where dolphins roam freely in their natural habitat. To protect and restore the local sea life, the destination has introduced a range of projects including new sea turtle

lighting initiatives, the continental United States' first ever Fishing Aggregating Device and [The Emerald Coast Open and Lionfish Removal & Awareness Day Festival](#) to promote effectively removing the invasive species from the Gulf.

“Visitors can also foster their love of marine life with a visit to Destin’s [Gulfarium C.A.R.E. Center](#), which promotes the rehabilitation and release of stranded sea turtles,” says Schweitzer. “My kiddos loved the marine-biologist-led tour just as much as setting sail on a trimaran in search of dolphins.”

Destin is also home to a buzzing gulf-to-table seafood scene, including spots like [Lulu’s](#) (owned by Jimmy Buffett’s little sister Lucy), [Rockin Tacos](#) and [Brotula's Seafood House](#). “In fact, do some good and order up whatever lionfish—an invasive species that prey on the area’s native fish population—is on the menu,” says Schweitzer. “Destin truly is a Florida hidden gem, and you’ll be so glad you discovered it.”



Where to Go: St. Pete, Florida

Chosen By: [Terry Ward](#) is a Florida-based travel writer whose work appears in CNN, *National Geographic*, *Lonely Planet* and the *Washington Post*, among many other outlets. Follow her along her journey on Twitter and Instagram at [@TerryWardWriter](#).

Why: “St. Pete presents one of Florida’s best mixes of a cool and lively urban downtown with beautiful beaches right nearby,” says Terry Ward. “The town is known for its art scene—from the murals everywhere to Salvador Dali and Renaissance masterworks in museums—but it remains delightfully casual and approachable at every level, too.”

With 35 miles of uninterrupted coastline including some of Florida’s top-rated beaches and a booming arts and culture scene, it’s no surprise that St. Pete is popping on travelers’ radars. [The Dalí Museum](#) continues to offer unique and innovative exhibits that explore multi-sensory, immersive experiences for all types of travelers and is a must visit when in the destination.

Also appealing: “It’s an LGBTQ+ haven and home to the state’s largest Pride parade every year,” says Ward. “And the new St. Pete Pier has become a center for gathering all year round, whether at a pop-up roller rink, among the pelicans and anglers casting out line at its tip or while enjoying sprawling views of downtown and Tampa Bay from a rooftop Tiki bar washed with salty breezes.”

This year is bringing big changes in the hospitality scene, including major renovations to the iconic [Vinoy Resort & Golf Club](#) and hot new hotels popping up all around town. The EDGE District is welcoming its first lifestyle property, the [Moxy Hotel by Marriott](#), while [Mint House](#) is set to open in the district in June 2023, offering

apartment-style accommodations. Additionally, the [AC Hotel St. Petersburg](#) by Marriott opened earlier this year.

And when it comes to soaking in St. Pete’s annual 361 days of sunshine, it doesn’t always happen at the beach. This year the 75-mile [Fred Marquis Pinellas Trail Loop](#) is being completed with a 6.7-mile addition. The multi-use pathway stretches from Tarpon Springs to St. Pete with connections to coastal communities along the way, making it a great way to explore the area.



EXPLORING SAVANNAH, GEORGIA. | GETTY

Where to Go: Savannah, Georgia

Chosen By: [Melissa Klurman](#) is a travel expert and contributor at *Reader’s Digest*, *The Points Guy* and *Travel Awaits*.

Why: A charming southern escape, the “Hostess City” of Savannah is a favorite of travel writer Melissa Klurman for its rich history—the entire downtown is a National Historic Landmark; its 22 park squares, including the illustrious Forsyth Park of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* fame; and, of course, its numerous regional culinary delights.

Despite its many allures, Klurman says, Savannah’s live music scene has been a bit under the radar. “Savannah is seemingly always in the shadow of Nashville and Austin. That’s all about to change though,” says Klurman.

This year, the city got a new entertainment venue, Enmarket Arena, bringing big name acts to a 9,500 seat arena. That comes on the heels of the opening of the Plant Riverside District, an entertainment zone that debuted during the pandemic.

Even more enticing is the vibrant [Savannah Music Festival](#), a 17-day celebration of stellar live jazz, blues, folk, global roots and classical music. It’s an easy-to-attend (and enjoy) concert series, says Klurman, who also notes that tickets start at wallet friendly prices of just \$31. “You can dip into indoor and outdoor performances, ticketed big name draws like Buddy Guy, or smaller lunchtime events to get a flavor of this southern festival,” says Klurman. “It’s been a local favorite for more than 30 years, but I’m betting that with the new focus on Savannah as a truly notable music destination, that the Savannah Music Festival will be at the top of music lovers’ lists in the coming years.”



A RENDERING OF THE LONGFELLOW HOTEL, WHICH WILL OPEN THIS SUMMER IN PORTLAND'S HISTORIC WEST END. | LEONARDO R. MERLOS

Where to Go: Portland, Maine

Chosen By: Born and raised in Maine, Vanessa Santarelli is the founder of [Your Maine Concierge](#) (the state's first custom guided-experience company) and co-host of the [Maine Life TV show](#).

Why: "One could visit Portland for a week and still only scratch the surface of all that Maine's largest city has to offer," says Vanessa Santarelli.

From fine dining to local seaside eats, Portland has more restaurants per capita than any other city in the country besides San Francisco. Earlier this year, Per Se and Eleven Madison Park alums opened [Twelve](#) to rave reviews. Some other notable spots include [The Danforth](#) (a restaurant and cocktail bar with sleek interiors by the Death & Co team), [Tandem](#) (a bakery and coffee shop in a former gas station), [Crispy Gai](#) ("a locals' hot spot where bartender Arvid Brown's twist on the classic daiquiri

with Thai basil is not to be missed,” says Santarelli). [Miyake](#) also just reopened after having been closed for years due to Covid. “Chef Masa’s signature hamayaki dish alone will make you want to plan your return trip to Maine before the check gets to the table,” says Santarelli.

Looking for a quintessential Maine experience? “Pop across the bridge to South Portland for local oysters on the half shell, ceviche, smoked trout and salmon toast at [SoPo Seafood Market and Raw Bar](#), paired with a local craft beer like Patina from [Austin Street Brewery](#), on their way to a casual, yet breathtakingly scenic lunch of delicious Maine lobster rolls on the no-frills picnic tables at the [Lobster Shack](#) at Two Lights, watching the sailboats and fishing vessels cruise by,” says Santarelli. “After lunch, walk in the footsteps of famed painter Winslow Homer by scheduling a private studio tour with the Portland Museum of Art on the ocean cliffs in Scarborough that inspired many of his most admired works.”

This year will also bring exciting hotel news: Designed by the same folks that did the acclaimed [Lake House on Canandaiga](#), [Longfellow Hotel](#) will open this summer in Portland’s historic West End neighborhood. The property will be the first independent, full-service hotel to open in Portland in 20 years, and is the namesake of famed Portland poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Owned and operated by two lifelong Maine brothers, the hotel reinterprets Maine’s wild, rugged beauty into a sophisticated, calming oasis in the heart of Portland.

Another new hot spot: The [Washington Baths](#), a design-forward Scandinavian style public bath house. This year will also mark the 200th anniversary of the first steamship to Portland from Boston, which started regular passenger service between the two cities and helped transform Maine into “Vacationland.”



A SAND DUNE TRAIL IN MICHIGAN'S SLEEPING BEAR DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE. | GETTY

Traverse City, Michigan

Chosen By: [Erica Zazo](#) is a freelance outdoor and travel writer based in Chicago. She often writes about lesser-known hiking trails and outdoor adventures across the Midwest.

Why: For an underrated destination to add to your 2023 bucket list, look no further than waterfront Traverse City, located on the Northwest side of Michigan. The destination is the perfect blend of small-town charm, mixed with elevated offerings in the cultural and culinary space, such as [Modern Bird](#) (from a husband and wife duo who trained in Michelin-level kitchens) and [Dennos Museum Center](#) (with the largest collection of Inuit art in the country).

“As a Michigan native, I can’t say enough about my love of Traverse City,” says Erica Zazo. “I’m a huge fan of going on outdoor adventures throughout the region,

including kayaking and fly fishing on the Boardman River, biking through downtown, hiking on Old Mission Peninsula and boating in the Grand Traverse Bay.”

One of this lesser-known destination’s claims to fame is that it is the country’s Cherry Capital: Visitors can stroll through the cherry blossom trees in springtime and celebrate the region’s favorite crop at the [National Cherry Festival](#) in July. Traverse City is also home to a hidden wine gem: the [Traverse Wine Coast](#). With its location on the 45th parallel, the region lines up with prestigious wine regions in Europe and has two unique areas climatically moderated by the massive waters of Lake Michigan: The [Leelanau](#) and [Old Mission Peninsula](#).

This is also beer country. “I’m a big Michigan craft beer fan, and visiting Farm Club north of downtown Traverse City is one of my favorite places to drink local beer,” says Zazo. “They have an amazing food menu, impressive brews and an unbeatable view from their amazingly beautiful taproom that oozes with cozy modern cabin vibes.” For a bike-and-brew adventure, Zazo recommends a ride along the Leelanau Trail, a 17-mile paved bike path that passes right by Farm Club and stretches all the way to Suttons Bay.

Lastly, Traverse City is a destination for all seasons—whether it’s skiing and [winter sports](#) at Crystal Mountain Resort, [leaf peeping](#) in the fall, or exploring [Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore](#) in the spring and summer. For a great place to stay, the [Alexandra Inn](#) will debut this summer on a private beach along East Grand Traverse Bay. Each of the 32 guest rooms will have soaker tubs and glass-faced balconies with stunning water views.



UP-AND-COMING HATTIESBURG, MISSISSIPPI. | GETTY

Where to Go: Mississippi

Chosen By: Laura Begley Bloom is a [travel expert](#) and the author of this column.

Why: The Magnolia State has everything a traveler could want in 2023, from a cutting-edge culinary scene to buzzing small towns to incredible natural beauty.

In Hattiesburg, take in over 50 pieces of art on the public art trail, tuck into the [Hattiesburg Pocket Alley Pocket Museum](#) (a 48×36-inch window display filled with a monthly rotating collection of objects) and thrift your heart out at the [Lucky Rabbit](#), which even has glassblowing demonstrations.

Other hidden-gem towns include Waveland (the only community of the Gulf Coast that prohibits commercial buildings on its beachfront), Bay St. Louis (which has a

quaint downtown filled with art galleries and antique shops) and Diamondhead (known for its golf scene and some of the best greens on the coast.

Mississippi has also carved out a signature culinary culture, with high-end dining by celebrity chefs to farm-to-table spots to no-frills establishments. In historic downtown Ocean Springs, [Vestige](#) offers a contemporary American menu paired with inspiration of the flavors and techniques of Japan, while at [Elvie's](#) in Jackson, chef Hunter Evans channels his passion for food and hospitality learned in his grandmother Elvioletta's New Orleans kitchen. The Delta is also known for tamales, and the easiest way to experience this beloved snack is by following the [Hot Tamale Trail](#).

When it comes to nature, [Quapaw Canoe Company](#) runs daytrip and overnight wilderness customized expeditions on the Lower Mississippi River via its Back Waters, Bayous, Oxbows and Flood Plain. The Mississippi also offers great birding throughout its forests and sandy beaches, and the [Mississippi Coastal Birding Trail](#) helps guide visitors to identifying over 40 birding sites identified by local birders.

Mississippi's lodging ranges from forest retreats to historic inns and everything in between. [The Roost](#) in Ocean Springs is a restored boutique hotel located within walking distance of the beach and the eclectic downtown. Set on 26 acres, the [Monmouth Historic Inn](#) in Natchez was originally built in 1818 and is now a National Historic Landmark.



KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI'S DOWNTOWN SKYLINE WITH UNION STATION. | GETTY

Where to Go: Kansas City, Missouri

Chosen By: [Anna Petrow](#) is a Kansas City-based culinary, travel and lifestyle photographer and regular contributor to *The New York Times*, *Travel + Leisure* and *Fathom*.

Why: “Kansas City’s culture includes a unique blend of the creative and the culinary,” says Anna Petrow. “A city positioned in the heartland, our chefs and farmers were among the first in the country to quietly lead the farm to table movement.”

Now, Kansas City is having its moment, thanks in part to people who genuinely care about where their food comes from. “You see that care come to life in a creative way in everything from cocktails to chocolate handcrafted in KC,” says Petrow. [“Christopher Elbow”](#)’s confections have gained a place on the national stage,

while local liquor brands like [J. Rieger & Co.](#) and [Mean Mule](#) have quickly won the hearts of Kansas Citians through both innovation and homage to the heritage of our city, which eschewed prohibition in favor of speakeasies and jazz, earning us the nickname ‘Paris of the Plains.’”

Another hallmark of this city is that it’s a place that values community over competition. “You see this all the time, from restaurants supporting each other’s new ventures, to coffee shops leading the charge for community initiatives,” says Petrow. One person who embodies this spirit: Jackie Nguyen, owner of Vietnamese coffee shop [Cafe Cà Phê](#). “Her shop has become a home for artists, organizers and dreamers,” says Petrow. “Rarely a week goes by when they aren’t hosting a culture workshop or fundraiser for a fellow small business inventor—true advocacy.”

All of this feeds into the general spirit of support for the arts, including First Fridays in the [Crossroads](#), open gallery nights, street art festivals that draw big crowds, open-air barbecue competitions in the summer and institutions like the beloved [American Jazz Museum](#). “Great food and drink are never far behind,” says Petrow. Case in point? “KC’s most anticipated brewery, Black-founded and owned [Vine Street Brewing](#), will be opening near the museum this year,” says Petrow. “So go ahead and book a flight to our new airport—your tastebuds will thank you.”



A NIGHTTIME VIEW OF ATLANTIC CITY'S WATERFRONT. | GETTY

Where to Go: Atlantic City, New Jersey

Chosen By: [Andrea Doyle](#), a journalist with Skift Meetings.

Why: “Atlantic City is set to have a banner 2023 and I will be a frequent visitor,” says Andrea Doyle. America’s Playground (as this beachside city is called) has seen significant reinvestment into the destination over the last several years, including multi-million dollar hotel renovations, game-changing restaurants and all-new attractions.

“There are so many new features coming online that I am excited to experience,” says Andrea Doyle. “I am looking forward to dining at [Nobu](#), which is set to open this year, enjoying a show at [Spiegelworld](#) and checking out a few of the many top-name concerts featured this summer.”

When it arrives at [Caesars in Atlantic City](#) with a brand new production of “The Hook” in summer 2023, Spiegelworld is set to be the planet’s premier purveyor of submersive entertainment. Also bringing new life to the destination: the highly-anticipated [\\$55 million rebrand and remodel](#) of [Borgata’s Water Club](#) to MGM Tower. Adding to the excitement: [Island Waterpark](#) at [Showboat Atlantic City](#), which will be the largest indoor waterpark in the country and will feature state-of-the-art surf machines creating life-size waves and the largest custom aqua forms in the world.

And of course, there are the tried-and-true favorites that continue to deliver. “On getaways with my girlfriends as well as my book club, we enjoy shopping, dining at prestigious restaurants, spa treatments at wellness centers like [Exhale Spa + Bathhouse at Ocean](#) and dancing the night away at [Boogie Nights at Tropicana](#),” says Doyle.



CROW'S NEST, WHICH PROVIDES A MULTI-SENSORY VIEW OF NIAGARA FALLS. ©STEPHEN MATERA 206.715.4572

Where: Niagara Falls, New York

Chosen By: Michele Herrmann, Travel, Culinary and Lifestyle Freelance Writer and Content Creator

Why: Niagara Falls is a bucket-list destination for people from all over the world, thanks to iconic attractions such as the [Maid of the Mist](#) and [Cave of the Winds](#). Founded in 1885, [Niagara Falls State Park](#) has always been a point of interest for visitors to the Falls, and now a new \$46 million Welcome Center opening later this spring will feature sustainable elements, hands-on exhibits and indigenous history to enrich the experience.

“The New York State side of Niagara Falls has really seen a lot of growth and revitalization,” says Michele Herrmann. “From establishments such as Wine on Third, to the new Visitor’s Center, there’s a lot going on. Other sites to visit include the Aquarium of Niagara and the Niagara Power Vista.”

Nature is the focal point of any visit to Niagara Falls USA, and the new [Niagara Hiking Company](#) offers guided day hikes into the Niagara Gorge, with scenic vantage points and narrated history of the area.

A short walk from Niagara Falls, visitors can stay at the [Red Coach Inn](#), celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2023. The historic hotel overlooks the spectacular Upper Rapids of the Niagara River. Also located within walking distance of Niagara Falls: the recently renovated [voco The Cadence Hotel](#). Rooms have balconies where guests can kick up their feet and enjoy a glass of wine from one of the many local [Niagara wineries](#).



OKLAHOMA CITY'S BRICKTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD AT DUSK. | GETTY

Where to Go: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Chosen By: Kay Kingsman, travel writer and blogger at [The Awkward Traveller](#).

Why: “Oklahoma City is not often at the top of dream destinations for travelers, but 2023 is the year that will change,” says Kay Kingsman. “Other cities around the country may get the colloquial title of ‘weird’ or ‘quirky,’ but Oklahoma City, also called OKC for short, flies under the radar for its unconventional attractions and locally curated art scene.”

The [Bradford House](#) boutique hotel in uptown is a new staple to OKC hospitality. “It offers guests unique guest rooms, delightful afternoon tea, jazz nights with regional musicians, and even weekly French classes,” says Kingsman. “It’ll be hard to leave your cozy hotel room, but once you do, check out two of the most unique museums you’ll ever come across: the [American Banjo Museum](#) and the [American Pigeon](#)

[Museum](#). While both are seemingly random, visitors will learn how both pigeons and banjos were integral to the foundation of modern American culture.”

Be sure to round out your cultural enrichment with a trip to the newly opened [First Americans Museum](#). “It explains the decolonized history of the Americas through the lens of the continent’s Indigenous peoples,” says Kingsman.

There are other amazing [things to do in OKC](#) beyond museums. “Have a psychedelic experience at [Factory Obscura](#) and dine at the award-winning [Grey Sweater](#) restaurant,” says Kingsman. “Oklahoma City is also a fantastic road trip stop, as it lies along Route 66, one of the strangest, but also most artistic, highways in the country.”

Whether you are just passing through or staying a while, be sure to also add on at least a day trip to the nearby city of Tulsa. “Tulsa is a destination all on its own, but if you only have time for one activity, be sure to join the eye-opening [Greenwood Black Wall Street tour](#),” says Kingsman. “Visitors will learn the seedy reality of how government entities systemically destroy and displace Black neighborhoods, and also the steps on what they can do to take action.”



EXPLORING PORTLAND, OREGON BY BICYCLE ON THE SAINT JOHNS BRIDGE. | GETTY

Where to Go: Portland, Oregon

Chosen By: Kay Kingsman, travel writer and blogger at [The Awkward Traveller](#).

Why: “Like a phoenix from the ashes, Portland, Oregon is reemerging in 2023 with unprecedented growth in the food and beverage scene, both in quality and variety,” says Kay Kingsman.

Awarded “best foodie city of 2022” by WalletHub, Portland is leading the industry in innovative menus representing cuisines from every corner of the globe. “One especially exciting trait of Portland’s new trajectory is how many of the new and rising businesses are owned and operated by BIPOC and LGBTQA+ trailblazers, reinforcing that a visit to Portland can suit every traveler,” says Kingsman.

With so many great food options, it might be a little overwhelming for first-time visitors. Kingsman's top recommendations: [Matutitna](#) or [Masala Lab](#) for breakfast, followed by [Nong's Khao Man Gai](#) or [Heavy Plays](#) for lunch. "End the night with a bang at [República](#) or [Kann](#), both James Beard-nominated restaurants," says Kingsman. Or grab a bite at the establishments that made Portland a household name in the culinary world: food carts. "There are literally hundreds of food carts, and for the most part you can't go wrong, but a few of my personal favorites are [Balong](#), [Erica's Soul Food](#), [Kim Jong Grillin](#) and [Speed-o Cappuccino](#)," says Kingsman.

How to fill your time between meals? "Get active at a few of the new inclusive fitness studios like [Flow in the City](#) or join in for a community run hosted by [Deadstock Coffee Roasters](#)," says Kingsman. "You can also go at your own pace with a stroll through the [Portland Japanese Garden](#), which added a new tea cafe, or explore the city on an urban hike and pop into a few locally owned small businesses for a little souvenir shopping—sales tax free."



EXPLORING CASTILLO SAN FELIPE DEL MORRO, A 16TH-CENTURY SPANISH FORT IN SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO. | GETTY

Where to Go: Puerto Rico

Chosen By: Kay Kingsman, travel writer and blogger at [The Awkward Traveller](#).

Why: Powerfully rebounding from Hurricane Irma and Maria in 2017, Puerto Rico is sprinting full speed ahead into 2023—and beyond—with new avenues to enjoy while remaining loyal to its Boricuan identity. “One of the first things visitors may notice is the variety of lodging options that directly benefit the community, like the [Dreamers Welcome](#), a new LGBTQIA-owned hospitality group co-founded by Puerto Rican artist and designer Roy Delgado,” says Kay Kingsman.

From surfing, to hiking, to just sunbathing near the lagoons, Puerto Rico is a destination of natural beauty, with miles of beautiful coastlines and the only rainforest National Park in America. “For the nautically inclined, there are also multiple islands off the coast with soft white sand and crystal clear waters for

snorkeling,” says Kingsman. “Or grab a kayak and waft through one (or all!) of the three bioluminescent bays.”

Other nature highlights include the reopening of the renowned [Camuy Caves](#), known for its extensive network of natural lime caves and underground waterways waiting to be explored. And then there’s the state-of-the-art self-sustainable company [Earthship PR](#), which offers educational tours and short-term rentals of its off-grid and sustainable homes built with recycled materials

Along with the island’s natural beauty, Puerto Rico’s cultural attractions are also a big draw. “Companies like [Higuaca Adventours](#) and [Sojourn](#) offer accessible Taino and Afro-Borinken heritage tours,” says Kingsman. Coupled with the worldwide explosion of Puerto Rican musicians such as Bad Bunny, Rauw Alejandro, and Villano Antillano, the island is experiencing incredible growth in the art scene as well. “Be sure to check out community art collectives such as [El Local en Santurce](#) to get the latest pulse on the creative events in Puerto Rico,” says Kingsman.

There are also a number of new restaurants blooming across the island. “A food tour with [Flavors of San Juan Food](#) or [Spoon](#) is a must-do to get a taste of some of the best flavors Puerto Rico has to offer,” says Kingsman. “If tours aren’t your style, you can DIY your own culinary adventure by following recommendations by local Puerto Rican food influencer [Come Con Juan](#).”



NNEYA RICHARDS IN RHODE ISLAND'S SOUTH COUNTY. | NNEYA RICHARDS

Where to Go: South County, Rhode Island

Chosen By: Nneya Richards is a speaker and travel blogger at ['N A Perfect World](#), a curated intersection of travel, food, fashion and geopolitics inspired by the global-citizen lifestyle of the millennial. Richards aims to empower young people, especially those of color, to travel, as she believes it is through exploring the world that we will bridge cultural gaps and misunderstandings.

Why: “It’s just over three hours away from NYC on a fast, comfortable Amtrak ride. But shhh... don’t tell the New Yorkers,” says Nneya Richards. “During the summer season, getting to South County, Rhode Island is easier than getting to the Hamptons. And you’re going to want to head here all year round.”

South County, Rhode Island is on the list for 2023, thanks to all its secret diversions and some not-so secret celebrity fans. “You may know the town of Watch Hill from Taylor Swift’s *Last Great American Dynasty*,” says Richards. “Or maybe it’s because Watch Hill is home to the oldest Flying Horse carousel in the country, dating back to 1754.”

Also going for South County: “There’s something for everyone,” says Richards. “There are laidback surf town vibes in places like Narragansett, and you’ll find the best seafood in the country at restaurants like [Matunuck Oyster Bar](#), and cuisine that could easily be just at home in a hotspot in Mexico City at [Dalia](#), a waterfront Mexican restaurant at Ocean House.”

There’s plenty of hotel news in South County, including [The Cottage Collection](#) (new accommodations from the acclaimed by Ocean House), [The General Stanton Inn](#) (an historic property in Charlestown that’s reopening in May) and [Surf Shack Bed & Breakfast](#) (a funky inn coming in late 2023 in Narragansett).

Other new exciting spots include [Double Barrel Steak by David Burke](#), which recently debuted at The Preserve Sporting Club & Residences and [Seaside Shadows](#) ghost tours in Westerly (new since last fall). And coming in 2024: Charleston’s Ninigret Park will be home to new [Troll works](#) by the famed Danish artist Thomas Dambo.

Best of all: “It’s one of those pockets of peace that the rugged coastlines of the Atlantic can do so well,” says Richards. “And the sunrises and sunsets are just marvelous.”



THE CLEAR NIGHTTIME SKIES IN BADLANDS NATIONAL PARK IN SOUTH DAKOTA. | GETTY

Where to Go: South Dakota

Chosen By: Laura Begley Bloom is a [travel expert](#) and the author of this column.

Why: Besides its six national parks, 63 state parks and recreation areas, iconic monuments and scenic byways, South Dakota has plenty of new reasons to add the state to your travel bucket list in 2023.

In the legendary Badlands, the [Oglala Lakota Living History Village](#) is a new entry point to the beautiful landscape and the past and present culture of Lakota Country. Another new adventure in the heart of Lakota Country: a [Buffalo Road Vacation](#) at the legendary Farlee Ranch on the Cheyenne River Reservation, which provides visitors with an understanding of the life of Native Americans. This year also marks the 75th year anniversary of the [Crazy Horse](#) monument—which is still being

constructed and honors the Lakota leader who bravely defended the Lakota people's way of life.

In Custer State Park, [the new Bison Center](#) brings an all-bison experience to the park's scenic drive through the southern prairie, educating future generations on the importance of these majestic animals through dynamic interpretive displays. For a new way to see the Black Hills, the Custer-based [Overland America](#) specializes in off-road adventures in Jeep and Overland Trailer rentals.

Another South Dakota must-see for landscapes, tribal history and rich culture: the [Native American Scenic Byway](#), which takes travelers through the lands of the Yankton, Crow Creek, Lower Brule, Cheyenne River and Standing Rock Sioux Tribes.

South Dakota's culinary scene might also surprise you, especially in Sioux Falls, which is home to spots like [The Treasury](#) (an imaginative cocktail lounge located through the bank vault doors of the area's newest boutique hotel, Hotel on Phillips), [Remedy Brewing Company](#) (a newly opened family and dog-friendly brewery) and the trailblazing [Sanaa's Gourmet Mediterranean](#) (led by 2023 James Beard Award-nominated chef Sanaa Abourezk).



THE ENTRANCE TO THE WOODSTOCK INN & RESORT IN WOODSTOCK, VERMONT. | WOODSTOCK INN & RESORT

Where to Go: Woodstock, Vermont

Chosen By: Amanda Gabriele is a writer, editor, world traveler and martini enthusiast. She's currently a senior editor at InsideHook and her work has appeared in *Travel + Leisure*, *Eater*, *Gear Patrol*, *Thrillist*, *Matador* and more. She lives in Brooklyn, New York but is constantly looking for her next adventure, which you can follow on Instagram [@amandameatballs](#).

Why: Woodstock, Vermont has been making headlines for reasons big and small. The town was recently named to American Express Travel's [2023 Trending Destinations list](#), based its popularity with cardholders. And the destination garnered attention when it reopened its iconic Suicide Six ski area—one of the oldest in the country—with a new name, [Saskadena Six Ski Area](#), and new amenities. The change was recognized both for its long overdue nod to the Abenaki people's ancestral lands, as well as the importance of mental health awareness.

The town's simple appeals add to its allure. "I can't think of a more idyllic place than Woodstock, Vermont—it makes for a perfect getaway in any season," says Amanda Gabriele. "It has all the outdoor activities (hiking, skiing, fishing) and a lovely main street with great shops (don't miss F.H. Gillingham and Sons, Woody's Mercantile and Yankee Bookshop)."

For such a small town, Woodstock also has a buzzing hospitality scene. "I'm always in search of the perfect cocktail bar, and I could live inside [Au Comptoir](#) with its cozy interior and delicious drinks," says Gabriele. On the mountain, [Perley's Pourhouse](#) at Saskadena Six offers a selection of Vermont craft beer on tap, an outdoor wood-burning fireplace and fire pits.

The town is also home to the iconic [Woodstock Inn & Resort](#). "It's dog-friendly, which is a huge plus," says Gabriele. "and there are comfy sitting areas (and an

awesome game room!) scattered around the property that are perfect for a nightcap and chatting up new friends. Its two restaurants—[Red Rooster](#) and [Richardson's Tavern](#)—are excellent and many of the dishes are made using fresh produce from the inn's own garden.”

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