INSPIRATION

The Most Beautiful Place in Every U.S. State

Think of this as your starting point to the most epic cross-country trip ever.

BY CAITLIN MORTON

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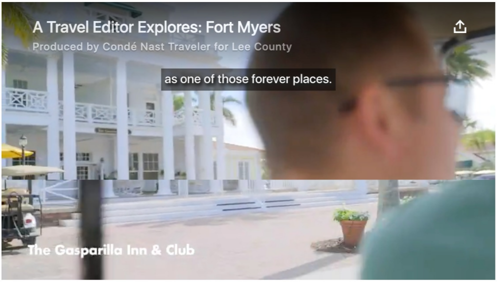
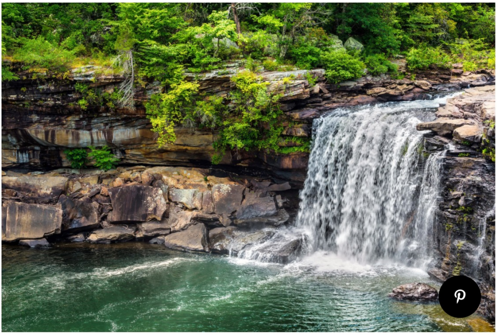
If you've ever done a road trip across the U.S., you've probably stepped away thinking: How can one country be home to all of that? No two states are the same, and each has its stars—the kind of sights that make you catch your breath and nearly veer off the highway. Alaska's glaciers. Arizona's canyons. Arkansas's Ozarks. And that's only the As.


A Travel Editor Explores: Fort Myers
Produced by Condé Nast Traveler for Lee County
as one of those forever places.
The Gasparilla Inn & Club

The geography of America is as diverse as it is photogenic; and if you're from here, it kind of makes you proud, knowing this is home. Picking just 52 places isn't easy, but we polled our Facebook followers, did some digging, and came up with this list of the must-see, must-visit spots in each state. Of course, it only begins to scrape the surface of what this country has to offer—so consider it your starting point, and get exploring.

This article has been updated with new information since its original publish date. All listings featured in this story are independently selected by our editors. However, when you book something through our retail links, we may earn an affiliate commission.



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Alabama

The most beautiful place in Alabama: Little River Canyon National Preserve

This 15,288-acre preserve is located at the top of Lookout Mountain near Fort Payne, Alabama. The Little River has carved out quite the picturesque canyon over the past several eons, complete with towering rock faces and waterfalls. Outdoor enthusiasts can take advantage of the preserve's whitewater paddling opportunities, while road trippers can stop by the many overlooks along Alabama State Road 176 to get views of the canyon.

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Alaska

The most beautiful place in Alaska: Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve

Covering 3.3 million acres of mountains, wild coastlines, and deep sheltered fjords, Alaska's Glacier Bay National Park sits in one of the world's largest international protected areas. We can't think of many other places on earth where you can see crashing glaciers and breeching whales in the same day as temperate rainforests and mountain goats.

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Arizona

The most beautiful place in Arizona: Grand Canyon National Park

Easily one of the most recognizable U.S. national parks—and one of the most recognizable spots on the entire planet—the Grand Canyon has become nearly synonymous with America. We could tell you all about the sunsets and views and epic hikes along this 277-mile-long chasm, but honestly? This is one you need to see for yourself.

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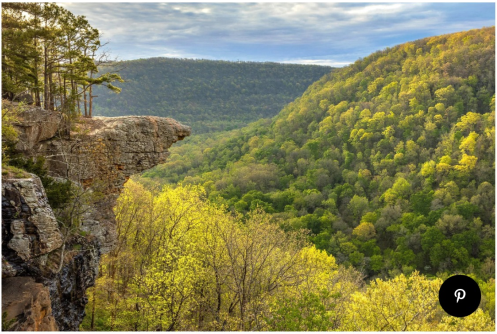

Alamy

Arkansas

The most beautiful place in Arkansas: Whitaker Point

Also known as Hawksbill Crag, Whitaker Point is the most photographed spots in all of Arkansas. The stony outpost juts over the valleys of the Buffalo National River, arguably the most beautiful stretch of the Ozark Mountains. Head here during the day to snap some photos, then stick around for some epic stargazing come nightfall (the park gained status as an International Dark Sky Park in 2019).

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California

The most beautiful place in California: Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park

The entire Big Sur coastline is stunning (and *very* road trip-worthy), but the winner for most scenic spot has to go to Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park. Situated about 35 miles south of Carmel, Pfeiffer Beach features huge cliffs, waterfalls, lush vegetation, and sometimes even dolphins and otters playing in the shallows. You can purchase park passes for $10 per car, per day.

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Colorado

The most beautiful place in Colorado: Maroon Bells

Located about ten miles west of Aspen, the Maroon Bells—two 14,000-foot peaks above the White River National Forest—are a couple of the most photographed mountains in Colorado. Shutterbugs are known to set up their cameras along the shores of Maroon Lake well before sunrise, hoping to get that iconic shot of the Bells and aspen trees reflected perfectly in the water.

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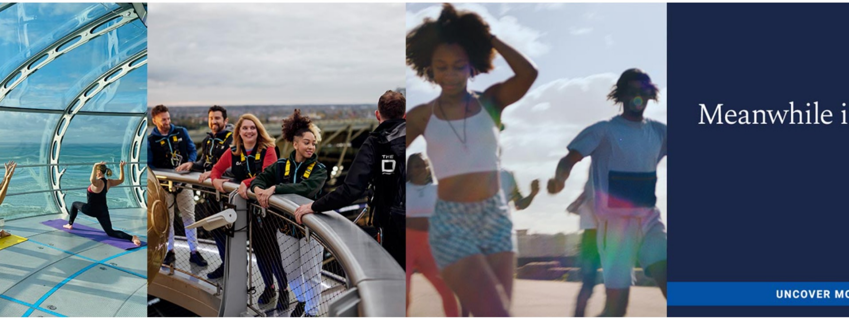
Connecticut

The most beautiful place in Connecticut: Lighthouse Point Park

Just outside of New Haven, this 82-acre park comes alive in the summer months, with families flocking to swimmable beach, fishing pier, deactivated lighthouse, and working carousel that dates back to 1911. Even in the off-season, the waterfront park is a beautiful slice of nature—especially when thousands of birds pass overhead during migration.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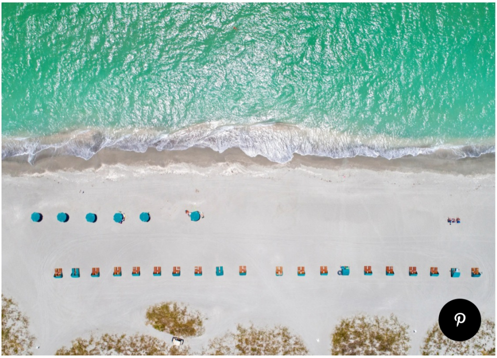
Delaware

The most beautiful place in Delaware: Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge

Positioned against the Delaware Bay in the center of the state, Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge is a true haven for nature-lovers. Visitors can walk the hiking trails or drive the 12-mile road through the refuge, taking in views of the salt marshes and wildlife. While the area is best known for its migrating snow geese in the winter months, you might also spot bald eagles, woodchucks, horseshoe crabs, and red fox.



Courtesy Visit Florida

Florida

The most beautiful place in Florida: Sanibel and Captiva Islands

The sister islands of Sanibel and Captiva have long drawn visitors with their biking trails, wildlife, and calm Gulf Coast beaches. Sanibel is particularly famous for being the seashell capital of the world—you could spend an entire day with a picnic and bucket at conch-heavy spots like Bowman's Beach. Meanwhile, Captiva is known for its untouched sand dunes and charming seaside hotels.

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Georgia

The most beautiful place in Georgia: Driftwood Beach

One of the Golden Isles along Georgia's Atlantic coast, Jekyll Island is a seven-mile-long stretch of marshes and Spanish moss. While its star attraction is probably the Jekyll Island Club Resort (past guests have included Vanderbilts and Rockefellers), the prehistoric-looking Driftwood Beach is a close second. As its name suggests, the beach is dotted with gnarled and weathered trees that double as excellent photo backdrops—just be sure to visit at low tide.

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Hawaii

The most beautiful place in Hawaii: Na Pali Coast

Easily the most striking coastline in America, the Na Pali ("high cliffs" in Hawaiian) Coast is only accessible by boat, helicopter, or strenuous hike—either way, it is 100 percent worth the effort. This northwest edge of Kauai has towering waterfalls, crescent beaches, and sea caves just waiting to impress you.

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Idaho

The most beautiful place in Idaho: The Palouse

The rolling region of the Palouse covers 4,000 sq. miles of northern Idaho and southeastern Washington. The loess hills resemble sand dunes in shape (probably because they were formed by wind-blown sediment, not erosion), but become a dreamscape of varying shades of greens during the wet spring months.

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Illinois

The most beautiful place in Illinois: Starved Rock State Park

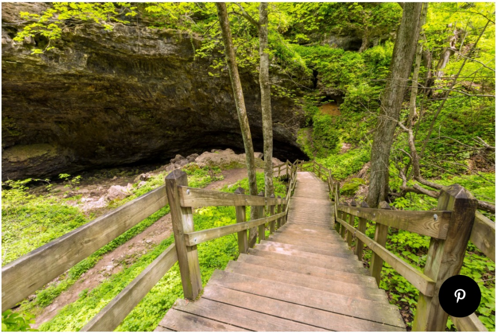
Just 90 minutes southwest of Chicago, Starved Rock State Park is a topographical standout in an otherwise flat state. The 2,630-acre park is known for its deep canyons, lush greenery, and protected wildlife, as well as impressive waterfalls. More intrepid adventures can visit in the winter to go ice climbing up the 80-foot St. Louis Canyon Falls.

Courtesy Indiana Dunes Tourism/Christine Livingston

Indiana

The most beautiful place in Indiana: Indiana Dunes National Park

The 15,000-acre Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore got a major upgrade in February 2019, when the landmark's official name changed to the Indiana Dunes National Park. The Indiana Dunes stretch for 15 miles along the shores of Lake Michigan, making it a popular spot for swimming—and even surfing—during the summer.



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Iowa

The most beautiful place in Iowa: Maquoketa Caves State Park

Maquoketa Caves State Park is probably the most unique site in Iowa, with 13 caves open to both hikers and spelunkers. A six-mile trail system links the caves and scenic overlooks, while campgrounds and picnic areas encourage visitors to linger for a while. You can even rent tubes and canoes to float down the nearby Maquoketa River.

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Kansas

The most beautiful place in Kansas: Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

North America used to contain 170 million acres of tallgrass prairie, but nearly all of it was converted into farmland over the years. Today, less than 4 percent of that original ecosystem remains—mostly in the Kansas Flint Hills. The Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve protects what little is left of these landscapes, with beautiful vistas, fields of wildflowers, and herds of bison ready for visitors.