

## Chapter 1 Taking in the Scenery

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## Monument Valley

### *The Iconic Wild West Landscape*

Ages 6 & up • Kayenta, Arizona, USA

WHEN MOST OF US THINK of the American West, this is what clicks into our mental Viewmasters: A vast, flat sagebrush plain with huge sandstone spires thrusting to the sky like the crabbed fingers of a primeval Mother Earth clutching for the heavens. Ever since movie director John Ford first started shooting westerns here in the 1930s, this landscape has felt familiar to millions who have never set foot here. We've all seen it on the big screen, but oh, what a difference to see it in real life.

If you possibly can, time your visit to include sunset—as the sheer walls of these monoliths capture the light of the setting sun, they truly seem to catch fire. There are three ways to tour the area, which is also a Navajo reservation: driving the 17-mile Valley Drive; hiking with a guide; or on horseback. Guides are usually local Navajos, born and bred to this barren landscape. If you drive, you can take your own car; but it is a rocky, rutted dirt road, so I personally would opt for a **jeep or van tour**. (Hold out for one that

visits backcountry areas that are otherwise off-limits to visitors, including close-ups of several **natural arches** and Ancient Puebloan **petroglyphs**.)

Sticking to the **Valley Drive** takes you to **11 scenic overlooks**, once-in-a-lifetime photo ops with those incredible sandstone buttes for backdrop. Often Navajos sell jewelry and other crafts at the viewing areas, or even pose on horseback to add local color to your snapshots (a tip will be expected).

John Wayne—John Ford's favorite leading cowboy—roamed these scrublands on horseback, and seeing it from a Western saddle does seem like the thing to do. Local outfitters run everything from a guided 1-hour trail ride to an overnight campout. One of the most comprehensive tour companies (jeeps, hikes, horses, you name it) is **Sacred Monument Tours** (☎ **435/727-3218**; [www.monumentvalley.net](http://www.monumentvalley.net)), but plenty of other operators can be booked from the visitor center. Although most of the park lies in Arizona, it is right on the state border, and you enter it from Utah. Just outside the park, **Goulding's Museum and Trading Post** is furnished as it was in the 1920s and 1930s when the moviemakers first discovered the area; there are also displays about the many films that were shot here.

Be sure to get a map so the kids can learn the eccentric rock formations' names—imaginative names like The Mittens, Three Sisters, Camel Butte, Elephant Butte, the Thumb, and Totem Pole. And as you stare at them, take an extra moment to imagine the forces of nature that have sculpted the soft desert stone into these incredible shapes. It's an only-in-America panorama that the kids won't ever forget.



Monument Valley.

① U.S. 163, 30 miles north of Kayenta (☎ 435/727-5870; www.monumentvalleyonline.com).

✈ Flagstaff Pulliam, 200 miles.

➡ \$\$\$ **Goulding's Lodge**, Monument Valley, UT (☎ 435/727-3231; www.gouldings.com). \$\$ **Hampton Inn-Navajo**

**Nation**, U.S. 160, Kayenta, AZ (☎ 800/HAMPTON or 928/697-3170; www.hampton-inn.com).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Just like the movies—only more so.

2

Awesome Vistas

# The Redwood Forests of California

All ages • Crescent City, California, USA

It's HARD TO EXPLAIN the feeling you get in the old-growth forests of **Redwood National and State Parks**. Everything seems big, misty, and primeval—flowering bushes cover the ground, 10-foot-tall ferns line the creeks, and the smells are rich and musty. It's so *Jurassic Park* you half expect to turn the corner and see a dinosaur.

The scientific name for these massive conifers is *Sequoia sempervirens*, cousins of the giant sequoias (see Sequoia National Park 3). Sheathed in rough reddish bark, miraculously fire-resistant, their stout straight trunks shoot up 100 feet or more before a canopy of branches begins; they often reach a total height of more than 300 feet. Among the planet's most ancient individuals—the oldest dated coast redwood is more than 2,200 years old—they only grow in temperate rainforests, meaning nowhere but the U.S. Pacific Coast. In 1968, the federal government created Redwood National Park (nowadays combined with three state redwood parks) to protect what's left of this seriously endangered species. The relative isolation of this stretch of coast helped the forests survive intact, but it also makes for a long drive.

The most spectacular display is along the **Avenue of the Giants**, a 33-mile stretch of U.S. 101 through the Humboldt Redwoods State Park (☎ 707/946-2263; www.humboltdredwoods.org).

Environmentalists bemoan the tacky attractions along this route, but youngsters love 'em—from south to north, hollow **Chimney Tree**, where J. R. R. Tolkien's *Hobbit* is rumored to live; **One-Log House**, a small dwelling built inside a log; and the **Shrine Drive-Thru Tree**. More dignified landmarks include **Founders Grove**, honoring those who started the Save the Redwoods League in 1918; and the 950-year-old **Immortal Tree**. Don't settle for looking at all this out your car window—from many parking areas you can ramble on short loop trails into awesome redwood groves.

The other cluster of parks begins another 100 miles or so farther north, threaded along U.S. Highway 101. The most scenic drive parallels 101, along the **Newton B. Drury Scenic Parkway**, passing through redwood groves and meadows where Roosevelt elk graze, and **Coastal Drive**, which has grand views of the Pacific. But again, the truly spine-tingling experience requires getting out and hiking through these soaring perpendicular woods. Pick up a park map to find your way to **Tall Trees Trail**, a 3¼-mile round-trip to a 600-year-old tree often touted as the world's tallest (get a permit at the Redwood Information Center in Orick); the self-guided mile-long **Lady Bird Johnson Grove Loop**; the short, very popular **Fern Canyon Trail**;

## TAKING IN THE SCENERY

or, for the littlest hikers, the quarter-mile-long **Big Tree Trail**, a paved trail leading to—what else?—a big tree.

① 1111 Second St. (☎ 707/464-6101, ext. 5064; [www.nps.gov/redw](http://www.nps.gov/redw)).

✈ Crescent City.

🏠 \$ **Curly Redwood Lodge**, 701 Redwood Hwy. S. (U.S. 101), Crescent City

(☎ 707/464-2137; [www.curlyredwoodlodge.com](http://www.curlyredwoodlodge.com)). \$\$\$ **Lost Whale Bed & Breakfast**, 3452 Patrick's Point Dr., Trinidad (☎ 800/677-7859 or 707/677-3425; [www.lostwhaleinn.com](http://www.lostwhaleinn.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Seeing the redwoods before they're gone.

## Awesome Vistas

3

# Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks

## *Giant Trees of the Sierras*

All ages • Visalia & Fresno, California, USA

ONLY 200 MILES BY ROAD from often-overrun Yosemite National Park ☎, Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks still feel like untrammelled wilderness. Only one road, the **Generals Highway**, loops through the area, and no road traverses the Sierra here. High-altitude hiking and backpacking are what these parks are really all about; some 700 miles of trails traverse this terrain of snowcapped Sierra Nevada peaks (including **Mount Whitney**, which at 14,494 ft. is the highest point in the lower 48 states), high-country lakes, and alpine meadows. For families, though, there's one main attraction: the largest groves of giant sequoias in the Sierra Nevada.

Though they are two separate parks, Sequoia and Kings Canyon are contiguous and managed jointly from the **park headquarters** at Ash Mountain—you hardly know when you're leaving one and entering the other.

Of the 75 or so groves of giant sequoias in the parks, the two most convenient to visit are Grant Grove (in Kings Canyon near the Big Stump park entrance), and Giant Forest (in Sequoia, 16 miles from the Ash Mountain entrance). In **Grant Grove**, a 100-foot walk through the hollow trunk of the **Fallen Monarch** makes a fascinating

side trip. The tree has been used for shelter for more than 100 years and is tall enough inside that you can walk through without bending over. In **Giant Forest**, the awesome **General Sherman Tree** is




Sequoia National Park.


considered the largest living thing in the world; single branches of this monster are more than 7 feet thick. Other trees in the grove (each of them saddled with names like General Lee or Lincoln) are nearly as large, creating an overall effect of massive majesty. Giant Grove has some 40 miles of intersecting footpaths to wander; the 6-mile **Trail of the Sequoias** will take you to the grove's far eastern end, where you'll find some of the finest trees.

While Sequoia's *raison d'être* is those incredible trees, Kings Canyon encompasses the deepest canyon in the United States: Drive to **Road's End** on the Kings Canyon Highway (open late May to early Nov) to stand by the banks of the Kings River and stare up at granite

walls rising thousands of feet above the river.

 **Ash Mountain entrance**, CA 198 from Visalia. **Big Stump entrance**, 180 from Fresno, CA (☎ 559/565-3341; [www.nps.gov/seki](http://www.nps.gov/seki), [www.sequoia-kingscanyon.com](http://www.sequoia-kingscanyon.com), or [www.visitsequoia.com](http://www.visitsequoia.com)).

 Fresno-Yosemite, 53 miles.

 **\$ Dorst Campground**, in Sequoia near Giant Forest (☎ 800/365-2267).

**\$\$\$ Wuksachi Village & Lodge**, 64740 Wuksachi Way, Lodgepole (☎ 888/252-5757 or 559/565-4070; [www.visitsequoia.com](http://www.visitsequoia.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** The redwoods' awesome (and even more endangered) cousins.

## 4

## Awesome Vistas

## The Columbia River Gorge

### *Mighty Old River*

All ages • Troutdale to The Dalles, Oregon, USA

**G**OUGING OUT THE JAGGED BORDER between Washington and Oregon, just east of Portland the mighty Columbia River bores through the Cascade Range in one of the most beautiful river gorges in the world. The Grand Canyon's stark red-stone chasms may be more primeval and powerful looking, but I have a special fondness for the Columbia River Gorge, where the awesome panoramas come carpeted in lush dark-green forest and spangled by crystalline waterfalls.

I-84 runs beside the river on the Oregon side (WA 14 follows the Washington shore), but it's well worth getting off I-84 at Troutdale to wind along U.S. 30, the Historic Columbia River Highway, for 22 miles at the west end of the 70-mile-long Gorge (it also parallels I-84 for 15 miles at the east end). You'll sweep close to sheer waterfalls—there are no fewer

than 77 in the Gorge—and rise to breath-catching vistas. Stop at **Vista House** at Crown Point (☎ 503/695-2230; [www.vistahouse.com](http://www.vistahouse.com)) for a spectacular view of Beacon Rock, an 800-foot-tall monolith across the river in Washington. A few miles east are the gorge's tallest falls, the 620-foot-high **Multnomah Falls**. When U.S. 30 leaves the river, continue on I-84 past the **Bonneville Lock and Dam** (in June and Sept you can see migrating salmon climb a fish ladder to bypass the locks) to the **Bridge of the Gods**, where Indian oral tradition claims a natural rock bridge once existed. Cross the bridge to Washington to visit the excellent **Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center**, 990 SW Rock Creek Dr., Stevenson (☎ 800/991-2338; [www.columbiagorge.org](http://www.columbiagorge.org)).

Showstopper views are great, but the gorge is even more fascinating as a

unique natural phenomenon. At the end of the last Ice Age, huge glacial ice dams in Montana (which still has glaciers—see the Going-to-the-Sun Road 22) burst and sent 1,000-foot-high floodwaters racing along the river toward the ocean, dragging ice chunks and rocks that carved a steep-walled gorge. Tributaries that had once meandered down gentle valleys were suddenly plummeting down to the river in dramatic cascades. The volcanic Cascade Range then began to rise *around* the gorge, making it even more dramatic. Call the kids' attention to the contrast between the rainforest west of the Cascades and the sagebrush scrublands to the east, caused by moist air condensing into rain and snow as it hits the western slopes, leaving the east side high and dry in what is called a rain shadow.

On the Oregon bank in Cascade Locks you can board the stern-wheeler

**Columbia Gorge** (☎ 800/643-1354; [www.sternwheeler.com](http://www.sternwheeler.com)) for a cruise on the Columbia; if trains are more your style, hop aboard the **Mount Hood Railroad**, 110 Railroad Ave. (☎ 800/872-4661; [www.mthoodrr.com](http://www.mthoodrr.com)) and chug up the Hood River Valley in vintage rail cars.

❗ ☎ 541/386-2333;

[www.fs.fed.us/r6/columbia](http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/columbia).



Portland International, 30 miles.

🏠 \$\$\$ **Columbia Gorge Hotel**, 4000 Westcliff Dr., Hood River, OR (☎ 800/345-1921 or 541/386-5566; [www.columbia gorgehotel.com](http://www.columbia gorgehotel.com)). \$\$\$\$ **Dolce Skamania Lodge**, 1131 SW Skamania Lodge Way, Stevenson, WA (☎ 800/221-7117 or 509/427-7700; [www.skamania.com](http://www.skamania.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Marveling at each curve in the road.

## Awesome Vistas

### 5

## Uluru (Ayers Rock)

### Australia's Red Rock Center

Ages 6 & up • Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Northern Territory, Australia

IT'S A BIT OF A MYSTERY why people trek from all over the world to gawk at Ayers Rock. For its size? Hardly—nearby Mount Conner is three times as big. For its shape? Probably not—most folks agree the neighboring Kata Tjuta (the Olgas) is more picturesque. And yet, undeniably, a faint shiver goes up the spine when you gaze on its serene, hulking mass.

People used to believe that Uluru (Ayers Rock's proper Aboriginal name) was a meteorite, but we now know it was formed by sediments laid millions of years ago in an inland sea and thrust above-ground by geological forces (there's twice as much again underground, it's thought). On photos it may look like a big smooth blob, but face to face it's dappled with holes and overhangs, with curtains of

stone draping its sides, with little coves hiding water holes and Aboriginal rock art, all of it changing color dramatically depending on the slant of the sun. The peak time is sunset, when oranges, peaches, pinks, reds, and then indigo and deep violet creep across its face as if it were a giant opal. At sunrise the colors are less dramatic, but many folks enjoy the spectacle of the Rock unveiled by the dawn to bird song.

Aborigines refer to tourists as *minga*—little ants—because that's what we look like crawling up Uluru, which to them is sacrilege. And yet despite this, and despite ferocious winds, sheer rock faces, and extreme temperatures, visitors still feel compelled to scramble up the rock, taking anywhere from 2 to 4 hours; the

views from the top are amazing, but is it worth it? There are plenty of other options. The paved 9km (5.6-mile) **Base Walk** circumnavigates Uluru, with time to explore water holes, caves, folds, and overhangs; an easy kilometer (.6-mile) round-trip trail from the **Mutitjulu** parking lot visits a pretty water hole with rock art near the Rock's base. On the free daily 90-minute **Mala Walk**, a ranger, who is often an Aborigine, discusses the Dreamtime myths behind Uluru and explains the significance of the rock art and other sites you see. Another peaceful way to see the Rock is on hour-long camelback forays through the red-sand dunes with **Frontier Camel Tours** (☎ 1800/806 499 in Australia, or 08/8956 2444; [www.camel tours.com.au](http://www.camel tours.com.au)). If it's aerial views you want, several local companies do scenic flights by light aircraft or helicopter over Uluru and other local landmarks.

With a glorious sunset viewing of Uluru your goal, start your day at Kata Tjuta (the

Olgas), 50km (31 miles) west of the Rock. *Kata Tjuta* means "many heads," an apt name for this monolith of 36 momentous red domes bulging out of the earth like turned clay on a potter's wheel. The Olgas are more important in Dreamtime legend than Uluru, and many modern visitors find they're even more spiritual. Good hikers may do the challenging 7.4km (4.6-mile) **Valley of the Winds** walk among the domes; there's also an easy 2.6km (1.6-mile) **Gorge** walk.

📍 **Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre** (☎ 08/8956 3138). **Ayers Rock Resort** (see below).

✈️ Ayers Rock (Connellan) airport.

🏠 \$\$\$ **Emu Walk Apartments** or \$\$\$ **Outback Pioneer Hotel and Lodge**, Yulara Dr., Ayers Rock Resort (☎ 08/8957 7888; [www.voyages.com.au](http://www.voyages.com.au)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Getting in touch with Dreamtime.

## 6

## Awesome Vistas

## Lake Titicaca: Jewel of the Andes

Ages 6 & up • Copacabana, Bolivia & Puno, Peru

**FACE IT:** The kids will talk a lot about their upcoming trip to Lake Titicaca—they just won't be able to resist saying the name. But that's okay. Once they get there and see this huge deep-blue freshwater lake sitting in its cup of mountain peaks, an awesome 3,600m (11,811 ft.) above sea level, they'll stop snickering.

To locals, measuring the altitude is irrelevant: Lake Titicaca is a mysterious and sacred place. Here, in the midst of the lake, Manca Capac and Mama Ocllo—the Adam and Eve of the Incas—were supposedly born on the Isla del Sol (Sun Island), which you can visit on a day trip from the picturesque lakeside town of Copacabana, Bolivia. (A 3-hr. bus ride from La Paz, **Copacabana** is also known


for its Moorish-style cathedral, with a deeply venerated miracle-working statue of the Virgin inside.) On Sun Island, you'll visit the ruins of **Chinkana**, a huge stone labyrinth built as a seminary for Inca priests. The path back to the town of Challapampa passes the sacred rock, shaped like a puma, from which Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo first stepped; farther on, you can look down and see the two huge footprints the sun is said to have made when it landed on earth to give birth to them. Tours also stop at Isla de la Luna (Moon Island), site of an ancient convent where the Virgins of the Sun performed ceremonies honoring the sun.

On the Peruvian shore (several local tour packages include both sides of the lake), the main town of Puno is not nearly as lovely as Copacabana, but the kids will want to come here to take a boat tour to the **Uros islands**. Since the time of the Incas, the local Uros Indians have lived on these tiny floating islands built on soft patches of reeds. Walking on the springy islets is truly a strange sensation. Some Uros wait for the tour boats to arrive so they can hawk their handmade textiles and reed-crafted items, but many others keep to their thatched huts, far from the snapping cameras, fishing and catching birds and continually repairing the reed underpinnings of their islets. Full-day trips also include stops at Taquile and Amantani islands, serene and rustic natural islands with **Inca ruins** to explore.

Other Andean peoples subscribe to a different myth: that Viracocha, the creator deity, called up the sun, moon, and stars to rise from icy Lake Titicaca to

lighten the dark world. Powerful spirits still live in this amazing sky-high lake, they say. Gliding over the calm blue surface, you may find yourself staring down into the water's cold depths to connect with them. But you don't need to believe in these ancient legends to sense the magic of Lake Titicaca.

**i Puna tourist information**, Plaza de Armas (☎ **051/36-5088**; [www.peru.info](http://www.peru.info)).

 **Manco Capac**, Juliaca, Peru, 45km (28 miles) from Puno.

 **Hotel Rosario del Lago**, Rigoberto Paredes and Av. Costanera, Copacabana, Bolivia (☎ **0102/862-2141**; [www.hotelrosario.com/lago](http://www.hotelrosario.com/lago)). **\$\$\$ Sonesta Posada del Inca**, Sesquicentenario 610, Sector Huaje, Peru (☎ **051/364-111**; [www.sonesta.com](http://www.sonesta.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Gazing up at a star-spangled sky from the stars' birthplace.

## Awesome Vistas

### 7


# The Cliffs of Moher

## Where Ireland Plunges into the Sea

All ages • Lahinch, County Clare, Ireland

**S**OMETHING AS SPECTACULAR as the Cliffs of Moher could never go undiscovered by the tourist throngs. They are County Clare's foremost natural wonder, 213m (700 ft.) high and 8km (5 miles) long, a series of sheer rock faces plummeting to the crashing Atlantic surf below. The views from here are truly panoramic, especially from 19th-century **O'Brien's Tower** at the northern end. On a clear day you can see the Aran Islands up to the north in Galway Bay. It's a dramatic place, with the roar of the waves crashing below and the call of circling seagulls. Daredevils might venture onto a forbidden area of north-facing cliffs which have been half-heartedly fenced off, but there's

plenty enough room on the main cliffs, with their well-paved path and lookout points; the heights are awesome without feeling perilous (and believe me, I'm borderline acrophobic). Because the cliffs jut out into the sea on a headland, you can gaze clearly over the sea to the north, west, and south.

Talk about the middle of nowhere—the Irish country road R478 meanders down from the **Burren**  and Galway, with little along the roadside and very few cars in sight. Then suddenly you round a curve and there's an immense parking lot filled with cars and tour buses and you've arrived at the Cliffs of Moher. Proximity to Shannon Airport means that this is often





Loop Head Lighthouse at the Cliffs of Moher.

a tour group's first stop upon hitting Ireland, so don't be surprised if you see a lot of folks staring out to sea with the glazed eyes of jet lag. There's no admission fee

per se, although you'll have to pay to get into the parking lot, and some tacky souvenir stalls are set up along the footpath to the cliffs. Just shepherd the children past it all and head uphill.

And while you're here, explore further along the craggy Clare coastline, where you'll find many off-the-beaten-path delights with intriguing names like Pink Cave, Puffing Hole, Intrinsic Bay, Chimney Hill, Elephant's Teeth, Mutton Island, Loop Head, and Lover's Leap. The tour buses won't follow you, that's for sure.

**i** R478, 7 miles north of Lahinch (☎ 065/708-1171; [www.county-clare.com](http://www.county-clare.com)).

**✈** Shannon International, 48km (30 miles).

**🏠** \$\$ **Aran View House**, Doolin (☎ 065/707-4061). Closed Nov–Mar.

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Nothing between you and America but sea.

## 8

## Awesome Vistas

## The Giant's Causeway

### *Hero's Footsteps in Black Rock*

All ages • Bushmills, Northern Ireland

**O**FTEN CALLED THE EIGHTH WONDER of the world, the Giant's Causeway is a one-of-a-kind **natural rock formation** that captures the imagination as few others do. It doesn't take much effort for children to imagine the striding giant who purportedly left these immense stone footprints in the sea off of Northern Ireland.

A World Heritage Site, the Causeway consists of roughly 40,000 tightly packed basalt columns that extend for 5km (3 miles) along the North Antrim coast. The tops of the columns form a dense honeycomb of stepping stones that sprawl outward from the cliff foot and eventually disappear under the sea. They're mostly hexagonal, about 30cm (12 in.) in diameter, and some are as tall as 12m (40 ft.). How

did they get there? Scientists estimate that they were formed 60 or 70 million years ago by a series of volcanic eruptions and cooling lava. In the surrounding cliff faces you can see dark stripes of volcanic basalt interrupting the sheer red rock.

But all that is the scientific explanation; the ancients, on the other hand, believed the rock formation to be the work of giants. Another even more romantic legend claims that the Causeway isn't natural at all, but the handiwork of Finn MacCool, the great Ulster warrior and commander of the king of Ulster's armies, who built it as a highway over the sea to bring his girlfriend from the Isle of Hebrides.

Tourists have come here to marvel over the Causeway since the late 17th century,

and there were many years when visitors were forbidden to walk out onto the stones, or had to pay extra to do so. Thankfully today they are open to the public. Watch your footing as you scamper over the uneven surface, traipsing from stone to stone. Delicate flowers and mosses grow in the crevices, and all sorts of seabirds nest in the nearby cliffs. To reach the causeway, follow the path from the visitor center's parking area. Along the way you'll pass plenty of other extraordinary volcanic rock formations, amphitheaters of stone and striated columns and formations with fanciful names like Honeycomb, Wishing Well, Giant's Granny, King and His Nobles, and Lover's Leap. From the causeway, a

wooden staircase climbs up Benbane Head and back along the **cliff-top walking path**, where you'll get spectacular views of the North Antrim coast. Or, to get a bird's-eye view, book a spectacular helicopter ride over the coast through **The Helicopter Center**, Newtownards Airfield (☎ 028/9182-0028).

📍 Causeway Rd. (☎ 028/2073-1855; [www.giantscausewayofficialguide.com](http://www.giantscausewayofficialguide.com)).

✈ Belfast, 121km (75 miles).

🏨 \$\$ **Marine Hotel**, 1 North St., Ballycastle (☎ 028/2076-2222; [www.marinehotel.net](http://www.marinehotel.net)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Myths written in monumental stone.

## Awesome Vistas

### 9

# Les Calanches: Going Coastal in Corsica

Ages 4 & up • Corsica, France

**L'ÎLE DE BEAUTÉ**, CORSICA IS CALLED—"island of beauty"—and rightly so. This mountainous Mediterranean island combines rugged landscapes with stunning vistas of the sea, while native herbs and flowers perfume the air with an unforgettable fragrance. Although Corsica is technically a French possession, the island is in fact much closer to Italy (you can practically swim to Sardinia from Corsica), and everything here seems to have an Italian accent. You're lulled into thinking it's simply a fragment of the Riviera that worked itself loose from the mainland—and then you drive through a landscape that looks as though it fell from Mars: Les Calanches.

Ferries from Marseilles arrive at Corsica's main city, **Ajaccio**, birthplace of Napoleon Bonaparte, a Riviera-like town with palm trees and promenades. Up the western coast from here, driving or cycling along coastal D81, you curve around a headland to the tranquil village of **Piana**, with its red-tiled roofs rising 440m (1,444 ft.) above the azure sea. But

beyond Piana, you enter an altered reality: The granite landscape to either side of the twisting road begins to turn red and become strangely striated and crumpled. The highway seems hacked out of the mountainside, and it zigs and zags crazily to cling to the corrugated rock faces. And so it goes, all the way along the southern end of the **Gulf of Porto**, from Piana over to Porto.

Les Calanches remind me of the buttes of Monument Valley ❶, but smaller and more eccentric, crabbed like the figures of arthritic old crones. And then, of course, there's that dynamite seaside backdrop setting it off, the hazy blue of the Mediterranean contrasting dramatically with the sharp-focused red rocks. As you drive along, ask the children to try to decide what these oddly shaped boulders remind them of—a rearing stallion? A fire-breathing dragon? A stegosaurus? Patches of green pine scrub, snarls of gray thorn, and bursts of dark red and yellow flowering shrubs decorate the

creased red-granite spires here and there, and the shoulder of the road drops with heart-stopping suddenness to the waters below. The road bends so sharply you can't see beyond the next curve—honk to warn oncoming drivers of your presence before you pull around to the next dizzying view.

Several **walking paths** have been laid out through this tortured landscape—park your car and get out to take a short scramble over the rocks. (Trail maps are available from the Piana tourist office.) From Porto, you can go on a **boat tour** to view the spiky red rocks from the water; contact **Nave Va** (☎ 04-95-21-83-97; www.naveva.com). And I'm sure

I don't need to tell you that sunset is the most glorious time of all to view Les Calanches, especially one of those lingering summer sunsets that the Mediterranean does so well.

❗ D81, between Piana and Porto (www.corsica.net).

✈ Ajaccio, 74km (46 miles).

🍴 \$\$ **Hotel Restaurant Beau Sejour**, Quartier Vaita, Porto (☎ 20-71-08-11-33).  
\$\$\$ **Les Roches Rouges**, Piana (☎ 04-95-27-81-81; www.lesrochesrouges.com).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Spotting the shapes in the rock piles.

## 10

## Awesome Vistas

## Phang Nga Bay

### Thailand's Secret Caverns

Ages 8 & up • Phuket, Thailand

THE JAMES BOND MOVIE *The Man with the Golden Gun* was filmed here, on this gorgeous bay north of the well-developed Thai resort island of Phuket. It's a stunning backdrop, with limestone karst towers jutting precariously from the water's glassy turquoise surface, creating more than 120 small islands that look like something out of a Chinese scroll painting. Kids, of course, are notorious for not appreciating beautiful scenery; what they will appreciate is the unique way you get to explore this craggy seascape—lying down in small canoes to slip inside secret caves. It lives up to every pirate fantasy they've ever had, and then some.

An arm of the Andaman Sea, its warm waters edged with white beaches, red mud banks, and tropical stands of mangrove trees, **Phang Nga Bay** is a national park 1½ hours' drive north of Phuket Town. Two-passenger kayaks, with an experienced paddle guide at the helm, dart around the bay's distinctive craggy

island rocks; you'll be told to lie flat in the boat to slip through tight cave openings. Once inside, magnificent chambers open up above the internal lagoons (called *hongs*, which is Thai for "rooms"), where it's believed pirates once hid their operations—or, if you're James Bond, secret agents hid their evil devices.

Touristy as it is, it's something you've got to do, especially with kids. The **day-long tours** include transport to and from Phuket Town, a cruise to the part of the bay where the islands cluster, a paddle guide, a bright-yellow inflatable kayak, and lunch. Once you've finished the tricky maneuvering around the caves, the guide may even let you paddle a bit yourself. The premier operator for these trips is **Sea Canoe**, Box 276, Muang Phuket 83000 (☎ 07621-2252; www.seacanoet.com).

Of course, if you want to do things the cushy way, you can just cruise around this lovely tropical bay on a restored Chinese sailing junk, the **Bahtra** (contact **East**



Kayaking in Thailand.

**West Siam** in Patong, 119 Rat-U-Thit 2000 Year Rd.; ☎ **07634-0912**). You won't get inside those caves, but you'll still feel plenty pirate-y.

❗ [www.phuket.com/island/phangnga.htm](http://www.phuket.com/island/phangnga.htm).

✈️ Phuket International.

🏠 \$\$\$ **Dusit Laguna Resort**, 390 Srisoontorn Rd., Cherngtalay District (☎ **067632-4320**; [www.dusit.com](http://www.dusit.com)). \$\$

**Karon Beach Resort**, 51 Karon Rd., Tambon Daron (☎ **07633-0006**; [www.katagroup.com](http://www.katagroup.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Hoping to find pirate treasure.

## Seven Beautiful Bridges

11

# The Ponte Vecchio

## Where Dante Crossed the Arno

All ages • Florence, Italy

FLORENCE, ITALY, owns the bragging rights as fountainhead of the Renaissance, and no landmark is more steeped in its history than the **Ponte Vecchio**. The name means “old bridge,” and this triple-arched stone bridge, lined with shops in the medieval custom, is indeed old, dating from 1220. The Arno is prone to devastating floods, one of which had washed away the Roman-era wooden bridge at this crossing point. But the stone bridge was built to survive, and so it has, against all odds.

Back then, Florence was just beginning to develop into a great city-state. In 1290, a crenellated stone palace, the **Palazzo Vecchio** (where today you can visit the **Uffizi Gallery** 332), was built near the foot of the bridge on the north bank, and work began on Florence's famous cathedral, the **Duomo**, with its distinctive geometric

bands of white, green, and pink marble. Florence's greatest poet, Dante Alighieri, lived between the Palazzo Vecchio and the Duomo and crossed the Ponte Vecchio often, as he mentions in his 1292 poem *La Vita Nuova*.

Another flood came in 1333; the bridge endured, though it was significantly redesigned afterward. The cathedral continued to take shape through the 1400s, adding its great red-tiled dome and the sculpted bronze doors of its Baptistry, while the bridge became the precinct of butcher shops (no doubt it was handy to toss scraps out the window into the Arno).

A century later, in 1540, with the Renaissance in high gear—Michelangelo had sculpted his *David*, Leonardo had painted the *Mona Lisa*—the second Cosimo de Medici moved into the Palazzo



Ponte Vecchio.


Vecchio, and it suddenly became essential to have a classy bridge leading over the Arno to the Medicis' new **Pitti Palace** (with kids, you may skip the Pitti's extensive art galleries, but don't miss a romp in the hillside **Boboli Gardens** behind it). Cosimo hired the prominent artist Giorgio Vasari to add a private bypass, a windowed corridor over the shops, where the Uffizi Gallery today displays portraits by such masters as Bronzino, Rubens, Rembrandt, and Ingres. Half a century later, Ferdinand de Medici, still not satisfied, banned butchers, allowing more refined tradesmen, goldsmiths and jewelers, to move in. (Crossing the bridge, you'll pass a bust of celebrated goldsmith and sculptor Benvenuto Cellini.)

Fast-forward to 1944, when the Nazis were beating a desperate retreat through Italy. As they came through Florence, they planted explosives to blow up the bridges and cut off their Allied pursuers. Someone

in command, though—allegedly Hitler himself—was an art lover, for only the Ponte Vecchio was spared. It was endangered again in 1966, when the flooding Arno swept over it, washing away a fortune in jewelry from the goldsmiths' shops. But again the bridge survived.

Today the restored Ponte Vecchio is closed to vehicular traffic but its cramped shops continue to sell expensive Florentine gold and silver. Walking across the Ponte Vecchio from the Duomo and the Uffizi Gallery to the Pitti Palace, stop at the arched opening halfway over—and commune with the spirits of Dante, Michelangelo, and those wicked, wicked Medicis.

**i Tourist office**, Via Cavour 1r (☎ 055-290-832; [www.firenzeturismo.it](http://www.firenzeturismo.it)).

  See Uffizi Gallery **332**.

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** A time capsule of the Renaissance.

## Seven Beautiful Bridges

12

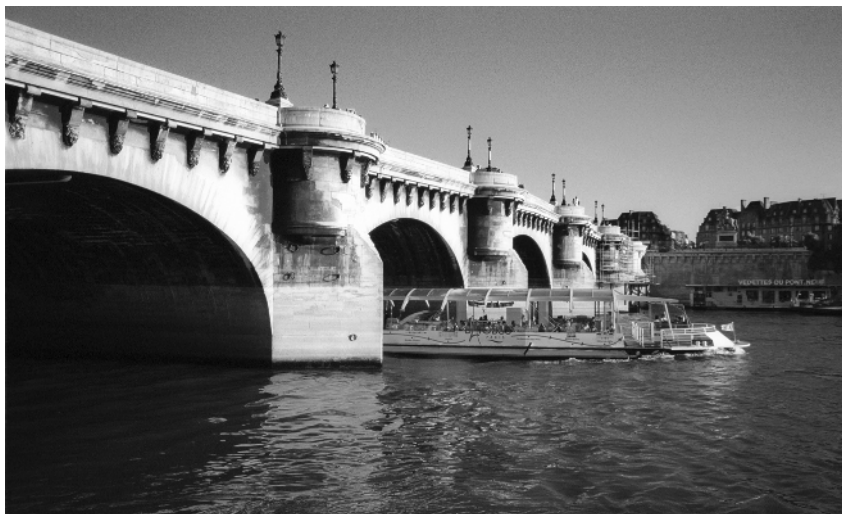
## Le Pont Neuf: Spanning the Heart of Paris

All ages • Paris, France

AS THE RIVER SEINE winds its way through Paris, any number of bridges arch over it, connecting the Right Bank with the Left Bank. My kids demanded we take one of those touristy boat rides just for the fun of gliding under the bridges, whooping underneath each one to hear their voices echo off the vaulted stone. With a wonderful sort of Gallic illogic, the oldest and most venerable is the Pont Neuf—literally, New Bridge. At the tip of the Ile de la Cité, just downstream from **Notre Dame 316**, the Pont Neuf links the Right Bank's 1st arrondissement (home of the **Louvre 334**) with the Left Bank's 6th arrondissement (home of the Sorbonne and the Luxembourg Gardens), so just about every visitor to Paris walks across this historic bridge at one time or another. But I often wonder how many of them really see it, or

how many stop to contemplate what a marvelous structure it is.

Erected in 1578 (King Henry IV laid the first stone), the Pont Neuf was radical when it was built. For one thing, it was not weighed down with houses and shops (like old London Bridge or the Ponte Vecchio **11** in Florence); its few original shops were removed in a 1606 reconstruction. For another thing, it featured innovative raised pavements for pedestrians—that is, sidewalks—and soon became a favorite spot for leisurely strolls, especially because its rounded bays, like castellated balconies over the river, were perfect for rendezvous. At 28m (92 ft.) wide, it was for a long time the widest bridge in Paris, and it still carries lots of traffic, including automobiles, which had not even been dreamed of when it was designed. A statue of Henry IV on horseback stands mid-bridge on the



Le Pont Neuf.

island; the original was torn down and melted in the French Revolution.

For 4 centuries, the Pont Neuf has withstood all the floods that washed the older bridges away—an impressive feat, considering that the original wooden posts still support the foundation. With 12 gracefully proportioned arches, it's the longest bridge in Paris, combining a seven-arch section between the Right Bank and Ile de la Cité and a five-arch section from the island on to the Left Bank. (Yes, my kids insisted on counting the arches, as well as the pairs of ornate iron lampposts between them.) Even now, with the Pompidou Expressway roaring under its northernmost arch along the Right Bank, the Pont Neuf presides over the river with a majestic, calm elegance.

In 1985, the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude used the Pont Neuf for a famous public art piece, wrapping it in silky golden cloth for 2 weeks. That will never happen again, but you can create your own Pont Neuf moment. Look at it from the quays, especially at night, when it is brilliantly lit and the dark river laps dreamily at its arches. Or stand on it in the daytime, gazing at Notre Dame in one direction, the Eiffel Tower in the other—with all of Paris at your command.

**i** For general information on Paris, plus airport and lodging, see **54**.

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** An old bridge called New Bridge that was ahead of its time.

## 13

## Seven Beautiful Bridges

## The Covered Bridge Tour

### *A Vermont Sampler of Classics*

All ages • Bennington, Vermont, USA

**W**ONDERFUL 19TH-CENTURY RELICS, New England's covered bridges evoke a rustic era of horses and buggies, quilting bees, and barn raisings. What you may not know is that bridges were covered not to shelter travelers from rain or to give courting couples a place to smooch—although they certainly did that—but to protect the bridge's timbers from weather damage. Most of them are painted red, for the simple reason that red paint, colored with iron oxide, was cheap to make. In southeastern Vermont, an easy and scenic half-day drive takes in five covered bridges. Remember: only one car at a time can drive through, so watch for oncoming traffic.

Begin in the town of Bennington with the **Vermont Covered Bridge Museum**, West Rd. at Gypsy Lane (☎ **802/442-7158**; [www.vermontcoveredbridge-museum.org](http://www.vermontcoveredbridge-museum.org)), which explains the what,

where, when, who, and why of covered bridges; if the kids get overwhelmed with details, at least they'll be diverted by the working train layout. Then it's time to hit the road, beginning on Route 67A across from the entrance of Bennington College, with the **Silk Road Bridge** over the Wallomsac River. Built about 1840 by Benjamin Sears, it's the shortest bridge on this route, 88 ft. long. Sears's son built the next bridge over the Wallomsac, 5 miles west along Route 67A, the **Paper Mill Village Bridge**. Originally named for a 1790 paper mill, this 125 ft. bridge has good parking nearby if you want to get out and snap a photo, and there's a picturesque waterfall below.

Proceed on 67A to Murphy Road for the next Wallomsac bridge, **Henry Bridge**, named after Elnathan Henry, who also built the nearby B&B the Henry House. This 117-ft.-long bridge dates

from 1840. Go north on Route 7A about 13 miles to the town of Arlington; turn east on E. Arlington Road and go 2 miles to the 1870 **Chiselville Bridge**, named for a former chisel factory. It was also called the Roaring Branch Bridge because it crosses Roaring Branch Brook, and luckily was built high enough to survive the 1927 flood that wiped out many other Vermont covered bridges. Go back to Arlington and proceed west on Route 313 4 1/2 miles to the **West Arlington Bridge** over the Battenkill River, popular with canoeists, kayakers, and fly fishermen. This is a real crowd-pleaser to end the tour with; a white steepled church is next door, and the Inn on Covered Bridge Green B&B, where artist Norman Rockwell once lived is also nearby.

Don't assume that the country's only covered bridges are in New England. Parke County, Indiana, about an hour's drive east of Indianapolis, has an even greater concentration of them tucked away on backcountry roads. For a driving map, contact the **Parke County Tourist Information Center**, 127 S. Jefferson St., Rockville, IN (☎ **765/569-5226**).

❶ [www.bennington.com/chamber/Bridges](http://www.bennington.com/chamber/Bridges).

✈ Boston, 190 miles.

🏠 \$ **Paradise Motor Inn**, 141 W. Main St., Bennington (☎ **802/442-8351**; [www.theparadisemotorinn.com](http://www.theparadisemotorinn.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** A crossing that bridges centuries.

## Seven Beautiful Bridges

14

# The Brooklyn Bridge New York Icon

All ages • New York, New York, USA

**AS THRILLING A SIGHT** as this beautiful brown-hued East River bridge is from afar, with its Gothic-style towers and lacy mesh of cables, the view from the bridge is even more thrilling. A boardwalklike **pedestrian walkway** goes all the way across, raised slightly above the car traffic. One mile long, it should take about half an hour to traverse—except you'll be tempted to stop more than once to ooh and ahh at the vision of Manhattan's skyscrapers thrusting upward, with the great harbor and Verrazano Bridge beyond.

The Brooklyn Bridge took 16 years to build, from 1867 to 1883, and for a while, it seemed to be cursed—original designer, John A. Roebling, died from tetanus contracted when his foot was crushed while surveying the site, and his son, Washington, who took over the job, fell ill with the bends after diving into the

river to supervise the workmen laying the pilings. A virtual invalid afterward, Washington Roebling watched the bridge going up through a telescope from his house in nearby Brooklyn Heights, while his wife actually supervised much of the completion of the project.

Why has the Brooklyn Bridge captured the popular imagination more so than other New York City bridges? Well, for one thing, it was the first steel-wire suspension bridge in the world when it opened in 1883. (Until then, the only way to get from Manhattan to Brooklyn was via ferry). Ever since, the Brooklyn Bridge has become a byword in New York lore. The standard old joke defines a con artist as a guy trying to sell rubes the deed to the Brooklyn Bridge. Cocky teenage hoodlums have proved their bravado by shinying up its cables, and suicides with a flair for the dramatic have plummeted to



their deaths from those same cables into the tidal currents below. The bridge has appeared in countless movies and TV shows, its outline practically synonymous with New York City.

From Manhattan, the **entrance ramps** are along Centre Street just south of Chambers Street on Park Row; pedestrian ramps on the other side empty out into Brooklyn's downtown—a bit of a wasteland on weekends, but not a far walk from **Brooklyn Heights**, one of the loveliest brownstone neighborhoods you'll ever

see. Go armed with a map. If your kids aren't hardy urban trekkers, walk halfway to get the view and then double back to Manhattan. Be aware that things get awfully windy once you're above the water!

**i** For information on New York City, including airport and lodging, see **56**.

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** It's one thing to see a landmark, another to walk across one.

## 15

## Seven Beautiful Bridges

## Tower Bridge

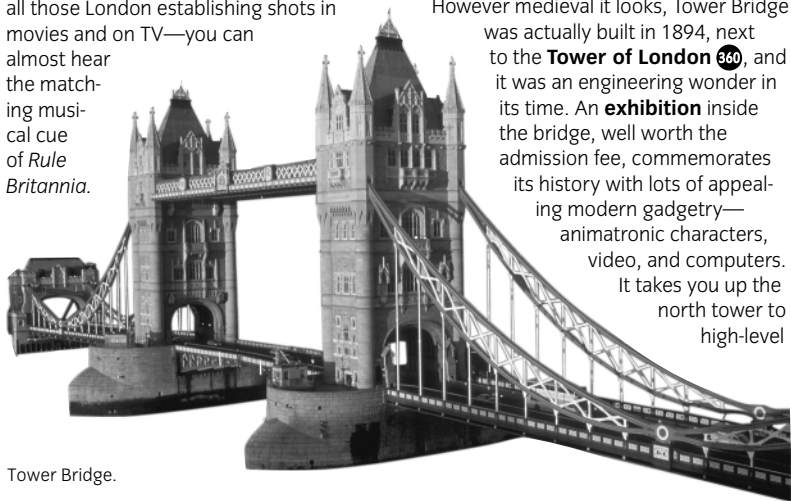
### Thames Gateway to London

Ages 6 & up • London, England

**N**ATURALLY, WHEN THEY GO TO LONDON, the kids will ask to see London Bridge. But what they're really thinking of is this, a grand drawbridge spanning the Thames with a pair of Gothic-style towers that echo Westminster's spires. It's one of the world's most celebrated landmarks, and possibly the most photographed bridge on earth. This is the bridge they see in all those London establishing shots in movies and on TV—you can almost hear the matching musical cue of *Rule Britannia*.

The original London Bridge, the one from the nursery rhyme, was a medieval structure loaded with houses and shops that tumbled down long ago; the current London Bridge, just upriver from this, is an ugly letdown, just like its predecessor, which was bought in the 1960s and shipped off to Arizona where it disappoints thousands of tourists every year.

However medieval it looks, Tower Bridge was actually built in 1894, next to the **Tower of London** **360**, and it was an engineering wonder in its time. An **exhibition** inside the bridge, well worth the admission fee, commemorates its history with lots of appealing modern gadgetry—animatronic characters, video, and computers. It takes you up the north tower to high-level



Tower Bridge.

walkways between the two towers with **spectacular views** of St. Paul's, the Tower of London, and the Houses of Parliament. You're then led down the south tower and on to the bridge's original engine room, with its Victorian boilers and steam-pumping engines that used to raise and lower the bridge (Tower Bridge is London's only drawbridge, which is why the central span is so high, although with dwindling river shipping trade it's only raised a few times a week now).

From the bridge's walkways, stop to admire the loopy course of the Thames River. London wouldn't have existed if it hadn't been for the Thames: Early Saxons settled near a conveniently shallow fording place near Westminster Bridge; Roman occupiers built a fort near today's London Bridge; William the Conqueror strategically positioned his White Tower here; and the docklands farther east

became the great port that made England a world power. The Thames is narrow enough and shallow enough to be spanned by plenty of handsome bridges, which you may have been crossing already without knowing their names. Along one great horseshoe curve heading west from here, they are London Bridge, Southwark Bridge (by the Globe Theatre), Blackfriar's Bridge (St. Paul's Cathedral), Waterloo Bridge (convenient for West End and South Bank theaters), Westminster Bridge (flanking the Houses of Parliament), Lambeth Bridge, and Vauxhall Bridge (near the Tate Gallery).

**i** **c** 020/7403-3761;

[www.towerbridge.org.uk](http://www.towerbridge.org.uk).



See London **55**.

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Nothing says London better.

## Seven Beautiful Bridges

16

# Sydney Harbour Bridge *Panorama, Australian-Style*

Ages 6 & up • Dawes Point to Milson's Point, Sydney, Australia

**A**USTRALIANS, with typical deprecating wit, call it "The Coathanger," this mighty steel arch soaring over Sydney Harbour. With a 503m (1630 ft.) central span, it isn't the longest single-arch bridge in the world but it's the largest, thanks to its 49m-wide (160-ft.) deck bearing eight lanes of car traffic, two railway lines, a bike lane, and a pedestrian walkway. The bridge is certainly longer than its arch rival, the Tyne Bridge in Newcastle, England, with its strikingly similar design (the Tyne bridge was finished first but its design was submitted later—draw your own conclusions). Sydney's opened in 1932, 5 years before the Golden Gate Bridge **17**, but like the Golden Gate this was a vital Depression-era public works project, creating jobs for some 1,400 workers over 8 years; construction costs weren't even

paid off until 1988. It's the focal point of the classic Sydney postcard view, with its high-rise skyline backdrop, the water below bustling with ferries, barges, tall ships, and yachts, and the **Sydney Opera House** looking like a fleet of white sails caught mid-billow over Sydney Cove. Call **c** 02/9250 7250 for guided tours; [www.sydneyoperahouse.com](http://www.sydneyoperahouse.com). Sydneysiders deemed the Opera House a monstrosity when it opened in 1973, 40 years after the bridge, but today it seems like the perfect finishing touch to this glorious harborscape.

Surprisingly few tourists do the obvious and walk across the Harbour Bridge. It's free, it only takes about half an hour from one end to the other (return on a ferry or a CityRail train), and the views are breathtaking. Reach the bridge walkway



Walking the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

from the Rocks, the historic district west of Circular Quay, by heading down Cumberland Street to the stairs underneath the bridge on your right. Partway across, you can enter the **Pylon Lookout** (☎ 02/9247 3408), one of four massive support pylons faced with Australian granite. Climb up 200 steps and you'll be 89m (292 ft.) above the water, with 360-degree views. For the really big thrill, however, go all the way to the summit of

the main bridge arch, 134m (440 ft.) over the water, with **BridgeClimb**, 5 Cumberland St., The Rocks (☎ 02/9240 1100 or 02/8274 7777; [www.bridgeclimb.com](http://www.bridgeclimb.com)). BridgeClimb organizes 3-hour climbs for ages 12 and over, heading out onto the steel catwalks in small groups every 10 minutes, wearing "Bridge Suits" and harnessed to a line. It's not cheap, but it's the sort of vertigo-inducing experience you'll never forget.

Of course, it's also fun to see the bridge from the water. Just hop on a regular passenger ferry from the wharf at Circular Quay to **Darling Harbour** (where you can visit the **Sydney Aquarium** 147 and the **Powerhouse** 289), chugging right under the Harbour Bridge. Thrill-hounds can pay more to board a high-speed tour with **Harbour Jet** (☎ 1300/887 373; [www.harbourjet.com](http://www.harbourjet.com)), departing from Darling Harbour, or **Oz Jet Boat** (☎ 02/9808 3700; [www.ozjetboating.com](http://www.ozjetboating.com)), from the Eastern Pontoon at Circular Quay.

❗ **Sydney Visitor Centre**, 106 George St., The Rocks (☎ 02/9240 8788; [www.sydneyvisitorcentre.com](http://www.sydneyvisitorcentre.com)).

✈ **Sydney International.**

🏠 **\$ Bernly Private Hotel**, 15 Springfield Ave., Potts Point (☎ 02/9358 3122; [www.bernlyprivatehotel.com.au](http://www.bernlyprivatehotel.com.au)). \$\$\$ **The Stafford**, 75 Harrington St., The Rocks (☎ 02/9251 6711; [www.rendezvous-hotels.com](http://www.rendezvous-hotels.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Soaring over the harbor.

## 17

### Seven Beautiful Bridges

## Crossing the Golden Gate Bridge

Ages 6 & up • San Francisco, California, USA

**WARN** THE KIDS ahead of time that the Golden Gate Bridge is not golden at all, but a flaming orange. (As toddlers, my kids thought it was going to be made of actual gold.) Once past that surprise, though, they cannot fail to be bowled


over by this glorious bridge spanning the Pacific Ocean where it meets San Francisco Bay. In all lights it has a magical quality—brightening at dawn, glowing at sunset, glittering at night, or blazing proudly through the city's trademark fog.




It's one of those quintessential U.S. landmarks, familiar from dozens of movies. Cars roll over it, boats cruise under it, and airplanes buzz overhead, but this bridge is best experienced while walking.

This deeply gouged strait was named the Golden Gate after the area's golden brown hills, yet it is a triply apt name when you also consider San Francisco's boom in the 1849 Gold Rush and its role as America's western gateway for immigrants. Though it echoes the East Coast's Brooklyn Bridge, built 54 years earlier, the West Coast bridge has a streamlined Art Deco look, with its gracefully swung single span, spidery bracing cables, and subtly tapering twin towers. Given the strong tides and depth of the strait, skeptics had claimed for years that a bridge could not be built here—that it would buckle in a gale wind or collapse in an earthquake. Nevertheless, construction began in May 1933, creating jobs for thousands for 4 years at the height of the Depression, and was completed at the then-colossal cost of \$35 million. (Its East Bay sibling, the 8¼-mile-long Oakland Bay Bridge, was completed the year before.) With only one pier actually planted in the water, it

features a single long central span, designed intentionally to sway in the strait's winds. At 1¾ miles long, it was for 27 years the longest suspension bridge in the world; its twin towers soar 746 ft., and its two main cables weigh 11,000 tons apiece.

On its opening day in 1937, some 200,000 pedestrians joined an inaugural walk across the bridge. To make your crossing, bundle up against the wind, then set out from the **Roundhouse** on the east side of the bridge. Be prepared: The traffic alongside the pedestrian walkway gets pretty noisy, and the bridge vibrates. Even if you only make it halfway, the experience is amazing; walk all the way to **Vista Point** in Marin County and you'll be rewarded with one of the most famous cityscape views in the world.

 Hwy. 101 N from San Francisco ([www.goldengatebridge.org](http://www.goldengatebridge.org)).

  See the Cable Car Hills of San Francisco .

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** A high-wire walk they'll never forget.

## Drives

# 18

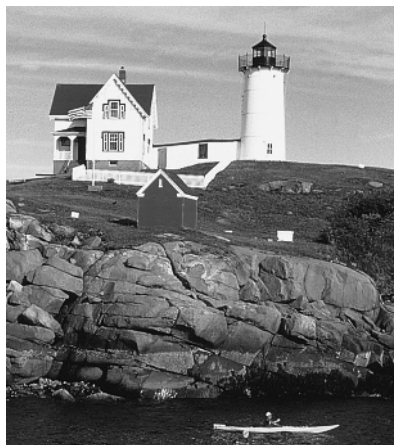
## The Lighthouse Tour of Maine

All ages • Kittery to Castine, Maine, USA

IT'S ONE OF THOSE CLASSIC IMAGES of New England: the stalwart lighthouse, perched above crashing waves, sending out its beam to welcome home the fishermen. And nowhere is the concentration greater than in Maine. It's only natural—Maine's jagged coastline is so fringed with inlets and islands and carved-out bays, if a giant came along and pulled it straight it would be 5,500 miles long. You need a lot of lighthouses to navigate a shore that crazy, and driving from one to the next is a great connect-the-dots way to enjoy the state.

Start out north of Kittery, turning off Route 1 to York Beach. At the northern

end of Long Sands Beach, postcard-perfect **Nubble Light** sits high on a peninsula, with its white Victorian keeper's house alongside. On a clear day, if you've got binoculars, you may also be able to see slim granite-gray **Boon Island Light** 10 miles out to sea—New England's tallest lighthouse, at 13 stories high. Just north of Kennebunkport, off Route 1 on Maine 208, the hamlet of Cape Porpoise has a lighthouse offshore on **Goat Island**, which has been used by the Secret Service detail to protect the senior President Bush when he's at his Kennebunkport home.



Nubble Light in Cape Neddick.

There are no fewer than five lighthouses in greater Portland—from south to north: the gracefully proportioned **Cape Elizabeth Light** at Two Lights State Park, featured in the paintings of Edward Hopper; the tapering white **Portland Head Light**, Fort Williams Park, 1000 Shore Rd., an active lighthouse since 1794 with a small museum in its former keeper's house; the granite-block **Ram Island Ledge Light** offshore from Portland Head; the fire-hydrant-shaped **Spring Point Light** on a breakwater at the end of South Portland's Broadway; and around the same point, the **Portland Breakwater Light**, nicknamed Bug Light for reasons the kids should be able to figure out.

Go north on I-95 to Brunswick, where Route 1 branches off east, running like a

spine along the heavily indented coast. In Boothbay Harbor, ferries from the pier visit the stout white **Burnt Island Light**, which you can tour. In Bristol, there's the whitewashed stone **Pemaquid Point Light**, which now contains a fishing museum. In Port Clyde, the peaceful **Marshall Point Light**, which also contains a small museum, played a bit part in the movie *Forrest Gump*. Northeast of here, the Penobscot Bay area has a host of lighthouses, including a pair on either side of Rockland harbor, the quirky **Rockland Harbor Southwest Light**, North Shore Rd., growing out of a wood-shingle house, and the red-brick **Rockland Breakwater Light** on the north side of the harbor. Another 50 miles or so on Route 1 will take you around the top of the bay to Castine, where the privately owned rough, conical **Dice Head Light** sits at the end of Route 166.

**i** **Maine Office of Tourism** (☎ 888/624-6345; [www.visitmaine.com](http://www.visitmaine.com)).

**✈** Portland International, 45 miles from Kittery, 140 miles from Castine.

**🏠** \$\$\$ **Sebasco Harbor Resort**, Rte. 217, Sebasco Estates, near Brunswick (☎ 800/225-3819 or 207/389-1161; [www.sebasco.com](http://www.sebasco.com)). \$\$ **Topside**, 60 McKown Hill, Boothbay Harbor (☎ 877/486-7466 or 207/633-5404).

**BEST TIME:** Spring, or fall, when you can enjoy the foliage. In summer Rte. 1 backs up for miles.

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Watching the beacon light wink on and off.

## 19 Drives

# The Skyline Drive & Blue Ridge Parkway

## Driving the Appalachians

All ages • Virginia, North Carolina & Tennessee, USA

**ANCHORED** AT EITHER END by national parks—Shenandoah National Park at one end, Great Smoky Mountains National Park at

the other—this 574-mile stretch of Appalachian mountain-crest highway is stunning any time of year. In May,

wildflowers bloom along with dogwood and mountain laurel, and in summer these mountain reaches stay refreshingly cool and green. We drove it in early fall, missing the vivid foliage of mid- to late October but experiencing an amazing sight: a blizzard of monarch butterflies stubbornly plowing into oncoming traffic, refusing to veer off of their hard-wired migration route. In the winter, whenever snow and ice close some parts of the parkway, you can even cross-country ski here.

Tell the kids that all those trees releasing hydrocarbons into the atmosphere creates the mountains' distinctive haze—blue along the Blue Ridge, slightly grayer (and therefore “smoky”) in the Smoky Mountains. Both parkways are mile-posted, which makes counting down the distances fun for kids, and there are walking trails marked continually (look for signs bearing a rifle-and-powderhorn symbol). We also played Spot the Scenic Overlook, keeping watch for the next pull-off area where we could jump out and really drink in those hill-and-valley vistas. Another thing to do is to count the tunnels—there's only one in Virginia but 26 in North Carolina, most of them in the hilly section below Asheville.

The 105-mile Skyline Drive, which has an entry fee, begins at Front Royal, Virginia, and slices southwest through long, skinny Shenandoah National Park. Around Waynesboro, the road's name changes to the Blue Ridge Parkway (469 miles in total), and the surrounding greenery becomes the Jefferson National Forest. You'll cross the border into North Carolina

and roll through the Pisgah National Forest (my kids love that name), reaching higher elevations as you angle west past Asheville to the Great Smoky Mountains park, which spills west into Tennessee.

You can take a break at several sites en route: At the Blue Ridge Parkway milepost 5.8, Humpback Rocks, the **Mountain Farm** trail meanders through a cluster of 19th-century farm buildings; at milepost 85.9, the Peaks of Otter, a loop trail leads to the rural **Johnson Farm**; milepost 176.2 accesses picturesque **Mabry Mill**, along with a blacksmith shop, wheelwright's shop, and whiskey still; **Puckett Cabin** (milepost 189.9) was the home of a busy 19th-century mountain midwife; the **Jesse Brown Farmstead** (milepost 272.5) consists of a cabin, spring house, and a Baptist church. At milepost 292, **Moses H. Cone Memorial Park** offers a turn-of-the-century manor house. Since your drive should take at least 2 days, overnight in Boone, North Carolina, where the **Hickory Ridge Homestead Museum** (☎ 828/264-6390) is a re-created log cabin furnished in 1780-era style.

**i** **Shenandoah National Park** (☎ 540/999-3500; [www.nps.gov/shen](http://www.nps.gov/shen)). Blue Ridge Parkway (☎ 828/298 0398; [www.nps.gov/blri](http://www.nps.gov/blri)).

**\$\$\$ Holiday Inn Express**, 1943 Blowing Rock Rd., Boone (☎ 800/HOLIDAY or 828/264-2451; [www.ichotelsgroup.com](http://www.ichotelsgroup.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Backwoods trails and the Daniel Boone vibe.

## Drives

20

# The Cabot Trail

## North America's Highland Wilds

All ages • Nova Scotia, Canada

**NOVA SCOTIA** IS LATIN for “New Scotland,” and the name really fits blustery, craggy Cape Breton Island. The Scots who settled this part of Canada were generally

Highlanders who'd rebelled against the English Crown, and I like to think that they immediately felt at home on these isolated uplands. **Cape Breton Island**



Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia.

**National Park** is a starkly beautiful wilderness with a split personality: in the interior rises a melancholy plateau of wind-stunted evergreens, bogs, and barrens, a fitting home for druids or trolls; around the edges, the mountains tumble suddenly to the sea in a dramatic coastscape of ravines and ragged, rust-colored cliffs. The Scottish Highlands don't have a scenic coastal highway, but the North American version does: the Cabot Trail, a 300km (185-mile) loop built in 1939 to take advantage of those astounding sea views.

You'll get onto the roadway at **Baddeck**, a New England-y town where Alexander Graham Bell spent his summers (there's a good exhibit on his life and work on Chebucto St.), but things get more rugged as you swing north toward the park. The gateway to the park is the Acadian town of **Chéticamp**, the most French-speaking part of the island—notice the French names on local shops and restaurants—where the visitor center has some good natural history displays and a large-scale relief map to give the

kids a geographic idea of where they're going.

The Cabot Trail circuit should take 6 to 8 hours to drive. Don't expect to make good time; the road has lots of brake-testing steep climbs and whooshing descents, and you'll also want to stop at many pullouts. The most gorgeous stretch is the 44km (27 miles) from Chéticamp to Pleasant Bay along the western coast. You'll lose the water views for a time after Pleasant Bay, as you cut across the headlands to Cape North, where English explorer John Cabot first set foot on the North American continent (although some Newfoundlanders claim he first landed in Newfoundland). Going down the eastern coast, you'll pass through a series of towns with Scottish names—Ingonish Centre, Ingonish Ferry, South Ingonish Harbour—and then make a precipitous climb to the promontory of **Cape Smokey**, where panoramic views explode on every side.

Stop and stretch your legs on some of the hiking **trails** that head inland from the road. The best ones for kids are the half-mile-long **Bog Trail**, which follows a boardwalk into the gnarled bogs of the tableland, and the half-mile **Lone Shieling loop**, which enters a verdant hardwood forest that includes 350-year-old sugar maples; a re-creation of a Scottish crofter's hut is a highlight of the trail. An 11km (6.8-mile) trail leads along the bluffs of Cape Smokey; even if you don't go all the way to the tip, it's worth walking part-way just to feel the headland winds and taste the salt air.

**i** **Cape Breton Highlands National Park**  
(☎ 888/773-8888; [www.pc.gc.ca](http://www.pc.gc.ca)).

✈ Halifax 282km (175 miles).


**🏠 \$ Cape Breton Highlands Bungalows**, Cabot Trail, Ingonish Beach (☎ 902/285-2000). **\$\$ Inverary Resort**, Shore Rd, Baddeck (☎ 800/565-5660 or 902/295-3500; [www.inveraryresort.com](http://www.inveraryresort.com)).


**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Scotland via French-speaking Canada.

## San Juan Skyway: Million-Dollar Highway

All ages • Begins & ends in Durango, Colorado, USA

**C**LOSE TO THE FOUR CORNERS, where Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico meet at right angles, this 256-mile loop of highway is one of the country's most spectacular drives, taking in the whole panorama of the Southwest—from ancient Native American cliff dwellings to Wild West towns to smart ski resorts, all against an incredible backdrop of 10,000-foot-high Rocky Mountain passes, canyons, waterfalls, and alpine meadows.

I prefer to follow the circuit clockwise from Durango, saving the most breathtaking scenery for the end. You can drive it in 1 day, but there are enough intriguing stops en route to make it worth 2 or 3 days. For example, the first (and, frankly, least scenic) 45 miles, along U.S. 160 west from Durango, takes you past **Mesa Verde National Park** , an

awe-inspiring archaeological site with thousands of Ancestral Puebloan cliff dwellings that deserves a full day on its own. Ten miles past the park, just before the town of Cortez, turn north on CO 145 up the Dolores River Valley, slicing into mountains thickly forested with green. Sixty miles past Dolores, the kids should be able to spot the startling rock spire that earned **Lizard Head Pass** its name. A few miles past here, you can detour 4 miles east to historic **Telluride**. This is where Butch Cassidy robbed his first bank, in 1889. The museum at 201 W. Gregory Ave. ( **970/728-3344**) displays loads of artifacts from the town's Wild West Days, and you get a distinct late 1800s vibe just from walking around the landmarked downtown streets.




Enjoying the Ouray Hot Springs Pool in Ouray, Colorado.




Colorado 145 goes west, following the San Miguel River Valley to Placerville, where you pick up CO 62 to head north over the Dallas Divide. You'll come next to **Ridgway**, a tiny old railroad town; go south on U.S. 550 to **Ouray**, another quaint Old West town to explore (a soak in the hot springs here makes a great break from driving). Past Ouray, you'll be driving the Million Dollar Highway, so named because millions of dollars passed over it in the great days of Colorado gold and silver mining. It's still worth a million dollars just for the views; the next 23 miles, over Red Mountain Pass to **Silverton**, are breathtaking, as the road shim-mies up the sheer sides of a gorge, dives through tunnels, and passes cascading waterfalls. On the Red Mountain slopes around you, look for relics of mining equipment and log cabins. From Silverton, U.S. 550 climbs over two last passes,

the Molas Divide and the Coalbank Pass; south of Purgatory, you join the gorgeous route of the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad **28** as you head back to Durango.

**i** **Durango Area tourist office**, U.S. 160 & E. 8th Ave. (☎ **800/463-8726**; [www.durango.org](http://www.durango.org)).

 Durango/La Plata, 14 miles.

 **\$\$\$ New Sheridan Hotel**, 231 W. Colorado Ave., Telluride (☎ **800/200-1891** or 970/728-4351; [www.newsheridan.com](http://www.newsheridan.com)). **\$** **The Strater Hotel**, 699 Main Ave., Durango (☎ **800/247-4431** or 970/247-4431; [www.strater.com](http://www.strater.com)).

**BEST TIME:** Apr–Oct (passes may be blocked by snow in winter).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Million-dollar mountain vistas.

## 22

## Drives

## Going-to-the-Sun Road

### *Soaring through Big Sky Montana*

All ages • West Glacier, Montana, USA

**WHEN THE ICE AGE ENDED** millennia ago, receding glaciers revealed a stunning valley they'd carelessly gouged out of what is now the state of Montana and lower Alberta, Canada. Majestic mountain crags loom on either side, their crevices hiding lakes and ponds that are really just melted glacial leftovers. The glaciers are still receding, in fact (the effect of global warming, some say); often in winter, avalanches heap over the scenic 50-mile road that bisects this valley. Climbing some 3,400 feet in a mere 32 miles, this breathtaking drive truly lives up to its poetical name: the Going-to-the-Sun Road.

The drive begins at West Glacier, the park entrance that meets U.S. Highway 2 near Columbia Falls, Montana. The first stretch of road traces the southeast shore


of **Lake McDonald**, the park's largest lake, with postcardlike panoramas of shimmering water backed by verdant mountains. Across from the Avalanche Campground ranger station, look for the marker for the Trail of the Cedars, a level quarter-mile nature boardwalk. Back on the road, you keep winding up into the mountains, getting a bird's-eye view of the surrounding peaks—be careful about looking out the car's side windows, because some of those drops are dizzying. There are three landmarks along this middle section: **The Loop**, an excellent vantage point for Heaven's Peak; **Bird Woman Falls Overlook**, where you can gaze across a sweeping valley to a waterfall; and, most kids' favorite, the **Weeping Wall**, a wall of rock that does,


in fact, weep groundwater profusely. At the 32-mile mark, **Logan Pass** has a visitor center, open summers only, that sits right on top of the Continental Divide—which, as you no doubt remember from geography class, is the ridge of the Rockies from which all rivers flow either east or west. Downhill (east) from here is the turnout for **Jackson Glacier**, the most easily recognizable glacier in the entire park, followed by trailheads for short wildlife-viewing hikes to Sunrift Gorge and Sun Point. At the east end lies the St. Mary visitor center. If you'd rather not retrace the park road, complete the loop clockwise another 57 miles by following U.S. 2 south, west, and then north along park borders back to West Glacier. Along the way, the Two Medicine park entrance offers another fun short trail, the Running Eagle Falls trail (trailhead 1 mile west of the entrance), a third-of-a-mile stroll

through dense forest to a large, noisy waterfall.

The whole loop can be done in 1 day with plenty of time for picnics, short hikes, and pulling off-road to enjoy the jaw-dropping vistas. To get the full effect, journey across the Going-to-the-Sun Road before 8:30am; you'll be astounded by the masterful job Mother Nature does of painting her mountains.

**i** **Glacier National Park** (☎ 406/888-7800; www.nps.gov/glac).

 Kalispell 29 miles.

 **Glacier Campground**, 12070 U.S. 2 (☎ 888/387-5689 or 406/387-5689). \$\$\$ **Lake McDonald Lodge**, on Lake McDonald (☎ 406/892-2525; www.glacierparkinc.com).

**BEST TIME:** Early June to mid-Oct.

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Straddling the Continental Divide.

## Drives

### 23

## The Pacific Coast Highway *California's Oceanside Spectacle*

All ages • Los Angeles to San Francisco, California, USA

**BEGINNING NEAR** the old mission town of San Juan Capistrano, state highway 1 hugs the California coast all the way up to Leggett, in northern California—and I mean it *hugs* the coast, darting around coves and clinging to steeply shelving cliffs, with the Pacific Ocean almost always out your side window. It's not the most efficient route to take from southern to northern California (or vice versa). Travelers intent on getting there fast opt for inland I-5, or at least U.S. 101. No, if you're driving the **Pacific Coast Highway**, you're looking for scenery—and some of the most spectacular coastal scenery in the world it is.

While some consider the PCH the whole series of connected highways from the Mexican border to Canada, I define it

as California Highway 1 (which sometimes overlaps with U.S. 101). At various points, this winding two-lane road may be called the Cabrillo Highway, after the Spanish explorer, or El Camino Real, the old Spanish road linking a chain of early settlements (see The Mission Trail **243**). What really matters is its proximity to the Pacific.

We tend to skip the southern section, avoiding L.A.'s congestion, and start alongside the bleached sands of **Santa Monica Beach** **447**. We usually break up the drive into 3 days so we can stop en route to walk on beaches, explore small towns, and so on. Along the way—say, around Cambria, near **Hearst Castle** **572**—suddenly we're no longer in Southern



Wildlife along the Pacific Coast Highway.

California, and things get more rugged. Up near **Half Moon Bay 119**, there's a steep downward plunge of the road called **Devil's Slide** that the kids love. Past San Francisco, we cruise a lonelier stretch of Northern California coast, where we make a pilgrimage to the giant redwoods—depending on time, we may make it as far as Muir Woods or **Redwood National Park 2**.

The most dramatic stretches of the drive occur where the mountains crowd close to the ocean's edge—for instance, just north of Santa Barbara, where the Santa Inez peaks tumble precipitously to the beach, or the entire section from Morro Bay north to Carmel, where the sea nips at the toes of the Santa Lucia mountains. Each curve you whip around reveals another jaw-dropping vista, narrow strips of white foam-edged sand curling below you on one side, furrowed brown mountainsides beetling over you

on the other. Surfers bob on their boards offshore—or are those seals?—and hawks coast dreamily overhead. It's beautiful at noon, with blue skies and bright sun; it's beautiful in a haunting fog; it's beautiful glowing at sunset; it's even beautiful in a wistful gray rain. It's just plain beautiful.

I've driven the Pacific Coast Highway twice with my kids, both times going south to north. Next time I plan to drive it north to south, which I suspect is even more thrilling. Maybe in a red convertible, with the Beach Boys' "Wouldn't It Be Nice" blasting from the car radio . . . ah, California.

**i** <http://gocalif.ca.gov>; [www.us-101.com](http://www.us-101.com).

**✈** Los Angeles International. San Francisco International.

**🏰** See Hearst Castle **372**.

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Riding the curves, watching the surf.

## Haleakala Crater Road

### *Volcano Touring in Hawaii*

All ages • Maui, Hawaii, USA

IF YOU REALLY WANT TO BE DULL, it's called Highway 378, and on the map it's such a wiggly line that you wonder what the road engineers were smoking when they laid it out. But when you drive the Haleakala Crater Road, you understand immediately: Every wiggle in that road is another steep switchback curve climbing up, up, up, right to the summit of the world's largest dormant volcano. It may take you over an hour to cover these 20 miles, with the weather changing every few miles as you pass through different climate zones. You'll run into patches of fog that turn out to be not fog at all, but drive-through cumulus clouds. Look out the window and you may see rare black-faced Hawaiian geese on the wing, right beside you. By the time you get to the top, the crater—a black hole so big it could hold Manhattan—is almost beside the point.

And then you get to drive back down (in low gear, please!).

Many visitors time their visit to Haleakala for sunrise or sunset, when the sun gilds the lunarlike landscape with colors so fiery, you can almost imagine that the lava beds have heated up again. Haleakala does mean House of the Sun, after all, and when you see the sun rise up out of the ocean, it's awe inspiring. With kids in the car, though, I hesitate to drive those curves in predawn or postdusk darkness. Besides, daylight lets them enjoy the views along the way, which can extend as far as 100 miles on a clear day. There are three scenic overlooks en route to the summit, essential stops not only for the views but to let the kids pop their ears and adjust to the thin air. At **Leleiwi Overlook**, about halfway up, you get your

first full panorama of the crater above. When the clouds are low and the sun's in the right place, you can see your own shadows, ringed with a rainbow, reflected on the surface of the clouds below—a rare phenomenon indeed. Shortly before the summit, the **Haleakala Visitor Center** has great views of the moonlike volcanic landscape. But it's still a few miles to **Puu Ulaula Overlook**, where the **Haleakala Observatories** are located, 10,023 feet high. Often you can see all the way to the Big Island from here (look for the snowcapped peak of Mauna Kea **610**). On your way back down, stop at the **Kalahaku Overlook** to admire the only-in-Hawaii silversword plant, with its spiky silver spears and tiny purple flowers.

If your kids are older, several local operators will take you up the volcano in a van and then give you mountain bikes to coast down the winding road; try **Maui Downhill** (☎ 800/535/BIKE, [www.mauidownhill.com](http://www.mauidownhill.com)) or **Maui Mountain Cruisers** (☎ 800/232-6284; [www.mauimountaincruisers.com](http://www.mauimountaincruisers.com)).

**i** **Haleakala National Park**, Hwy. 37 to 377 to 378 (☎ 808/572-4400; [www.nps.gov/hale](http://www.nps.gov/hale)).

✈ **Kahului**, 37 miles.

🚗 **\$\$\$ Banyan Tree House**, 3265 Baldwin Ave., Makawao (☎ 808/572-9021; [www.hawaiiimauirentals.com](http://www.hawaiiimauirentals.com)). **\$\$\$ Olinda Country Cottages**, 2660 Olinda Rd., Makawao (☎ 800/932-3435 or 808/572-1453; [www.mauibnbcottages.com](http://www.mauibnbcottages.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Driving through the clouds.

## The Ring of Kerry

### *Ireland's Wide Green West*

All ages • County Kerry, Ireland

IRELAND'S GREATEST TOURISM CLICHÉ is the Ring of Kerry, a 177km (110-mile) route around the Iveragh Peninsula where scores of tour buses thunder every day in summer. But taking your own car makes all the difference: Follow the road clockwise (the buses go counterclockwise) and you'll have the road less traveled, with room to enjoy the postcard-perfect seacoast views that made the Ring a tourist draw in the first place.

Without stops, the circuit takes 4 hours; plan for twice that so you can stop and explore, not just snap photos out your window. Driving south from tourist-choked Killarney on N71, you'll enter spectacular **Killarney National Park**, where the mountain scenery has an almost Wild West grandeur. From the road you gaze north over the memorably named range of Macgillycuddy's Reeks; Ireland's tallest mountain, **Carruntuohill**, at 1,041m (3,415 ft.), crops up in the distance. Stop to savor it at Ladies View, a scenic overlook where Queen Victoria's ladies-in-waiting raved about the panorama on a royal vacation (thus launching Kerry's tourism industry). Detour south to **Kenmare**, a neat little town on Kenmare Bay, where a Bronze Age stone circle stands intact around a dolmen tomb. At Kenmare Pier from May to October, **Sea-Fari Cruises**, Kenmare Pier (☎ 064/83171; [www.seafariireland.com](http://www.seafariireland.com)), runs 2-hour excursions to spot dolphins, sea otters, gray seals, and herons.

Wind on down the coast to charming **Sneem**, its houses painted in vibrant shades of blue, pink, yellow, purple, and orange. A few miles past Sneem, signs point to **Staigue Fort**, 3km (1¾ miles) off N70 on a narrow one-track road. A huge hit with my youngsters, this circular fort

was built around 1000 B.C. of unmortared rough stones, big enough to shelter an entire Iron Age clan. At the western end of the peninsula, **Waterville** is an improbably Mediterranean-looking resort town, where Charlie Chaplin often summered; there's a super beach here, a good (if windy) spot for a picnic. Detour from the main road to Portmagee, where a bridge leads to **Valentia Island** and **The Skellig Experience** (☎ 066/947-6306; [www.skelligexperience.com](http://www.skelligexperience.com)).

Its displays and audiovisuals delve into local birds and plant life, in particular those of the two tiny offshore islands known as the Skellig Rocks. These are Skellig Michael, a rock pinnacle towering over the sea where medieval monks built an isolated monastery; and neighboring Little Skellig, where vast flocks of gannets and other seabirds nest in summer. Cruises out to the Skelligs are available from Valentia.

Continue on N70, with Dingle Bay on your right. On this north side of the peninsula, open bog land constantly comes into view, a terrain formed thousands of years ago from decayed trees. Local residents dig up the turf to burn in their fireplaces. The atmospheric **Kerry Bog Village Museum** in Ballycleave (☎ 066/976-9184) was our favorite stop: a cluster of thatched-roof cottages showing what life was like in Kerry in the early 1800s, from the blacksmith's forge to the turf-cutter's house to the roof-thatcher's dwelling. The life behind the postcard views—that's what we were after, and we got it.

**i Ring of Kerry** ([www.kerrytourist.com](http://www.kerrytourist.com)). **Killarney Tourist Office**, Beech Rd., Killarney (☎ 064/31633; [www.killarneytown.com](http://www.killarneytown.com)).

## TAKING IN THE SCENERY



Kerry County Airport.



Killarney Railway Station.



\$\$ **Derrynane Hotel**, off N71,

Caherdaniel (☎ **800/528-1234** or

066/947-5136; [www.derrynane.com](http://www.derrynane.com)). \$\$

**Killarney Great Southern**, Railway Rd., Killarney (☎ **800/44-UTELL** in the U.S., or 064/31262; [www.gsh.ie](http://www.gsh.ie)).

### WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:

Kodachrome views, Celtic history.

## Drives

## 26

# The Fairy-Tale Road

## *In the Bootsteps of the Brothers Grimm*

All ages • Hanau to Hameln, Germany

CHILDREN HAVE LOVED the aptly named Grimm's fairy tales ever since these real-life brothers first published their children's stories in 1812. Central Germany is Grimm country, and the so-called **Fairy-Tale Road** (Märchenstrasse) rolls right through it, past half-timbered villages, towered castles, and gnarled forests where many a poor woodcutter toiled. From Hanau to Hameln, it's a 400km (250-mile) drive. While a few sites are worth a stop, the main thing is to gaze out the window at the *Shrek*-like landscape where Snow White or Rumpelstiltskin could dance out into the road at any moment.

The official starting point is a monument to the Grimms at Neustadter Marktplatz in **Hanau**, a suburb 20km (12 miles) east of Frankfurt. Jakob Grimm was born here in 1785, his brother Wilhelm a year later, but there's little 18th-century charm left in Hanau; for that, head north on B43 to **Steinau an der Strasse**, where the Grimm brothers spent their youth. A memorial fountain honors them in the main cobblestone square, and on weekends puppet shows enact fairy tales at the **Steinauer Marionettentheater**, Kumpfen 2 (☎ **06663/245**). Continue north on B40, then B254 and along the Schwalm River, which the Germans call *Rotkäppchenland*, or Little Red Riding Hood country. Quaint towns like Fulda, Lauterbach, and Alsberg set the fairy-tale scene; Neustadt has a circular tower

where Rapunzel could have let down her golden tresses. A good stop for the night is **Kassel**, where the Grimms lived from 1798 to 1830; the **Bruder Grimm Museum** at Schöne Aussicht 2 contains letters, portraits, and mementos.

After Kassel, go north on B3 and Route 80, following signs to Sababurg, where **Dornröschenschloss Sababurg**, in Hofgeismar (☎ **05671/8080**), was the setting of the Sleeping Beauty legend. Briar roses still bloom in the courtyard of this turreted Italianate castle, which is set in an old zoological garden and encircled by a wilderness of ancient oak and beech trees. North on Route 80 then 83, **Bodenwerder** was the birthplace of Lüken Baron von Münchhausen (1720–97), known as the “Liar Baron” because he told the biggest whoppers in Germany; his tall tales became a popular children's book. In the Rathaus, or town hall, the **Münchhausen-Erinnerungszimmer** (Münchhausen Memorial Room) displays mementos of his life (closed Nov–Mar).

Then it's northwest on Route 83 to picturesque **Hameln**, site of the Pied Piper legend. When the stingy citizens refused to pay an itinerant rat-catcher who rid the town of rats, in revenge he played a bewitching tune on his flute and lured Hameln's children out of town, never to be seen again. Frescoes in the restaurant of **Rattenfängerhaus** (Rat-Catcher's House), Osterstrasse 28 (☎ **05151/3888**),

illustrate the legend; Hameln shops sell rat figures of every conceivable material, including candy.

① **Hameln tourist office**, Deisterallee 1 (☎ 05151/957823; www.hameln.com).

✈ Frankfurt.

🚗 \$\$\$ **Mercure Hotel Hameln**, 164er Ring 3, Hameln (☎ 05151/7920;

www.dorint.com). \$\$ **Schloss Hotel Wilhelmshöhe**, Schlosspark 8, Kassel (☎ 0561/30880 or 0561/3088428).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Rapunzel's tower, Sleeping Beauty's castle, and a rat for the Pied Piper.

## 27

## Drives

## The Great Ocean Road Awesome Aussie Wonder

All ages • Torquay to Warrnambool, Victoria, Australia

THERE'S NO QUESTION that coastal roads pack a scenic wallop, but even among coastal roads, the Great Ocean Road stands out. If you want the kids to understand Australia's raw power, this drive is essential. Running along the southern coast for 106km (66 miles), it offers the expected sheer cliffs, sea vistas, and beaches, but then there's the Aussie difference: patches of lush rainforest and some incredible rock formations created by the pounding seas of the Southern Ocean.

Some tour operators offer 1-day loops from Melbourne, but it makes a lot more sense to rent your own car and take a leisurely 2 days. Where you stop, of course, depends on the kids' special interests. We associate Australia with surfers, and the eastern section of the drive, starting with **Torquay**, home of world-famous Bells Beach, is called the Surf Coast. The **Surfworld Museum**, Beach Road, West Torquay (☎ 03/5261 4606) has interactive exhibits on surfboard design and surfing history and video of the world's best surfers. In Lorne, another surfing town, stop at the **Ozone Milk Bar** on Mount Joy Parade, a classic Australian milk bar—a kind of down-market cafe that sells everything from shakes and pies to newspapers. From **Lorne** to

**Apollo Bay** is a thrilling stretch of road, as the pavement narrows and twists along a cliff edge. The **Angahook-Lorne State Park** along here has many marked rainforest walks; about 13km (8 miles) past Apollo Bay, just off the main road, you can stroll on the **Maits Rest Rainforest Boardwalk**. The road cuts inland through the Otway National Forest; past Beauchamp Falls, head south on an unpaved road for 15km (9½ miles) to the windswept headland and the historic **Cape Otway Lighthouse**, built by convicts in 1848. Five kilometers (3 miles) southwest of the old timber town of Lavers Hill, small **Melba Gully State Park** lets you walk on trails through rainforest ferns to find one of the last giant gum trees, some 27m (89 ft.) in circumference; it's thought to be over 300 years old. By now you're on the Shipwreck Coast, so named because there were some 80 wrecks along here in just 40 years. You'll reach the water's edge again just past Princetown, where you can see what a treacherous shore this is: Along a 27km (17-mile) stretch through **Port Campbell National Park** are the **Twelve Apostles**, a series of rock pillars standing just offshore; the **Blowhole**, which throws up huge sprays of water; the **Grotto**, intricately carved by the waves; **London**



Australia's Great Ocean Road.

**Bridge**, which looked like the real thing until the center crashed into the sea in 1990; and the **Loch Ard Gorge**. The scenic road ends in Warrnambool, another of those evocative Australian names. There's a faster road back to Melbourne from here—faster, but not nearly so much fun.

**i** **Great Ocean Road Visitors Centre**, Stead Park, Geelong (☎ 03/5275 5797; [www.greatoceanrd.org.au](http://www.greatoceanrd.org.au)).

**✈** Melbourne, 93km (58 miles).

**🏠** **Great Ocean Road Cottages**, Great Ocean Rd., Lorne (☎ 03/5289 1070; [www.greatoceanroadcottages.com](http://www.greatoceanroadcottages.com)). \$  
**Macka's Farm**, Princetown Rd., Princetown (☎ 03/5598 8261; [www.mackasfarm.com.au](http://www.mackasfarm.com.au)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Surfing and shipwrecks.

## Train Rides

28

# Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad

## *Classic Steam Train*

All ages • Durango, Colorado, USA

**EVER SINCE IT WAS BUILT IN 1882**, this little train has been puffing along the Rio de las Animas Perdidas (that's Spanish for the River of Lost Souls, a haunting name indeed), traveling 45 miles through the mountains and San Juan National Forest to the town of Silverton and back. When it was first built, Silverton was, as its name suggests, a silver-mining town, and the train's business was to bring precious ore back down to the railroad hub of Durango. When the United States went on the gold standard

in 1893, the price of silver dropped dramatically, throwing this region's economy into a tailspin. Many local railroads went belly up, but this one survived because of its incredible scenic views. Nowadays it's tourists that trundle along those tracks, in strings of restored gold-colored Victorian-era coaches.

Traveling at around 18 mph, you'll climb 3,000 feet, past relics of the area's mining and railroading activities; elevations en route range from 8,000 feet at



the passes to 14,000 feet on the peaks you'll see from the train windows. White puffs of smoke trail from its coal-powered steam locomotives—a fireman shovels about 6 tons of coal per day to power these locomotives. If you look at the tracks, they're only 3 feet apart (standard train tracks are 4 ft. 8½ in. wide), which makes it easier to navigate sharp mountain curves. In this train's case, the narrower tracks also meant workers had fewer inches to cut out of the sheer granite cliff face of the Animas Gorge. It was such a risky job that the railroad's president, William Palmer, constructed the route in secret so that his board of directors at the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad wouldn't veto the plan before he'd safely completed it.

This is a full-day excursion—it takes 3½ hours to ride from Durango to Silverton, you're given 2 hours to poke around picturesque Victorian-era Silverton, and then it's another 3½ hours back down to Durango. The best thing to do with your time in Silverton is to tour an actual mine; you can buy a combination ticket with the railroad ride that includes a visit to the

**Old Hundred Gold Mine** (☎ 800/872-3009 or 970/387-5444; [www.minetour.com](http://www.minetour.com)) in Cunningham Pass, just outside of Silverton (this only works with the 9:30am train departure). The tour takes you a third of a mile deep into Galena Mountain on an electric mine car, where miners demonstrate historic mining equipment and techniques. There's also gold panning, and box lunches are included in the deal.

Before getting on the train in Durango, spend half an hour or so in the **Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad Museum**, right beside the train depot (☎ 970/247-2733). Even if you have no train fanatics in the family (we do), the exhibits on the steam-train era will help set the scene for you, and kids enjoy climbing onto the restored locomotive and railroad cars.

📍 479 Main Ave. (☎ 888/872-4607; [www.durangotrain.com](http://www.durangotrain.com)).

🚂 See the San Juan Skyway 21.

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Clinging to the cliff face.

## 29

## Train Rides

## The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad

### *Mountain Train of the Wild West*

All ages • Cumbres, Arizona, to Antonito, New Mexico, USA

**BACK IN THE 1880s**, the Rocky Mountains were laced with little railroad lines, laid down to haul precious metal ore out of remote mines. Weaving through the San Juan Mountains, zigzagging along the New Mexico–Colorado border, the Cumbres & Toltec narrow-gauge railroad is the most classic example of these vintage lines. Along its 64 miles, it passes through a postcard-perfect mountain landscape of wildflower meadows, rustling stands of pine and aspen, and bristling rocky outcrops. It rumbles through two tunnels,

over 100-foot-high trestles, and along the magnificent Toltec Gorge of the Rio de los Pinos. And when it crests at the 10,015-foot Cumbres Pass, you're riding higher than any other passenger train in the States.

The Cumbres & Toltec began service in 1880, making it 2 years older than its sister Denver and Rio Grande branch line, the Durango & Silverton Railroad 28. Although the route doesn't climb quite as steeply as the Durango-Silverton line, its entire course is high country—beginning

at nearly 8,000 feet, about as high as the Durango train gets at its top passes. Narrow-gauge lines were better suited to mountain terrain, but there was one glitch: They couldn't interchange trains with standard-gauge lines. Finally the Denver and Rio Grande began the expensive job of converting its narrow-gauge routes in the 1890s. This branch line simply wasn't a candidate for conversion—the silver mines it served had shut down with the collapse of silver's value, and the area was otherwise remote and unpopulated. Traffic dwindled to a trickle by the 1920s, chugging along behind archaic coal-fired steam locomotives, the only engines that still fit on narrow-gauge rails. In 1969 the D&RG abandoned the route and began to rip up its tracks. A band of railroad preservationists scrambled to stop the demolition before the route's most scenic stretch, between Chama, New Mexico, and Antonito, Colorado, was lost forever, and the two states cooperated to open it as a tourist attraction (not to mention a bit of a movie star—it's appeared in films from *The Missouri Breaks* to *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*).

There are two ways to do the route: You can ride the full 64 miles, changing trains halfway through the route at Osier, Colorado, or you can do a day round-trip from either end, returning by train to your starting point. Either way, you're given time to stretch your legs and enjoy a buffet lunch beside Osier's old water tank and stock pens. If you do the through trip, van service is available to complete the loop. You can pay extra to ride in a luxurious parlor car; all passengers can sample sitting in the **open-air gondola**, which the kids shouldn't miss—it's the quintessential wind-in-your-face experience.

① ② **888/CUMBRES** or 505/756-2151; [www.cumbresandtoltec.com](http://www.cumbresandtoltec.com)

✈️ Albuquerque, 160 miles. Santa Fe, 91 miles.

🏠 **\$\$\$ River Bend Lodge**, 2625 U.S. 64/285, Chama, NM (☎ **800/288-1371** or 505/765-2264; [www.chamariverbendlodge.com](http://www.chamariverbendlodge.com)).

**BEST TIME:** Late May to mid-Oct.

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** When the whistle blows to shoo a high-country steer off the tracks.

## Train Rides

30

# The Rocky Mountaineer Canada's Train of Wonders

All ages • Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

WHEN THE OPERATORS of this **luxury train** through the Canadian Rockies call it "the most spectacular train trip in the world," the marketing hyperbole for once turns out to be true. This sleek blue-and-white train has an incredibly panoramic itinerary, clacketyclacking past churning waterfalls, shimmering glaciers, craggy snowcapped peaks, and galloping mountain streams. You won't have the vintage cars you'd get on the more historic trains

above, but there's something to be said for modern luxury coaches and upscale onboard dining. And while I for one love the romance of snuggling into a sleeping berth overnight, there's just too much unmissable scenery along this route to risk sleeping through any of it—the train tours make overnight stops at proper hotels, where you can get rested up for tomorrow's jaw-dropping sights.

There's no question these tours are pricey, though many meals are included,



The Canadian Rockies.

and you can tweak the price by choosing different levels of luxury, both on the train and in your overnight hotels. The company offers several vacation packages of different lengths and destinations, but the triangle from Vancouver to Jasper to Banff and back again is the one I'd opt for. The first leg goes from **Vancouver** to the picturesque resort town of Jasper, Alberta, angling north through the **Yellowhead Pass**, along scenic valleys rich in wildlife, including elk, bears, and scrappy mountain goats. **Jasper National Park** is rugged and backwoods, with activities like hiking and river rafting to get you into the wilderness. Motorcoaches then take you on the 285km (177-mile) trip from Banff to Jasper along the incredibly scenic **Icefields Parkway** (see The Columbia Icefields **72**), along the way stopping at the jewel-like resort town of **Lake Louise**, set on a vivid turquoise lake cupped in a dramatic bowl of glaciers (the greenish color of the lake results from sunlight refracted off the minerals deposited by glacier melt). From then it's a short drive down to **Banff**, the Canadian Rockies's other great national

park, where family float trips and short day hikes make it a snap to get into the great outdoors. The town of Banff has more ski-resort chic than Jasper, with boutiques and trendy cafes lining its turn-of-the-century streets; as a tourist, you're practically obligated to take the 8-minute gondola ride to the top of **Sulphur Mountain**, and to cruise **Lake Minnewanka** in a glassed-in motor launch—the scenic vistas make it worth the long lines. Reboarding the train in Banff, you'll glide in style back to Vancouver over the **Kicking Horse Pass**, following the original transcontinental rail line that united the vastness of Canada from east to west. There's no better way to appreciate how big—and how beautiful—North America is.

**i** 1150 Mountain St. (☎ 877/460-3200; [www.rockymountaineer.com](http://www.rockymountaineer.com)).

**✈** Vancouver International.

**🚿** See Vancouver Aquarium **146**.

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** The pampered traveler's way to explore the mountain wilderness.

## Chihuahua al Pacífico Railway

### *Climbing through the Copper Canyon*

Ages 8 & up • Los Mochis to Chihuahua, Mexico

CROSSING MEXICO'S RUGGED Sierra Madre range, the Chihuahua al Pacífico Railway climbs from coastal Los Mochis, near the Sea of Cortez, up nearly 2,425m (7,956 ft.) northeast along the rim of the fabled Copper Canyon before descending to the city of Chihuahua. If you just rode the train straight through, it would take 15 hours to cover 644km (400 miles), rattling through 86 tunnels and across 39 bridges through some of Mexico's most magnificent scenery—thick pine forests, jagged peaks, and shadowy canyons. And it would all be a blur to the kids.

Instead, spread the trip out over 5 days; stay overnight in various towns en route, where your hotels can arrange side trips—horseback riding, hiking, or jeep rides to caves, waterfalls, old missions, Tarahumara Indian settlements, or quaint mining towns hidden in the many tributary canyons. The Copper Canyon is so big, it could engulf four Grand Canyons—why whiz through it in a single day?

I recommend starting at the western end, Los Mochis, which the train leaves at the eyelid-propping hour of 6am. Take a snooze until the first stop, cobblestoned colonial **El Fuerte**, on the coastal plain before the foothills of the Sierra Madre. Beyond El Fuerte, you enter the most dramatic part of the train ride, snaking steeply up the Pacific Palisade to **Bahuichivo**, the first stop in canyon country. If you overnight here, you'll stay in **Cerocahui**, built around a sweet-looking mission church. It's little more than unpaved streets and 100 or so houses, but it has a stunning view of the mountains; and several excursions make this a good overnight choice. Take the train onward to

**Barrancas** and then, 3km (1¾ miles) farther, **El Divisadero**, the same Continental Divide you can straddle up in Montana (see Going-to-the-Sun Road 22). A 20-minute stop allows passengers to walk to a lookout to gape at the most breathtaking panorama of the canyon along the whole train route. The next-to-last stop is at **Creel** (rhymes with "feel"), a rustic logging town with access to lots of fabulous side trips.

You must buy tickets for a particular date, point of departure, and destination, so design an itinerary to book in advance or sign up for a packaged tour (several leave from El Paso or Tucson; **Sierra Madre Express** in Tucson [☎ 800/666-0346] does a 1-week tour that runs its own deluxe trains through the canyon). Just don't expect trains to stick to the official timetable—they won't. Take it in stride and the kids will too.

❗ [www.mexicoscoppercanyon.com](http://www.mexicoscoppercanyon.com).



Los Mochis and Chihuahua.

🏠 \$\$\$ **Hotel Posada Barrancas**

**Mirador**, El Divisadero (☎ 800/896-8196

in the U.S. or 635/578-3020). \$\$\$ **Hotel**

**Posada del Hidalgo**, Hidalgo 101, El Fuerte

(☎ 800/896-8196 in the U.S., or 698/893-

1194 in El Fuerte). \$ **Motel Parador de la**

**Montaña**, Av. López Mateos s/n, Creel

(☎ 614/410-4580 or 635/456-0023;

[www.hotelparadorcreel.com](http://www.hotelparadorcreel.com)). \$\$\$ **Paraíso**

**del Oso**, Cerocahui (☎ 800/884-3107 in

the U.S., or 614/421-3372 in Chihuahua;

[www.mexicohorse.com](http://www.mexicohorse.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Going deep into the canyons.

# The Mountain Railways of North Wales

## *Vintage Excursions up the Welsh Peaks*

All ages • Llanberis & Porthmadog, North Wales

LACING AROUND THE MOUNTAIN FASTNESSES OF **Snowdonia National Park** 405 in North Wales are a number of intriguing little 19th-century railways, built by ingenious engineers to haul the “gray gold”—slate—out of that rugged terrain for shipping all over the world. All of them are delightful, but what’s really amazing is the number of them in a compact area. In 2 or 3 days your family can take no fewer than six different train rides, each of them different.


One starting point is Llanberis, nestling between Lake Padarn and Lake Peris.


The **Snowdon Mountain Railway** (☎ 0870/458-0033; [www.snowdonrailway.co.uk](http://www.snowdonrailway.co.uk)) runs 8km (5 miles) from Llanberis to within a few yards of the top of the Snowdon peak at about 1,085m (3,560 ft.). The only rack-and-pinion train in Britain, it is also the steepest train ride (lasting 1 hr. each way), and the view from the top platform, where the train stops, is one of the most panoramic in the country—it’s possible to see some 160km (100 miles) into Ireland, spying the Wicklow peaks on a clear day. The much tamer **Llanberis Lake Railway** chugs 8km (5 miles) along the dreamy shore of Lake Padarn (1 hr. round-trip).


Down on the coast, the town of Porthmadog offers the **Ffestiniog Railway** (☎ 01766/516024; [www.festrail.co.uk](http://www.festrail.co.uk)), a steep and twisting 22km-long (14-mile) narrow-gauge railway with steam locomotives. It’s the only link between the two main train

lines in North Wales, so many regular passengers use it, not just tourists. Its end-point is Blaenau Ffestiniog, a gloomy slate-mining village up in the mountains, its surrounding rock face dramatically ravaged by mining. From the coastal town of **Caenarfon**, where there are a splendid castle ruin and an excavated Roman fort, a narrow-gauge railway runs 13km (8 miles) or so uphill into Rhyd Ddu, where walkers can reach hiking trails up Snowdon.

And if those haven’t quenched your thirst for narrow-gauge railways, the **Bala Lake Railway** (☎ 01678/540666; [www.bala-lake-railway.co.uk](http://www.bala-lake-railway.co.uk)) is a 7km (4½-mile) stretch along Llyn Tegid (Bala Lake), a glacial lake mirroring the mountains in the inland town of Bala. From the coastal village of **Tywyn**, yet another train steams 11km (6¾ miles) up to Abergynolwyn, with five stations en route leading to waterfalls and mountain walking trails. Contact the **Talyllyn Railway** (☎ 01654/710472; [www.tallyllyn.co.uk](http://www.tallyllyn.co.uk)).

 **Llanberis Tourist Information Office**, 41B High St. (☎ 01286/870765).

 Bangor, 14km (8½ miles) north of Llanberis.

 **Royal Victoria Hotel**, Llanberis (☎ 01286/870253).

**BEST TIME:** Trains run May–Oct.

**WHY THEY’LL THANK YOU:** The thrill of puffing up sheer mountainsides.

## Zermatt to St. Moritz: The Glacier Express

All ages • Switzerland

THE NAME “EXPRESS” IS A BIT MISLEADING—it takes 7½ hours for the Glacier Express to get from Zermatt, in the southwestern Swiss Alps, over the Oberalp Pass to St. Moritz in the southeast. Along the way you’ll cross 291 bridges, many trestled high above gorges, and duck through 91 tunnels. But every bit of that time, you’ll have your noses pressed to the glass, gazing at the panoramas of hazy blue peaks and deep valleys around you, whether mantled in sparkling snow or carpeted in wildflowers. Seven-and-a-half hours may seem too short—even normally restless youngsters will be entranced.

**Zermatt**, at the base of the Matterhorn (in French, Mont Cervin), still has the atmosphere of a village. Though originally better known for mountain climbing (the **Alpine Museum** in town details the race to climb the Matterhorn, scaled first in 1865 by Edward Whymper), today it’s a full-bore ski resort. In fact, Zermatt gets so much snow every winter that high-altitude skiing continues through the spring and early summer. A bewildering number of cable cars, gondolas, and cog railways ascend various peaks around town; if the

kids are game, try a day out on the **Gornergrat**, the highest open-air railway in Europe.

**St. Moritz**, on the other hand, is probably *the* most fashionable ski resort in the world, a magnet for jet-setters, movie stars, tycoons, and aristocrats. It became a winter destination in the mid-19th century, when the first skiers ventured onto its slopes (locals thought they were nuts). Today there are five ski complexes, a bobsled run, curling rinks, even winter golf and horse racing on the frozen lake. In summer, golf and windsurfing are popular, and of course the spas still operate year-round. Expect chic shopping, posh restaurants, and sky-high prices.


When this track was first laid in 1928, some of the mountain bridges had to be dismantled for blizzards every winter, but in 1982 a new tunnel through the Furka mountain enabled the route to stay in operation year-round. There’s at least one train a day, with a second one added in summer. Coaches are comfortably upholstered, with dining cars and panoramic observation coaches; both first- and second-class service is available, and though it’s a pricey trip, substantial discounts are



The Glacier Express.

offered for children. Advance reservations are essential.

**i The Matterhorn-Gotthard Railway** ([www.glacierexpress.ch](http://www.glacierexpress.ch)). **Rail Europe** (☎ 800/438-7245; [www.raileurope.com](http://www.raileurope.com)).

 Zermatt, narrow-gauge from Visp or Brig, 4 hr. from Geneva. St. Moritz, 2 hr. from Chur.

 \$\$ **Hotel Riffelberg**, Zermatt-Umgebung (☎ 027/966-65-00; [www.zermatt.ch/riffelberg](http://www.zermatt.ch/riffelberg)). \$\$\$ **Hotel Waldhaus am See**, Via Dimleij 6, St. Moritz (☎ 081/836-60-00; [www.waldhaus-am-see.ch](http://www.waldhaus-am-see.ch)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Counting the tunnels and bridges.

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## Train Rides

## El Teleférico

*Venezuela's Cable Car to the Skies*

Ages 6 & up • Mérida, Venezuela

SET BETWEEN TWO SNOWCAPPED RIDGES OF THE Andes, the picturesque colonial town of **Mérida** is a lot like college towns everywhere, with cafes and bookstores and crowds of students roaming its narrow streets, thanks to the Universidad de los Andes. The **Sierra Nevada National Park** is next door, so there's always a crew of backpackers tramping around too. But one thing Mérida has that other college towns don't: the world's highest and longest cable car, running for 13km (8 miles) to the top of Pico Espejo.

The cable car begins in Plaza Las Heroínas, on the edge of downtown near the border of Sierra Nevada National Park. It's incredibly popular, so buy your tickets in advance and come early in the day (coming early may also mean clearer skies, though this high, there are no guarantees). Cars depart for the top only in the mornings; you'll be back down by midafternoon. The cable car usually runs Wednesday through Saturday, and maybe fewer days of the week in low season, so be sure to check ahead. Don't forget to dress warmly in layers, as the temperature will change several degrees on the way up. Remember, too, that the air is thinner up here—you'll really feel it, so don't overexert yourself.

The tramway consists of four individual stages. At each intermediate station, you have a brief break to walk around and enjoy the views before heading up the next one. Not everyone makes it all the way to the top—fourth-stage tickets are only sold up at Loma Redonda, the end of the third section. Up until then you ride in canary-yellow enclosed cars, but for the final stage, the cars are fire-engine red. The whole trip takes about an hour; you won't wear out children's attention spans.

The trip begins with a quick and high crossing over the **Río Chama**, a mountain river, then a steep ascent over **lush forests**. On the second stage, you'll notice the montane forest turning to cloud forest as you gain altitude, with forests supplanted by the scrub pines and distinctive velvety-leaved frailejones of the paramo. By the final stage, you've left the paramo and are above the tree line, swinging over barren mountainside with traces of snow on the highest peaks around you. At the top, a serenely beautiful white statue of the **Virgen de las Nieves** (Virgin of the Snows) presides over the peak. If the clouds permit, you can get a great view of **Pico Bolívar**, the highest mountain in Venezuela, crowned with a statue of its namesake hero.

## TAKING IN THE SCENERY

Another popular option is to get off at Loma Redonda and hire a **mule** for the 4- to 5-hour round-trip ride to Los Nevados, a tiny, isolated Andean mountain village. Mule-packing in the Andes—how many of their friends have done that?

**i** Plaza las Heroínas (☎ 0274/252-5050; [www.telefericodemerida.com](http://www.telefericodemerida.com)).

✈ Mérida.

🚗 \$\$\$\$ **Hotel & Spa La Sevillana**, Sector Pedregosa Alta (☎ 0274/266-3227; [www.andes.net/lasevillana](http://www.andes.net/lasevillana)). \$ **Posada Luz Caraballo**, in front of Plaza Milla (☎ 0274/252-5441).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Switching from the yellow cars to the special red ones.

## Train Rides

35

### Kuranda's Scenic Skyways

Ages 4 & up • Cairns to Kuranda & back, Australia

**T**HE QUEENSLAND COAST OF AUSTRALIA has not one but two world-class natural wonders: the Great Barrier Reef **(43)** and the Wet Tropics Rainforest. From a base at Cairns, one day you can go snorkeling on the coral cays, and the next head inland to the mountain village of Kuranda, an exotic retreat of cool mountain air and mist-wrapped rainforest. Some people drive up the winding 25km (16-mile) mountain road, but why remain earthbound when you can glide with the kids over the rainforest canopy in a cable car?

The **Skyrail Rainforest Cableway** is the world's longest gondola cableway, a

90-minute climb 7.5km (4½ miles) upwards in six-person gondolas. Get an early start and you'll have fine morning light for photographs, but don't cancel if it's raining—a silvery layer of mist only adds haunting beauty to the panorama. From the Skyrail terminal, in the northern Cairns suburbs (Captain Cook Hwy. at Kamerunga Rd., Caravonica Lakes), the view of the coast as you ascend is breathtaking. Rising over the foothills of the coastal range, watch the lush green of the rainforest take over beneath you; as the foliage gets thicker, you can spot ferns and orchids and the brilliant blue butterflies of the region.



Seeing Queensland by rail.



There are two stops, at Red Peak and Barron Falls, where you must change gondolas; take the time to stroll around the boardwalks at the intermediate stations for ground-level views of the rainforest.

Once you're in Kuranda, getting close to nature is very easy. You can walk through either of two aviaries—**Birdworld**, behind the Heritage markets off Rob Veivers Drive (☎ 07/4093 9188), or **The Aviary**, 8 Thongon St. (☎ 07/4093 7411)—or the outstanding **Australian Butterfly Sanctuary**, 8 Rob Veivers Dr. (☎ 07/4093 7575; [www.australianbutterflies.com](http://www.australianbutterflies.com)). The butterflies will land on you if you wear pink, red, and other bright colors. If you have time, the 40-hectare (99-acre) **Rainforestation Nature Park**, Kennedy Highway (☎ 07/4085 5008; [www.rainforest.com.au](http://www.rainforest.com.au)), offers visitors a 45-minute narrated ride into the rainforest on a World War II amphibious Army Duck; you can also see a performance by Aboriginal dancers, throw a boomerang on the Dreamtime Walk, or have a photo taken cuddling a koala in the wildlife park.

In the afternoon (2pm or 3:30pm), hustle back to the fern-draped Kuranda railroad station and get on the **Kuranda Scenic Railway**, which snakes 34km (21 miles) through the magnificent vistas of the Barron Gorge National Park, past gorges and waterfalls, and through 15 tunnels back down to Cairns Central rail station. Two spectacular rides in 1 day—what lucky children!

📍 **Skyrail Rainforest Cableway** (☎ 07/4038 1555; [www.skyrail.com.au](http://www.skyrail.com.au)). **Kuranda Scenic Railway** (☎ 07/4036 9249; [www.ksr.com.au](http://www.ksr.com.au)).

🏨 \$\$\$ **Hotel Sofitel Reef Casino**, 35–41 Wharf St., Cairns (☎ 1800/808 883 in Australia, 800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 020/8283 4500 in the U.K., or 07/4030 8888; [www.accorhotels.com](http://www.accorhotels.com)). \$ \$ **The Reef Retreat**, 10–14 Harpa St., Palm Cove, Cairns (☎ 07/4059 1744; [www.reefretreat.com.au](http://www.reefretreat.com.au)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Seeing the rainforest canopy from above.

## 36

## Boat Rides

## The Seattle-Victoria Ferry

### *Sailing the High-Speed Puget Cats*

All ages • Seattle, Washington, USA, to Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

**C**CROSSING THE U.S.-CANADA BORDER is generally a fairly routine experience—but not if you sail across it on a **high-speed catamaran** from Seattle, Washington, to Victoria, British Columbia. The trip takes only 3 hours, just enough time for the kids to roam around the boat, get a bite to eat, and stare out the windows at the gorgeous northwest coast. Exciting as open water is, it soon gets monotonous for children; one of the glories of this trip for kids is that most of the ride is on glacier-carved **Puget Sound**, where land can be viewed on either side, the rugged conifer-mantled highlands of the Olympic Peninsula on one side and the rural Skagit Valley on the other.

You leave from Seattle's busy ferry port, Pier 69, with the futuristic Space Needle lifting its curious head over the downtown Seattle skyline and majestic Mount Rainier visible to the south, snow-capped even in summer. Working your way past Seattle harbor's sailboat and kayak traffic, you'll enter convoluted Puget Sound, with the mountains of the Olympic Peninsula gradually rearing their peaks on your left. Coming out of Puget Sound near Port Townsend, you'll see the lovely San Juan Islands on the right (the same company runs ferries to the San Juans, including some whale-watching excursions). Then it's across the Strait of



The Seattle-Victoria ferries.

Juan de Fuca, the first stretch of open water on your voyage so far.

On the far side of that strait lies Vancouver—Vancouver Island, that is, which is not the same thing as the mainland city of Vancouver. What is on Vancouver Island is British Columbia's capital, Victoria, which is like a little slice of Victorian England served up on the northwest coast of North America. Ferry schedules are organized to make a day trip perfectly doable, with plenty of time to explore Victoria before heading back to Seattle. The mild Pacific climate is beautifully suited to horticulture, and

Victoria's pride and joy is its rose gardens, particularly the spectacular **Butchart Gardens**, 800 Benvenuto Ave., Brentwood Bay (☎ **250/652-4422**; [www.butchartgardens.com](http://www.butchartgardens.com)). If you can't sell your kids on visiting a garden, there's plenty to see around the charmingly restored Inner Harbour: **Miniature World** in the Fairmont Empress Hotel, 649 Humboldt St. (☎ **250/385-9731**), with loads of small-scale dioramas from history and literature, the glass-enclosed views of harbor creatures in the **Pacific Undersea Gardens**, 490 Belleville St. (☎ **250/382-5717**), and the **Victoria Butterfly Gardens**, 1461 Benvenuto Ave., Brentwood Bay (☎ **250/652-3822**), which are exactly what the name says.

☎ ☎ **800/888-2535** or 206/448-5000 or 250/382-8100; [www.victoriaclipper.com](http://www.victoriaclipper.com).

✈ Seattle-Tacoma International, 23km (14 miles). Victoria International, 26km (16 miles).

🚢 **Admiral Inn**, 257 Belleville St., Victoria (☎ **888/823-6472**; [www.admiral.bc.ca](http://www.admiral.bc.ca)). **The Edgewater**, Pier 67, 2411 Alaskan Way, Seattle (☎ **800/624-0670**; [www.edgewaterhotel.com](http://www.edgewaterhotel.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Gliding up the fjord in time for tea and scones.

## Boat Rides

37

# Cruising the Mighty Mississippi

## A River Ride through the Heart of America

All ages • Various locations along the Mississippi River, USA

THE NATIVE AMERICANS LIVING ON ITS SHORES called it the Messipi, or "big river," but in American lore the Mississippi River is so much more. Yes, it is long—at 2,350 miles, it's the third-longest river in the world—but as it surges north to south down the middle of America, it gives this continent a heartbeat that is essentially, uniquely ours.

I vividly remember the thrill of crossing it for the first time, at age 13, on a nighttime train, with a momentous feeling of Heading West. To ride its majestic brown waters, for whatever stretch of the river, is to feel connected to West and East and North and South all at once. And if you're going to do it, do it the right way, on a

**steam-powered paddle boat** with lacy white fretwork and fluted smokestacks and the whole banjo-strumming shebang.

Several river towns offer 1- or 2-hour paddle-wheel cruises to give you a taste of what it feels like to be out on that great river—St. Paul, Minnesota; La Crosse, Wisconsin; St. Louis, Missouri; Tunica Resort, Mississippi; and New Orleans, Louisiana all have sightseeing paddle-wheelers. From LeClaire, Iowa, you can even book a 2-day cruise on the *Riverboat Twilight* along the Upper Mississippi to Dubuque and back (☎ **800/331-1467**; [www.riverboatwillight.com](http://www.riverboatwillight.com)). To really give the kids that old-timey thrill, though, a longer trip is the way to go, to see how the river changes character over its course. The headwaters begin up in Minnesota at Lake Itasca, but the Mississippi is merely a small stream at that point; after it meets the Minnesota River at St. Anthony Falls, it widens significantly, with steep bluffs on either side. Just above St. Louis it joins up with the Illinois and then the Missouri rivers, becoming truly huge and fast-moving. As it rolls down into Arkansas and Louisiana, the softer soil of the Delta creates a mazy, loopy river course, with many islands and a lazy majesty all its own. By the time it

reaches New Orleans, the Mississippi has really *been somewhere*.

The **Delta Steamboat Company** rules the river when it comes to these extended journeys: It has three vintage paddle-wheelers with sleeping cabins, theaters, dining rooms, and even a swimming pool; a “riverlorian” on board tells stories of the river, and young passengers can hang out in the pilothouse and earn a cub pilot’s license. Itineraries vary according to which river ports you choose, from Minneapolis to St. Louis to Memphis to New Orleans. The boats dock at charming river towns along the way, with guided tours arranged; between ports, take along a copy of *Huckleberry Finn* or *Life on the Mississippi* and plunk yourself down in a deck chair while the kids scamper around the ship. A week on the river—it’s a great way to see America in microcosm, exploring it at the pace of another century.

☎ ☎ **800/338-4962**; [www.mississippirivercruises.com](http://www.mississippirivercruises.com).

✈ Depends on port of embarkation.

🛥 Onboard.

**WHY THEY’LL THANK YOU:** Rolling down the river.

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## Boat Rides

## Scouting Alaska’s Inside Passage

### *Ferries to the Glacier*

All ages • Juneau, Alaska, USA

**EVERY SUMMER**, boatloads of tourists crowd onto luxury cruise ships to be pampered on their way through Alaska. But that’s not my idea of a rugged wilderness experience—not when you can still travel in comfort on the swift, well-outfitted ferries of the **Alaska Marine Highway System**, with the option of planning your own itinerary to suit your family’s interests.

Officially designated an All-American Road, the Alaska Marine Highway covers 3,500 nautical miles from Bellingham,

Washington, out to the Aleutian Islands. A fleet of sleek blue-hulled ferries steams its entire length, but I think the most interesting segments are those of the Inside Passage, that crazy network of inlets and channels around the countless islands of the Alaskan Panhandle. Squeezed between the Canadian Yukon and the Gulf of Alaska, this little strip of southeast Alaska—a breathtaking mix of dense green northwest rainforest and pristine

white glaciers—stretches 500 miles from Ketchikan to Yakutat.

In the middle is Juneau, Alaska's capital city and where you'll probably arrive by plane. Before leaving Juneau, trundle the kids off to see the **Mendenhall Glacier**, Glacier Spur Road (☎ 907/789-0097), where you can stand in front of a wall of blue ice and feel its chilly breath. The two destinations that most interest my kids are in opposite directions from Juneau: **Ketchikan**, a spruced-up logging town with the world's largest collection of totem poles that's 17 hours south by ferry; and **Sitka**, an exotic mix of Russian and Tlingit cultures that's 8¼ hours north of Juneau by ferry. The beauty of taking the ferries? Using Juneau as a base and making separate excursions to Ketchikan and Sitka just takes planning. If you schedule it right, you may even be able to hit every town at an hour when the cruise mobs are gone and the locals relaxed.

Spending several hours on these ferries is no problem. These are handsome modern craft, with restaurants, gift shops, and in some cases even movie theaters

on board, not to mention solariums and observation lounges where you can park yourselves to watch the scenic coast roll past. Naturalists often come along for the ride to talk about Alaska's wildlife and geology with passengers; some ships have small video arcades or play areas for toddlers. For overnight journeys, you can reserve two- to four-berth cabins (book several months in advance for summer voyages), although you are also free to roll out your sleeping bags on the comfy reclining seats in the lounges. Hey, that counts as roughing it in my book.

📍 6858 Glacier Hwy. (☎ 800/642-0066 or 907/465-3941; [www.ferryalaska.com](http://www.ferryalaska.com)).

✈ Juneau International.

🏠 \$\$ **The Driftwood Lodge**, 435 Willoughby Ave., Juneau (☎ 800/544-2239; [www.driftwoodalaska.com](http://www.driftwoodalaska.com)). \$\$\$ **Goldbelt Hotel Juneau**, 51 E. Egan Dr., Juneau (☎ 888/478-6909; [www.goldbelt-tours.com](http://www.goldbelt-tours.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Waking up to see a glacier slide past your window.

## Boat Rides

39

# Pirate Cruising in the Caribbean

Ages 6 & up • The Bahamas or the Cayman Islands

EVER SINCE DISNEY's *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie came out (yar, that Johnny Depp), the pirate franchise has gotten a new lease on life; I know several 6-year-olds who won't leave the house without their eye patches and cutlasses. Entrepreneurs from Clearwater, Florida, to Bath, Maine, have launched pirate-themed harbor tours, but if you're going to do it, do it the right way: in the warm blue waters of the Caribbean.

The most elaborate outing is **Beyond Boundaries's** 4-day pirate cruise, on a Windjammer tall ship departing from Miami and ending up in Nassau, The Bahamas. After all, with its scattered

islands and secret coves, the Bahamas was a hornet's nest of pirate action back in the day. While at sea, the crew teach passengers sword fighting; pirate movies are projected onto the ship's big white sails; buried treasure is dug up on a deserted island; and a general goofy ship-board atmosphere reigns. Once you arrive in Nassau, there's a dinner at the interactive **Pirates of Nassau**, Bay Street (☎ 242/356-3759; [www.pirates-of-nassau.com](http://www.pirates-of-nassau.com)), and a sightseeing tour of Nassau led by a pirate storyteller. (Even if you don't do the cruise, these Nassau attractions are good for pirate parents to know about.) Book ahead to get the right

cabin configuration, before other families snap up the big cabins. There's a 9-day option if you want to continue on to Jamaica, where the pirate activities are more historic and less interactive.

In the Cayman Islands, a shorter option is a 2-hour coastal cruise out of Grand Cayman on the **Jolly Roger**, a rakishly decorated blue boat that is a two-thirds replica of Christopher Columbus's flagship, the *Nina*. The troupe of buccaneer actors on board perform all the standard pirate shtick, conscripting kids to haul the mainsail and swab the deck; there's also a swim stop for some snorkeling and splashing about. This colorful outing feeds on the Caymans's history as a Caribbean pirate hideout—many present-day Caymanites are descendants of the original pirates. Every October, Grand Cayman

holds a weeklong **Pirate Heritage Festival** that's tons of swashbuckling fun—though, with most kids in school that time of year, it degenerates into a rum-soaked adult party, quite in keeping with the moral character of pirates.

**i Beyond Borders Adventure Travel** (☎ 800/487-1136; [www.potcfantrips.com](http://www.potcfantrips.com)). **The Jolly Roger** (☎ 345/945-SAIL; [www.jollyrogercayman.com](http://www.jollyrogercayman.com)).

✈ Miami International. Grand Cayman.

🚢 \$\$\$ **Harbour Heights**, W. Bay Rd., Grand Cayman (☎ 809/947-4660). \$\$\$ **Ramada Treasure Island Resort**, W. Bay Rd., Grand Cayman (☎ 809/949-777; [www.ramada.com](http://www.ramada.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Scrambling like monkeys up the rigging.

## 40

## Boat Rides

## Punting on the Cam

Ages 6 & up • Cambridge, East Anglia, England

**PUNTING ON THE RIVER CAM** in a wood-built, flat-bottomed boat (which looks somewhat like a Venetian gondola) is a traditional pursuit of students and visitors to Cambridge University, one of England's two venerable universities (see also Oxford 199). Wafting your way downstream, you pass along the ivy-covered "Backs" of the colleges, their lush gardens sweeping down to the Cam. It's one of the best ways an outsider can glimpse student life at this university, where the illustrious graduates include everyone from Isaac Newton to Charles Darwin to Stephen Hawking.

**Cambridge**, founded in the early 13th century, is a conglomeration of some 31 colleges. The most famous of them you'll pass as you head downstream are St. John's, founded 1511, with its Bridge of Sighs arching over the river; Trinity College, founded by King Henry VIII in 1546 and the alma mater of Isaac Newton and


Lord Byron; King's College, founded 1441, with its exquisite medieval Chapel (be sure to go visit it on foot after punting); and the lovely Queen's College, dating from 1448, just before the river splits at Sheep's Green.


People sprawl along the banks of the Cam on a summer day to judge and tease you as you maneuver your punt with a pole about 4.5m (15 ft.) long. The river's floor is muddy, and many a student has lost his pole in the riverbed shaded by the willows. If your pole gets stuck, it's better to leave it sticking in the mud instead of risking a plunge into the river.

About 3km (1¾ miles) upriver lie the meadows of **Grantchester**, immortalized by poet Rupert Brooke (the town lies about a mile from the meadows). When the town clock stopped for repairs in 1985, its hands were left frozen "for all time" at 10 minutes to 3, in honor of Brooke's famed sonnet "The Soldier."

**Scudamore's Boatyards**, Granta Place (☎ **01223/359750**), by the Anchor Pub, has been in business since 1910. You rent boats by the hour, and there's a maximum of six persons per punt; the place is open year-round, although March through October is the high season. If you'd rather not attempt punting yourself, you can hire a "chauffeur" for a (hefty) additional fee.

① **Cambridge Tourist Information Centre**, Wheeler St. (☎ **01223/457577**).

 Cambridge, 1 hr. from London.

 \$\$\$ **Cambridge Garden House Moat House**, Granta Place, Mill Lane (☎ **01223/259988**; [www.moathousehotels.com](http://www.moathousehotels.com)).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Rolling, rolling, rolling on the river.

## Boat Rides

41

# Cruising the Fjords

Ages 6 & up • Norway

IT TOOK, OH, 3 MILLION YEARS OR SO to carve out the dramatic furrows and fissures that make the Norwegian coast look like nowhere else on earth. At some points these deeply indented fjords become so narrow that a boat can hardly wedge between the steep mountainsides. Waterfalls spill down their cliffs, brightly painted storybook villages nestle in their creases, rags of mist trail around rocky coves. To glide up these crystal-clear waters by ship is an unforgettable experience.

The scenic city of **Bergen**, a quarter of the way up Norway's coast, is often called the gateway to the fjords; north of here, the coast suddenly fragments and crumbles dramatically into scattered archipelagoes and inlets. Elegantly appointed steamers travel north from Bergen along this breathtaking coast, taking 5 or 6 days to round Scandinavia's northern tip and reach Kirkenes. The round-trip journey circles around and sails back south, timing things so that you'll see in the daytime anything you missed while sleeping in your berth on the way up. Though these are luxury cruise vessels—and you'll pay cruise prices to travel on them—the ships are also transport for locals, stopping at 34 ports en route, with enough time for passengers to hop off for shopping and shore excursions. Among the major stops are **Trondheim**, a city with a remarkably well-preserved timbered medieval district;


**Bodo**, the first port north of the Arctic Circle; **Tromsø**, site of the world's northernmost planetarium (see Tromsø 311); the fishing port of **Hammerfest**, where you may see local Lapps with their reindeer; and **Honningsvåg**, the world's northernmost village and terminus of the Midnight



One of Norway's dramatic fjords.

Sun Road, where you can take an excursion to the stark Nordskapp plateau, the “top of Europe,” with its dark cliffs dropping precipitously into the Arctic Ocean. But it’s not the sights onshore that the kids will remember in the end—it’s the day after day of those stunning fjord views, with the northern light sparkling off the waters and each new turn revealing another dramatic forested chasm.

**i Bergen Line** (☎ 800/323-7436 or 212/319-1300). **Norwegian Costal Voyages** (☎ 800/334-6544; [www.cruisenorway.com](http://www.cruisenorway.com)).

 Bergen.

 Sleeping quarters provided onboard. \$ **Minotel Dreggen**, Sandbrugaten 3, Bergen (☎ 55-31-61-55; [www.hotel-dreggen.no](http://www.hotel-dreggen.no)). \$\$ **Quality Edvard Grieg Hotel and Suites**, Sandsliåsen 50, Bergen (☎ 55-98-00-00; [www.choicehotels.com](http://www.choicehotels.com)).

**BEST TIME:** Summer June–July, when the sun barely sets.

**WHY THEY’LL THANK YOU:** When you cross the Arctic Circle—and keep on going.

## 42

## Boat Rides

## Crisscrossing Lake Como

All ages • Como, Italy

**BACK AND FORTH WE WENT**, trying to decide which of northern Italy’s romantic lakes to visit: Garda? Maggiore? Como? We finally chose Lake Como because it’s the smallest, only 4km (2½ miles) across at its widest point, with the far shore always visible, and therefore easier for our toddler son to scope out. (It’s also closest to Milan, about 48km/30 miles away). I’ve heard the other two are spectacular, but I don’t see how they could out-enthrall Lake Como, its shimmering deep-blue waters bordered with flowery gardens and aristocratic villas of soft golden

stone. And even though we had a rental car, we soon realized the best way to enjoy Lake Como is to crisscross it on ferries, sitting in the balmy open air with other travelers instead of enclosed in a steel cocoon.

Lake Como is incredibly long and skinny, with its most charming towns clustered mid-lake. Starting from the town of Como at the southwest tip, we headed north along the western shore 5km (3 miles) to **Cernobbio**, a chic haven dominated by the celebrated Villa d’Este (see the hotel recommendation below),



Lake Como.

originally built in the 16th century. After a stroll in its lush gardens, it was north another half-hour to **Tremezzo**, where the landscaping is surprisingly tropical—citrus trees, palms, cypresses, and magnolias—and as we stood on its panoramic lakeshore we felt our urban anxieties begin to dissolve. Leaving the car behind, we hopped a ferry to **Bellagio**, a tony resort town as gracious as its Vegas namesake is garish. Clinging to a promontory at the lake's fork, Bellagio has steep cobblestone streets to climb, as well as arcaded shops, smart cafes, and a blossoming lakeside promenade.

Our next ferry took us to picturesque **Varenna**, which still has a certain fishing-village quaintness despite a stock of resort hotels. Here we investigated Italy's shortest river, the Fiumelatte, a mere 250m (820 ft.) long. It only appears in summer, rushing frothy and milk-white down a rock face to crash into the lake. Leonardo da Vinci once tried to determine the water's source, but neither he—nor anyone else—has ever found it. We boarded another ferry (by this time it was like a game to our son) and crossed back west

to **Cadenabbia** to see 19th-century **Villa Carlotta** (☎ 0344-40405), or at least its gardens, with exotic flowers and banks of rhododendrons and azaleas. (There's a fine art museum, too, but we had a toddler to amuse.) A mile south and we were back at Tremezzo to reclaim our car.

Lake Como is definitely a summertime destination—the boat service operates only Easter to September, and many hotels close November to March. But under a blue sky, when the sun shines and the flowers bloom, it's like heaven on earth.

**i Società Navigazione Lago di Como**, Lungo Lario (☎ 031-304060 or 031-579211). **Como tourist office**, Piazza Cavour 17 (☎ 031-269712; www.lakecomo.org).



Como, 40 min. from Milan.

**\$\$\$ Grand Hotel Villa d'Este**, Via Regina 40, Cernobbio (☎ 031-3481; www.villadeste.it). **\$ Hotel Du Lac**, Piazza Mazzini 32, Bellagio (☎ 031-950320; www.bellagiohoteldulac.com).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Hopping a ferry like it was the local bus.

## Boat Rides

43

# Gliding down the Danube From Vienna to Budapest in Style

All ages • Vienna, Austria, to Budapest, Hungary

**VIENNA AND BUDAPEST** are two of Europe's most romantic cities, and two of my personal favorites, so the idea of linking them with a boat trip up the beautiful blue Danube was impossible to resist. Though the Danube doesn't have the majestic Wagnerian chasms and castles of the Rhine, I love the way it waltzes sweetly through green forests and farmlands, through eastern Austria, past Bratislava and along the Slovakia/Hungary border, and then down through the lush Hungarian lowlands. The water may be more brown than blue these days, but the Danube is still beautiful.

Vienna and Budapest make a natural pairing: Both have a 19th-century look and pace, great for strolling aimlessly, lingering in coffeehouses (where the pastries are fabulous!), and listening to schmaltzy music. Their grandest churches are both dedicated to St. Stephen—Vienna's **Gothic Domkirche St. Stephan** and Budapest's domed **St. Stephen's Basilica**. Vienna has the **Prater** (home of the **Ferris Wheel** 485); Budapest, the **zoo** and amusement rides in **City Park**. Budapest has medieval **Buda Palace** 86, Vienna the baroque Habsburg palace of Schönbrunn.



Budapest still bears traces of its years under Communist rule, but less so than other former Iron Curtain capitals.

**River steamers** make a day of this journey, leaving Vienna at 6am and making stops in **Komaron**, site of a famous Austro-Hungarian fortress, and **Esztergom**, with its massive neoclassical cathedral. You'll arrive in Budapest late that night, ready to find your hotel and set off sightseeing the next morning. To make a round-trip in 1 day, you can travel via **hydrofoil**, which takes only 5½ hours to get from Vienna to Budapest or vice versa; you can opt to take the train back that night, which gives you an extra 3 hours for sightseeing in Budapest. There are three downsides to the hydrofoil option: The spray raised by the boat's jets obscures some details of the scenery, there are no sightseeing stops along the way, and it runs only April through October. But still.

Another (considerably cheaper) option is just to do the Hungarian section of the river, departing from and returning to

Budapest. This particularly scenic stretch of the river, called the **Danube Bend**, is overlooked by tall forested hills; there's a dramatic horseshoe bend at Visegrád, known as the Elbow of the Danube, and stops can be made at several charming riverside towns. Leisurely boat rides up the Danube bend are run April through September by MAHART, the state shipping company (☎ 1/318-1704; [www.mahartpassnave.hu](http://www.mahartpassnave.hu)). From Budapest to Esztergom takes 5 hours.

❗ **DDSG Blue Danube Shipping Co.**, Friedrichstrasse 7, Vienna (☎ 01/588800; [www.ddsg-blue-danube.at](http://www.ddsg-blue-danube.at)).

✈ Vienna International. Ferihegy Budapest.

🚢 **Hotel Erzsébet**, V. Károlyi Mihály u. 11-15, Budapest (☎ 1/889-3700; [www.danubiusgroup.com](http://www.danubiusgroup.com)). **Hotel-Pension Suzanne**, Walfischgasse 4, Vienna (☎ 01/5132507).

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** A dreamy glide into Europe's old-fashioned heart.

## 44

## Boat Rides

## Riverboating up the Amazon

### *Songs of the Rainforest*

Ages 8 & up • from Manaus, Brazil

**IF YOUR KIDS ARE LIKE MINE**, they've raised money in school for saving the rainforest—but do they really know what it is that they're saving? Before they grow up, at least once they should encounter the world's biggest forest, this amazing tropical wilderness that accompanies the world's largest river on its mighty course through Brazil to the Atlantic Ocean. Indeed it is endangered, indeed we ought to save it—and, properly inspired, your children and mine can do it.

Thanks to the rise in eco-tourism, rainforest outings are much more accessible than they used to be. The usual starting

point for visiting the Amazon basin is Manaus, the largest city in the region, located on the shores of the Rio Negro. Numerous operators run boat trips out of Manaus, usually on a double-decked riverboat that serves as your home base. These package tours generally include certain common elements: nature-spotting excursions in canoes up the smaller channels, sunset and sunrise tours, wildlife-watching walks under the leafy canopy of the rainforest, caiman spotting, piranha fishing, and a visit to a *caboclo* (river peasant) settlement with houses built on stilts. But when you're not on an

## TAKING IN THE SCENERY

excursion, you're moving on the wide brown river, its green shores slipping away to either side. There is always something to see, even if it's just the vastness of the river itself. **Viverde** (☎ 092/248-9988; [www.viverde.com.br](http://www.viverde.com.br)), a local travel company, handles a range of tours; **Amazon Clipper Cruises** (☎ 092/656-1246; [www.amazonclipper.com.br](http://www.amazonclipper.com.br)) has three old-style Amazon riverboats which make regular 3- and 4-day trips; **Swallows and Amazons** (☎ 092/622-1246; [www.swallowsandamazonstours.com](http://www.swallowsandamazonstours.com)) runs a variety of adventure-tour itineraries on traditional wooden riverboats.

The most amazing thing to see around Manaus is the Meeting of the Waters (Encontra das Aguas), where the dark, slow waters of the Rio Negro meet the fast, muddy brown waters of the Rio

Solimões. Because of differences in velocity, temperature, and salinity, the two rivers don't immediately blend but carry on side by side for miles. If the boat trip you're signed up for doesn't pass through this phenomenal juncture, try booking a flight-seeing tour over it—and actually, come to think of it, that's the best way to see how its contrasting colors gradually mix and mingle, from up on high.

**i** **Manaus Tourist Center Tourist Service Center** (☎ 092 3231-1998; [www.amazonastur.am.gov.br](http://www.amazonastur.am.gov.br)).



Eduardo Gomes in Manaus 16km (10 miles).



Included in boat tours.

**WHY THEY'LL THANK YOU:** Either the piranhas or the parrots—depends on the kid.