

## Mississippi River

The Mississippi River is the second longest river in North America, just behind the Missouri River. It lies entirely within the USA and passes through 10 states: Minnesota, Louisiana, Wisconsin, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas and Mississippi. It has several tributaries leading into it, helping it to be the fourth largest river in terms of how much water it carries. There are several large cities along the banks of the Mississippi River such as Memphis, New Orleans, Minneapolis and Baton Rouge. Due to its length, the Mississippi River has been divided into three sections – the upper, middle and lower Mississippi. The river is home to a wide variety of animal life, despite it being busy with large river traffic in certain sections.



### Key facts

- The Mississippi River was formed during the last ice age when tonnes of glacial meltwater carved valleys out of the rock down towards the Gulf of Mexico.
- It is one of North America's greatest migration routes for birds and fish, with 60% of North America's birds following the river to find their way south.
- Though its true length is disputed, the Mississippi River is around 2350 miles in length and 11 miles across at its widest point.
- The river runs north to south, almost from the Canadian border to its mouth at the Gulf of Mexico. It has several sections of whitewater for kayaking and large lakes for more family-friendly water sports.
- With over 260 species of fish, the Mississippi River contains at least 25% of all fish species in North America. Fishing for catfish is a popular tourist activity.

## Rocky Mountains

The Rocky Mountains, or 'Rockies', form a large mountain range that runs down the western side of North America, stretching down from northern Canada to New Mexico. This massive range forms the Great Divide. Rainwater on the western slopes runs down to the Pacific Ocean and rainwater on the eastern slopes runs down into the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans. The Rockies are made up of over 100 smaller mountain ranges. Within the USA, the main range itself is split into four sections – the Northern Rockies, the Middle Rockies, the Southern Rockies and the Colorado Plateau. These sections all have a selection of national parks, where tourists come to hike, camp, or take part in mountain sports.



### Key facts

- There are around 100 ski resorts along the length of the Rocky Mountains in places such as Aspen, Colorado and Whitefish Mountain, Montana, which are very popular during the winter.
- Skiing, snowshoeing, ice skating and sledging are popular winter sports in the Rockies. More extreme winter pastimes include ice climbing, snowmobiling and snowboarding.
- In the summer months, people come to the Rockies to camp, hike, kayak, mountain bike and practise yoga. Extreme summer sports include mountain climbing, wingsuiting and BASE jumping.
- The many national parks of the Rockies, such as Yellowstone National Park and Sinks Canyon, are home to a wide variety of wildlife, which makes them popular destinations for nature lovers. There are also many hiking trails and natural landforms such as geysers, glaciers and rivers to explore.
- In 2016, over 77 million people visited the Southern Rockies area within Colorado.

## Grand Canyon

The Grand Canyon is a huge, steep-sided gorge where the Colorado River has carved its way through the rock over millions of years and the wind and rain have eroded the landscape into the interesting shapes we see today.

The Grand Canyon is located in Arizona, Nevada and Utah and is 227 miles long. It is over a mile deep in places, and its width ranges from 160 metres to 18 miles wide.

The Grand Canyon National Park includes the section of the canyon that runs from Lake Powell in the east to Lake Mead in the west. The amount and speed of water that flows through the Colorado River is the reason for the canyon's great depth.

Dams have been built to slow the flow of water from the river and create reservoirs for the increasing population in the area. Hoover Dam and Glen Canyon Dam have helped control the Colorado River water and the amount of erosion it causes.



### Key facts

- The Grand Canyon is one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World and attracts around five million tourists a year.
- The Grand Canyon Skywalk is a U-shaped bridge with a glass floor, which has been placed over a 240-metre vertical drop. Visitors can walk on the glass floor and enjoy unprecedented views of the canyon.
- Hiking and rafting are very popular activities and there are many campsites throughout the area. However, the high temperatures of the desert environment can cause problems, and tourists are advised to prepare carefully for the heat.
- Visitors can also enjoy views of the Grand Canyon from the air. Aeroplane flights, helicopter tours and even skydiving trips are available for more adventurous tourists.
- Truly extreme athletes can take part in the Grand to Grand Ultra marathon, a 273-kilometre, six-stage race which lasts seven days. What a challenge!

## Everglades National Park

The Everglades is an area of tropical wetlands in the southern tip of Florida, which contains a variety of habitats such as pine forest, swampland, mangrove forest and a coastal bay area near to the Florida Keys. The park is home to a wide variety of tropical marine and freshwater species of animals and plants. Due to the tropical climate of the area, the Everglades has a dry season from November to April, and a wet season from May to October. The Everglades needs a lot of maintenance, as damage from hurricanes and tropical storms happens frequently. The area is often invaded by exotic species from other countries, which harm the native plants and animals. Exotic pets have also been released into the Everglades and experts believe that 25% of animal species living there are not native to the Everglades.



### Key facts

- Boating is a popular pastime in the Everglades, and visitors can travel along routes such as the Wilderness Waterway and the Turner River Canoe Trail.
- There are plenty of hiking routes to follow, with campsites along the way. Visitors can walk to places such as Alligator Alley or take the Tamiami Trail to the viewing tower at Shark Valley.
- With its marine environments, tourists visiting the Everglades can dive among coral reefs or take a glass-bottomed boat trip to spot tropical marine creatures.
- Birdwatching is another common activity in the Everglades. Visitors travel to Corkscrew Swamp to see tropical birds and rare plant life.
- Over one million visitors come to the Everglades every year.

## Old Faithful – Geyser

Old Faithful is a geyser found in Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. It blasts hot water almost 60 metres into the air. It was named Old Faithful in 1870 because of the regular eruptions it gives out. Each eruption is around 90 minutes apart. Every time Old Faithful erupts, over 20,000 litres of boiling water shoot up into the air, lasting for around five minutes. Old Faithful is found in the Upper Geyser Basin of Yellowstone National Park. This area covers approximately two square miles and contains nearly 500 geysers, which is about a quarter of all the world's geysers. Yellowstone National Park is an area with a lot of volcanic activity and much of the park itself sits inside a huge crater caused by a volcanic eruption over half a million years ago. Old Faithful is the most popular of all the geysers in the park and many visitors come to watch the eruptions.



### Key facts

- Old Faithful has several hotels, dining areas and a visitors centre nearby.
- Many visitors watch the eruption from the geyser's perimeter.
- The dining room of the Old Faithful Inn allows great views of the erupting geyser.
- Around three million tourists visit Yellowstone National Park each year.
- Hiking is another popular activity in the area around Old Faithful.

# Lake Superior

Lake Superior is the largest of the five Great Lakes of the USA, and is one of the largest lakes in the world. The southern and western shores are in the United States, but the northern and eastern shores are in Canada. Lake Superior is 350 miles long from east to west and 160 miles wide at its widest point. Some parts of the lake are over 400 metres deep. Lake Superior has a section of whitewater and rapids, where the water from the lake drains into Lake Huron. The northern shore of Lake Superior is very rocky, with coves and high cliffs and forests surround large parts of the lake. The waters of the lake are often busy with ships.



## Key facts

- Lake Superior is very popular with kayakers and sailors due to the many natural harbours and coves.
- With its many forests along the shore, hikers and campers are frequent visitors to the lake.
- The Lake Superior Circle Tour is a 1000 mile road route that allows visitors to drive around the lake, with many hotels and campsites along the route.
- The beaches around the lake attract families to the shoreline each summer.
- Fishing trips are popular because the lake is home to 78 species of fish including trout, salmon and pike.
- The lake is visited by 3–4 million people each year.

# Monument Valley

Monument Valley is an area of the Colorado Plateau that is known for its giant, red rock formations called buttes. The buttes are the remains of mountains that would have been part of the Rockies, but have been eroded and shaped by the weather. The valley sits across the border of Arizona and Utah. It has a desert environment, with hot summers and cold winters, but it doesn't get as hot as other deserts due to its height. It is easy to drive to the valley, as U.S. Highway 163 runs close by. Visitors can pay to drive down a scenic driving route or take a guided tour. There are many campsites and hotels en route. Monument Valley is also part of the Navajo Nation Reservation.



## Key facts

- Hiking is a common pastime, but tourists have to be part of a guided tour led by a qualified Navajo guide.
- Many westerns have been filmed in the valley, so horseback tours are available for tourists who want the 'cowboy' experience.
- Hot air balloon rides are available from May to September and are a popular way for tourists to see the valley.
- As the valley is part of the land owned by the Navajo, the visitor centre contains information and artefacts that explain Navajo history.
- There are a variety of shops selling items ranging from tourist souvenirs to hand-crafted Navajo jewellery and ornaments.
- Biking is strictly forbidden, as bike tyres would damage the sandstone environment.

## Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls lies at the half-way point of the Niagara River. This river links the two Great Lakes of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, and forms part of the border between Canada and the USA. Three separate waterfalls make up Niagara Falls. The larger Horseshoe Falls (670 metres across) sits on the Canadian side of the border, while the smaller, yet still impressive, American Falls (320 metres across) sits within the USA. The Bridal Veil Falls is the smallest of the three waterfalls, at just 17 metres wide, and is separated from the American Falls by the tiny Luna Island. Around 12 million people visit the Niagara Falls each year. The cities on either side of the falls are both called Niagara Falls, but one is in Ontario, Canada, while the other is in New York State, USA.



### Key facts

- Boat trips are popular with tourists. The 'Cave of the Winds' tour takes visitors to the bottom of the Bridal Veil Falls and American Falls. The 'Journey Behind the Falls' takes visitors to the bottom of the Horseshoe Falls.
- There are several observation towers that provide aerial views of the Niagara Falls such as the Skylon Tower on the Canadian side and the Niagara Falls Observation Tower on the US side.
- There are many parks near Niagara Falls, such as Whirlpool State Park, which is popular for walking and biking.
- The Niagara Sky Wheel was constructed in 2006. Tourists sit inside large capsules and are taken over 50 metres into the air to enjoy amazing aerial views of Niagara Falls.