

Great American breaks for 2019

Explore California's stunning landscapes, ride a Harley on Route 66, or go on a five-city foodie tour. **Aaron Millar** has the top holidays

The west

1 Grand Canyon rafting

Celebrate the 100th anniversary of the park with a guided, small-group whitewater-rafting trip, taking in the full 277 miles of the canyon, camping out on deserted beaches and exploring rarely visited areas along the way. Or clamber into a dory rowing boat and paddle along the Colorado River, just as John Wesley Powell did on the first official passage through the canyon in 1869.

Details An eight-day Grand Canyon rafting trip with all camping equipment and meals, a river guide and transport from Las Vegas costs from £2,239pp. The 14-day Grand Canyon Dory

Expedition costs from £3,299pp. Flights to Las Vegas cost extra. Departures are from April to September (020 8682 8920, grandamericanadventures.com)

2 Explore Yosemite

The park's spectacular Mariposa Grove, with its giant sequoias, is open again after three years of restoration. From there follow the Gold Rush Trail, aka Highway 49, in its centennial year, through old mining towns to the sparkling waters of South Lake Tahoe and the wineries of Sacramento and back to the culture and nightlife of the San

Francisco Bay Area.

Details A 15-day California Lakes and Mountains fly-drive with car hire and accommodation, costs from £2,446pp (020 8776 8709, frontier-america.co.uk). Flights cost from £350 return (norwegian.com)

3 Art in the desert

The Desert X contemporary art exhibition uses the landscape of the Coachella Valley as a canvas and exhibition space, with work from internationally acclaimed artists spread over 50 miles of the greater Palm Springs area. Base yourself at the new boutique Sands Hotel and Spa; it is bold, gorgeous and ▶

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like staying in an art installation.

Details Doubles cost from \$179 (£135) (00 1 760 321 3771, sandshotelandspa.com). Desert X runs from February 9 to April 21; entry is free (desertx.org)

4 California family fun

The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, the largest museum of its kind, opens in Hollywood this year and will take fans behind the scenes of the world's most popular films. At nearby Universal Studios Hollywood, a new Jurassic World ride is set to open in the summer, as is Disneyland California's new attraction, Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge. Visit all three on this Trailfinders trip.

Details A 14-day Ultimate Family Adventure with flights to Los Angeles, accommodation, car hire, a three-day ticket to Disneyland Resort and a one-day ticket to Universal Studios and SeaWorld San Diego, costs from £2,449pp (020 7368 1200, trailfinders.com)

5 Hot springs, Arizona

In the late 19th and early 20th century Castle Hot Springs was the place to be, welcoming everyone from the Rockefellers to the Roosevelts. Now it's back and more luxurious than ever. The new all-inclusive boutique resort, set in a remote canyon, opens this month, with 32 cottages, three hot-spring pools, a spa, organic food picked fresh from the in-house farm.

Details A cabin for two costs from \$1,200 a night, including all food, soft drinks and activities (00 1 877 600 1137, castlehotsprings.com)

6 Death Valley tour

Death Valley gets a bad rap. But far from being a boring wasteland, these 5,000 square miles of eastern California are filled with some of the most stunning landscapes in the country, from sand dunes the size of skyscrapers to rainbow-coloured hills. Last year it got even better with the opening of the Oasis at Death Valley, a luxury desert retreat in the heart of the park. Soak in the spring-fed swimming pool and savour the sunsets and stars.

Details There are two hotels at the Oasis

at Death Valley. Doubles at the luxury Inn at Death Valley cost from \$349 (£267) a night. Doubles at the family-friendly Ranch at Death Valley cost from \$249 a night (00 1 760 786 2345, oasisatdeathvalley.com)

7 Santa Fe chic

Opening in the autumn, the luxurious Bishop's Lodge Santa Fe in New Mexico is the perfect base to explore one of America's most beautiful cultural cities. Set in a secluded canyon, with views over the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the 317-acre adobe-style resort includes stables and a trout stream, as well as hiking and mountain-biking trails. But as lovely as it is, Santa Fe is still the star, with a charming historic district and one of the best art scenes in the country.

Details Doubles cost from \$450 a night (00 1 310 437 4636, bishopslodge.com). For more information see santafe.org

8 Western thrills

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid rode on to the big screen 50 years ago and this self-drive trip through the Wild West terrain of Utah, Arizona and Colorado will take you to many of the locations from the film. Highlights include Monument Valley, backdrop to more westerns than any other American landscape, and Mesa Verde National Park, the best-preserved Native American cliff dwellings in the country.

Details A 14-day self-guided Canyon Country and National Parks trip with flights to Las Vegas, returning from Phoenix, accommodation and car hire, costs from £2,695pp (020 7838 5892, wexas.com)

9 Explore Zion park

Zion Mountain Ranch is only five minutes from the eastern entrance of the iconic Zion National Park. The ranch features designer wooden cabins with amazing park views, fresh farm-to-table food for guests and free-roaming buffaloes outside. And it's just a couple of hours from the remote north rim of

the Grand Canyon. Fewer than 10 per cent of visitors see the canyon from this hard-to-access side; it's quiet and wild,

with great trails and viewpoints.

Details A cabin for two costs from \$189 a night (00 1 866 648 2555, zmr.com)

10 Ranching in Montana

This new horseback adventure takes guests deep into the back country of Montana's spectacular Beartooth Mountains on a private guided ranch and pack trip, which, unusually for these kinds of wilderness rides, can be tailored to all ability levels and for children aged ten and over. The itinerary combines a few hours in the saddle each day with hiking, fly-fishing and exploring the area's rich Native American heritage. The camps are rustic, but comfortable.

Details An eight-day guided Montana Wilderness Pack Trip with two nights at the Barron Working Ranch, five nights camping, all meals, horses, equipment and transfers costs from £2,179pp. Flights to Montana are not included. Departures are in July and August (01509 618811, ranchrider.com)

11 Utah ranch adventure

The Lodge at Blue Sky, just outside Salt Lake City, opens in May in the mountains of Park City, Utah. It features an Olympic-size equestrian centre, private trails for riding, hiking or mountain biking and, in winter, heli-skiing on Utah's most remote and beautiful peaks. Inside, the design is sleek and contemporary, with picture windows leading the eye to the tips of the Wasatch Mountains.

Details Doubles cost from \$800 per night, room-only, including airport transfers and some activities (00 1 866 296 8998, bluesky.aubergeresorts.com)

12 Paddle-wheel cruise on the Columbia River

Follow in the footsteps of the 19th-century explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark on this new luxury river cruise through the canyons, mountains and winelands of the Pacific Northwest. Navigating along the Columbia and Snake rivers, on a route first forged by the pair's pioneering 1804 expedition, you can take in some of America's most spectacular landscapes

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from the comfort of one of its grandest paddle-wheel river cruisers, the *American Empress*. Highlights include a visit to Hells Canyon, the deepest gorge in North America, and cruising through the dramatic Columbia River Gorge.

Details A nine-day Rivers of the New World cruise with flights to Spokane via Seattle, full board on the cruise and guided excursions costs from £3,495pp (020 3553 3722, vjv.com)

13 Aurora by rail

This new self-guided trip from Alaskan Railroad is all about experiencing one of the true wonders of the north, the aurora borealis. Beginning in Fairbanks, you'll spend two nights off-grid in a remote boreal forest, staying in a specially designed geodesic aurora viewing dome. Then you will set off on the Aurora Winter Train to Talkeetna, near Denali, for "flightseeing" over the park and the chance to try your hand at Alaska's state sport, dog-sledding.

Details A nine-day borealis trip with accommodation, train tickets and guided excursions costs from \$1,639pp. Flights to Fairbanks are not included (00 1 907 265 2494, alaskarailroad.com)

14 Alaskan luxury chalet

Perched above a remote glacier in the middle of Denali National Park, Sheldon

Chalet, accessible only by helicopter, is the most exclusive new wilderness lodge in the country. Activities include heli-fishing for salmon and heli-hikes, but, best of all, are the dark skies, far northern latitude and high altitude here, which provide some of the brightest and most reliable aurora-viewing conditions in the world. Each of the five luxurious guest rooms have panoramic windows looking out to the glacier.

Details One night's full board with drinks, activities and helicopter transfer from Talkaneeta, costs from \$2,300pp. Flights to Anchorage and transfers to Talkaneeta are extra (00 1 907 854 7007, sheldonchalet.com)

The east

15 Pittsburgh direct

Home to three of America's best sports teams, excellent food and nightlife, gorgeous riverfront scenery and a superb art scene, the Steel City is an undiscovered cultural diamond in the heart of the rust belt. From April 2, it'll be easier to reach, with British Airways launching a direct Heathrow to Pittsburgh flight. Check out the fabulous Warhol Museum and stay at the cool Moxy hotel, which opens in March.

Details The Moxy Pittsburgh has doubles from \$130 (moxy-hotels.marriott.com). Flights cost from £600pp (0344 493 0125, ba.com)

16 Hit the whale trail

Commemorate the 200th birthday of Herman Melville, author of *Moby-Dick*, with a trip along the new Massachusetts Whale Trail, a self-drive route. Explore the historic whaling town of Nantucket,

where *Moby-Dick* is set, the lush hills of The Berkshires, where Melville lived, and Cape Cod for some of the best whale-watching in the country.

Details Nine days' room only, with flights to Boston and car hire, costs from £1,599pp (01342 889505, americansky.co.uk)

17 Join NYC Pride

For the first time, WorldPride, the annual celebration of LGBTQ rights, will be held on American soil. Three million visitors are expected, with 50 official events, screenings, rallies and exhibitions planned to paint the Big Apple in rainbows throughout June. This trip is designed to put you in the heart of the action for the final weekend, including what could be the largest Pride march in the event's history.

Details Four days' room only, with flights to New York departing June 28, costs from £635pp (0344 5573859, virginholidays.co.uk)

18 Star Wars in Orlando

Opening in Disney's Hollywood Studios this autumn, Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge is

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a new fully immersive land featuring the rides Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance and Millennium Falcon: Smuggler's Run. At Legoland there's the debut of Lego Movie World with three new attractions based on the hit 2014 film. And Universal Orlando has an all-new Harry Potter rollercoaster alongside a new hotel complex, the Endless Summer Resort, which has Universal's most affordable rooms yet, starting at \$100.

Details An eight-day Universal's Endless Summer Resort trip with flights, accommodation and week-long tickets to Universal Parks costs from £989pp

(020 8131 3024, ocean-florida.co.uk). A seven-day Disney Ultimate ticket, valid for all four Disney theme parks, costs £375 per adult and £355 per child (0800 1690730, disneyholidays.co.uk). Tickets to Legoland cost from \$80.99 a day (legoland.com)

19 New England by train

This new trip from Rail Discoveries combines the golden hues of New England in autumn with one of the country's most spectacular train rides: the Mount Washington Cog Railway, celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. The steep three-mile climb to the summit of the highest peak in the northeast US is one of the most colourful in the region. Other highlights include stops at prime leaf-peeping site, the Quechee Gorge.

Details An eight-day group trip (limited to 40 people) with flights to Boston, accommodation, train tickets and most activities, but not meals, costs from £1,795pp. Departures are on September 17 and September 21, and October 7 and 8 (01904 734939, raildiscoveries.com)

20 Tour the Keys

Take advantage of new low-cost Norwegian Air flights from Gatwick to Miami, launching March 31, to check out the new Bungalows Key Largo, the first all-inclusive resort in the Florida Keys, which opened last month. Surrounded by golden sand and the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, this luxury adult-only resort is all about romance. Each of the beach-chic style cabana rooms have private outdoor

soaking tubs and verandas gazing out to sea. There are six bars and restaurants, a spa, two pools and a private beach.

Details All-inclusive doubles cost from £780 a night, including most activities (001 866 8010195,

bungalowskeylargo.com). Flights cost from £350 return (0330 828 0854, norwegian.com)

21 Virginia celebrations

In 1619 the first legislative assembly in the New World was held in Jamestown, Virginia. To commemorate this, Virginia is throwing a year-long party of cultural programming, entitled *American Evolution*. From Colonial Williamsburg, the world's largest living history museum and the battlefields of Yorktown, to Historic Jamestowne and the monuments of Washington DC, this trip is designed to tell the story of the country.

Details An eight-day self-guided Washington DC & Virginia's Historic Triangle trip with flights to Washington DC, accommodation and car hire, costs from £3,239 for a family of four (0844 8044480, purelycapitalregionusa.co.uk; americanevolution2019.com)

22 Historic cities tour

From the leafy plantation of Georgia to the dazzling lights of Times Square, this new group trip from Titan includes some of the east coast's most fascinating cities. Take a backstage tour of CNN news in Atlanta, and a carriage ride through the moss-draped oaks of Savannah. See the Magnolia Plantation and Gardens in Charleston, and America's first colonies in Virginia. Finish exploring the monuments of Washington DC and the skyscrapers of New York City.

Details A 14-day America's Historic Cities group tour with flights to Atlanta, returning from New York, coach transfers, accommodation and guided excursions, costs from £2,499pp. The maximum group size is 50. Departures are on May 23 and August 23 (0800 9885873, www.titantravel.co.uk)

More holidays next page

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23 Snowshoe in Vermont

Not many people outside New England know about this 300-mile cross-country ski and snowshoe trail, the longest ski touring path in America, but it's one of the best adventures in the country — and normally possible until mid-April. The four-day stretch from Bolton Valley to Stowe, travelling inn-to-inn through the Green Mountains, is the locals' choice for the best scenery and most charming places to stay.

Details An eight-day self-guided trip with flights to Boston, accommodation in Bolton Valley and Stowe, and car hire, costs from £1,249pp. Equipment hire is extra (0844 8044480, purelynewengland.com). More information at catamounttrail.org

24 Gastronomic USA

This self-guided trip from Trailfinders takes in five of America's best foodie cities. Start with fresh lobster in Boston, move on to dumplings and knish in New York's Lower East Side, then fly for cocktails and creole cooking lessons in New Orleans. Finish with dim sum overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge and then some of the best Mexican food in the world, in San Diego.

Details A 16-day self-guided United Tastes of America trip with flights to Boston, returning from San Diego, three internal flights, train tickets from Boston to New York, accommodation and five food tours, costs from £2,689pp (020 7368 1200, trailfinders.com)

The south

25 Discover Charleston

On April 4, British Airways will launch its first direct service from Heathrow to Charleston, South Carolina. It's one of the south's most enchanting cities, with its cobbled streets and mansions surrounded by beaches and golden isles. For a treat, stay at the new Hotel Bennett, with its lavish

old-world interiors, a rooftop pool and cocktail bar that's set to be the best sundowner spot in the city.

Details Doubles at the Hotel Bennett cost from \$500 a night (00 1 877 661 8981, hotelbennett.com). Return flights cost from £600 (0344 4930125, ba.com)

26 Memphis turns 200

The home of Elvis and birthplace of rock'n'roll, Memphis turns 200 this year and it will celebrate for a whole month. Highlights include the Beale Street Music Festival, from May 3-5, featuring more than 60 acts across four stages, and the World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest, from May 15-18. This fly-drive holiday from Purely Travel is timed for the festivities, with stops at Tennessee's other musical hotspots, Knoxville, Chattanooga and Nashville, along the way.

Details An 11-day trip with flights to Nashville, accommodation and car hire, costs from £1,879pp for departures in May (0844 8044480, purelysouthernusa.co.uk). For more information see memphisinmay.org

27 Harley road trip

It's been 50 years since the cult classic *Easy Rider* hit the screens and a new guided group tour from Bon Voyage has

been designed to follow the exact route taken by Wyatt and Billy (Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper) in the film. Riding on a Harley Davidson in convoy, with a 15-bike limit, the trip begins in Los Angeles, travelling along Route 66 through Death Valley and Monument Valley, Utah, into the Wild West towns of Durango, Colorado and Taos, New Mexico. From there, it's into the Deep South, through to New Orleans.

Details A 16-day group Easy Rider 50th Anniversary Movie Tour, with flights to Los Angeles, returning from New Orleans, accommodation, motorbike rental, support vehicle and fuel, costs from £5,125, based on two people sharing a room and one bike. Departures are on May 22, June 6, September 18 and October 2 (0800 3160194, bon-voyage.co.uk)

28 Jazz on the tracks

This new trip splits time between two of America's great jazz cities: New Orleans, the birthplace of America's original art form, and New York, home of the Blue Note. The trip is timed to coincide with the 50th New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, with travel between the cities on an overnight sleeper train, the Crescent, one of America's classic rides.

Details An eight-day New York and New Orleans Jazz trip with flights to New York, returning from New Orleans, a sleeper berth on the Crescent train and accommodation, but not tickets to the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, costs from £1,675pp (01904 527181, greatrail.com). For information on the festival see nojazzfest.com

29 Astronaut training

July 20 marks 50 years since the first *Apollo* moon landing and this holiday will take you to mission control in Houston and Cape Canaveral in Florida, which are gearing up to mark the anniversary. Also, check out the new Astronaut Training Experience at the Kennedy Space Center. These five-hour simulations of a mission to Mars are about as close as you can get to the real thing, and if you come in June or August, you can book a seat to watch an actual rocket launch.

Details An eight-day Houston and Space Coast trip with flights to Houston, returning from Orlando, internal flight, accommodation and car hire costs from £1,545pp (020 8742 8299, americaasyoulikeit.com). The Kennedy Space Centre costs \$57 for adults (£44), \$47 for children; the Astronaut Training Experience costs from \$175pp, age ten and over (00 1 877 313 2610, kennedyspacecenter.com)

30 Golf in St Louis

The first public course designed by Tiger Woods is set to open at Big Cedar Lodge, a 4,600-acre lakeside retreat in the Ozark Mountains, just a few hours from