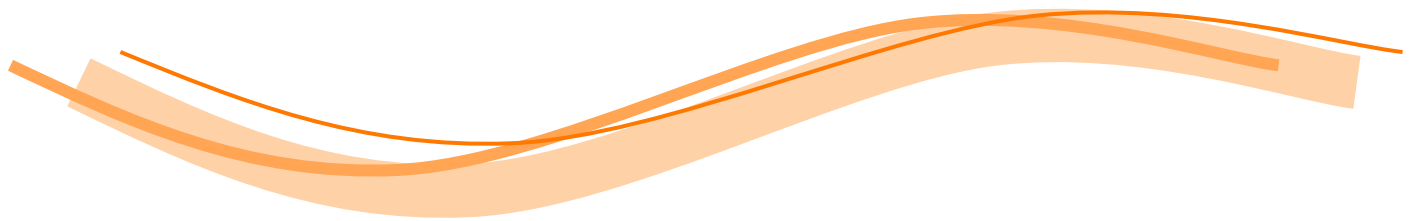




**US NATIONAL PARKS
&
INSIGHT VACATIONS**





US NATIONAL PARKS	<p>Last year (2016) was the U.S. National Park Service’s Centennial year: one hundred years of preserving, protecting and opening up some of the greatest natural and historical spaces on the continent. Starting in the Nineteenth Century, the scenic natural wonders of the West, such as the towering mountains and majestic trees of Yosemite and the immense vistas of the Grand Canyon, inspired individual Americans to call for their preservation, asking their government to create something called “national parks.”</p> <p>In 1916, the work of caring for these places was moved to a new agency created by Congress for that specific purpose. The National Park Service was given the responsibility to not only conserve and protect parks, but also to leave them “unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”</p> <p>Today there are over 400 national parks and monuments which include not only places of scenic grandeur, but also places that commemorate history too. The National Parks have been described as “America’s Best Idea”. Insight Vacations feature trips that make that claim come alive in the region where the idea was first realized: America’s West.</p> <p>These notes are organized into three sections to help you plan your trip to these wonderful places:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. An overview of some of the most iconic National Parks2. A personal perspective from my recent tour of the parks3. Insight Vacations and their tours of the National Parks
Yosemite	<p>Starting with the one where it all began: Yosemite, in the Californian Sierra Nevada...</p> <p>Yosemite highlights:</p> <p>Yosemite Falls: falling a total of 2,425 feet, these falls are the highest in North America.</p> <p>Tunnel View provides one of the most famous views of Yosemite Valley; from here you can see El Capitan and Bridalveil Fall rising from Yosemite Valley, with Half Dome in the background.</p> <p>Half Dome is perhaps the most recognized symbol of Yosemite. Rising nearly 5,000 feet above the Valley floor, it is one of the most impressive landmarks in Yosemite.</p> <p>Hikes: Valley Loop Trail, Mirror Lake Trail, Lower Yosemite Fall Trail, Mist Trail and, appropriately, the John Muir Trail</p> <p>Insight tours that visit here:</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Best of California - Great Western American Adventure - Grand Tour of America's West <p>Insight highlight – Stay at Yosemite Valley Lodge</p>
<p>Yellowstone</p>	<p>Established in 1872, Yellowstone National Park is the world's oldest and perhaps most famous national park, known worldwide for its geysers and geothermal pools. It's the largest of America's national parks outside Alaska, and crosses volcanic plateaus and heavily forested peaks, containing 2.2 million acres of steaming hot springs, crystalline lakes and thundering waterfalls. This is a once in a lifetime sort of place.</p> <p>Yellowstone highlights:</p> <p>Geothermal curiosities such as Old Faithful and the Norris Geyser Basin are just the beginning of Yellowstone's attractions. See Old Faithful erupt its powerful jet of boiling water and steam, as well as touring the hot springs terraces and viewing the belching boiling mud pools.</p> <p>The park's 150 geysers and the bubbling mud pools, hissing fumaroles and hot springs act as pressure valves, releasing the heat and steam that build up below the ground. Together, they make up the world's largest geothermal system (75 per cent of the earth's geysers are found here in Yellowstone)</p> <p>The park offers incredible natural diversity and abundant wildlife, together with picture-postcard views.</p> <p>The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone River, over 40 kms long and up to 1,200 feet deep, begins at the river's thundering 308-foot Lower Falls. Wildlife is prolific – (I saw bison grazing in the Lamar Valley, elk roaming around the streets of Mammoth Hot Springs and encountered a grizzly bear in the woods north of the Norris Canyon Road.)</p> <p>Insight tours that visit here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - American Parks Trail - America's Magnificent National Parks - Grand Tour of America's West <p>Insight highlight – join a local expert to walk through the landscape of spouting geysers, hot springs and steaming fumaroles</p>
<p>Grand Canyon</p>	<p>The scale of the Grand Canyon is overpowering. It is one of the planet's most powerful and inspiring landscapes. Numbers don't do it justice, but here they are anyway: 277 river miles long, 18 miles wide, a mile deep and 1.5 billion years of earth history.</p> <p>The Watchtower enables visitors a little of the human history with the geologic history which somehow makes the cocktail easier to assimilate.</p> <p>Viewpoints heading west from the Watchtower along Desert View Drive: Navajo Point, Lipan Point, Moran Point, Grandview Point...all add a different and equally marvelous dimension to the Grand Canyon vistas.</p> <p>Hiking the Rim Trail along the edge of the abyss also brings different</p>

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	<p>panoramas with each twist and turn. Or hike just a little of the Bright Angel Trail down into the Canyon Tusayan Museum and Ruin, which places the First Nations presence in the context of the Grand Canyon. It's a tiny museum with just a handful of exhibits, but well worth the time to understand that when John Wesley Powell first rafted down the Colorado in the mid-nineteenth century, his were definitely not the first human eyes to set upon this extraordinary sight. There is a partially excavated Indian village alongside the museum, which helps bring a sense of reality to the museum exhibits.</p> <p>Insight tours that visit here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - America's Magnificent National Parks - America The Beautiful - Great Western American Adventure - Grand Tour of America's West <p>Grand Canyon highlights: Stay at the National Park Lodges, Grand Canyon, Celebration Dinner at the Thunderbird Room with views of the South Rim</p> <p>Insight highlight – presentation/geology lecture by local expert, at the Grand Canyon</p>
<p>Utah's National Parks</p>	<p>The wonderfully named "Mighty 5" National Parks in Utah draw several million visitors from around the world each year to marvel at surreal scenery and unforgettable activities.</p> <p>Park Highlights:</p> <p>Zion National Park – deep crimson canyons, mesa top wild flowers, amazing hikes, desert rivers</p> <p>Capitol Reef National Park – "The Land of the Sleeping Rainbow": domes, tilted buttes, jumbled rocks</p> <p>Canyonlands National Park – a forbidding maze of plateau, mesas and canyons</p> <p>Bryce Canyon National Park – smallest of the five but the most visually stunning</p> <p>Arches National Park – More than 2,000 sandstone arches</p> <p>Insight tours that visit here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wonders of the American West - Enchanting Canyon Lands <p>Insight highlights – Private shuttle with live commentary in Zion Canyon. Wonderful setting for the Celebration Dinner in Bryce Canyon.</p>
<p>Mount Rushmore</p>	<p>Strictly speaking, Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills of South Dakota is a National Memorial rather than a National Park, but it is one of the grandest monuments that you are ever likely to see.</p> <p>Conceived in 1924 by Danish-American sculptor Gutzon Borglum, the great sculptures on Rushmore were to be a 'Shrine of Democracy' that would use the presidents' images to trace the country's history, from its</p>

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	<p>birth (Washington) through to its early growth (Jefferson), preservation (Lincoln) and robust development in the 20th century (Teddy Roosevelt).</p> <p>Work on the monument began on October 4, 1927, and ended 14 years later, on October 31, 1941. When the granite dust cleared, Rushmore had been transformed with four enormous faces, six storeys high, peering into the Black Hills.</p> <p>Insight tours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - American Parks Trail; - Grand Tour of America’s West; - America’s Magnificent National Parks
<p>Mesa Verde</p>	<p>For me, Mesa Verde National Park is one of the most haunting and atmospheric ancient sites I have ever experienced...</p> <p>Situated close to where Colorado, Arizona, Utah and New Mexico meet, this is the only National Park in the US devoted to the works of Man. It is the fusion of huge canyon desert-land scenery and abandoned 700 year old Ancestral Puebloan dwellings that make this place so unique in time and space.</p> <p>Cliff Palace, tucked under overhanging sandstone cliff faces was the largest community, four storeys high, accessed by narrow wooden ladders – and it’s just one of over 600 cliff dwellings in Mesa Verde. Wandering around Spruce Tree House, another atmospheric, cliff-sheltered home, it is possible to feel the spirit of this mystical place and its long forgotten people.</p> <p>Insight tour:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wonders of the American West <p>Insight highlight – stay at Far View Lodge in the National Park. It sits on a high shoulder of Mesa Verde near mile marker 15 on the main park road, offering panoramic vistas into three states.</p>
<p>“America Wild”</p>	<p>If you are looking for another reason to visit the parks, look out for a dazzling visual celebration of the USA’s majestic National Parks on IMAX film. It’s called “America Wild: National Parks Adventure” and it takes us off on the ultimate off-trail adventure into America’s awe-inspiring great outdoors and untamed wilderness. Yosemite is one of the stars in this breath-taking film which celebrates the U.S. National Parks. Don’t miss it: it will inspire you to come see some of the places we talk about in these Travel Notes. Here is a trailer to tempt you:</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4F_B8u1PqI</p>
<p>For More Information</p>	<p>Website: www.VisittheUSA.ca</p> <p>Ask for more information: http://www.visittheusa.ca/usa/contact-us.aspx</p> <p>Discover USA Blog: http://www.visittheusa.ca/usa/blogs.aspx</p>

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<p>NATIONAL PARKS OF THE US SOUTHWEST – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE</p>	<p>I am inviting you to come with me on a Great American Road Trip. And this one is pretty special. I was inspired to plan this trip by the “Visit the USA” website where you will find details on all those great American Road Trips that you always dreamt you would take one day. I am starting on the Pacific Coast, in San Francisco, and driving 5,000 kilometers through the US Southwest, through California, Arizona and New Mexico. Every great road trip needs a theme, a thread that provides purpose to the trip. My objective on this trip was to visit the iconic National Parks of America’s Southwest in a very special year for the National Park Service of the United States.</p>
<p>The National Parks Service Centenary</p>	<p>2016 was the U.S. National Park Service 2016 Centennial year: one hundred years of preserving, protecting and opening up some of the greatest natural and historical spaces on the continent. Starting in the Nineteenth Century, the scenic natural wonders of the West, such as the towering mountains and majestic trees of Yosemite and the immense vistas of the Grand Canyon, inspired individual Americans to call for their preservation, asking their government to create something called “national parks.” In 1916, the work of caring for these places was moved to a new agency created by Congress for that specific purpose. The National Park Service was given the responsibility to not only conserve and protect parks, but also to leave them “unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”</p> <p>Today there are over 400 national parks and monuments which include not only places of scenic grandeur, but also places that commemorate history too. The National Parks have been described as “America’s Best Idea”. This trip will make that claim come alive in the region where the idea was first realized: America’s West.</p>

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<p>The Route</p>	<p>This road trip begin on the Pacific Coast at San Francisco and heads east to the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the three National Parks of Yosemite, Kings Canyon and Sequoia.</p> <p>Then west, back into California’s Central Valley and south to curl around the other side of the mountains to the Basin and Range region, where Death Valley awaits.</p> <p>Heading south and east we cut across a corner of Nevada, bypass Las Vegas (no stopping – this is a National parks trip!), south to Hoover Dam and then east into Arizona and onto the Grand Canyon.</p> <p>Ever eastwards, we travel part of old Route 66 and see Meteor Crater and Petrified Forest National Park before crossing into New Mexico and two little known National Monuments: El Morro and El Malpais.</p> <p>Onto New Mexico’s biggest city of Albuquerque, then south almost to the Mexican border, to White Sands National Monument. East, over the mountains to Carlsbad Caverns National Park and finally north to the state capital of Santa Fe and ending back in Albuquerque.</p> <p>Nearly 5,000 kilometers of great road tripping and unforgettable natural wonders!</p>
<p>Recommended Books</p>	<p>I used Lonely Planet guidebooks on my trip. They have several that cover this trip; the specific ones I recommend are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - California - Southwest USA - Yosemite, Sequoia & Kings Canyon - Grand Canyon
<p>Starting in San Francisco</p>	<p>San Francisco is the perfect place to start a road trip showcasing the National Parks, because they are all around you. I flew into San Francisco International Airport, picked up my rental car and within the hour, I was driving across the iconic Golden Gate Bridge, which is itself part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The Pacific Ocean glints in the sunshine far below and you feel as if you are driving into a movie set.</p>
<p>Muir Woods</p>	<p>A few minutes up the road, not half an hour from the city, is Muir Woods National Monument, a little gem of a park. The Redwood Creek Trail leads me through an awe-inspiring valley of massive Coast Redwoods, the tallest trees in the world. The land was bought by William Kent to protect these last stands of uncut Redwoods. He named this place after John Muir, the spiritual founder of the National Park Service, whilst he himself introduced legislation that created the National Park Service in 1916.</p> <p>So, it’s appropriate that this road trip begins here with the late afternoon sunlight filtering through the ancient trees of Cathedral Grove in Muir Woods. There is a hush on the trail beneath the trees and a stillness in the air. You can loop back on the other side of the valley, high on the</p>

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	<p>Hillside Trail and you're able to almost look some of the 350 feet high trees in the eye. This place almost defines being at one with nature...</p>
<p>The Presidio</p>	<p>Back across the Golden Gate, you enter the Presidio, the historic origin of San Francisco and the third National Park in one day. The Presidio served for over 200 years as an army post, successively for Spain, Mexico and the US. Now it is a peaceful oasis in the city with glorious views of parkland, Bay and noble architecture. You can stay here for your first night of the trip at The Inn at the Presidio. It was once the home of the bachelor officers and is an elegant base for visitors to San Francisco.</p>
<p>Yosemite</p>	<p>Yosemite National park: it was to this inspirational wilderness that John Muir brought Teddy Roosevelt to convince him of the need to protect such wondrous places. And I'm thinking that John Muir let the landscape itself do the persuading...</p> <p>I visited Yosemite at the turn of the season: the previous week I would have needed tire chains to access the park; but in late March Spring sunshine filled the valley and meltwater filled the dramatic waterfalls that spring from the immense granite cliffs.</p> <p>See all the great valley viewpoints. Tunnel View provides one of the most famous views of Yosemite Valley. From here you can see El Capitan and Bridalveil Fall rising from Yosemite Valley, with Half Dome in the background. Half Dome is perhaps the most recognized symbol of Yosemite. Rising nearly 5,000 feet above the Valley floor, it is one of the most impressive landmarks in Yosemite.</p> <p>And the place is made for hiking: I made the most of the spring sunshine and hiked Valley Loop Trail, Mirror Lake Trail, Lower Yosemite Fall Trail, Mist Trail and, appropriately, the John Muir Trail to give me an intimate feel for this lovely place.</p>
<p>Kings Canyon & Sequoia</p>	<p>Heading south down the Sierra Nevada there are two more mountainous National Parks that are even higher in altitude than Yosemite: Kings Canyon and Sequoia. Again, it is a dramatic approach up hairpin bends under the granite knob of Moro Rock. I stayed at the Alpine Wuksachi Lodge at over 7,000 feet and there was deep snow everywhere in March. These two National Parks adjoin each other and both deserve to be better known. Kings Canyon hides a cleft in the earth that is deeper than the Grand Canyon and in the March snows I was only able to peer down into its depths from a viewpoint on the Generals Highway which had only opened from under winter snows that very day. Check the road conditions if you travel at this time of the year or earlier in winter.</p> <p>I hiked frozen trails, snowshoed in the forest, gazed on contiguous USA's highest peak, Mount Whitney and watched a spectacular sunset from atop Beetle Rock. But the highlight unquestionably was spending time in the Giant Forest. Here are groves of Giant Sequoia trees that</p>

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	<p>gently remind you of your place on this planet. For they are huge and have been here forever. General Sherman Tree is the largest living organism on the planet. As I stood beneath its immensity – 275 feet high, 103 feet circumference and 1,385 tons in weight – I reflected that this great tree began its life 2,500 years before mine and will outlive me for sure...</p>
<p>Death Valley</p>	<p>The final National Park on this Californian leg of the road trip is the ominously named Death Valley National Park. To get there from Sequoia is quite a journey and one that for me began at first light at the Lodge scraping the ice off my windscreen and ended later in the day at the aptly named Furnace Creek in Death Valley, where the temperature hovered around 100F.</p> <p>From snows to desert sands. From 7,000 feet up, to nearly 300 feet below sea-level – this is a unique part of the road trip.</p> <p>This is a park of extremes. Death Valley is the driest, hottest and lowest spot in America. Enter via Rainbow Canyon where you may see Airforce fighters playing Star Wars games deep in its depths and then spend time at some of the highlights in the baking heat.</p> <p>Mesquite Flats Sand Dunes is a desolate region of blown sand. The Badwater Basin is the lowest point on the continent, full of dry saline flats and mirages of lakes that evaporate as you approach. Artist Drive is a narrow twisting road that showcases the bright colours of an artist's palette on the sides of the canyon walls.</p> <p>The view of the badlands at Zabriskie Point is so famous it has inspired a film title of the same name.</p> <p>And the sunset from the summit of Dantes View at 5,500 feet was phenomenal, encompassing 6,000 vertical feet and the Basin and Range topography of Death Valley.</p> <p>It is the serendipity of events on road trips that cannot be planned which often remain the most memorable moments- and so it will be for me in Death Valley. For I was lucky enough to be here at something that happens for just a few weeks every ten to twelve year: a "Super Bloom", where the normally desolate Death Valley desert is covered with wild flowers coaxed out of decades-long hibernation by the right combination of weather conditions. Yellows punctuated by whites and purple, like a mirage... Quite beautiful.</p>
<p>Grand Canyon</p>	<p>The scale of the Grand Canyon can be overpowering. It is one of the planet's most powerful and inspiring landscapes. Numbers don't do it justice, but here they are anyway: 277 river miles long, 18 miles wide, a mile deep and 1.5 billion years of earth history.</p> <p>Start your commune with the Canyon at the Watchtower at the eastern end of Desert Drive. It will enable you to mix a little of the human history with the geologic history which somehow makes the cocktail easier to assimilate. The Watchtower, perched on the edge of the Canyon, is a</p>

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symbol of 2016's National Park Service's centenary and is being transformed into a cultural showpiece.

It is also the perfect place to gaze past the frescos on the wall, through the rough openings of the Watchtower and out into the immensity of the canyon.

This is just the first of many viewpoints that I spent time at heading west from the Watchtower along Desert View Drive. Navajo Point, Lipan Point, Moran Point, Grandview Point...all add a different and equally marvelous dimension to the Grand Canyon vistas. Hiking the Rim Trail along the edge of the abyss also brings different panoramas with each twist and turn.

Along the way, I take in Tusayan Museum and Ruin, which places the First Nations presence in the context of the Grand Canyon. It's a tiny museum with just a handful of exhibits, but well worth the time to understand that when John Wesley Powell first rafted down the Colorado in the mid-nineteenth century, his were definitely not the first human eyes to set upon this extraordinary sight. There is a partially excavated Indian village alongside the museum, which helps bring a sense of reality to the museum exhibits.

To really get to grips with the Grand Canyon, you have to get off the Rim and actually into the depths of the Canyon to truly feel its immensity. Take a full day hike away from the mass of humanity at South Rim Village on the most famous of all the Grand Canyon hikes: the Bright Angel Trail.

Bright Angel Trail

This is an intense but rewarding experience. The Trail is ten miles long, but snakes down over 3,000 feet...and then back up 3,000 feet of course. It's like launching yourself off the side of a tall building. The Rim rapidly disappears from view and you are cloaked in the early morning shadows.

The drops are enormous. Two great sandstone buttresses are solved by short tunnels. You may have to make way for a mule train making its way up the trail. The trail switchbacks past two Rest Houses and casual hikers are left far behind – only focused hikers carry on towards a distant plateau above the Colorado River at the base of the canyon. Immense cliffs of Kaibab Limestone are followed by equally impressive Coconino sandstone cliffs, separated by endless switchbacks and millions of years of geological time.

At last, the green oasis of Indian Garden approaches. Heaven! After hours of dry and increasingly hot trail, here is a spring, a stream and actual trees...plus a drinking water source. After a picnic lunch you can experience the ecstasy of paddling in the cool stream water. Then you will realize that you have to start the return trip if you are to make

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	<p>the Rim before sundown! This is what the Grand Canyon experience is truly all about...</p>
Petrified Forest	<p>This National Park combines two exquisite attractions: the hauntingly beautiful landscapes of the Painted Desert and the amazing fossilized record of ancient trees.</p> <p>Here in Petrified Forest National Park it is possible to step back 225 million years and see, touch and marvel at tree logs that have been perfectly preserved.</p> <p>The 28 mile park road leads you first to the Painted Desert Inn, an adobe National Historic Landmark, then on through the desert to Kachina Point and Pintado Point for views over the gaunt Painted Desert landscapes.</p> <p>On past a remnant of old Route 66 with a rusting old wreck, to Puerco Pueblo, the remains of a settlement dating to around 1300 AD and proving that Ancestral Puebloans liked a room with a view. Nearby Newspaper Rock has more than 650 petroglyphs carved into the desert stone, the oldest dating back over 2,000 years.</p> <p>As so often, this park saves the best till last. The last section of the drive takes you to Blue Mesa loop and trail where the first of the petrified logs are seen. Together with Crystal Forest, Long Logs Trail and Giant Logs Trail, the desert becomes filled with these amazing relics of the Permian period when the first of the dinosaurs roamed the earth. Sections of colourful, agatized log are everywhere, scattered randomly on the desert floor. Their surface still looks like rough bark, but it is hard as steel and protects the interior structure which has been faithfully replaced, cell by cell, with quartz of every hue. Some of the logs are enormous – up to 180 feet long and “Old Faithful” is 10 feet across at its base.</p>
El Morro	<p>Come off Interstate 40 as you head eastwards into New Mexico from Arizona onto the back roads – it’s classic road trip territory, with huge landscapes, empty roads and the promise of wonders ahead.</p> <p>The first of these is El Morro National Monument. It was once a welcome oasis in a barren land. Travellers were drawn here from ancient times due to its rare pool of fresh water.</p> <p>As they passed by, they created graffiti that today tells a fascinating story of the people who visited this place. Thanks to the interpretation by the National Parks Service you learn the story behind every name and message carved in the rock at El Morro.</p> <p>Here at Inscription Rock are petroglyphs created by the Native Puebloan people depicting the animals that they hunted and their sacred symbols. There are messages from Spanish soldiers who passed by and even Lieutenant Governors sent from Spain to this new territory.</p> <p>There are markers from Pioneers who passed this way en route to</p>

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	<p>California and a better life. Railway surveyors signed their names here – before they ultimately bypassed this area and it lost its significance as a resting place for travellers. Until now... As you sit in the crisp sunshine at over 7,000 feet above sea level, and imagine the countless weary peoples who have found a respite in this place.</p>
<p>El Malpais</p>	<p>Each National Park or Monument on this road trip teaches you about geology and the formation of these spectacular South Western landscapes.</p> <p>El Malpais National Monument, close to El Morro, was formed by volcanic action and here are huge areas of lava tubes, cinder cones and some of the most recent lava rock formations in North America. You can explore its jumbled and sometimes jagged landscape by hiking El Calderon Trail. The highlights are the lave tube caves which once carried rivers of molten lava and now exist as darkly sinuous caves under the volcanic landscape.</p> <p>Further west, El Malpais National Monument features huge sandstone bluffs. Stand atop Sandstone Bluffs Overlook and gaze out of a true wilderness of lava fields and desert lands, a desolate environment, but one in which Ancient Puebloans still managed to eke an existence.</p>
<p>White Sands</p>	<p>Drive south from Albuquerque towards El Paso and the Mexican border to the Tularosa Basin. This is where you will find one of the world's great natural wonders - the glistening white sand dunes of gypsum sand which cover 275 square miles of desert, creating the world's largest gypsum dune-field: White Sands National Monument.</p> <p>This unearthly landscape is not comprised of ordinary sand - the dunes are formed from gleaming white gypsum. This is the largest gypsum dune field in the world – it is so large that astronauts in the Space Station can see White Sands National Monument and know that they are over New Mexico. The dunes were formed because of an unusual combination of geological events, but in essence deposited gypsum crystals were tumbled by the wind to grind them to a fine powder. And the wind continues to shape the landscape, painting beautiful patterns on the dunes.</p> <p>The National Parks Service provides great interpretation here, as at all the National Parks. This Interdune Boardwalk makes the dunes accessible to everyone. There are also informative “Sunset Strolls” with a Park Ranger. For the 100th anniversary of the National Parks Service there are special events such as concerts amongst the dunes as well as Full Moon Nights.</p> <p>And who says that National Parks aren’t also fun? At White Sands National Monument the dunes are regarded as a highly stable resource and you can walk wherever you wish, take some great marked hikes and even camp overnight on the dunes under the stars. But the best thing to do is to whizz down the dunes on a sled – much warmer and</p>

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	<p>drier than sledding on snow! You can even purchase a sled at the Park Visitor Center.</p>
Carlsbad Cavern	<p>There is no indication that far below the desert landscape of Carlsbad Caverns National Park hides one of the most remarkable cave systems in the world...</p> <p>The caves were discovered in the early 1900's and were soon declared a National Park. What actually led to their discovery was what looked like smoke rising from the ground. In fact this phenomenon was hundreds of thousands of bats leaving the cave at twilight to feed. Today the cave system is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. You can hike down into the depths via the Natural Entrance Route, where as the daylight faded away, the enormity of this cave system becomes apparent...</p> <p>The cave system is very extensive and stretches many kilometers underground. The stalagmites, stalactites, columns and other formations are quite beautiful. The Big Cave at the far end of the system lives up to its name – the scale is tremendous: it covers 8.2 acres, is 255 feet high and 1,800 feet long...and lies 800 feet under the desert landscape above.</p> <p>For those of faint heart, there is an elevator service built down into the cave so you don't have to face the long, uphill hike out of this cave system!</p>
Roswell	<p>No, this is definitely not a National Park, but it is certainly a National Oddity, and it is on the route north to Santa Fe from Carlsbad Caverns, so it's certainly worth seeing what all the fuss is about.</p> <p>And the fuss is the "Roswell Incident"</p> <p>The International UFO Museum recounts the events surrounding the mysterious 1947 "Roswell Incident". Did a UFO crash near this small New Mexico town? Did the US Government cover it up and remove both the spaceship and the bodies of aliens? We will never know.....but the truth is out there somewhere!</p>
Santa Fe	<p>A highlight of any trip to New Mexico has to be Santa Fe. Older than Quebec City and the highest State Capital in the US at over 7000 feet above sea level - Santa Fe is a cultural treasure trove of historical adobe buildings, fascinating museums and a modern arts explosion that makes for a wonderful mix. Visit the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts and the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, which displays many lovely paintings inspired by New Mexico landscapes.</p> <p>The Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe is the oldest public building in the US. It began as home to New Mexico's first Governor in 1610 and passed to Pueblo Indians and Mexico before becoming the seat of the US Territory's earliest Governors. It faces the Plaza - Santa Fe's heart for over 400 years – and a great place to hang out as the desert light fades, and reflect on your remarkable trip of 5,000 kilometers, three</p>

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	<p>states, from ocean to mountain to desert and thirteen National Parks and Monuments.</p>
<p>Accommodations</p>	<p>I would recommend the accommodations I experienced on this trip:</p> <p>The Inn at Presidio 42 Moraga Ave, San Francisco, CA 94129 415-800-7356</p> <p>Yosemite View Lodge, 11156 Hwy 140, El Portal, CA 95318 209-379-2681</p> <p>Wuksachi Lodge, Wuksachi Way, Sequoia National Park, CA, 866-807-3598</p> <p>Grand Canyon Squire Inn, 74 Highway 64, Tusayan, AZ 86023 Phone: 928-638-2681</p> <p>The Wigwam Motel 811 W Hopi Dr, Holbrook, AZ 86025 Tel: 928-524-3048</p> <p>Nativo Lodge, 6000 Pan American Freeway, Albuquerque NM 87109 505-7987-4300 www.nativolodge.com</p> <p>Inn of the Mountain Gods, 287 Carrizo Canyon Road, Mescalero NM 88340 Tel: 575-464-7780 http://innofthemountain gods.com</p> <p>Trinity Hotel, 201 S. Cana St., Trinity NM 575-234-9891 www.thetrinityhotel.com</p> <p>Hotel Albuquerque, 800 Rio Grande Blvd. NW Albuquerque NM 87104 505-843-6300 www.hotelabq.com</p>
<p>Travel Show Blogs:</p>	<p>You can read all about my personal journey following this road trip, complete with photographs from the trip on three travel blogs, one for each state:</p> <p>http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/Blog/tabid/400/EntryId/89/Great-American-Road-Trips-The-National-Parks-of-California.aspx</p> <p>http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/Blog/tabid/400/EntryId/90/Great-American-Road-Trips-The-National-Parks-of-Arizona.aspx</p> <p>http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/Blog/tabid/400/EntryId/91/Great-American-Road-Trips-The-National-Parks-of-New-Mexico.aspx</p>

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Images	You can see images from my road trip on Pinterest at: https://www.pinterest.com/TravelShow/
INSIGHT VACATIONSTO THE NATIONAL PARKS OF THE USA	<p>For over 35 years Insight Vacations has been known as the provider of some of the world's finest escorted tours. They are particularly regarded as experts in touring the USA.</p> <p>They are also the leading escorted tour operator in Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean as well as offering tours in Canada, North Africa, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.</p> <p>You can be confident that Insight will bring you quality hotels, luxury transport and the most in-depth local knowledge. Enjoy unique escorted vacations, with signature business class travel, expert Tour Directors and hand-picked hotels in the best locations.</p> <p>So come explore some of the most dramatic and awe-inspiring natural wonders on the planet...and a few, equally inspiring, man-made wonders too! On our itinerary are the greatest of the USA's National Parks out West - from the Grand Canyon to Yosemite and from Utah's canyons to Yellowstone.</p> <p>Tour them in the company of Insight Vacations, who are absolute experts in vacations to the US National Parks. Offering carefully curated itineraries, highly coveted accommodation in beautiful lodges located right in the Parks themselves, and private guided tours with Park Rangers - an Insight Tour adds up to the very best experience possible as you discover these breathtakingly beautiful places.</p> <p>Insight's eight different itineraries make sure that you take in all the must see sights and top experiences. Your Tour Director takes care of all the travel details and excellent local guides fill you in with fascinating history and insider stories. You don't have to worry about your baggage handling and you sit in luxury, air conditioned coaches enjoying free WiFi. And, suitably relaxed, you can take in the best that the West has to offer.</p>
Insight's USA	<p>Every part of the United States, from east to west, and north to south, is incredibly diverse in terms of landscape, culture and history with an enormous amount to discover. As the world's third largest country by size there is a staggering array of unique places to visit and always something new to experience.</p> <p>Start with Washington D.C.'s iconic landmarks, memorials and famous museums; then make your way to Philadelphia, the birthplace of the</p>

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	<p>United States and the nation’s original capital. Get a huge dose of American history in Boston, or take a beach break in charming Cape Cod. New York is impossible to resist with its stunning skyline, art, museums, and shopping; while attraction-packed Chicago is equally enticing.</p> <p>Nature is on full display in the west, in particular California’s ruggedly beautiful coastline; the stunning cliff-and-canyon landscape of Zion National Park; Yellowstone’s unique geothermal activity, spectacular landscapes and abundant wildlife; and the unforgettable dramatic rock walls of the Grand Canyon that will truly take your breath away. Los Angeles and Hollywood beckon with endless sunny days, shopping and glamour; while scenic San Francisco is perfecting for wandering; and there’s never a dull moment in decadent Las Vegas.</p> <p>The unmistakable character and cultural heritage of the Deep South makes for one of the most fascinating places to visit in the United States. Southern hospitality is justifiably famous, as is the variety of music, literary heritage and mouth-watering cuisine. Make a stop in Charleston, South Carolina’s oldest city; experience true southern comfort in Savannah; explore lively New Orleans for its music, food and rich history; and don’t forget about Memphis, birthplace of the blues and home of Graceland</p>
<p>What makes Insight Different?</p>	<p>Insight is a premium tour - like traveling in business class. These premium tours reach back to the “Golden Age of Touring”</p> <p>What makes Insight different?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smaller groups – maximum 40 guests - More legroom and comfort - First-class hotels in central or scenic locations - More inclusions and sightseeing - More meals - delicious dining and more choice - Impeccable service - International fellow guests - Insight tours are better value, and often actually cheaper when you compare with buying the individual trip components - Insight tours are leisurely, some with 2 or 3 night stays in each city - Insight’s average age is 47 years old - Significant free time is built into every tour - Insight offers 6 distinct touring styles – see below - Insight sells only through travel agents
<p>Insight Touring Styles</p>	<p>Insight Vacations premium tours offer you the chance to experience Europe’s finest cities, sights, hotels and culinary delights. Whether you want to explore Europe at a leisurely pace, experience as much as possible or get off the beaten track, Insight Vacations offers a complete</p>

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	<p>range of six touring itineraries to suit all holiday dreams.</p> <p>Discovery Journeys are designed to provide a balanced 'snapshot' of several countries in one itinerary.</p> <p>Regional Experiences are for those seeking to focus on a specific region or country.</p> <p>Easy Pace Tours contain predominately three or four nights in each city centre for exploring at leisure.</p> <p>Country Roads Tours visit all the main sights but also take you off the beaten track;</p> <p>Luxury Gold is an exceptional range of uniquely tailored deluxe tours. You'll appreciate luxury hotels, dine in authentic restaurants and enjoy leisurely days with premium included sightseeing.</p> <p>City Breaks – Select Choices is a unique series of linked city-stay itineraries bringing freedom, choice and flexibility while avoiding the hassles, headaches and unforeseen costs normally associated.</p> <p>Special Interest Itineraries - Insight Vacations bring you several exclusive departures that allow you to hone in on some of the most notable things a destination or region is known for.</p>
Insight's Coaches	<p>Insight Coaches: Travel in armchair comfort, with the same spacious legroom found in airline Business Class. Our entire fleet of luxury touring coaches has been uniquely customised, removing several rows of seats to allow up to twice as much legroom as the standard coaches used by other operators. You'll experience extended panoramic views, air-conditioning, amazing sound systems, video and power-outlets and Wi-Fi to keep you in touch with friends back home.</p>
Group Size	<p>Smaller Group Size: An average of 30 guests (and never more than 40) means you can enjoy a greater level of personal attention from your Tour Director and, with extra legroom, easier boarding of the coach. It also means you can look forward to a more intimate, friendlier touring experience, sharing memorable moments with like-minded new friends.</p>
Signature Experiences	<p>Signature Experiences are one of Insight's defining features... Included experiential, authentic activities or immersive opportunities where you will meet local people and experts who are keen to share their stories, heritage and way of life.</p> <p>For example: Join a Navajo Guide in Monument Valley in a special ATV vehicle to explore the iconic vistas of this Navajo Tribal Park, made famous in America's favourite Western movies.</p>

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<p>Accommodations</p>	<p>Signature and First Class Hotels are also an Insight hallmark... Where you stay makes the difference between a good vacation and an unforgettable one. Insight hotels are handpicked to bring you the best central and scenic locations. You can be sure that famous sites and landmarks will be right on your doorstep and you'll enjoy a warm welcome and real comfort.</p> <p>Often tours stay within the National Parks – this accommodation has to be booked a long time in advance and is highly prized. It's a privilege to stay in such luxury in such beautiful environments. Not all Tour Operators offer this.</p> <p>For example, on an Insight tour of the Grand Canyon National Park, while most of the visitor's leave the park at the end of the day and overnight outside the park – the saying goes "When you stay at Grand Canyon National Park Lodges, you're not just close – you're there!"</p>
<p>Dining</p>	<p>Authentic dining is an integral part of each trip... Share engaging conversation within extraordinary settings, while indulging in the rich, authentic flavours of each destination. Insight's exclusive dining experiences below, always including wine, feature cuisine that reflects the cultural diversity of each destination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome Dinner - Signature Evening - Dine-Around Evenings - A Celebration Dinner <p>For example, in the Grand Canyon you stay within the park and enjoy a Highlight Dinner at the Thunderbird Room while taking in views of the South Rim.</p>
<p>Tour Directors</p>	<p>The Tour Director's role is a crucial one in making an Insight trip so seamless.</p> <p>Your highly-skilled Tour Director will be on hand to share knowledge, advice, act as a travelling concierge, give practical assistance, and manage the details of your journey so that everything runs smoothly. Leave the baggage handling, check-ins, reservations, tips, and all the other details to them. Hassle-free travel is their speciality and they have thought of everything, leaving you to relax and effortlessly enjoy your vacation. If you would like suggestions on how you could spend your free time, your Tour Director will be only too happy to offer guidance.</p>
<p>History of Insight Vacations</p>	<p>In 1978, its first year, the company had a handful of staff in London and carried just 5700 passengers. Today, Insight has a team of professionals throughout the world, plays host to over 100,000 guests per year and has offices in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Singapore and the UK. The company has also appointed specialist agents in Argentina, Brazil, Mauritius, India, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Korea, Taiwan and China.</p>

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	<p>Insight has achieved many important Tour Operator 'Firsts' over the years including, in 1983, being the first scheduled tour operator to win 'the Queen's Award for Export Achievement' from Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.</p> <p>Rediscovering a Golden Age - Insight invites you to rediscover the Golden Age of European Travel</p> <p>Group touring in Europe was started in 1841 by an Englishman, Thomas Cook, when he took a party from Leicester to Loughborough, a grand journey of 12 miles and back! In the golden age of touring that followed, those early travellers expected and received personal service, well planned itineraries, good quality, well located hotels and enjoyed the benefit of travelling in small select friendly groups - with no attention to detail spared. Since then, much has changed, not all for the better!</p> <p>In this fast paced world of the 21st century, most of these desirable touring principles have been forgotten - but not by Insight. They are justifiably proud of their commitment to give you that something 'extra' when you travel with them, and for 2016 they are featuring the very best. All Insight tours feature itineraries perfectly paced for your complete satisfaction.</p>
<p>Who goes on an Insight Vacation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Average age is 47 - Core over 55 - Baby boomers - free time and central hotels are important - 65% are past Cruise vacationers – Insight is like Land Cruising - Discerning clients - 5% are single - no supplement - Average of two Honeymooners per Europe Tour - More Families - discounts and Super Savers are popular - Guests are often “time poor, not money poor”
<p>Brochures</p>	<p>You can view the brochures online here or request copies by post: https://www.insightvacations.com/ca/tours/request-a-brochure</p>
<p>Special Offers</p>	<p>Check here https://www.insightvacations.com/ca/special-offers/red-hot-deals for details of their current special deals – there is always an offer to tempt you!</p>
<p>Insight’s America’s Magnificent National Parks Tour</p>	<p>Here is one of the recommended tours to see some of the very best of America’s National Parks with Insight Vacations!</p> <p>America’s Magnificent National Parks</p> <p>15 days with prices from C\$6645 Vacation type: Premium Tour</p>

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Brochure: Insight USA, Canada and South America 2017

Average rating: 5 out of 5

An epic adventure through remarkable scenery, National Parks and prominent landmarks, crafted to please those with a love of nature and history.

This sprightly tour combines 'Enchanting Canyonlands' with the 'American Parks Trail' to form a complete experience of North America's most popular parks, historic monuments and scenic grandeur.

HIGHLIGHTS

SIGNATURE EXPERIENCES

Grand Canyon: Join a Local Expert for an informative presentation and witness the burnt orange hues of the canyon walls.

Monument Valley: Join a Navajo Guide in a special vehicle to explore the iconic vistas of this Navajo Tribal Park, made famous in America's favourite Western movies.

Lake Powell: A testament to the power of water over rock, glide through the narrow sandstone turns of Antelope Canyon during your cruise.

Zion Canyon: The most relaxing and informative way to see the grandeur and natural features of the canyon is by a private shuttle that includes live commentary.

Yellowstone: Upper Geyser Basin boasts the highest concentration of spouting geysers, hot springs, and steaming fumaroles in the world. Join a Local Expert for an informative walk through these natural wonders.

Cody: Explore the award-winning Buffalo Bill Center of the West, known for its excellent Western art collection, firearms and natural history.

Deadwood: Historical Wild West figures such as Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane called Deadwood home. Learn about the Gold Rush and the town's notable residents aboard Kevin Costner's Original Deadwood Tour.

Deadwood: Enjoy an audience with Lakota tribe members who share a live narrative of the Great Sioux Nation.

ADDITIONAL INCLUDED HIGHLIGHTS

Sedona: Visit this Red Rock Country artists' colony.

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Grand Canyon: Enjoy stunning views.

Cameron: Stop at the Historic Trading Post.

Glen Canyon: Visit the dam.

Bryce Canyon National Park: Enjoy the rugged beauty with a leisurely walk along Sunset Point to view the hoodoos.

Salt Lake City: View the headquarters for the Mormon religion.

Jackson: See the town's iconic antler arch.

Grand Teton National Park: Enjoy views of Jenny Lake.

Yellowstone National Park: See Old Faithful.

Black Hills: Witness the huge Crazy Horse Memorial and the famous Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

Countryside: Oak Creek Canyon, Grand Canyon's South Rim, Painted Desert.

AUTHENTIC REGIONAL FLAVOURS

Grand Canyon: Enjoy a Highlight Dinner at the Thunderbird Room while taking in views of the South Rim.

Las Vegas: Enjoy a Highlight Dinner in Las Vegas.

UCross: After an afternoon of horseback riding in your beautiful surroundings, enjoy a hearty ranch style Highlight Dinner.

Custer: Toast to the finale of your tour at a lively Celebration Dinner with wine.

1 Welcome Dinner (WD), 14 Full Breakfasts (FB), 3 Highlight Dinners (HD), 3 Dinners (D), and 1 Celebration Dinner (CD)

STAY AT THE BEST ADDRESSES

Lake Powell: We guarantee lake-view rooms with picture-perfect vistas and breathtaking sunsets.

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Zion National Park: Stay in rustic charming lodges, located right inside the National Parks.

Las Vegas: Where else would you want to stay, but the Cosmopolitan? A modern, luxury, upscale, resort, overlooking the heart of the strip.

Grand Tetons: Stay right inside the National Park at the desirable Jackson Lake Lodge. One of the largest of all the eco-friendly resorts, with breathtaking views.

UCross: Enjoy a relaxed and peaceful atmosphere during your stay at the Ranch at UCross. The plush accommodations enhance the natural scenic beauty of the surroundings.

Spearfish: Deep in the heart of one of the most breathtaking, beautiful canyons in the world, nestled alongside lofty pines and spectacular cliffs, you will find Spearfish Canyon Lodge. Built and decorated in the style of the old lodges of the West, the outside world is as near or far as you need it to be.

Overview: This captivating tour stays in cosy lodges located right inside the Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks. The gracious stone and wood State Game Lodge is set in a beautiful mountain valley of Custer State Park and served as the 'Summer White House' for two American presidents.

ADDITIONAL FIVE STAR SERVICES

An expert Insight Tour Director, at the pinnacle of their career, will guide you on your journey. Serving as your 'travelling concierge', this skilled guide will act as consummate organiser and be your 'friend in a foreign land'.

Enjoy the unique comfort of Insight's luxury air-conditioned 40 seat coach with extended leg room and on-board restroom. It's business class comfort.

A personal radio headset gives you the freedom to wander during visits to famous highlights, without missing any of your Local Expert's fascinating insights and commentaries.

Baggage handling everywhere, with seamless and prompt delivery to your door at every hotel.

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Hotel and restaurant tips included - you'll never have to worry about how much to give, nor search for foreign currency. Plus we include all taxes and portage charges at hotels.

Stay connected with friends and family with our complimentary coach and hotel Wi-Fi.

Insight Flourishes - from time to time, your Tour Director will enchant you with local tidbits, each representing authentic food or beverages unique to the destination.

Included airport transfers on the first and last day of your tour.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 ARRIVE PHOENIX – SCOTTSDALE

Welcome to Arizona. Your airport transfer takes you to your tour hotel in Scottsdale. Enjoy the superb facilities and grounds of this desert oasis. At 18:00, join your Tour Director for a Welcome Reception with drinks and appetizers.

Hotel: Scottsdale Marriott at McDowell Mountains

Welcome Reception and Dinner

DAY 2 SEDONA AND THE WONDERS OF THE MIGHTY GRAND CANYON

Head north to the quaint bohemian colony of Sedona, where you can browse the stores and galleries, before travelling on to Grand Canyon National Park. Perhaps take an optional flightseeing tour by helicopter or plane over this natural wonder. Spend the night inside the park, enjoying the peace and quiet after the crowds have departed. During your stay, join a Local Expert for an informative presentation about the wonders of the Grand Canyon. In the evening, enjoy a Highlight Dinner in the Thunderbird Room while taking in the magnificent views.

Hotel: National Park Lodges, Grand Canyon

Full Breakfast, Highlight Dinner

DAY 3 MONUMENT VALLEY AND LAKE POWELL

Head to the historic Cameron Trading Post, featuring Southwest American Indian arts and crafts. The journey carries on through the colourful Painted Desert to Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park, where you board all-terrain vehicles for a guided tour of the valley floor, used as a backdrop of many Western Films. Stop at the Glen Canyon Dam to learn about its impact on the Colorado River before arriving at your

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lakefront resort.

Hotel: Lake Powell Resorts and Marinas, Lake View Rooms
Full Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4 LEISURELY LAKE POWELL

(Relaxed Start) Relax and enjoy the resort's facilities or join an optional float trip down the scenic Colorado River. Take a leisurely cruise through scenic Antelope Canyon with its dramatic steep, sandstone walls.

Hotel: Lake Powell Resorts and Marinas
Full Breakfast

DAY 5 BRYCE CANYON'S STONY SYMPHONY

Head to Bryce Canyon National Park in Southern Utah and enjoy a leisurely walk along Sunset Point to view the great amphitheatres of odd-shaped monoliths known as hoodoos before heading to Zion National Park.

Hotel: Zion National Park Lodge
Full Breakfast

DAY 6 ZION TO LAS VEGAS - FROM NATURE TO NEON

Travel through more amazing scenery to the lush cliff-and-canyon landscape of Zion National Park. Board a private Zion Canyon Shuttle with live commentary to experience the scenic highlights of the park, followed by some time to explore on your own. A complete change of scenery awaits you in the afternoon when you arrive in Las Vegas; bright lights, shopping malls, huge themed hotels and the omnipresent slot machine. In the evening, join your Tour Director and newfound friends for a Highlight Dinner with drinks before seeing the lights and glitz of Las Vegas.

Hotel: The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas
Full Breakfast, Highlight Dinner

DAY 7 SALT LAKE CITY

Travel to Salt Lake City, the capital and most populous city in the State of Utah, and headquarters of the Mormon faith.

Hotel: Hilton Salt Lake City Center
Full Breakfast

DAY 8 JACKSON AND GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

Join a morning orientation tour of Salt Lake City to see the famous Temple Square. Then travel north across the Oregon Trail to visit historic Jackson, where arches of elk antlers adorn the central square. Later, continue to your lakeside lodge overlooking Jackson Lake and

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the stunning peaks of Grand Teton National Park.
Hotel: Jackson Lake Lodge
Full Breakfast

DAY 9 YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

The Grand Tetons thrust skyward 6,562 feet (2,000 metres) from the valley floor. Stop to admire some of the incredible views at Jenny Lake. Then enter Yellowstone, the world's first National Park and known for its unique geothermal activity, spectacular landscapes and abundant wildlife.

Hotel: National Park Lodges, Yellowstone
Full Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 10 GEYSERS AND COLOURFUL MUDPOTS AT YELLOWSTONE

Walk among the geysers and watch them erupt. You will be joined by a Local Expert for an informative stroll through Yellowstone's Upper Geyser Basin. There is plenty of time to see the colourful bubbling mudpots and observe Old Faithful shooting water over 120 feet (37 metres) in the air. See free-roaming deer, elk and bear in their natural habitat and the roar of the Lower Yellowstone Falls.

Hotel: National Park Lodges, Yellowstone
Full Breakfast

DAY 11 RELAXING AT THE RANCH AT UCROSS

Depart Yellowstone National Park and travel through the stark Shoshone Canyon and Absaroka Rocky Mountains to reach the Wild West town of Cody. Visit the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, built in honour of one of America's great Western legends. Head to Clearmont in Wyoming and after checking into your hotel, ride horseback enjoying stunning scenery before enjoying a ranch style Highlight Dinner.

Hotel: The Ranch at UCross
Full Breakfast, Highlight Dinner

DAY 12 DEVILS TOWER INTO THE BLACK HILLS

(Relaxed Start) After a morning at leisure, head towards Devils Tower, an astounding geologic feature that protrudes out of the surrounding Black Hills and considered sacred to the Lakota and other tribes. Then, travel to Spearfish Canyon, a great spot for wildlife enthusiasts, where the breathtaking limestone palisades of this creek-carved gorge are more ancient than the Grand Canyon. Enjoy dinner including an option of local trout, which became native to the Spearfish region when they were brought from Colorado in 1899.

Hotel: Spearfish Canyon Lodge

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	<p>Full Breakfast, Dinner</p> <p>DAY 13 CUSTER AND THE WILD, WILD WEST Keep a lookout for pronghorn antelope as you cross the great high plains to the Black Hills of South Dakota. In Deadwood, join Kevin Costner's Original Deadwood Tour and explore this once lawless town. With a Local Expert, hear about the days of Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane, who made this town famous during the gold rush of the 1870s. Then, bear stories told by members of the Lakota tribe who share a live narrative of the Great Sioux Nation. Continue on to Custer State Park, renowned for its beautiful landscape and abundant wildlife. Perhaps get up close and personal with herds of buffalo on an optional jeep safari. Hotel: The State Game Lodge, Custer State Park Full Breakfast</p> <p>DAY 14 THE MOUNTAIN MONUMENTS OF THE BLACK HILLS OF SOUTH DAKOTA View the Crazy Horse Memorial, dedicated to all Native Americans. Move on to Mount Rushmore National Memorial, where carvings of Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Roosevelt dominate the Black Hills. The rest of the day is yours to spend at your leisure before a farewell Celebration Dinner. Hotel: The State Game Lodge, Custer State Park Full Breakfast, Celebration Dinner</p> <p>DAY 15 DEPART DENVER Travel south from Custer State Park where your tour ends on arrival in Denver, with a transfer to Denver International Airport. Full Breakfast</p>
<p>My Insight Experience</p>	<p>I travelled with Insight in India in November 2014 after a gap of many years – what a difference! My two week journey with Insight Vacations took me to Delhi, capital of the sub-continent, across Northern India to the holy city of Varanasi, the oldest continually inhabited city in the world. I travelled to Khajuraho's carved temples, to the palaces of Orchha and of course to Agra, home of the world's most beautiful building, the Taj Mahal. From there, on to the great abandoned city Fatehpur Sikri, and then south and west into Rajasthan, to the Pink City of Jaipur. I travelled by air, by coach, by boat, by train, by cycle rickshaw and even by elephant! It was a magnificent journey and allows me to unreservedly recommend Insight Vacations. See my photos on Pinterest at https://www.pinterest.com/TravelShow/india/</p>

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	<p>And see my Travel Blog at http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/Blog/tabid/400/EntryId/86/India.aspx</p>
Singles	<p>If you wish to share with another tour member you can advise Insight Vacations at the time of booking. Insight believes that traveling solo doesn't have to cost you more. They will try to match you with someone of the same sex in order to avoid having to pay the single supplement. If they are not able to provide a suitable roommate, they will provide a single room at no extra cost.</p>
Tour Director	<p>This is Insight's appointed tour escort who manages your entire trip, and is responsible to see that your vacation runs smoothly. He or she travels with you, coordinating your day-to-day itinerary, hotel check-in and language translation; as well as giving practical advice on everything from 'do's and don'ts' to the best restaurants and sights.</p>
Hotels	<p>All Insight hotels are carefully selected to be appropriate for your tour and for the destination. They are mainly First Class, Superior First Class and Deluxe standard, but some will be selected because they particularly reflect the region or country. Even in the more remote areas, Insight chooses from the best touring hotels available.</p>
Meals	<p>Insight tours feature an abundance of dining experiences. You'll enjoy included three course Table d'hôte dinners where we arrange the ideal complement of local foods such as soups and salads, pasta, paella, fish, chicken or various meats, plus appetizing desserts and coffee or tea.</p> <p>On some tours Insight features a 'Dine-Around Evening' with a choice of two or three restaurants. Your Tour Director will advise you of each menu so you can pre-select and make your reservation. Even if your first choice is unavailable you will enjoy any of the other delicious options also with wine, beer or soft-drinks.</p> <p>Other tours may offer a 'Highlight Dinner' at a restaurant, which usually features a menu typical of the region, similarly with wine, beer or soft-drinks.</p> <p>Hearty breakfasts are always included, from delicious traditional full-cooked breakfasts in Britain and Ireland to substantial buffets or continental style breakfasts as is the usual custom throughout Europe. In North America breakfast will consist of a full American breakfast. Should you require special dietary menus your tour director can arrange these for you when informed in advance.</p>
Luggage	<p>Handling is included for one suitcase per person.</p>
Tipping	<p>On an Insight Vacation, some gratuities are included in the price of your</p>

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	<p>trip: baggage handling, meal service for all meals listed in the tour itinerary, and hotel service charge. Room service, however, is not included in the tour price.</p> <p>Tipping is a widespread practice and is a customary way of acknowledging service. Here are some guidelines: Restaurant, total bill 10-15% Tour Director \$4.00 per person per day Motor-coach Driver \$2.50 per person per day Local Sightseeing Guide \$1.00</p>
Coaches	<p>Insight's coaches are safe and comfortable and the drivers are highly experienced professionals. To give each passenger an equal opportunity, they rotate seats daily. A non-smoking policy is in place. Regular rest stops are provided so that you can stretch your legs.</p>
Passports	<p>The Chris Robinson Travel Show always advises listeners to carry their passport with them at all times. This ensures against loss or theft in hotels. For added protection, keep a photocopy of your passport in your suitcase. Hotels are sometimes required to hold your passport in order to comply with local regulations.</p>
Sustainable Travel	<p>Protecting the environment and the people and places Insight visit is a top priority for the company. They want to help ensure these remain for future generations to enjoy and are committed to ensuring they minimize the environmental impact of their own operations around the world.</p> <p>Insight's Responsibility</p> <p>Every time we travel, whether by car, train, plane or coach, we are burning fossil fuels and contributing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. And while there are many ways to travel while on holiday, by choosing an Insight escorted tour, you are opting for one of the most environmentally friendly ways to go. Their website has a grid that shows you the amount of carbon dioxide emitted per km for a passenger traveling on various forms of transport which clearly shows coach transport as emitting significantly less carbon dioxide than other forms of transport. It's over five times more efficient than car travel for instance. With carbon dioxide being one of the main causes of global warming, it's good to know that buying an escorted tour holiday is a better way to travel.</p> <p>They are reducing the carbon footprints and environmental impact of their offices by introducing recycling, energy reduction and waste minimisation projects as well as supporting local community projects where they live and work. Insight staff are involved in making a difference and they are encouraging staff to spend two working days a year volunteering for charitable projects.</p>

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	<p>Conservation Foundation: To demonstrate commitment and ongoing investment, Insight are supporting and contributing to The Leading Travel Companies of the World Conservation Foundation www.tlwc.com a not-for-profit organisation that will invest in supporting long term sustainable tourism.</p> <p>The Insight group of companies is donating US\$1 million per year to fund much-needed conservation, community and sustainable tourism projects that will create a better world for future generations to enjoy. To ensure every dollar goes to people and places in need, each project is carefully vetted by the Foundation's Members of the Board.</p>
<p>TreadRight</p>	<p>TreadRight is a not-for-profit foundation established by The Travel Corporation (TTC) of which Insight is a part, which sees their brands give financial support to sustainable tourism projects around the world. Ultimately, TreadRight is how they play a part in creating a more sustainable future.</p> <p>TTC's family of brands have always supported philanthropic causes, and established their foundation - originally called The Travel Corporation Conservation Foundation - in 2008. The TreadRight Foundation name reflects the broader scope of work the foundation now engages in and easily communicates the values of the organisation to their guests.</p> <p>The TreadRight team provides assistance with project selection and management of foundation project partnerships. The team also provides tools and resources to communicate the work of TreadRight to those who travel with them..</p> <p>TreadRight is registered in Switzerland as a not-for-profit foundation. The financial contributions made by each TTC brand go directly to the projects. Administration costs are kept to an absolute minimum with TTC providing office space for the TreadRight Program Manager & Coordinator as well as marketing, design and technical support. This additional support is provided free of charge.</p> <p>At TTC and TreadRight, they believe the onus is on them to do their part and it is not their place to ask guests to support these sustainability initiatives. However, if you would like to help support their many inspiring partners, you can donate to them directly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Céline Cousteau Film Fellowship - Wilderness Foundation - Africa - WildAid - Alliance for Artisan Enterprise

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Happy Hearts Fund- Free The Children- Australia Zoo Wildlife Warriors- Sea Turtle Conservancy- Tourism Cares- Amy Biehl Foundation <p>Since 2008 we have helped to support more than 35 sustainable projects in more than 30 destinations around the world.</p> <p>To find out what's happening with the TreadRight projects you are interested in you can use these links:</p> <p>Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/treadright</p> <p>Twitter: https://twitter.com/TreadRightOrg</p> <p>Email. https://www.treadright.org/foundation/contact-us</p>
Contacts	<p>Address: Insight Vacations, 33 Kern Rd, Toronto, Ontario M3B 1S9 Tel: 1-866-747-8120</p> <p>Email: info@insightvacations.ca</p> <p>Website: www.insightvacations.com</p> <p>Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/InsightVacations</p> <p>Pinterest: https://www.pinterest.com/insightvacation/</p> <p>Twitter: https://twitter.com/insightvacation</p>

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