

# BORN IN THE USA

Celebrate everything that makes the USA special, including road trips, motels and heritage, says Stuart Forster



**S**tanding 20 feet tall, the fibreglass giant in front of me is known as a muffer man. With horns on his helmet, Eric was moulded in the 1960s to advertise Viking Carpets. At the time, many such figures stood by American roads promoting products and services. And today they remain there as historical monuments of America's past.

Driving along Historic Route 66, I've made it my mission to photograph muffer men and now have a varied collection of snaps.

The famous figures even inspired a Donald Trump giant outside of the Pink Elephant Mall in Livingston, Illinois, complete with a red "Make America Great Again" cap. Packed with all kinds of Americana, the mall is by an alignment of the 'Mother Road' used between 1940 and 1977.

Here in the small town of Atlanta, Illinois, several restored muffer men are displayed outside the American Giants Museum. Further down the street, a figure holds an outsized hot dog, prompting me to think about lunch.

**ROUTE 66 CENTENNIAL**

The U.S. has faced a few challenges recently when it comes to tourism, including fast rising costs for travel and experiences. And applying for an ESTA, which allows visa-free travel and entry into the U.S., increased from \$21 to \$40 last September. Costs for entering the country's national parks were also hiked from the start of this year.

International visitors face a \$100 surcharge – on top of regular fees – to visit 11 popular parks, including Bryce Canyon, Grand Canyon and Yellowstone. The price of the annual America the Beautiful pass, to access national parks and federal recreational lands, has more than tripled to \$250 for non-U.S. residents.

Despite this, Karen Farrar, Product and Marketing Manager of North America Travel Service, says: "Demand for the USA is holding really well. We have seen



**“Visitors can learn about the first encounters of the American Revolution at the Lexington Visitor’s Center”**

high demand for New England, the Deep South, Texas (particularly ranching) and Route 66.

“Although the majority of bookings are still fly-drives, there has been an increase in enquiries for non-drive holidays – using rail, private transfers and internal flights – so we have widened our programme to include a larger selection of these types of itineraries.”

The U.S. is an ideal destination for road trips. Running between Chicago and Santa Monica, Route 66 was designated a highway in 1926.

Ahead of its centennial this year, signage, murals and even original sections of the road – such as the Carpenter Park Alignment near Springfield, Illinois – were spruced up.

This year will also see several

exhibitions about the road, including Roads, River, Rooms, and Reels at the National Museum of Transportation in St Louis, Missouri, and Route 66: California Dreamin’ at the California Automobile Museum in Sacramento, while The Pharmacy Gallery and Art Space in Springfield hosts works by artist Bob Waldmire.

No Route 66 roadtrip is complete without a stop at the country's most iconic of accommodations.

The world's first motel opened in California in December 1925, making the roadside accommodation just over 100 years old. Motels can be a characterful and moderately priced alternative to hotels, and there are numerous options available. The 33-room Skyview Motel in Los Alamos, on California's Highway 101, has an on-site restaurant, an adults-only pool and rents bicycles to explore the Santa Ynez Valley.

RuPaul's Drag Race winner Trixie Mattel owns the Trixie Motel in Palm Springs, whose pool parties and Yeehaw Cowgirl Room are helping redefine the motel experience.

**SCENIC DRIVES**

Visit the National Scenic Byway Foundation's website to identify scenic drives that will suit your client's interests and itinerary.

This year 'The Blues Crossroads' at the meeting point of highways 49 and 61 will unveil a new Mississippi Blues Trail marker and feature on a self-guided blues trail. While travellers seeking Indigenous tourism experiences may be tempted to visit the new Chickasaw Heritage Centre near ▶

**Picture:** (clockwise from left) An unmistakable Route 66 sign in Illinois (Stuart Forster); Buffalo on a ranch (Vivian Arcidiocono); A vintage police vehicle parked outside a retro diner (Holger Woizick)





## “This year is the 250th since the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence”

► Tupelo, historically the centre of the Chickasaw Nation.

Mississippi’s enduring appeal to UK holidaymakers lies in its authenticity, offering true Americana experiences through world-changing Blues heritage along the Mississippi Blues Trail, rich history and warm Southern hospitality.

Rochelle Hicks, Director of Visit Mississippi, says: “Visit Mississippi is leaning into this by promoting immersive, scenic road trips – from the Natchez Trace Parkway to the coastal charm of the Mississippi Gulf Coast – encouraging visitors to connect more deeply with the state’s music, culture, and communities.”

### AMERICA’S SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL

This year is the 250th since the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence in what is now Philadelphia’s Independence Hall. Celebrations of that historic event are being held across the country.

Philly is also home to the Liberty Bell Center and the National Constitution Center, and offers much for people who appreciate art and history. To mark the Semiquincentennial, the Betsy Ross House, named after the woman who

stitched the first version of the Stars and Stripes flag, has immersive tours and a special Semiquincentennial-themed Flag Fest which takes place from June 6-14.

Washington D.C. is a 90-minute train ride from Philly and a major fireworks show is planned there to commemorate the country’s 250th birthday.

The Declaration of Independence is displayed in the National Archives, next to the Bill of Rights. Elsewhere in D.C., the undercroft of the Lincoln Memorial will open this year. The Hirschhorn Sculpture Garden will reopen in October and, in July, the National Air and Space Museum will reopen in the institution’s 50th year.

The American Revolution’s first shots were fired in New England and

visitors can learn about the first military encounters of the campaign at the Lexington Visitors Center. Bunker Hill Monument stands in memory of the war’s first major battle. It is in Boston, which will host Sail Boston from July 11-16 – part of a series of Sail 250 events featuring rigged tall ships.

### NEW OPENINGS

In June, the Barack Obama Presidential Center will open in Chicago’s Jackson Park. Its many facilities include a museum focusing on the president and Michelle, his First Lady, a recording studio, an athletic centre and a library. It’s not the only opening that will commemorate a presidency.

The new Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library is taking shape ►

**Pictured:** (clockwise from top) A couple walking in front of a Route 66 mural in Collinsville, Illinois (Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau of Southwest Illinois); A sign in Santa Monica, marking the trail’s end (Terence Starkey); Ace Sign Co. Sign Museum located in Springfield (Visit Springfield, Illinois)





► in North Dakota. It will serve as an immersive gateway into the North Dakota Badlands, connecting visitors to the landscapes and stories that shaped Roosevelt, the 26th president of the U.S., who held office from 1901-1909.

"This strengthens why our state belongs on every traveller's 2026 itinerary and beyond – authentic experiences, unforgettable scenery, and a deeper sense of place found only in North Dakota," says Sara Otte Coleman, North Dakota's Tourism Director, of the

attraction that opens on July 4.

A \$2 billion renovation of Portland International Airport, the chief entry point to Oregon, will be completed this year. The city is renowned for its culinary scene and pods of food carts. The opening of the PDX Food Pod, Hollywood Bar and Carts and the James Beard Public Market is planned for 2026. Art aficionados may appreciate the newly opened Mark Rothko Pavilion at the recently expanded Portland Art Museum.



### THE HOT LIST: WHAT TO SELL IN 2026

For agents keen to help clients celebrate a big year for the U.S., here is a selection of hooks, tours and itineraries which make the most of trips Stateside..

**Pictured:** (left to right) Badlands National Park in South Dakota (Sofia Simoes); The entrance to the Theodore Roosevelt National Park (Ryan Stone); A cattle drive at a ranch (Bailey Alexander)

#### 1 FAN FAVOURITES

11 U.S. cities, including Atlanta, Dallas, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Miami, and New York will host FIFA World Cup matches during the summer, opening up opportunities to sell fan trips to specific locations or longer multi-stop road trips.

# FIFA WORLD CUP 2026™

## START THE EXPERIENCE IN LOS ANGELES

DISCOVERLA.COM



**2 TAKE A DAY OFF**

Forty years on from the release of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, On Location Tours is offering a tour inspired by the movie. Ideal for clients interested in set-jetting trips, The Art Institute of Chicago, Federal Plaza and Willis Tower are included on the itinerary. [onlocationtours.com](http://onlocationtours.com)

**3 SKY'S THE LIMIT**

Do you have clients who want to feel like they're living in a Western movie? Then capitalise on cowboy culture and dude ranches by selling a range of ranching holidays offered by American Sky in Texas, Colorado, Arizona and elsewhere. [americansky.co.uk](http://americansky.co.uk)

**4 ON TRACK**

Train lovers or those who want a multicentre itinerary have the option of travelling on Amtrak's twice-daily Mardi Gras Service between New Orleans and Mobile, Alabama, which has stops in coastal Mississippi. [amtrak.com](http://amtrak.com)

**5 U.S. EXPANSION**

Lusso has expanded its North America programme. Two popular self-drive ▶



An advertisement for Los Angeles featuring four soccer players in black and gold jerseys celebrating. The background is a solid yellow color. On the left, the text "WE LOVE LA" is written vertically in large white letters. At the top, "HOLLYWOOD" is written in a large, outlined font. In the center, the "Los Angeles" logo is displayed in white script with a sun icon. At the bottom right, the text "NOW PLAYING @ DISCOVERLA.COM" is written in white. One player's jersey has "SEGURA" and the number "4" on the back.

## Amelia Island, Florida: Find Your Unwind.

Located just 30 minutes from Jacksonville on Florida's northeast coast, Amelia Island offers a relaxing alternative for travellers seeking an authentic American holiday. This 13-mile-long barrier island features pristine Atlantic beaches and rare maritime forests, ideal for outdoor exploration.



The island's rich history will take your clients on a walk back in time. This legacy is beautifully preserved within the Victorian charm of its walkable downtown. Discover a side of Florida that feels both familiar and wonderfully unexpected.

Learn more at  
[AmeliaIsland.com/Travel](https://AmeliaIsland.com/Travel)



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### “In June, the Barack Obama Presidential Center will open in Chicago, featuring a museum, recording studio and library”

► tours are the 14-day Boston, Boats and Beaches trip, and the 13-day multi-centre Rhythm of the Deep South itinerary. All of Lusso's holidays are bespoke.  
[lussotravel.com](https://lussotravel.com)

#### BOOK IT

A 15-day Get your kicks on a Route 66 fly-drive holiday with North American Travel Service includes Economy flights to Chicago (returning from Los Angeles), car hire and accommodation along the 2,448-mile route between the Windy City and Santa Monica. The first night is in Chicago's Palmer House, a Hilton Hotel. Prices start from £2,695pp.  
[northamericatravelservice.com](https://northamericatravelservice.com)



**STUART FORSTER**

→ An award-winning travel writer, Stuart has visited the U.S. numerous times and travelled on Route 66 last summer.

Pictured: (above) A giant, decorative cowboy boot statue located at The Big Texan Steak Ranch in Amarillo, Texas (K Mitch Hodge)