

North America's 50 most beautiful attractions

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American beauties



Zhukova Valentyna/Shutterstock

The vast and varied continent that encompasses the USA and Canada has a mind-boggling array of lovely landscapes, encompassing gleamingly gorgeous skylines and wonderfully wild wilderness areas. From some of the world's most beguiling cities to sprawling national parks

with slate-grey mountain ranges and lakes in bold blue to milky turquoise, these are just some of the most beautiful attractions across North America.

Grand Canyon, Arizona, USA



Galyna Andrushko/Shutterstock

Finding an ugly inch of the [Grand Canyon](#), or a bad angle to view it from, would be quite a task. The granddaddy of all the continent's canyons is simply breathtaking, no matter how one looks at it. It's overwhelmingly vast, sprawling out in shades of rust-red, soft peach and grey, and looks at its beautiful best at sunrise, when the undulating valleys of rock formations are washed in hazy shades of pink and lilac.

Havasu Falls, Supai, Arizona, USA



Edwin Verin/Shutterstock

The beauty doesn't stop outside the boundaries of the Grand Canyon. This dreamy waterfall makes its velvety cascade in a remote area a little outside the national park. The landscape is incredible, with dramatic, honey-coloured gorges, waterfalls and blue-green swimming holes, with the vivid colours of Havasu Falls the most striking of all. It's one of five waterfalls on the [Havasupai Indian Reservation](#), whose residents are known as 'people of the blue green water'. Unfortunately the reservation and the waterfall within it are currently closed to the public with plans to reopen it in 2023.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee and North Carolina, USA



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The forested peaks and valleys of this national park resemble a painting. Or a whole gallery of paintings on rotation throughout the day and seasons, from the intricate detail of fir trees and spring blooms to the abstract lines of the misty, layered mountains at dusk and sunrise. Clingman's Dome, [the highest point in Tennessee](#) at 6,643 feet (2,025m), keeps a watchful eye on the beguiling landscape with views stretching more than 100 miles (161km) on clear days.

Old San Juan, San Juan, Puerto Rico



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Spanish-Colonial homes in shades of lemon, violet, peach and spearmint brighten Old San Juan or Viejo San Juan, the most historic part of Puerto Rico's capital. These rainbow buildings, dating back to the 16th century, watch cheerfully over blue-tinged cobbled streets, while forts and the old city walls gaze over the ocean. The rest of the city is incredibly pretty, too, with creamy beaches, forested parks and lagoons.

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Stanley Park, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada



Dan Breckwoldt/Shutterstock

Vancouver's long waterfront path runs through Stanley Park, following the curves of the seawall and passing by beaches, bloom-filled gardens, hemlock forests and even a miniature railway. This tranquil park would be gorgeous enough in any surroundings – views over the bay, of distant mountains and of Vancouver's gleaming skyline make it even more so.

[Discover the world's most beautiful cities](#)

Big Sur, California, USA



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The entire Highway 1 or Pacific Coast Highway and pretty much everything along its wiggling way could justifiably be counted among North America's most beautiful attractions. Big Sur, though, is perhaps the most heart-stoppingly beautiful stretch. As the highway curls around this portion, between Carmel and San Simeon, the cliffs feel closer, the redwoods taller and the dips towards the swirling blues of the ocean even more dramatic. Bixby Bridge (pictured) is a famous landmark, spanning bluffs that sprout fluffy pampas grass and overlooking a creamy sweep of sand.

[Here are more of America's most scenic coastal drives](#)

Washington Monument, Washington DC, USA



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When this ivory-hued marble obelisk was completed in 1884, as a towering tribute to first US president George Washington, it was the tallest building in the world. It has since been surpassed by a few skyscrapers, of course, but it remains a striking icon of the capital. Piercing the sky at 555-foot (169m) tall, it's also still the city's tallest structure apart from radio towers. What really adds to its beauty is the reflecting pond that so immaculately mirrors the 'needle' when viewed from another famous monument, the Lincoln Memorial.

Lake Superior, Michigan, USA



John McCormick/Shutterstock

Its name might seem a tad boastful but it's fair enough, really. The biggest of the Great Lakes chain – and the world's largest freshwater lake by surface area – covers a vast 31,700 square miles (82,103sq km). It's so huge, in fact, it seems more like an ocean than a lake. There are shipwrecks beneath its bold-blue surface, which is scattered with 450-odd islands – some of which, including those in the archipelago that make up [Isle Royale National Park](#), have their own lakes and waterfalls.

[Check out these stunning photos of the world's most spectacular shipwrecks](#)

Copper Canyon, Chihuahua, Mexico



Isabellaphotography/Shutterstock

Located in the desert of northwest Mexico, Copper Canyon features some of the most marvellous vistas in the country. The series of twenty canyons are home to the Tarhumara people, descendants of the Aztecs, who have been living here for centuries. Travellers can enjoy this spectacular area best while taking the Copper Canyon Train Ride, a 390-mile-long (650km) railway connecting Los Mochis and Chihuahua City. The line travels through the country's most rugged landscapes, crossing deep ravines and trekking along impressive mountains.

Savannah Historic District, Savannah, Georgia



f11photo/Shutterstock

Savannah is the epitome of Southern beauty and charm, from its grand Georgian mansions to each tendril of Spanish moss that drapes elegantly from its hefty oak trees. Nature has a way of interplaying with the city's man-made attractions to make it even more gorgeous, from the oaks that shade Forsyth Park (pictured) to riverfront warehouses and bold pink azalea blooms, which brighten parks and cemeteries in springtime.

Denali National Park, Alaska, USA



evenfh/Shutterstock

This eclectic landscape covers six million wild and ruggedly gorgeous acres dominated by North America's tallest peak, Denali. [The park](#)'s natural beauty runs the gorgeous gamut from alpine forest to snowy slopes and glaciers, with resident Dall's sheep, wolves and brown and black bears adding to the charm. As if that weren't enough, the park is one of the best places to view the aurora borealis or Northern Lights in winter.

[Gaze at stunning images of the Northern Lights here](#)

Old Town, Québec City, Québec, Canada



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There's a touch of the fairy tale about Québec, known for its fortified Old Town or citadel. Spire-topped towers and houses with gently sloping mansard roofs line cobbled streets, with many of the impeccably preserved buildings dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. Château Frontenac, a castle that's now a luxury hotel, is the most imposing structure, while the city's location by the Saint Lawrence River makes it all the more lovely.

[Here are 7 reasons to visit Southern Québec](#)

Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, USA



Kris Wiktor/Shutterstock

Some parts of [the USA's first national park](#) don't seem to belong on the same planet, let alone within the same preserve. There's the turquoise Grand Prismatic Spring, the predictably dramatic spurting of Old Faithful geyser, and the three connecting cascades that make up Yellowstone Falls, flowing past pine-studded cliffs. There's the wildlife, from wolves and bears to bighorn sheep and bison. And then there's Yellowstone Lake, whose shimmering surface is believed to conceal a whole new world of geysers, hot springs and canyons like those in the rest of the park.

[See our guide to northern Wyoming here](#)

Lacandon Jungle, Chiapas, Mexico



Rubi Rodriguez Martinez/Shutterstock

Mexico's largest rainforest, the 10,800-acre Lacandon Jungle is not only home to incredibly diverse flora and fauna, rivers, lakes and waterfalls, but also the Lacandon Indigenous tribe and ancient Maya ruins. One of the most fun ways to enjoy the rainforest is by booking a river rafting tour along the Lacanjá River, where travellers can float down the river while looking out for wildlife and enjoying the verdant landscapes. Combining the rafting tour with a hike can lead visitors to breathtaking Maya villages and ruins, such as Lacanjá Chansayab, Bonampak and Yaxchilan.

Gulf Coast, Alabama, USA



Darryl Vest/Shutterstock

The alabaster sands and wildlife-rich waterways of Orange Beach and Gulf Shores – neighbouring resorts not far from Mobile – are favoured by pretty much anyone who's set eyes on them. For everyone else, the fact that Alabama has some of the continent's whitest beaches might pleasantly surprise. Aside from the broad, soft beaches which line the shore, the area is known for its biodiversity and has even been compared to the Amazon.

Joshua Tree National Park, California, USA



RomanSlavik.com/Shutterstock

This park, around an hour from Palm Springs, has the feel of a film set. Perhaps it's the huge, *Flintstones*-esque boulders that seem to have been rolled in on castors, or a night sky so heavy with stars it looks like a glittery backdrop. Or it could be the spindly, spiky-looking namesake trees, surely straight from the imagination of a set designer. [Joshua Tree National Park](#) is strewn with surreal, sculptural details, from 30-foot (9.1m) tall Arch Rock to the piled-up boulders of Jumbo Rocks.

Napa Valley, California, USA



Brandon Bourdages/Shutterstock

California has many wine areas and they're all pretty lovely. But Napa is a classic, like a beautifully aged cabernet sauvignon. The valley is home to more than 400 wineries, from grand chateaux and cellars producing Champagne-method fizz to hip tasting rooms in old garages. Most wineries flank Highway 29, while quieter tasting rooms sprawl out from the squiggly Silverado Trail.

[Read our guide to California's wine areas here](#)

Bryce Canyon, Utah, USA



Sean Pavone/Shutterstock

Spindly rock spires or hoodoos fill the bowl-shaped Bryce Amphitheater – the most distinctive part of [the national park](#) – like a jagged, vibrantly hued sea. It would be incredible in any colour but the combination of apricot, cream and crimson shades is especially eye-popping. Paths wind beneath the tall rock formations and through the forest and other natural amphitheatres that make up the park.

[Read our full Southern Utah guide for more on the region](#)

Yosemite National Park, California, USA



Andrew Opila/Shutterstock

This [incredible national park](#) has a way of making visitors feel very small indeed. Everything is massive, majestic and pretty magical, really. There's Mariposa Grove, whose paths wiggle beneath towering giant sequoia trees. Then there's Yosemite Falls, the USA's tallest waterfall, flowing from a head-spinning 1,430 feet (436m) above ground and cascading over granite cliffs and through meadows. Throw in tranquil lake beaches, huge boulders and pine-clad valleys and it's hard to find fault.

[Discover more of America's most beautiful waterfalls here](#)

Art Deco Historic District, Miami, Florida, USA



Sean Pavone/Shutterstock

There's delightful Art Deco detail everywhere in this designated historic district in Miami's South Beach neighbourhood. Rows of 1930s buildings, painted in soft pastel shades from peach to sky blue, line the famous beachfront stretch Ocean Drive. The colourful parade continues on the beach itself, with more than 30 lifeguard huts painted in vivid stripes and bold hues befitting the area's history. Throw in soft sand, cornflower skies and palm trees and this is pretty much the retro seaside dream.

Bonneville Salt Flats, Utah and Nevada, USA



Layne V. Naylor/Shutterstock

North America has some incredible roadside attractions and [this natural wonder](#) is among the most surreal and unexpected. Sprawling out next to the I-80 between Salt Lake City in Utah and Wendover, Nevada, these salt pans sprawl across more than 30,000 acres. Nothing grows or lives here – it's just an expanse of bright white, the surface of the salt flats cracking and curling in the heat.

[See more unusual roadside attractions in the US here](#)

Kenai Fjords National Park, Alaska, USA



Sekar B/Shutterstock

[Kenai Fjords](#) is one of Alaska's smallest national parks though it's not exactly tiny, covering 1,047 square miles (2,711 sq km). And it certainly punches above its weight when it comes to breathtaking natural beauty. From glaciers like shiny, freshly whipped Italian meringues to the thickly forested shoreline of Resurrection Bay and the tree-clad rocks that jut from Porcupine Bay (pictured), it feels like the park has cherry-picked its favourite natural wonders from around the globe. The wildlife, from moose to clown-faced puffins, is rather lovely too.

Casa Loma, Toronto, Ontario, Canada



Jon Bilous/Shutterstock

This mansion, perched on a hilltop in midtown Toronto, looks lovely from any angle and in any light. Gothic-Revival style [Casa Loma](#) was constructed between 1911 and 1914 and is now a historic site that usually offers tours and hosts special events. Its grandeur has also attracted attention from Hollywood, used as the location of Xavier's school in the *X-Men* movie series and for some scenes from 2002 film *Chicago*. The elegance continues inside, with 98 rooms decorated in an Edwardian style – plus two underground tunnels and a secret basement.

Lake Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, Mexico



LatitudeStock/Alamy Stock Photo

Situated in the western state of Michoacán, Lake Pátzcuaro is home to a handful of stunning islands and islets, each worth paying a visit to. The highlight of the lake, Janitzio Island, boasts an impressive 130-foot-tall (40m) statue of the national hero José María Morelos and is one of the best places to experience Day of the Dead celebrations. All the villages of Lake Pátzcuaro showcase fascinating cultures featuring old colonial structures and local Indigenous peoples, which share their heritage with visitors.

Mona Island, Puerto Rico



Julio Salgado/Shutterstock

Puerto Rico's main island is surrounded by around 100 smaller, scattered beauties, from inhabited islands to deserted sandy cays or islets. One of those is Mona Island, whose unspoiled beauty and rich biodiversity has earned it the nickname 'the Galapagos of the Caribbean'. The tiny island was once inhabited by indigenous Taíno people, whose cave drawings remain, and is now a designated nature reserve. Limestone cliffs and sandy beaches provide important territory for rare birdlife and reptiles, with the [largest hawksbill sea turtle nesting site](#) in the Caribbean.

Crater Lake, Oregon, USA



Bill45/Shutterstock

The USA's deepest lake – plunging to staggering depths of 1,943 feet (592m) – is also among the most beautiful. It isn't just the colour that makes it mesmerising, although the inky, navy hue is one of [Crater Lake](#)'s most striking features, making it appear almost solid. It's the surrounding slopes, where the former volcano collapsed to form the caldera, now fed by rain and snowmelt. And it's also features like Wizard Island, a cinder cone formed of volcanic ash and shaped like a pointy hat, and the 'Old Man of the Lake', a hemlock tree trunk that bobs in the water.

Mount Thor, Baffin Island, Nunavut, Canada



Ed Dods/Shutterstock

Beauty doesn't always reveal itself in a blaze of colour. This elephant-grey peak dominates a craggy landscape of granite rock, limpid rivers, glaciers and fjords in Canada's Arctic north. It's the striking centrepiece of [Auyuittuq National Park](#) on Baffin Island and its beauty is heightened by its remoteness. Fewer than 40,000 people live in the entire Nunavut region, an area roughly the same size as Western Europe, allowing wildlife like polar bears, Arctic wolves and beluga whales to thrive.

Wrangell-St Elias National Park, Alaska, USA



Troutnut/Shutterstock

Huge swathes of Alaska are given over to nature and [Wrangell-St. Elias](#) is the biggest national park in the US – big enough to hold Yellowstone six times over. It feels like dozens of different national parks have been combined, the landscape is so varied. Its borders hold four mountain ranges, ice fields, volcanic peaks and glaciers topped with lakes. The national preserve, in Alaska's southeastern corner, also provides roaming space for moose, mountain goats and brown and black bears.

Campeche, State of Campeche, Mexico



SCStock/Shutterstock

A UNESCO World Heritage site since 1999, the walled city of Campeche is a provincial capital with remains of its history in every corner. Inside its walls, historic pastel buildings meet narrow cobblestone alleys while the outskirts boast colonial forts and old fishing docks. The city is most beautiful when the sun shines bright on the colourful details across its centre and highlights the white Campeche Cathedral, built between 1540 and 1760.

Everglades, Florida, USA



pisaphotography/Shutterstock

This vast green national park offers a hint of what nature gets up to when we're not around. It's a thick, green mass and tangle roamed by crocodiles, alligators, turtles and enormous insects. [The Everglades](#) covers 1,875 square miles (4,856sq km) like an emerald and sapphire carpet, with mangroves, marshes and forest making up the subtropical wilderness.

Manhattan, New York City, New York, USA



SINITAR/Shutterstock

There's much to be admired in the Big Apple but Manhattan is the city's gleaming, iconic core. Its skyline is one of the (if not *the*) world's most recognisable, jagged, glinting and gorgeous in any light, from the pale haze of dawn to sunset and after-dark, when New York's bright lights shimmer over the Hudson River. Among Manhattan's many highlights are the needle-topped Empire State Building, flashy Times Square and the incongruous oasis of Central Park.

Statue of Liberty, New York City, New York, USA



Stefano Garau/Shutterstock

New York has its own first lady and she's a beauty. [The copper sculpture](#) of robed Roman goddess Libertas was gifted to the US from France as a symbol of friendship, and she has stood guard on Liberty Island in New York Harbor since the late 19th century. Her full name is 'The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World' though she's been given many nicknames over the years, from Saint Liberty to Green Goddess.

Lake Tahoe, California and Nevada, USA



NKneidlphoto/Shutterstock

A lake so huge it spans two states and several resorts, Lake Tahoe is North America's largest alpine lake – so vast that at points it seems more like a sea. The lake formed millions of years ago during the Ice Age and, a little more recently, has become known for winter skiing. It's equally beautiful once the snow melts away from the mountains, though, with a coastline laced with coves, bays, beaches and forest.

Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, California, USA



Luciano Mortula - LGM/Shutterstock

The Golden Gate is one of the world's most famous bridges, and certainly one of the most dramatically, grandly beautiful. Few structures symbolise their city as much as this rust-red bridge. It's a classic for good reason: its beautifully bold curves and lines are just mesmerising to look at, from every angle and distance and in any light. And, though it may be a man-made, engineering marvel, the Golden Gate Bridge complements the city's parks and beaches as effortlessly as it does the gleaming downtown skyline.

[See more of the world's most beautiful bridges here](#)

Painted Hills, John Day Fossil Beds, Oregon, USA



Tomas Nevesely/Shutterstock

The Painted Hills, part of the [John Day Fossil Beds](#), would be worthy of any art gallery but Mother Nature was the one wielding a paintbrush here. And she's created a swirly-whirly masterpiece, with stripes and waves of gold, apricot and brick-red across the rippled claystone. The colours change with the light, washed in pale pastels at dawn and deepened to a richer, redder palette at sunset. In spring, once the snow melts, yellow wildflowers peep out between the cracks, adding an extra dimension of colour.

Niagara Falls, New York, USA and Ontario, Canada



Ong.thanaong/Shutterstock

Niagara Falls isn't the biggest or the tallest waterfall on the continent but it is among the most famous and dramatically gorgeous thanks to its three broad, thunderous cascades. Located near Buffalo in New York state, and splashing across the border into Canada, it's made up of Horseshoe Falls (the biggest), American Falls and the Bridal Veil Falls. The falls owe their distinctive green-blue hue to a mix of powdered rock and mineral salts, which dye the water teal and turquoise.

St Louis Cathedral, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA



Sean Pavone/Shutterstock

New Orleans' historic French Quarter is an endless parade of eye-catching beauties, from the colourful Creole houses to lacy balconies strewn with Mardi Gras beads. St Louis Cathedral is perhaps the most iconic and striking landmark, though, overlooking Jackson Square since 1727. Its gleaming white façade and perfect spires give it the look of a fantastical castle that wouldn't be out of place in a Disney resort, but this is a fully operating Catholic church – and part of the city's fabric.

[Discover our guide to New Orleans here](#)

Diablo Lake, Washington, USA



Chechubus/Shutterstock

The colour of Diablo Lake, in [North Cascades National Park](#), is no trick of the eye or the light. The vivid, milky turquoise hue is very real, caused by flour-like particles that have been ground from rocks by surrounding glaciers. The lake does look even more spectacular when they catch the light, though, creating a breathtaking vista against the forested banks and mountain backdrop.

Cloud Gate, Chicago, Illinois, USA



Miune/Shutterstock

Chicago is pretty famous for its architecture, yet it's a giant, mirrored bean that has become one of the Windy City's most recognisable landmarks. Cloud Gate – commonly known as 'The Bean' – was designed by British-Indian sculptor Sir Anish Kapoor and has held court in the city's Millennium Park since 2004. It creates a particularly striking image against the backdrop of some of the city's famous buildings, while its mirrored surface captures the skyline beautifully.

White Sands National Monument, New Mexico, USA



Galyna Andrushko/Shutterstock

The pale dunes that ripple across this [national park](#) are dazzling white – and dazzlingly beautiful. Rolling for 275 square miles (712sq km), they look like extra-thick snow, whisked egg whites or soft peaks of Chantilly cream. White Sands is the world’s largest gypsum dunefield, comprised of a rare chalky sand that usually dissolves easily in water but has remained intact in the desert heat, brightening the landscape between the San Andres and Sacramento mountain ranges.

Caddo Lake, Texas and Louisiana, USA



Adventures On Wheels/Shutterstock

This swampy lake, which straddles Texas and Louisiana, oozes Southern beauty and ambiance from its moss-draped branches to its gloopy bayous, where fat-trunked cypress trees emerge from the soupy water. The maze of waterways is home to alligators, which can be occasionally seen basking on logs, and (allegedly) Bigfoot – Caddo Lake is said to be prime sasquatch territory.

Jasper National Park, Alberta, Canada



Elena_Suvorova/Shutterstock

The [largest park in the Canadian Rockies](#) has eye-popping scenery at every turn. In fact we doubt there's an unattractive part of its 4,247 square miles (11,000sq km), which pack in glaciers, lakes, waterfalls, mountains and natural springs. Among its many glorious highlights are Maligne Lake (pictured), famed for its shimmering cerulean water, and enormous, glacier-strewn Columbia Icefield.

West Quoddy Head Lighthouse, Lubec, Maine, USA



Allan Wood Photography/Shutterstock

This candy-striped lighthouse certainly doesn't hide its light under a bushel. While some towers are subtle ivory or brick-red, [West Quoddy Head Lighthouse](#) is a bright beacon of bold red and white stripes. It's found in Lubec, the easternmost town in the continental USA and part of Maine's Bold Coast – a stretch of blazing blue bays, oceans and coves. And it certainly fits in.

Chichen Itza, Yucatán, Mexico



Ivan Soto Cobos/Shutterstock

As one of the Seven Wonders of the World, Chichen Itza, nestled on the Yucatán peninsula, is one of the greatest Mayan centres in the country. With its nearly 1,000-year history, the ancient site has many structures and views to marvel at, from artistic works and stone monuments to temples and its impressive ball court. The main pyramid, the Temple of Kukulcán, is especially stunning as the golden sun rays illuminate it beautifully.

[Read more: The 5 best archaeological sites to visit in Mexico](#)

Notre-Dame Cathedral Basilica, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada



karamysh/Shutterstock

[This cathedral](#) is the oldest and largest church in Canada's capital, beginning life as a humble wooden structure in 1832 and replaced by the rather grander building in 1885. The spired, Neoclassical structure is pretty spectacular but it's the inside that really wows. Gilded details and shades of sapphire and turquoise give it the feel of a beautiful jewellery box, while carved reliefs, statues and intricately detailed stained-glass windows add to its opulence.

Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, Texas, USA



Angelito de Jesus/Shutterstock

Just outside German-settled town Fredericksburg in Texas Hill Country, [Enchanted Rock State Natural Area](#) is both otherworldly and rooted in nature. Its dominant attraction is an enormous boulder that looks like it's crash-landed from Outer Space. The granite surface is dotted with fragrant shrubs, blackjack oaks and vernal pools that are home to fascinating fairy shrimps, whose eggs survive the dry season before springing to life when it rains.

Black Hills, South Dakota and Wyoming, USA



Benjamin F Sullivan/Shutterstock

This [national forest](#) straddles South Dakota and Wyoming and contains some pretty impressive sights within its 1.2 million acres. It incorporates Black Elk Wilderness, home to South Dakota's highest natural point, Black Elk Peak, and named after a holy man of the Oglala Sioux. The whole area is a humbling, dramatic jumble of pine forests, jagged peaks, canyons, lakes and open grasslands. Peter Norbeck Scenic Byway has dramatic views of another famous attraction, Mount Rushmore.

[See the most beautiful scenic byway in every state here](#)

Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Ontario, Canada



Andres Garcia Martin/Shutterstock

Designed by Daniel Libeskind, the [Royal Ontario Museum](#) is Canada's largest museum and arguably its most striking. Its style of blending old and new is clear from the exterior. An aluminium and glass 'crystal'— added in 2007 – juts out from the historic façade, looking like a particularly stylish crash landing. The interior incorporates the modern expansion, the original 1914 building and the eastern wing, added in 1933.

[Discover more of the world's most beautiful museums here](#)

Hoh Rainforest, Olympic National Park, Washington, USA



Anton Foltin/Shutterstock

There's something especially magical about beauty when it springs up in unexpected places. [Olympic National Park](#) is one of the continent's most eclectic parks, with scenery that ranges from glacier-capped peaks to burnished gold beaches and natural hot springs. But [Hoh Rainforest](#), named after the river that flows from Mount Olympus to the Pacific, is something really special. The temperate rainforest glimmers in vivid shades of green, with old-growth trees shrouded in emerald moss and ferns.

The Butchart Gardens, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada



kavram/Shutterstock

[The Butchart Gardens](#) are a heady riot of colour and fragrance, with 55 acres including a sunken garden, serene Japanese landscaped garden and wonderfully romantic rose garden. A huge team of gardeners tends to the manicured land and hothouse blooms to honour the legacy of founder Jennie Butchart, who started the garden in 1912 in place of a limestone quarry in her backyard.

Lake George, New York, USA



Colin D. Young/Shutterstock

Lake George has been nicknamed the 'Queen of American Lakes'. Thomas Jefferson, the USA's third president, described it as "the most beautiful water I ever saw". Somehow it lives up to even these lofty expectations. This long-time playground for the wealthy, looking to escape the summer heat, is home to such beauties as Million Dollar Beach, a creamy curl of sand by the lakeshore. It's part of [The Adirondacks](#), an area of snow-fed lakes and rivers, mountain peaks and wildflower-scattered meadows.

Assateague Island, Maryland and Virginia, USA



Mary Swift/Shutterstock

Two herds of feral wild ponies have made themselves at home on this barrier island, and it's hard to imagine a lovelier place to graze and roam. [Assateague Island](#), a designated national park straddling Maryland and Virginia, is a wildly beautiful land of salt marshes, maritime forests and pale beaches. The horses are descendants of domestic animals and are allowed to thrive here alongside other wildlife such as bald eagles and, off the coast, dolphins.

Portland Head Light, Cape Elizabeth, Maine, USA



Sean Pavone/Shutterstock

America's east coast is laced with lovely lighthouses and each has its own distinct charms. Portland Head Light, just outside the city in Cape Elizabeth, is a subtle beauty in white with a red-roofed keeper's cottage. But it stands out mostly due to its location at the mouth of Portland Harbor in Fort Williams Park, where it has guided ships since 1791. Its rocky perch feels like the edge of the world and is especially lovely in the honeyed, pink-streaked light of sunrise.

The Wave, Vermilion Cliffs National Monument, Arizona, USA



Johnny Adolphson/Shutterstock

This eye-popping, mind-bending rock formation would look very much at home in the lobby of a world-class art gallery. But [The Wave](#) has been sculpted by nature, creating a swirling sea of sandstone striped in red, gold, apricot and cream. It's part of Vermilion Cliffs National Monument and the rest of the dreamlike landscape, with slot canyons, cliffs and buttes under skies that shimmer with stars at night, is equally – and stunningly – surreal.

[Discover more of America's most stunning natural wonders here](#)

Moraine Lake, Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada



Zhukova Valentyna/Shutterstock

The surface of Moraine Lake, a highlight of [Banff National Park](#), dances its way through the day with altering shades of soft teal, milky turquoise and icy sapphire. Its pristine appearance looks even more dramatic against a backdrop of snow-dusted mountains and shores edged with pine trees. Ice forms on the glacial-fed lake in winter and early spring with floes often breaking off and shimmering under the water's surface for an extra layer of beguiling beauty.