



WIDE-EYED ON THE OPEN ROAD

IT MIGHT TAKE SLIGHTLY MORE PLANNING, BUT A FAMILY ROAD TRIP IS A UNIQUE AND ENRICHING JOURNEY. FEW OTHER HOLIDAYS PROVIDE THE SAME AMOUNT OF BONDING. HERE, WE SHOWCASE FIVE GREAT ROAD TRIPS.

Words: Ben Stower

Not just any old drive can be called a road trip. Both the start and finish should be enticing, and there needs to be stops along the way that provide deeper appreciation for the region.

There will be hiccups and tantrums (not just from the kids), but also moments of true happiness and discovery. Here are five journeys that are certain to provide the latter, and a few tips to help minimise the former.

> Natural wonders await along the highway leading to Monument Valley, Utah.



ARE WE THERE YET?



> FROM LEFT
Views across the
Grand Canyon;
Horseshoe Bend
on Lake Powell.



USA

Grand Canyon Trail

APPROX 1,304 KILOMETRES

➔ **Mother Nature would approve of this road trip. From Phoenix, Arizona, to Park City, Utah, sits a collection of the USA's most revered natural sights, including the Grand Canyon, Lake Powell and Zion National Park.**

Days 1–2 Phoenix, Arizona

Don't rush from Arizona's capital city. Spend the first two days organising a hire vehicle and supplies, and enjoying Phoenix's family-friendly attractions.

Venture downtown to the Children's Museum of Phoenix, which invokes imagination and creativity with 300-plus interactive experiences. Keep everyone's legs stretched with a walk down Roosevelt Row Arts District (RoRo), filled with street art, galleries, live music and restaurants.

Prepare for the open road (and driving on the opposite side) with a short trip to Rawhide in Chandler, a replica 1800s frontier town with stunt shows, stagecoach

rides, sundown cookouts and more Wild West mayhem.

The Hilton Phoenix Suites is a great place to bunk down. It has a convenient midtown locale and offers affordable two-room suites and a swimming pool.

Days 3–4 Grand Canyon National Park

Cross the vast and breathless Arizona desert, passing the ghost town of Bumblebee in the Bradshaw Mountains. Sitting just off famous Route 66, Flagstaff has seen its fair share of travellers and knows how to accommodate with a range of quirky attractions.

Visit the Lowell Observatory at 10am, 1pm or 4pm, in time for one of the daily solar viewings, followed by the Wupatki National Monument, an underrated Native American ruin in the Painted Desert.

From Flagstaff, you can take the Interstate 80 to pass Humphreys Peak, the highest natural point in Arizona, or Interstate 40, which turns north at Kaibab National Forest, a great stop for nature walks and a picnic.

The South Rim is the Grand Canyon's most accessible and frequented section.

Park at the visitor centre and catch a free shuttle bus to the Grand Canyon Village and various scenic viewpoints, or simply drive up to one of the many viewing areas. The Hermits Rest Route (nine viewing areas) and Kaibab Rim Route (three viewing areas) are usually available, with both dishing up gorgeous views of the Canyon.

The lodges at Grand Canyon National park, such as Phantom Ranch and Thunderbird Lodge, are serviced by the free shuttle bus. Accommodation is also available in nearby Tusayan.

Days 5–6 Lake Powell

The drive to Lake Powell is short and relatively straightforward; the destination being its true highlight. The famed reservoir is dotted with sights such as Antelope Canyon, Wahweap Bay and Dangling Rope Marina.

Stop off in Page, which has a large supermarket and the John Wesley Powell Memorial Museum, before drifting out onto the water in a houseboat.

Houseboating is the best way to experience Lake Powell, with a range

of luxurious and affordable vessels available from Wahweap Marina. Having your beds, kitchen and activities in one place makes life much easier.

A houseboat also grants the freedom to tailor your own Lake Powell itinerary with fishing, water sports, picnics and stops at any of the 96 major side canyons.

Alternatively, rent a boat for the day and take to the water with skis or tube in tow, splashing out around the mystic scenery.

Day 7 Zion National Park, Utah

You've now officially entered Utah, where the subtle changes in environment and roadside towns offer a refreshing pace.

The first stop is Zion National Park in Springdale, an enormous piece of ancient history and nature home to unique plants, animals and stories of pioneer times.

Short and long hiking trails let visitors explore most of the park. The Wildcat Canyon Trail is both rewarding with deep canyon views, and feasible at a length of 9.3 kilometres. Ranger-led activities, such as walks, shuttle tours and informative talks, are better for those wanting a more guided experience.

Stay on site in a lodge or at one of two luxurious villas, most of which have kitchen facilities, multiple bedrooms and canyon views.

Day 8 Bryce Canyon National Park

Top off your national parks checklist with Bryce Canyon, a short drive from Zion and home to some of the most fascinating rock formations in the world.

Stop by the visitor centre first for maps, exhibits and information on the park. There are four main viewpoints – Sunrise, Sunset, Inspiration and Bryce – all of which can be reached via car. Hiking the canyon trail or canyon rim also reveals the various hoodoos (odd-shaped pillars of rock).

Bryce Canyon has ranger programs available during certain months that incorporate astronomy, full-moon hikes, family-friendly activities and geology talks.

Opt for nearby B&B or hotel accommodation to maximise your sightseeing time. Check with hotels for vacation packages, which combine lodging with guided tours on quad bikes, horses or mountain bikes.

Days 9–10 Park City

The five-hour ride from Bryce Canyon to Park City includes some of Utah's quirkier roadside attractions. In Fillmore, one resident has sculptures made from dead desert wood in his front yard; there's a fort constructed from volcanic rock in Cove Fort; and Midway has a beehive-shaped rock dome called The Homestead Crater, with tunnel access and a geothermal spring.

Although Park City is primarily viewed as a winter destination, the city is in fact a year-round playground for young and seasoned travellers.

Main Street is the epicentre of shopping, ghost tours, art galleries and accommodation. If you're in town over the weekend, make sure you don't miss the Park Silly Sunday Market, which features clowns, face painting and more entertaining silliness.

Park City's slice of the Rocky Mountains isn't wasted. Skiing and sledding are as popular in winter as hiking, hot-air ballooning, fly fishing and rafting are during the warmer months. It's why this city is the perfect garnish to your journey through America's adventurous outdoors.

ARE WE THERE YET?



This hub of outdoor leisure is perfect for surfing, stand-up paddleboarding and shorkelling.”

SYDNEY TO BRISBANE

The legendary Pacific Coast

APPROX. 997 KILOMETRES

➡ Arguably the most complete package of Australia's eastern coastline, the **Legendary Pacific Coast route is a lucid dream of sun-licked beaches, quaint towns, adventure experiences and quintessential Aussie dining.**

Day 1 Brunswick Heads

Begin your morning in Brisbane with some penniless family activities at the Queensland Museum's Dino Activity Zone and a dip at Streets Beach in South Bank Parklands.

Trade in city for ocean as you head towards Queensland's famed Gold Coast, stopping off at one of the big theme parks

– Warner Bros. Movie World, Wet'n'Wild, Dreamworld or WhiteWater World, or continue into Surfers Paradise.

Crossing over from Queensland to NSW, the golden beaches continue in Kingscliff. This hub of outdoor leisure is perfect for surfing, stand-up paddleboarding and snorkelling. Enjoy lunch from one of the beachfront cafes or restaurants, which have quickly given Kingscliff gourmet appeal.

The Pacific Motorway (M1) takes you slightly inland before popping out at Brunswick Heads, which sits at the point of three tranquil waterways and the Coral Sea.

There are three North Coast Holiday Parks all with water views and self-contained cabins. Alternatively, you can stay at the Brunswick River Inn. With beds for the night sorted, enjoy dinner at the iconic Hotel Brunswick's wide-open dining area overlooking the Brunswick River.

Day 2 Coffs Harbour

Spend the morning kayaking along the rivers to estuaries and secluded beaches, or explore the local boutiques before getting on the road again and following the Pacific Highway (A1) down to Coffs Harbour.

Feel free to stop in at Ballina where you'll find an animal park, reptile display and mini golf in Macadamia Castle. Summerland House Farm, in nearby Alstonville, offers locally grown food and tractor rides around its working macadamia and avocado farm.

The Big Banana Fun Park at the northern tip of Coffs Harbour isn't just home to the iconic oversized banana. A 600-metre toboggan track, laser tag and four water slides are a few of the attractions that make this a worthy stop before Coffs.

Coffs Harbour is renowned in northern NSW for its relaxed, coastal vibe and calendar of regular events, particularly during school holidays. For something

a little different, check out the Clog Barn's model Dutch village and working railway.

Coffs Jetty B&B, Beachlander Holiday Apartments and Tradewinds Apartments are potential suitors for families needing space, multiple rooms and a convenient location.

Day 3 Newcastle

Continuing south, head inland just after Raleigh to Bellingen, where you'll find the Dorrigo Rainforest with its breathtaking Skywalk experience that transports you above the trees.

Save most of the day for exploring Port Macquarie where you can pick fresh strawberries at Ricardoes Tomatoes & Strawberries, see native animals at Billabong Koala & Wildlife Park, and ride camels on Lighthouse Beach.

The Zebu Bar & Grill, part of Rydges Port Macquarie, offers a great kids menu and is situated on the river with a large lawn in front for running around.

Budget-friendly accommodation can be found at Flynns Beach Caravan Park, which has spacious cabins that sleep up to six people.

Day 4 Central Coast

The Central Coast is a charming mix of Melbourne's cosmopolitan living, Brisbane's outdoor lifestyle and Sydney's laidback beaches.

Crowne Plaza Terrigal offers affordable rooms on the beach, close to shops, cafes and the rest of the coastal towns. Satisfy your little adventurers with a visit to TreeTop Adventure Park to ride the flying foxes and complete the low- and high-rope obstacle courses.

Head away from the beach for a moment to Glenworth Valley Outdoor Adventures where you can ride quad bikes and horses, abseil beside a waterfall and kayak. It's a big day out, but that's definitely worth the time.

Day 5 Sydney

NSW's capital city is a sightseeing mecca full of unexpected surprises, such as an overnight experience at Taronga Zoo that includes a night safari and behind-the-scenes tour.

Don't bother driving around the city – that's too much stress for a holiday. Pick up a travel pass to save money on ferries, trains and buses.

Accommodation ranges from hotels in great locales with attractions like the aquarium, IMAX Theatre and Maritime Museum, to holiday parks with self-catered cabins, pools and plenty of space. You can also camp at Cockatoo Island, the world's only inner-city waterfront campsite.

If you've got some active youngsters, take up the challenge of climbing the Sydney Harbour Bridge. If you tire of the city, ditch the crowds and catch the ferry across to Manly's beach and open-plan cafes.





> FROM LEFT
The London
Eye; the
heritage city
of Ghent in
Belgium;
a colourful
street in the
capital of
Belgium,
Brussels.



LONDON TO BRUSSELS

The Channel Tunnel

APPROX. 364 KILOMETRES

➡ **Taking the family from London all the way to Belgium combines three countries into one epic road trip. The surprise here is you don't even have to leave your car.**

Days 1–2

London, England

Get acquainted with London by visiting Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey and other iconic sights while mixing in some kid-friendly attractions, such as the London Dungeon and Science Museum.

Don't bother driving in the city. Grab an Oyster Card for cheaper public transport and discounts on dining, shopping and entertainment.

Catching one of the city's highly rated musicals is a great way to kick off the trip. London has a lot of staple shows, such as *The Lion King*, *Matilda* and *Wicked*, with cheap walk-up tickets.

Family-friendly accommodation is

easy to find in this populous city with numerous hotels offering connecting rooms. Premier Inn Kensington (Earl's Court) Hotel remains one of the best for value, location and facilities.

Day 3

Folkestone

From London, you're aiming for the English side of the Eurotunnel in Folkestone, but don't rush for fear of missing quintessential British attractions and towns along the way.

Take the turnoff to Maidstone, the closest town to Leeds Castle. The castle is a fascinating piece of history that welcomes all with its birds of prey exhibit, play areas, grottos and Segway tours.

If there's sunlight to spare, head to the Kent Battle of Britain Museum, which has retired fighter jets and other displays about one of England's most famous battles.

Spend the night in Folkestone and wake up fresh for the following day's cross-continent journey. The Holiday Inn Express Channel Tunnel offers comfortable rooms with multiple beds close to the train.

Day 4

Calais, France

England one day, France the next; the holiday gets really interesting now. Remember to purchase a ticket for the Eurotunnel Shuttle, not the Eurostar. The cost is determined per car (about A\$155 for a single trip) and will change if you plan on riding the train back within a specific time period.

The car shuttle train is made up of closed wagons that hold vehicles in place during the two-hour ride under the English Channel. You can walk along the carriages, but there isn't much to see, so pack entertainment.

The next sunlight you feel will be in France's city of Calais. Take in the Six Burghers Monument, Town Hall and city views from the Calais Lighthouse. If the weather permits, Calais has a collection of sandy beaches on the Opal Coast.

Stay in one of Calais' charming B&Bs, which better serve families and offer more classic French culture than hotels.

Day 5

Ghent, Belgium

Stick to France's northern coast on your way to Ghent – the kids won't believe you're about to enter your third country in as many days.

However, there's one more stop beforehand. The city of Dunkirk's World War II history is one of miracles and near defeats. Learn more at the Memorial Du Souvenir.

Leaving Dunkirk, you're about 10km from crossing the border into Belgium. A landscape of open, green fields is interjected by quaint towns and heritage cities leading into Ghent.

Ghent's portside districts and medieval landmarks paint a beautiful profile on Belgium's canvas. The 12th-century Gravensteen castle and 10th-century St Bravo's Cathedral are only the tip of the city's historic side. Stroll through the city centre, along the canal, ducking into local shops and restaurants.

The Marriott and Novotel are two family-friendly hotels with great proximity to attractions and affordable rooms.

Days 6–7

Brussels

This unbelievable road trip, covering three countries, comes to a temporary end in Belgium's capital, Brussels.

Far from just a finish line, Brussels is a prime location for extensive immersion in Belgium's melting-pot culture of French, English and Dutch influences.

Get an entertaining taste of the continent at Mini-Europe, which has accurate miniatures of cities complete with working models and multimedia games. There's also the Océade year-round water park with slides, wave pool and hot tubs.

Remember that culture? The city has some fascinating institutions including the Comics Art Museum, Natural Sciences Museum and Autoworld Brussels.

Brussels is packed with family-friendly hotels, B&Bs and holiday rentals for longer stays. As hotels go, Novotel Brussels Centre offers cosy mid-range rooms in a prime locale. There's one more decision to make. Will you head back to England, continue through Europe or begrudgingly return home?

ARE WE THERE YET?

How to keep the peace on the road

01 Opt for self-catered apartments or resorts over fancy hotels. A stocked minibar can be a budget nightmare when tiny hands are involved.

02 Pack colouring books and plain paper for made-up games that don't rely on batteries.

03 Keep the music varied and remember headphones.

04 Invest in a portable DVD player or iPad. Movies can make the hours fly by.

05 Pack pillows for sleeping en route.

06 Sugar-free lollies are tasty and won't exaggerate the stir-crazies.

07 Play games that incorporate the scenery outside, such as I-Spy and 21 Questions.

08 Let the kids sleep in a separate room so you can stay up without keeping them awake.





> FROM LEFT
Snorkelling on the Great Barrier
Reef; a palm-fringed beach at
Palm Cove; Queenstown, the
action capital of New Zealand.



ARE WE THERE YET?

QUEENSLAND

Captain Cook Highway

APPROX. 67 KILOMETRES

➡ If you haven't visited Australia's Sunshine State, the Captain Cook Highway, hugging Queensland's coast from Cairns to Port Douglas, is a rewarding introductory trip that delights with scenic tropical seaside, lush rainforests and friendly beachfront communities.

Days 1–2 Cairns

Cairns, the 'gateway to the Great Barrier Reef', has numerous trips available for anyone wishing to see the world-famous marine life of this Heritage-listed reef.

The rest of the city is also best experienced by stepping outside and embracing your adventurous side. Boat charters out to the nearby islands, jet boating on the Trinity Inlet, kneeboarding and waterskiing at Cable Ski, and the ropes courses at Cairns ZOOM and Wildlife Dome all utilise Australia's natural gifts.

Yet it's not all rough and tumble on the coast. Hot-air balloon rides, the Australian Butterfly Sanctuary and Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park keep you relaxed and entertained.

Choose beach or rainforest at one of Cairns' family-focused resorts. Bay Village Tropical Retreat has two- and three-bedroom apartments that are set slightly back from the Esplanade's playgrounds,

walking paths and weekend markets.

The award-winning Cairns Coconut Holiday Resort packs a ridiculous amount of kid-friendly facilities into its expansive area including an interactive play area, water park, jumping pillows and outdoor cinema.

Days 3–4 Palm Cove

Captain Cook Highway is intended to be taken at a more leisurely pace. Remember the plastic bags for wet towels and swimmers in case you stop for a dip in one of the beaches between Cairns and Palm Cove.

Machans Beach, Holloways Beach, Trinity Beach and Clifton Beach are all viable options for relishing golden sand licked by cool, blue waves.

Clifton has an additional drawcard: Cairns Tropical Zoo. This wildlife retreat isn't frugal with its special encounters. You can feed, pat or hold certain animals, including koalas, crocodiles, lemurs, wombats and birds.

Get ready to settle into Palm Cove's serene beachfront setting where the resorts are separated from the sand by towering melaleuca trees that wave through the ocean breeze.

Watersports are an option with stand-up paddle boards and kayaks for hire, or you can taste the local flavours at beachfront cafes and restaurants. A cruise out to Double Island and its nearby reefs also provides quality swimming, snorkelling and wildlife experiences.

Families are spoilt with the amount of resorts that feature swimming pools, kids clubs and beach activities. Peppers Beach Club & Spa delivers two- and three-bedroom self-catered accommodation on the beachfront.

Days 5–6 Port Douglas

This section is one of the most scenic, as the highway hugs the coastline tightly before heading slightly inland to Wangetti, home to one of the coast's most exciting attractions.

Hartley's Crocodile Adventures is a fun and educational wildlife reserve where crocodile spotting and feeding in the lagoon, koala feeding, turtles and quolls are all on the agenda. There are also daily presentations on cassowaries, snakes, wallabies and other native animals.

If you're still searching for that perfect family holiday portrait, you might find it at Rex Lookout, slightly north of Wangetti.

Entering Port Douglas, you're between two Heritage-listed sites: the Great Barrier Reef on one side and Daintree National Park on the other. Not to mention Cape Tribulation to the north.

Deciding which to visit or to simply stay put and enjoy the sights and activities along Port Douglas' Four Mile Beach might just be the toughest choice you'll have to make all holiday.

The range of affordable resorts and apartments is also plentiful, with Oaks Lagoons, Pink Flamingo and Club Tropical all standing out for families.

NEW ZEALAND

South Island coast

APPROX. 870 KILOMETRES

➡ Pass through mountainous terrain, heritage towns and natural forests as you traverse New Zealand's Southern Island from coast to coast in search of adventure, culture and the next memorable sight on the horizon.

Days 1–2 Christchurch

Sitting on the edge of the Canterbury Plains, Christchurch is the gateway to the Southern Alps. Check into Spencer Beach Holiday Park, which couples units and cabins with swimming pools, mini golf, volleyball, a flying fox and playground.

Explore the city down low on the tramway or with a leisurely walking tour, or get a bird's-eye view from the Crater Rim via the Christchurch Gondola.

Thrills can be found on the water in a high-speed jet boat or an inflatable raft as you pass *Lord of the Rings* scenery before battling unrelenting rapids.

Zip lines and treetop obstacle courses challenge and entertain at Adrenalin Forest, while Orana Wildlife Park brings you closer to the animals with giraffe feedings and a ride through the lion habitat.

Day 3 Greymouth

Driving inland from Christchurch you're followed by farms and expansive fields that

don't break the horizon until the sudden rise of the Southern Alps. The road is lined with eye-catching scenery right through Arthur's Pass when the snow-tipped peaks bunch towards you.

Greymouth, a small, welcoming commune, is preceded by Shantytown. This recreated gold-mining town is a throwback to life in the 1860s with steam train rides and gold panning.

Greymouth Seaside Holiday Park's sea-view apartments, self-contained units and cabins are perfect for families. The holiday park also has a large playground, games room and beach access.

Greymouth is best used as a gateway to Paparoa National Park. The 40-minute drive north to Truman Track reveals an easy walking trail that leads you through native forest out to the Tasman Sea.

Day 4 Haast

Today's drive is an eight-hour slog to Haast along the West Coast Highway and will require a fresh supply of snacks and entertainment for the backseat travellers.

Break up the trip with stops at Hokitika, home to glass-blowing and sculpture studios; Ross' colonial town with historic jail, bank and cottages; and Franz Josef Glacier, which almost reaches the coast.

These all help prepare you for Haast, one of New Zealand's best landing points for a nature excursion. Entertainment focuses on the wild, with river safaris, fishing and visits to seal and penguin colonies.

Look to Haast Lodge for affordable and cosy rooms close to restaurants, shops and a playground. Haast River Holiday Park is another option, thanks to its self-contained units, go-cart hire and games room.

Days 5–6 Queenstown

Follow the Haast River along the Haast Pass Highway where more mountainous terrain awaits through Mount Aspiring National Park. As you break out of the rainforest, you're joined by two regal lakes that lead into Wanaka.

Wanaka is an adventurer's toy box with jet boating, horse riding, whitewater rafting and ski fields nearby. The city also has a quirkier side that shines through at Stuart Landsborough's Puzzling World.

Take time to enjoy this part of the South Island, but leave enough for Queenstown. Arguably the adrenalin-capital of New Zealand, Queenstown uses its surrounding mountains and lake to serve up blood-pumping experiences such as canyon swinging, ziplining and skiing.

Treat yourself to self-contained lakeside accommodation at the Esplanade or The Haddens. There's also the Queenstown Holiday Park Creeksyde.



Getting there

Visit your local Flight Centre for more advice and the latest deals on road trips.
Go to flightcentre.com.au
or call 131 600 24 hours