

USA »



Spectacular coastal sights can be seen on a roadtrip through Maine; Nantucket village (below) is worth a visit. Photos / Getty Images, Doug van Kampen

P is for perfection

Ewan McDonald on the unforgettable landscapes and epicurean delights in historically rich New England

Picturesque, peaceful and prosperous — the three P's sum up New England, in the northeast of the United States. With its rich history, some of the most famous universities in the world, a mix of seaside villages and mansions that have inspired writers and movie-makers, it's one of the prettiest places you'll drive through — especially during autumn.

Starting in Boston, our road trip will take you in a loop through each of the six states that make up the region, covering more than 1600km.

Boston is located in Massachusetts and, as one of the nation's oldest cities, has endured a colourful history including the Boston Tea Party and the Boston Massacre. It's home to major New England sports teams — basketball's Celtics, football's Patriots and baseball's Red Sox (remember *Cheers*?) — as well as Harvard and MIT universities, but has also made a name for itself in gastronomy, particularly with its crustacean options.

North of Boston is the port town of Salem. Best known for its witchcraft history, you can uncover all the grim details during a city walking tour, or a visit to the Salem Witch Museum. Literary enthusiasts may prefer to explore the House of the Seven Gables, the 17th century mansion made famous by Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel of the same name. No matter where you wander, you won't be able to avoid the city's past, as many of the 18th century storefronts have been turned into coffee shops, boutique hotels and galleries.

Travel on to the historic coastal city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and spend a day sampling the wares of microbreweries and seafood restaurants. Admire the centuries-old coloured wooden houses and outdoor museum of the Strawberry Banke Historic District. Further

on is Portland, the largest city of Maine. The beautifully restored Old Port district includes cobblestone streets, 19th century brick buildings and fishing piers. By day discover boutiques, craft shops and cafes; by night, impressive nightlife.

Still in Maine, and just a few hours from Portland, Acadia National Park is one of the country's most popular. Be the first to see the sunrise by summiting Cadillac Mountain, or take the Park Loop Road on the eastern side of the rugged-yet-spectacular Mt Desert Island for exceptional views.

You'll need to backtrack through New Hampshire to get to Vermont, but now's the time to explore the White Mountains. The highest range in the northeast, it's a nature lover's paradise for hiking, camping, fishing and boating. Remember to take the Cog Railway to the top of Mt Washington, or tour the imposing granite walls of Flume Gorge.

Vermont, America's most rural state, is a patchwork of farms, small towns and villages. The stunning Green Mountains run from south to north and offer year-round pursuits such as hiking, fishing, skiing and snowshoeing. Burlington is its largest city and, 72km south of the Canadian border, sits on the shore of Lake Champlain with the mountains at its back. Its quirky downtown is centred along

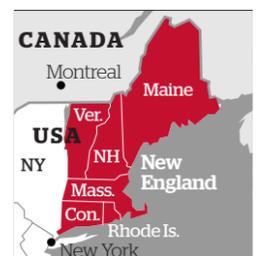
pedestrianised Church Street Marketplace; it's the hometown of Ben & Jerry's icecream and a considerable cheese-making industry.

Enjoy mountain views, farm-dotted valleys and villages along the drive south to New Haven, Connecticut. Considered the most suburban state, with several large towns and cities, Connecticut appeals to young and well-heeled families, as well as those bright minds attending Yale. Historic attractions and landmarks include Revolutionary War sites, Victorian architecture and town greens, but there's also a swathe of visitor trails to suit everyone — from “chowda”, pizza, wine and beer, to bicycle, farmers' market and dinosaurs.

Rhode Island is the US's smallest state; you'll easily spot the yachts, mansions and Brown University students. Newport, the original, longtime home of the America's Cup, shelters the decadent homes of tycoons and magnates, such as the Rockefellers and Vanderbilts. You can visit the latter's family mansion, along with the Belcourt at Newport, being restored to its former decadent glory.

Close the loop in Massachusetts, with a drive down Cape Cod Peninsula and a world of beaches, lighthouses, and lobster shacks.

Sea-lovers can watch whales or join an Atlantic White Shark Conservancy expedition. Landlubbers can soak up the region's laid-back atmosphere, visit scenic vineyards, beautiful islands like Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard (with their memories of the Kennedy family's Camelot), or spend a day antiquing for that perfect souvenir.



Checklist NEW ENGLAND

DETAILS

House of Travel's 'Best of New England' roadtrip package comes with 11 nights accommodation and 10 days car hire. Prices start from \$2119pp.

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