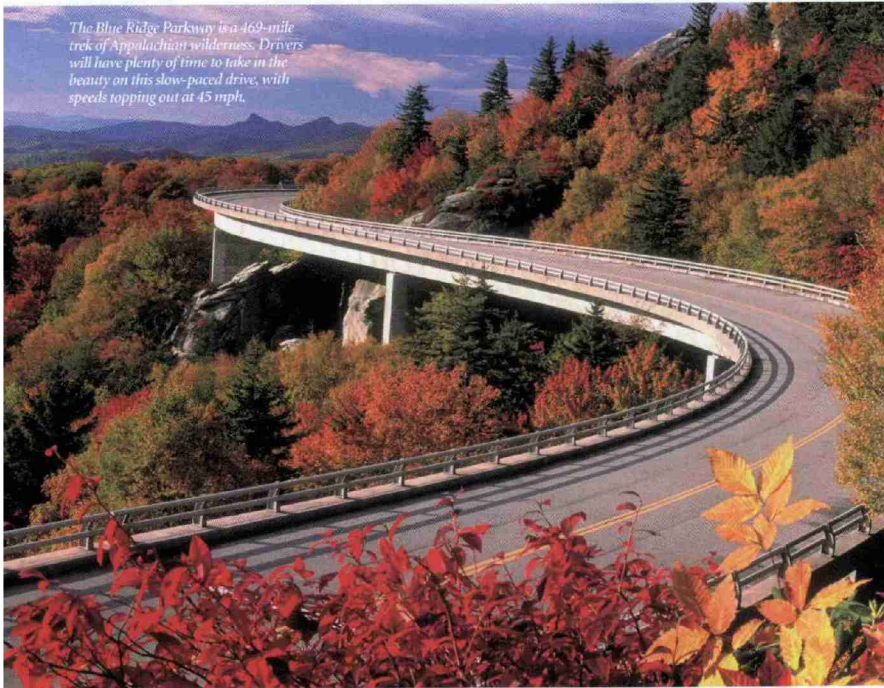


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The Blue Ridge Parkway is a 469-mile trek of Appalachian wilderness. Drivers will have plenty of time to take in the beauty on this slow-paced drive, with speeds topping out at 45 mph.

## Blacktop is Beckoning

Top off the gas tank, change the oil, check the tires and renew your auto club membership, because this month's getaway is going to add a few miles to the odometer.

by Kyle Whitecotton

**A**MERICA'S LANDSCAPE IS RICH WITH PROMINENT PANORAMAS AND MEANDERING ROADWAYS; what follows is the best of both, merging to make this country's top 10 scenic drives.

### California's Pacific Coast Highway

While the Pacific Coast Highway between Dana Point and Malibu tours mostly the city streets of Southern California, the Los Angeles smog lifts north of the county line to reveal exemplary vistas that make this drive the chief run of North America's preeminent scenic drives. From the quaint town of San Luis Obispo to the undulating streets of San Francisco, Highway 1 skirts the coast for 270 miles, climaxing along the rugged cliffs of the Big Sur Coastline. Along the way, stop in at

the Hearst Castle, picnic at Point Lobos State Reserve, and then stretch your legs along the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk before arriving in San Francisco in time for dinner at Fisherman's Wharf.

### Appalachia's Blue Ridge Parkway

Like bookends to a shelf of classic American literature, Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina and Shenandoah National Park in Virginia lie at each end of a 469-mile trek of Appalachian wilderness and pastoral landscape called The Blue Ridge Parkway. A product of Roosevelt's New Deal, more than 75 years have passed since construction began on the parkway. More than 100 hiking trails make the Parkway a perfect place from which to set out on foot to explore the wildflowers in the

spring, the changing colors in fall and an abundance of wildlife year round. This is a slow-paced drive, topping out at 45 mph, so leave the exigencies of life behind and carve out time to enjoy a multitude of overlooks, picnic stops and developed areas along the way.

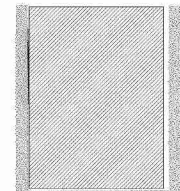
### Montana's Going-to-the-Sun Road

No matter what the Oxford English Dictionary might claim, the definition of sublime lies somewhere in the mountains of Northwest Montana. To find it, simply follow the yellow dividing line of Going-to-the-Sun Road through Glacier National Park. Bisecting the park from east to west, this 50-mile stretch of road takes two hours to drive without stopping; however, a non-stop drive through such breathtaking scenery should be a crime. The road accesses a vast selection of wilderness terrain from crashing whitewater rivers and trickling roadside waterfalls to ancient hanging glaciers and jagged mountain peaks before topping out at the 6,646-foot Logan Pass.

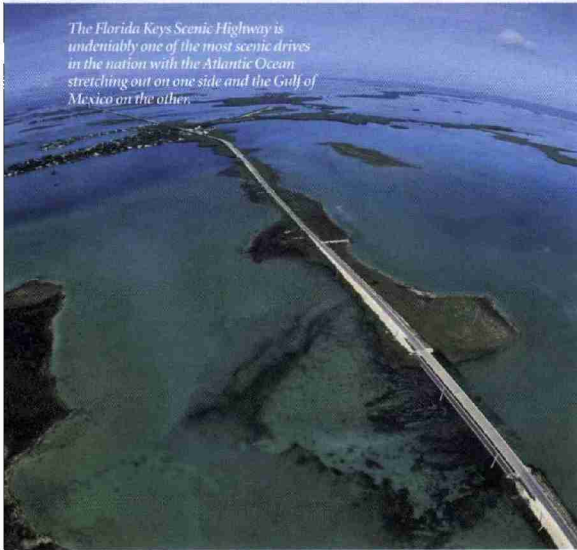
### Hawaii's Hana Highway

A trip to the Hawaiian Islands typically conjures up images of frozen umbrella drinks and daylong retreats on sandy beaches lined with palm trees and sunburned tourists long before thoughts of a 50-mile drive down one of the country's most beautiful roads. The Hana Highway links the small town of Hana to the busier heart of Maui by way of a slender strip of blacktop that tours tropical rainforests, countless waterfalls and picturesque seascapes. After more than 600 curves and 59 bridges, this three-hour drive arrives in charming Hana, a destination worthy of an extended stay. Venture beyond Hana for even more audacious driving and scenery in the Maui backcountry.

**Alaska's Seward Highway** South of Anchorage, along a 50-mile stretch of road



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*The Florida Keys Scenic Highway is undeniably one of the most scenic drives in the nation with the Atlantic Ocean stretching out on one side and the Gulf of Mexico on the other.*

that simultaneously traces the base of the Chugach Mountains and the shore of the Turnagain Arm, Alaska's Seward Highway crosses onto the Kenai Peninsula, venturing onward through the heart of Chugach State Park before setting a course for the town of Seward, 70 miles away. Along the way, the Kenai Peninsula Borough, a 25,000-square-mile smorgasbord of majestic Alaska wilderness, dominates the subject of your windshield at every turn. Although this is a three-hour, non-stop trek, you'll need an extended weekend to take advantage of the landscapes, trailheads, fishing waters, wildlife encounters and small towns along the way.

**Utah's Highway 12** Between Capitol Reef and Bryce Canyon National Parks runs Utah's Highway 12, forging a path through some of the most rugged and diverse wilderness landscapes this country has to offer. A number of small communities line this 124-mile stretch of blacktop along with a host of scenic points with names like Hell's Backbone Backway, The Hogback, Escalante Petrified Forest State Park and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. This is the land of pink limestone cliffs, hordes of towering hoodoos, mystical Indian ruins, sagebrush flats, high alpine forests and an ancient seabed offering its own peculiar beauty. Leave Highway 12 for one of the lonelier backways or park at a trailhead

for a tour of the back-country and even more scenery.

### **Colorado's Million Dollar Highway**

Tucked away in the San Juan Mountains of Southwestern Colorado, between Ouray and Silverton, runs a sinuous two-lane stretch of vertiginous ascents and white-knuckle descents known as the "Million Dollar Highway." Originally constructed as a toll road in 1883, this highway is more like a time machine for the Wild West days of Rocky

Mountain gold and silver mining. Climbing to more than 11,000 feet atop Red Mountain Pass and creeping alongside sheer drop-offs void of even the slightest guardrail, this drive is, quite literally, breathtaking. While the one true origin of the "Million Dollar" name is difficult to discern from myth, there is little doubt that the views along this road are easily worth as much as the moniker suggests.

**Vermont's Route 100** Vermont's Route 100 from Wilmington to Lake Memphremagog near the Canadian border traces Green Mountain National Forest while touring countless small towns and farmsteads typical of this New England landscape. Loaded with opportunities for outdoor recreation, this road makes it difficult to keep the car in drive. Photographers beware; views encompass picturesque mountains, rivers and lakes set off by the history and culture of places like Andover, Ludlow, Plymouth, West Bridgewater, Killington and Pittsfield. While a tour of Vermont's foliage season makes this road a perfect fall excursion, Route 100 is a four-season road, turning into a winter wonderland when the leaves fall and offering loads of ice fishing and horse-drawn sleigh rides. As part of the "Skier's Highway," many of the Northeast's best ski resorts are just a short detour from Route 100.

**Minnesota's North Shore Drive** Turn

north from Duluth, Minn., along the North Shore Scenic Drive and follow the shoreline of Lake Superior, the world's largest freshwater lake, for a 154-mile drive to the Canadian border. On the way, you'll encounter eight state parks, Superior National Forest and a multitude of crystal clear streams and waterfalls pouring out of the north woods. This is a three-hour drive without stopping, but take the time to visit some coastal towns like Grand Marais. Stretch your legs at Split Rock Lighthouse in Two Harbors while taking in a section of the Superior Hiking Trail—a 286-mile path that skirts a ridgeline high above the lake. As you reach Grande Portage and near the end of this drive, visit the local state park to observe the state's tallest waterfall.

**Florida Keys Scenic Highway** With the Atlantic Ocean stretching out on one side and the Gulf of Mexico on the other, the Florida Keys Scenic Highway is undeniably unequalled on any list of U.S. scenic drives. From the Florida mainland at Jewfish Creek Bridge to mile marker 0 in Old Town Key West, this section of Highway 1 covers more than 100 miles between sunrise and sunset. Abandon the tumult of the everyday and relax in the island culture of Key Largo as you head south. Dolphins, manatees, key deer and a world of endangered wildlife lead the way toward bluer skies over mangroves, coral reefs and the turquoise waters of this tropical island getaway. Plan accordingly and save this drive for last; the chances are good that you won't turn back. **fw**