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USA



TRAVEL USA



Get Your Vibe on I-65 Chicago-New Orleans

17 days / 16 nights from NZ \$7,699

Get Your Vibe on I-65 : Chicago - New Orleans

Follow one of America's great self-drive corridors on this Chicago to New Orleans journey along Interstate 65, linking the Great Lakes, the American Heartland, bourbon country and the Deep South. Designed for Kiwi travellers wanting to experience a true cross-section of the United States, this itinerary combines iconic cities, regional culture and well-known highlights along a classic north-to-south route. From Chicago's skyline and architectural landmarks, the journey continues through Indiana's open landscapes, Kentucky's bourbon heritage, Nashville's live music scene, Alabama's Civil Rights history and into Louisiana's bayous and French Quarter atmosphere. Each destination reflects a different side of American life, from major urban centres to smaller regional cities and towns. This self-drive journey brings together a diverse range of experiences across multiple states, offering a practical, immersive and engaging way to explore America from Chicago to New Orleans along one of its great interstate corridors.

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Chicago Hop-On Hop-Off Tour / Millennium Park & Cloud Gate ("The Bean") / Skydeck Chicago / Chicago Architecture River Cruise / Field Museum / 360 CHICAGO Observation Deck / Navy Pier / Chicago Riverwalk / Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum / Churchill Downs & Kentucky Derby Museum / Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory / Muhammad Ali Centre / Evan Williams Bourbon Experience / Bardstown Bourbon Company / National Corvette Museum / Nashville Hop-On Hop-Off Tour / Country Music Hall of Fame / RCA Studio B / Nashville Guided Food Tour / Ryman Auditorium / Grand Ole Opry Show & Backstage Tour / Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum / Rosa Parks Museum / USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park / French Quarter / Jackson Square & St. Louis Cathedral / Mississippi River Jazz Dinner Cruise / Oak Alley Plantation / Louisiana Small Airboat Swamp Adventure / National WWII Museum / New Orleans School of Cooking



Riverfront Chicago

Day 1: Arrival - Riverfront Welcome to Chicago

Arrive in Chicago and transfer to your hotel, ideally positioned within easy reach of the Riverwalk, Millennium Park and the Magnificent Mile. After your flight, the rest of the day is intentionally light to allow time to rest and settle in. Take a relaxed walk along the Chicago Riverwalk, where striking skyscrapers reflect across the water and cafés, bridges and public art create an easy introduction to the city. It's a simple first taste of Chicago's urban energy without a structured schedule. As evening approaches, explore dining in the Loop or West Loop, both known for excellent restaurants and relaxed city atmosphere. If you feel up to it, enjoy a rooftop drink overlooking the skyline or a casual gastropub dinner nearby. Tonight is about arrival, recovery, and settling into Chicago, where you will spend the next few days exploring before the road journey begins south on Interstate 65.

Overnight: Chicago - Silversmith Hotel Chicago Downtown or similar

Day 2: Chicago – Skyline Views, River Cruises & Legendary Blues

Start the day with breakfast at Lou Mitchell's, a Chicago institution since 1923, known for classic breakfasts, strong coffee, and complimentary doughnut holes. Afterwards, explore the city using the Hop-On Hop-Off Bus Tour, an easy way to navigate Chicago's key landmarks and districts. Hop off at Millennium Park to see Cloud Gate ("The Bean"), stroll through Grant Park, or visit the Art Institute of Chicago, home to one of the country's most significant art collections. Continue to Skydeck Chicago at Willis Tower, where glass ledges extend 411 metres above the streets below, delivering sweeping views across the city skyline. In the afternoon, enjoy an Architecture River Cruise along the Chicago River, showcasing the city's world-famous blend of historic and modern architecture. This evening, dine in the West Loop or River North before experiencing Chicago's legendary blues scene at venues such as Buddy Guy's Legends or Kingston Mines. *Overnight: Chicago - Silversmith Hotel Chicago Downtown or similar*



Architecture River Cruise



Skydeck Chicago



The Bean in Millennium Park



Millennium Park



Wrigley
Field



Griffin Museum of Science
& Industry

Day 3: Chicago – Museums, Neighbourhoods & Local Culture

Today focuses on Chicago's world-class museums and cultural institutions, with time put aside for a full day of flexible sightseeing. You may choose to visit the **Field Museum**, home to Sue - the world's largest T. rex skeleton - alongside extensive natural history and cultural exhibits. Alternatively, the **Shedd Aquarium** showcases marine life from around the world, while the **Griffin Museum of Science and Industry** offers interactive exhibits focused on innovation and discovery. Sports fans may wish to visit historic **Wrigley Field**, while astronomy enthusiasts can head to **Adler Planetarium** for sweeping Lake Michigan and skyline views. Those interested in shopping can explore the **Magnificent Mile** or **State Street**, while **River North** offers galleries, cafés and boutique shopping. This evening is left open to enjoy Chicago's dining scene at your own pace, from neighbourhood restaurants to rooftop bars or live music venues.

Overnight: Chicago - Silversmith Hotel Chicago Downtown or similar



Adler Planetarium



Magnificent Mile

Day 4: Chicago Icons – Views, Food & Final Highlights

Start the day at 360 Chicago Observation Deck for sweeping panoramic views across Lake Michigan and the city skyline, offering one of the best elevated perspectives of Chicago's lakefront and urban grid. Afterwards, enjoy a classic Chicago deep-dish pizza lunch at Lou Malnati's or Giordano's, both long-standing local institutions known for their signature style. Spend the afternoon at Navy Pier, enjoying its waterfront promenade, Ferris wheel and lively lakefront atmosphere, before continuing along the Chicago Riverwalk, where cafés, public art and striking skyline views create a relaxed way to experience the city at street level. This final Chicago day brings together the city's most recognisable experiences, showcasing bold architecture, lakefront energy and the Riverwalk. As evening falls, enjoy a final dinner in River North or West Loop before returning to your hotel and preparing for the road journey south along Interstate 65, leaving the Great Lakes behind.

Overnight: Chicago - Silversmith Hotel Chicago Downtown or similar



360 Chicago Observation Deck



Deep Dish Pizza



Navy Pier



Chicago Riverwalk



Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum



Canal Walk

Day 5: Chicago, IL to Indianapolis, IN - Into the American Heartland (300 km)

Pick up your Alamo rental car in Chicago this morning and depart the city, heading south towards northwest Indiana. Join Interstate 65 near Gary, Indiana, the birthplace of the Jackson family, including Michael Jackson, before the landscape transitions from urban suburbs into Midwestern farmland and open highway. Continue south into Indiana and arrive in Indianapolis by early afternoon. Explore the Canal Walk, a relaxed waterfront district with pedestrian paths, bridges, public art and cafés. If time allows, and it is a non-race day, visit the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum (approx. US\$25), which showcases America's motorsport heritage and racing culture. Enjoy an evening at leisure in downtown Indianapolis before continuing deeper into Kentucky and bourbon country tomorrow, with time to relax, dine locally, or simply unwind after your first full driving day along Interstate 65, marking the transition into the American heartland experience.

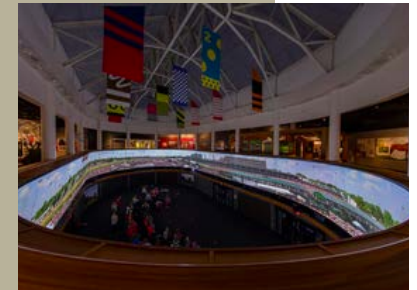
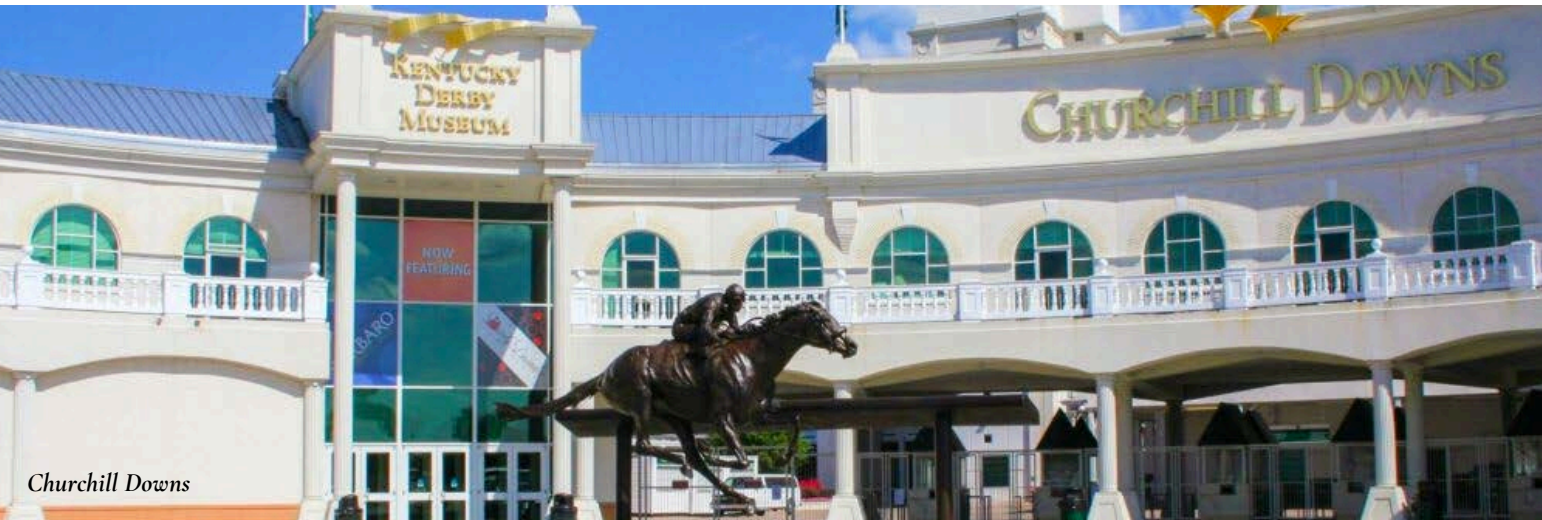
Overnight: Indianapolis - Hotel Indy Indianapolis or similar



Jackson Family Home



Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum



Day 6: Indianapolis, IN to Louisville, KY - Horse Racing Capital of the World (185 km)

Continue south into Kentucky and arrive in Louisville, a city defined by sport, heritage and bourbon culture. Spend the afternoon at **Churchill Downs**, home of the Kentucky Derby, and explore the **Kentucky Derby Museum** for insight into America's most famous horse racing tradition. Walk through the grandstand and track area, gaining a sense of the scale and history behind the world's most iconic horse race. This experience provides a powerful introduction to Louisville's sporting identity and its deep connection to thoroughbred racing. The rest of the afternoon is free, allowing time to settle into the city or explore at your own pace before evening. As night falls, enjoy dinner in downtown Louisville, where Southern hospitality meets a modern dining scene, or try the city's famous **Hot Brown sandwich** at the historic Brown Hotel, a true local specialty. A relaxed first taste of Louisville's food scene.

Overnight: Louisville - 21C Museum Hotel or similar

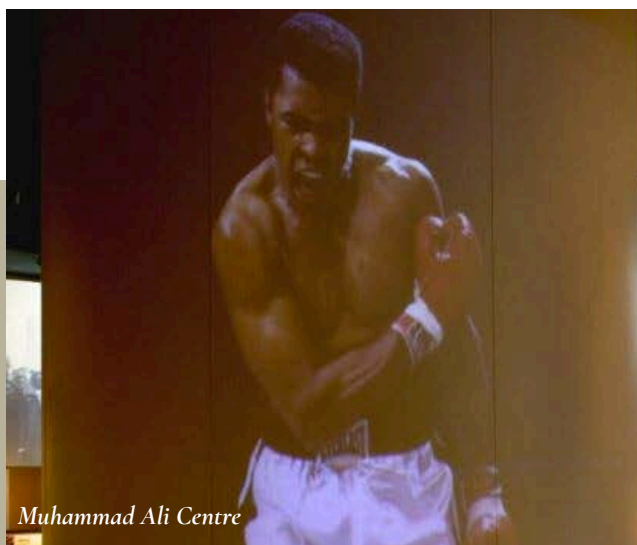
Kentucky Derby Museum



Kentucky Derby



Evan Williams Bourbon Experience



Muhammad Ali Centre



Day 7: Louisville - Bourbon, Baseball & Cultural Icons

Today explores Louisville's cultural identity through three of its most defining experiences. Begin at the **Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory**, where the story of America's most iconic baseball bat is brought to life through interactive exhibits and live production demonstrations. Continue to the **Muhammad Ali Centre** for a deeper look at the life and global legacy of the Louisville-born boxing legend, known as "The Louisville Lip," combining sport, history and powerful storytelling. This afternoon, enjoy the **Evan Williams Bourbon Experience**, an immersive introduction to Kentucky bourbon heritage, production and tasting culture. Together, these experiences showcase Louisville's unique blend of sport, spirit and storytelling, shaped by its sporting heroes and craft traditions. The rest of the day is at leisure, with time to explore the downtown district or NuLu, known for its creative dining and relaxed atmosphere. Tonight enjoy Louisville's laid-back dining and local atmosphere before continuing south tomorrow.

Overnight: Louisville - 21C Museum Hotel or similar



Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory

Day 8: Louisville, KY to Nashville, TN - Bourbon Country or Corvette Museum & Music City Arrival (275 km)

Depart Louisville this morning and head south on Interstate 65, travelling through the rolling landscapes of Kentucky. Travellers have the option to stop enroute, either in Bardstown, widely regarded as the heart of bourbon country, for a visit to the **Bardstown Bourbon Company**, a modern distillery experience combining guided tastings, contemporary architecture and hospitality, or alternatively at the **National Corvette Museum** in Bowling Green, an impressive world-class museum celebrating America's iconic sports car heritage, featuring rare vehicles, interactive exhibits and the famous sinkhole display. Both cost approximately US\$25 - 30 per person. Continue south across the Kentucky - Tennessee border and arrive in Nashville in the afternoon. After checking into your centrally located hotel, take time to settle in before heading downtown. Begin your introduction to Music City with a stroll along Broadway, where neon lights, rooftop bars and live music venues create a vibrant street atmosphere.

Overnight: Nashville - Holston House Nashville or similar



National Corvette Museum



Bourbon Tasting Bardstown Bourbon Company



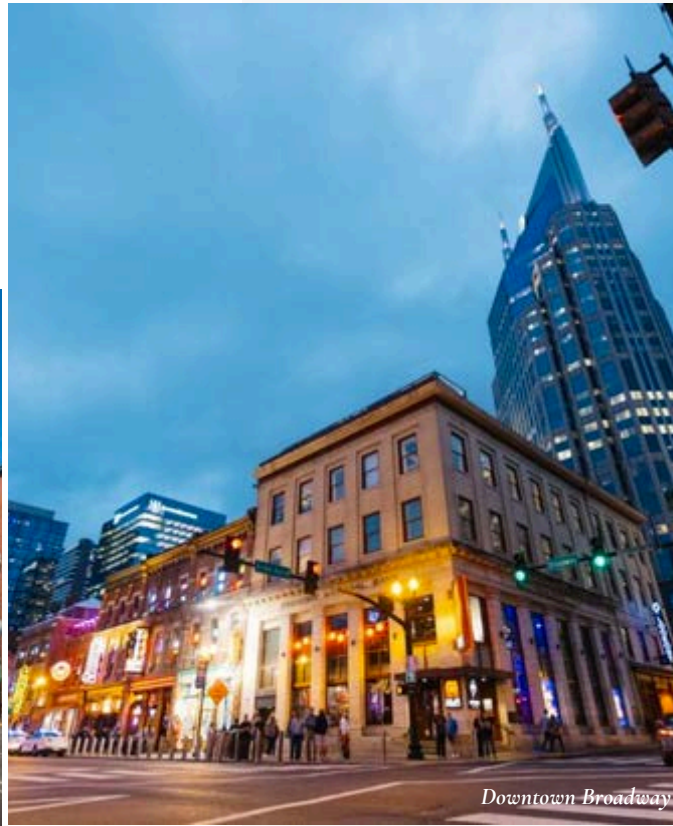
Bardstown Bourbon Company



National Corvette Museum



Nashville Hop-On Hop-Off Bus Tour



Downtown Broadway

Day 9: Nashville Icons - Country Music Foundations

Begin the day with a **Nashville Hop-On Hop-Off Tour** covering Music Row, Downtown and Centennial Park, offering an easy overview of Nashville's key districts and landmarks. Stop off to visit the **Country Music Hall of Fame**, home to one of the world's most significant collections of music history, followed by a guided visit to **RCA Studio B**, one of the most important recording studios in American music history, where legends helped define the Nashville sound. These experiences provide a strong foundation for understanding the city's musical legacy and global influence. In the evening, return to **Broadway** for live music and entertainment across multiple venues, where country, rock and blues performances create an energetic nightlife atmosphere. Today focuses on structure, storytelling and cultural discovery, showing why Nashville is recognised as the heart of American music and one of the most influential music cities in the world.

Overnight: Nashville - Holston House Nashville or similar



Country Music Hall of Fame Nashville



RCA Studio B

Day 10: Nashville - Local Food, Ryman & Grand Ole Opry Experience

This morning, experience a guided food tour in East Nashville or 12South, showcasing modern Southern cuisine and local flavours, from barbecue and hot chicken to creative chef-driven dishes and neighbourhood favourites. Afterwards, visit the **Ryman Auditorium**, known as the “Mother Church of Country Music,” and one of the most significant venues in American music history, where countless legends have performed on its historic stage. Spend the afternoon at leisure before an early evening break to refresh and prepare for one of the trip’s highlights - a night at the **Grand Ole Opry** live show, followed by a backstage tour offering exclusive access behind the scenes of country music’s most iconic stage. This is the signature Nashville experience and a true highlight of the entire journey. The combination of food, heritage, and live performance creates a fully immersive cultural day that defines Music City at its most authentic and memorable.

Overnight: Nashville - Holston House Nashville or similar



Day 11: Nashville, TN to Birmingham, AL - Civil Rights & Innovation (295 km)

Travel south into Alabama with an early departure from Nashville, following Interstate 65 through changing landscapes of rolling countryside and small Southern towns before arriving in Birmingham by early afternoon. On arrival, check into your hotel then visit the Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum, home to one of the world's largest motorcycle and motorsport collections, featuring over 1,600 machines, rare racing vehicles and immersive displays within a striking modern complex. Continue to the 16th Street Baptist Church, a profoundly significant Civil Rights landmark and place of remembrance central to the American Civil Rights Movement. Together, these experiences highlight Birmingham's powerful contrast between engineering innovation and social history, offering deep insight into the city's identity. The city centre is compact and easy to navigate, allowing time to reflect on the day. Evening is at leisure in downtown Birmingham before continuing toward the Gulf Coast tomorrow.

Overnight: Birmingham - The Kelly Birmingham or similar



16th Street Baptist Church

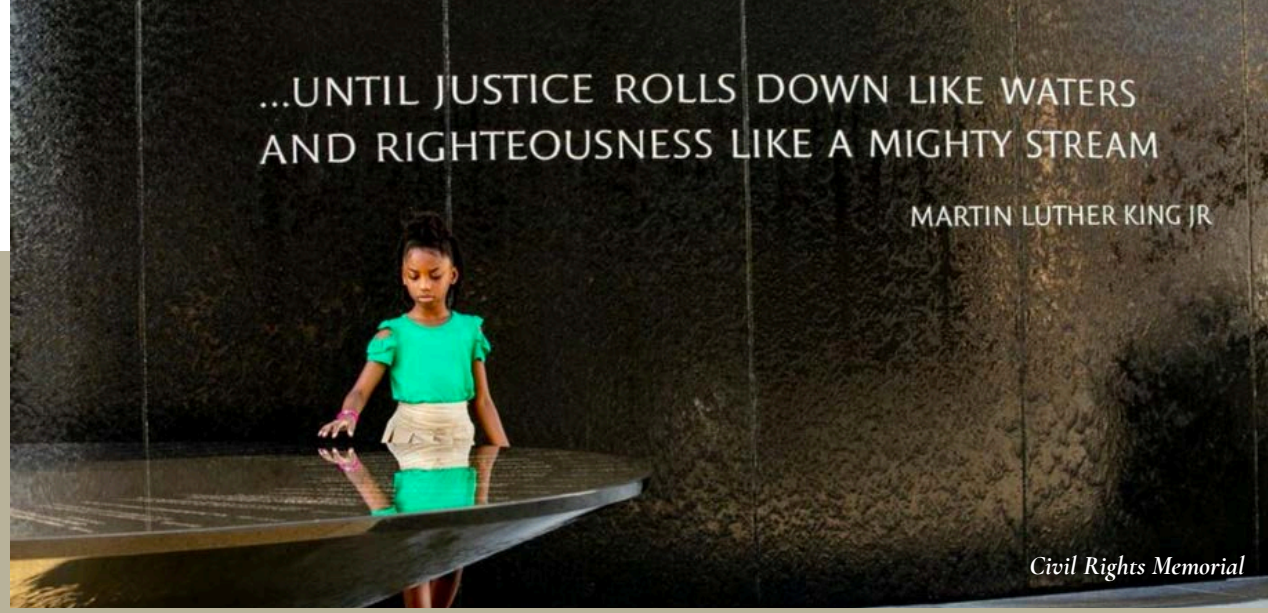


Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum

Day 12: Birmingham, AL to Mobile, AL via Montgomery (395 km)

Depart Birmingham early this morning and travel south along Interstate 65, the longest driving day of the journey. Arrive in Montgomery, Alabama's capital and a pivotal centre of the American Civil Rights Movement. Visit the **Rosa Parks Museum**, located at the site of her 1955 arrest, offering powerful interactive exhibits that tell the story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and its global impact on civil rights. Continue to the nearby **Civil Rights Memorial**, designed by Maya Lin, commemorating those who lost their lives in the struggle for equality. Rejoin I-65 and continue south through rural Alabama landscapes before arriving in Mobile in the late afternoon. Check into your hotel and enjoy a relaxed evening in the waterfront district, where oak-lined streets, historic architecture and Gulf Coast air create a noticeably softer Southern atmosphere. Mobile marks the transition toward the Gulf Coast and Louisiana.

Overnight: Mobile - Fort Conde Inn or similar



Day 13: Mobile to New Orleans - USS Alabama & French Quarter Arrival (240 km)

Begin the morning at Battleship Memorial Park, home to the USS Alabama Battleship and USS Drum submarine, offering a powerful insight into America's naval history and Gulf Coast defence heritage. Walk the decks, explore the exhibits and gain a sense of life at sea before departing Mobile. Continue west through southern Alabama and Mississippi landscapes before crossing into Louisiana and arriving in New Orleans in the afternoon. On arrival, drop off your rental car as it will no longer be required for your stay in the city. After check-in at your centrally located hotel, take time to settle in before heading out to explore the French Quarter, where wrought-iron balconies, lively streets and historic architecture create an immediate sense of place. As evening arrives, make your way to Frenchmen Street for live jazz in intimate venues, where music spills from every doorway and vibrant night-time energy.

Overnight: New Orleans - Hotel St. Marie or similar



French Quarter



USS Alabama Battleship



Alabama Gulf Coast



Royal Street French Quarter Buskers



French Market New Orleans



Jackson Square & St Louis Cathedral

Day 14: New Orleans – New Orleans – French Quarter, River Cruise & Jazz Night

Explore Jackson Square, St. Louis Cathedral and the French Market, the historic heart of New Orleans where street performers, artists and cafés bring the French Quarter to life. Stop at Café du Monde for its famous beignets and café au lait, a quintessential New Orleans tradition. Continue exploring the French Quarter's atmospheric streets, courtyards and hidden passages, where French, Spanish and Creole influences blend into one of America's most distinctive and characterful neighbourhoods. As evening approaches, enjoy a Mississippi River jazz dinner cruise at sunset, combining live music, skyline views and Creole cuisine aboard a classic paddlewheeler. Continue the night at Preservation Hall or a similar French Quarter jazz venue for an intimate live performance. Today captures the essence of New Orleans through history, river life and music culture in one immersive experience, centred on the French Quarter and its timeless atmosphere and vibrant street life.

Overnight: New Orleans - Hotel St. Marie or similar



Mississippi River Jazz Dinner Cruise



Café du Monde

Day 15: New Orleans - Oak Alley Plantation & Airboat Swamp Adventure

Travel to **Oak Alley Plantation**, famous for its dramatic oak-lined avenue and grand antebellum mansion, where guided commentary brings the history of plantation life in Louisiana into context. Continue into the Louisiana swamps for a **small-group airboat adventure** through winding bayous, offering a more thrilling and up-close way to explore the wetlands. Glide across open water and narrow channels as you spot wildlife including alligators, turtles, raccoons, snakes and a wide variety of birdlife in their natural environment. This day combines Southern history with raw natural landscapes, creating a striking contrast to the urban experiences of New Orleans. Together, the plantation visit and airboat experience showcase two very different sides of Louisiana's cultural and natural heritage in one full-day journey. Return to the city in the evening for a relaxed night in the French Quarter, enjoying the food, music and atmosphere after a full day of exploration.

Overnight: New Orleans - Hotel St. Marie or similar



Airboat Swamp Tour



Oak Alley Plantation



National WWII Museum

Day 16: New Orleans - WWII Museum, Cooking Class & Farewell Dinner Experience

Begin the morning at the **National WWII Museum**, one of the most immersive and highly regarded historical attractions in the United States, offering powerful exhibits and storytelling that bring key moments of history to life. After your visit, enjoy a light lunch in the city before continuing to an afternoon highlight at the **New Orleans School of Cooking**. Here, Cajun and Creole chefs guide a hands-on demonstration introducing classic Louisiana dishes such as gumbo, jambalaya and pralines, with plenty of tasting along the way. This experience highlights why food is central to New Orleans culture and Southern hospitality. The rest of the day is free to relax. Tonight, enjoy a farewell dinner at **Brennan's** or **Commander's Palace**, both iconic New Orleans dining institutions, celebrating the city's world-famous cuisine and culinary heritage. Today blends history, culture and cuisine in a fitting final full day in the Big Easy.

Overnight: New Orleans - Hotel St. Marie or similar



School of Cooking

Day 17: New Orleans Departure - Café du Monde & Farewell to the Big Easy

Enjoy a final relaxed morning in New Orleans before your early afternoon transfer to the airport for departure with our Star Alliance partners, United Airlines and Air New Zealand. Depending on flight time, take a last stroll through the French Quarter, soaking up the atmosphere of Jackson Square, wrought-iron balconies and lively street performers, or enjoy a final café breakfast at **Café du Monde** with its famous beignets and café au lait. This is a fitting final taste of the city's unique food and café culture before you leave. If time permits, enjoy one last wander along the Mississippi riverfront or nearby streets at a gentle pace. This concludes your Interstate 65 journey from Chicago's skyline to the Deep South, finishing in one of America's most atmospheric and culturally rich destinations, where music, food and history have defined every stage of the experience from start to finish.



French Quarter at Dusk



Your Journey, Your Way

This itinerary is a suggested route along Interstate 65 from Chicago to New Orleans, designed to showcase the diverse landscapes, cities and cultural experiences along the way. It is fully customisable to suit your travel style, interests and pace - whether spending more time enjoying Nashville's live music scene, exploring Kentucky bourbon country, or adding extra experiences along the journey. With Travel USA, every journey can be tailored to create a more personal and immersive experience, with flexibility to adjust accommodation styles, sightseeing inclusions, driving days and routing to suit individual preferences, budgets and travel goals while experiencing one of America's great north-to-south self-drive corridors.

Best Time to Travel

This Interstate 65 itinerary is best experienced between March and September, when weather conditions are generally warm, attractions are operating fully, and cities such as Chicago, Nashville and New Orleans are at their most vibrant. Spring and autumn offer comfortable temperatures for sightseeing and self-driving, while summer brings lively festivals, outdoor dining and extended daylight hours. If travelling outside these months, some seasonal experiences may vary, however Travel USA can recommend alternative options and routing adjustments to ensure an enjoyable journey year-round. Contact Travel USA for tailored advice on the best travel periods, accommodation choices and seasonal experiences throughout America's Great Lakes, Heartland and Deep South.

Accommodation

Travel USA has carefully selected a collection of quality 3.5 - 4 star boutique properties chosen for their location, character and overall guest experience. In Chicago, Silversmith Hotel offers a stylish downtown base near the Riverwalk and Millennium Park, while Hotel Indy delivers contemporary design in the heart of Indianapolis. Louisville's 21c Museum Hotel combines upscale accommodation with a unique art-focused atmosphere. In Nashville, Holston House places you steps from Broadway and the live music scene, while The Kelly Birmingham provides character and comfort. Fort Conde Inn in Mobile adds historic Southern charm, before Hotel St. Marie immerses you in the atmosphere of New Orleans' French Quarter. These properties balance comfort, location and authenticity, but can always be tailored to suit individual travel styles and budgets.

What's Included?

- Airport arrival transfer in Chicago & departure transfer in New Orleans
- 4 nights' accommodation at the Silversmith Hotel Chicago Downtown
- 3 day all-inclusive Chicago Go City Sightseeing Pass - 30+ attractions
- 9-day Alamo rental car in a full-size vehicle (Chevrolet Malibu or similar)
- 1 night's accommodation at the Hotel Indy, Indianapolis
- 2 night's accommodation at the 21C Museum Hotel, Louisville
- Kentucky Derby Museum - admission and guided track visit
- The Main Ticket - includes access to 7 Louisville attractions
- 3 night's accommodation at the Holston House, Nashville
- Nashville Hop On Hop Off Trolley Tour
- Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum admission
- RCA Studio B Tour & Ryman Auditorium admission
- Guided Food Tour of 12South with 5+ Tastings
- Grand Ole Opry Show Tickets + Post-Show Backstage Tour
- 1 night's accommodation at The Kelly, Birmingham
- 1 night's accommodation at the Fort Conde Inn, Mobile
- 4 night's accommodation at the Hotel St. Marie, New Orleans
- 3 day all-inclusive New Orleans Go City Sightseeing Pass - 20+ attractions
- Oak Alley Plantation & Small Airboat Tour

Pricing:

All of our pricing is based on dynamic rates meaning we will provide you with the best of the day at the time of booking. Our suggested itinerary has been created using fully refundable rates. Final pricing will depend on factors like month of travel, how early you book, availability and whether you choose non-refundable or fully refundable rates.

NZ\$ pricing for our 17day / 16night package

- From \$7,699 - \$8,275 depending on the month of travel

Terms & Conditions apply - [CLICK HERE](#) for more details

This is a suggested itinerary based on our recommendations. There are no fixed departure dates or schedules so you can customise the itinerary to suit your personal preferences and needs. Contact us with your proposed dates and we will create a personalised travel package just for you.

Travel USA Planning Assistance is included with all our packages



New Orleans at Sunset