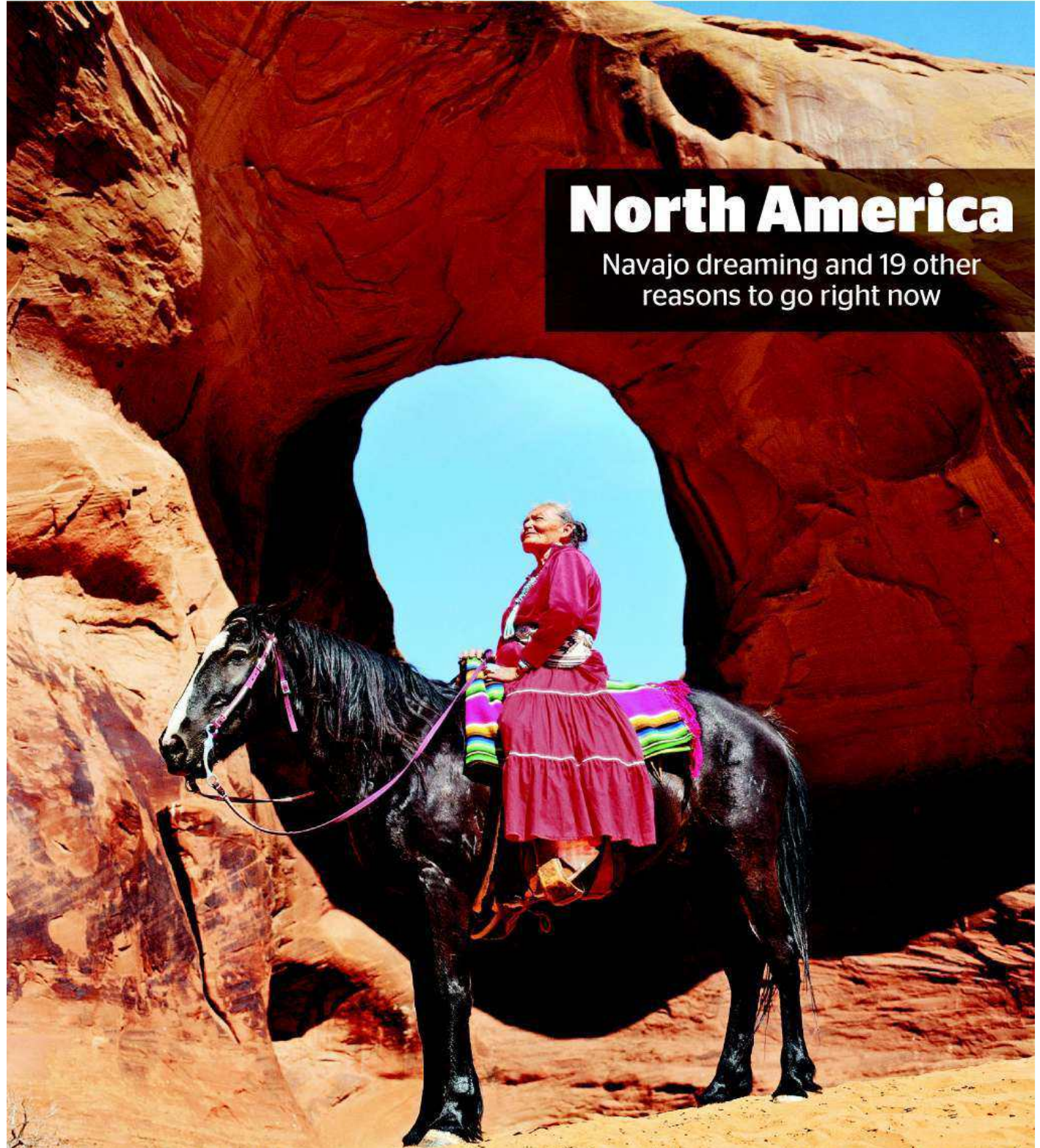


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# North America

Navajo dreaming and 19 other reasons to go right now

# A continent for all seasons

From urban grit and shopping to wilderness treks and civil war sites, **Kristie Kellahan** unveils 20 top experiences in the US and Canada

## 1. Wizard-tastic!

Butter beer, anyone? Harry Potter fans will be in seventh heaven at the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, now open at Universal Orlando in Florida. A theme park within the greater theme park, it has roller-coasters, freaky special effects, live performances by Harry and Hermione lookalikes, themed dining at the Three Broomsticks and more merchandise than you can poke a wand at. Don't miss Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey, the park's signature ride, a thrilling journey through Hogwarts Castle. And yes, the butter beer is delicious. [universolorlando.com/harrypotter](http://universolorlando.com/harrypotter).

## 2. New in New York

New York City might have been hit hard by the GFC but it's sending a loud, clear message of renewal with a slew of flash hotel openings. The boutique James Hotel just opened downtown in Soho, with a hyped David Burke restaurant. The Setai Fifth Avenue is glam, fab and claims to have 214 of the biggest rooms and suites in the city.

The W Downtown is bringing DJ nights and rock-star style to the traditionally dowdy Financial District and Element New York Times Square West takes green and healthy travel to a new level. [starwoodhotels.com](http://starwoodhotels.com), [setaififthavenue.com](http://setaififthavenue.com), [jameshotels.com](http://jameshotels.com).

## 3. As big as Texas

In May, Qantas begins direct flights to Dallas-Fort Worth from Sydney, opening up the fascinating state of Texas to more Aussie travellers. Known for its oil money, cattle ranches, that TV series and larger-than-life personalities, Texas is a diverse and welcoming destination.

In Dallas, don't miss the renowned steakhouses, great shopping and a cultural scene that includes the Public ArtWalk, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and the annual Shakespeare Festival. With more time to spare in Texas, try Austin's music scene and Houston for blockbuster shopping. [visitdallas.com](http://visitdallas.com).

## 4. Local heroes

Canadians have championed the idea of the "100-mile diet", eating only food grown within a 100-mile (161-kilometre) radius of their homes. Vancouver authors Alisa Smith and J. B. MacKinnon wrote a best-selling book outlining their experience of eating this way for a year, picking up a swag of awards and a TV show in the process. The Vancouver foodie scene is progressive, embracing local and organic practices. A feast of farmers' markets, foodie festivals, cooking schools and even a slow-food cycling tour are available for the gourmand with a social conscience. [100milediet.org](http://100milediet.org).

## 5. Cowboy cool

Gwyneth Paltrow's role as a country singer in *Country Strong* has turned the spotlight on all things cowboy. Do it in style at The Ranch at Rock Creek. Opened in May, it's a luxury homestay and cowboy experience on 2428 hectares of Montana wilderness.

A former cattle ranch, the property has undergone a renovation to become a deluxe guest ranch. Think of it as cowboy culture, without the dusty, uncomfortable parts. Guests can try barrel racing, trail rides, mountain biking and fly fishing. Then, retire to a suite or the soothing spa. John Wayne never had it so good. [theranchatrockcreek.com](http://theranchatrockcreek.com).

## 6. Summer fun

So chic. Quebec City, with its French-speaking population, old stone buildings and charming little bistros, will have you thinking you've dropped into Europe. The walled city experiences extremes of temperature, so unless you fancy packing your thermals, plan a visit for spring or summer.

The best excuse we've found to make the trip? The Quebec City Summer Festival in July attracts about 1 million visitors and hosts some of the world's best music and street performances. [quebecregion.com](http://quebecregion.com).

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# A continent for all seasons

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## 7. Shop 'til you drop

One of the main reasons for travel to the US has always been the epic shopping spree. Now, with the Aussie dollar holding firm at parity with the greenback, the bargains are even more thrill-inducing. Clothes, shoes, bedlinen, make-up, jewellery and even golf clubs top the list of the most popular items bought in the US. In the Big Apple, your first stop should be Century 21 – a crowded discount designer emporium spread over several floors. As they say, it's fashion worth fighting for. In Hawaii, a trolley-car ride to Waikale Premium Outlets is worth the trip for massive discounts on brands including Nine West, Coach and Ralph Lauren. And in LA, the newest kid on the block is Santa Monica Place, an open-air mall with all your favourite brands.  
[c21stores.com](http://c21stores.com), [premiumoutlets.com](http://premiumoutlets.com), [santamoniacplace.com](http://santamoniacplace.com).

## 8. Yukon believe it

Yukon is the most accessible northern territory of Canada; visitors who make the trip are rewarded with stunning wilderness landscapes. A range of tours gives an insight into life in the rugged north, one of the remotest parts of Canada. Things to try include dogsledding, snowmobiling, kayaking, horseback riding and hunting. The spectacle of the northern lights, or aurora borealis, is best seen against the winter sky, so get your skates on.  
[travelyukon.com](http://travelyukon.com).

## 9. The big O

Oprah raved about her visit to Australia, so it's only fair Aussies check out Oprah's base and the home of her TV studios, Chicago. If you were born under a lucky star, you can nab tickets to watch her tape the show but be quick, as Oprah is filming her last season. For everyone else, there is Chicago's dining scene to enjoy – don't leave town without visiting one of the famous steakhouses or pizza parlours, where

deep-dish pizza is perfected. It's a massive baseball town, too, so any Cubs or White Sox game you attend is sure to be fun. And with Obama-mania still going strong, there are plenty of tours you can take of "Barack's Chicago", the city where he lived before the move to the White House.  
[explorechicago.org](http://explorechicago.org).

## 10. New Orleans goes off

It's festival season in New Orleans and who needs a better reason than that to let the good times roll? Best known for

southern food and soul music, the city is also home to the Tennessee Williams Festival, Jazz & Heritage Festival and the French Quarter Festival. For maximum sizzle, plan your trip around Mardi Gras on March 8, when colourful floats of half-naked dancers wind their way along Bourbon Street, tossing sparkly bead necklaces to the crowds. The after-parties rock on until the wee hours, fuelled by potent Hurricane cocktails.  
[neworleansonline.com](http://neworleansonline.com).

## 11. Fashion fantastic

He's designed for pop royalty (Madonna's cone bra), movie stars, dance icons and major fashion houses – his own and, most recently, Hermes. He even had a crack at popularising skirts for men as an everyday fashion statement. And in this, the first major international museum exhibition devoted to Jean Paul Gaultier, the French enfant terrible of fashion is honoured for his avant-garde style and original inspirations.  
*The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier: From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk* opens at the

*the Catwalk* opens at the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Arts on June 17. The display will be made up of 100 haute couture dresses as well as pi

sketches, original photography and audiovisual clips.  
[mbam.qc.ca](http://mbam.qc.ca).

## 12. Happy happy, joy joy

It's official: San Luis Obispo in California is the happiest city in the US, according to *New York Times* best-selling author Dan Buettner in his book *Thrive*. An enticing lifestyle blend of award-winning wines, beautiful beaches, hiking trails, charming galleries and a sunny Mediterranean climate appeals to people from all over the US. Experience the area the way the locals do – car-free – with a series of initiatives started by the government to promote green tourism. It's a move that looks like it will be a model for towns the world over.  
[slocarfree.org](http://slocarfree.org).

## 13. Bear with it

Nature lovers come from all corners of the globe to experience the Great Bear Rainforest, an exhilarating wildlife encounter in British Columbia. The Kitsoo/Xaixais First Nation people act as guides, leading guests around the largest intact temperate rainforest in the world. A place teeming with spirit bears, grizzly bears and wolves, it presents a rare opportunity to learn about the ancestral lands and traditional territory of Canada's indigenous population direct from First Nation people. After an energetic day spent hiking and bear watching, rest your weary head at Spirit Bear Lodge. This is waterfront accommodation inspired by traditional building methods, albeit featuring more than a few modern creature comforts.  
[spiritbear.com](http://spiritbear.com).

## 14. Bar none

The humble hotel bar was once the last place you'd want to meet for a drink. Banish thoughts of stale peanuts and staler decor – hotel bars have had a makeover. In Atlanta, check out Lumen, in the lobby of the Ritz-Carlton, where jewel-like shades



are highlighted by the clever lighting of chandeliers and sparkly lamps. Martini Bar at the Raleigh in Miami is making a splash with its art deco elegance in a place known for its occasional tackiness. At the Standard in New York it's Biergarten that has the pretty young things talking, with its High Line location and classic menu of German comfort food and moreish beers.  
[ritzcarlton.com](http://ritzcarlton.com), [raleighhotel.com](http://raleighhotel.com), [standardhotels.com](http://standardhotels.com).

### 15. Rocky Mountain northern high

Sit back and take in the vast, pretty-as-a-picture and ever-changing landscape of Canada as you travel by rail. The popular Rocky Mountaineer train winds its way through western Canada and the majestic Rockies, its domed glass roofs making sightseeing a breeze. This month, Rocky Mountaineer introduced the option for RedLeaf Service passengers to upgrade to SilverLeaf Service on select routes, including Vancouver to Banff. Guests will enjoy extra niceties, including a hot-meal service at their seat, entertaining commentary and twice the viewing area of the RedLeaf cars.  
[rockymountaineer.com](http://rockymountaineer.com).

### 16. Ground Zero

Perhaps difficult to believe, 2011 marks a decade since the tragic events of September 11, 2001. At Ground Zero in New York, construction on the memorial site is moving ahead at a feverish pace, with the memorial set to open in September. In the

meantime, however, you can visit the preview site in Manhattan's Financial District to watch the progress of the memorial and share your September 11 story for the museum's planned interactive exhibit.  
[national911memorial.org](http://national911memorial.org).

### 17. Navajo dreaming

There's more to the US than shopping and theme parks. No, really! The Navajo, the largest Native American tribe in North America, have lived in the south-west of the country for more than 1000 years. On a fascinating 10-day Wonders of the American West tour, you'll learn about Navajo life, history and culture as a local guide shares insights and stories. At night, gather around the campfire for a traditional cookout in the canyons. Think of it as "the US does the outback".  
[insightvacations.com.au](http://insightvacations.com.au).

### 18. History comes alive

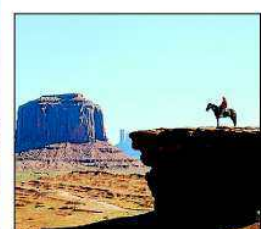
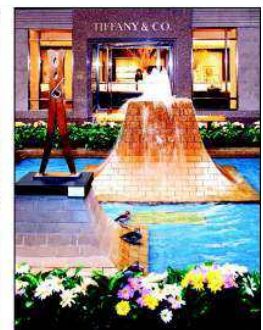
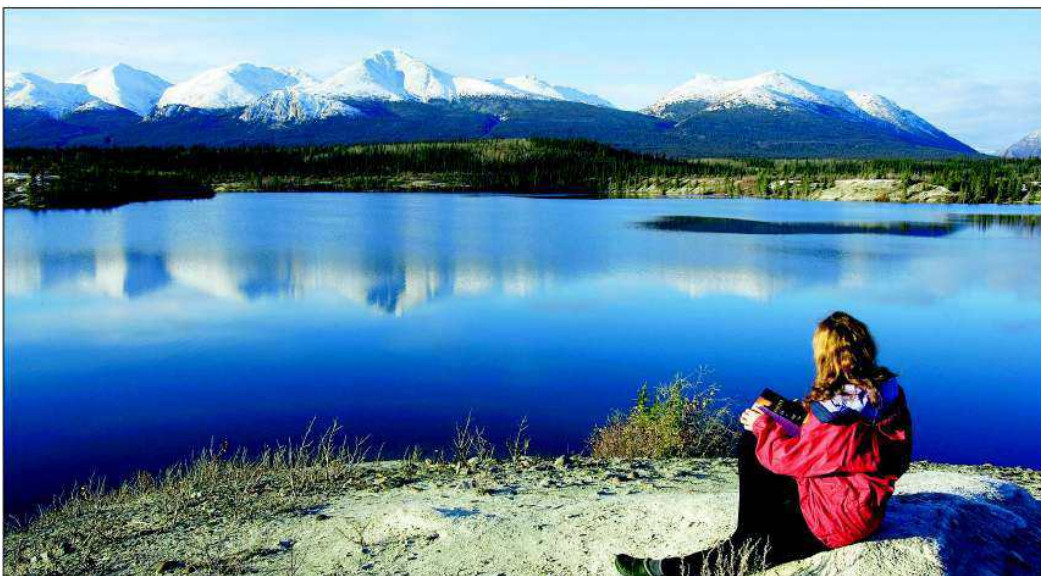
This year marks the sesquicentenary of the Civil War; 150 years since the outbreak of the deadliest conflict in American history. Commemorative events are planned in many states, including Virginia, Pennsylvania, Georgia and the Carolinas. Opinions and passions still run hot on both sides, with descendants of those for the Union debating fiercely with Confederate supporters at living history re-enactments around the country. Get both sides of the story from re-enactors at Gettysburg, a site of extraordinary history and beauty.  
[civilwar.org/150th-anniversary](http://civilwar.org/150th-anniversary).

### 19. Into the wild

Cruising is one of the fastest-growing segments of the travel industry and why wouldn't it be? The price is all-inclusive, you unpack once and small ships can go to places you might never have access to by land. Explore the beautiful coastlines of British Columbia and south-east Alaska on specially chartered yachts with Bluewater Adventures. Wilderness and wildlife are its specialty, with cruises taking in a grizzly-bear sanctuary and ancient forests. Guests can leave the vessel and kayak each day in secluded bays and inlets. With a commitment to sustainable eco-friendly tourism practices, carbon-neutral departures are offered.  
[bluewateradventures.ca](http://bluewateradventures.ca).

### 20. Ice, ice baby

Ice hockey is to Canada what cricket is to Australia and gridiron is to the US. In other words, it's huge! Score tickets to an ice-hockey match (if you can – they sell out pretty quickly) and cheer along with the locals as they watch the returning champs, the Notre Dame Hounds, battle it out alongside the Calgary Northstars, Winnipeg Thrashers and other top teams. Matches are played in most large cities throughout the season. Rug up in team jerseys, drink beer from a plastic cup, yell as loudly as the next guy and don't forget to keep your stick on the ice.  
[hockeycanada.ca](http://hockeycanada.ca).





Wonders of creation ... (clockwise from far left) Montreal is hosting the Gaultier exhibition; the Yukon; shopping in Dallas; baseball in Chicago; a Navajo Native American in Utah.

Photos: Getty Images



Magical sights ... (from top) the Wizarding World of Harry Potter in Orlando, Florida; the Quebec City Summer Festival.



Big and beautiful ... (clockwise from above) party time at Mardi Gras, New Orleans; cycling at San Luis Obispo, California; the Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia; fine-dining on Vancouver's waterfront.