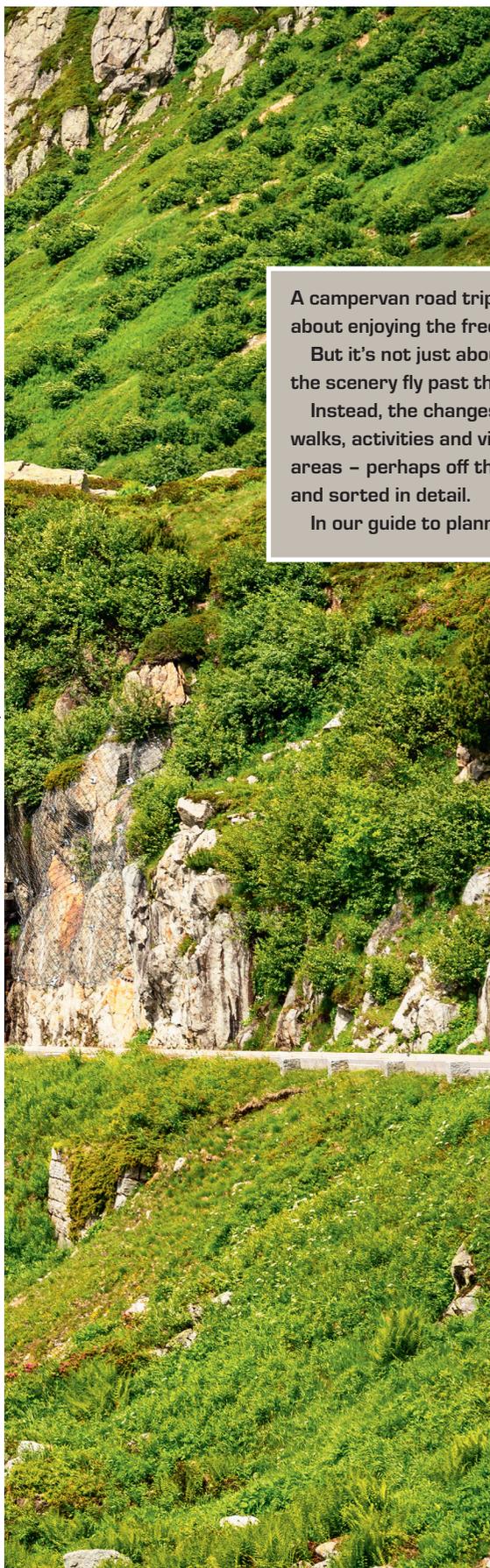


HEAD OUT ON THE HIGHWAY

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A road trip is all about freedom and nothing gives you more freedom to explore than a campervan. It's the ultimate way to discover everything a place has to offer. Here's how to prepare for a road trip, followed by 15 must-try routes. So get your motor running...

A campervan road trip is more than just a holiday. It's about enjoying the freedom of the road.

But it's not just about driving all day and watching the scenery fly past the windscreen, either.

Instead, the changes in location let you take in walks, activities and visits to attractions in different areas – perhaps off the cuff or planned as a theme and sorted in detail.

In our guide to planning the perfect camping road

trip, you'll find all the important information and advice you'll need to plan a successful tour in the UK or overseas.

Whether your road trip takes in an entire continent, a single country or just a particular area, you're certain to have an adventure that creates memories that will last forever.

Words ■ Iain Duff

A campervan road trip can be a simple affair but even the most straightforward tour needs some advance planning.

Now, if you are lucky enough to have an unlimited amount of money or time, you could simply choose where you want to go and hit the highway.

Sadly, most of us don't have that luxury. So, to make the most of your budget and time, it's essential to come up with a detailed route and a plan for overnight stops. Not only does that help you make the most of your trip but it makes sure that you are able to get onto the campsites you want at busiest times.

Don't be put off by the thought of researching and preparing a trip, though. Planning is all part of the adventure, and for some people it's the best bit!

Where to go

This is the first thing you need to decide and the options are endless. First of all, do you want to tour in the UK or in Europe?

You could go for a recognised 'official' route such as the North Coast 500 in Scotland or the Wales Coastal Way. Or you could create an itinerary of your own, simply by deciding on somewhere that you really want to explore

and researching a route that takes in as many interesting places as possible.

When to go

As tempting as it might be to take your road trip in the height of summer when the weather is likely to be at its best, it's worth considering earlier or later in the season.

Popular routes, such as the NC500, can be extremely busy

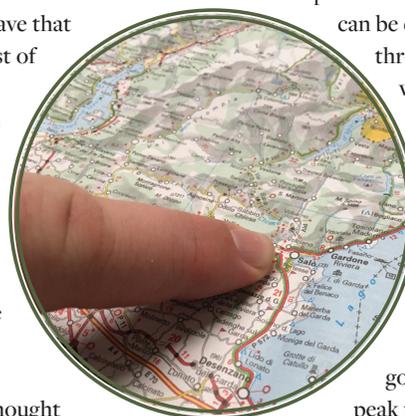
throughout the summer, which makes driving far less enjoyable, especially on the sort of back roads that make up many of these trips.

Campsites are also quieter and cheaper in spring and early autumn, which is another very good reason for avoiding the peak times.

When you're deciding when to travel, make sure to check whether there are any big events planned to take place when you want to go. As I've learned from experience, get the timing wrong and a big music festival, for example, could unexpectedly turn that sleepy Suffolk A-road into something that resembles central Birmingham at rush hour.

Plotting a route

On a road trip, the journey is the destination and an integral part of the holiday rather than something to be endured.





The stunning North Coast 500 in Scotland

Normally when you're going on holiday, you'd try to find the shortest and quickest way to get you from A to B. Usually that would mean travelling along motorways, dual carriageways and major A-roads.

But, on a road trip, the route you take is as important as the final destination. When you sit down to plan your journey, instead of choosing the fastest highway, look for the road that offers up the best views. Think slow – perhaps a meandering coastal road or a snaking mountain pass. Make time to stop and take in the sights.

Scour the internet and guidebooks to find the most interesting attractions and places to visit in the area, and factor them into your route.

When it comes to actually working out the route you want to follow, there's nothing quite like poring over a traditional paper map or road atlas. Spread the map out on the floor and spend a couple of hours looking at all the alternative options.

The amount of time you have for the trip will obviously have a major bearing on your itinerary. But don't forget to factor in getting to the beginning of the route and getting back home. Depending on where you want to go, that could mean adding two or three days onto the start and end of your holiday.

If you can build it into your itinerary, take a break from driving and pick a place

to stay for a few days so you can really get to explore in some more detail.

While paper maps are great for giving you a feel for the area, Google Maps is a brilliant tool for working out how long it will take to drive between destinations.

What might seem on the map like a short drive, could, in reality, take twice as long due to local conditions, and that might throw all your plans out of whack. Plotting the

proposed route online should flag up any issues like that and let you really plan your route in detail.

Choosing your stops

On many of the most popular road trip routes, it is important that you try to book your camping accommodation well in advance, especially at peak times.

The campsite you choose will partly





ONE OF THE BIG APPEALS OF A ROAD TRIP IS STUMBLING ACROSS LITTLE-KNOWN GEMS OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

depend on the kind of facilities you need, but it will also be determined to a large extent by what is available where you want to stay.

The good news is that you will only be staying one or two nights, so you won't need a huge amount of facilities and, even if the campsite is poor, you'll be moving on quickly to somewhere else.

For smaller, simpler sites, there's often less need to book in advance; plus the management and atmosphere can be very relaxed, which suits a flexible touring trip.

And there's rarely a need to stay a minimum number of nights during peak holiday times.

If you're willing to wing it, you can try wild camping. In other words, finding a spot where you can park up overnight without having to pay. It's not for everyone; personally, I prefer to stay on official campsites where there are proper facilities and more security. But if you do want to try it, there are apps that will help you find wild camping park-ups; including reviews and photographs. The important thing is that you should be responsible.

Don't park in places where you will be a nuisance to the locals and, when you depart, leave no trace. If you're travelling abroad, be aware of the rules in the country you are in. In many places it's illegal to stop overnight anywhere other than a campsite or aire.

How much will it cost?

Budgets for a road trip will vary and ultimately will be decided by how much you can afford and what you choose to spend.

But to keep costs under control and make



A road trip lets you see some incredible scenery

sure you don't run out of money, we would recommend first working out roughly how much it will cost for fuel, tolls and camping pitches, then setting a daily budget for food and drink and any other miscellaneous costs, eg visitor attraction entry fees.

Wild camping will obviously save you some money, as will staying on aires rather than fully fledged campsites when you are travelling abroad.

One of the big appeals of a road trip is stumbling across little-known gems off the beaten track – a cheap café that serves up hearty food at a fraction of the cost of a city-centre restaurant, or a quirky museum in a tiny village somewhere.

These are the places that can make a trip and it's always worth taking a chance on

somewhere that might look unlikely, in the hope that it turns out to be a hidden gem.

Although most retailers now accept cards or contactless payment – in fact some now insist on it – in some places, you might still find that cash is the only way to pay, so make sure you have some to hand. And if you're abroad, always have some local currency with you in case of emergencies.

Packing your 'van

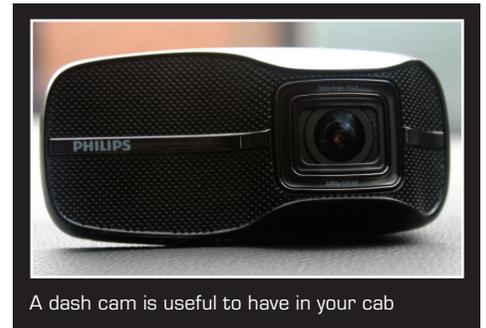
Storage is always at a premium in campervans, so tough plastic boxes with lids, like the Really Useful range, are great for transporting accessories that won't fit into your cupboards.

Soft luggage makes sense when space is at a premium. If you do find you need to take more gear with you, or you want to leave some spare capacity for souvenirs of your trip, then consider a rear cargo box or a roof box if your 'van will allow it.

Tempting though it is to squeeze luggage around passengers, please do not do it. All that kit will be instantly converted into missiles in the event you need to make a sudden stop or you're involved in an accident.

Hitting the road

You should have sorted out your route in some detail during the planning stage, but, before you set off, make sure you have alternative options as a back up, in case of roadworks, accidents or bad weather.



A dash cam is useful to have in your cab

It's likely you'll be covering a lot of miles, so, before setting off, make sure your 'van is up to the job. Get the tyres checked, check oil levels and generally give everything a once-over. Breakdown cover is vital and make sure you have a spare tyre on board, if possible. If you're going abroad, remember to get all your paperwork in order.

Sat-nav certainly makes life a lot easier, but on a road trip you need to be flexible, so don't follow it religiously. Take a traditional road atlas as well, as they can often give you a better overview of the area than the electronic map on the sat-nav.

If you're following an official route like the NC500, don't be afraid to deviate from the main drag to see more interesting places. Some of the best places I've discovered have been because I decided to turn off the main road on a whim. Take your time and you will get more out of a road trip. Make time to stop and soak in the views.



Crossing the border into Germany



The radio can be great company on the road

Remember that, as well as tourists, you will be sharing the roads with local people who rely on the roads for their day-to-day life. So it is important to make sure you drive responsibly and safely and treat the area with respect.

Set off with plenty of time in hand, rather than set an unrealistic or demanding schedule for reaching your next stopover. If you can, share the driving, and take regular breaks. These ease tensions as well as helping to keep drivers alert.

If you've got a pitch booked, give the campsite a call an hour or so before you are

due to get there to check it's all in order. If you get very delayed en route, let the campsite wardens know you'll be late.

In the 'van

With your route planned, campsites booked and 'van packed, you are ready to get your motor running and head out on the highway. The last thing to do is stock up on boiled sweets and gather all your important documents together, safe and handy.

The easiest way to keep track of key paperwork, tickets, credit cards and money on holiday is to use a neat document wallet and stash it in the glove compartment. Keeping it all together focuses the mind on not losing it.

On the road, have plenty of listening options available – download your favourite podcasts and/or audio books in advance, and set up a driving playlist on your phone. If you're old school (or just old) you could even make up your own compilation CDs!

Tuning in to local radio stations is a brilliant way to get a feel for the area you're visiting, as

well as providing you with useful traffic information on the local roads.

DVDs and video games will keep youngsters occupied – but on longer trips, traditional car games like I spy are good fun for everyone (up to a point!).

Pack your fridge or coolbox with everything you need for something to eat and drink en route; being self-contained saves time, money and aggravation. If you do want to stop for food and drink, pubs off the beaten track beat motorway services for refuelling any day of the week. That said, we have stopped at some fantastic service stations on our travels through Europe.

A dash cam can give you more peace of mind when you take to the road and it can provide a good video record of the drive as well as coming in handy if the worst happens and you have a prang.



Plan ahead to secure the best camping spots • INSET Traffic chaos in Scotland



15 EPIC DRIVING ROUTES

Here is my selection of 15 stunning UK and European road trips for your campervan. The list features a mixture of official and unofficial routes, most of which I've completed. All of them will provide you with memories that will last forever

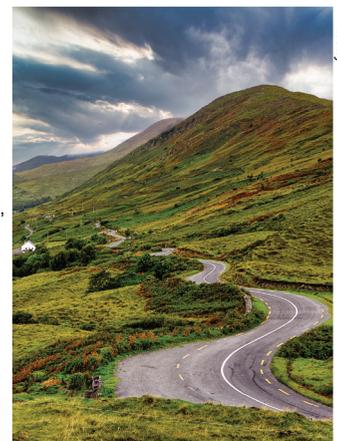


1 SCOTLAND NORTH COAST 500 516 MILES

The North Coast 500 is the ultimate UK road trip and one of the best in the world – an epic 516-mile circular driving route around the most northerly tip of the UK mainland. It boasts incredible coastal scenery, with a new spine-tingling vista around every corner. As well as the stunning views, the route also provides a fascinating insight into the history of this remote part of the Scottish Highlands. You can complete the route in as little as a week and get plenty out of it, but ideally you'd want to devote a couple of weeks to it at least. Since the North Coast 500 officially came into being in 2014, it has gained international recognition as one of the most exceptional road trips in the world, so it's really busy most of the year.

2 IRELAND 1,600 MILES WILD ATLANTIC WAY

Spanning no fewer than 1,600 miles, the Wild Atlantic Way stretches down Ireland's west coast from the north of County Donegal, down to the southern tip of County Cork and the route goes through some of the most beautiful and dramatic scenery in Europe. The route offers spectacular Atlantic Ocean vistas and memorable places to visit and can be done in one go over a couple of weeks or split into shorter chunks for multiple visits. There are more than 150 locations that have been officially designated as places to visit along the route.



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3 ENGLAND CCR 200 200 MILES

The CCR 200 is a new coastal road trip showing off the lesser-known side of the Lake District. It stretches through Cumbria from Morecambe Bay in the south to the Solway Firth in the north. The route takes in two AONBs and various nature reserves as well as other attractions like secluded beaches and castles. A 32-mile stretch of England's Coast Path, which recently opened between Whitehaven and Silecroft Beach, is also included within the route. The road trip is aimed at campers of all kinds – including those in campervans, motorhomes, caravans and tents – and has been split into five sections that can each be done in a day, with itinerary ideas and a mix of campsites to choose from.



4 WALES WALES COASTAL WAY 180 MILES

The Coastal Way follows the coastline of Wales around Cardigan Bay, between St Davids in the south and Aberdaron in the north. It is part of The Wales Way, a family of three national routes – which also includes the Cambrian Way and the North Wales Way.

The Coastal Way passes through some stunning scenery, as well as countless picturesque fishing villages, pretty harbour towns and traditional seaside resorts. Golden beaches, towering cliffs and hidden coves provide the backdrop to an epic week-long road trip.



5 FRANCE NORTH TO SOUTH 984 MILES

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From Caen to Cannes, this epic 980-mile drive takes you from the north of France to the glamorous Mediterranean coast, and on your way you'll be passing through some of the best the country has to offer.

Just half an hour from the ferry port in Caen you'll find Bayeux, home of the world-famous tapestry which depicts the 1066 Norman invasion of England. From there, head to the Normandy coast and Mont St-Michel, before going back inland in the direction of Le Mans, home of the 24-hour road race. Next it's south through the Loire Valley and the Dordogne as far as Bordeaux, before taking a sharp left towards Midi-Pyrénées. In the Tarn district, pay a visit to the medieval hilltop town of Cordes-sur-Ciel and the town of Albi, with its spectacular red-brick cathedral. Then onto Provence and your final destination, Cannes on the French Riviera.

6 EUROPE THE GRAND TOUR 1,523 MILES

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This unforgettable road trip takes you through the heart of Europe, covering more than 1,500 miles. Starting in Amsterdam, we pass through Belgium, Luxembourg and France, then down to the Swiss Alps, on to Lake Garda in Italy and up through Austria, Liechtenstein and the heart of Germany, before ending up back in the Netherlands for our ferry home.

Switzerland was the highlight. The roads are a dream, and the further into the country you get the more spectacular the surroundings become. At Lake Thun, the rolling hills turn into tree-lined mountains that rise like colossal, jagged, white-tipped fangs on the horizon. The route from there to Italy takes you across the Susten Pass, a frankly terrifying road that climbs its way to a height of more than 2,260m, almost twice as high as Ben Nevis. The Tarmac clings to the side of the mountain as it twists and turns towards the top. The sharp hairpin bends seem to jut out into the abyss as you creep cautiously towards them, but, if you have the guts to look out the window, the views over the vast valley below are breathtaking.

On the descent the road is just as precarious, with yet more sharp bends and precipitous drops. Back at ground level, you power through the Gotthard Road Tunnel, a 10-mile-long concrete tube that takes you through the heart of the Alps, then past Lake Lugano and on into Italy itself. After the adrenaline-charged crossing of the Alps, and a chaotic drive on the motorways around Milan, the gentler roads around Lake Garda come as something of a relief.

The route back takes you across the mountains again, but with wider roads and fewer hairpin bends, this time it's a little less scary. On the descent, it's worth a brief detour from the main A13 at Thusis to visit the Viamala-Schlucht, a gorge that was carved through the 300m-high cliffs thousands of years ago by glacial ice and the Rhine.

7 ENGLAND 70 MILES ATLANTIC HIGHWAY

Atlantic Highway is the name given to a 70-mile section of the road from north Devon down to the outskirts of Newquay in Cornwall. If you've ever visited Cornwall, you will probably know this route better as the A39, the main road through the southwest. The route roughly follows the line of the Atlantic coast and, as you travel south, to your right is the rugged cliffs, vast beaches and rolling waves of the ocean – and to your left, wild westcountry countryside. There are awe-inspiring views and picturesque villages all along the way and you certainly won't be short of things to see or do. And there is no shortage of campsites along this route for overnight stopovers. The only downside is that the roads round here are extremely busy in the summer, so if you want a more stress-free trip, try heading down out of season.

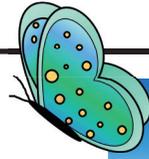
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8 NORTHERN IRELAND CAUSEWAY COASTAL ROUTE 120 MILES

Northern Ireland remains something of a mystery to many of us on the UK mainland, but, if you have the opportunity to visit, grab it with both hands. A road trip is a brilliant way to discover the raw beauty of the place, especially around its dramatic coastline. The Causeway Coastal Route winds for 120 miles between Belfast and Londonderry, through a variety of landscapes and all sorts of roads and it's perfect for a three or four-day tour. Among the early highlights are Carrickfergus Castle, the beautiful Antrim glens and the village of Cushendun, one of several spots with *Game of Thrones* connections. Next look out for the Dark Hedges – aka Kingsroad highway in Westeros – as you head north up the coast towards the stunning rock formation of Giant's Causeway. The last leg takes you along the north of the island to the city of Londonderry.



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9 ITALY WORLD TREASURE TRAIL 500 MILES



Few countries can rival Italy's treasure trove of globally important cultural riches. Its food is arguably the best in the world, its cities burst at the seams with historical artefacts, statues and architecture, and its landscape can take your breath away. And, of

course, there's the passionate people who live there. There's no better way to enjoy this incredible country than by taking a road trip, and this 500-mile route from Venice to Naples – taking in Bologna, Florence, Tuscany and Rome along the way – is truly epic. It follows in the footsteps of the young English aristocrats of the seventeenth century, who embarked on the Grand Tour as a rite of passage before settling down to become the political and economic leaders of the day. During your week-long journey you can glide down Venice's Grand Canal in a gondola, tuck into authentic spaghetti bolognese in Bologna, gaze at great artworks by Michelangelo, Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci in Florence and immerse yourself in Rome's history. It all ends in Naples, a thrilling city of charm and grit – the spiritual home of football legend, Diego Maradona.

10 BALTICS TALLINN TO RIGA 273 MILES

The former Soviet republics of Estonia and Latvia have come a long way since they regained their independence following the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s. Both have thriving European capitals that are rich in history and culture while looking firmly to the future. As ever, though, it's when you venture out of the big cities that you get more of a sense of what a country is really like, and that's where a road trip comes into its own. Our route starts on the cobbled streets of Estonia's capital, Tallinn, and its medieval old town. The route out of town takes you along wide boulevards lined with some grim-looking Soviet-era architecture, reminding you just how recently the country was under Moscow's control. On the way out, look out for the Russalka Memorial and the Tallinn TV Tower, two of the city's major landmarks. Head south 116 miles to Tartu, Estonia's second city and a vibrant university town. En route there's plenty to see, including the Jägala waterfall and suspension bridge, a couple of nature reserves and the Ice Age Centre.

Tartu, on the banks of the River Emajõgi, is a charming little city that is well worth a stopover before continuing on to the rustic border town of Valga. Here you can stand in the centre of town, with one foot in Estonia and one in Latvia. From there, follow the A3 south-west, then head over to the coastal road and the town of Saulkrasti, before driving south into Riga.

11 SCOTLAND SOUTH WEST COASTAL 300 300 MILES



The South West Coastal 300 is a circular touring route around the southwest of Scotland. It's a fantastic way to discover one of the UK's hidden gems. Scotland's southwest – Dumfriesshire, Galloway and South Ayrshire – has a coastline with sandy

beaches, rocky coves and quaint fishing villages that Cornwall would be proud of. Inland, there are hills that provide a stiff challenge to walkers and climbers, not to mention hundreds of square miles of forestry and gently rolling countryside where cycling enthusiasts can clock up the miles without worrying too much about traffic.





12 ENGLAND NORFOLK COASTAL ROAD 90 MILES

This isn't an officially designated road trip as such, but the 90-mile stretch of the A149 along the Norfolk coast, from Great Yarmouth to Cromer and then on to King's Lynn, is a gorgeous drive that takes you through some of Britain's loveliest countryside and most charming towns and villages. A four-day trip will give you plenty of time to explore seaside resorts like Sheringham, Hunstanton and Wells-next-the-Sea, go wildlife spotting in the Broads, park up and take short hikes along coastal paths and visit stunning beaches like the huge expanse of sand at Holkham. Norfolk is great for foodies and there are plenty of historic buildings to look at, too. The coast is also blessed with many excellent campsites.

13 ICELAND THE RING ROAD 830 MILES

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Iceland has an incredible landscape featuring icy glaciers, spectacular waterfalls and geothermal springs. A road trip will let you experience everything the country has to offer. Route 1 is an 830-mile road that encircles the entire island, making it the perfect route for a summer road trip, with campsites scattered along the way. As it's an island, the only way of getting there with your own campervan is driving to Denmark and taking a ferry via

the Faroe Islands. To save time, it might be better to fly over and hire a camper instead. Spend your first day exploring the Golden Circle, which includes the Pingvellir National Park, Gullfoss waterfall and the bubbling geothermal geysers. Then follow the ring road anticlockwise, starting with the spectacular waterfalls on the south coast. The east of Iceland is a vast wilderness and, while there isn't much to do, there is plenty to see along the coastline. Route 1 carries on around the coast to Akureyri, where you can take a break from driving and go whale spotting, or even book a flight over an active volcano! The last leg takes you back to Reykjavik, where you can spend some time discovering a unique capital.

14 CROATIA ADRIATIC HIGHWAY 400 MILES

Adventure, culture, and unparalleled natural beauty await you on this epic Croatian road odyssey. Croatia's Adriatic Highway meanders alongside the sparkling Adriatic Sea, weaving through charming fishing villages, ancient towns, and lush vineyards. Along the 400-mile route you'll find numerous campsites, offering stunning views of the sea. Picture waking up to the gentle lapping of waves against the shore, sipping your morning coffee with a mesmerising sunrise as your backdrop. As you wind your way through rugged cliffs and alongside azure waters, be captivated by the stunning vistas and picture-postcard panoramas. Immerse yourself in Croatia's rich culture, indulge in delicious seafood delicacies, and unwind on pristine beaches. Don't miss the iconic city of Dubrovnik, with its imposing medieval walls, or the idyllic island of Hvar, famed for its lavender fields.

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15 ENGLAND THE EXPLORER'S ROAD 300 MILES

The Explorer's Road spans almost the entire length of eastern England, from the Scottish border to Hertfordshire, taking in some of the country's hidden gems and finest attractions. It roughly follows the route of the historic Great North Road and today's A1, a route that has been travelled by the English for 2,000 years. Along the way you can discover the likes of Berwick,

Durham, Alnwick, Richmond, York, Lincoln, Southwell, Stamford, Hitchin and Hertford. Veer off the beaten track to explore stunning beaches, spectacular countryside, historic landmarks and vibrant cities, with plenty of campsites lining the route.

