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Home > Local > How to Do a Scenic East Coast Road Trip in 3 Days or Less

How to Do a Scenic East Coast Road Trip in 3 Days or Less

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Born in Canada and raised in America, Nicola loves hamburgers and has a knack for apologizing.

Wise folks say that life's about the journey, not the destination, and if there's a travel equivalent to that, it would be the road trip. And while there's nothing more freeing than packing up your bag and hitting the road, sometimes that road can be a little, well, *dull*. So how do you keep from going cross-eyed staring down the same uninspiring highways? Simple. Go East.

When it comes to beautiful views, the East Coast has got 'em from mountain tops all the way down to sea-level, and there's no better way to see it all than from behind the wheel. Though it's possible to do the whole thing in one 8-day jaunt, we've broken up our epic East Coast road trip into themed, bite-sized treks for those who may not have more than a few vacation days to spare at a time.

Planning on renting a car for your road trip? Find coupon codes for Avis, Budget, and more.

Northeast Itinerary | Central East Itinerary | Southeast Itinerary

The Northeast Trip: A Trek Through Picturesque Countrysides

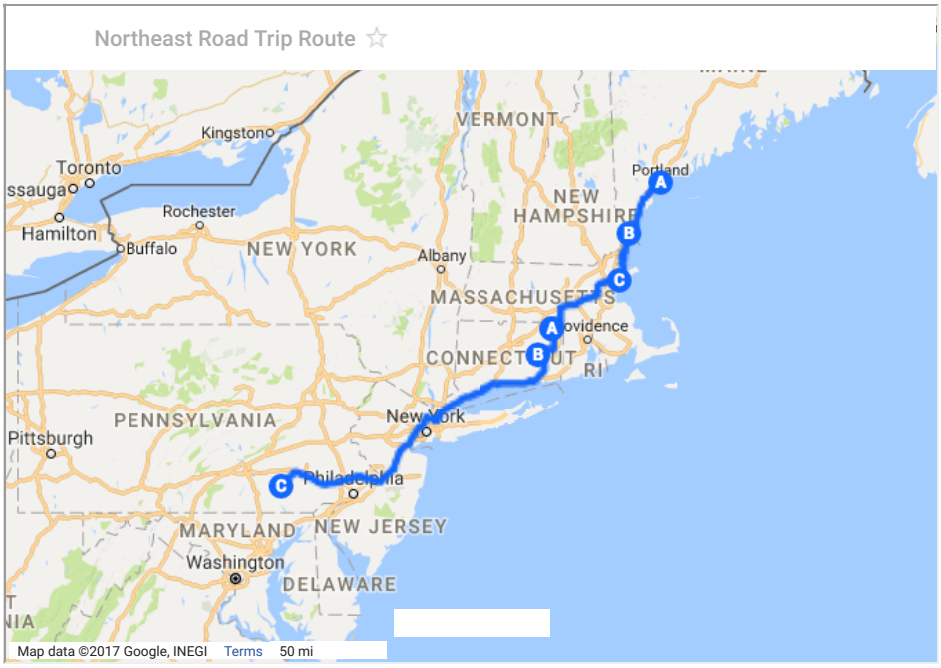
Faded red barns, rolling fields, and rows of trees swaying softly in the breeze. No, we're not talking about rural midwest—this is New England. While some might associate the upper East with New York City's hustle-and-bustle, this rural trip has a slower pace to it. As you drive along country lanes and into picturesque small towns, you may have to remind yourself that what you're seeing isn't a set from a quaint 1950s TV show.

Day 1 | 4 hours and 30 minutes of driving time

- **Start here**: Portland, Maine
- **Drive on:** Route 1A at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to pass sandy beaches and picturesque towns along the New England coastline
- **Make a stop in**: Salem, Massachusetts. You'll find attractions such as the Salem Witch Museum and The House of the Seven Gables, which was built in 1668. *Plan to spend about **90 minutes** at each attraction.*
- **Call it a day at:** The Inn at Woodstock Hill in Woodstock, Connecticut, a historic farmhouse with four-poster beds and cozy fireplaces

Day 2 | 6 hours of driving time

- **Start here**: Woodstock, Connecticut
- **Drive on:** the charming Route 169, lined with stone walls and clapboard homesteads. Then, head west on Route 14.
- **Make a stop in:** Lebanon, Connecticut, also known as "the heartbeat of the Revolution," where you can visit the historic town green or one of the town's four museums. *Plan to spend **at least 2 hours** exploring the town.*
- **Call it a day at:** Silverstone Inn & Suites in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a limestone B&B in the heart of Amish country



Pro Tip: In New England, the seasons can make a huge difference. Plan a trip in early to mid-October to accent your trip with colorful fall foliage.

The Central East Trip: A Journey Into the Mountains

Whether you're at the base looking up or peering miles ahead from its peak, a mountain will always remind you just how big and grand the world is. As you travel up steep roads and descend into luscious valleys on this mountainside road trip, you'll have plenty of opportunities to just stop and stare.

Day 1 | 4 hours of driving time

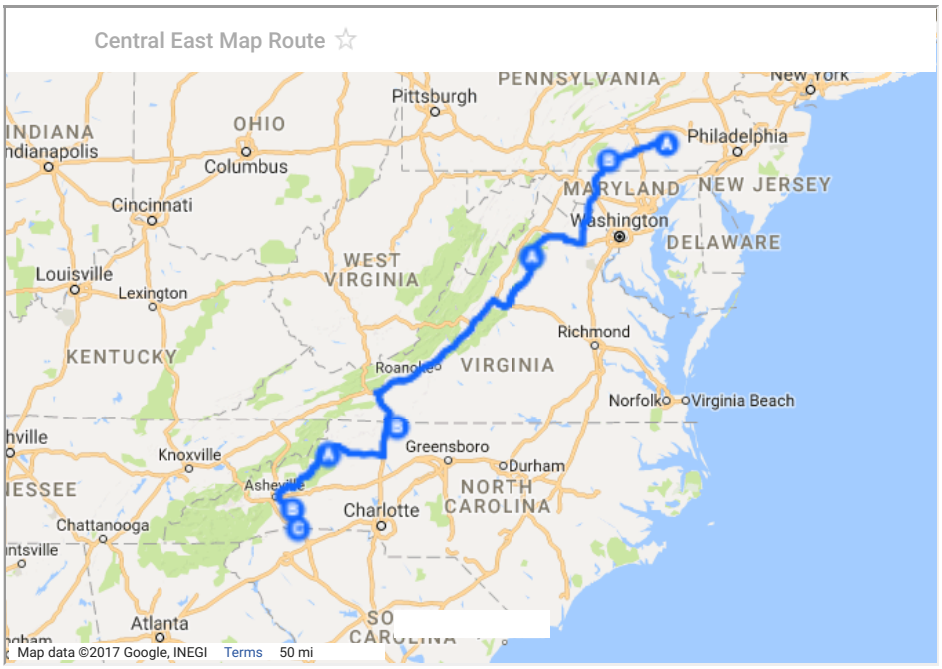
- **Start here**: Lancaster, Pennsylvania
- **Drive on:** US Route 15, which leads you through mountain towns such as Thurmont, Maryland and over the scenic Roddy Road Covered Bridge
- **Make a stop in:** Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where you can visit Civil War attractions or stretch your legs by hiking a portion of the Appalachian Trail. *Plan to spend **at least 2 hours** at Gettysburg Battlefield, plus another hour on the trail.*
- **Call it a day at:** The Mimslyn Inn in Luray, Virginia, a cozy escape within walking distance of downtown Luray and the Luray Caverns

Day 2 | 6 hours and 40 minutes of driving time

- **Start here**: Luray, Virginia
- **Drive on**: Skyline Drive, a leisurely drive through Shenandoah National Park and the Blue Ridge Mountains
- **Make a stop in**: Mount Airy, North Carolina, birthplace of actor Andy Griffith. You can tour the Andy Griffith Museum and stroll the streets that inspired the fictional town of Mayberry. *Plan to spend **1 hour** at the museum, plus another hour to explore the town.*
- **Call it a day at**: Gideon Ridge Inn in Blowing Rock, North Carolina, where you can relax on broad stone terraces and enjoy a view of the distant mountains

Day 3 | 4 hours of driving time

- **Start here**: Blowing Rock, North Carolina
- **Drive on**: Blue Ridge Parkway, a stunning series of twists and turns through the Appalachian Mountains that offer gorgeous mountain views and beautiful foliage
- **Make a stop in**: Chimney Rock, North Carolina (you'll have to turn onto highway 74 and head east). There, you'll find Chimney Rock State Park, where you can hike a 25-minute trail to soak in views that stretch out up to 75 miles. *Plan to spend **90 minutes** exploring the park.*
- **Call it a day at**: The Red Horse Inn in Landrum, South Carolina, an award-winning B&B nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains



***Pro Tip:** While beautiful, mountain roads can be slow-going—Skyline Drive's speed limit is 35mph, so take the next highway exit if you're running short on time.*

The Southeast Trip: A Cruise Down the Coast

At the end of the day, a road trip should still be a vacation, and nothing says vacation better than rolling waves, sandy beaches, and the smell of salt in the air. Roll down your windows, and you might just be able to hear the waves as you follow the coastline past miles of seaside views. And, of course, don't forget to get out of the car once in a while to feel the sand between your toes and the sun on your face.

Day 1 | 7 hours and 30 minutes of driving time

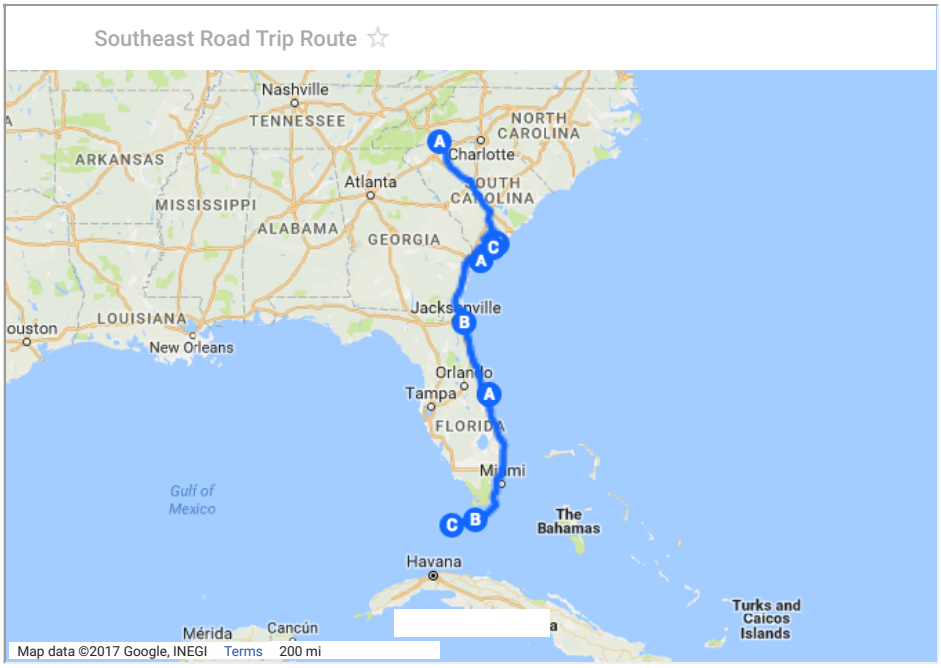
- **Start here:** Landrum, South Carolina if you're doing the full trek, or Charleston, South Carolina if you're just in it for the ocean views
- **Drive on**: I-26 (from Landrum) until hitting Route 17. But be sure to take a detour on Route 174, which will lead you down to Edisto Island for your first look at the sea before looping back to rejoin the main route.
- **Make a stop in**: Hunting Island, South Carolina, where there's a 3-mile beach on which you can climb to the top of a centuries-old lighthouse. *Plan to spend **1 hour** at the lighthouse.*
- **Call it a day at**: DeSoto Beach Bed and Breakfast in Tybee Island, Georgia, a relaxing B&B steps away from the beach

Day 2 | 6 hours and 45 minutes of driving time

- **Start here**: Tybee Island, Georgia
- **Drive on**: A1A Scenic and Historical Coastal Byway until Palm Coast, which connects a series of islands off the Floridian coast and offers dazzling seaside views
- **Make a stop in:** Neptune and Atlantic Beach in Florida for a day of beach-bumming and browsing beach-front shops in "The Corner". *Plan to spend **up to 2 hours** shopping and enjoying the beach.*
- **Call it a day at:** The Inn at Cocoa Beach in Cocoa Beach, Florida, where you can enjoy the ocean views from your own private balcony

Day 3 | 6 hours of driving time

- **Start here**: Cocoa Beach, Florida
- **Drive on:** The Overseas Highway, a 113-mile road that connects the Florida Keys and delivers stunning 360° ocean views
- **Make a stop in:** Marathon, Florida to feed snacks to sea turtles at The Turtle Hospital. Otherwise, you can stop to swim with dolphins at the Dolphin Research Center on the nearby island of Grassy Key. *Plan to spend **2–3 hours** at each attraction.*
- **Call it a day at**: The Inn at Key West in Key West, Florida to sunbathe under palm trees next to the inn's stunning pool. Finally, toast to all of your travels with a cocktail at the onsite tiki bar, a fitting place to kick back after your epic East Coast road trip.



Pro Tip: Ocean-front roads can sometimes be closed due to bad weather. Be sure to check for road closures on the Florida Department of Transportation website before your trip.

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