

5 Sites for Pandemic-Sore Eyes

No room on the cruise you want to take or park you want to visit? No worry. America is full of scenic destinations. Here are some of our favorites.

By [Jenny Wisniewski](#)

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Some call it revenge travel — that is, getting back at COVID-19 by getting away. The pandemic may have kept us confined for two years, but 2022 is shaping up to be a year of travel. With eased restrictions and [nine out of ten older Americans](#) fully vaccinated against COVID, 67% of older adults reported an intention to travel, according to the [AARP 2022 Travel Trends study](#), released in March.



Bixby Bridge in Big Sur, Calif. | Credit: Jenny Wisniewski

Two months later, the picture has become somewhat more complicated with the number of COVID-19 cases once again on the rise. Still, some travelers may feel a bit less vulnerable than they were last summer knowing that [77% of Americans](#) have received at least one dose of the vaccine and the recently developed Pavlovid pills may help keep severe COVID outcomes at bay. Many others have simply reached their limit on social distancing.

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"I'm really seeing a mix of desires," said Andy Lunt, an advisor at Travel Experts Inc. who specializes in travel for older adults. "On the one hand, the desire to get away — and some people say I don't care where, I just want to go somewhere. Combined with that, though, is a reluctance to venture too far," he added.

Many older adults are booking domestic cruises on the Great Lakes, Mississippi River or New England coastline, Lunt said. National parks are

another popular destination. However, he warns that many cruises are booked and parks crowded.

Still, the U.S. is a big place. If you want to get away this summer or fall to view something beautiful, something besides the same four walls of your office or home, here are five scenic destinations that will likely rejuvenate your spirit.

The Stunning Seascape of Monterey County, California

You've probably seen the images in movies: a sports car snaking around a two-lane, winding roadway before crossing the famed Bixby Bridge. On one very-close side, cliffs descend dramatically to the crashing waves of the Pacific. On the other, the Santa Lucia mountains reach up to meet the blue-gray sky — and practically rub shoulders with you on the way.

Scenic Highway 1 is breathtaking on the screen. But it is much, much better in person.

On the drive between Monterey and Big Sur, you will have plenty of opportunities to get out of your car at scenic overlooks to take in the misty majesty of it all. Several state parks, including Point Lobos, Julia Pfeiffer Burns and Pfeiffer Big Sur State Parks, offer the chance to experience the area's natural wonders a little more deeply. Hiking trails for people of all ability levels will lead you to waterfalls, giant redwoods and more scenic overlooks.

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For other spots to enjoy the scenery, view a sunset at dog-friendly Carmel Beach following a fresh catch-of-the-day dinner at one of the many sidewalk cafes on Carmel-by-the-Sea's Ocean Avenue, or shoot a round of golf at Pacific Grove, where the back nine overlooks the Pacific.

"There is no shortage of scenic beauty in Monterey County, and I'd recommend that travelers explore it at their leisure," advised Rachel Dinbokowitz, public relations manager of the Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau. "The destination is full of incredible scenic drives – from 17-Mile Drive through Pebble Beach to exploring vineyards along River Road and iconic Highway 1 down through Big Sur."

Mountain Vistas in Asheville, North Carolina

While in Asheville you could happily spend your days sitting in an Adirondack chair taking in the splendor of the Blue Ridge Mountains. That is, if the area didn't have so much else to offer.

Gazing at the views while visiting a few of Asheville's sites is a great compromise. And one of those highlights is The Omni Grove Park Inn, perched atop Sunset Mountain. Opened



in 1913, this grand hotel features an 18-hole golf course and a 43,000 square foot subterranean spa.

Even with its modern amenities, it has maintained its charm. The native uncut granite boulders on its walls are adorned with black and white plaques for Eleanor Roosevelt and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Soak up the offerings or come for a tour and a moment of relaxation while sipping a glass of wine and taking in the view.



The Blue Ridge Parkway near Asheville, North Carolina

Another must-see is the Biltmore Estate, a French Renaissance 250-room chateau built for George and Edith Vanderbilt. Get a close-up look at the Gilded Age with a tour of the house and its 65 fireplaces, 16th century tapestries and original art masterpieces. The property includes a winery, and on its 8,000-acre backyard is an outdoor adventure center that offers biking, kayaking, archery and much more.

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Asheville is also known as a community for artists and art lovers. In its River Arts District, you can visit artisans at work, take a class and shop. And once per month, the district really comes alive with gallery walks, live music, wine tastings and free trolley rides. Additional [art festivals](#) abound throughout the summer and fall in the Asheville area.

The Outdoor Paradise of Wisconsin's Northwoods

When poet Mary Oliver wrote of trees "turning their own bodies into pillars of light" and "giving off the rich fragrance of cinnamon and fulfillment," she may have been experiencing the Northwoods of Wisconsin. Its half million acres of box elder, sugar maple and white birch trees blanket five counties in the northern half of the state. The area is also home to 3,200 lakes, streams and rivers.





Wisconsin's Northwoods | Credit: Tom Pier

Vacationers head to the Northwoods (or "Up North" in Wisconsin parlance) to hike, bike, hunt, fish, camp, canoe, kayak and water ski. Rustic cabins, campsites and lodges are favored spots to hole up for a few days or more.

One popular destination is Vilas County. A great way to experience its woods is on a bike trail, like the Bearskin Trail, a scenic rail trail starting in Minocqua. If hiking is more your thing, options include the Powell Walsh Wildlife Area between Manitowish Waters and Lac du Flambeau and the North Lakeland Discovery Center in Manitowish Waters, which includes a 22-station bird breeding trail. And golfers have seven courses to choose from including Timber Ridge, a public, 18-hole championship golf course.

Be sure to take a break from the activity to visit one of the many supper clubs in the area. The menus are almost certain to include whitefish and walleye, and the bars to stir up a tasty brandy old-fashioned, a Wisconsin specialty.

The Otherworldly Landscape of Southern Utah

Revel in the colors of southern Utah. Plan to see more variations of taupes and terra cottas than you ever imagined possible, all set against a cobalt blue sky.

Southern Utah boasts of five unique national parks. One of many possible itineraries is taking a drive down the 122-mile Scenic Byway 12. Begin with a stay in the quaint town of Torrey and a visit to Capitol Reef National Park, the least crowded of the five [national parks](#) in the state.



Utah's Bryce Canyon National Park | Credit: Jenny Wisniewski

Driving on, you will begin a climb to 9,000 feet. Stop at an overlook for a view of the firs and aspens, the red rock and the canyonlands in the distance. You may even see a bit of snow. After continuing on, a great place for a stop is Boulder's Anasazi State Park Museum, site of an ancient Puebloan village.

For the adventurous (and those with a four-wheel drive vehicle) a hike through Peek-a-Boo and Spooky Gulch Slot Canyons in Escalante National Monument are an otherworldly experience. Hiking these narrow, winding

canyons are like a trip through a natural funhouse. Be aware that they do require a drive down a 25-mile dirt road and a hike to reach the canyons themselves.

After an overnight stay in the town of Escalante, head to Bryce Canyon National Park, known for its flamingo-colored cliffs and spindly hoodoos, or columns of rock. If you are a morning person, consider viewing the landscape at sunrise. You will never forget the quickly changing warm hues as the sun peeks up over the canyon.

Kentucky's Inland Waterway: Lake Cumberland

Nothing beats listening to the rhythmic ripples of lake water while the setting sun throws its golden glitter upon the waves. Sitting on the deck of a boat or a dock with a beer in hand while doing so isn't bad either.

So why Lake Cumberland? For one thing, its sheer size provides for solitude if you want it. The lake is a reservoir with 1,200 miles of shoreline.

And it offers a unique stay-and-play option — houseboats. In fact, some refer to it as the houseboat capital of the world. The boats typically come with equipped kitchens, living spaces and bedrooms, and many have hot tubs and slides. A special license is not needed to operate the boats, but training is provided.

Lake Cumberland's waters are typically calm, which makes the lake ideal for kayaking, canoeing, and stand up paddling. Fishermen have good opportunities to catch several varieties of bass including striped bass, bluegill, crappie, rockfish and walleye.

You may never want to leave the lake, but if you are looking for alternative activities in close proximity, there is a little something for everybody.

History buffs might like the Mill Springs Battlefield National Monument in Nancy, site of a major Civil War victory for the Union Army. Music aficionados may want to head to the Renfro Valley Entertainment Center in Mount Vernon for classic Southern music: country, [Southern gospel](#) and mountain bluegrass. For those interested in cars, there is a monthly car show and "car cruise" in Somerset.



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