BRAND USA

NEWS RELEASE

Brand USA Highlights Sampling of What's New in the USA in 2025

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Featured Image: Courtesy of The Dollywood Company

WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 9, 2024) — Explore the culinary tradition of barbecue at a new Kansas City museum, watch top soccer clubs from around the globe compete in U.S. cities, head to Alaska to see a famous sled dog race, and visit Universal Orlando's new Epic Universe park.

These attractions and events, along with many others, make 2025 a truly exciting year to visit the USA. "Whether you're on a road trip exploring our spectacular landscapes and diverse history, or heading to a theme park, sports event or museum, there's never been a better time to plan a trip to the USA," said Fred Dixon, president and CEO of Brand USA, the nation's destination marketing organization.

NEW ATTRACTIONS AND LODGING: UNIVERSAL, YOSEMITE AND MORE

In Orlando, Florida, the theme park capital of the world, Universal Orlando opens its new Epic Universe park May 22, doubling the park's current size with 50 new attractions and venues offering immersive stories and thrilling rides. Epic's five new worlds include How to Train Your Dragon — Isle of Berk; Dark Universe, home to Dracula and Frankenstein; a new Wizarding World of Harry Potter installment called the Ministry of Magic; Celestial Park's gardens and fountains, and fun and games at Super Nintendo World.

Nearby, Walt Disney World's new attractions include a "Pirates of the Caribbean"-themed tavern in Adventureland; Spaceship Earth Lounge at EPCOT; a nighttime parade at Magic Kingdom with characters from "Frozen" and "Encanto," and new shows featuring "The Little Mermaid," "Zootopia" and Disney villains. This will also be the first full year for Tiana's Bayou Adventure, a log flume water ride that replaced Splash Mountain at both Disney World's Magic Kingdom in Florida and Disneyland in Anaheim, California. Tiana, from "The Princess and the Frog," is Disney's first Black princess. The Disneyland ride is located in the newly renamed Bayou Country land, a reference to Tiana's hometown, New Orleans, Louisiana.

To mark Disneyland's 70th birthday, which begins May 16 and runs through the summer of 2026, the park has several new offerings. They include an after-hours "90s Nite" and an animatronic figure portraying park founder Walt Disney, which is part of an attraction called "Walt Disney — A Magical Life." Disneyland is also reviving several past experiences, including the "Paint the Night" nighttime parade and "Wondrous Journeys" nighttime spectacular, while Disney California Adventure brings back the "Better Together: A Pixar Pals Celebration!" parade.

Kansas City, Missouri, has long been known as a top destination for mouthwatering barbecue, and in March, the city opens the world's first Museum of BBQ. The immersive experience explores food history and culture, including various styles of barbecue from Texas, North and South Carolina, and Memphis, Tennessee. Other attractions in Kansas City include the American Jazz Museum, the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum and Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

San Antonio, Texas, featured on Travel + Leisure's Best Places to Go in 2025, has loads of new attractions for the new year, including new Kimpton, InterContinental and Plaza hotels. But the city's most unusual new lodging is located inside its zoo: The Spekboom Lodge is a luxurious retreat offering overnight stays for (human) visitors inside the new Naylor Savanna habitat for zebras, giraffes, rhinos and

other animals. Meanwhile, San Antonio's famous River Walk is getting a new immersive dining, entertainment and shopping experience called Mexico Ceaty, featuring the cuisine and culture of Mexico and San Antonio.

And remember the Alamo? It's the historic Spanish mission that was used as a fort in the Texas war for independence from Mexico. Legendary frontiersman Davy Crockett was among 200 men who died in battle there on March 6, 1836. Today the Alamo is part of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park and the only UNESCO World Heritage site in Texas. A new World Heritage Center exploring local history, art and culture opens in January.

In Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the new OKANA Resort & Indoor Waterpark opens in late February in the city's Horizons District, near the First Americans Museum and Exhibit C Gallery, which focus on Native American art, history and culture. Other local attractions include the Oklahoma City National Memorial, a moving tribute to victims of a 1995 bombing, and the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. OKC was included on AFAR travel magazine's list of best places to go in 2025, which also highlighted the city's James Beard Award-winning restaurant Grey Sweater, the boutique hotel Bradford House, and the DeadCenter Film Festival.

California's Yosemite National Park is getting a host of new and revamped lodging options, including the reopening of Tuolumne Meadows Campground this summer and the full reopening of Ahwahnee Hotel following earthquake-safety retrofits. New accommodations opening near the park include Outbound Yosemite, an outdoor lifestyle hotel, and Under Canvas glamping. Last year saw openings for Firefall Ranch and Wildhaven Yosemite glamping, along with Tenaya at Yosemite's newly remodeled lodge rooms.

Los Angeles is looking ahead to late 2025 and early 2026 for the world's first AI art museum, DATALAND, at the Grand LA shopping and entertainment complex; Destination Crenshaw, a 1.3-mile open-air museum celebrating LA's Black community; and the Automated People Mover at LAX Airport, a free, 24/7 electric train debuting January 2026 that will allow visitors to access terminals, parking, rideshares and the Metro rail system.

In May, Virginia Beach, Virginia, opens Atlantic Park, offering year-round surfing, plus surf lessons and camps, in a 2-acre lagoon using wave technology. The $350 million, 10-acre development includes upscale retail, dining and The Dome, an indoor-outdoor amphitheater. Visitors can then test their surfing skills on the real waves of the Atlantic Ocean across the street. Virginia Beach also hosts the East Coast Surfing Championships, held every year the last weekend in August. Virginia Beach native Pharrell Williams' Something in the Water music festival returns to the city April 26-27, right before the May premiere of Pharrell's coming-of-age movie musical "Golden."

ANNIVERSARY MILESTONES, FROM NASHVILLE TO ALASKA

Just outside Cleveland, Ohio, Cuyahoga Valley National Park celebrates its 50th anniversary with a yearlong series of guided hikes, scenic train rides, river excursions and cultural events. While you're in the area, don't miss Cleveland's historic West Side Market and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

In Nashville, Tennessee, the Grand Ole Opry, a legendary country music venue, marks the centennial of its first show in 1925 with a series of special Opry 100 performances and experiences. Elsewhere in Tennessee, singer Dolly Parton's Dollywood theme park marks its 40th year along with the first full season for the park's Dolly Parton Experience, a museum about her life. Dollywood is in Pigeon Forge, the gateway to Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

In Virginia, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge marks the 100th year of its annual July Pony Swim, when thousands of people gather to watch cowboys herd wild ponies across the Assateague Channel. The destination is also known for its beaches, stargazing, kayaking and birdwatching.

Alaska is celebrating 100 years since a team of sled dogs raced through the frozen wilderness, carrying lifesaving medicine to thousands of children in a diphtheria epidemic. The dogs' heroism, persevering for 365 miles in frigid weather, is remembered annually with the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. The race kicks off March 1 in Anchorage, where the Wildbirch Hotel — the city's first new major hotel in 20 years and its first-ever upscale boutique lodging — opens in early 2025. The Wildbirch is located in Anchorage's "Mushing District," showcasing dogsledding history and culture. Meanwhile, the city of Nome, where the diphtheria serum was delivered back in 1925, will mark the centennial of what locals call the Serum Run with a week of events, Jan. 25-Feb. 2. A wintertime visit to Alaska also offers opportunities to see the Northern Lights, which are expected to have a strong year in 2025.

EVENTS AND OPENINGS, FROM SPORTS TO PRIDE TO BROADWAY

The FIFA Club World Cup will bring 32 soccer teams from around the world to play 63 matches in the USA from June 15 to July 13. Host cities are Atlanta, Georgia; Charlotte, North Carolina; Cincinnati, Ohio; Los Angeles, California; Miami, Florida; Nashville, Tennessee; Orlando, Florida; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Seattle, Washington; Washington, D.C., and East Rutherford, New Jersey, just outside New York City, where the final game will be played in MetLife Stadium. The club tournament takes place a year before the 2026 World Cup, which will be held in the USA, Mexico and Canada.

The National Football League's championship game, Super Bowl LIX, takes place Feb. 9 in New Orleans, with hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar headlining the halftime show. New Orleans' spectacular Mardi Gras parades roll out March 4, followed by the French Quarter Fest , April 10-13; New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, April 24-May 4, and the Essence Festival of Culture, July 3-6.

WorldPride takes place May 17-June 8 in Washington, D.C., celebrating the global LGBTQ+ community and marking the 50th anniversary of Pride celebrations in the nation's capital. Events include a parade and street festival, march and rally, human rights conference and cultural programs. If you're flying into D.C.'s Ronald Reagan National Airport, check out the newly opened Capital One Landing airport lounge for travelers with Capital One credit cards. The tapas-style menu is curated by renowned chef Jose Andres, whose popular restaurants include Jaleo in Washington and Mercado Little Spain in New York.

New York City's Broadway roster explodes in 2025 with a host of exciting new shows that include legendary actor Denzel Washington as Shakespeare's "Othello," Tony Award winner Idina Menzel in a new musical, "Redwood"; "Succession" star Sarah Snook playing all 26 characters in a one-woman production of "The Picture of Dorian Gray"; Nick Jonas (of the Jonas Brothers) in "The Last Five Years"; a prequel to the Netflix hit "Stranger Things" called "Stranger Things: The First Shadow," and a new "Waiting for Godot" starring "Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure" actors Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter.

New York is also looking forward to several major reopenings, including Harlem's Studio Museum, expected late in the year in a new site on 125th Street, and the Frick Collection, which reopens in April and plans a Vermeer show for June. The Bronx Zoo opens World of Darkness, an exhibition of nocturnal creatures, next summer; its original World of Darkness closed in 2009.

In January, the Center for Jewish History in Lower Manhattan opens a full-scale recreation of the house in Amsterdam where Anne Frank hid with her family during World War II before being found by the Nazis. Anne died at age 15 in a concentration camp; her diary is one of the 20th century's most famous books.

Meanwhile, in upstate New York, the final section of the 34-mile Adirondack Rail Trail is scheduled to be completed in 2025, offering year-round recreation for everything from biking and birding to snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. The trail's easternmost point is Lake Placid, which hosted the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympics and remains a charming destination, especially for winter vacations.

Alabama in 2025 launches the Year of Alabama Trails, showcasing 20 themed itineraries ranging from the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement to birding, gardens, golfing, hunting and fishing. Several of the state's compelling historic sites are located in the capital city of Montgomery, including the somber National Memorial for Peace and Justice, honoring Black lynching victims; the Rosa Parks Museum, named for the Black activist who refused to give her seat on a bus to a white man; and the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church , where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King served as pastor and rose to fame.

Southern California's Palm Springs area celebrates midcentury modern architecture, art, interior design and culture with tours, parties and exhibits during Modernism Week, Feb. 13-23. From March 8-May 11, Greater Palm Springs hosts Desert X, a free contemporary art festival featuring art that responds to the arid desert environment and promotes dialogue on the environment, Indigenous peoples, and cultural understanding.

LOOKING AHEAD: ROUTE 66 CENTENNIAL AND AMERICA 250

Looking ahead to 2026, the USA will mark two major anniversaries: the centennial of Route 66, which is the iconic highway connecting Chicago to Los Angeles, and America 250, commemorating 250 years since the nation was founded with the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

Route 66, also known as the Mother Road, was the USA's first fully paved highway, stretching nearly 2,500 miles through eight states: Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California. The legendary route helped launch the tradition of the Great American Road Trip, with hundreds of classic motels, historic sites, roadside attractions and charming small-town main streets for travelers to visit along the way.

Route 66 remains a fun, relaxing and nostalgic way to sightsee and experience the real America, whether you're driving through big cities like Tulsa, Oklahoma, or Albuquerque, New Mexico, or looking for that legendary corner in Winslow, Arizona, made famous in the Eagles song "Take It Easy." Consider touring the entire route on a leisurely two- or three-week trip, from its starting point near the Art Institute of Chicago, to the last stop at California's Santa Monica Pier overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

While the USA's big 250th birthday celebration won't happen until July 4, 2026, some destinations are marking the earliest chapters in America's Revolutionary War this year. That war, also called the War of Independence, was fought to end British colonialism and establish a democracy.

The war's first major battles took place in 1775 in and around Boston, Massachusetts, so those sites are marking their 250th anniversaries this year. What historians refer to as "the shot heard 'round the world" was fired on April 19, 1775, at the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Minute Man National Historic Park is marking the anniversary with an April 19 battle re-enactment and many other events. The Battle of Bunker Hill took place June 17, 1775, in the Boston neighborhood of Charlestown, and Boston National Historical Park is marking the 250th anniversary of tours and programs.

Other states with 2025 events related to America 250 include Pennsylvania, where George Washington was appointed commander of the Continental Army in May 1775 in Philadelphia. That meeting took place in what is now Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was signed a year later. The hall is part of Independence National Historic Park, along with two dozen sites including the Liberty Bell, Museum of the American Revolution, National Constitution Center, historic homes and cemeteries.

In Virginia, museum exhibitions and other programming will commemorate Founding Father Patrick Henry's famous "Give me liberty or give me death" speech, made 250 years ago on March 23, 1775, at St. John's Church in Richmond. Other major historic sites in Virginia include Colonial Williamsburg, George Washington's home at Mount Vernon, and Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello.

Look for more signature America 250 events in 2026.

NOTE TO EDITOR
Accompanying high-resolution imagery can be downloaded here.

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About Brand USA
Brand USA is the nation's destination marketing organization, dedicated to attracting legitimate international inbound travel to strengthen the U.S. economy, increase exports, create quality jobs, and promote community prosperity. By running data-driven campaigns and unifying messaging across industry and government, Brand USA positions the United States as a top global destination while providing current visa and entry information.

Over the past 13 years Brand USA has driven 11.3 million additional international visitors who spent $38.1 billion in the United States, leading to $82.9 billion in total economic impact and sustaining an average of more than 40,000 jobs each year. These efforts have generated nearly $11 billion in attributable tax receipts at the federal, state, and local levels.

Media Contacts

Chris Heywood
Senior Vice President, Public Relations & Chief Communications Officer

Andrew Felts
Senior Manager, Media Relations & Communications