

A  
**Short and Sweet  
Introduction**

to the

**Great American West  
Vacation**

*a travel guide of tips and ideas based on  
my family's United States west road trip*

Joe Dodridge

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This book is for entertainment purposes. It is understood that things change all of the time and some information might be incomplete or inaccurate.

Cover image: my picture in Badlands National Park

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**SPECIAL TIP!!!**

Visit

**[www.shortandsweetintroductions.com/westlinks](http://www.shortandsweetintroductions.com/westlinks)**

for links to the websites of each park and memorial, as well as other resources.

## What is This Book?

***This is the book I wish I had!!!***

A few years ago, our family went on a great American west road trip. We loaded up our kids (then 9 and 12 years old), a couple of grandparents, too many suitcases, and headed west.

Now, don't think we just winged it. I spent countless hours planning – reading, researching, calling, and asking. I talked to my parents who've been out west a few times. I talked to other people who've gone out west. I even relied on memories I had as a kid. But, what I didn't have was a book that told me “these are the places where you need to go and this is what you're going to see.”

So, what is this book? This book is your introduction to the great American west vacation. The book will follow the two-week route we took, with some additional side-trip options thrown in.

This book isn't a book of stories, though it is our story. This book isn't an all-encompassing guide, though there are plenty of tips and suggestions.

This book is all of my research and experiences written down for you to plan your own trip.

Maybe you don't even know where to start. Where should you go? Does time of year matter? What are the main national parks? What's it like in the desert, the mountains, and the prairie? Is seeing redwood trees worth it (yes!)?

This is a brief book and won't go into every hotel and dining option. I'll give you basic information about each park and attraction, but you can learn more by visiting my website,

[www.shortandsweetintroductions.com/westlinks](http://www.shortandsweetintroductions.com/westlinks), for links to the websites of those parks and attractions.

This book is organized in the order that we took our trip – from Day 1 to Day 14. Scattered throughout the book are “Honorable Mentions” – brief sections of the book that describe places we didn’t visit, but you might want to add to your trip.

At the end of the book is a section called “Other Things.” Here you’ll find overall hints and tips about lodging, learn the difference between national parks and monuments, and more.

So, pack your backs (figuratively) and get comfortable (literally), and let’s go out west!

## The Trip in Two Pages

This trip covers a big loop of the western United States, starting in the north and ending in the south. It doesn't really matter where you start – our first attraction was in South Dakota. It also doesn't matter where you finish – our last attraction was in Colorado.

So, starting on I-90 in South Dakota, we visited the **Minuteman Missile National Historic Site**, **Badlands National Park**, **Wall Drug**, **Mt. Rushmore**, **Sturgis**, and **Deadwood**. There are other things to do here too (Crazy Horse Memorial, Wind Cave National Park, Jewel Cave National Monument, and Custer State Park) – they will get an honorable mention and you might decide to add them to your trip.

Heading west and slightly north, we visited **Devil's Tower** and **Little Bighorn National Monument**. An honorable mention from here is to head further north to Glacier National Park, though we didn't do it on our trip because of time.

Next, we dropped down into **Yellowstone National Park** where we spent two days, but you can actually take more than a week to appreciate this park!

Our trip from Yellowstone took us to San Francisco. Along the way (long and boring!) we took a detour by **Lake Tahoe**. It's worth mentioning that many peoples' west trips don't go to San Francisco, but rather drop south from Yellowstone to Grand Teton National Park and Utah. I'll mention those as an honorable mention, but this book doesn't take that route!

In San Francisco, we visited **Alcatraz**, **Fisherman's Wharf**, the **Golden Gate Bridge**, and took a bus tour (warning about bus tours: you get what you pay for!).

Leaving San Francisco, we saw redwood trees in **Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park**, and drove the **Pacific Coast Highway** south towards Los Angeles.

In L.A., we went on a **Hollywood tour** and a **whale-watching tour**, went to the beach, and went to **Disney California Adventure Park**. Of course, there are other things in L.A. that we didn't do that deserve an honorable mention. And, although we didn't go to San Diego, I've been there before and will also mention that in the honorable mention.

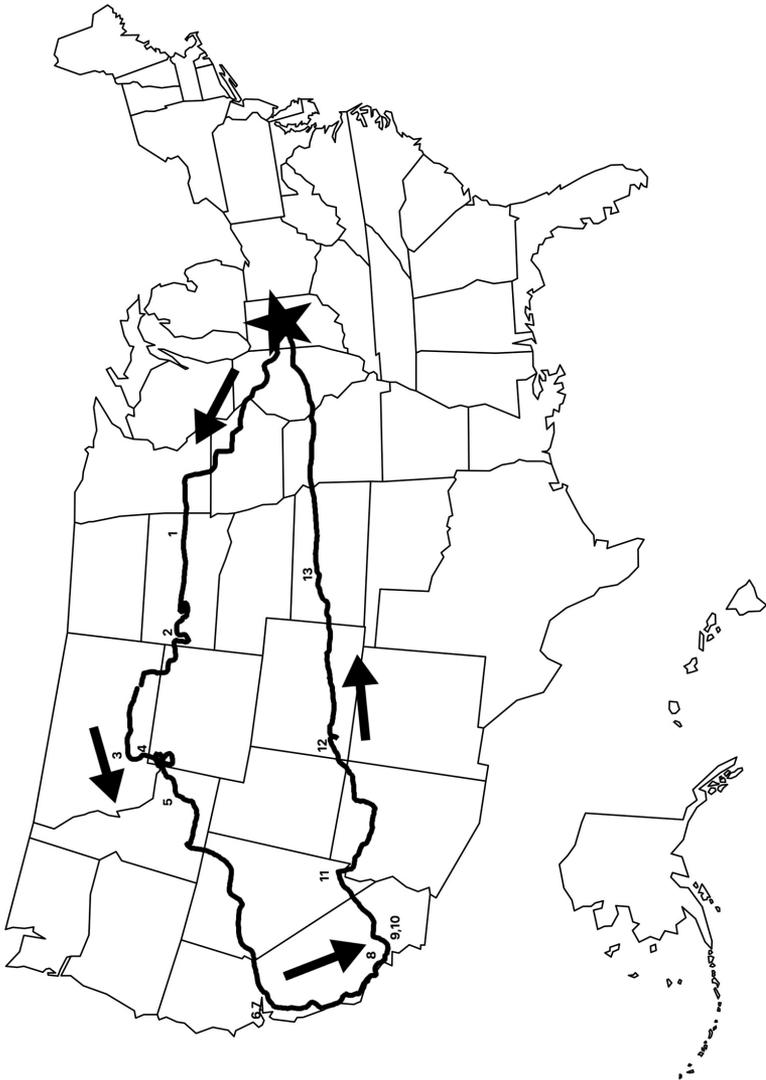
From L.A., we drove east to Las Vegas. We didn't see anything in particular, but we did walk around and take in the sights (some sights you don't want your kids to see!).

Leaving Las Vegas (which is a movie I've never seen), we quickly saw the **Hoover Dam** and drove to the **Grand Canyon**. Then heading east, we visited **Mesa Verde National Park** and waved to the **Great Sand Dunes National Park** as we continued our way home. There are other options to head east from the Grand Canyon. I'll go over those options in an honorable mention (Utah's national parks with sights in Colorado or heading straight home through New Mexico).

We did this trip in 14 days, and while it was a little crazy, I'd do it all again! As you read this book, at times you'll wonder how we fit it all in and other times you'll think I'm an idiot for skipping over something on our trip.

Use our trip as a guide for your trip. No doubt you'll want to change it up, add and delete. And hey, if you have a full month, do it all – honorable mentions included!

# Map – Our Trip in a Nutshell



*(numbers indicate where we spent that night)*

# Our Crazy Planning Spreadsheet

	Day	Miles	active hours	Itinerary	Night		
Saturday, July 2	1	765	15	drive/lunch (11), supper with family (2), drive (2) **we get 1 extra hour drive/lunch (5), Minuteman Missile (1), Badlands (3), Wall Drug/Supper (2), drive and check-in Lazy U (1.5), drive (.5), Mount Rushmore with lighting ceremony (1.5), drive (.5) **we get 1 extra hour drive (1), Deadwood (1), drive/lunch (2), Devil's Tower (1), drive/supper (4.5), Little Bighorn (1), drive (2.5)	Sioux Falls, SD	Clubhouse Hotel and Suites	
Sunday, July 3	2	356	15	drive (1), Deadwood (1), drive/lunch (2), Devil's Tower (1), drive/supper (4.5), Little Bighorn (1), drive (2.5)	Rapid City, SD	Lazy U	
Monday, July 4	3	527	13	Yellowstone (about 1 hour into Yellowstone) drive/lunch (10), supper at Lake Tahoe (1.5), drive (3.5) **note we get 1 extra hour	Livingston, MT	Livingston Inn	
Tuesday, July 5	4	163	13	Yellowstone (about 2 hours out of Yellowstone) drive/lunch (10), supper at Lake Tahoe (1.5), drive (3.5) **note we get 1 extra hour	Gardiner, MT	Super 8	
Wednesday, July 6	5	269	15	drive/lunch (10), supper at Lake Tahoe (1.5), drive (3.5) **note we get 1 extra hour	Fort Hall, ID	Shoshone-Bannock Hotel	
Thursday, July 7	6	809	12	Alcatraz, bus tour, Golden Gate Bridge) drive coast and meals (about 7.5 hours of driving (12 plus stops)	Dublin, CA	Hyatt Place Dublin/Pleasanton	
Friday, July 8	7	0	12	Alcatraz, bus tour, Golden Gate Bridge) drive coast and meals (about 7.5 hours of driving (12 plus stops)	Dublin, CA	Hyatt Place Dublin/Pleasanton	
Saturday, July 9	8	386	12	drive coast and meals (about 7.5 hours of driving (12 plus stops)	Westlake Village, CA	Hyatt Regency Westlake	
Sunday, July 10	9	100	12	sight see in Los Angeles (bus in Hollywood: Chinese Theater & star sidewalk, Rodeo Drive; whale watching in Newport Beach)	Los Angeles	Best Western Plus Anaheim Inn	
Monday, July 11	10	0	15	Disneyland - California Adventure (hours are 8-10, show at 10:15p)	Los Angeles	Best Western Plus Anaheim Inn	
Tuesday, July 12	11	270	12	drive (4), sight see in Las Vegas (8) (Bellagio fountains, Fremont St, Mirage volcano, Treasure Island)	Las Vegas	Hyatt - New York, New York	
Wednesday, July 13	12	554	13	drive/lunch (5), Grand Canyon (2), drive/supper (6) drive (.25), Mesa Verde (2), drive/lunch (4.75), Great Sand Dunes (1), drive/supper (6.5) *note we lose 1 hour	Cortez, CO	White Eagle Inn and Lodge	
Thursday, July 14	13	608	14.5	drive, drive, drive (12.5 hours driving) **note we lose 1 hour	Oakley, KS	Kansas Country Inn	
Friday, July 15	14	859	14.5	drive, drive, drive (12.5 hours driving) **note we lose 1 hour	home!		

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the rest of this book?

Visit

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purchase it Amazon!