

USA: From the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean

Englischer Filmkommentar

Badlands and Mount Rushmore

(2:20 min)

We are in South Dakota - in the Badlands, a bizarre landscape.

"Bad" land, even the first settlers realized this on their way to the West – and moved on. Agriculture is not possible here.

Originally, the area belonged to the **Sioux**. One of the last battles between the U.S. Army and the Sioux was the **Wounded Knee** Massacre in 1890. Many Indians were killed, including women and children. Today, most Native Americans live in reservations and in poverty, often selling jewelery to tourists.

Lenard Martinez, Native American:

"Everybody is tamed down, we're not wild no more, so it's pretty good living on this reservation. I am happy, and I don't wanna live nowhere else. I'm just being happy here. I come here to the Badlands Visitors Center to sell my crafts cause there are no jobs, so you kind of have to create your own. There is a lot of jobs, but I guess not enough so."

We make our way from the Badlands to one of the most visited places in America, to **Mount Rushmore**. The mountain is only about a two hour drive away from the Badlands.

The most important American presidents are carved into the rock here: George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln.

The whole region is geared towards the tourism industry, especially the town Keystone, next to the **National Monument**. Every year around three million visitors arrive. Especially popular is a ride on the historic train.

Rocky Mountains

(3:20 min)

We move westwards. The terrain is hilly and we come across the first foothills of the **Rocky Mountains**.

The Rocky Mountains are a vast range of fold mountains which stretch over 2,500 miles from Alaska to New Mexico. The highest peaks are in Alaska and over 20,000 feet high.

In the states of Colorado and Wyoming they reach heights of over 14,000 feet. Some mountain tops in higher altitudes are covered with snow even in summer. The tree line is at about 12,000 feet.

Unlike in the Appalachians, mostly conifers grow here. Mainly pines, larches and firs. In the often dry mountain valleys the vegetation is dominated by bushes.

Originally many buffaloes roamed in North America. Today we almost only meet them in national parks – eye to eye with the tourists.

In some regions of the Rocky Mountains, the ground rumbles – especially in **Yellowstone National Park**. A huge magma chamber lies under this oldest national park in the U.S.. It bubbles in every corner. Steam emerges from everywhere and it reeks of **sulfur**.

Every year, about three million people visit. A special highlight is the **Old Faithful**. The **geyser** erupts regularly, shooting boiling water over 150 feet high up into the air. In some locations in the national park sulfur has colored the rocks yellow. Hence the name "**Yellowstone**".

The town **Jackson** is close to the national park and is a picture-perfect "**Wild West town**". But the prices can be very high. Staying in a simple motel costs 250 dollars per night.

The magma chamber underneath the Yellowstone National Park has also created a completely different landscape only about 200 miles to the West. The **Craters of the Moon** is a bizarre lunar landscape – one of the most desolated and barren areas in the USA. The last volcanic eruption happened here only 15,000 years ago, just a blink of an eye in Earth's history. A new outbreak could happen at any time.

Great Salt Lake and Salt Lake City

(2:30 min)

From the Craters of the Moon we are heading south. We cross the eastern region of the **Great Basin** – a wide, dry and hot landscape with no outlet to the sea. Our destination is **Salt Lake City** and the **Great Salt Lake** in Utah – which truly lives up to its name.

The Lake is about 75 miles long and on average about 30 miles wide – approximately eight times larger than Lake Constance. It contains up to 27 percent salt. The summers get extremely hot here and the lake water evaporates. The shoreline of the lake is covered in the remaining salt.

On the southern shore of the lake lies Salt Lake City. Over one million people live in the wider area. The city was founded in 1847 by the **Mormons**, a religious community which was persecuted and finally settled in Utah.

Salt Lake City is now a **service** and **tourist center**, but also an **industrial city**. Key economic sectors are the defense industry and electronics but also the petrochemical industry. In huge refineries around Salt Lake City the locally extracted crude oil is processed on site before it is dispatched.

The area is also rich in other **natural resources**, for example **metals**. One of them is copper, which can even be strip mined. Close to Salt Lake City is the largest copper open-face mine in the world. It is the deepest man-made hole on Earth.

Approximately 275,000 tonnes of copper are mined here annually, but also gold and silver. Like the oil, copper is also processed on site in huge **copper mills**. The energy is provided by the work's own power plants nearby.

Grand Canyon

(3:40 min)

From Salt Lake City, we drive south past the Monument Valley, the Antelope Canyon and the Horseshoe Bend to the **Grand Canyon**.

We travel about twelve hours to get to one of the greatest and probably most famous **natural wonders** on the face of the Earth.

The Grand Canyon is about 300 miles long. At its widest point, the northern and the southern rim are 20 miles apart. And it is up to 6,000 feet deep. There are different theories how this huge canyon developed. But it is certain that the Colorado River played a vital role in its shaping.

Patrick Gamman, Park Ranger, Grand Canyon National Park:

“The Colorado River starts in Rocky Mountain National Park in over 14,000 feet in elevation. So being so high actually all of that water that comes down is being pulled down by gravity and it carves into these layers. The carving of the Grand Canyon, most geologists agree, goes back about 6 million years.”

The rocks, however, are much older than the Grand Canyon. The oldest can be found at the bottom of the canyon. They were formed in the **Archean age** about two billion years ago.

The Grand Canyon is not only interesting geologically, the **vegetation** is very diverse, too.

At higher levels the air is cool. The vegetation is dominated by conifers. Deeper into the canyon less trees can be found. Mainly shrubs and bushes grow here.

On the bottom of the canyon the dryness increases so that hardly any vegetation can survive.

The Grand Canyon is a popular destination for tourists from all over the world. Every year about four million people come to admire the natural wonder.

Dorothy Billey, Tourist:

“Yesterday when I came and first saw the Canyon it was very awe-inspiring. I just couldn't believe the beauty and the grandeur and the size of it. And my feelings now: After taking a helicopter ride this morning I feel like it's bigger even than I thought it was.”

A notable attraction is the **Grand Canyon Skywalk**. Daredevils can walk on a glass plate over the abyss. The Skywalk is outside of the National Park. It is on the territory of the **Hualapai** and is organized privately.

Not only the Native Americans benefit financially from the tourism, but also the communities surrounding the Grand Canyon. **Seligman** is on the historic **Route 66** – the old route spanning through the United States from East to West. The town has the charm of the 1950s and a detour is highly advised. After the construction of the new Interstate Highway, Route 66 was cut off from regular transit traffic and with it the steady flow of money. Today tourism helps the town survive.

Hoover Dam and Las Vegas

(2:20 min)

West of the Grand Canyon lies the **Hoover Dam**.

The damming of the **Colorado River** created **Lake Mead**. Here the river can be used to generate power. The Hoover Dam is one of the largest dams in the world.

The produced energy is mostly notably needed in the close-by **Las Vegas** – especially at night... "Welcome to fabulous Las Vegas" – to the **gamblers' paradise** in the middle of the **Nevada** desert.

Casinos, mega shows, luxury hotels – attractions and superlatives of any kind make Las Vegas one of the most visited cities in the United States. About 39 million tourists visit annually.

The foundation for the boom of Las Vegas was the legalization of gambling in Nevada in 1931. **Theme hotels** offer spectacular attractions, meant to lure the gamblers into the casinos. For example the Venician – a copy of the city of Venice. The guests can ride through the hotel in gondolas.

One problem in Las Vegas is **water**. Golf courses, pools and hotel fountains require a great amount. But water is scarce in Las Vegas, in the middle of the **Mojave desert** in the rain shadow of the mountains. It rains less than 6 inches per year. Nothing but cacti and bushes grow here.

Death Valley

(1:40 min)

The driest and hottest area of the U.S. is the **Death Valley**.

In summer the temperatures is 40 degrees Celsius – at night. During the day it rises well above 50 degrees. The valley is surrounded by high mountains. The clouds release their water before they can reach the valley.

Badwater Basin is the **lowest point** in North America. We are 282 feet below sea level.

A particularly spectacular viewpoint in Death Valley is **Zabriskie Point**. The bizarre landscape was formed by erosion. The area repeatedly served as a film set – every visitor of the national park should go and enjoy the view. The extreme climate is very hostile. Smaller settlements were quickly abandoned again. Gold used to be mined here. Today Rhyolite is a ghost town.

California: Los Angeles

(3:30 min)

We are leaving the Death Valley. Our next stop is **California**, the sunshine state on the Pacific coast.

Los Angeles is the second largest city in the United States. About 17 million people live in Greater L.A.. The climate is subtropical, basically it is T-shirt weather throughout the year – even in January.

Originally, California, Arizona and New Mexico were Mexican territory. In the middle of the 19th Century war broke out between Mexico and America. The United States won and New Mexico, Arizona and California were ceded to the United States.

The Mexican influence is still present everywhere in California. In some areas more Spanish than English is spoken. Approximately 40 percent of California's population are Hispanic. However, some of the Hispanics live here illegally.

Antonio Batista, Illegal Immigrant:

“I am living under a bridge and in the streets. I am homeless. I have nothing. I have no ID, social security and no work. Nothing. Jesus Christ is my family here. Everything is different in the US. Me and others are being discriminated, no matter where they are coming from, Indonesia, Phillipines or from Africa.”

There are also other ethnic groups besides the Hispanics. Approximately 10 percent of the population of Los Angeles is Asian.

South of the center, in "South Central L.A." many African Americans live. They make up approximately 12 percent of the population of Los Angeles. In the neighborhoods Watts and Compton, both the unemployment and crime rate are relatively high.

Los Angeles gained world-wide fame mainly because of the media industry. Hardly any other industry is marketed internationally as well as the American film industry. The film industry moved from New York to Hollywood back in the 1920s, because of the climate and better year-round lighting conditions. Until today the major movie studios generate billions year after year. Once a year the Academy Awards for the best movies and actors are awarded in Hollywood. The staircase that the stars climb up every year is a popular photo opportunity for tourists. Another highlight is the Walk of Fame with over 2000 stars.

California: Industry and Agriculture

(3:30 min)

California is an economic heavyweight, not only due to the film industry. As an autonomous country, California would rank among the **Top Ten** economies in the world.

One contributor is the **aviation industry**. One of the leading aircraft manufacturers has an office in California and the biggest concerns of defense industry worldwide are located in California as well.

California is also the cradle of the computer industry. In the 1930s, one of the first computers in the world was assembled in a garage in **Palo Alto**, close to San Francisco. Today the major software and hardware companies in the world are in Silicon Valley. Per year about 180 billion dollars revenue are generated here.

Since the 1920s, the oil industry has been another economic sector here. Every year about 200 million barrels of oil are produced in California. Worldwide, the USA is ranked third in production.

Agriculture is also of great economic importance in California. The state is among the most productive agricultural regions in the world. Due to the favorable climate it is possible to harvest multiple times a year in some regions. But not without irrigation. The water comes from the cooler North where large reservoirs can ensure the water supply. Due to climate change and population growth, shortages could happen in the near future, both in agriculture and for the people.

John Ford, California State Department of Water Resources:

“The demands for water keep rising. The supply for water is not rising with that demand. So this is what we face today is really a process now of reallocating water supply, educating people how to conserve water supply because no new water supplies are being developed presently and you really have to work with what is available. And certainly it gets stressed when you go through dry years or drought cycles as we are currently.”

California is the **fruit basket** of the United States. Almost everything grows here, for example citrus fruits. The cultivation of cotton or nuts and pistachios is possible, too. California is particularly well known for its wine. The biggest joined wine-growing district is the Napa Valley. There are several hundred vineyards – some of them are amongst the best in the world.

Tomatoes are grown in California, too. However, the price is competitive. Therefore, the farmers tend to process the tomatoes on the spot. They are washed and canned. Harvest time is a time of intense activity.

California: Natural Hazards and San Francisco**(1:50 min)**

California also has a natural down-side. A major risk is earthquakes. Along California's coast runs a more than 700 mile long crack in the Earth's crust – the **San Andreas Fault**.

Here, the **Pacific Tectonic Plate** slides laterally past the **North American Plate**. The plates snag and tension builds up, which then discharges in the form of earthquakes.

Particularly disastrous was the earthquake of 1906 in San Francisco where over 3,000 people lost their lives. Little can be felt of the looming danger in the San Francisco of today. But the 800,000 inhabitants have to constantly live with the risk of earthquakes.

San Francisco is one of the **most visited** cities in the United States. Per year it welcomes approximately 15 million guests. One highlight is the landmark of the city, the **Golden Gate Bridge** – one of the longest suspension bridges in the world. The **crookedest street** winds through San Francisco, as well – **Lombard Street**. But the most popular method of transportation is not the car, but the **Cable Car** – the only remaining cable tram in the world, running through San Francisco since 1873.

Looking onto the Pacific Ocean we now say goodbye to the United States.

A long journey lies behind us – over mountains, fields, and through the many cities of the **Land of Opportunity**.