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When you think about holidays across the pond, it's easy to pick New York for shopping and LA for its beaches. But we wanted to see another side to the States so we took to the road in the Midwest, stopping off at major cities like Chicago and Minneapolis, and cute rural towns along the legendary Route 66.

CHICAGO

We started our journey in Chicago and top of our agenda was the Skydeck viewing platform at the Willis Tower, which gives you a panoramic view of the whole city – the perfect spot for our first selfie! Next, we joined the First Lady River Cruise, where you'll learn all about the towering buildings that make up the city skyline. Latinicity is great for a lunch stop – it's a food hall filled with Latin street stalls selling tasty dishes like nachos and tacos.

We also found time for some shopping on The Magnificent Mile, to sample some famous Chicago deep dish pizza at Lou Malnati's – a family-run pizzeria that's been serving the

locals for decades – and to catch a live band at Kingston Mines, one of the longest-running blues clubs in the city. Then it was time to crash out at the centrally located Omni Hotel.

ROUTE 66

Next on our itinerary was America's most famous road, Route 66. Our first stop was Joliet, where we took a tour around the Old Joliet Prison. It's over 160 years old and was used as a filming location for cult TV show *Prison Break*.

En route to the quaint town of Pontiac, we stopped at The Launching Pad drive-in restaurant for an ice cream and a photo next to the Gemini Giant, a 30ft tall spaceman who stands outside. In Pontiac there are 23 outdoor murals to check out, illustrating the town's local history. We'd recommend Bernardi's II for dinner if you like

Italian food – it serves yummy pasta dishes.

Our next stop was Springfield, where we visited the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum for a quick history lesson on the first US president to be assassinated while in office. Then we nipped into classic biker bar Motorheads for delicious cheese curds and a giant pretzel.

ILLINOIS

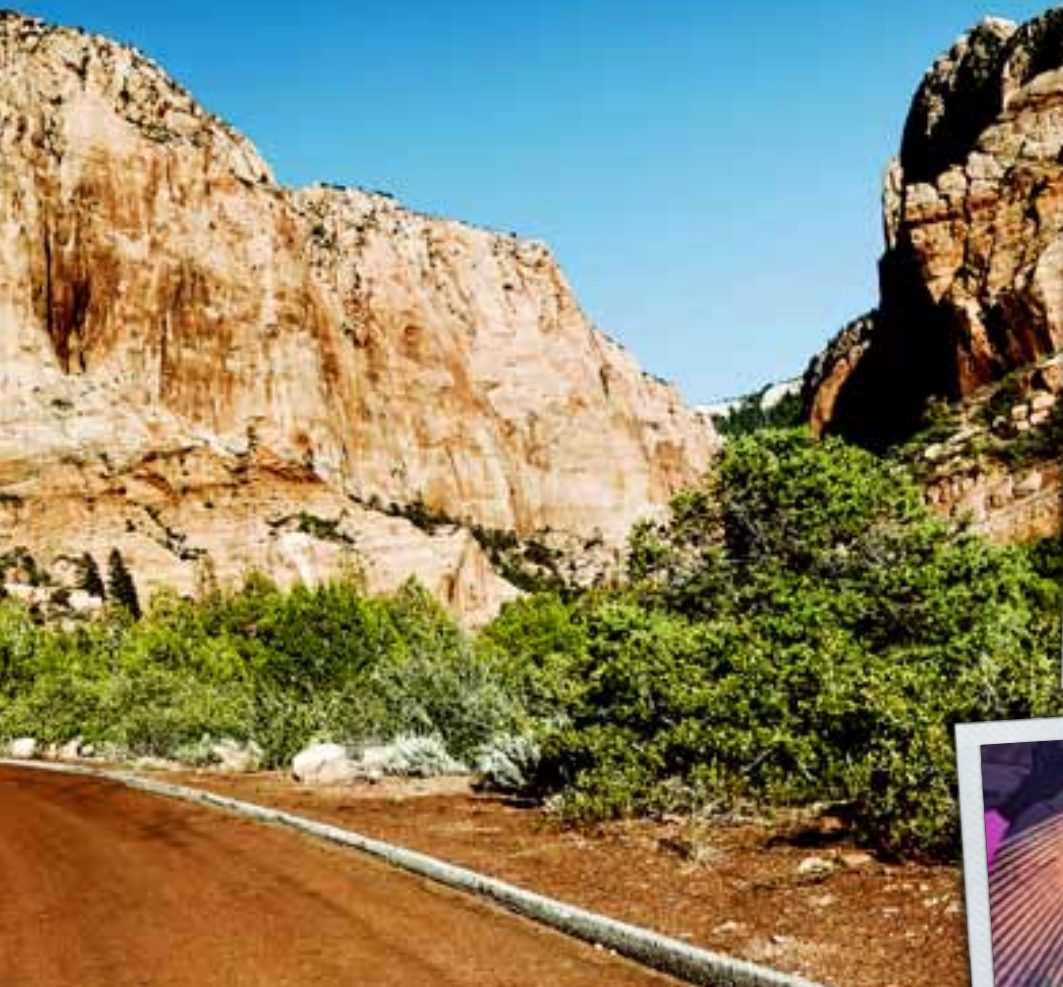
We paused for a breather at the DoubleTree By Hilton Collinsville lodge in southern Illinois, having first popped into the Old

Bakery Beer Company in neighbouring Alton to try some craft ales. Then we headed north to the city of Moline, which is the birthplace of plow-manufacturing company John Deere – and you can sit inside one of the giant machines at the dedicated museum.



E ROAD

magical Midwest on the drive of a lifetime



Cruising on Chicago River



*The Gemini Giant outside
The Launching Pad restaurant*



Prince's Paisley Park home

For evening entertainment, the Celebration Belle Captain's Dinner and Dance Cruise is a charming boat ride along the Mississippi River. Be prepared to join in with line-dancing to the country tunes provided by the live band. They also take song requests – even One Direction!

THE TWIN CITIES

As we approached the final stops on our journey – Minneapolis and Saint Paul in Minnesota, which are commonly referred to as the Twin Cities – we stopped off at the National Eagle Center in Wabasha to see its bald and golden eagles and the Minnesota Marine Art Museum in Winona, where you can view works by Monet and Van Gogh.

We also got our retail fix at the Mall of America, which is home to over 520 different stores. One of the country's largest indoor theme parks, Nickelodeon Universe, is also found there. Be sure to take a flight on FlyOver America, a simulated ride that whisks you over some of America's most beautiful scenery, including Niagara Falls.

Pop icon Prince was born in Minneapolis and you can take a tour around his famous private estate and production complex, Paisley Park, where some of his greatest hits were recorded. Some fabulous memorabilia – including the two motorbikes that featured in the film *Purple Rain* – are on display too.

The magnificent Minnehaha Park is also worth a visit. The pretty waterfalls made a fabulous final spot for a selfie!

HOW TO BOOK

Visit bon-voyage.co.uk and greatlakesusa.co.uk for more information and suggested itineraries. Prices start from £1,845 per person, which includes large car hire (drop-off fee applies), three nights in Chicago, two in Springfield, two in Collinsville, two in Moline, one in Winona and three in Minneapolis/Mall of America as well as flights with Delta Airlines. For independent car hire visit affordablecarhire.com.



The spectacular Minnehaha Falls