

SHOP TILL YOU DROP

Do Black Friday the American way and head to the biggest, most incredible mall in the States



Nickelodeon Universe isn't just for kids



See the beauty of the Mississippi the old-fashioned way



Visit the largest mall in America



Explore the Minnehaha Falls

PHOTOS: ALAMY, GETTY IMAGES

Thinking of booking a Christmas shopping trip to the States? Or taking full advantage of Black Friday on 24 November? Then explore further afield than New York (busy, expensive) and instead take a look at Minneapolis. With direct flights from the UK and home to the largest mall in America (which, incidentally, offers sales-tax free shopping on clothes and shoes - bonus!), the city is also the birthplace of the legendary singer Prince, so has a rich musical heritage that's ripe for exploring after you've shopped till you're ready to drop.

RETAIL THERAPY

Mall of America (mallofamerica.com) is home to more than 500 stores over three floors, stocking everything from cut-price fashion, unique gifts and homeware (with many stores championing local charities and artisans) to high-end designers (don't miss Nordstrom Rack for top labels at hugely discounted prices).

And when you're laden down with bags? If you're staying at the Radisson Blu hotel, which is linked to the mall, just contact its concierge service and they'll pick up your purchases wherever you are and return them to your room - so you can hit the credit card some more!

But that's not all... At the centre of MOA is Nickelodeon Universe (nickelodeonuniverse.com), a giant indoor theme park with over 30 rides and attractions from the truly fist-biting to those suitable for tiny tots, so you won't hear cries of, "When can we go home?" from the kids.

Underground there's a Sea Life (visitsealife.com), with underwater creatures ranging from seahorses to sharks - eek! And don't miss FlyOver America (flyover-america.com), an interactive ride like none you'll have experienced before, where you soar over the States with the wind in your hair. We challenge you not to scream as you head over mountaintops, along rivers and

through cityscapes. You get to see the length and breadth of the country in a way you'd never have imagined. It's truly exhilarating!

Check ahead for special guests appearing at the Rotunda on the east side of the mall. It hosts hundreds of free events each year and past performers include One Direction, Mariah Carey and the professionals from *Dancing With The Stars*, to name a few. When you get peckish, take your pick of more than 50 eateries from fast food to fine dining. The mac 'n' cheese at the Twin City Grill (twincitygrillrestaurant.com) is highly recommended.

There's also a cinema, Rock of Ages Mini Golf with music from the 50s to the present day, a *Crystal Maze*-style Escape Game (theescapegameinneapolis.com) and even, should passion suddenly overcome you, The Chapel Of Love (chapeloflove.com), where wedding packages cost from \$399.

MUSICAL MAGIC

Of course, you can't shop the entire time you're in town. Well, you could, but it'd be a shame to miss out on the other attractions the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-Saint Paul have to offer.

Top of the must-see list is Paisley Park (officialpaisleypark.com), the incredible studio-cum-home that Prince built on the outskirts of town. The unimposing pure white exterior looks more like a big office building than the extravagant Hollywood-style homes of many music legends, but the Tardis-like interior reveals a home as unique as you'd expect from the man who defined an era.

Not only houses living space and four studios, where Prince's most iconic albums were recorded, but also a sound stage where films including *Graffiti Bridge* were made. On the tour, you can see memorabilia up close, including costumes and guitars, as well as hear unreleased material and footage of little-seen interviews. A visit here even ends with a brunch of some of Prince's favourite vegetarian dishes created by his personal chef. It's an experience not to be missed.

If you want to continue the theme into the evening, book a table at Dakota Jazz Club & Restaurant

(dakotacooks.com) in Downtown Minneapolis, where Prince always had a table reserved. Tuck into Creole shrimp and sausage, chicken and sausage gumbo or fried sunfish, while listening to the best live music in the city.

If you like your meat served with more meat, try Fogo de Chão (fogodechao.com). This all-you-can-eat traditional Brazilian steakhouse offers more than a dozen cuts carved at the table, alongside a salad bar if you have any room left for trimmings!

COCKTAIL HOUR

For a nightcap, enjoy a rooftop drink accompanied by music that's guaranteed to get you up dancing at Crave American Kitchen & Sushi Bar (craveamerica.com).

Then head to the W Hotel for up-tempo club The Living Room, or the chilled Prohibition bar on the 27th floor (thelivingroom-prohibition.com), where you can relax with a cocktail while overlooking the city.

CRUISE ALONG

If you want to step back into a bygone age, take a dinner cruise from Stillwater - known as the birthplace of Minnesota - on an old-fashioned paddle steamer (stillwaterriverboats.com). The boat sails along the Mississippi River that divides the Twin Cities

and, as the sun sets, you'll get to tuck into a three-course buffet that features prime rib and walleye, the local fish. Continue the fun by heading to Velvetten Speakeasy (thevelvetten-speakeasy.com), where you enter through a secret door into a dark and cosy

bar for jazz-era music served up with the best cocktails you're likely to have tasted in a long time!

A tour of Minneapolis and Saint Paul is also not to be missed (grayline.com). You'll learn about the incredible history of the Twin Cities and visit Minnehaha Falls of Minnehaha Park, with its sculpture of Hiawatha and Minnehaha. Then there's the impressive architecture of the cities, which feature "skyways" that let you walk from one building to the other during the freezing winter temperatures without ever going outside.

GETTING THERE

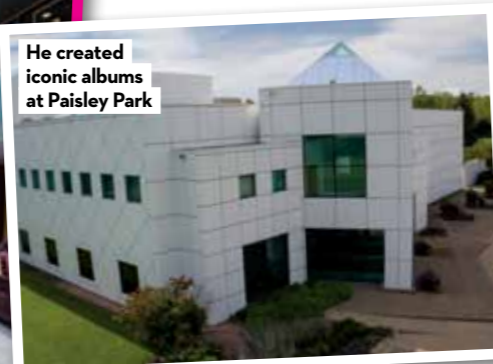
There are 50 hotels within ten minutes of MOA, all of which offer a free shuttle service. Radisson Blu (radissonblu.com, rates from \$166 in November) is adjacent to the mall and just five minutes from Minneapolis-St Paul Airport. Visit My America Holiday (myamericaholiday.co.uk) for a tailor-made trip, staying at Radisson Blu.

Delta (delta.com) flies daily from London Heathrow, with return fares from £635.57, including taxes. ■

KAREN CROSS



Uncover Prince's secrets on a tour



He created iconic albums at Paisley Park



Kick back at Dakota



Mariah performed at the mall