

TRAVEL

2017 IN REVIEW

Hard hits in top spots

From devastating hurricanes to the retirement of the most famous plane of the jet age, 2017 was an action-packed year for travelers. The USA TODAY Travel team looks back at the most important stories of the year.



Utah's Bears Ears National Monument, established in 2016, is one of several slated to shrink in 2018. JIM LO SCALZO/EPA-EFE

Destinations

It was a tumultuous year for many U.S. destinations. Hurricanes hit Houston, parts of Florida and several Caribbean destinations. Las Vegas is still reeling from domestic terrorism. And then there were wildfires in California.

Puerto Rico is still coming back as a tourism spot after Hurricane Maria devastated the island in September. Hotels and bars have opened back up but only about 65% of the island has had power restored. Many residents have left the island to join residents in the mainland.

California is still recovering from the wildfires. The Thomas Fire torched more than 270,000 acres. So far, that's made it the second-largest fire since record-keeping began in 1932. September and October were peak season in Napa and Sonoma counties, but both suffered significant drops in occupancy around that time. During the same period, Mendocino and Solano counties picked up business from the displaced residents and recovery workers.

Meanwhile, Las Vegas is recovering after the horrific gun attack at a music festival left 58 people dead and more than 500 injured. After the Oct. 1 shooting, visitation was down just over 4% compared to 2016, but the city still welcomed 3.6 million people in October and more than 36 million year-to-date, according to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. The Strip is up and running again, even getting Lady Gaga for a residency next year.

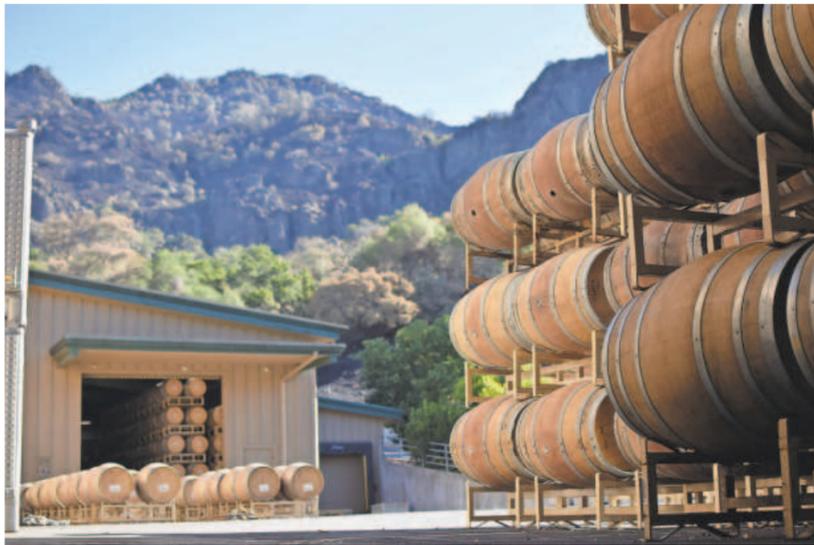
— Nancy Trejos

National parks and public lands

Actions started in 2017 could bring changes to national parks and other public lands in 2018. Several scale-backs to national monuments have been proposed by Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke after a review of 27 monuments around the USA, including removing 100,000 acres from Cascade-Siskiyou monument in Oregon and 297,000 acres from Gold Butte National Monument in Nevada. This follows the shrinking of two Utah public lands, Bears Ears National Monument by more than 1 million acres, and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by half. Several groups have filed lawsuits



The venerable Boeing 747 flew its last flights for U.S. airlines. PAUL SANCYA/AP



After devastating wildfires, California's Napa and Sonoma valleys are ready to welcome visitors. STAGS' LEAP WINERY

to halt the removal of land from each monument.

Zinke also recommended the creation of three new national monuments: Badger-Two Medicine within the Lewis and Clark National Forest in Montana; Camp Nelson in Kentucky, a Civil War training depot; and the home of Medgar Evers in Mississippi, the murdered civil rights leader.

Proposed fee hikes for national parks also have been recommended at more than 17 of the busiest parks, with fees more than doubling in price. This comes as fee free days fell from 16 in 2016, to 10 in 2017, to four in 2018: Jan. 15 (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day); April 21 (the first day of National Park week); Sept. 22 (National Public Lands Day); and Nov. 11, Veterans Day.

— James Riley

Airlines

The Queen of the Skies is slowly relinquishing her throne, at least in the United States. By early January, Boeing's iconic 747 jumbo jet will no longer be flying for any U.S. passenger airline.

United ended its 747 flying in the fall, sending its last model of the jet to the salvage yard after a splashy retro-themed farewell flight from San Francisco to Honolulu on Nov. 7. Delta's last regularly scheduled flight on the 747 came Dec. 19, though it's using the jet for a few charter flights into early January. Delta's last 747 is expected to go a "boneyard" in Arizona soon after New Year's Day. The airlines had been the last two U.S. carriers to use the jet for passenger flights.

On the bargain front, U.S. fliers have more budget options to Europe than ever before. Icelandic budget carrier WOW has expanded rapidly, while upstart Primera will begin flying from three U.S. airports this spring. Also new to the scene is Level, a no-frills trans-Atlantic budget outfit launched by Brit-



MSC Meraviglia, the fourth-largest ship ever, made its debut. BERNARD BIGER

ish Airways' parent company. But few can match the appetite for growth shown by low-cost carrier Norwegian. Just in 2017, the fast-growing airline added 25 new routes from U.S. airports. More growth is coming in 2018; Norwegian has announced plans for 11 more routes between the USA and Europe.

What's old is new again at Pittsburgh International Airport. In September, the airport became the first U.S. airport allowing non-fliers regular access into its gate-side terminal areas since security measures changed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. Fliers still must go through screening and show ID so they can be vetted against no-fly lists.

— Ben Mutzabaugh

Cruising

Perhaps the biggest cruise story of the year was the June debut of MSC Cruises' 171,598-ton MSC Meraviglia — the fourth largest cruise ship ever built. Nineteen decks high and chock-full of eateries, bars and entertainment zones, Meraviglia is a floating mega-resort on a scale matched only by the biggest vessels from Royal Caribbean and Norwegian Cruise Line. It can hold up to 5,714 passengers. MSC also unveiled the

153,516-ton MSC Seaside. Scheduled to sail year-round from Miami starting this month, Seaside boasts a Miami Beach style that mimics its new home.

In addition to adding ships, cruise lines in 2017 were busy upgrading older vessels. Cruise giant Carnival added new eateries and bars to nearly half a dozen of its 25 ships including Carnival Elation, Carnival Sensation, Carnival Dream and Carnival Ecstasy. Princess updated its 13-year-old Caribbean Princess.

Another big story for the industry was the impact of hurricanes Irma and Maria, which hit the region in September. Dozens of sailings were canceled, delayed or rerouted, and several big cruise destinations including St. Thomas and St. Maarten were closed to cruise ships for weeks. But those damaged ports have since reopened and 2018 Caribbean itineraries are intact.

The year also saw an explosion of voyages from the USA to Cuba. Norwegian Cruise Line launched weekly sailings in May from Miami to Cuba's capital, Havana. The trips kicked off just days after Royal Caribbean and Regent Seven Seas Cruises operated their first voyages to the destination. Two other lines, Oceania and Azamara, began Cuba cruises in March, and Carnival joined the fray in June.

— Gene Sloan

Food and dining

2017 brought a few firsts in the food world. The first brick-and-mortar Nutella Café opened in Chicago in May. Food Network host Anne Burrell opened her first restaurant in Brooklyn in May. Celebrity chef Robert Irvine opened his first Las Vegas restaurant at the Tropicana in July. And iconic Eleven Madison Park's fine-dining team opened fast-casual concept Made Nice in New York City in April.

Options continue to improve for vegetarian and vegan diners across the country. The Impossible Burger is available on more and more menus, and eateries solely selling plant-based patties, such as Superiority Burger, surprise with success.

Test kitchens and incubators foster culinary talent and innovation and draw crowds as rapidly as food halls, which continue to open across the USA. New York City added four food halls this year.

In the world of bartending, cider is having a moment, with cider bars thriving and the apple beverage making waves in mixology. And American gin makers are experimenting with botanicals beyond juniper.

California wine country has shown resilience following devastating wildfires in October, and star chefs earned plaudits for disaster relief, from Jose Andres' work in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, to Guy Fieri serving meals to California residents displaced from the fires.

— Ashley Day