



## Chicago to San Francisco on the California Zephyr

### 9 Night Rail Tour

Experience one of North America's most iconic rail journeys on this adventure from Chicago to San Francisco. Beginning in the vibrant Midwest and ending on the laid-back West Coast, this itinerary combines classic city stays with the legendary California Zephyr train, offering a relaxed and scenic way to cross the continent. Travelling by rail allows you to slow the pace, settle in comfortably, and enjoy sweeping views that simply can't be seen from the road or air.

Along the way, discover Chicago's architectural grandeur, enjoy an overnight stop in Denver beneath the Rocky Mountains, and watch the landscape transform from open plains to dramatic canyons and alpine scenery. The journey culminates in San Francisco, where historic neighbourhoods, iconic landmarks, and waterfront views provide the perfect finale. With time to explore independently and optional excursions to wine country or Yosemite National Park, this trip offers a wonderful balance of adventure, comfort, and classic American experiences.

#### Highlights:

- Discover Chicago's world-famous architecture, riverfront, and vibrant food scene
- Travel aboard the legendary California Zephyr, one of North America's most scenic train journeys
- Enjoy sweeping views of America's heartland from the comfort of the observation lounge
- Spend a night in Denver, the "Mile High City"
- Experience the dramatic Rocky Mountains as the train winds through canyons and alpine scenery
- Explore San Francisco's iconic landmarks, neighbourhoods, and waterfront

#### What's included:

- Getting there: Flights to Chicago, return from San Francisco
- Transport: Return airport transfers and coach seats on board Amtrak's California Zephyr
- Accommodation: 9 nights total (including 1 night on the inbound flight) - 8 nights accommodation: 2 nights Chicago, 1 night Amtrak, 1 night Denver, 1 night Amtrak, 3 nights San Francisco
- Meals included: as per accommodation booked, most hotels will only offer room only or breakfast

#### Not included:

- Any meals, drinks, tips, expenses of personal nature
- Cabin upgrades onboard Amtrak's California Zephyr
- Anything not mentioned in the "What's Included" column

# Full Itinerary

## Day 1 - UK to Chicago

Fly to Chicago, and transfer to your hotel. After check-in, the remainder of the day is free to relax after your journey or begin exploring the city at your own pace. Perhaps take a gentle walk along the Chicago River, enjoy a first taste of the local cuisine, or simply settle in and rest ahead of tomorrow's sightseeing.

ACCOMMODATION: Somewhere close to the Amtrak station, like 3\* Hampton Inn Chicago Downtown West Loop, 4\* Canopy by Hilton Chicago Central Loop or 4\* The Midland Hotel



## Day 2 - Discover Chicago

Today is free to explore Chicago at your own pace. You may wish to stroll along the Chicago Riverwalk, where cafés and walkways line the water's edge, or visit Millennium Park to see the famous Cloud Gate sculpture ("The Bean"). Architecture lovers might enjoy a river cruise, offering fascinating insight into the city's world-famous skyline and historic buildings.

Food lovers could sample Chicago's legendary deep-dish pizza, while shoppers may enjoy browsing the boutiques and flagship stores along the Magnificent Mile. Alternatively, visit one of the city's renowned museums or simply soak up the lively atmosphere of this great American metropolis.

ACCOMMODATION: Somewhere close to the Amtrak station, like 3\* Hampton Inn Chicago Downtown West Loop, 4\* Canopy by Hilton Chicago Central Loop or 4\* The Midland Hotel



## Day 3 - Board the California Zephyr

This morning, make your way to Chicago Union Station to board the legendary California Zephyr. Settle into your reserved coach seats as the train departs westward. If you wish to enhance your rail experience, there is the option to upgrade (at an additional cost) to a private sleeping compartment, offering lie-flat beds and included meals in the dining car.

Spend the afternoon relaxing in the observation lounge or café car as the Midwestern landscapes roll by. Vast open farmland, small-town America, and gently winding rivers create an ever-changing backdrop to your journey, offering a peaceful and uniquely American way to travel.

ACCOMMODATION: California Zephyr (Coach seating)

## Day 4 - Arrival in Denver

Awake as the scenery begins to change while the train approaches Colorado. This morning you arrive into Denver, known as the "Mile High City", set against the dramatic backdrop of the Rocky Mountains.

Disembark the train and leave your luggage at your hotel. The remainder of the day is free to explore Denver at your leisure. You may wish to stroll through the revitalised LoDo (Lower Downtown) district, visit the beautifully restored Union Station, or enjoy the city's lively food and craft-beer scene.

Alternatively, consider a visit to the iconic Red Rocks Park & Amphitheatre, located just outside the city. Famous for its dramatic natural rock formations and spectacular setting, it offers panoramic views and scenic walking trails by day, and is widely regarded as one of the most unique concert venues in the world. This stop provides a welcome break in the journey and a chance to experience one of the American West's most vibrant cities.

ACCOMMODATION: Somewhere close to the Amtrak station, like 3\* The Oxford Hotel, 4\* The Maven Hotel At Dairy Block or 5\* The Crawford Hotel



## Day 5 - California Zephyr Through the Rocky Mountains

This morning, return to Denver Union Station to reboard the California Zephyr and continue your rail journey. Shortly after departure, the train enters the Rocky Mountains, widely regarded as the most spectacular stretch of the entire route.

Spend the day at leisure on board as towering peaks, forested slopes, dramatic canyons and rushing rivers unfold outside your window. The train winds through remote wilderness inaccessible by road, following the Colorado River through deep gorges and alpine scenery. Divide your day between the observation lounge and your seat, enjoying one of the most scenic rail journeys in North America.

ACCOMMODATION: California Zephyr (Coach seating)

## Day 6 - Arrival in San Francisco

Today the train arrives into the San Francisco Bay Area. On arrival into Emeryville, connect by Amtrak's included bus service into downtown San Francisco.

After checking in to your hotel, the remainder of the afternoon is free to begin discovering this iconic city. Perhaps stroll along the Embarcadero with views across the bay, browse the artisan stalls of the Ferry Building Marketplace, or simply relax and enjoy your first taste of San Francisco's laid-back West Coast atmosphere.

ACCOMMODATION: Somewhere close to the Amtrak terminal, like 3\* Club Quarters Hotel in San Francisco, 4\* Hotel Griffon, 4\* San Francisco Marriott Marquis or 4\* Galleria Park Hotel



## Day 7 - Explore San Francisco

A full day to experience San Francisco's highlights. Perhaps begin with a ride on one of the city's historic cable cars, climbing steep streets to reveal wonderful views over the bay. Visit Fisherman's Wharf to see the sea lions at Pier 39, explore waterfront shops and restaurants, or take a boat trip out to the infamous former prison of Alcatraz Island.

You may also wish to walk or cycle across the Golden Gate Bridge, one of the world's most recognisable landmarks, or explore neighbourhoods such as North Beach and Chinatown, each offering their own distinctive character. With its scenic setting and relaxed atmosphere, San Francisco is a joy to discover.

ACCOMMODATION: Somewhere close to the Amtrak terminal, like 3\* Club Quarters Hotel in San Francisco, 4\* Hotel Griffon, 4\* San Francisco Marriott Marquis or 4\* Galleria Park Hotel



## Day 8 - Optional Day Trip to Napa and Sonoma Wine Country or Yosemite National Park

Today is free for you to further explore the region. You may choose to enjoy a relaxed day in San Francisco, or take an optional full-day excursion beyond the city.

One option is a visit to the beautiful Napa and Sonoma Valleys, famous for rolling vineyard landscapes and world-class wineries. Join a guided tour to enjoy wine tastings, learn about Californian winemaking, and soak up the picturesque countryside.

Alternatively, for nature lovers, a full-day excursion to Yosemite National Park offers breathtaking scenery, granite cliffs, waterfalls, and forested valleys - one of America's most iconic national parks. Both excursions offer memorable experiences and can be arranged in advance.

ACCOMMODATION: Somewhere close to the Amtrak terminal, like 3\* Club Quarters Hotel in San Francisco, 4\* Hotel Griffon, 4\* San Francisco Marriott Marquis or 4\* Galleria Park Hotel



## Day 9 - Fly San Francisco to UK

Transfer to San Francisco Airport for your return flight to the UK.

## Day 10 - Arrival in the UK

Your overnight flight arrives back in the UK for you to make your journey home.

# FAQs

## BEST TIME TO TRAVEL

The best time to travel is late spring through early autumn (May to October), when daylight hours are longest and scenery is at its most impressive. Summer months offer clear mountain views and warmer temperatures, while spring and early autumn can bring fewer crowds and beautiful seasonal colours. Winter departures are possible but daylight is shorter and weather conditions may occasionally affect train schedules.

## WHAT IS THE SEATING LIKE ON THE TRAIN?

Coach seats are spacious, recline significantly, and offer ample legroom, power outlets, and access to both the café and observation cars. Meals are not included for coach passengers; however, food and drinks can be purchased from the café car.

Your luggage travels with you on the train. Larger suitcases can be stored on lower luggage racks, while smaller items may be kept overhead or at your seat.

## VISA

British citizens do not require a VISA to visit the USA, but they do need to apply online for an electronic authorization (ESTA). <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/>

## VACCINATIONS

There are no mandatory vaccinations required to enter the USA. However, we recommend consulting your GP or a travel health clinic before you travel to ensure your routine vaccinations are up to date and to receive any personalised health advice.

## NATIONAL PARK ENTRANCE FEES

Most U.S. National Parks charge an entrance fee, typically around USD \$20–\$35 per vehicle. From 1 January 2026, the “America the Beautiful” Annual Pass will cost USD \$250 for non-U.S. residents, which provides access to most National Parks. In addition, non-U.S. residents without an annual pass will pay a USD \$100 per person surcharge to enter 11 of the most visited national parks, on top of standard entrance fees. Find more information at: <https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/passes.htm>