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What the Great American Road Trip Will Look Like in 2040

Buckle up, friends. It's going to be a ride.

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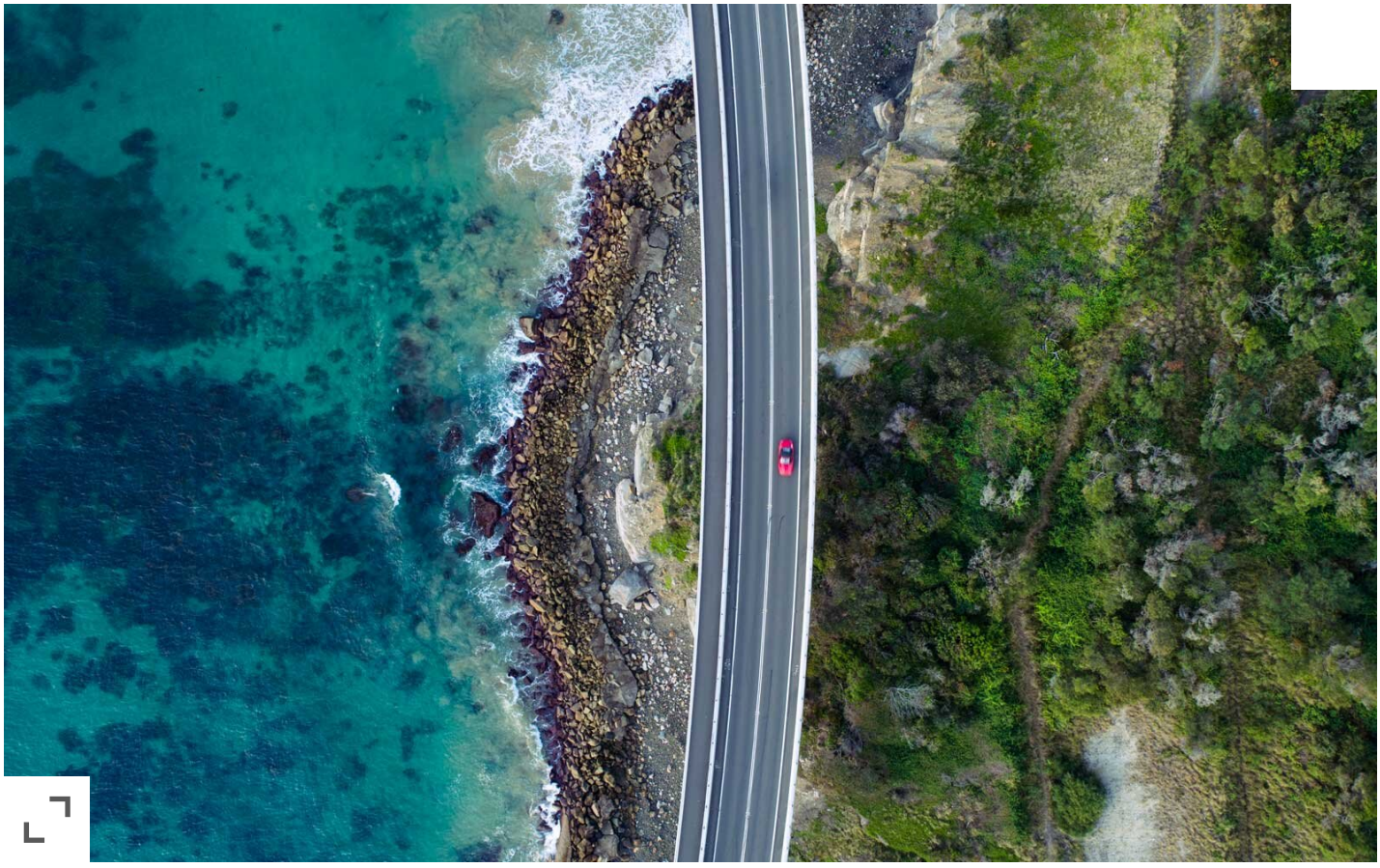
SEPTEMBER 15, 2018



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From *Easy Rider*-style motorcycle trips to cross-country family adventures á la *National Lampoon's Vacation*, the great American road trip looms large in the collective imagination. But times are a'changin', and a more Jetsonian mode of travel— namely, self-driving cars and even flying taxis — are gaining speed.

So what does the road trip of the future look like? T+L maps its out.

The Rise of Electric Cars

Between the vroom of an engine and the plume of exhaust trailing behind you, there's nothing like the thrill of hitting the open road (in a gas guzzling car, that is).

But traditional cars have been falling out of favor for years, and a recent AAA survey found that 20 percent of Americans (that's 50 million people!) are likely to go electric for their next car.

The environmental benefits alone are worth it. According to the Department of Energy, we could reduce foreign oil use by 30-60 percent and lower carbon pollution by 20 percent if all the cars in the country were switched to hybrids or plug-in electric vehicles.

But there's also a financial argument for going electric. It costs half as much to charge an electric vehicle as it does to fill a tank of gas, and for Tesla Model S and X owners, supercharging is free. Just think: with all that extra cash, you might even be able to skip the road trip and opt for a flight instead!

While Tesla is arguably driving the electric car movement, more high-end brands are putting skin into the game, as well — so you'll have options for your next set of wheels. Beyond the popular Chevy Volt and Nissan LEAF, Jaguar's I-Pace SUV is debuting in 2019, followed by Audi's self-driving A9 e-tron sedan and Porsche's Taycan in 2020. Ford, meanwhile, has doubled its EV research budget to $11 billion, and Volvo will only make electric or hybrid cars starting next year. By 2025, General Motors will have at least 20 electric models, and BMW will have 12, including the much anticipated BMW i4, which has a range of up to 435 miles per charge. Volkswagen will also be making electric versions of its 300 models by 2030.

Expanding Charging Networks

Every invention comes with its own set of er, roadblocks. And with electric vehicles, there's always the fear of running out of charge and being stranded on the side of the road.

But with the government pouring millions into the electric vehicle market, the aforementioned risk is becoming less prevalent. In fact, there are currently more chargers in Manhattan than gas stations!

Through the Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Department of Energy spent $15 million to build a nationwide charging network, adding 18,000 residential, commercial, and public plugins. More than 48,000 charging stations, operated by private companies such as Blink, EVgo, and ChargePoint, can be used by almost all electric vehicles, no matter the make or model. In addition, luxury brands like Tesla and Porsche have their own exclusive supercharging spots that can restore full battery in under an hour.

Electric Highway Tourism

If you think electric cars are great for shorts jaunts but less-than-ideal for long hauls, think again.

Companies like Electrify America (a subdivision of Volkswagen) are investing billions (yes, billions) into extensive electric vehicle infrastructure along U.S. highways, making it easier than ever to go the distance.

On the east coast, New York launched a $250 million EV program that will produce 400 public chargers and 200 fast chargers on major roadways, and neighboring New Jersey is spending $300 million to build a network of 50,000 stations. Meanwhile, California — the cradle of the electric vehicle industry — has received a $738 million grant to expand the state's charging presence over the next five years.

And many destinations are leveraging electric routes to fuel tourism. The most impressive is the West Coast Green Highway, a network of chargers spanning British Columbia and Baja California. Many of these chargers are outfitted at small convenience stores and other local businesses, and spaced 20-30 miles apart.

Then there's the U.S. Highway 2 in Washington, which, when it opened last year, became the first electric scenic byway in America. Charging stations were set up at mountain resorts, historic museums, and in quaint towns from Everett to Spokane. Oregon took it one step further, placing chargers at spas and wineries across some of the state's most beautiful regions, including Willamette Valley and the Columbia River Gorge.

Big hotel brands are getting on board, too. Mariott has close to 400 charging stations, and other chains such as Starwood, Hilton, and Hyatt have also followed suit. Check to see if your favorite hotel is EV-friendly via Charge Hotels.

Goodbye Gas Stations, Hello Entertainment Hubs

To be honest, we're not too sad to see the grimy gas stations go. Especially given the alternative: charging stations located near upscale shopping centers and grocery stores.

For example, Electrify America is installing fast stations at 100 Walmarts across 34 states, and EVgo is adding plugins at Whole Foods, Rite Aid, and REI.

And rest stops are also getting a major upgrade. Tesla is building its own supercharger lounges with coffee, WiFi, and even food trucks. (No more McDonalds!)