

### 36 Hours: 150 Weekends in the USA & Canada

Edited by Barbara Ireland

This mega-guidebook is a handsomely designed, 744-page collaboration between the *New York Times* and Germany's inimitable TASCHEN publishing house. It's about the size and heft of a college-edition dictionary, and its intended audience—the literate, haute bourgeoisie who read the *Times* travel section—will find it as handy as a dictionary. According to the book's foreword, the *Times* inaugurated its "36 Hours" column in 2002:

Created as a guide to that staple of crammed 21st-century schedules, the weekend getaway, it takes readers each week on a carefully researched, uniquely designed two-night excursion to an embraceable place. With a well-plotted itinerary, it offers up an experience that both identifies the high points of the destination and teases out its particular character.

A passage of such tiresome boilerplate would normally make readers want to lob stink bombs in every bed-and-breakfast in America, yet I found myself surprisingly taken with *36 Hours*, especially its design. The pale blue cover has a kind of denim pliability like that of a cookbook. Inside, the pages are lightly textured. Art, graphics, and photos are likewise muted—a welcome change from the hyper-shiny, semi-metallic photography found in many high-concept travel books. The agile designers at TASCHEN have even included indented thumb-tabs to mark section divisions—again like a dictionary. Also built-in bookmarks—five pastel ribbons—like those in a Bible.

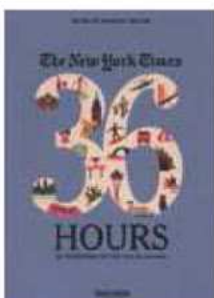


Of the 150 destinations in *36 Hours* (ranging from New York City to Chicago, Phoenix, Los Angeles all the way to Kauai), eighteen are located in Canada, Alaska, and Hawaii. The remaining 132 occur in the Lower Forty-eight, with California taking the overall prize with twenty-three winners. For a *New York Times* publication to give California the gold medal seems generous and democratic—although New York State takes the silver with ten sites.

As an armchair browser, I decide to head straight to Alaska. Here is Juneau, which cannot be reached by car, only by air or sea. My first day in town, Friday (each chapter is arranged like a traditional weekend), I'm ordered to purchase "a pair of brown rubber, calf-high Xtra Tuf Boots, a must-have item in any Alaskan's

wardrobe." Okeydoke. Saturday, I'm to spend in Berners Bay, craning my neck for sea lions, harbor seals, hawks, geese, maybe an eagle or two. Sunday, I'm sent to the Mendenhall Glacier. "Dress warmly," my guidebook instructs me unnecessarily, who will not have left home without packing the equivalent of an Everest climber's gear.

*36 Hours* cheerfully and bossily sends us out on our little tours each Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, hour by hour, on each of the 150 weekend destinations. Is there a living traveler on earth who would actually do that? Consult a textbook, morning, noon, and night? Still, *36 Hours* contains an enormity of tips and addresses, most of which, I assume, are true. Although—I found this glaring solecism in the Las Vegas chapter, where someone wrote *never* when they clearly meant to say *always*: "Regardless of economic cycles, Las Vegas is never boring."



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