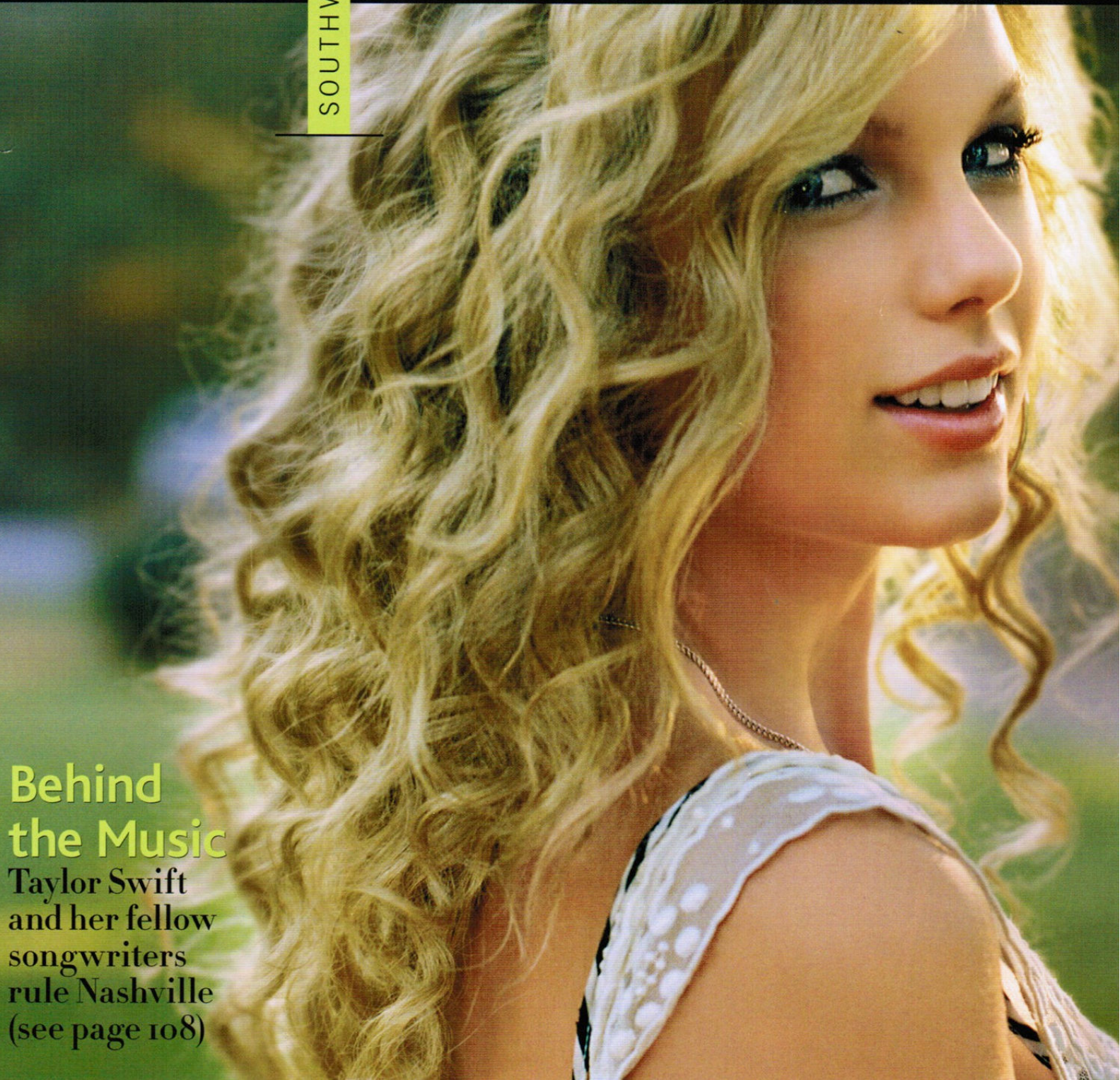


Spirit

SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

JUNE 2008



**Behind
the Music**
Taylor Swift
and her fellow
songwriters
rule Nashville
(see page 108)

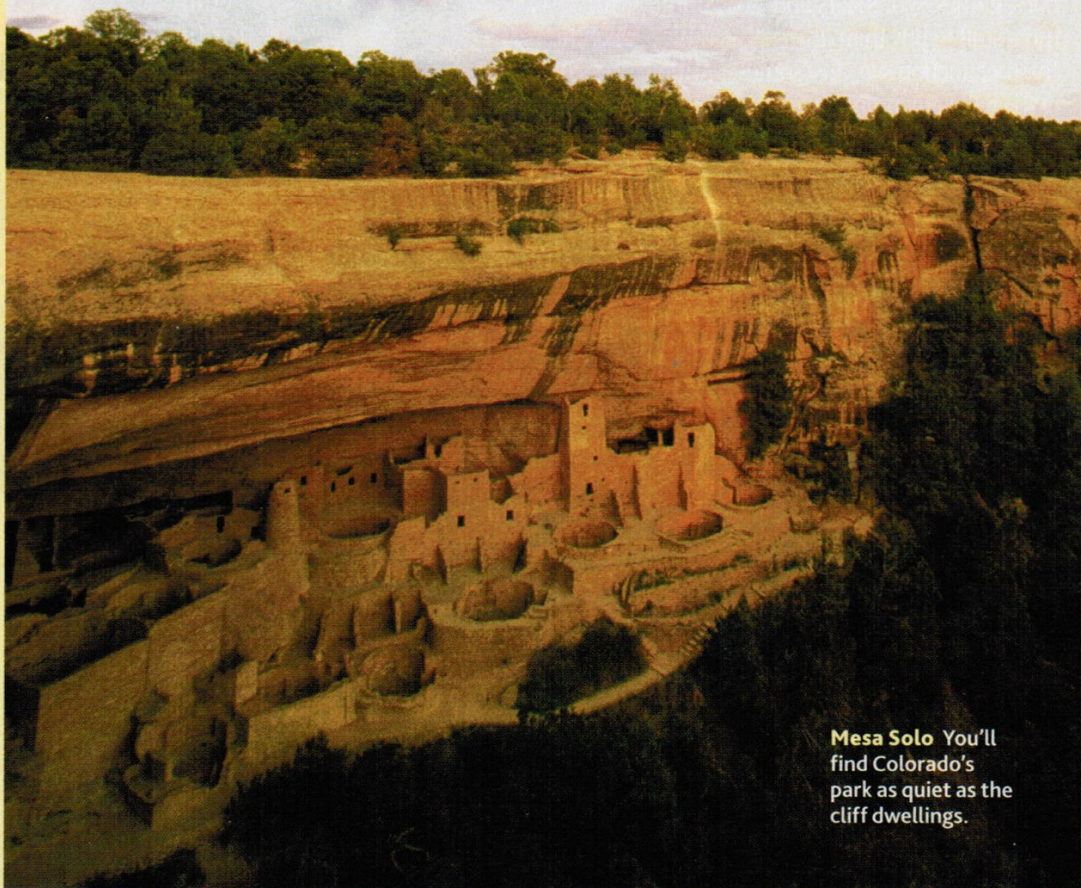
More than 62 million people visited America's national parks last year, 15 million more than pushed through the turnstiles at Disney World. That makes the most popular parks more packed on peak summer weekends than Tomorrowland. But if you want to avoid the crowds, talk to Bill Wade. The former ranger and park manager now heads the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees. With three decades at eight parks under his flat-brimmed Stetson, Wade suggests four national parks you've probably never visited—but should.

Mesa Verde

In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt authorized these 600 cliff dwellings in Colorado—270 miles north of Albuquerque, New Mexico—as the first national park to preserve the works of man. Two loop roads provide access to multiple overlooks that provide even better views. I grew up here—my father worked as chief ranger—and have always favored Square Tower, a four-story structure tucked back in a canyon near the popular Cliff Palace site; and Balcony House, which you enter by climbing a 32-foot ladder and then crawling through a tunnel on your hands and knees. nps.gov/meve

Secret Parks

Retired ranger BILL WADE has your ultimate entry pass.



Mesa Solo You'll find Colorado's park as quiet as the cliff dwellings.



Treasure Islands
At Dry Tortugas, your reward comes in the form of peace and quiet.

Click This
Find even more secret sites at spiritmag.com. Just click Parks.

Dry Tortugas

A cluster of six sandy islands and reefs surrounded by the turquoise water of the Gulf of Mexico, Dry Tortugas offers an experience unlike any other park in the system. Besides the incredible snorkeling and bird life, the main island houses Fort Jefferson, an enormous brick fortress built in the mid-1800s to improve America's coastal defenses. Its military history stretches from the pirate days to the Spanish-American War. To get there, you'll have to arrive by boat or seaplane from Key West, Florida, 70 miles east. nps.gov/dрто

Canyonlands

The nearby Arches and Capitol Reef national parks receive twice as many visitors every year, which means you can move more freely in Canyonlands' rugged, burnt-orange landscape. Start in the north at Island in the Sky, the most accessible of the park's three sections—and 240 miles southeast of Salt Lake City—and drive out to the Grand View Point Overlook. A thousand feet below, the surging Colorado and Green rivers unite and flow to the Grand Canyon and Hoover Dam. For another perspective, float the park's famous rapids, including Cataract Canyon, on multi-day trips that start near Moab and finish at Lake Powell. nps.gov/cany

Big Bend

Containing three environments—mountain, desert, and river—in one park, this isolated nook along the Rio Grande River attracts adventurous travelers. As a reward for the long drive—the park lies 240 miles southwest of Midland, Texas—visitors will spot a crown of 7,000-foot peaks rising from the Texas plains. The Chisos Mountains ring the aptly named Chisos Basin, whose highlights include the five-mile Window Trail. From the visitors' center, you'll descend into Chihuahua Desert, which blooms each spring with spectacular wildflowers. nps.gov/bibe