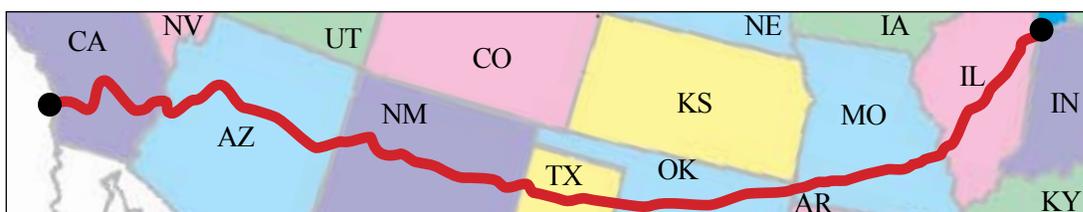


Hit the Road

Few things say summer quite like a road trip. When not just any route will do, gear up for one of these great drives across the United States.

by Julie Collins



Chicago

Sometimes you need a big road trip; the ultimate road trip that's worth writing to your children or grandchildren about. If a great drive is calling your name, check out one of these routes. From storied Route 66 to the Oregon Trail (yes, really!), there's bound to be a stretch of road in your region worth traveling—whether you're interested in a leisurely day's cruise along part of the route or a larger-scale adventure.

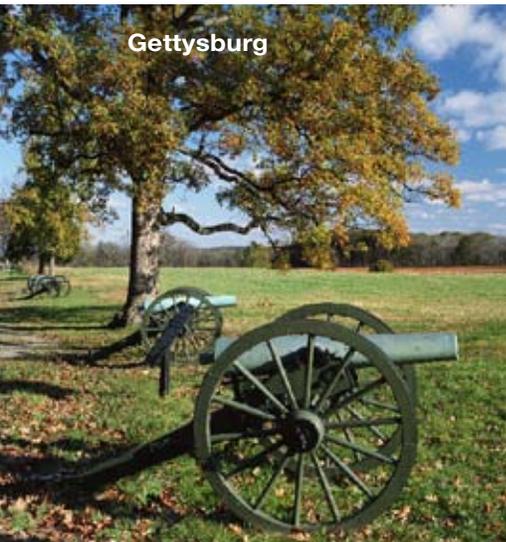
Route 66

You've undoubtedly heard the phrase before, but have you gotten your kicks on Route 66 yet? If not (or, heck, even if you have), perhaps it's time to hit the road for this iconic drive. The catch? Route 66 doesn't appear on modern maps anymore (it was de-commissioned as a federal highway when high-speed interstates sprung up around the country), so you'll need to do some research before retracing the path of the old two-lane that traveled from Chicago to Los Angeles. Fortunately, there are plenty of travel guides available, and you'll find Historic Route 66 signs posted on some portions that are left. Along the way, keep your eyes peeled for remnants of the "Mother Road"—billboards, giant statues, strange roadside attractions, old filling stations, and quirky diners and motels.

CAN'T-MISS SITES: There are cities galore worth exploring along this route, which was built to link small towns with metropolitan cities including St. Louis, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Albuquerque. But some of the best sites are located outside of city limits, when it's just you and the road. Must-sees range from the kitschy: graffiti-covered Cadillacs buried in the ground at Cadillac Ranch outside Amarillo; the rebuilt Route 66 Diner in Albuquerque; the Route 66 museum in Barstow, California, to the cool: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library in Springfield, Illinois; Meramec Caverns in Missouri; and, of course, the Grand Canyon.



Grand Canyon



Appalachian Trail

You don't have to own a pair of hiking boots to appreciate the scenic splendor along the longest hiking trail in the country, which winds from Maine to Georgia. That's because there are plenty of lovely two-lane roads that allow you to follow the route of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail through all 14 states. You'll travel from the rugged woods of northern Maine to some of the best of New England's mountains, including the Presidential Range of New Hampshire, Vermont's Green Mountains, and the Berkshires of western Massachusetts. Move through Pennsylvania's industrial Lehigh Valley to the land of the Pennsylvania Dutch. For a shorter drive, try the scenic leg running from Virginia's Shenandoah National Park along the Blue Ridge Parkway into North Carolina. The best part? Along the way, stretching your legs is as easy as hopping out and hiking on the trail!

CAN'T-MISS SITES: You'll get within easy driving distance of a detour to Boston and New York for arts, culture, and shopping. Stop at Gettysburg in Pennsylvania to visit the battleground. Or for another taste of history, head to Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home located outside of Charlottesville, Virginia. You'll finish the route in Atlanta, where the country's largest aquarium, the Georgia Aquarium, sits next to the World of Coca-Cola—even if there aren't any kids in tow, both are worth a stop.

Great River Road

You don't have to be a fan of Mark Twain to appreciate the mighty Mississippi River, and you don't have to hop on a barge or paddle boat to experience it when you follow the Great River Road, which wends along with the river from its beginning in Minnesota to where it empties into the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana. Trace the river past limestone cliffs, towering bluffs, forested hills, and rolling farmland. It's not a speedy route, often crossing the river and meandering (like its namesake) past river towns, historical sites, and wildlife refuges.

CAN'T-MISS SITES: The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul are worth a stop for their cultural offerings and shopping (think Mall of America). In Wisconsin, you'd be remiss not to stop for some cheese—try the Nelson Cheese Factory. Continuing down the route, one of the best

continued on page 24



continued from page 23

museums honoring the river is the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium in Dubuque, Iowa. In Missouri, visit Mark Twain's hometown of Hannibal. And be sure to spend some time in Memphis, a city loaded with history of the musical variety (visit studios where Elvis, Johnny Cash, and Otis Redding recorded, or tour Graceland) and more (stop at the National Civil Rights Museum located within the Lorraine Motel, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated). Last but not least, spend some time in New Orleans (where no visit is complete without a trip to Bourbon Street).

Oregon Trail

Traversing the storied Oregon Trail by wagon was a hardship survived by only the heartiest souls; fortunately, following the journey using modern transportation is much less daunting. You'll run alongside—and in some cases even right over—the Oregon Trail on your journey from one of the jumping-off cities in the middle of the country to the Wild West (or vice versa, if you're so inclined). The route across the Great Plains and myriad mountains is ripe with history, scenery, and interesting stops.

CAN'T-MISS SITES: Unparalleled attractions abound on this route. If you begin in St. Louis, where travelers from the East would load their wagons onto steamships so they could head due west upstream, be sure to stop for an up-close peek at the gleaming Gateway Arch. Then plan to spend time at one or more of the jumping-off points, where travelers would begin their land journey west—options include Independence, St. Joseph, or Westport in Missouri; Council Bluffs, Iowa; or Omaha, Nebraska. During the lonely drive across Nebraska, make sure to stop and gaze at the stone spire called Chimney Rock—many travelers considered it the eighth wonder of the world when they came across it on their journey. Chimney Rock is just the beginning of the awe-inspiring sites should you choose to detour to Wyoming highlights such as Grand Teton National Park, Jackson Hole, and Yellowstone. And things are no less interesting at the end of the trail (officially located 10 miles south of Portland in Oregon City) either. Here, the Willamette Valley, the nearby Columbia River Gorge, and Portland itself beckon even the weariest travelers to explore. ■

Visit roadtripusa.com for more information on each of these routes.

