


travel  
itinerary  
road trips

# GET YOUR KICKS ON ROUTE 66

A five-day road trip tracing the California leg of the historic “Mother Road” from seaside **Santa Monica** to **Needles** in the Mojave Desert

visit  
**California**

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- Day 1: **LAX to Santa Monica**
  - Day 2: **Santa Monica to Pasadena**
  - Day 3: **Pasadena to San Bernardino**
  - Day 4: **San Bernardino to Barstow**
  - Day 5: **Barstow to Needles**

# ROUTE 66

## Itinerary overview

Join the legions of adventurers and dreamers who have driven the famed Route 66 from Chicago to Los Angeles since it first opened to road trippers in 1926. Celebrating its centennial milestone anniversary in 2026, Route 66 is a national treasure and bucket-list worthy journey steeped in nostalgia. Most of the fabled highway is still traversable within California to this day. This itinerary starts at Route 66's western end in Santa Monica and heads

east, traveling roughly 315 miles (507 kilometers) through the Mojave Desert with the option to continue into Arizona or to loop back to Los Angeles via Joshua Tree National Park or Big Bear Lake. Expect to be immersed in vintage vibes with quirky roadside stops and photo ops galore. Note: Two mobile apps offer turn by turn navigation to help stay on track: [Route 66 Navigation](#) and [Route 66 Ultimate Guide](#).



## ● Day 1: LAX to Santa Monica

In 1936, the end of Route 66 was extended from Downtown Los Angeles to the corner of Lincoln and Olympic Boulevards in Santa Monica. In 1952, the Will Rogers Highway plaque was placed at the route's symbolic end, where Santa Monica Boulevard reaches the Pacific Ocean.

- Upon arrival at LAX, get into the California groove in sunny **Santa Monica**.
- Have lunch at the recently restored **Mel's Drive-in** diner, which was once the Penguin coffee shop, an iconic Googie-style landmark and the true western terminus of Route 66.
- Stroll along the iconic **Santa Monica Pier** and take photos by the "End of the Trail" Route 66 sign as well as the blue and yellow Santa Monica Pier sign.
- Ride the **Pacific Park Ferris Wheel**, taking in elevated views of the entire **Los Angeles** coastline.
- Check out the **Original Muscle Beach**, located on the southside of the pier with history dating back to the 1930s.
- Do dinner at **The Lobster**, established in 1923 at the base of the pier and serving up ocean views alongside Michelin-endorsed cuisine.
- Sip a nightcap at nearby **Chez Jay**, a Santa Monica institution since 1959.
- Overnight in **Santa Monica**.



## Day 2: Santa Monica to Pasadena

Before Route 66 was extended to Santa Monica the route ended in Downtown Los Angeles at Broadway and 7th Street—later it ended in Pasadena at Colorado Boulevard and Arroyo Parkway. This day has you exploring Los Angeles neighborhoods from West to East, ending in elegant Pasadena.

- Depart Santa Monica via Santa Monica Boulevard (SR-2), a former stretch of Route 66 that will take you through **Beverly Hills** and **West Hollywood**.
- Check out two classic, photogenic eateries heading through West Hollywood: the revitalized **Formosa Café**, an Old Hollywood icon in WeHo located across from the Samuel Goldwyn Studio dating back to 1939, and **Tail O' the Pup**, a hot dog-shaped walk-up stand established in 1946.
- When you reach Sunset Junction in artsy **Silver Lake**, stop for a wander around the concentration of hip neighborhood shops and eateries.
- Take Sunset Boulevard through the eclectic **Echo Park** neighborhood to continue on the original Route 66 towards **Downtown Los Angeles**.
- Sunset Boulevard ends near **Olvera Street**, LA's oldest neighborhood that is considered a living museum; it's home to **El Pueblo de Los Angeles**, historic adobes, cultural museums and more.
- After exploring the historic DTLA district, hop on the Arroyo Seco Parkway (SR-110) to **Pasadena**, traveling the first freeway of Route 66 in the U.S. built in the 1940s and passing by **Dodgers Stadium**. The Figueroa Street Tunnels are the only vehicular tunnels along all of Route 66.
- If you need a refreshment en route, take the Fair Oaks exit in South Pasadena to **Fair Oaks Pharmacy & Soda Fountain**, which has been serving patrons since 1915.
- Continue on SR-110 to its end on East Colorado Boulevard, where you can explore the vibrant **Old Pasadena** district.
- Overnight in **Pasadena**; the mid-century **Saga Motor Motel** built in 1959 and designed by Harold Zook is one of the last operating Route 66 motels in the area.



### Day 3: Pasadena to San Bernardino

Journey through the San Gabriel Valley, which was once where Route 66 travelers got their first taste of Southern California's citrus groves. Stop to check out Route 66 landmarks as you make your way to the town of San Bernardino, the heart of the **Inland Empire** region.

- Before getting on the road, enjoy breakfast at **Russell's**, a Pasadena staple since 1930.
- Take Colorado Boulevard (tracing the **Tournament of Roses Parade** route) to **The Original Whistle Stop**, a train hobby store that opened in 1951.
- Continue to the **Aztec Hotel** at 301 West Foothill Boulevard in Monrovia to see the exterior of the former hotel, a standout example of the Mayan Revival architecture popular in the 1920s and 1930s; it's on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Take Huntington Drive/Historic Route 66 to **The Donut Man** in Glendora, passing through Azusa; ever since opening in the 1970s, the old school doughnut shop has been associated with Route 66.
- Before leaving Los Angeles County, stop to check out the shops and restaurants in **Historic Downtown Claremont**.
- Historic Route 66 will become Foothill Boulevard as you head east to Upland, where you can see retro Route 66-style streetlamps and the "Madonna of the Trail" statue (1010 Euclid Avenue) erected in 1929 to mark the path of the National Old Trails Road, which predated Route 66.
- Once in Rancho Cucamonga, stop by the **Sycamore Inn**, a Rancho Cucamonga institution since the mid-1800s, when a stagecoach line ran through the area. It found new life in 1939 when Danish settlers bought the inn and it soon became a Route 66 favorite; it's still beloved for its steakhouse, which opens at 4:30 p.m. daily.



- Nearby, check out the **Cucamonga Service Station** that dates back to 1915 and is now a mini-museum showcasing photos and memorabilia.
- Historic Route 66 on Foothill Boulevard will lead you to San Bernardino, where you can visit the **Original McDonald's Site & Museum** at 1398 North E Street for a taste of Americana history on the location of the first McDonald's fast food restaurant that opened in 1948.
- Save room for dinner at **Mitla Café**, which has been satisfying cravings for delicious Mexican cuisine since 1937.
- Check into **Wigwam Motel**, built in 1949 to welcome travelers on Route 66 and the inspiration for The Cozy Cone Motel in the animated Disney movie Cars; the 19 tee-pee shaped accommodations have been refurbished over the years with modern amenities and you can cool off in the swimming pool.



## ● Day 4: San Bernardino to Barstow

This day's journey winds north into Victorville and Barstow, each home to Route 66 museums. Watch the landscape change as you enter the less-populated Mojave Desert and the roads feel more open.

- Head north on I-215 and I-15 to Victorville.
- Upon arrival, check out the great vintage neon sign at the **New Corral Motel** at 16937 7th Street.
- Next, go to **California Route 66 Museum** in Old Town Victorville to peruse the vast collection of photos, antiques and vintage cars, including a 1917 Model T Ford.
- Before you leave town, have breakfast or lunch at **Emma Jean's Holland Burger Café**, a classic diner has been serving burgers and "trucker's special" sandwiches since 1947. The popular Route 66 road stop has been featured on the TV show Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives and took a star turn in the movie Kill Bill Vol. 2.
- Hop on the National Trails Highway towards Oro Grande to stop at **Elmer's Bottle Tree Ranch**, a quirky site featuring more than 200 "trees" created by the late Elmer Evan Long, a welder and scrap-material artist.
- National Trails Highway will bring you to Barstow's **Route 66 Mother Road Museum**, a showcase of vintage road signs, photos and other mid-century memorabilia.
- Check out Barstow's **Main Street Murals** depicting the town's history along Route 66 and take photos of the classic **Route 66 Motel** in Barstow.
- Go bargain hunting at **The Outlets at Barstow**.
- Overnight in **Barstow**.



## ● Day 5: Barstow to Needles

As you near Needles, stop at famed Route 66 locations that have set the stage for countless films, TV shows, music videos and photo shoots over the decades and detour into the Mojave National Preserve.

- Have breakfast at [Lola's Kitchen](#) or [Roy's Cafe](#) before leaving Barstow—the latter is inspired by Route 66 landmark Roy's Motel & Café in Amboy, which you'll soon see.
- Take I-40 E to National Trails Highway in Newberry Springs to see the filming location of the cult classic 1987 film [Bagdad Café](#). The small, memorabilia-filled café is generally open to the public for photo ops of the interior, but don't expect to find food served here!
- Continue on I-40 E and National Trails Highway to the [Amboy Crater National Natural Landmark](#) where you can get a great open road photo op with the Route 66 logo and explore the dormant volcano's lava fields.
- Just down Route 66 is [Roy's Motel & Café](#), which started as a gas station in 1938. In the 1940s, they added a motel, café and auto repair shop. While the town of Amboy has become something of a ghost town, you can still get gas, snacks and souvenirs in the shop—and the photography possibilities are prime.
- Head east on National Trails Highway to Kelbaker Road, crossing I-40 into the [Mojave National Preserve](#), with its miles of open road through Yucca Trees (also known as Joshua Trees).
- Stop to check out the [Kelso Dunes](#), the second largest dune system in California.
- Retrace your route to continue on to Needles via I-40 E, and beeline to the Old West-style [Wagon Wheel Restaurant](#) for a meal.
- Overnight in Needles at the [Best Western Colorado River Inn](#).





## ● Next Stop Options

If you want to continue your road trip in California rather than continuing along Route 66 into Arizona, consider heading down to [Joshua Tree National Park](#) and [Greater Palm Springs](#) for a few days of outdoor adventure, rest and relaxation. Fly out of Palm Springs International Airport or via LAX, a 2-hour drive depending on time of day. Or opt for a peaceful mountain lake escape in beautiful [Big Bear Lake](#), where water sports, hiking and birding are on tap. Fly out of Ontario International Airport (53 mi/85 km away) or LAX (114 mi/183 km).