the birthplace of the road trip

Hit the mother road and all of her vintage glory

It’s the things you see along the way that you remember most. The giant statue of the guy holding a hot dog. The drive-in where it’s not a day past 1955. The Lincoln monument. Legendary Route 66 begins in Illinois and offers road trippers 300 miles of vintage, quirky, and larger-than-life roadside attractions.
Day 1 Chicago

Chicago is known for its impressive architecture, famous museums, great music and delicious food. Start your day off with an architecture boat tour and enjoy the city from a new perspective. Then peruse the shops on the Magnificent Mile before refueling at a classic Chicago establishment like Billy Goat Tavern or Lou Mitchell’s. Take it easy in the afternoon with a trip to the Chicago History Museum or the Museum of Science and Industry.

Day 2 Chicago

Take in the city sights! Cloud Gate in Millennium Park (aka “The Bean”) is a must-see attraction. Marvel at this unique sculpture from all angles and snap a few pics of your reflection. Then, take things to the next level with a visit to the best observation decks in the city: Skydeck Chicago and 360 Chicago. Your jaw will drop as you marvel at the impressive scale of the city’s skyline and Lake Michigan. Grab a slice of Chicago’s famous deep dish pizza for lunch, and then spend the afternoon exploring the famous works of art at the Art Institute of Chicago, one of the largest art museums in the U.S.

Day 3 Heritage Corridor

Willowbrook, Joliet & Wilmington

When you’re ready to hit the road, be sure to snap the perfect selfie at the very spot Route 66 begins. You’ll find the iconic sign on E. Jackson Blvd. On your way out of the city, set the course for Dell Rhea’s Chicken Basket. As seen on Guy Fieri’s Diners, Drive-Ins & Dives, this classic Route 66 spot will satisfy your appetite and leave you with a smile. Next up is the Old Joliet Prison Tour. Featured in The Blues Brothers, this historic location is sure to entertain. Hear tales of notorious inmates and grab a snap of yourself in a cell as you explore the prison grounds.

Pontiac

As you head toward Pontiac, pull over for a quick pic with the larger than life Gemini Giant, then get ready to start embracing Route 66 memorabilia up close. In Pontiac, visit the Route 66 Mural & Hall of Fame Museum for an iconic photo spot and get your classic car fix at the Pontiac-Oakland Automobile Museum.

Day 4 Springfield

In Springfield, visit both the Illinois State Capitol and Old State Capitol for a dose of history. Also make time for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum – known for its variety of unique and interactive exhibits. For food, Cozy Dog Drive In is the perfect lunch spot to break up your day. As you depart, make time for a quick photo stop on the Historic Route 66 brick road in Auburn.

Day 5 Great Rivers & Routes

As you near the Great Rivers & Routes area, be sure to squeeze in as many unique roadside stops as you can. It’ll be hard to leave empty- handed from the Pink Elephant Antique Mall where you can browse all kinds of retro knick-knacks and unique treasures. Then it’s on to the World’s Largest Catsup Bottle for a great roadside stop and photo-op. In Collinsville, be sure to visit Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site for a great view and breath of fresh air. Chain of Rocks Bridge is another unique attraction nearby. For a bit of extra height, a Grafton Sky Tour offers spectacular aerial views with the added bonus of Aerie’s Winery waiting for you at the top.

And that completes your Illinois Route 66 road trip! This itinerary can easily be started in Chicago—or flip the route if you are starting in southern Illinois.