

THREE-DAY ROAD TRIP ITINERARY

By Roger Naylor

DAY ONE

BURROS, BREWS, AND GOLDFISH

TOPOCK

Let's begin on the western edge of Arizona's Route 66. Before you even start, stop! Pull over at Topock66, a beautiful restaurant on the banks of the Colorado River, where you can take a swim, eat, and raise a glass to toast the remarkable journey that lies ahead. Live music skips across the water as boats travel up and down the river. You're having a party and you haven't gone anywhere yet. That's the beauty of two-lane travel. Set your own pace. Stop and explore whatever you want. Create the adventure you've dreamed about.

OATMAN

The road flashes across gaunt desert and you're already part of something special. You're traveling the longest unbroken stretch of Route 66 still in existence, 158 miles of sweet winding pavement. A former gold mining town, Oatman sags in happy repose. Historic buildings fronted by wooden sidewalks are strung along the highway. Gunfights are daily occurrences in the street and a herd of wild burros will be right in the middle of everything. They'll hold up traffic, stick their head in shops and car windows while seeking handouts of alfalfa cubes. (Please don't feed them anything other than alfalfa sold in stores. It's for their own health.) The burros are descendants of animals used by miners and abandoned when the ore played out. They've become furry ambassadors of Route 66, known and loved around the world.

Grab a cold beer or an ice cream cone. Browse the shops. Visit the Oatman Hotel where the restaurant is wallpapered with dollar bills. Before you leave, take a last look around. There's no place else like Oatman on all of Route 66.

DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

Heading out of town prepare for some of the most jaw-dropping scenery on the Mother Road. The old highway curls through rocky hills that go shambling off in all directions. At Sitgreaves Pass you're gazing into three states — Arizona, California, and Nevada. From there the road slithers down the mountain in a series of sharp twists and turns. Stop at any of the designated pullouts to admire the views and let the blood rush back to your knuckles. Just past milepost 30, watch for the pullout on your right with ghostly steps cut into the rock. These lead up to Shaffer Fishbowl Spring. This tiny desert waterhole, crucial for wild burros and bighorn sheep, is also home to a few goldfish. Not exactly what you expected to find in the Mojave Desert, is it? Now you know you're having a road trip. At the bottom of the hill, grab a cold drink and some old-fashioned candies at Cool Springs.

KINGMAN

Make your first stop in Kingman at the Kingman Visitor Center. Tour the Arizona Route 66 Museum and the intriguing Electric Vehicle Museum. Shop till you drop in our Route 66 store and then hit the town for dinner and drinks. You'll have plenty of options to choose from in Kingman's walkable and vibrant downtown.

Go retro with burgers and homemade root beer at colorful Mr. D's Route 66 Diner. Or try an artisan creation at Floyd & Co. Wood Fired Pizza. Cap off your evening with specialty craft brews at Ricketty Cricket and Black Bridge. The breweries have turned Kingman into a hotspot for beer lovers.

THE KICKER...

If you've got an extra day or two to spend on your journey, take advantage of all Kingman has to offer. More museums, more restaurants, and an excellent network of hiking trails carved from the desert foothills. If warm temperatures discourage desert hiking, just drive into the high ramparts of the Hualapai Mountains. Rising to an elevation of 8,000 feet and topped with shady forests of ponderosa pine, white fir, and aspen, they make a delicious oasis, just minutes from downtown Kingman.

DAY TWO

CAVERNS, CANYONS, AND MEMORABLE SMALL TOWNS

OPEN ROAD

Pull out of Kingman but you won't go far before you're tapping the brake. Stop for a photo with Giganticus Headicus. He's hard to miss—a 14-foot tall green tiki head is the stoic guardian of Route 66. Just a few miles beyond, pull into Hackberry General Store. Also hard to miss, the iconic spot is a treasure trove of memorabilia, overflowing with old cars, gas pumps and vintage signs.

Another worthwhile stop is Keepers of the Wild, a non-profit rescue sanctuary for abused, neglected, and abandoned exotic animals. Tigers, lions, leopards, monkeys, and more relax in spacious enclosures spread across boulder-strewn hillsides. Take a tour to see these beautiful creatures or just make a donation. And then ramble on down Route 66. A big part of this day is savoring the wide-open spaces of Arizona. Here the horizons are swept back wide. Open country is all around and an endless blue sky presses down from above. Roll your windows down and crank up the music. You're cruising on Route 66!

GRAND CANYON CAVERNS

Explore a vast hidden world when you tour Grand Canyon Caverns. It all starts with an elevator ride dropping 200 feet underground. When you emerge, you step out into the largest dry caverns in the United States with soaring chambers and walls twinkling with selenite crystals. But don't worry, dry caverns support no life so you'll encounter no bats or bugs just lighted paths that meander through this ancient cave network. The guided tours at Grand Canyon Caverns last 45 minutes.

SELIGMAN

Strings of Burma Shave signs provide roadside poetry as you motor into Seligman, the birthplace of Historic Route 66. This is where it all began; the preservation movement that saved a highway was spearheaded by the town barber, Angel Delgadillo. Don't be surprised to find tour busses lining the street. They come to pay homage to Angel, who holds court from his old barbershop, now Route 66 Gift Shop and Visitor Center.

Take your time exploring the small town that many consider the beating heart of Route 66. Grab a burger or ice cream at the Snow Cap Drive In, opened by the beloved Juan Delgadillo and still run by his family. And don't be surprised if you have a few laughs while you're there. Or try the hearty international fare at Westside Lilo's Cafe. Just don't leave without sampling their luscious carrot cake.

WILLIAMS

When the road climbs into the pine forest surrounding Williams, it all may seem familiar somehow. That's just because Williams exudes the kind of charm that reminds almost everyone of the town they grew up in, or at least dreamed about. Downtown bustles with shops, restaurants, and bars as music spills from every open door. Ride the Route 66 Zipline, and then head for Bearizona. This drive-thru wildlife park offers visitors a close encounter with animals, big and small, amid the ponderosa pines. Bus tours, keeper talks, and birds of prey shows make Bearizona an educational, as well as entertaining, experience.

THE KICKER...

Williams is also the gateway to a little gulley we like to call Grand Canyon. You're an hour away from the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. That's the very definition of can't miss. You can drive to the park on your own. Or better still, treat yourself to a historic train ride. Grand Canyon Railway departs from Williams each morning and returns by evening, following a three-hour layover at the South Rim where you can get your heart thoroughly squeezed by views that you have to see to believe.

DAY THREE

MUSICAL HISTORY, SMILING RABBITS, AND DINOSAURS

METEOR CRATER

It may just be a giant hole in the ground to some folks, but Meteor Crater is one of the most fascinating and scientifically significant sights on Route 66. It's the best-preserved impact crater on earth and has been studied for decades. When NASA planned their first moon landing, this is where they brought the astronauts to train, on Route 66. How cool is that?

WINSLOW

Don't miss La Posada Hotel, last of the great Santa Fe Railway hotels, and famed architect, Mary Colter's masterpiece of graceful design. The airy, romantic, hacienda-style building is filled with artistic flourishes. Walk the grounds, peruse the galleries, and then dine in the Turquoise Room, one of the finest restaurants on the Mother Road.

Afterwards, be part of musical history. Visiting Winslow and NOT standing on a corner is like going to the Grand Canyon without looking down. Just down the street from La Posada you'll see the most famous corner on all of Route 66. Standing on the Corner Park captures all the elements from the Eagles' hit song "Take it Easy." There's even a girl in a flatbed Ford. Folks travel from all over the world to stand on a corner in Winslow, Arizona. Such a fine sight to see. And if that song gets stuck in your head for the rest of the day, well, there are a lot worse tunes you could be humming. Go ahead and belt out a verse if you feel like it.

JACKRABBIT TRADING POST

This Route 66 classic has catered to generations of travelers. Signs for this Joseph City trading post once stretched across the country ending with a big bright yellow "Here It Is" billboard. After you've done your shopping inside, be sure to climb in the saddle of the giant jackrabbit out front for another great photo op. Notice the hint of a smile the rabbit seems to be wearing. He's the Mona Lisa of overgrown bunnies. Makes you wonder what secrets he knows.

HOLBROOK

With the teepees of the Wigwam Motel and giant dinosaur sculptures lining the street, Holbrook just feels like a Route 66 town. Visit the old courthouse that houses the visitor center. They've also got an excellent museum there that includes information on the Old West era. Back in the day, Holbrook was a wilder town than Tombstone and you can learn all about a famous gunfight that took place just a short walk from where you're standing.

PETRIFIED FOREST NATIONAL PARK

Make one final stop before you head for home. The rolling prairie suddenly breaks apart against a cluster of vivid badlands that define the Painted Desert, marking the northern edge of Petrified Forest National Park. Here trees that have turned to colorful stone—trees that once shaded dinosaurs—lie tumbled amid gnawed hills and hoodoos. Welcome to Triassic Park. The fossils of the plants and animals unearthed here tell the story of a time when the world was young. A scenic road travels north-to-south through the park offering viewpoints, historic sites, and a Route 66 memorial. Short hiking trails lead to large deposits of petrified wood, the Arizona state fossil.

FLAGSTAFF

Nestled at the base of the San Francisco Peaks, Arizona's highest mountains, Flagstaff is one of the most picturesque towns on all of Route 66. A thriving downtown is only enhanced by energy from the adjacent college campus. Try the Walk the Talk self-guided walking tour to learn about almost forgotten chapters of Route 66 history. When the tour takes you past Mother Road Brewery, don't try to resist. Enjoy a cold beverage on their patio. Then dive into Flagstaff's nightlife scene, which will entertain you throughout the evening.

Roger Naylor is an avid hiker, travel writer, and author of numerous books, including *Arizona Kicks on Route 66*.