

Get Your Kicks

Arizona Route 66



Will Rogers Highway, The Mother Road or America's Main Street.

Back when the journey mattered as much as the destination, Route 66 was the "ultimate road trip" through the American frontier. Arizona's stretch is one of the most beautiful along the entire route, providing photo opps, a wealth of history, and lots of Route 66 memorabilia.



Route 66 is one of the original highways in the U.S., established in 1926 and completely paved by 1938. It became one of America's most famous roads – a major route from Chicago to Santa Monica that stretched 2,448 miles. In the 1930s, many headed west on this route to escape the Dust Bowl, where drought and high winds caused thousands of families in the Great Plains to abandon their farms. During



World War II, war-related jobs sent people to California, and in the 1950s folks were headed west on vacations. The Arizona stretch of Route 66 was particularly popular because of destinations like the Painted Desert (p20), the Grand Canyon (p40) and Meteor Crater (p30). Towns along this popular route thrived after folks opened service stations, motels and restaurants to accommodate the travelers. In keeping with America's love of the car – the first drive-thru restaurant was opened and you could listen to the hit song “Get Your Kicks on Route 66” on your radio. Many road-side attractions sprung up along the route, including Wigwam Motels. Only three of the original seven survive today, with one in Holbrook (p28). Life was good, at least for a while.

Williams (p34 and p35)

As life moved faster and more people were traveling, the Interstate replaced more and more of the original route, despite protests and even lawsuits by many of the once-thriving, now-struggling towns it bypassed. In 1984, the now-complete I-40 skirted around Arizona's final stretch of Route 66 just north of Williams. With decertification of the highway the following year, US 66 was officially taken off the map. Most of the original road was either torn up or became part of the new Interstate system. Many states kept sections of the Route as state roads or off ramps, but today it's impossible to drive the whole route uninterrupted. In an effort to keep the history of this iconic road alive, the first

Route 66 associations were founded in Arizona in 1987 with others following shortly after. "Historic Route 66" signs are now up along most of the Route and some portions are on the National Register of Historic Places. I would highly recommend driving Arizona's section of Route 66 if you haven't already, since your parents or grandparents may have driven it, or at least wished they were that cool!

