

Epic Road Trip

USA 2026

15 days · 2 drivers · Chicago → Grand Canyon → Los Angeles → San Francisco →
Yellowstone → back to Chicago

[View Route](#)[Traveler's Checklist](#)



Trip Route: 15 Days Through the Heart of America

From the winds of the Great Lakes to the geysers of Yellowstone — your epic route covers the best of the USA.

15

Days on the Road

June 20 — July 4, 2026

~5000

Miles of Route

Chicago to Chicago, full loop

8

U.S. States

Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado, Arizona, California, Nevada, Montana,
Wyoming, South Dakota

3

National Parks

Grand Canyon, Sequoia, Yellowstone

General Road Trip Survival Tips

National Park Savings

America the Beautiful Pass — \$80

Buy it from a ranger at the Grand Canyon entrance. It covers two vehicles and is registered to your name using a passport or ID. It pays for itself by the third stop: Grand Canyon, Sequoia, Yellowstone.

Water & Snacks

Bring a large cooler, 2–3 big cases of bottled water, nuts, snacks, and energy drinks. Every morning, grab a bag of ice at a gas station for **\$3** and dump it in the cooler — you'll always have ice-cold water and fresh food on hand.

Portion Sizes

Portions at American diners are huge. Order one hot dish or salad to share between two people so you're not wasting money or food.

  **Fuel Hack:** Gas in California is 40–50% more expensive than in Arizona, Nevada, or Wyoming. Download the **GasBuddy** app to find the cheapest stations. Fill up your tank completely before crossing into California!



Step-by-Step Itinerary: Days 1–5

Day 1 — June 20: Chicago →
Omaha/Lincoln

10–12 hours of driving. Depart Chicago via I-80 West / I-76 West through Illinois and Iowa. The goal is to get as far west as possible. Stop at major highway rest stops like **Love's or Pilot** — they have the cleanest restrooms and a wide selection of fast food.

Day 3 — June 22: Pagosa Springs →
Tusayan (Grand Canyon)

~7–8 hours (390 miles through the mountain passes of Colorado and the deserts of Arizona). Hotel: [Holiday Inn Resort The Squire at Grand Canyon, 74 State Route 64, Tusayan](#). Don't waste time unpacking — head straight to dinner at *Squire Pub* or *Desert Lounge & Grill* (taking orders until 9:30–10:00 PM).

Day 5 — June 24: Grand Canyon → Los
Angeles (Route 66)

~9 hours with stops. Hotel: [Hilton Santa Monica Hotel & Suites, 1707 4th St.](#) 🛢️ Fill up your tank in **Kingman, Arizona** before crossing into California!

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Day 2 — June 21: Transit → Pagosa
Springs, Colorado

~7–9 hours. Hotel: [Quality Inn Pagosa Springs, 158 Hotsprings Boulevard](#). After two tough days on the road, be sure to hit the **hot springs** in the evening — the open-air hot mineral pools are the perfect way to recharge for the drivers.

Day 4 — June 23: Grand Canyon (Full Day)

🕒 **5:00 AM** — catch the sunrise at **Mather Point** (10 minutes from the hotel). Get around Hermit Road on the free Shuttle Bus. Hike 1 mile down **South Kaibab Trail** to **Ooh Aah Point**. In the evening — watch the sunset at **Desert View Watchtower** via the Eastern Entrance.



Tusayan Restaurants: Hours of Operation

Most full-service restaurants in the town of Tusayan (the gateway to Grand Canyon) close at 9:00 PM or 10:00 PM. To guarantee a proper sit-down dinner, you'll need to arrive in town and be seated **no later than 8:15–8:30 PM**.

Traditional Restaurants (until 9:00–10:00 PM)

- **Yippee-Ei-O Steakhouse** (steaks, American cuisine) — until **10:00 PM**
- **Plaza Bonita** (Mexican cuisine) — until **9:00 PM** (later on Saturdays)
- **The Foodie Club** (diner, burgers, pasta) — until **9:00 PM**
- **Wagon Wheel Saloon** (bar and dinner) — kitchen until **9:00 PM**, bar stays open later
- **Holiday Inn Squire Resort** — Squire Pub and Desert Lounge & Grill until **9:30–10:00 PM**



Fast Food & Late-Night Options (until 11:00 PM)

If you arrive late on the road or decide to stay in the park for sunset, after 10:00 PM your only options will be fast food chains:

- **McDonald's** (Drive-thru) — until **11:00 PM**. This is the latest option in town.
- **Wendy's** — typically until **10:00 PM**

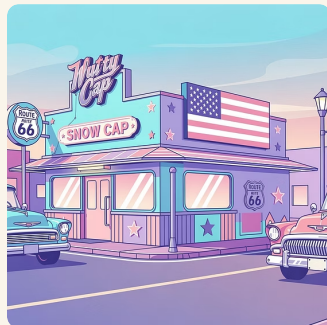


The most reliable option after a long day of driving — order takeout directly at your **Holiday Inn Squire** hotel, which has its own great pub and grill on-site.



Stops Along the Legendary Route 66

Exit I-40 onto the old highway and soak in the spirit of American classics!



Seligman, AZ

A real-life movie set and the inspiration for the animated film *Cars*. A must-stop at the legendary **Delgadillo's Snow Cap** diner (open since 1953). Order a burger and a classic milkshake in an atmosphere of pure retro madness.



Hackberry General Store, AZ

The most iconic vintage store-museum on Route 66. Rusty Cadillacs, old gas pumps, and classic signs — the perfect Instagram spot.



Kingman, AZ — Mr. D's Diner

An authentic neon diner straight out of the 1950s. Try the signature cheese fries and the exotic **Root Beer Float** — root beer with a scoop of ice cream.



Amboy, CA — Roy's Motel & Café

A giant neon sign standing in the middle of the scorched Mojave Desert. One of the most iconic cinematic locations on Route 66, perfect for dramatic photos.



Peggy Sue's 50's Diner, Yermo CA

On the way into LA. A large roadside diner featuring life-size figures of Elvis and Marilyn Monroe. Don't miss the classic American apple pie.



Cars (2006) — *watch before Day 5*. The film is entirely based on the small towns of Route 66. Radiator Springs is a blend of Seligman and Hackberry — the very places where you'll be eating.



Itinerary: Days 6–10 — Los Angeles & San Francisco

Day 6 — June 25 🎬 LA with a Guide

Griffith Observatory, Walk of Fame, Beverly Hills. 📷 Best view of the HOLLYWOOD sign — from **Lake Hollywood Park** (drive up by car). 🍔 For lunch — **In-N-Out Burger**, order "**Animal Style**" from the secret menu.

Day 7 — June 26 🎂 Birthday!

Stroll along Santa Monica Beach right by the hotel. Walk to the end of the pier and take a photo by the "**Route 66 - End of the Trail**" sign. 🅅 Park at **Santa Monica Public Parking Structures** (2nd and 4th streets) — first 90 minutes free!

Day 8 — June 27 🌊 Free Day in LA

Walk along **Venice Beach** by the ocean, then head over to **Venice Canals** — an incredibly quiet, upscale, and photogenic neighborhood with little footbridges. Check with your guide for additional spots!

Day 9 — June 28 🌲 Sequoia → Fresno

~4 hrs to the park + 3 hrs in the park + 1.5 hrs to Fresno. Must-see: **General Sherman Tree** (the largest tree on Earth) and **Tunnel Log** — drive your car right through a giant fallen sequoia! ⚠️ On the Generals Highway switchbacks, use engine braking (shift to "L" or "2").

Day 10 — June 29 🌉 San Francisco

~3 hrs from Fresno. 📷 **Battery Spencer** — the classic Golden Gate Bridge viewpoint. **Lombard Street** — the most crooked street in the world. 🦀 Dinner: **Clam Chowder in a Sourdough Bread Bowl** at Fog Harbor Fish House on Pier 39.



CRITICAL SAFETY — San Francisco: Abnormally high rate of car break-ins (thieves smash windows in under 3 seconds, even in broad daylight). The rule is ironclad: absolutely **nothing** should be left visible in the car — no jackets, no charging cables, no empty bags. Store all belongings in the trunk **before** you arrive at the parking spot. Park only in attended garages: **Pier 39 Garage** or **Fifth & Mission Garage**.



Itinerary: Days 11–15 — Yellowstone & the Final Push

Day 11 — June 30: Vacaville → Elko
(Nevada)

~7–8 hours. Hotel: [Fairfield Inn By Marriott Vacaville, 370 Orange Drive, Vacaville](#) (breakfast included). A dull stretch — good for resting and monotonous driving. Swap drivers every 2 hours. Gas prices in Nevada will pleasantly drop again after California.

Day 13 — July 2: Yellowstone → Cody
(Wyoming)

4–5 hours of scenic driving through the park with stops. 📷 **Grand Prismatic Spring** — drive to the **Fairy Falls Parking Lot** and walk 0.6 miles to the **Grand Prismatic Overlook** for the perfect panoramic shot. 🤠 At 8:00 PM — **Cody Nite Rodeo** (arrive 40 minutes early — seating in the general zone is first come, first served). Dinner at **The Irma Hotel** (est. 1902) — Prime Rib or bison steak. Hotel: [AmericInn by Wyndham Cody, 508 Yellowstone Avenue](#) (breakfast included).

Day 15 — July 4: Murdo → Chicago 🇺🇸
Final Push!

~12 hours accounting for holiday traffic. ⚠️ **July 4th — Independence Day:** Expect massive traffic jams on the approaches to Chicago in the evening — everyone is heading out for fireworks. Leave Murdo **no later than 6:00 AM!** 🕒 You'll be crossing a time zone boundary: Mountain Time → Central Time (you lose 1 hour — your phone will update automatically).

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Day 12 — July 1: Elko → West Yellowstone
(Montana)

~6.5–7 hours. Hotel: [Holiday Inn West Yellowstone, 315 Yellowstone Avenue](#) (breakfast included). 🌋 Evening pro tip: head straight into the park right after check-in. There are far fewer tourists near **Old Faithful** in the evening, and an eruption against the evening sky looks incredibly atmospheric.

Day 14 — July 3: Cody → Murdo (South
Dakota)

~8.5 hours across the prairies of Wyoming and South Dakota. The route passes near **Devils Tower** and **Mount Rushmore** (the faces of four presidents). If you have the energy, make a quick detour for photos.



Road Checklist: USA Road Trip 2026

 INTERACTIVE CHECKLIST

What to Pack for the Road

- ☐ National park pass (America the Beautiful Pass — purchase at the first entrance)
- ☐ Driver's licenses for both drivers and work permits, all TPS status documents (even pending ones)
- ☐ Powerbank with fast charging support and car cables Type-C / Lightning
- ☐ Offline Google Maps (download zones: Arizona desert, Sequoia, and Yellowstone)
- ☐ Sunscreen SPF 50+ and lip balm (the sun in the Mojave and Arizona deserts burns instantly)
- ☐ Comfortable hiking shoes with good traction (for Grand Canyon, Sequoia, and Yellowstone)
- ☐ Thermo cooler and a sun shade for the windshield
- ☐ Warm fleece / jacket (in Pagosa Springs, at sunrise in the Grand Canyon, and in Yellowstone it will be cold in the morning)



Budget & Daily Expenses

- ☐ Gas (\$ per gallon): _____
 - ☐ Accommodations (hotels): _____
 - ☐ Food, diners, and restaurants: _____
 - ☐ Parking, souvenirs: _____
 - ☐ Unexpected expenses: _____
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Apps to Download

- ☐ GasBuddy — find the cheapest gas stations
- ☐ Google Maps offline maps downloaded
- ☐ America the Beautiful Pass activated



Insta-Spots Checklist: Best Shots of the Route

Check off each spot after you've nailed the perfect shot!



Grand Canyon

- ☐ **Desert View Watchtower** — panoramic view of the Grand Canyon at sunset
 - ☐ **Mather Point** — first rays of sunlight at dawn (5:00 AM)
 - ☐ **Ooh Aah Point** — photo on the edge of the cliff inside the canyon
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Route 66

- ☐ **Hackberry General Store** — retro neon signs and Cadillacs
 - ☐ **Roy's Motel & Café (Amboy)** — neon sign in the Mojave Desert
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Los Angeles

- ☐ **Lake Hollywood Park** — perfect view of the HOLLYWOOD sign
 - ☐ **Santa Monica Pier** — "Route 66 - End of the Trail" sign at sunset
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Sequoia

- ☐ **Tunnel Log** — car driving through a giant sequoia
 - ☐ **General Sherman Tree** — the largest tree on the planet
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San Francisco

- ☐ **Battery Spencer** — Golden Gate Bridge with SF skyline in the background
 - ☐ **Lombard Street** — the most crooked street in the world
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Yellowstone & Wyoming

- ☐ **Grand Prismatic Overlook** — the colorful "eye of the Earth"
 - ☐ **Old Faithful** — geyser eruption against the evening sky
 - ☐ **Cody Nite Rodeo** — cowboys on wild bulls in action
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My Personal Impressions (fill out after the trip)

- ☐ Best place of the trip: _____
- ☐ Most delicious food / diner: _____
- ☐ Most stressful or unexpected moment: _____
- ☐ Place I 100% want to come back to: _____

Movies to Download: Films About the Places on Your Route

Watch these films before or during your trip to deeply feel the spirit of each place!



Route 66 and the Spirit of Freedom

- **Cars (2006)** — watch before Day 5. The animated film is entirely modeled after Route 66 towns. Radiator Springs is a mix of Seligman and Hackberry.
- **The Grapes of Wrath (1940)** — a farming family during the Great Depression travels Route 66 to California. This is the historical foundation of the very road you'll be driving on Day 5.



Los Angeles

- **La La Land (2016)** — watch while in LA. Iconic scenes were filmed at Griffith Observatory and the Santa Monica Pier, where you'll be walking.
- **Once Upon a Time in Hollywood (2019)** — Tarantino perfectly captures the atmosphere of Los Angeles.



San Francisco

- **The Rock (1996)** — watch before SF. A cult action film set on Alcatraz Island and the city streets.
- **Rise of the Planet of the Apes (2011)** — the final scenes take place on the Golden Gate Bridge.



Wyoming, Yellowstone, and the Wild West

- **Yellowstone (TV series)** — watch before Wyoming and Cody. A modern western starring Kevin Costner.
- **Dances with Wolves (1990)** — an epic drama about the prairies of South Dakota and Wyoming.
- **The Revenant (2015)** — a brutal and beautiful survival story set in America's wild frontier.
- **True Grit (2010)** — an atmospheric western by the Coen Brothers.

The Civil War and the Abolition of Slavery

- **Lincoln (2012)** — Spielberg's portrait of the 16th president and the fight to abolish slavery.
- **12 Years a Slave (2013)** — a powerful film based on a real memoir.

The Making of a Nation and the 20th Century

- **There Will Be Blood (2007)** — the rise of the oil industry in California.
- **Oppenheimer (2023)** — set in the New Mexico desert, which borders your route.
- **Green Book (2018)** — a road trip film about classic American cars and roadside motels.
- **Forrest Gump (1994)** — the ultimate film about American history. Forrest ran those same roads out West!

🎵 Atmospheric Playlist: Download on Apple Music / Spotify

The right music turns a road trip into a movie. Here's your soundtrack to an epic road trip!

📻 Route 66 Classics & the Spirit of Freedom

- *Nat King Cole* — Route 66
- *Chuck Berry* — Route 66
- *Steppenwolf* — Born To Be Wild (perfect for the desert roads of Nevada and Arizona)
- *Lynyrd Skynyrd* — Sweet Home Alabama
- *Eagles* — Hotel California / Take It Easy
- *Creedence Clearwater Revival* — Have You Ever Seen The Rain

🌴 Los Angeles & California

- *The Mamas & The Papas* — California Dreamin'
- *The Beach Boys* — Surfin' USA / California Girls
- *Red Hot Chili Peppers* — Californication / Dani California
- *Lana Del Rey* — West Coast / High By The Beach
- *Phantom Planet* — California

🌉 San Francisco

- *Scott McKenzie* — San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)
- *Tony Bennett* — I Left My Heart in San Francisco

🤠 The Wild West, Wyoming & the Prairies

- *Johnny Cash* — I Walk the Line / Ghost Riders in the Sky
- *Chris Stapleton* — Tennessee Whiskey
- *Zach Bryan* — Something in the Orange (a modern country hit for evenings in Wyoming)
- *Bon Jovi* — Wanted Dead Or Alive

🇺🇸 "Get your kicks on Route 66!" — Nat King Cole, 1946. This song played on the radio in every car that drove this road 80 years ago. Now it will play in yours.

Favor Travel Tours & Tickets wishes you incredible adventures on your journey and unforgettable memories for years to come — so you can look back and say, "Hey, remember Route 66 and the rodeo?"

Thank you for choosing us to be a part of your memories!