

Road trippin'

Navigate the twists and turns of a stretch of Route 66 in Arizona as the iconic highway has a second coming.

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JULY, 2025

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Qantas, National

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Story by ANDREA BLACK

Mel Curtis

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Navigate the twists and turns of a variety of roads and the adventures on the way. Experience the thrill of a road trip.

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It’s a crowded Sunday night at Mother Road Brewing Company in Flagstaff, Arizona, an evening pitstop on one of the United States’ most celebrated roads. Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers’ *I Won’t Back Down* is playing in the background and I’m sipping a Sunday Drive lager, eating blackened catfish tacos and listening to stories of transformation. “Route 66 is always reinventing itself,” says brewery owner and long-time local Michael Marquess, eyeing his green 1930 Ford Model A parked outside. He opened Mother Road (motherroadbeer.com) in an empty steam laundry building in 2011 and named it after the moniker John Steinbeck used for Route 66 in his timeless novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. “There were a lot of businesses that were abandoned so we kind of took a chance on it.”

This is a story often told on the “Main Street of America”, a highway that winds more than 3900 kilometres from Chicago to Santa Monica Pier in Los Angeles. Celebrating its centenary next year, Route 66 has long been a metaphor for the pursuit of new possibilities, since the days when families travelled from the Great Plains states to California looking for work. Although officially decommissioned in 1985 and bypassed in these parts by the faster (but blander) Interstate 40, it’s a tale that continues and one I’m keen to explore, motoring through part of the Arizona section of Route 66, ribboning my way 330 kilometres from Winslow to Kingman with detours along the way.

I have plenty to choose from when making the playlist for my road trip, starting with Chuck Berry’s version of (*Get Your Kicks On) Route 66*, *Willin’* by Little Feat and the Eagles’ *Take It Easy*. In Winslow, there’s a monument called Standin’ On the Corner, inspired by the lyric from this Eagles’ anthem (it references the town), with surrounding gift stores playing the band’s music on loop. “You do know the dirty little secret?” Marquess whispers when talking about Winslow, 93 kilometres east of Flagstaff. “That song was actually written in Flagstaff [by Jackson Browne and Glenn Frey] over by the Wienerschnitzel,” a hot dog stand that’s still there but is now called Route 66 Dog Haus.

While dilapidated ghost towns are dotted along the Mother Road, their neon signs dimmed, others are thriving. In Flagstaff, I bunk down at one of the two newly rejuvenated motels on the main drag, the High Country Motor Lodge (qantas.com/hotels/highcountrymotorlodgeflagstaff), which offers wilderness-inspired lodges and rooms with a modern-rustic palette, crisp white linen and a cassette player with mixed tapes. As well as the town’s eight breweries, there are delicious house-cured sandwiches at Proper Meats + Provisions (propermeats.com) and a wide range of books at Bright Side



Mother Road Brewing Company, Flagstaff



Williams



High Country Motor Lodge, Flagstaff

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Navigate the twists and turns of a variety of roads and destinations in New South Wales. Right here, take a scenic journey.

Photo by [unreadable]

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Route 66 Dog Haus, Flagstaff



Miss Kitty's, Trailborn Grand Canyon hotel, Williams



Bedrock City

(brightsidebookshop.com) around the corner. Up the hill, the Lowell Observatory (where dwarf planet Pluto was first spotted in 1930) has the newly opened Astronomy Discovery Center (lowell.edu) with live presentations delving into the mysteries of the cosmos six nights a week.

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It's late winter and there's ice on this two-lane section of highway, melting as the hat of fog lifts and reveals blue skies above. Entering the town of Williams, the spruce and sagebrush make way for Mid-century road signs in a kaleidoscope of colours and shapes, all vying for the attention of the weary traveller. Williams has a cacophony of nostalgic gift stores and diners with beat-up Chevies parked out front. Most of the motels are weatherworn, save for the recently renovated Trailborn Grand Canyon (trailborn.com), which has classic Old West landscapes and retro prints in the rooms, along with Grown Alchemist bathroom amenities. The onsite Southwestern steakhouse, Miss Kitty's, serves generous helpings of hush puppies and your choice of cut cooked to order.

They're expecting a big summer season ahead at this new local, where outdoor endeavours centre around the pool and spa area (with space to play cornhole and bocce) and the adjacent Camp Hall holds Wild West Bingo nights. I'm one of its first guests and come nightfall, I venture to the outdoor firepit to toast up my marshmallow s'mores kit, available from the front desk. Willie Nelson's warm storytelling pipes over the outdoor speakers and it seems the right comforting soundtrack for biting into these gooey biscuity delights and gazing at constellations in the clear night sky.

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On the road again among forests of ponderosa pine, it takes just an hour to arrive at the Grand Canyon's South Rim entrance. I park and jump on the shuttle bus that heads towards Hermits Rest on the Canyon Rim Trail. Reaching the lookout at Pima Point, it takes a moment for my eyes to adjust and take in the view – a patchwork of red, chocolate and orange sedimentary rock escarpments and plateau gilded with gold as the sunlight hits. Up above, condors soar and down in forested gorges, desert bighorn sheep flex their hooves to bound up the steep terrain. On a quiet day like this, you can hear the roar of the Colorado River rapids echoing up the canyon.

It's not just the natural splendour in these parts; there's also pleasure in the built environment, sometimes unexpected. Rising from the desert along a stretch of barren highway

Andrea Black. Grant Faint. Christian Harder

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100



South Rim, Grand Canyon



Seligman

connecting the South Rim of the Grand Canyon to Williams, a giant Fred Flintstone sign beckons drivers into Bedrock City with a “Yabba-Dabba-Doo” ([raptor-ranch.com](#)). I wander through this Stone Age theme park dotted with caveman buildings copied from the 1960s cartoon, their primary colours popping against the dry landscape, before slipping down the Dino dinosaur slide.

Further west, 98-year-old former barber Angel Delgadillo is on his daily constitutional in the town of Seligman and stops by his family’s store, Angel & Vilma’s Original Route 66 Gift Shop ([route66giftshop.com](#)). Delgadillo was the first in 1987 to campaign for “Historic Route 66” signage on the former US highway in a bid to revive the town, which today has numerous Mid-century pop culture photo opportunities, mostly of motoring memorabilia, and a killer carrot cake at Westside Lilo’s Cafe ([westsideliloscafe.com](#)). It worked and soon other locations followed, with the remaining seven states along Route 66 forming associations. Largely because of Delgadillo’s efforts, Seligman is known today as the “birthplace of Route 66”.

“Business is getting better by the day and the legacy of the road will live on,” he says, not long after a bus stops out the front of his shop and a group of European tourists are given a warm welcome. “Cities and towns all along historic Route 66 are planning celebrations for the centennial and people will come from all over the world to celebrate.”

In Arizona, there’ll be car rallies and a fun run on the longest remaining stretch of the original highway, from Seligman to Kingman then Topock. For Delgadillo, “Route 66 will always represent what’s good in America – mom and pop businesses and travellers being treated like family.”

Andrea Black, Mitch Diamond, Craig Hastings