

Route 66 National Scenic Byway

Click to view Area attractions and map in new window.

For people across the U.S. and around the world, Historic Route 66 embodies the American spirit, conjuring thoughts of freedom, adventure, opportunity, and the open road. From Illinois to Arizona, travelers on the “Mother Road” can rediscover the subtle grandeur of this iconic stretch of highway, formed in 1926. In this case, the journey truly can be the destination. The route enters New Mexico from Texas near I-40, across a vast sunlit prairie. As it crosses the state, it winds back and forth—and under—today’s interstate in a curlicue ribbon of time, before exiting to Arizona just west of Gallup. If you want to follow the entire remaining road, get a Route 66 map to help you maneuver it. You can see quite a bit though just following I-40 and getting off in the towns mentioned below. Through 1937, the road meandered west of Santa Rosa through small villages in the Sangre de Cristo foothills up to Santa Fe and its plaza. The route then turned south and descended what was treacherous La Bajada hill in a series of hairpin, hair-raising turns that led to Albuquerque. Later the road was re-routed and straightened, skipping Santa Fe. Instead, it headed through Moriarty and Tijeras Canyon before arriving in the state’s most populous city, and then shooting westward into the sunset.

Tucumcari

Tucumcari Mountain is the first harbinger of the high country as it rises from the plains southwest of its namesake town. Delightful 1950s-era motels, curio shops, and diners (one in the shape of a sombrero) line the main drag through town, often beckoning with vintage neon signs. www.tucumcarinm.com

Santa Rosa

Straddling the Pecos River, the town of Santa Rosa offers a glimpse of the Mother Road’s glory days in friendly cafes and other establishments from that bygone era. The local airport tarmac covers some of the original Route 66, but boulders emblazoned with advertising remind travelers of the road’s heyday, when marketing was as simple as buying a can of paint and a brush. www.santarosanm.org

Albuquerque area

You hit the mother lode of the Mother Road along Central Avenue with some remarkable buildings and neon from the Route 66 heyday. The Kimo Theater on Central between 4th and 5th Streets may be the single most striking architectural creation along the entire byway, a Pueblo Deco fantasy, built in 1927 as a vaudeville theater. It remains a venue for arts performances and other activities today. You can explore the route in four directions:

- Head east and go past Nob Hill toward Tijeras.
- Head north through Bernalillo and Algodones.
- Go west and meet up again with I-40 near Rio Puerco, where you continue on I-40 to where it meets up again with Route 66 at the Cibola County line.
- Head south through Isleta Pueblo and back up to join post-1938* Route 66 near Correo.

www.itsatrip.org

Grants

The uranium boomtown of Grants offers a classic assortment of neon, motor courts, cafes and theaters, and a charming park between the main street and the railroad tracks. Heading out of town westward between crimson sandstone cliffs, trading posts and quirky curio shops begin to dot the sides of the highway. www.grants.org

Gallup

Gallup's main street has a collection of neon signs and period cafes and motels to rival Tucumcari. Its El Rancho Hotel was a legendary movie star hang-out beginning in the 1930s. The "Gateway to Indian Country," the city is bordered to the north by the vast Navajo Reservation, and by Zuni Pueblo to the south. If you can plan your trip for mid-August, the city hosts the remarkable Inter-Tribal Ceremonial, a combination powwow, rodeo, parade, pageant, and celebration. www.gallupnm.org