

The Triangle Tour

THREE OF OUR NATION'S MOST HISTORIC HIGHWAYS

Many years ago, before the creation of the modern interstate highway system by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, travelers drove a nationwide series of named and numbered roads and highways.

The quickest way to traverse the vast expanses of America was on the major roadways of the day. These were the days of long "road trip" vacations taken by Americans in the 1940s, '50s and '60s. Vacationers, however, weren't the only ones plying these roads and highways. Salesmen, truck drivers, repairmen, builders and farmers were driving these major roads every day to deliver goods and services to American families and businesses.

Three of our nation's most famous highways are located in or near the Chicago Southland. The Lincoln Highway, Dixie Highway, and Route 66 all have a close relationship to Chicago and can be accessed in one day from the Chicago Southland. Each is unique in its history, route, and reason for being.

The **"Triangle Tour"** enables visitors to Chicago or the Chicago Southland the ability to access any one or all of these three historic highways in one day. For a more in-depth look at attractions and diversions along these historic routes, accommodations are available for overnight travelers or historians.

Let's begin with some history. The **Lincoln Highway** is America's first transcontinental paved roadway. Developed in 1913 by Carl G. Fisher, the Lincoln Highway was conceived to transport people and goods swiftly from one end of the country to the other – east to west – as quickly as possible. Running from Times Square in New York to Lincoln Park in San Francisco, the Lincoln Highway passes through ten states, and is named in honor of our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln, Illinois' most recognizable citizen.

Fisher, founder of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and developer of Miami Beach, also developed the **Dixie Highway** in 1914/15. The Dixie Highway runs north to south from Sault Saint Marie, Michigan (East Route) and Chicago (West Route) to Miami Beach, Florida. Built after the Lincoln Highway, Fisher's motive for creating the Dixie Highway was strictly financial: he wanted to bring Northerners south to buy land in Miami Beach!

The "Crossroads of the Nation," located in the Southland community of Chicago Heights, is where the Lincoln and Dixie Highways intersect. The **Arche Fountain** (circa 1914), located on the southwest corner of the intersection, was a former wayside for weary travelers and has been faithfully restored to its original condition. Looking northeast on the opposite corner, you'll see a new bronze statue, **"Lincoln on the Road to Greatness."**



The Lincoln and Dixie Highways are both precursors to **Route 66**, conceived in 1926. Also known as the "The Mother Road," Route 66 is perhaps the most famous of any American road. However, some Lincoln and Dixie Highway boosters consider their favorite roads the "Grandpa" and "Grandma" of all American Highways! But Route 66, which "winds from Chicago to L.A.," still reigns as America's most popular historic road, as evidenced by the many songs, movies and TV shows that have extolled the virtues of driving this historic route.

Travelers can begin the Triangle Tour on any of the three roadways, but it's best to travel "clockwise" from your starting point. On the Lincoln Highway, that would be east to west; on Route 66, southwest to northeast, and on the Dixie Highway north to south.

Let's begin the Triangle Tour in the picturesque Southland village of Homewood. Starting at Dixie Highway and Ridge Road, travel south about a block to Independence Park, where a commemorative plaque noting Dixie Highway's place in history is located. Continue following the Dixie Highway signs by driving south through Homewood and Flossmoor and into Chicago Heights. Here Dixie Highway merges with Halsted Street (IL Route 1). Travel south two blocks after the merge and you'll come to the **Crossroads of the Nation** (mentioned above), where the Dixie Highway and Lincoln Highway meet. The Arche Fountain is on the southwest corner, and the "Lincoln on the Road to Greatness" statue is on the northwest corner. Parking is available in the Chicago Heights Public Library lot at the intersection's southwest corner for a closer look at these two artifacts.

We'll be back for more of the Dixie Highway after we visit the Lincoln Highway and Route 66!

Next, turn right onto US 30 (Lincoln Highway) and begin traveling west. On the north side of the road are some Chicago Heights largest homes, many of which were built around the time of the Lincoln Highway's construction in the period of 1910 - 1920. Proceeding west on the Lincoln Highway, we enter the Village of Park Forest, the nation's first planned community. The Park Forest House Museum (397 Forest Blvd., 708-748-3731, by appointment) offers visitors a glimpse back into the late 1940s and early '50s when Park Forest welcomed thousands of World War II vets and their growing families. Olympia Fields is just across the Lincoln Highway, and played host to the 1928 and 2003 U.S. Open Golf Championships and many other famous golf events.





MSP

Try your luck at a Joliet Casino while driving the Triangle Tour.

Matteson, Illinois, is the next community west along the Lincoln Highway. Originally settled by German immigrants, Matteson was a prosperous farming community along the Illinois Central Railroad and remains a retail center today. The underpass at Governors and Lincoln Highway is the site of the original Illinois Central alignment, which is still in use today by Metra, the regional commuter rail system.

Matteson is home of **Lincoln Mall** (Lincoln Highway and Cicero Ave., 708-747-5600, www.lincoln-mall.com), a major regional shopping center with a variety of stores, and the Matteson Historical Museum (813 School Ave., 708-748-3033, www.vil.matteson.il.us/Museum/museum.htm).

Crossing over Interstate 57, travel west on Lincoln Highway out of Matteson and you'll see some of the little remaining farmland in Cook County. After about five miles you will enter the Village of Frankfort, settled by immigrant German farmers in 1855, and the highest point between Chicago and the Mississippi River.

Take a left turn (south) onto LaGrange Road (U.S. 45), and take LaGrange about two blocks south to the left turn lane onto **Old Frankfort Way**. This street runs into White Street, where you'll make a left turn (south) and drive about five blocks into historic downtown Frankfort. In downtown Frankfort is the Old Plank



The Arche Fountain in Chicago Heights

Road Trail, a 21-mile "rails to trails" conversion that runs from Park Forest to Joliet (<http://oprt.org/index.html>).

Downtown Frankfort's architecture is mainly from the mid- to late-1800s, as you'll see when you stroll through the quaint streets and visit the many fine antique and specialty shops in this lovely community. **The Trolley Barn** and **Breidert's Green** are two interesting locations in Frankfort.

Built in 1885, the Trolley Barn once housed trolleys on the old Joliet and Northern Indiana Trolley Line. Numerous other rail lines passed through Frankfort, which was known at that time as a "stop on your way West." Now, the Trolley Barn houses numerous antique dealers and specialty shops, plus a butcher and coffee shop, making it a one-stop location for your shopping pleasure.

Breidert's Green is just across the street, near the old train station along the Old Plank Road Trail. Now the train station is used as the stage for summer concerts, and the green is a busy rest stop for walkers, skaters and cyclists.

Frankfort has a variety of restaurants within walking distance of the antique shops, including: Courtyard Bistro (21 S. White St., 815-464-1404), Francesca's Fortunato (40 Kansas Street, 815-464-1890, www.miafrancesca.com), and Kansas Street Grill (20 Kansas Street, 815-469-9670). For a special afternoon respite, take in High Tea at **The Pickwick Society Tea Room** (21 S. White Street, 815-806-8140).

After exploring Frankfort, retrace your route back to Lincoln Highway and continue west. Aurelio's Pizza (310 W. Lincoln Highway, 815-469-2196), offers family dining and true Chicago-style pizza, and Continental House of Pancakes (10211 W. Lincoln Hwy., 815-464-0301) serves excellent breakfast and lunch. About a half mile on, you'll pass the **Abe Lincoln Motel** (10841 W. Lincoln Highway, 815-469-5114), a fine example of 1950s motel architecture which is still family-run. Also, on the north side of the road, you can see remnants of the original Lincoln Highway pavement next to the new bicycle trail.



The Grainery in Frankfort

Traveling further west along the Lincoln Highway, Lincoln-Way East High School offers a fine example of an old Lincoln Highway marker right at the school's front door. Continuing west, you'll travel through New Lenox, Illinois, along the banks of Hickory Creek and the Rock Island Metra Line. Soon after crossing under Interstate 80 – the road that replaced the Old Lincoln Highway – you'll travel about two miles to another viaduct, and after passing underneath, take a quick right on Highland Park Drive and bear to your right, driving into **Pilcher Park**, along the banks of Hickory Creek. This is the perfect place for a rest or picnic lunch, and a wonderful place for bird watching and relaxation in the beautiful surroundings.

Moving on, exit Pilcher Park by taking a right on U.S. 30, and continue along the Lincoln Highway past Mt. Olivet Cemetery into the bustling City of Joliet. Taking a right onto Scott Street (Illinois 53), we are now on old **Route 66, The Mother Road**.

Downtown Joliet offers numerous attractions and restaurants for travelers. The Rialto Square Theatre (102 N. Chicago St., 815-726-7171, rialtosquare.com) is an ornate, historic theatre built in 1926 as a vaudevilian movie palace. Just to the west is Silver Cross Field, home of the Northern League (independent) Joliet Jackhammers Baseball Team (One Mayor Art Schultz Drive, 815-726-BALL, jackhammerbaseball.com).



Learn about Joliet's history as an industrial powerhouse and transportation center at the Joliet Area Historical Museum (204 Ottawa St., 815-723-5201, jolietmuseum.org). The museum also features exhibits on Lincoln Highway and Route 66, so it's a perfect stop for our historic roads tour!

Feeling lucky? Harrah's Joliet Casino is right on the Des Plaines River at 151 N. Joliet Street (815-740-7800, harrahs.com).

After exploring downtown Joliet, get back on to Route 66 by finding northbound Scott Street (Route 53). Driving about six blocks north to Columbia Street, where Route 66 jogs to the left and under a train viaduct. But before this turn, to the right, is the old **Joliet Iron Works Historic Site**, now on the National Register of Historic Places and a great stop on our Triangle Tour. Call the Forest Preserve District of Will County at 815-727-8700 or go to fpdwc.org/ironworks.cfm to learn more about the Joliet Iron Works.

This site is also intersected by the **Illinois and Michigan Canal Trail**, a path that follows this historic canal route.

Crossing over the Des Plaines River, take a right and continue following Route 66 (IL-53) north. The Broadway Greenway offers rest stops and views of the Des Plaines River Valley. Children will enjoy **Haunted Trails** (1423 North Broadway [Rt. 53], 815-722-7800), featuring mini-golf, arcade games, lazer tag, and go-karts, plus food and refreshments.

Stateville Correctional Center (at Rt. 53 and Stateville Rd.) contains an historic panopticon cell house, or "round house," one of the only structures of its kind still in operation in the United States. Just north of Stateville is Lewis University, a Catholic university offering undergraduate and graduate programs, plus an airport and aeronautical course offerings.

Continuing north on Old Route 66, take a right onto Romeo Road (135th Street), and drive about a mile east to the **Isle A La Cache Museum**, part of the Forest Preserve District of Will County and a wonderful place to learn about the explorers, fur trappers, traders, and Native Americans in the Des Plaines River Valley.

Be careful to stay on Route 66 along the upcoming stretch of road as you continue northeasterly toward Chicago. You'll see a left-handed turnoff for Route 53, but don't make that turn! Stay on Joliet Road right through the

intersection, following the Route 66 signs. **White Fence Farm** is a famous dinner location suitable for the entire family. The restaurant has been open continuously since the 1920s, and has some of the best fried chicken in Chicagoland. White Fence Farm offers a petting zoo, musical entertainment and themed shows, a classic auto museum, and car shows during the summer months. Be sure to have your dinner in the Route 66 Room, one of ten dining rooms in this popular restaurant, located at 11700 Joliet Road, 630-739-1720. Open for dinner only Tuesday through Saturday, and at 12:00 noon on Sundays.



After visiting White Fence Farm, just a bit north of 107th Street, the road makes a gradual curve and intersects with Interstate 55. Get on to I-55 (be careful merging into traffic) and continue in a northeasterly direction about 8 miles to the Joliet Road exit (Exit 276C). "Historical Route 66" signs will mark this route.

At the intersection of Joliet and Wolf Roads, there are two great restaurants to stop for lunch or dinner, the Wolf's Head Inn (6937 Joliet Rd., 708-246-0400) and The Dome Family Restaurant (6921 Joliet Road, 708-246-3436) are both good dining choices along old Route 66. A little further to the northeast at Joliet Road and Brainard Ave., The Flame Restaurant (803 Joliet Rd., 708-352-3442, theflame.com) offers elegant dining and a great wine list, and has been popular throughout Chicago for its famous steaks and seafood. Continuing northeast, we cross LaGrange Road (Route 45) and to our right is The Quarry Shopping Center. Here you will find numerous retailers and fast food establishments.

About a half-mile east of LaGrange Road, you must detour around the McCook Quarry. Take Joliet Road/East Avenue north to 55th Street, then turn right (east) on 55th Street. After about a mile, take a left onto Joliet Road again. Traveling north on Joliet Rd. about a half-mile, you'll see J.C.'s Pub (8650 Joliet Rd., 708-387-0030), offering fine Italian selections for lunch and dinner.

Continue driving along Joliet Road through some industrial areas and over the DesPlaines River. After passing through the woods, you will come to Harlem Avenue (Route 43). Take a left onto Harlem Avenue, then go north about three blocks to Ogden Avenue (Illinois 34), making a right onto Ogden.



Haunted Trails



Buckingham Fountain

Driving along Ogden Avenue, you'll see many references to Route 66, and some of Chicago's industrial areas. After a few miles, as you near downtown Chicago at Harrison Street, look to the east and you will see **Cook County Hospital**, where many scenes from the Harrison Ford and Tommy Lee Jones film "The Fugitive" were filmed, and the television drama "ER" is set. To the north you will see the United Center, home of the Chicago Bulls and Blackhawks.

Continue to drive northeast on Route 66 (Ogden Avenue) to Jackson Boulevard. Turn right on Jackson, and proceed into downtown Chicago. Along Jackson, you will pass the Chicago Police Academy (1300 W. Jackson Blvd.), Fannie May Candies (1137 W. Jackson Blvd., 312-243-2700, fanniemay.com), Bay's English Muffins (1026 W. Jackson Blvd., 312-346-5757, bays.com), and Chicago's Greektown at Jackson and Halsted.



Greektown is a great place to stop for lunch or dinner, with a huge variety of splendid Greek restaurants for your dining enjoyment. Park your car and walk several blocks along Halsted Street to experience Greektown firsthand, with Greek bakeries, shops, restaurants and Greek tavernas welcoming visitors from around the world.

Continuing eastward along Jackson Street, you will pass the famous Lou Mitchell's Restaurant, a Chicago classic since 1923, serving breakfast and lunch (565 W. Jackson Blvd., 312-939-3111). The next block east is **Union Station**, Chicago's main train station serving daily commuters and Amtrak passengers, and just across the bridge over the Chicago River, the Sears Tower dominates the skyline. For a great view of Chicago

and surrounding states, make a stop at the **Sears Tower Skydeck** (233 S. Wacker Dr., 312-875-9696, the-skydeck.com), located 1,353 feet above Wacker Drive on the 103rd floor of the Sears Tower.

Driving east on Jackson Street, amid the buildings between Clark Street and Dearborn Street on the north side of Jackson is a monumental sculpture by Alexander Calder entitled, "**The Flamingo**." This 54-foot high, reddish-pink sculpture sits in Chicago's Federal Center Plaza.

Motoring east past State Street "that great street," to Michigan Avenue at Jackson Blvd., we come to the beginning of the Dixie Highway in the Chicago metro area. Turn right (south) onto Michigan Avenue and you'll notice the **Art Institute of Chicago** (111 S. Michigan Ave., 312-443-3600, art.edu/aic), a must-see during our Triangle Tour.

The collection of the Art Institute of Chicago contains many of the most famous paintings in the world, including works by Edward Hopper "Nighthawks," Mary Cassatt "The Child's Bath," a huge collection of Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings, Grant Woods "American Gothic," and Frederic Remington's sculpture "The Bronco Buster" among many others. European masterpieces includes Gustave Caillebotte's "Paris Street, Rainy Day," van Gogh's "Self-Portrait," plus masterpieces by Chagall, Dali, Gauguin, Klee, Man Ray, Matisse, Monet, Picasso, Rembrandt, and Toulouse-Lautrec.

After visiting the Art Institute, head south just two short blocks to Congress Parkway and to your left into Grant Park for the magnificent **Buckingham Fountain**, built in 1927. According to the Chicago Park District website, "Edward H. Bennett designed the fountain to represent Lake Michigan with four sea horses, built by Marcel Loyau, to symbolize the four states that touch the lake: Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. Bennett attributed the design specifically to the influence of the Latona Basin in Louis XIV's gardens at Versailles."

Moving on south along Michigan Avenue, you will see the hulking behemoth of **Soldier Field**, home of the Chicago Bears, to your left in the distance. The Dixie Highway is not marked in Chicago, so please remain aware as you drive through the Chicago portion of the Dixie!

South on Michigan Avenue at 2120 is **Chess Records**, a Chicago landmark and the real home of Chicago Blues. After emigrating from Poland

with their parents as children, brothers Leonard and Phil Chess began their careers as nightclub owners and recording executives in the late 1940s. By the mid-1950s, the likes of Chuck Berry, Willie Dixon, Buddy Guy, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and Sonny Boy Williamson had all become household names in the blues and jazz community and Chicago's black community. With their prolific recording and songwriting careers blossoming in the mid-1950s and early '60s, these artists were instrumental in the British Invasion, producing the likes of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, and Cream, among many others.

Chicago's "**Motor Row**" was also located along South Michigan Avenue, from approximately the 1400 to 2500 blocks. During the automobile's early years – the 1920s and 1930s – as many as 116 dealers lined these blocks and several others nearby, selling new cars to Chicagoans. Ford, Buick, Chevrolet, and Cadillac all had showrooms along South Michigan Avenue, as did other, less familiar names, like Hudson, Marmon, and Pierce-Arrow.

Notorious Chicago gangster Al Capone's first headquarters were in the Metropole Hotel on the northeast corner of 23rd and Michigan. Capone's last headquarters – before he was convicted of tax evasion in 1931 – was the Lexington Hotel at 2135 S. Michigan Ave.

At 2400 S. Michigan is the **Chicago Defender**, a 100-year old newspaper serving the Chicago African American community. The Defender has been the voice of the America's Black community against racism and segregation, and "led the movement known as The Great Migration," according to their website. The area from 22nd Street to Garfield Boulevard (55th Street) came to be known as **Bronzeville** in the late 1920s, and to this day retains that name. The Chicago Police Department's ultra-modern headquarters is located at 3510 S. Michigan Ave.

Further south along Michigan Avenue stood the mansions of famous Chicagoans Charles Comiskey, and meat packing magnates Gustavus Swift, Phillip Armour and Michael Cudahy.

At 55th Street (Garfield Blvd.), take a right and enter westbound Garfield Boulevard. Garfield is one of Chicago's grand boulevards, one of a system of boulevards stretching across the city. Our tour takes us west to Western Avenue, but following Garfield Boulevard east takes drivers to the Lakefront, the Hyde Park neighborhood, University of Chicago, and the Museum of Science and Industry.



At Western Avenue, take a left and begin to travel south. At 62nd Street, you'll see a large Sears building, one of the first of hundreds of stores the famous retailer built through the years. Continuing south on Western Avenue, the original Dixie Highway route, you'll pass more car dealers, and at 79th Street, St. Rita High School, where Pope John Paul II stayed during his time in Chicago in 1979 and made an appearance before hundreds of thousands of the faithful.

Continuing south on the Dixie Highway you will ascend a hill at 83rd Street, coming to the top at 87th Street. This intersection is the highest point in the City of Chicago, and on a clear day if you look northeast you'll see the skyscrapers of downtown Chicago.

At 9233 S. Western, you and your traveling partners can experience a true Chicago tradition, an Original Rainbow Cone (open seasonally, 773-238-

8753). Travelers along the Dixie Highway stopped at this building back in the 1920s to experience the delight of a Rainbow Cone, a five-flavor ice-cream/sherbet concoction that has lived on in Chicago history since that time. The Original Rainbow Cone is served annually at the nation's largest food festival, Taste of Chicago.

After a cone, continue traveling south along Western Avenue. At 95th Street, you'll see The Plaza, one of America's first indoor shopping malls, and continuing south you will enter the Beverly area, one of Illinois' first residential historic districts.

Continuing south on the Dixie Highway, you will enter the City of Blue Island at 119th Street, where the Dixie Highway now becomes a signed roadway. From 127th Street to the Calumet Sag Channel waterway, you'll drive through historic downtown Blue Island. Stop in at one of the many fine antique and specialty shops along Western Avenue, including **Three Sisters Antique Mall** (13042 S. Western, 708-597-3331) featuring over 125 dealers; **Through The Looking Glass** (13114 S. Western, 708-489-1661), located in the circa 1890s Blue Island Opera House; or **Vermont Antiques** (2403 W. Vermont, 708-388-8448) located just west of Western at 131st Street in an old department store building.

Blue Island is another great place to catch a bite to eat. Try Broukal's Food & Spirits (12924 S. Western, 708-597-2360) for great burgers and pub grub, or Island's Café (13000 S. Western, 708-489-1747) for fine Northern Italian cuisine.

Continuing south on Dixie Highway (Western Avenue) you'll cross over the bridge and staying in the right lane, turn onto Olde Western Avenue. Here are two more great restaurants, Mario's Tacos (13325 S. Olde Western Ave., 708-389-4023) for fine Mexican food, and Maple Tree Inn (13301 S. Olde Western Ave., 708-388-3461), offering fine New Orleans cuisine and a wide beer selection.

Getting back on Western Avenue heading south, you'll pass through the suburbs of Posen, Dixmoor, and Harvey. Western Avenue is now named Dixie Highway, and at 151st Street, you will see the remnants of Dixie Square Mall, where the mall scene in the Blues Brothers movie was filmed. Once a thriving suburban shopping mall, Dixie Square fell into disuse with the construction of newer regional malls. Efforts are now underway to resurrect the old mall as a shopping center.

Following Dixie Highway south again, you will enter Homewood, where we began our Triangle Tour. If you've completed this more than 90-mile trip in one day, stop for a respite at **Balagio Ristorante** (18042 Martin Ave. at Ridge Rd., 708-957-1650, balagio-restaurant.com), **Aurelio's Pizza** (18162 Harwood Avenue, just east of Dixie Highway, 708-798-8050) or **Bogart's Charhouse** (18225 Dixie Hwy., 708-798-2000).

That wraps up the Triangle Tour of the Chicago Southland's historic highways: The Dixie and Lincoln Highways and Route 66. Done in either one day or three separate drives, you're sure to find something interesting on the Triangle Tour!



The Old Plank Road Trail