

Vintage Arizona



Photos Left to Right: Cozy Peach (AOT), Kingman Club Neon (Visit Kingman), Hackberry General Store (Bruce Gascho)

From neon signs to roadside motels, Arizona has some cool vintage places and things to explore. “Vintage” refers to the time period from the 1950s and 1960s when the car culture in the US was booming, giving way to road trips, neon signs, roadside motels and diners. We have highlighted below a few “cool” vintage things to do and see throughout the state.

ROUTE 66

The ultimate road trip, Route 66 in Arizona crosses across the northern part of Arizona passing through small towns and stands as a reminder of days past. Named the “Mother Road” by the author John Steinbeck it has been an inspiration for movies and songs, forever immortalized in American culture. Arizona’s Historic Route 66 has been preserved as living history to be enjoyed for generations to come. Arizona has the best preserved stretches of Route 66 and still has more than 250 miles that are drivable, including the longest unbroken stretch from west of Ash Fork to the California state line, a total of 158 miles in length.

NEON SIGNS

Neon signs were commonplace along major thoroughfares and highways around Arizona during the art form’s boom in the 1950s, particularly along Route 66. Neon signs were all about attracting attention. Today, these signs are not commonplace but some have survived and some have even been lovingly restored. We have picked a few of our favorite neon signs and places to see them from the bygone days.

“Kingman Club” in Kingman

This neon sign isn't right on Route 66, but it is just a block north on Beale Street. That is where you will find the iconic neon sign of "Kingman Club" from the early years of downtown Kingman. Many Route 66 travelers make a point of finding this sign, which is one of the most-photographed sites in Kingman.

“Gateway Saguaro” in Tucson

Tucson's old road into town, the "Miracle Mile strip," was a haven for neon in the 1950s and 1960s, when flashing signs beckoned to visitors. One of the most famous neon signs here is the “Gateway Saguaro” on Oracle Road standing at 30 feet tall. By local artist Dirk J. Arnold, this neon sign shows people traveling northbound on Oracle the history of the roadway signifying the Miracle Mile, and if they are traveling southbound it welcomes them to Tucson.

Neon Signs on Historic Route 66 in Williams

In 1954, US Route 66 was expanded in Williams with two lanes running east and two to the west creating a loop to cruise around the town. It was then possible to cruise endlessly from one end of town to the other end, checking out who was cruising and what kind of car they were showing off. Drive historic Route 66 through the town of Williams at night and you will get a taste of the old Route 66 days. Here saloons, restaurants, motels and shops have neon lights aglow up and down the street.

Neon Lights Park in Casa Grande

Take a step into the past in Casa Grande. Bask in the beautifully colored and vibrant lights in the outdoor [Neon Lights Park](#) on the town’s Main Street. This four-acre park in the Arizona Plaza opened April 13, 2019, in the heart of the Historic Downtown District with 14 lovingly-restored and salvaged signs mostly from the 1950’s. In 2020 the park was awarded the James W. Garrison Heritage Award, the top prize given by the Governor’s Heritage Preservation Honor Awards. Spend some time on the benches enjoying the vintage mid-century neon signs or walk along the landscaped paths. The lights are turned on at dusk and are turned off at 11:00 p.m. Phoenix is 47 miles or 76 km from Casa Grande.

STEP BACK IN TIME

There are some places where time has stood still and you can sense that when you arrive. From vintage cars parked on the street to memorabilia scattered about, here are a few such places that feel like you just stepped back into the 1950s from the moment you arrive.

[Hackberry General Store](#)

Hackberry General Store is a museum of old Route 66 and has been called the “mother lode of mother road memorabilia”. No gas is sold but vintage pumps stand outside. Take a walk through the vintage diner, have a bottle of Route 66 Beer (root beer) and find a special souvenir of your trip. Take a stroll through the yard and see the many nostalgic tin signs including Burma-Shave road signs. The 1957 Red Corvette has become a favorite photo spot for many visitors.

Lowell, AZ

Walking down Erie Street in Lowell, Arizona, is like walking into a 1950’s postcard. Erie Street used to be the commercial district of a once thriving mining town that was incorporated into neighboring Bisbee. Today, Erie Street has remnants of days gone past including a Shell gas station, motorcycle repair shop, department store and vintage cars parked on the street.

[Flagstaff Route 66 Self-Guided Walking Tour \(Walk This Talk\)](#)

Route 66 continues to bisect Flagstaff today and the road is lined with relics from the route's glory days. Travel along the original alignment through the redeveloped Southside Historic District. A self-guided tour begins at the historic train station, passing by classic drive-in motels and Flagstaff landmarks. Pedestrian signs at locations along the Walk This Talk route notify you to call toll-free 928-218-2926 to hear pre-recorded oral histories of Route 66 happenings at specific sites. Along the route, photo opportunities abound.

VINTAGE ACCOMMODATIONS

From funky retro fitted airstreams to roadside motels, spending the night surrounded by vintage décor and design is like stepping back in time and completing a road trip down vintage lane.

[The Motor Lodge Motel](#) - Prescott

The Motor Lodge Motel occupies a motor court that has been in service as a motel in Prescott, Arizona since 1937. The 13 rooms each have a separate entrance and front porch. In 2008, the motel was completely renovated but still maintains its vintage vibe. Conveniently situated three blocks south of the Courthouse, it is far enough away to avoid the crowds yet still close enough to the heart of downtown Prescott.

[Shady Dell](#) – Bisbee

The Shady Dell features accommodations in nine fully restored vintage aluminum travel trailers which combine mid-century Americana kitsch with the comforts of home in the 1950s. The Shady Dell's long and epic journey began in 1927 as a place to provide trailer and camping spaces to weary travelers along the famous Highway 80, which stretched from Savannah, Georgia to San Diego, California. Like its more famous brother Route 66, Highway 80 was a center of travel, exploration and family getaways in the early portions of the 20th century. Today, the park is a nice mix of practicality and vintage fun.

[Cozy Peach](#) – Queen Creek

Set in the middle of Schnepf Farms with views of the San Tan Mountains, Cozy Peach has nine completely refurbished Vintage airstream trailers. They come with plush bedding, flat screen televisions, air conditioning, microwaves, patio furniture, and individual firepits.

[The Downtown Clifton Hotel](#) – Tucson

Just south of downtown Tucson, this hotel was built in 1948 along Stone Avenue, formerly US Route 80. The hotel was purchased and lovingly restored in 2014. The interior is eclectic and mid-century modern with a vintage vibe. Each room has a separate entrance and there is a large outdoor communal area. The hotel was recently expanded to include 22 new rooms.

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Appreciate AZ: The Arizona Office of Tourism and the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics have forged a partnership to promote sustainable tourism practices across Arizona's spectacular landscapes and unique destinations. In addition to following local rules and regulations, it's important to understand the principles of Leave No Trace, which are guidelines that help protect beautiful, wild spaces. These include such things as plan and prepare, stick to trails, trash your trash, leave what you find, be careful with fire, respect wildlife, and share the outdoors. [Appreciate AZ](#) is Arizona's program for responsible tourism. It ensures we are doing our part to educate visitors and residents on how to recreate responsibly and to keep our state beautiful for future generations. If we do our part to take care of our public lands, we will have the privilege of enjoying them for many years to come. Thank you for doing your part to keep Arizona beautiful!

Please note: For visitor guidance due to COVID-19 such as mask-wearing, a list of tourism-related re-openings or closures, and a link to public health guidelines, click here: <https://www.visitarizona.com/covid-19/>. Some attractions are open year-round and some are open seasonally or move to seasonal hours. To ensure the places you want to see are open on your travel dates, please check their website for hours of operation.

Additional information can be found on our website:

<https://www.visitarizona.com>

Plan your Route 66 road trip: <https://www.visitarizona.com/like-a-local/six-days-touring-the-mother-road-route-66/>