

Destination HERE: *Tourism in Southwestern Illinois*

Where the Great River Road meets the Mother Road

There’s only one place in America where the Great River Road meets the Mother Road of Route 66. And that is the Great Rivers & Routes region of southwest Illinois.

Nestled between four national byways and three great rivers, this six-county area located just north of St. Louis in Illinois, provides the perfect natural getaway. With sweeping scenic views and nationally-recognized hiking and biking trails, treetop ziplining, river cruises, kayaking, and epic rides on a 1500-foot gondola/ open air chair lift to the top of the river bluffs and an Alpine Coaster ride through the natural features of limestone bluffs, this is the ideal opportunity to experience the Great Outdoors Inside the Midwest.

The region is a road trippers paradise offering a variety of scenic and vintage roadways – the perfect escape for travelers throughout the U.S. and internationally.

Take a drive along the last 100 miles of Route 66 in Illinois – a classic highway home to giant pink elephants, a rabbit ranch, the World’s Tallest Catsup Bottle and enjoy kitsch melded with classic Americana. Visit the Litchfield Museum and Route 66 Welcome Center for a birds-eye view of Mother Road history. Tour the historic Cannonball Jail and Million Dollar Courthouse in Carlinville and visit the Mother Jones Monument and Soulsby’s Service Station in Mt. Olive. Dine out at the Ariston Café, the oldest continuously operating café on Route 66. Or enjoy foodie delights at Weezy’s or the Route 66 Creamery in Hamel.

Edwardsville is home to the classic Wildey Theatre and the newly refurbished West End Station which is anticipated



Photo courtesy Great Rivers & Routes of Southwest Illinois/Scott Evers Photography

to open in June. Discover the World’s Tallest Catsup Bottle and Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site – a UNESCO World Heritage Center in Collinsville.

The Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau added 12 individualized outdoor Postcard Murals to communities along Route 66 including Virden, Girard, Carlinville, Litchfield, Livingston, Staunton, Hamel, Edwardsville, Granite City and Collinsville. Murals are coming soon to Mt. Olive and Benld. Twelve-foot Route 66 shields, the perfect Instagram photo stop, were placed in Collinsville, Edwardsville, Granite City, Hamel, Litchfield and Carlinville to top off the Route 66 experience. All of this in preparation for the national, and state, centennial celebration of the iconic highway.

Take the road less traveled and check out the jaw dropping year-round views of the Mighty Mississippi River as it gently curves along the Meeting of the Great Rivers National Scenic Byway. This 33-mile stretch of roadway is arguably one of the most scenic drives in the U.S. and captures the essence of America’s three great rivers – the Mississippi, the Missouri and Illinois – which come together alongside the highway. Along the way, take part in the start of the Lewis & Clark westward adventure at the Lewis & Clark State Historic Site and the Lewis & Clark Confluence Tower in Hartford.

Visit the National Great Rivers Museum and Melvin Price Locks and Dam near Alton. The museum is celebrating its 20th Anniversary this year. Stop

by the Robert Wadlow Statue, an ode to the World’s Tallest Man who was born in Alton. Visit the Miles Davis statue, another legend whose birthplace was Alton. Make a stop in the historic village of Elsah during the byway drive and step back in time with a stroll through the village and a visit to the Elsah General Store.

Grafton sits alongside the Mississippi River and its confluence with the Illinois River. Enjoy riverfront dining at The Loading Dock and experience Midwestern adventures at Aerie’s Resort with the Grafton SkyTour, Aerie’s Alpine Coaster and the Grafton Zipline. Coming Soon: the Byway Flyway at Aerie’s Resort. At the end of this scenic road trip is Pere Marquette State Park, the largest state park in Illinois. For outdoor enthusiasts, hop on a bike or take a walk along the 130 miles of MCT Trails that wind through Madison County.

Local makers creating one-of-a-kind wares give the Great Rivers & Routes region a sparkle. Sip a glass of wine perfected by Grafton Winery & Brewhaus or enjoy a pint of locally crafted beer from Old Bakery Beer Company alongside the waters of the Mississippi River. Take a tour of David Stine Furniture and see how locally harvested hardwoods are transformed in to tables, bed frames and chairs. Sip on a cocktail concocted from horse-radish infused vodka in a former newspaper print shop at Old Herald Brewery & Distillery in Collinsville. Bite in to a delicious sweet treat from Aria’s Cookies & Confections and enjoy fresh organic produce from Three Rivers Community Farm.

Experience the Great Outdoors Inside the Midwest in southwest Illinois!

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INSIDE THE
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