On the Blues Highway





A **journey** deep into the **roots** of the **Blues**, between **New Orleans** and **Chicago**, via the **Louisiana plantations** and **Cajun Country**, **Natchez**, **Vicksburg**, **Clarksdale** and the **Mississippi** “**Delta**”, **Memphis** and **St Louis**. Follow the route taken by Black **bluesmen** leaving the **South** in search of a better life. A vibrant **musical itinerary**, in color and rhythm, in the footsteps of the greatest. Includes a detour along the legendary **Route 66**, before arriving in **Chicago** on the shores of the gigantic **Lake Michigan**.



Day 1

Arrival in New Orleans at the end of the day.

Transfer to downtown.

Enjoy the evening strolling through the French Quarter, or go listen to jazz (and blues) on Frenchmen Street.

Overnight in New Orleans.



Day 2

First full day in New Orleans, "the Creole" city, with a unique atmosphere on the banks of the Mississippi.

The French Quarter, also known as the Vieux Carré (even though it's rectangular), is the city's historic district. A French architect designed it in the early 18th century to feel like a real village. After major fires in the late 18th century, most buildings were rebuilt by the Spanish — hence the more Hispanic than French architectural style.

The famous Bourbon Street is the iconic street, with its mansions and houses featuring long balconies, highly prized during Carnival festivities,

among others.

Very lively in the evening, you'll see street performers, vendors, bars, restaurants... and all kinds of excess.

Overnight in New Orleans.



Day 3

Jackson Square and the Riverwalk are must-sees. From the riverfront, you can take jazz dinner cruises on classic paddlewheel boats. You'll also find the excellent Audubon Aquarium.

The Central Business District is home to the outstanding National WWII Museum.

The leafy Garden District is one of the nicest areas: take the streetcar there and walk back via the beautiful antebellum Victorian mansions in Greek Revival style, passing Lafayette Cemetery and Magazine Street.

North of the French Quarter, Treme is the birthplace of New Orleans jazz and a major center of African-American and Creole culture, around Congo Square. Heavily impacted by Hurricane Katrina, this working-class neighborhood is reviving — and gentrifying a bit: even actor Nicolas Cage has planned his tomb here... Dive into the excellent HBO series "Treme"!

Overnight in New Orleans.



Day 4

Head for the Louisiana Plantation Road along the Mississippi. Must-sees include Laura Plantation and Oak Alley, with its magnificent oak-lined avenue.

After the Old Spanish Highway and Saint-Martinville along Bayou Teche, detour to Avery Island, home to the Tabasco factory.

Arrival in Lafayette, the capital of Cajun country. Acadian Village offers a great reconstruction of a Cajun village. Vermilionville is a living-history museum featuring historic Acadian buildings and celebrating Cajun culture, crafts and history with period-costume animations.

Possible evening at a "Fais Dodo", with Zydeco music.

Overnight in Lafayette.

Note: possibility to add a second night in Lafayette to better enjoy Cajun country.



Day 5

In the morning, we recommend a swamp boat ride in the Lake Martin bayou to look for alligators (contact us).

You cross the Atchafalaya delta, a refuge for many wildlife species, then reach Baton Rouge, capital of Louisiana, on the banks of the Mississippi River.

Stop by the river where the USS Kidd, a former destroyer, is docked and open for visits.

Head to St. Francisville, your last stop in Louisiana, on the east bank of the Mississippi.

It's a charming town with beautiful historic homes nestled among magnolias, azaleas and century-old oaks.

Overnight in a former plantation in St Francisville (subject to availability), or nearby.



Day 6

Head for the Angola Prison Museum, the oldest penitentiary in Louisiana (and the state's largest maximum-security prison). It's a truly unusual experience! The prison is known for its rehabilitation program, including, among other things, the organization of rodeos.

The route takes you to Natchez, on the banks of the Mississippi, after a small detour via the charming little town of Woodville. From time to time you will rejoin the famous US Highway 61, nicknamed the 'Blues Highway'. It roughly follows the migration of Black populations from the southern states to the big northern cities.

Drive to Natchez, the oldest city in the state of Mississippi. Stroll above the cliffs overlooking the riverbank; there are some beautiful 'antebellum' mansions. As for 'Under the Hill' (below the hill), it's a small riverside area, perfect for enjoying a great evening of live music.

Overnight in Natchez.

Day 7

Today's route follows the Natchez Trace Parkway. Overall, this superb road (the only designated scenic parkway of its kind in the U.S.!)



stretches nearly 750 km, from Natchez to Nashville.

After the pleasant town of Port Gibson, you reach Vicksburg, a city with a typically Southern atmosphere on the Mississippi (the old bridge is worth a look). The main street is nice. Vicksburg Military Park recounts the siege and battle that saw Union forces defeat the Confederates after 47 days.

The Trace continues to Bentonia and the Blue Front Cafe, a legendary stop on the Mississippi Blues Trail. Opened in 1948, it hosted improvised concerts by great bluesmen such as Skip James and Sonny Boy Williamson. Today it is owned by Jimmy "Duck" Holmes, who sometimes treats visitors to a guitar riff. A great blues festival takes place every June.

Arrival at Belmont Plantation in Greenville. Overnight on site (subject to availability).



Day 8

Head to Indianola, home to the museum dedicated to the legend Mr B.B. King. You can even try a few chords there.

After Leland and its murals, continue to Cleveland, then make a must stop at Dockery Plantation, a former plantation with only a few remains left (and an adorable little gas station). Today it's a memorial site on the Mississippi Blues Trail — and one of the birthplaces of the blues, according to B.B. King himself!

Arrival in Clarksdale. Many musicians were born here, lived here or passed through. The Delta Blues Museum, housed in an old station, pays tribute to these greats. Don't miss the salute to the two guitars at the Crossroads... Live blues nights at Ground Zero, the Shack Up Inn...

Overnight at the Shack Up Inn, a truly unique place (subject to availability).

Note: possibility to add a second night in Clarksdale to better enjoy the blues evenings.



Day 9

Detour via Tutwiler, where W.C. Handy is said to have first "met" the blues on the small station platform. Faded explanatory panels and murals still testify to it.

The route then leads to Oxford, a university town with a really pleasant center laid out around its "Square".

So pleasant that William Faulkner, Nobel Prize winner in 1949, made it his home base (his house can be visited). John Grisham also owns a house here, among other famous writers.

After Sardis Lake, continue north to Memphis. If it's not too late, you may visit Graceland, Elvis's home south of the city (reservation required). For fans, it's a must. For others, it's like Vegas: you should see it at least once (the house is worth it — quite moving).

Overnight in Memphis.



Day 10

Besides Elvis, Memphis is also where another King, Martin Luther King, was assassinated on April 4, 1968 at the Lorraine Motel.

Don't miss the visit of the legendary Sun Studio, where the biggest names recorded — from Elvis to U2, including Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Roy Orbison.

Stax Records is another must: it embodies the "Memphis Sound", the signature of many artists who recorded there, such as Isaac Hayes and Otis Redding.

Beyond Sun and Stax, Memphis has many points of interest, including the Memphis Rock 'n Soul Museum...

And of course, in the evening, the musical Memphis comes alive on Beale Street. There are plenty of blues clubs, like the excellent Rum Boogie or B.B. King's Blues Club.

Overnight in Memphis.



Day 11

The route rejoins the majestic Mississippi near Tiptonville, at Marijac Memorial River Park. In good weather, it's a perfect place for a picnic by the river.

Just before entering Kentucky, the road crosses Reelfoot Lake State Park, known for birdwatching and water activities (you can rent paddleboards, kayaks and canoes in Samburg). Hunting is also practiced... Sunsets are spectacular!

Arrival in Paducah, on the banks of the Ohio River. We love this town's special vibe, with its small downtown of tree-lined streets and red-brick façades, especially around Market House Square.

In the evening, that's where to be. Beautiful murals along the Riverfront. Paducah also has an unusual museum dedicated to quilting — the art of patchwork.

Overnight in Paducah.



Day 12

Drive to Cape Girardeau, a nice town on the Mississippi (the movie "Gone Girl", with Ben Affleck, was filmed here). Lovely murals.

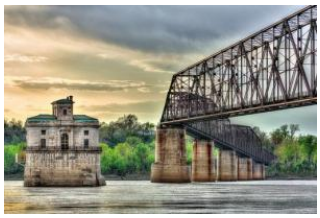
Along the way, Trail of Tears Park pays tribute to the tragic forced removal of Native Americans to Oklahoma in the 1830s. Great river views, then a detour via the hamlet of... Belgium, then Chester in Illinois. Popeye fans will enjoy it.

After the pleasant town of... Waterloo, arrive in St Louis, at the confluence of the Missouri and the Mississippi. A key stop on Route 66, it's also the city of Chuck Berry.

The university district vibe is great, with clubs, bars and restaurants. And then there's the impressive ascent of the Gateway Arch.

Overnight in St Louis.

Note: Ideally, St Louis deserves a full day. Possibility to add a second night.



Day 13

The route heads toward the Chain of Rocks Bridge. Built in 1936 and over 1,600m long (with a 22° bend in the middle), it remains one of the most iconic Route 66 remnants, even though it's no longer open to cars.

After Edwardsville, Staunton and the surprising Henry's Rabbit Ranch, the Old Route 66 passes through Litchfield, with its SkyView Drive-in Theatre and the Ariston Cafe.

Then head to Springfield, capital of Illinois. Stop at the Cozy Dog Drive In and, on the way out of town, at Shea's Gas Station Museum, a vintage gas station turned museum, where owner Bill Shea will share plenty of anecdotes.

Downtown, stroll through the carefully reconstructed district that includes Abraham Lincoln's home (guided tours possible).

Overnight in Springfield.



Day 14

Drive to Pontiac on Route 66 to admire the beautiful murals, some in trompe-l'œil style. This small town has a provincial atmosphere that contrasts with the increasingly urban suburbs of Chicago.

Dwight features old cafés and classic Route 66 gas stations, like the Ambler's Gas Station.

In Wilmington, don't miss the Gemini Giant, a 10m-tall giant astronaut holding a rocket. This is also where you'll find the oldest hotel on Route 66, the Eagle (1836).

Stop in Joliet, the "Blues Brothers" town (you can visit the prison), full of Route 66 architecture, with its theater, station and the Ruby Street lift bridge.

Drive to Chicago and return your rental vehicle at Midway airport (then transfer to downtown).

Overnight in Chicago.



Day 15

Chicago is wonderfully diverse — ethnically, culturally and musically.

We highly recommend a boat cruise on the Chicago River (watch out for the stiff neck). Michigan Avenue is the cradle of modern architecture. As for the famous Loop, stroll from bridge to bridge and take the elevated metro (red line) that circles it.

Walk through Grant Park or Lincoln Park, near the lively Old Town district. In the evening, that's the place to go for a drink or dinner.

If the weather is nice, rent a bike and ride along the lakefront (the Riverwalk...). Or even sunbathe on the beach (yes, really...). And for blues, head to Buddy Guy's Legends, Blues Chicago, or the House of Blues...

Overnight in Chicago.



Day 16

Use your morning to go up to the top of the Willis Tower and challenge your fear of heights on the Skydeck.

Further north, stroll along the Magnificent Mile, near the Water Tower.

Nearby, another climb is worth it: the iconic Hancock Center, especially to try the impressive tilting glass platform at "360° Chicago" (you can also enjoy a drink there).

Art lovers can visit the Art Institute of Chicago, and natural history fans will love the extraordinary Field Museum.

Early afternoon: transfer to Chicago airport.

Return flight to Europe (arrival the next day).

Extension or itinerary changes: contact us

Accommodation