Road trip eats

A cross-country adventure inspires a food writer and illustrator to re-create regional favorites at home.

U.S. Route 66 covers a lot of miles of experiences—more than 2,400 to be specific. Thousands of miles and decades of road-tripping have taught my husband, Dan, and me that a great way to get to know (and remember) a destination is through the food. So when we set out in a rented camper van to drive the length of Route 66 last fall, our goal was to eat like the locals at each stop. Every regional dish was an edible snapshot of our trip. After we returned home to New Jersey, I started reverse-engineering some of our favorite dishes to relive our adventure. Even if you don’t spend a month traveling Route 66, you can get a taste of the road with these recipes.

ROUTE 66

One of the earliest parts of the original U.S. Highway System, Route 66 (aka the Main Street of America or the Mother Road) was established in 1926 and stretches from Chicago to Santa Monica, CA, winding through eight states along the way. I mapped out an itinerary of must-see destinations, restaurants, and quirky stops.

Mini Corn Dog Bites

Battered & Fried In SPRINGFIELD, IL

The Cozy Dog Drive In is the self-proclaimed home of the “original hot dog on a stick.” More than 70 years later, Cozy’s corn dogs are still dipped and fried to order. At home, I translated these into bite-size dogs.
St. Louis’ iconic Gateway Arch climbs 630 feet high and was built to commemorate westward expansion.

Recipes begin on Page 94.

Vanilla Frozen Custard

Scooped Up in St Louis

Even in cold weather, you’ll see fans queue up outside Ted Drewes Frozen Custard shops, including the stand that opened in 1941 along Route 66. The stands are so ubiquitous in the STL metro that you can even get a fix at the zoo and ballpark. Frozen custard is like a thick soft serve; extra egg yolks add body and a rich, velvety texture. Do like they do at Ted Drewes shops and top yours with any combo of sauces, nuts, cookies, fruit, and/or candy.

Hot Off The Grill In El Reno, Ok

There’s certainly no shortage of burgers along Route 66, but if you stop for only one along the way, make it a cheeseburger at Robert’s Grill. At the oldest burger dive in Oklahoma (est. 1926), the grillmaster piles shaved raw onions onto quarter-pound patties. He lets the burger sizzle on the griddle for a few minutes before flipping it so the onions are on the heat. A firm press with a spatula smashes the onions into the griddle to caramelise and frizzle under the burger. Tangy yellow mustard slaw comes on the side. My version uses a similar griddle technique, and I serve the slaw right on top.

Griddled Onion Cheeseburger

I like to serve these onion burgers on potato buns, but any sturdy bun will work.

"I was always thrilled to sit down for a plate of great food and a beer at the end of the day."
Sauced & Smothered In ALBUQUERQUE

My husband and I had a rule rolling into New Mexico: Every meal we ate had to include green chiles, the culinary trademark of the state. At Frontier Restaurant, a 300-seat spot close to the University of New Mexico, a house-made green chile stew studded with pork and potatoes smothered the enchiladas.

**RECIPE BEGIN ON PAGE 94.**

Inspired by the homemade flour tortillas Frontier serves on the side, Casey makes her enchiladas with flour tortillas instead of the traditional corn.

**GREEN CHILE ENCHILADAS**

**Prickly Pear Limeade**

Tart & Refreshing In ARIZONA

It seemed like prickly pear was on every drink menu in the Southwest. The fruit of the opuntia (prickly pear cactus) tastes similar to kiwi or melon and is often made into an electric-pink syrup used in all sorts of drinks. My Prickly Pear Limeade starts with lots of lime juice (naturally) and easily transitions into a shortcut margarita.

"I can’t think of a better way to see America than through its food."

MINI CORN DOG BITES
You’ll need 24 wooden craft sticks for these corn dogs. The width doesn’t matter. Your cutter will pick up luck with thin, regular, and wide craft sticks.

**START TO FINISH** 40 min.

1. Cut the dog inside into thirds and skewer each piece with a wooden craft stick. In a large bowl stir together cornmeal, flour, sugar, 1 tsp. kosher salt, the baking powder, and baking soda.
2. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a rimmed baking pan with paper towels. Fill a 4- to 6-qt. Dutch oven with about 2 inches of oil (don’t let it reach more than halfway up the sides) or fill an electric deep fryer with oil per manufacturer’s instructions.
3. Heat oil to 350°F. Stir egg and buttermilk into dry ingredients.
4. Dip skewed hot dogs into batter to coat, spreading batter over ends of hot dogs. Fry battered hot dogs in hot oil 3 minutes or until golden brown, turning to cook evenly.
5. Transfer to prepared baking sheet; keep warm in oven. Repeat with remaining hot dogs and batter.**Tip** Makes 24 mini corn dogs.

**PER CORN DOG** 114 cal, 7 g fat (2 g sat fat), 46 mg cholesterol, 352 mg sodium, 11 g carbs, 1 g fiber, 1 g sugars, 4 g pro

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**VANILLA FROZEN CUSTARD**

**HANDS-ON TIME** 25 min.
**TOTAL TIME** 8 hr. 45 min., includes freezing

| 4 egg yolks | ½ cup sugar |
| 2 cups heavy cream | 1 cup whole milk |
| 1 Tbsp. vanilla |

1. Place egg yolks in a medium heatproof bowl. Whisk in ¼ cup sugar. Continue to whisk about 1 minute or until mixture is slightly thickened (coats the back of a rubber spatula).
2. In a medium heavy saucepan combine cream, milk, remaining ¼ cup sugar, and ¼ tsp. kosher salt. Cook over medium until liquid starts to steam and bubble at edges, stirring frequently with spatula. Reduce heat to medium-low.
3. Drizzle ½ cup hot mixture into egg yolks, whisking continuously to blend. Slowly whisk egg yolk mixture back into mixture in saucepan.
4. Cook and stir custard 5 to 10 minutes or until it thickens enough to coat the spatula in thick ribbons.
5. Strain custard through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl. Stir in vanilla. Refrigerate, covered, at least 4 hours or overnight.
6. Pour cold custard into a 1½- to 2-qt. ice cream maker. Churn according to manufacturer’s instructions. Freeze at least 4 hours before serving. Serves 8.

**EACH SERVING** 303 cal, 25 g fat (15 g sat fat), 165 mg chol, 69 mg sodium, 16 g carbs, 16 g sugars, 4 g pro

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**GREEN CHILE ENCHILADAS**

**HANDS-ON TIME** 15 min.
**TOTAL TIME** 1 hr. 15 min.

| 1-oz. pkg. shredded cabbage with carrot (coleslaw mix) | ¼ cup yellow mustard |
| 1 Tbsp. mayonnaise | 1 tsp. cayenne seeds |
| 1 lb. ground beef (80% lean) | ½ small white onion |
| 2 cups finely chopped yellow onion | 4 cloves garlic, minced |
| 1 lb. ground pork | 4 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth |
| 1 cup frozen whole kernel corn | 1 lb. russet potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch dice |
| 4-oz. cans diced Hatch green chiles (mild or hot), or 4 oz. cans diced green chilies plus 1 fresh serrano chile, minced |
| 2 Tbsp. yellow cornmeal | ½ cup minced white onion |
| 8-inch flour or corn tortillas | 3 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese (12 oz.) |
| 1 tsp. chili powder | 1 cup fresh lime juice (3 to 4 limes) |
| 2 Tbsp. Lime Simple Syrup | 1 Tbsp. prickley pear syrup |
| ½ cups water or plain seltzer |

**PRICKLY PEAR MARGARITAS**

Pour 2 tsp. kosher salt onto a plate. Wet rims of two cocktail glasses with lime wedges; dip rims in salt. Fill glasses with ice. Fill a cocktail shaker halfway with ice. Add 3 oz. tequila, 1 oz. Cointreau or other orange liqueur, ¼ cup fresh lime juice, ½ cup Lime Simple Syrup, and 1 oz. prickly pear syrup. Shake until cold. Strain into glasses. Serves 2.

**EACH SERVING** 274 cal, 66 mg sodium, 39 g carbs, 32 g sugars

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**RULES FOR SWEEPSTAKES**

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