Travel in the USA
Motels, Restaurants, Gas Stations, and Airlines
History of the Motor Lodge: Cabin Camps and Cottage Courts

Cabin Camps

During the Depression, local businessmen and farmers would partner with oil companies to establish roadside gas stations. They then built premade or homemade cabins, or “Cabin Camps,” for travelling tourists behind the gas stations. The cabins offered more conveniences and amenities than a traditional campsite.

Cottage Courts

Cottage Courts were more tasteful than the homemade Cabin Camps. The cottages were placed around a public lawn and intended to be easier for automobilists to access. Tourists would park their vehicles in front of their rooms or underneath a carport. Restaurants appeared near the cottages enticing tourists to stop.

History of Howard Johnson’s

Howard Johnson was born in 1897 in Boston, Massachusetts. Before establishing the legendary restaurant chain, Howard Johnson managed an ice cream business and drug stores.

During the 1930s, Johnson spearheaded a revolutionary format for food service that was both a sit-down restaurant and offered fast-food take out. He later opened motor lodges.

The chain was extremely popular after WWII as families once again had the finances to travel. The buildings were always white with orange roofs. The restaurant served meals and ice cream at affordable prices.

Howard Johnson’s became the world’s largest restaurant chain in 1952 with 351 restaurants. The company eventually debuted on the stock market. By the mid-1960s, Howard Johnson’s consisted of 770 restaurants and 265 motels.

In 1952, Kemmons Wilson constructed the first Holiday Inn outside of Memphis, Tennessee. Wilson was inspired to build the Holiday Inn chain during a family road trip where he was disappointed with the selection of poor quality hotels. He imagined a hotel chain that was clean and affordable for guests.

The first hotel Kemmons designed had 120 rooms, each with air conditioning, a television, and a telephone. The hotel also had an outdoor swimming pool. Children under 12 were not charged extra.

With the government allotting $76 billion for tollway development, in 1956 Wilson expanded his hotel chain. Holiday Inn debuted on the stock market in 1967.
The chain’s first European Holiday Inn hotel premiered in the Netherlands. Holiday Inn was the world’s first hotel chain to surpass $1 billion in annual sales.

Today, Holiday Inn greets over 120 million guests every year at 3,300 hotels.

History of Sinclair Oil

Originally a drug store owner, Harry Ford Sinclair went on to become one of the greatest oilmen in the United States in the early 1920s. The Sinclair Oil Company, nicknamed “Sinco,” had gasoline stations from New York to Colorado, and Oklahoma to Iowa.

Sinclair Oil had a number of notable firsts in the industry: the first high-octane gasoline, the first featured promotions at racing events, and the first modern service station. Sinclair also had a balloon in the popular Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.

During WWII, Sinclair Oil delivered 42 million gallons of military oils in 1944, manufactured fuels for artic and dessert military vehicles, and constructed a plant to produce synthetic rubber for the United States government.

In 1930, advertising executives debuted Sinclair’s iconic “Dino.” The publicity campaign featured a dozen dinosaurs including the gigantic Apatosaurus who became the company’s official mascot in 1932.

History of Texaco Oil

In 1902, The Texas Oil Company, nicknamed “Texaco,” was founded. The oil company incorporated the five-pointed star, the symbol of Texas, into its signage in 1903. According to legend, the green “T” was inspired by the colors of the Italian flag.

The famous Texaco Fire Chief and Sky Chief gasolines were introduced in 1938.

Bob Hope became the spokesperson of Texaco from 1975-1985 and was referred to as "Mr. Texaco." Bob Hope publicized Texaco heavily during his famous TV specials.

History of Route 66

In 1921, the government decided to pursue a national highway construction project. Entrepreneurs Cyrus Avery and John Woodruff lobbied for developing a road system that linked Chicago and Los Angeles.

In 1926, the number “66” was allocated to the Chicago-to-Los Angeles route which became one of the country’s important road systems. From the beginning, planners envisioned U.S. 66 to link the main streets of rural and urban towns to provide smaller communities access to a major thoroughfare. The mission was to connect rural areas in Illinois, Missouri, and Kansas to Chicago.

*In The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck heralded and immortalized U.S. Highway 66 to be the “Mother Road.” During the Dust Bowl, an estimated 210,000 people moved to California and travelled the highway. Route 66 signified the “road to opportunity.”
During the Great Depression, thousands of unemployed men from every state were employed as laborers to pave the road. In 1938, Route 66 was proclaimed to be “continuously paved.”

Troops and military equipment trekked Route 66 to destinations across the country during WWII. After the war, American families travelled the iconic highway to vacation spots. Motels, gas stations, souvenir shops, and restaurants popped up alongside the road to entice tourists to spend the night or grab a meal.

Route 66 was featured in a 1946 Nat King Cole song with the memorable lyrics “get your kicks on Route 66.” The road was immortalized in the 1960s show “Route 66,” which starred Martin Millner and George Maharis.

Famous Route 66 motor lodges include El Vado and Zia Motor Lodge in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The highway was home to iconic gas stations such as Soulsby’s Shell station in Mount Olive, Illinois; Bob Audettes’ gas station in Barton, New Mexico; and the Tower Fina Station in Shamrock, Texas.

Pan American was originally a mail carrier service between Key West and Havana. The airline, nicknamed Pan Am, launched passenger service in 1928. From 1937 to 1941, Pan Am expanded routes to the United States mainland, Latin America, Alaska, China, Africa, and the Middle East.

By 1941, Pan Am travelled to 52 countries, employed 8,750 employees, owned 162 aircraft, operated 192 radio/weather stations, and had gates at 300 airports across the world.

After WWII, Pan American re-opened its Atlantic and Pacific routes. Pan Am debuted Round-the-World schedules in 1947. Pan American was one of the first airlines to utilize the Constellations and the Boeing 377 Stratocruiser.

Pan Am was recognized for providing excellent service and affordable fares. The airline was a trailblazer and set standards in marketing, innovations, technology, and the quality of meals provided to guests.

Due to major deficits, the company ended service in 1991.

History of Eastern Airlines

Eastern Airlines, originally North American Aviation, started as a U.S. Mail carrier between New York and Atlanta. In 1930, the airline changed its name to Eastern Airlines and transformed into a passenger carrier.

The airline was purchased by Eddie Rickenbacker, the famous World War I pilot, in 1931. During the 1950s, Eastern Airlines travelled across the East Coast and operated international routes.

In 1960, Eastern Airlines added Douglas aircraft which allowed Eastern to offer non-stop service from New York City to Los Angeles.

Upon adding Boeing aircraft to the fleet, Eastern adopted the dark blue hockey stick design colors which are now a standard in the industry.

Eastern Airlines was the subject of infamous crashes, one featured in the movie The Ghost of Flight 401. Due to fierce competition from low budget airlines, Eastern Airlines stopped service in 1991.