



Wilmington, Illinois Community Profile Overnight Itinerary



"The Island City" of Wilmington has witnessed a lot of history and has intricate ties to The Illinois & Michigan Canal, Route 66, and even the Underground Railroad. The city's historic downtown is an antiquarian's dream with 20 different antiques shops to browse. The annual Catfish Days Festival is a great place to get a taste of local flavor and a bite of catfish. Another popular stop along Route 66 is The Gemini Giant, a fiberglass man sporting a space helmet and rocket ship which serves as a tribute to the country's obsession with space travel during the 1960's. Outside the city, one can enjoy boating and fishing on the Kankakee River, as well as, The Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Preserve.



Wilmington is located on the banks of the Kankakee River, along the original 1926 alignment of Illinois Route 66. Wilmington has a unique geographic feature - a large island in the Kankakee River, which divides the river into a large channel and a small channel. This is why it is known as, "The Island City." The city's origins date back to 1834, but it wasn't until 1854 that it was incorporated officially as the city of Wilmington. The population is 5,134 as of the 2000 U.S. census. The portion of Route 66 traveling from Joliet to Wilmington was placed on to the National Register of Historic Places in 2006.

ATTRACTIONS:



[Gemini Giant](#)

The old Launching Pad Drive-In on Route 66 in Wilmington is the home to the Gemini Giant, a fiberglass “Muffler Man” sporting a space helmet and rocket ship. It is a remnant of our fascination with space travel in the 1960s. Come on by and take a picture with a piece of history.
810 East Baltimore Street

(815) 476-2175

[Gemini Giant Website](#)



[Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie](#)

Encompassing 18,000 acres of the former Joliet Army Ammunition Plant, this is the largest tallgrass prairie restoration in North America. Historic Route 66 bisects the preserve. The immensity of this open grassland contrasts with the urban landscape of Chicagoland. In October 2015, a small herd of bison was introduced at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie as a 20-year experiment in prairie restoration. The herd is a conservation herd, and their grazing pattern is helping to create a more diverse ecosystem for prairie plants, birds and other wildlife as volunteers, staff and other partners work together to restore what was once native Illinois prairie. The long-term goal, which will take decades, is to hopefully one day be able to show people what the Illinois prairies might have looked like hundreds and thousands of years ago.

Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

30239 IL-53

(815) 423-6370

[Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Official Website](#)



[Historic Water Street Shopping District](#)

Conveniently located off Route 66, downtown Wilmington is home to an assortment of shops offering antiques, collectibles and other unique items, including the Old Theatre Antique Mall, Hayden's Crossing, Paraphernalia Antiques and the Treasure Cove.

North Water Street

(815) 476-2175

[Historic Water Street Shopping District City Website](#)

[Historic Water Street Shopping District Downtown Merchants Association Website](#)



Wilmington Island Park District - North & South Island Parks

Wilmington has a unique geographic feature - a large island in the Kankakee River, which divides the river into a large channel and a small channel. This is why it is known as, "The Island City." The Wilmington Island Park District maintains North & South Island Parks, which are divided down the middle by Illinois Route 66.

Wilmington Island Park District

1165 S. Water St.

(815) 476-2175

[Wilmington Island Park Official Website](#)

[North & South Island Parks Website](#)



[Sinclair Dinosaur](#)

The Sinclair Dinosaur stands on top of a Sinclair gas station built in 1963, which is now G & D Tire & Alignment. In 2001, the new owner bought the statue which was previously located in Chattanooga, Tennessee, making it a popular attraction for Route 66 visitors.

200 E. Baltimore St.

(815) 476-7744

[Sinclair Dinosaur Website](#)



[Eagle Hotel](#)

The Eagle Hotel was built as a stage stop and hotel by David Lizer in 1836. Since then it has also been a warehouse, tavern, bank, and storefront. The hotel may be one of the oldest commercial structures on Illinois Route 66.

200 E. Baltimore St.

(815) 476-7744

[Eagle Hotel Website](#)



[The Mar Theatre](#)

Built in 1937, the building has only been used as a movie theatre. The original auditorium comfortably seats 300 moviegoers with a new second auditorium accommodating 64 patrons. Outside, the original marquee is still used to inform moviegoers of current shows. The Mar is still a first run theatre and is one of the oldest and the only privately owned operating movie theatres in the Will County Area.

121 South Main Street
(815) 476-4662

[The Mar Theatre Official Website](#)



[Nelly's Restaurant](#)

Nelly's has become a favorite restaurant on Route 66. The handmade 100% Angus burgers and large selection of specialty sandwiches to choose from makes this a frequent return stop. Hand cut fries and lightly battered onion rings are among the favorite selections. While you wait for all your food to be cooked fresh, write on the marker boards or sign the ceiling! Many visitors from around the world traveling Route 66 have made their mark here. Flags hang from Nelly's beams from visitor countries, some as far away as Australia.

140 Bridge Street
(815) 476-9590

[Nelly's Restaurant Official Website](#)



[Wilmington Illinois Route 66 Experience Hub](#)

You are standing on an island surrounded by the scenic Kankakee River, the source of Wilmington's nickname, "The Island City." People have crossed the river here for hundreds of years. It was a winter camp of the Potawatomi Tribe. In 1834, Thomas Cox Harnessed the water for a saw mill and soon after platted the town. Route 66 passed through her from 1926 to 1939. The most photographed citizen of Wilmington is not a person. He is The Gemini Giant, a 1960's "muffler man" at the Launching Pad Drive-in. These enormous advertising characters towered over roads across America, clutching mufflers, hot dogs, axes, and, in Wilmington, a rocket ship.

140 Bridge Street

(217) 525-9308

[Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway Interpretive Exhibits Official Website](#)

MAJOR EVENTS:



[Catfish Days](#)

Catfish played a large part in initiating the event, Catfish Days, after Forked Creek spilled over its banks and flooded the cellars of a section of Wilmington called, "Catfish Town". The annual festival dates back to 1976, and features a carnival, live entertainment, flea market/craft show, 5K race, food & drink, catfish dinners and much more!

North Island
147 North Park Street
(815) 476-2175
[Catfish Days Official Website](#)



[Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Events](#)

What is the history behind the introduction of the Midewin bison herd? Where did they come from? What was the main purpose in bringing the bison to Midewin and what changes have been noted to date? Learn all about this famous conservation bison herd! Midewin is the largest tallgrass prairie restoration in North America. Historic Route 66 bisects the preserve.

Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

30239 IL-53

(815) 423-6370

[Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Events Official Website](#)



[Wilmington, IL Downtown Merchants Association Events](#)

- The Water St. Flea Market takes place the first Saturday of the Month – April through October from 9am to 3pm on N. Water St. in Wilmington.
- Bewitched on Route 66, held on a special Saturday in mid-October, features Halloween themed fun for the whole family, including a flea market, live music, kids games, scarecrow contest and more.
- An Evening on Water Street. Each year in August, October & December, a special night is chosen for some old fashioned late night shopping downtown! Music will be playing on the street and many merchants will stay open late, have sales and provide refreshments!

Wilmington, IL Downtown Merchants Association

202 N. Water Street

(815) 926-2741

[Wilmington, IL Downtown Merchants Association Events Website](#)



[Red Carpet Corridor Festival](#)

The Annual Red Carpet Corridor Festival is held the first full weekend in May and traverses 13 Communities from Joliet to Towanda along a 90-mile stretch of Old Route 66 that collectively celebrates the Mother Road. Each town puts together its own events for the weekend, making for a great shopping and sight-seeing experience. Gather the family and take a trip down memory lane. Towns include Joliet, Elwood, Wilmington, Braidwood, Godley, Braceville, Gardner, Dwight, Odell, Pontiac, Chenoa, Lexington and Towanda.

(815) 844-5847

[Red Carpet Corridor Official Website](#)



[Route 66 Association of Illinois Motor Tour](#)

The Motor Tour has been traversing Illinois Route 66, alternating each year from North to South and South to North. The caravan makes passport stops at major attractions along the way (including in Joliet), and also includes the annual Hall of Fame Banquet. Held the second weekend in June.

(708) 444-1312

[Route 66 Association of Illinois Official Website](#)

AMENITIES:



City of Wilmington

1165 S. Water St.

Wilmington, IL 60481

(815) 476-2175

[City of Wilmington Official Website](#)

[City of Wilmington Tourism Website](#)



Wilmington Island Park District

1165 S. Water St.

Wilmington, IL 60481

(815) 476-2175

[Wilmington Island Park Official Website](#)



Heritage Corridor CVB Visitors Center - Joliet

30 N. Bluff Street

Joliet, IL 60435

(815) 727-2323

[Heritage Corridor CVB Official Website](#)

[Heritage Corridor Wilmington Tourism Website](#)

Van Duyne Motel & Canoe Rental

107 Bridge St.

(815) 476-2801

[Van Duyne Motel Facebook Page](#)

Knight's Inn - Wilmington

24001 Lorenzo Rd

(815) 476-4271

[Knight's Inn - Wilmington Official Website](#)

[City of Wilmington Dining & Shopping Website](#)
[Welcome to Wilmington Dining & Shopping Website](#)

[CLICK HERE - Wilmington Google Map](#)



Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway

700 East Adams

Springfield, IL 62701

(217) 525-9308

info@illinoisroute66.org

www.illinoisroute66.org