



AllWays Traveller

Oklahoma, USA

www.allwaystraveller.com

On the road in Oklahoma

Oklahoma is a state located in the South Central region of the United States of America.

Its eyes set firmly on the future, Oklahoma is nevertheless a state where the past lives – vividly.

Cherokee and Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee Creek and Seminole – the so-called ‘Five Civilised Tribes’ – today proudly present their culture and traditions to the world.

And cowboys still wear big hats and cattle roam the range where once the bison was dominant.

From endless, table-flat plains and rolling prairie grasslands to low, craggy mountains, the landscape too evokes times when the Surrey had a fringe on top and this really was the frontier.

Big skies and open country, beautifully engineered, lightly trafficked byways – this really is idyllic road trip country, dotted with fascinating little towns and villages and well served with museums and other attractions.

There’s the big city appeal of Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

And then there’s the irresistible lure of Route 66.

Ashley Gibbins

The International Travel Writers Alliance
www.itwalliance.com



www.travelok.com



A personal perspective

Go west young man!



By Roger St. Pierre

Most Brits only know Oklahoma from the eponymous musical, set in the far-off days when the West really was wild.

But this large state is stridently modern too – home today to thriving oil, aircraft, biotechnology, IT and tourism industries.



Diverse and full of interest

Oklahoma is a diverse place, full of interest for anyone with a passion for Americana.

It straddles the fabled Route 66 highway – 'The Mother Road' or 'Main Street USA', as it was dubbed in its between-the wars heyday.

These are the lands where 19th Century pioneers staged the biggest land grab in history.

And where the 1930s Depression and the Dustbowl disaster wrought havoc.

The dust storms blew thousands of farmers into bankruptcy – spawning the gritty and evocative writings of John Steinbeck and the mournful songs of Woody Guthrie.

Oil and planes

Oil discoveries made fabulous fortunes overnight on these Great Plains and rolling Prairies and it's where America's aircraft industry was born – Tulsa having at one point been the busiest airport in all the world.

The facts

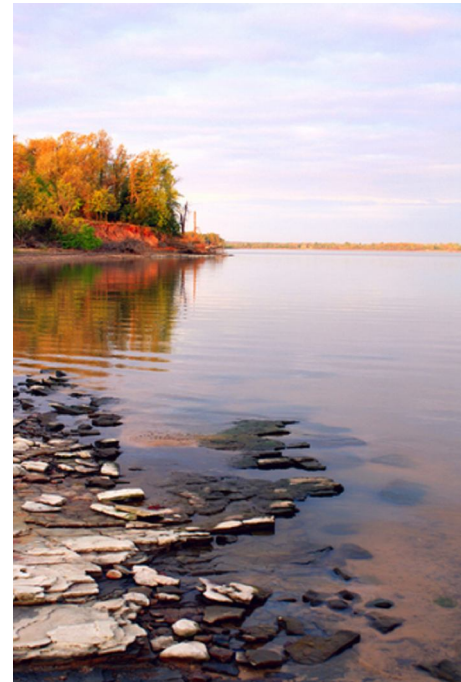
Getting to Oklahoma

There are no direct flights from the UK but Oklahoma City and Tulsa are well served gateways into the state.

United and Continental are the principle carriers and flights via Chicago, Charlotte and Dallas are the most convenient.



Climate



Far from the sea and well above sea level, the North American high plains and prairies have a continental climate – which means very hot, dry summers and bitterly cold but often sunny winters.

On average, some 54 tornados strike the state of Oklahoma each year – among the highest such incident rates in the world.

Oklahoma City

The Red Earth Festival

They do everything big in these parts and my memorable road trip kicked off with a visit to the spectacularly huge and colourful Red Earth Festival, staged at the cavernous Cox Convention Center in Oklahoma City.



This amazing event manages to be, at the same time, a celebration of arts and crafts and one of the biggest and most talent-laden dance competitions in the world, with more than 3,000 traditionally garbed people taking part – but only genuine Native Americans need apply (though spectators of all kinds are welcome).

Newly opened within a short walk of the Cox Center and adjacent to the Skirvin Hilton Hotel is the new home of the Red Earth Museum, which is home to 1,600 items of fine art, pottery, basketry, textiles and beadwork.

Bricktown is the fun place to be at night in OKC, a neon-lit wonderland of bars and clubs, with canal boat rides too.

www.redearth.org



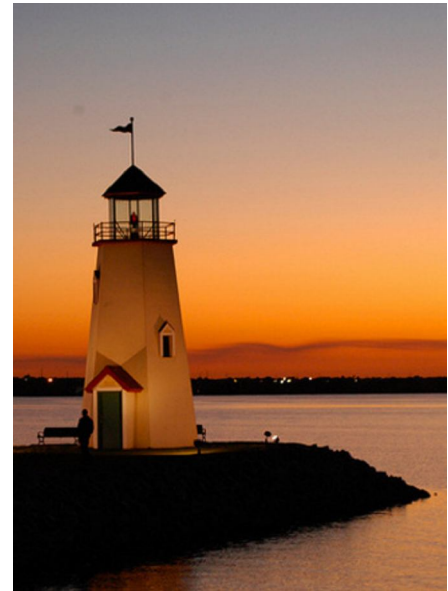
A more sombre mood awaited me at midnight amid the silence and simple beauty of the haunting memorial to the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing.

Row of row of metal chairs stand symbolically – one for each of the victims of the outrage. A thought-provoking museum tells the story of what happened, and attempts to answer the painful question: “why?”

www.oklahomacitynationalmemorial.org

Language

Thanks to continuing Mexican immigration, Spanish is increasingly widely spoken in Oklahoma but the real linguistic wealth comes from the 25 or so different Native American languages still spoken – the highest concentration in the country.



Currency

The US dollar remains good value for British visitors but don't be misled by seemingly low posted prices as a sales tax will be levied at the till.

The rate varies from one local jurisdiction to another and in restaurants you will be expected to leave a whopping 20 per cent (wait staff live off their tips).



In communities with a sizeable Native American population, some retailers are loathe to accept US\$20 bills because these notes bear the likeness of Andrew Jackson, the president who evicted the so-called ‘Five Civilised Tribes’ from their homes in the Eastern States and sent them into exile on reservations in Oklahoma.

Thousands died along the infamous ‘Trail of Tears’, the memory of which trauma is still bitter.

The fabled road



"If you ever plan to motor west, just take my way, take the highway that's the best. Get your kicks on Route 66" – so goes the song that Nat 'King' Cole, Chuck Berry and the Rolling Stones made so iconic.

Vast stretches of the fabled road that "winds from Chicago to LA" no longer exist.

But in Clinton there's enough of it to make this friendly strip-development town a suitable home for a memorabilia-packed Route 66 museum, whose parking lot is crammed – natch – with sparkling Harleys and lovingly cared for old Chevys.

It's a visitor magnet: I shared my tour with a French couple, three Germans and a quartet of Brits who had rented Harleys for an 'Easy Rider' style three-week motorbike trip across the States.

It was in Davis, another great little place – set deep in the Arbuckle Mountains, close by the delightful Turner Falls Park with its massive waterfall-fed outdoor bathing pool – that I first came in contact with the awesome chicken fried steak, hanging off both sides of a gargantuan plate and accompanied by enough home fries and 'fixings' to feed a family.

Just as Buffalo wings have no such content (they are simply named after the New York State city of Buffalo), so there's no chicken in this beast.

It simply takes its name from the way it is battered, KFC-like, and cooked to end up as a heart attack on a plate. They really do eat big in these parts.

Cuisine

This is a land where BBQ reigns, along with outsize steaks and other hearty fare. Beware the awesome chicken fried steak – a gigantic slab of meat coated in KFC style batter.



Chilli and ribs cookouts are a popular summer pursuit, treated with extreme competitiveness as chefs, professional and amateur alike, seek to outdo one another.

Food tends to be basic, often fried – and calorie laden.

So-called Indian fried bread is purveyed from roadside stalls as traditional Native American fare but is actually made to a recipe from India!

Accommodation

As well as the upscale Renaissance Hotel in Oklahoma City I had overnights at a diverse range of locations.

All the major American hotel brands, and many international ones too, are well represented in Oklahoma City and Tulsa while roadside hotels and motels at all price levels are abundant statewide.

American B&Bs tend to be of very high quality. I loved the Moonlight Bay Chalet a luxurious log cabin, set above a small lake deep in the woods near Sulphur.

www.premierlakeproperty.com

I also overnights at the Best Western Lawton Hotel and the Hampton Inn, Clinton

www.bestwesternlawton.com
www.hamptoninn.hilton.com

State and national parks



This whole area – where Mid-West meets Wild West – is very much small town USA at its most evocative.

But these often tiny communities – a bar, a school, four houses and they call it a city! – have massive hearts.

A key appeal of a road trip in this region is simply to meander from one warm welcome to the next.

Lovers of the great outdoors will find 50 state parks, six national parks and protected areas, including, in the northwest of the state, the 29,000-acre Tallgrass Prairie Preserve – the largest such area in the world.

The roads might often be long and straight and, well, boring, but the towns you pass through and the people you meet will ensure you'll have fun and a great time.



Arbuckle Wilderness is a highly rated safari park in a beautiful location.

Nearby not-to-be-misseds include the Chisholm Trail Museum in Duncan, which superbly evokes the era of the great cattle drives, and Lawson's museum of the Great Plains

The Comanche National Museum tells the Native American tribe's story.

www.comanchenation.com
www.arbucklewilderness.com
www.museumgreatplains.org

More information :

www.travelok.com

Other things to see and do

Route 66

A dedicated guide to the 426 still drivable miles of Route 66 within Oklahoma's borders is available.

www.travelOK.com

Attractions detailed in the 'Mother Road' itinerary include Arcadia's Round Barn and POPS (the world's ultimate soft-drink and soda-pop dispensary), the bizarre Blue Whale in Catnoosa, Totem Pole Park in Foyil, the Route 66 Interpretive Center in Chandler, Elk City's Route 66 & Transportation Museum and the Oklahoma Route 66 Museum in Clinton.

Take to the water



Oklahoma has 2,500 miles of river shoreline and more than 200 lakes. Natural attractions include the 77-foot high Turner's Falls, outside little Davis, and the spring-fed pools at Chickasaw National Recreation Area.

There are also plentiful facilities for biking, hiking and horse riding.

Known in pre-war days as 'The Terracotta City' Tulsa has a wealth of surviving art deco gems. Genius architect Frank Lloyd Wright's only skyscraper, the iconic Price Tower can be seen in Bartlesville.

Art trove

Oklahoma City's National Western & Cowboy Heritage Museum showcases a massive cache of western paintings and sculptural pieces.

One of the largest collections of Native American art can be enjoyed at Tulsa's Gilcrease Museum.

Ranch country

Check out Oklahoma's Panhandle, which sits beside the state's border with Texas.

This is serious hill country and boasts some of the west's finest dude ranches.



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The International Travel Writers Alliance

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Roger St Pierre



Delaware is the only one of America's 50 states that Roger St. Pierre has not yet visited.

He has, though, travelled through most regions of Oklahoma and proclaims it a great fly-drive destination.

Roger has a particular passion for Route 66, having driven many of the surviving stretches of 'The Mother Road'.

Roger is a long-serving member of the British Guild of Travel Writers and a regular contributor to *AllWays traveller*.