visit nw illinois

MOBILE GUIDE

ITINERARY · NORTHWEST ILLINOIS

48 HOURS IN REAGAN COUNTRY

Two days built around the two houses that made a president, the Dixon boyhood home and the Tampico apartment he was born in, with the Lincoln Highway, a restored Illinois Central depot and a four-thousand-acre bison prairie filling the space between them.



Ronald Reagan Boyhood Home & Visitors Center photo 3

48 Hours	13	2	3
HOW LONG	STOPS	COUNTIES	BEST FOR
		Lee County, Whiteside County	History, Couples, Families

OPEN ONLINE

Open the live itinerary
visitnwillinois.com/itineraries/48-hours-in-reagan-country

DAY 1

DAY 1: DOWNTOWN DIXON AND THE ROCK RIVER

Dixon does not oversell its most famous son, which is exactly why the town is worth two days. The Reagan sites are genuinely good and genuinely small; around them sits a river town with an 1850s main street, a 240-acre park where he worked as a lifeguard, and a stretch of the first coast-to-coast highway in America. Base yourself in Dixon and drive out on day two.

Everything on day one is within a mile of the Galena Avenue bridge, and most of it is walkable from the riverfront.

DRIVING ROUTE

Open this day in Google Maps

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7 PLANNED STOPS



ATTRACTION

Ronald Reagan Boyhood Home & Visitors Center

1 hr - Dixon

WHY IT BELONGS

The restored house the Reagans rented from 1920 to 1923, shown on a guided tour that runs April through December, Thursday to Saturday, 10am–3pm. The last tour leaves at 3pm sharp. Start here so a late arrival does not cost you the whole reason you came.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

Dixon



ATTRACTION

Dixon Lincoln Highway Interpretive Gazebo

20 min - Dixon

WHY IT BELONGS

Five minutes on the riverfront with the interpretive panels: the Dixon Arch, the 1919 Transcontinental Motor Convoy that a young Dwight Eisenhower rode with, and how the Lincoln Highway came to run through the middle of town.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

Dixon



3

ATTRACTION

Reagan Peace Park

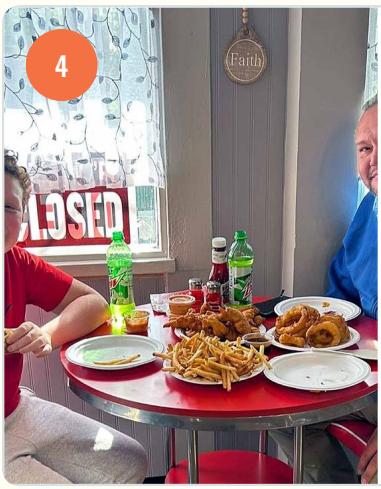
20 min - Dixon

WHY IT BELONGS

A twenty-foot “Wings of Peace and Freedom” sculpture, murals, and a genuine section of the Berlin Wall, a short walk along the water from the gazebo.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

Dixon



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FOOD & DRINK

Flynnie's Kitchen

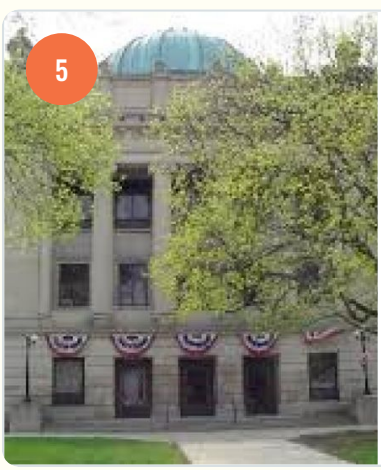
Lunch - Dixon

WHY IT BELONGS

An eight-seat downtown diner doing burgers, all-beef hot dogs and rotating comfort-food specials with meat from a local butcher. Order to go and eat it on the riverfront a block away. Open Monday to Friday and Sunday, closed Saturdays, so swap in the Alley Loop if that is your day.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

Dixon



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ATTRACTION

Old Lee County Courthouse

20 min - Dixon

WHY IT BELONGS

The 1901 Classical Revival courthouse still runs county business under its dome. The marker on the lawn records a campaign speech Abraham Lincoln gave on this spot, the other Illinois politician Dixon claims.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

Dixon



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OUTDOOR RECREATION

Lowell Park

1–2 hrs - Dixon

WHY IT BELONGS

Two hundred and forty acres on the Rock River, on the National Register, with hiking trails, a nature centre and boat launches. This is the beach where Reagan lifeguarded through seven summers and is credited with pulling 77 people out of the water, the notches he cut in a log are the local legend.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

Dixon



7

FOOD & DRINK

Basil Tree Ristorante

Dinner - Dixon

WHY IT BELONGS

Dinner in an 1850s building downtown: family-run since 2009, widely praised Italian, a full bar, and vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options handled properly rather than grudgingly.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

Dixon

DAY 2

DAY 2: OUT ALONG THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY

Southeast to Amboy, east through Franklin Grove and the prairie, then a long westward run to Tampico on the way home. Roughly 70 miles of driving, all of it on two-lane roads.

DRIVING ROUTE

Open this day in Google Maps

www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&origin=41.71...

6 PLANNED STOPS



8

FOOD & DRINK

Busy Bee Bakery

Breakfast - Amboy

WHY IT BELONGS

Twelve miles south to Amboy for scratch sourdough, cinnamon rolls and biscuits and gravy. Sunday hours start at 7am, which makes this the easy first move of the day. Closed Monday to Wednesday.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

Amboy

9

ATTRACTION

Amboy Depot Museum

1 hr - Amboy

WHY IT BELONGS

The Illinois Central's divisional headquarters, in brick and Joliet limestone and on the National Register: restored down to the chimney caps. The complex takes in a freight house, a one-room schoolhouse, a steam engine and a caboose, all on the old rail yard.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

10

ATTRACTION

H.I. Lincoln Building

30 min - Franklin Grove

WHY IT BELONGS

An 1860 limestone building put up by a distant relative of Abraham Lincoln, now the national headquarters of the Lincoln Highway Association and its interpretive centre. Open weekends seasonally through October; call ahead outside that.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

11

OUTDOOR RECREATION

Nachusa Grasslands

2 hrs - Franklin Grove

WHY IT BELONGS

Four thousand acres of restored tallgrass prairie, oak savanna and wetland with a conservation bison herd roaming 1,500 of them. Sightings are never guaranteed. Bring binoculars, drive the designated roadsides slowly, and walk one of the five hiking areas. The visitor centre is open dawn to dusk.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

12

ATTRACTION

John Deere Historic Site

1–2 hrs - Grand Detour

WHY IT BELONGS

Grand Detour, where a blacksmith built the first self-scouring steel plough in 1837 and changed Midwestern farming. Free, open April through October: the restored 1836 family home, live blacksmith demonstrations, and the archaeological dig marking the original shop.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

13

ATTRACTION

Ronald Reagan Birthplace

1 hr - Tampico

WHY IT BELONGS

Thirty-five miles west in Tampico, the apartment above a storefront where Reagan was born on 6 February 1911, restored to the period and run by the local historical society. Self-guided and quietly affecting. Daily April to October; weekends only in March.

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS