

AUTO COURTS

Auto camps predated motels by a few years, being established in the 1920s as primitive municipal camp sites where travelers pitched their own tents. As demand increased, for-profit commercial camps gradually displaced public camp grounds. *[Ah! Capitalism will find a way!]*

Until the first travel trailers became available in the 1930s, auto tourists adapted their cars by adding beds, makeshift kitchens and roof decks. The next step up from the travel trailer was the cabin camp, a primitive but permanent group of structures. During the Great Depression, landholders whose property fronted onto highways built cabins to convert unprofitable land to income; some opened tourist homes. The (usually single-story) buildings for a roadside motel or cabin court were quick and simple to construct, with plans and instructions readily available in how-to and builder's magazines.

Expansion of highway networks largely continued unabated through the depression as governments attempted to create employment but the roadside cabin camps were primitive, basically just auto camps with small cabins instead of tents.

The 1935 City Directory for San Diego, California, lists "motel"-type accommodations under tourist camps. One initially could stay in the Depression-era cabin camps for less than a dollar per night, but small comforts were few and far between.

Travelers in search of modern amenities soon would find them at cottage courts and tourist courts. The price was higher but the cabins had electricity, indoor bathrooms, and occasionally a private garage or carport. They were arranged in attractive clusters or a U-shape.



Often, these camps were part of a larger complex containing a filling station, a café, and sometimes a convenience store. Facilities like the Rising Sun Auto Camp in Glacier National Park and Blue Bonnet Court in Texas were "mom-and-pop" facilities on the outskirts of towns that were as quirky as their owners.

Auto camps continued in popularity through the Depression years and after World War II. Their popularity finally starting to diminish with increasing land costs and changes in consumer demands.

Combining the individual cabins of the tourist court under a single roof yielded the motor court or motor hotel. A handful of motor courts were beginning to call themselves motels, a term coined in 1926. In contrast, though, they remained small independent operations, whereas motels quickly adopted a more homogenized appearance and were designed from the start to cater purely to motorists. *[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motel#Auto_camps_and_courts]*

Even today, though, Auto Courts can still be seen across the country. Many of these early motels are still popular and are in operation, as in the case of the 3V Tourist Court in St. Francisville, Louisiana, built in 1938.