

NEBRASKA

Group Travel Planner

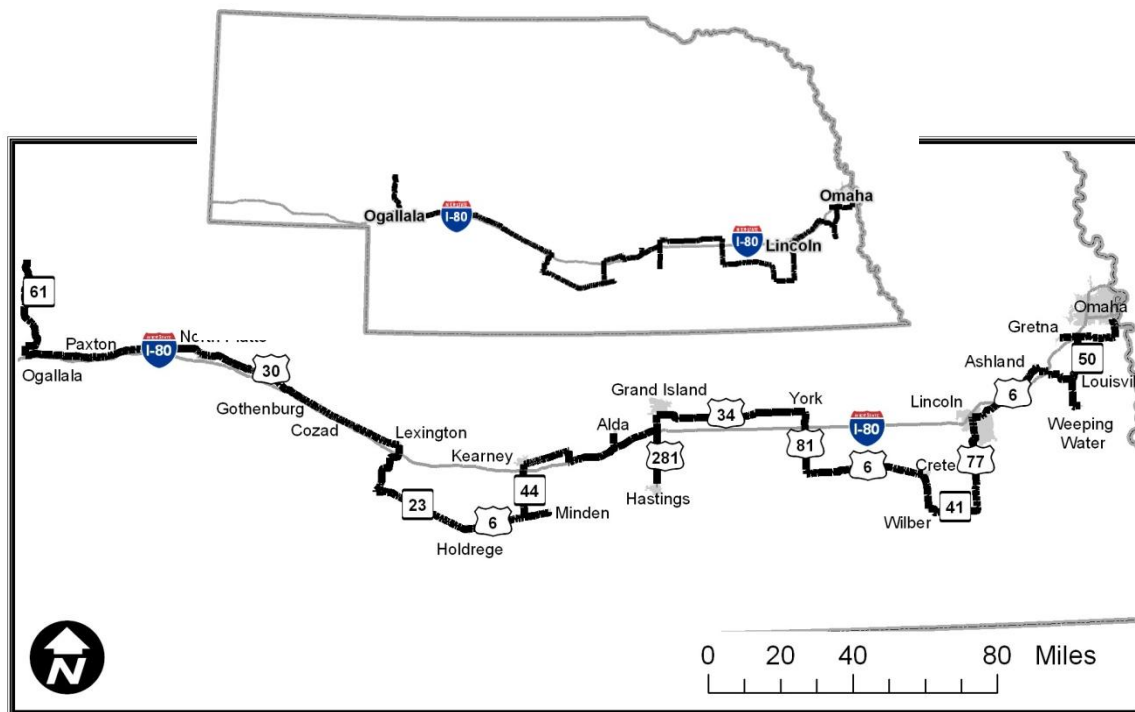


Tour 21 **From Cosmopolitan to Cowboys** **Omaha to Ogallala**

2009

Tour 21

From Cosmopolitan to Cowboys: Omaha to Ogallala



Day 1

Nebraska's largest city, Omaha has a tremendous selection of group tour attractions, shopping experiences, historical and cultural sites, and overnight facilities. [Henry Doorly Zoo](#), 3701 S. 10th St., 402-733-8401, offers a number of impressive attractions, such as the **world's largest indoor rainforest**, the **largest aquarium between Chicago and San Francisco**, the **Desert Dome** (including a sand waterfall), **Kingdoms of the Night** beneath the Desert Dome, and **Hubbard Gorilla Valley**. The zoo boasts an outstanding big cat collection, open-air aviary, and the **Lozier IMAX® Theater**. **Orangutan Forest** boasts an impressive outdoor area and a renovated indoor area. Two 65-foot tall, solid concrete Banyan trees, each weighing more than 222,750 pounds with over 15 branches each, are entangled with thousands of feet of man-made vine to create a one-of-a-kind habitat designed especially for these intelligent animals. Your group can enjoy a tram ride around the zoo as well as catered meals and refreshment breaks at the **Tree Tops Restaurant** or concession stands throughout the zoo.

Other attractions in the Omaha area are equally exciting. The historic [Old Market District](#), 402-346-4445, is an eclectic shopping and dining district located near downtown Omaha that features dozens of boutiques, lodging properties, nightclubs, bars, cafes and upscale restaurants. The [Durham Western Heritage Museum](#), 801

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S. 10th St., 402-444-5071, is located in a restored Art Deco train station and showcases the history of Omaha and the Union Pacific Railroad. [Joslyn Castle](#), 3902 Davenport St., 402-595-2199, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is the state's first historic landmark arboretum. Built in 1903, this Scottish, four-story, 35-room house takes visitors back in time to the turn-of-the-century with its superb craftsmanship and decorative opulence.

The [Hot Shops Art Center](#), 1301 Nicholas St., 402-342-6452, just north of the Old Market, is 92,000-square-foot of art studios, showrooms and gallery space. The center is a first of its kind in Omaha and includes four Hot Shops (Bruning Sculpture, Loken Forge, Crystal Forge and Wilson Custom Tile), 44 art studios, three art galleries, exhibition spaces and a café/coffee shop. Hot Shops Art Center will satisfy the creativity of the hidden artist in everyone on your tour! Located in the heart of historic North Omaha, [Loves Jazz & Arts Center](#), 2510 N. 24th St., 402-502-5291, showcases the wonderful history and culture that African Americans have achieved in the arts, music and humanities. Exciting exhibits, workshops, performances, educational programs and other activities highlight and explore the African American experience.

The [Joslyn Art Museum](#), 2200 Dodge St., 402-342-3300, is a world-class museum of exquisite works of art from antiquity to the present, and features European, American, Western American, Native American and Asian art. The museum is especially noted for its collection of American West art. It also is world renown for its collection by Swiss artist Karl Bodmer, whose watercolors and prints document his journey in 1832-1834 to the Missouri River frontier. [El Museo Latino](#), 4701 S. 25th St., 402-731-1137, highlights the important contribution that the Hispanic population has had on the history, culture and development of Omaha. Bilingual guided tours are available to groups of 10 or more.

The 100-acre [Lauritzen Gardens](#), 100 Bancroft St., 402-346-4002, includes an arboretum, bird sanctuary, rose garden, children's garden, herb garden, spring flower walk, Victorian garden, festival garden, and woodland trail. The 5,000-square-foot floral display hall in the visitor and education center offers year-round, ever-changing floral displays. A café and a gift shop also are available. The preserve at the [Neale Woods Nature Center](#), 14323 Edith Marie Ave., 402-731-3140, includes 550 acres of forests, hilltop prairies and riverside woodlands along the Missouri River. Scheduled nature programs are offered, as well as stargazing at the **Millard Observatory**, 402-453-5615. The visitor center features exhibits, animal displays and a gift shop.

Cruise up the scenic Missouri River on the [River City Star Riverboat](#), 402-342-7827, and afterward enjoy live jazz at **Rick's Café Boatyard**, 605 N. 6th St., 402-345-4545, located on **Lewis and Clark Landing**. The **Heartland of America Park** boasts an enjoyable gondola ride around the lake and a 300-foot water fountain, complete with a colorful evening light show. The **Mormon Trail Center at Winter Quarters**, 3215 State St., 402-453-9372, in north Omaha chronicles the hardships

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faced by the Mormon Pioneers who camped in the area during the harsh winter of 1846-47. The interpretive center offers films and state-of-the-art exhibits about the Mormons and their trek west. **Florence Mill**, 9102 N. 30th St., 402-551-1233, was founded in 1846 as the **Mormon Winter Quarters gristmill**. Now listed on the National Register of Historic Places and Save America's Treasures lists, the mill and grain elevator (1915) served farmers during Nebraska's territorial days through the 1980s. Today it is home to the **Winter Quarters Mill Museum** and **Loft Gallery**. [Historic Florence](#) was built on the ruins of Winter Quarters, and today the mill, bank and depot are open during summer months and by appointment.

If art and culture are your favorite pastimes, Omaha boasts a number of exceptional galleries and theatres, such as the [Omaha Community Playhouse](#), 6915 Cass St., 402-553-0800, (the largest community theatre in the country) and the [Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts](#), 724 S. 12th St., 402-341-7130, in the Old Market. Catch a world-class performance at the [Holland Performing Arts Center](#), 1314 Douglas-on-the-Mall, 402-345-0202.



For those in the group who feel no vacation is complete without some hard-core shopping, Omaha features a great selection of shops and retail outlets to suit anyone's taste and budget. The city is home to great shopping malls, such as [Village Pointe](#), 168th and Dodge Sts., 402-505-9773, an outdoor mall in west Omaha that recreates a small-town shopping district. Other equally impressive shopping opportunities are [Nebraska Furniture Mart](#) (the nation's largest furniture store under one roof), 700 S. 72nd St., 402-255-6327, and [Borsheim's](#) (the largest jewelry store under one roof), 120 Regency Parkway, 402-391-0400.

West Omaha is home to the world-famous [Father Flanagan's Boys Town](#) (renamed Girls and Boys Town), 137th and Dodge Sts., 402-498-1140. Boys Town, an actual working town, is an inspirational stop for any group tour. With prior arrangements step-on guides are available, often a boy or girl who lives at Boys Town. You can see the Oscar that Spencer Tracy won for portraying Father Flanagan, stroll through the garden inspired by the Bible, and see the world's largest ball of stamps in the gift shop. A fun group tour opportunity is "Dinner with Father Flanagan" where your group tour enjoys a traditional family style dinner while portraying the life of one of the children who called Boys Town home. Afterward, they can go to the Wall of History to see the outcome of their child. A visit by Father Flanagan also is included. Self-guided tour information and on-site café are available.

Bellevue, Nebraska's third largest city is south of Omaha on Highway 75. The **Lewis and Clark Children's Interpretive Art Wall** is located in Haworth Park, 402-332-

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5999, along the Missouri River in Bellevue. The many stories of the Lewis and Clark expedition are told in art through the eyes of children from across the country.

South of Omaha, [Fontenelle Forest Nature Center](#), 1111 N. Bellevue Blvd., 402-731-3140, shows evidence of diverse American Indian cultures with 70 known sites of Indian lodges and mounds from the Nebraska Phase culture of 1100-1400 A.D. The forest also boasts more than 1,400 acres of woods, wetlands and waterways with deep ravines, loess ridges, more than 40 varieties of trees, and more than 200 species of birds along 17 miles of walking paths. The **Katherine and Fred Buffett Forest Learning Center** is a beautiful facility that features permanent historical and children's exhibit galleries, including new exhibits of the historic Lewis and Clark Trail. The National Park Service declared Fontenelle Forest in Bellevue an official site on the National Historic Lewis & Clark Trail.

Shop! Shop! Shop! The **Nebraska Crossing Outlet Mall**, 402-332-4940, in Gretna will let you cure that shopping bug with a variety of shopping opportunities at discount prices, such as Mikasa, Carter's Osh Gosh, Bon Worth, Casual Corner, and more. The [Aksarben Aquarium](#), 402-332-3901, located in [Schramm Park State Recreation Area](#), 402-234-6855, displays more than 60 of Nebraska's freshwater fish species. The 12,000-square-foot [Aksarben Aquarium Outdoor Education Center](#) includes the aquarium, a terrarium, an auditorium, and display area. [Vala's Pumpkin Patch](#), 402-332-4200, hosts a five-week Fall Festival, complete with hayrack rides, haunted house, lost pumpkin mine, storybook farm, and various other activities. Spend time choosing the perfect pumpkin for your pumpkin pie, or perhaps one to leave for the Great Pumpkin on Halloween night.

Fresh lobster in Nebraska? Darn tootin'! Stop by the [Lobster Inn Restaurant](#) at [Linoma Beach Resort](#), 402-332-4500, on Highway 6 near Gretna for the biggest, freshest lobster tails in Nebraska! A 110-foot inland lighthouse sits on the Platte River and overlooks a 40-acre lake with a public beach. The [Holy Family Shrine](#), 402-332-4565, is a respite for the weary traveler. This impressive glass chapel is open to all people. Directions: Interstate 80, Exit 432, south on Highway 31, west on Pflug Road.

Springfield will delight your group tour with its many attractions. In addition to a beautiful view of the surrounding countryside, the [Soaring Wings Winery](#), 17111 S. 138th St., 402-253-2479, offers wine tastings, tours and a gift shop. Experience an eclectic two-acre sculpture garden at the [Carl Weiss Sculpture Studio](#), 402-680-0642. The formal and informal gardens are dotted with sculptures from local and regional artists, including Carl Weiss' landscape concepts, bronze sculptures and artwork. Meander quietly along the walking paths at [Springcreek Gardens & Nursery](#), 12275 Main St., 402-253-3045, where a new plant or surprise is around every corner. The full



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service nursery and landscape design center offers more than 450 varieties of perennials, shrubs and landscape trees.

Enjoy an ice cream shake and remember old times at the **Springfield Old Fashioned Soda Fountain**, 205 Main St., 402-253-2000.

In Louisville, the [Louisville Art Gallery](#), 230 Main St., 402-234-2867, features more than 3,500-square-feet of exhibition space for sculptures, paintings, ceramics, pottery and fine art photography. **The Gallery Shop**, 127 Main St., 402-234-2669, is home to **Art Chicks**—where singing, dancing and frivolity are encouraged. You might find yourself wearing a feather boa and brandishing a magic wand as you explore the two shops and garden that make up the gallery. You can select a whimsical art piece and then indulge in a gourmet lunch. Call ahead for tours.

A short drive from Omaha will bring you to the [Loft Community Theatre](#), 402-267-5400, near Weeping Water. Located in a converted 1924 hog barn, the “Born in a Barn” players have produced more than 300 plays since 1977. Four major productions run from May to October each year. Freshen your house and your life from a selection of more than 70 delicious candle scents at [Cryin’ Creek Candles](#), 402-267-3235. But it’s more than simply a candle store. Enjoy a glass of Nebraska wine or beer as you shop, or stop in the Farmhouse Lounge for a wine tasting. Candles and wine—what more could you ask for?

Spend a leisurely afternoon trying new wines in a French Country House setting at [Slattery Vintage Estates](#), 8925 Adams St., 402-267-5267, in Nehawka. Afterwards, take your glass outside to enjoy bird watching in a relaxing courtyard.

Located equidistant between Omaha and Lincoln on Highway 6, Ashland boasts a charming downtown district full of cool, funky shops and restaurants that serve good, stick-to-your-ribs kinda food! It’s also the gateway to three top-notch attractions: [Strategic Air and Space Museum](#), 28210 W. Park Highway, 402-944-3100, **Lee G. Simmons Wildlife Conservation Park and Safari**, 402-944-9453, and [Eugene T. Mahoney State Park](#), 402-944-2523. The Strategic Air and Space Museum highlights the history and heritage of the Strategic Air Command. You can view the original bombers and planes that helped safeguard our nation’s freedom. Excellent interactive displays, along with dining facilities and a gift shop, are available at the museum.

The Lee G. Simmons Wildlife Conservation Park and Safari is a drive-through exhibit where your group can view native prairie animals, such as bison, elk, wolves, and cranes. Your group can drive through the safari or with prior arrangements board a tram for a guided tour. A gift shop and café are available. Eugene T. Mahoney State Park is one of Nebraska’s most popular state parks, offering a variety of outdoor activities.

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If the cowboy experience is more your group's taste, then include a stop at the [Double D Ranch](#), 567 County Road C, 402-944-2207. Delicious chuckwagon dinners, yodeling, and toe tappin' cowboys are just some of the many fun experiences you'll have. So don your best cowboy hat, sing along, and eat some of the most scrumptious food this side of the Mississippi!

If a glass of fine Nebraska wine and a relaxing setting are more what your group is looking for, come on by for a sample at **Four Winds Vineyard**, 1033 County Road 5, 402-944-9463. Afterward, head over to [Willow Point Gallery and Museum](#), 1431 Silver St., 402-944-3613, to view an indoor wonderland of nearly 30 wildlife species placed in replicas of their natural surroundings. Acclaimed artist Gene Roncka's five foot paintings include Lewis and Clark displays.

The [Round the Bend Steakhouse and Saloon](#), 30801 E. Park Highway, 402-944-9974, in nearby South Bend is the home of a very quirky annual event. Each June, visitors and locals clamor to South Bend for the annual Testicle Festival—a fun-filled festival that celebrates the Rocky Mountain oyster. But if you're not ready to sample this local delicacy, you'll still find some of the most delicious food this side of the Missouri River. The restaurant is large enough to handle most group tour sizes. Come and have a ball!

Reflect upon the past at the **WWII Library and Museum**, 402-944-4238, in Greenwood. The museum displays memorabilia used by American, German and Japanese service men during WWII, along with 2,000 books and 2,200 hours of documentary tapes on the war. During the summer months, take a ride in a WWII Jeep.

Lincoln is Nebraska's state capital and second largest city. As you travel along the interstate north of the city, look south to see the impressive [State Capitol](#) building, 1445 K St., 402-471-0448, looming on the horizon. A guided tour of the building is a must while in the Star City. It is Nebraska's pride and joy and features many outstanding works of art that depict the political and cultural development of the state. It also is known for being the nation's only one-house legislative body—the Nebraska Unicameral. After exploring the State Capitol building, make sure to visit the **Nebraska Governor's Mansion**, 1425 H St., 402-471-3466, across the street. Guided tours are available Thursday afternoons. Reservations are required for groups of more than 10.

You can wile away your evenings enjoying Lincoln's exciting [Haymarket District](#), 402-435-7496. This historic downtown district offers a wide variety of galleries, restaurants, antique stores, shops, bars and coffee houses in turn-of-the-century buildings in what was once Lincoln's warehouse and farmer's market district. Today it is home to the state's largest farmers market held on Saturday mornings from May-October. Your group can prearrange a group meal at one of the Haymarket's many great restaurants, or you can encourage your group to find their own favorite

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spot. Lincoln also boasts many fine lodging properties that cater to the group tour market.

If you're looking for Nebraska-made products, look no further than [From Nebraska](#), 140 N. 8th St., 402-476-2455, in the Haymarket. You're sure to find something special to take home to remember your trip. Licorice lovers will want to spend time sampling some of the world's best licorice at [Licorice International](#), 803 Q St., Suite 300, 402-542-6742. This store offers licorice from across the globe, including France, Germany, the U.S., Denmark, Australia, Switzerland, and the U.K.

Many other exciting attractions are located throughout Lincoln. The [Sheldon Museum of Art](#), 402-472-2461, is an excellent modern art gallery that houses 20th century American art. Located on the University of Nebraska Main Campus, the building was designed by internationally famous architect Philip Johnson. The [Lincoln Children's Zoo](#), 402-475-6741, is in a lovely park-like setting where you can experience a close encounter with more than 300 animals and a variety of beautiful flowers. The [National Museum of Roller Skating](#), 4730 South St., 402-483-7551, is the only one of its kind in the country and features many rare examples of skates. Admire the larger than life sculpture, "**Torn Notebook**," a piece of art created in steel and aluminum that was commissioned by the Sheldon Museum of Art from world-renowned artists Claes Oldenberg and Coosje van Bruggen.

Located on the University of Nebraska Main Campus, the [Great Plains Art Museum](#), 1115 Q St., 402-472-6220, features changing exhibits and collections of western art. The [Hyde Memorial Observatory](#), 3701 S. 70th St., 402-441-7895, lets your group tour explore the nighttime sky. Asian culture and history come alive through beautiful exhibitions of Asian art and artifacts at the [Lentz Center for Asian Culture](#), 1155 Q St., 402-472-5841, in downtown Lincoln. The [University of Nebraska State Museum of Natural History](#), 402-471-4754, features a world-class collection of fossil elephants, American Indian art, folk art, dinosaurs, wildlife dioramas, a hands-on discovery center and planetarium. Other exhibits chronicle life on the Great Plains for more than 12,000 years, such as the "American Indian Gallery," "The First Nebraskans," "Nebraska Joins the Union," and "Building the State." People on your tour can laugh out loud, cry, and be thoroughly entertained at one of the [Lied Center for Performing Arts](#), 301 N. 12th St., 402-472-4700, many fun-filled and high quality presentations.

The [International Quilt Study Center](#), 402-472-6549, on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's East Campus, features 950 quilts from the Ardis and Robert James Collection. It also is home to more than 1,600 quilts from the Robert Cargo Collection of African American Quilts, the Jonathan Holstein Collection, and the Sara Miller Collection of Amish Crib Quilts. The [American Historical Society of Germans from Russia Museum](#), 631 D St., 402-474-3363, preserves the history and culture of Germans who first immigrated to Russia, and then to America. The Heritage Center includes a summer kitchen, chapel, general store, blacksmith, railroad caboose, and residences that were turned into exhibits.

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The [Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center](#), 11700 SW 100th St., 402-797-2301, south of Lincoln, includes more than 600 acres of rare, native tall grass prairie, springs, wetlands, ponds and other natural environments. It offers visitors an unparalleled opportunity to experience Nebraska's tall grass prairie. The center boasts more than 350 species of plants and more than 170 bird species. [Prime Country Vineyard](#), 402-826-3567, sits on 480 acres of beautiful rolling hills southwest of Lincoln in Denton. Enjoy wiling away the time sipping a variety of delicious wines in the tasting room. Get "lost" in a labyrinth carved into more than 22 acres of corn with more than 3 miles of twists and turns at [The MaIZE at Benson Farms](#), 6000 S.W. 140th St., 402-795-3276. Bring a flashlight and try it in the dark!

A short drive north of Lincoln takes you to [James Arthur Vineyards](#), 2001 W. Raymond Road, 402-783-5255, in Raymond. The winery features a winetasting room, gift shop and peaceful hiking trails. While you're in Raymond experience everyday life at a certified organic farm at [Branched Oak Farm](#), 17015 NW 70th St., 402-783-2124. An on-farm store sells food and products grown directly on the farm.

Day 2

Everyone in Wilber is Czech—at least during the first weekend of August when the town hosts thousands for the Annual Wilber Czech Festival. The U.S. Congress proclaimed Wilber the National Czech Capitol and folks in Wilber take that seriously. However, you can get a sense of Czech heritage anytime you come to town. The **Wilber Czech Museum**, 102 W 3rd St., 402-821-2183, contains detailed information on the heritage of those who founded Wilber and on their homeland of Czechoslovakia. There is usually a quilting bee going on at the museum, and the ladies are always delighted to chat with you and show you around.

Located next door to the museum is the **Wilber Bakery**, 104 W 3rd St., 402-821-2995, where your group must sample a kolach, also known as "Czech Danish." Around the corner is the beautifully restored **Hotel Wilber**, 203 S. Wilson St., 402-821-2020, a wonderful bed and breakfast. Your group can tour the facility and grab a bite to eat. *Vitame Vas!* With advance notice, costumed guides are available to escort your group along walking tours of Wilber. These tours include a meal.

Your tour simply can't go through Geneva without first doing a little shopping at one of the many specialty shops downtown that surround the historic courthouse. If you're looking for antiques and collectibles, [Patrice's Specialties](#), 455 S. 13th St., 402-366-9511, won't steer you wrong. It's a treasure trove of things from yesteryear! Spend time at the **Cesky Bratri Cemetery and Pioneer Chapel**, 402-759-4910, in nearby Milligan. This was the



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first Catholic church in the county, and many of the gravestones date back to the late 1800s.

The big balloon tells you that you are nearing York. This community of just over 8,000 offers an outstanding array of restaurants and fast-food facilities. But it is best known for [Chances “R” Restaurant and Lounge](#), 124 W. 5th St., 402-362-7755, in downtown York. The “R,” as it is known locally, hosts more group tours than any other private restaurant in Nebraska—and for good reason—huge portions at reasonable rates and good food made from scratch. If you happen to be in York on a Sunday morning, the “R” offers an outstanding Sunday brunch—a treat worth fasting for.

While in York, your group will be amazed by **Lee’s Legendary Marbles and Collectables**, 3120 S. Lincoln Ave., 402-362-0103. More than a half-million marbles are on display, including some very rare examples. Two other very nice York attractions are the **Anna Beemis Historical Museum**, 211 E 7th St., 402-363-2630, which features historic artifacts and the [Yorkshire Playhouse](#), 402-362-7060, which offers a taste of Broadway in small town Nebraska. Four productions are scheduled throughout the year, as well as special seasonal events and children’s theater productions. The theater is handicap accessible and group rates are available for performances.

While in York, spend time browsing through the shelves of [Four Winds Indian Books](#), 402-362-5654, the world’s largest American Indian bookstore. Everything you’ve ever wanted to know about American Indian arts and crafts, languages, culture, history, lifestyle, tribes, cooking, clothing and hundreds of other topics is at your fingertips.

Marvel at beautiful life-size bronze sculptures and vibrant, colorful paintings that capture the true spirit of the west at [Friesen Gallery](#), 932 North Main St., 402-723-4977, in Henderson.

Aurora is a charming community with two outstanding attractions: The [Plainsman Museum](#), 210 16th St., 402-694-6531, and the [Edgerton Explorit Center](#), 208 16th St., 402-694-4032. The Plainsman Museum offers Nebraska history under one roof. A sod house, Pony Express station, car collection ag-related exhibits and equipment, and an outstanding doll collection are featured. Next door, the Edgerton Explorit Center is dedicated to Aurora native Harold “Doc” Edgerton—the inventor of the strobe light. The Explorit Center features examples of Edgerton’s work, as well as many hands-on science exhibits.

Visit Grand Island and experience pioneer life at the [Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer](#), 308-385-5316, which is one of the



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top 10 living history museums in the country. You can walk through an 1890s railroad town, push a handcart on the Mormon Trail, learn about Great Plains American Indians at the Pawnee Earth Lodge, or explore the birth cottage of Oscar-winning actor Henry Fonda. A variety of special events are offered at the museum throughout the year.

Bring some mystery to your tour! Was there an island in Nebraska? Why is Grand Island a “train hot spot?” Who are the internationally known Abbotts? Add a historic tour of the famous and infamous characters of Grand Island’s early days. See farming past to present with a look at local farms, “the business” behind agriculture, and tour some of the nation’s top agricultural manufacturing plants. The **Stuhr Museum Gift Shop** offers fantastic souvenirs and gifts.

Grand Island abounds with art galleries, specialty stores and other shops where you can buy that hard-to-find gift or souvenir to remember your trip. Some shops you must make time for are [Prairie Winds Art Center](#), 112 W. 3rd St., 308-381-4001, **The Warehouse Gallery**, 381 N. Walnut St., 308-382-8589, **The Gallery**, 3535 W. 13th St., 308-382-8701, [Maudie’s Stained Glass](#), 301 W. 3rd St., 308-382-1993, **Heart of the Country**, 311 W. 3rd St., 308-382-2861, and [Bartenbach’s Galleries](#), 209 N. Locust St., 308-382-7575.

Witness the majestic splendor as more than 500,000 Sandhill cranes descend upon the Platte River in central Nebraska between mid-February and mid-March. [The Wings over the Platte Visitor Center](#), 308.382.4400, is open during crane season and offers the best opportunity to view these impressive birds as they rest before continuing their journey northward. Your group tour can experience this wildlife phenomenon on three excellent tours provided by the Grand Island Convention & Visitors Bureau—**Sunrise, Sunset and Bridge Tours** when thousands of cranes leave the river each morning and return to their river roosts at night. The sight and sound will amaze you!

Hastings is a lively community that regularly caters to the group tour market. The [Hastings Museum of Natural and Cultural History](#), 1330 N. Burlington Ave., 402-461-4629, has one of the best natural history collections in the region, including the “People of the Plains” exhibit from prehistoric times to historic trails and pioneer towns.

Hey Kool-Aid! *Kool-Aid: Discover the Dream* is an interactive exhibit that tells the story of the birth of one of America’s favorite soft drinks. Lifelike murals and replicas, a fiber-optic river of Kool-Aid, interactive kiosks, and the original Kool-Aid Man costume help to tell the story.

The *Groundwater Discovery Adventure* teaches visitors about the Ogallala Aquifer (a large underground water reserve located underneath the Great Plains region) and the importance of groundwater to the settlement and development of the central plains. Some displays in this exhibit include a floor-to-ceiling mural of a prairie

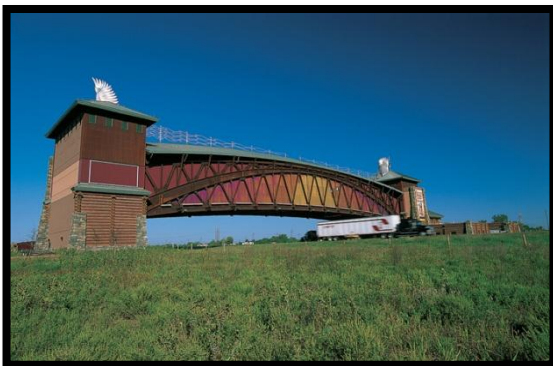
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landscape, paleontology dig areas, a simulated spring that bubbles from the Ogallala Aquifer and through a raised stream into the room, a walking bridge, teepees and an 1857 log cabin. An interactive water display allows visitors to dam water in a stream, lift gates to irrigate crop areas, and divert the stream to flood a miniature town.

The J.M. McDonald Planetarium will schedule special show times for groups. Also located there, the former IMAX Theatre has been upgraded to the Lied Super Screen Theater. Documentary and full-length feature films are shown on the five-story high screen to provide an incredible viewing experience.

Colorful banners hang throughout the city during the summer proclaiming Hastings as the official birthplace of Kool-Aid. The local visitors' bureau staff, 402-461-8400, can arrange dining experiences, tours of businesses and historic landmarks, evening entertainment and overnight accommodations for your group. Go back to the days of Kool-Aid moustaches and release your inner child at [Kool-Aid Days](#) in August.

Make sure you visit [Rowe Sanctuary and Iain Nicolson Audubon Center](#), 308-468-5282, near Gibbon, 30 minutes southeast of Kearney off Interstate 80. This 1,250-acre wildlife sanctuary is located on the banks of the Platte River. In early spring, more than one-half million Sandhill cranes pass through the area on their northward migration. Trips to crane viewing blinds are available every morning and evening in March and the first week in April. The Nicolson Audubon Center offers stunning views of the Platte River, interpretive displays, gift shop, and trails. An interesting tidbit about the facility is that it was constructed entirely of hay bales. Reservations are required for crane season viewing blinds in March.



Just east of Kearney, you will literally drive under [The Great Platte River Road Archway Monument](#), 877-511-2724. Locally known as the Arch, no tour of Nebraska is complete without a stop at the only tourist attraction in America that is located over a federal interstate highway. Built to commemorate the westward expansion of America, the Arch highlights the west's original American Indian

habitants, the Mormon, Oregon and California Trails, and the pioneers who traveled these early routes. Other exhibits highlight the expansion of the railroad that founded many Nebraska towns, the Overland Stagecoach and Pony Express, the Lincoln Highway, as well as modern marvels, such as the telegraph and fiber optics. Your group will learn about the history of transportation and communication along the famous Platte River Road through magnificent interactive exhibits and stunning audio/visual effects. The Arch also includes a food court and gift shop.

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See Nebraska in a whole new way at the [Museum of Nebraska Art \(MONA\)](#), 2401 Central Ave., 308-865-8559, which features works of art that highlight Nebraska and the Great Plains in 11 exciting galleries. This impressive museum is housed in a 1911 Renaissance revival historic post office that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition to works by great artists, such as George Catlin, Robert Henri, J. Laurie Wallace, Grant Reynard, and John Falter, MONA boasts an original collection of works by John J. Audubon that focuses on indigenous Nebraska wildlife. The museum's permanent collection includes more than 5,000 works by artists of regional, national and international importance, prints and a number of impressive rotating collections. Visitors can relax and stroll outdoors through the Cliff Hillegass Sculpture Garden and browse through the museum shop for that perfect gift.

For the nature lover, be sure to stop at [Cabela's](#), 3600 Highway 30, 308-237-7999, in Kearney—the “World's Foremost Outdoor Outfitter.”

Wander through the stately mansion of one of Kearney's most influential people. George Washington Frank, who developed projects that helped Kearney grow in the late 1800s, built the three-story [George E. Frank House](#), 2010 W. 24th St., 308-865-8284, in 1889. An annual Christmas walk at the Frank House starts after Thanksgiving and lasts for two weeks. Tours of the house can be arranged for groups throughout the year. The mansion's Tiffany window was one of few such windows located in private residences in the Great Plains region. A Union Pacific depot, train caboose and six turn-of-the-century buildings at the [Trails and Rails Museum](#), 710 W. 11th St., 308-234-3041, highlight the importance that the railroad had on the region. As you explore Kearney, be on the lookout for [Cranes on Parade](#)—6-foot fiberglass cranes, each one an original work of art.

Beer and pizza—the thought of them kinda warms your heart, don't they? Well then you're in luck! [Thunderhead Brewery](#), 18 E. 21st St., 308-237-1558, offers award winning beer and delicious pizza baked in a stone oven that will be sure to satisfy even the most discriminating of beer and pizza connoisseurs. Tours of the brewery can be requested.

Much of Nebraska's beauty is found “off the beaten path” in places where fresh air, golden sunsets, wide open sky and prairie, and sparkling lakes and rivers hold court. There're also more birds than you can shake a stick at that migrate through Nebraska or call the state home. Three fun-filled tours from Kearney take you to experience the many hidden gems, treasures, and funky places that make Nebraska a unique destination. Contact: Sandhills Guest Ranch, 308-547-2460.

Day 3

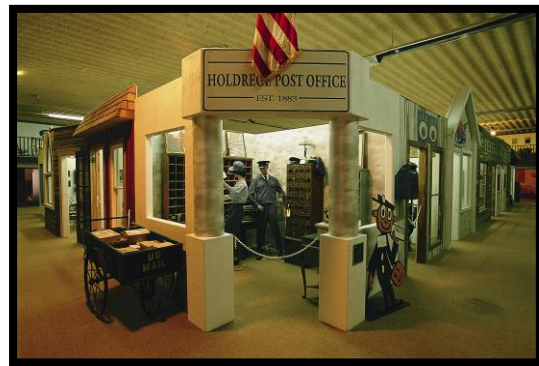
Minden is home to the world-famous [Harold Warp Pioneer Village](#), 800-445-4447. Twenty-six buildings, including a sod house, one-room school, Pony Express station, depot, general store and an 1884 church make up the village. It is home to the oldest

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existing Buick and 350 other antique cars, 20 historic aircraft, 100 vintage tractors, guns, motorcycles, snowmobiles, boats, buggies, trains, and trolleys. The historic crafts of spinning, weaving and broom-making are demonstrated for visitors year-round. If you come during the summer, plan to enjoy a nostalgic ride on an 1800-era steam carousel. A restaurant and a gift shop also are on-site.

Be sure to visit the [Minden Opera House](#), 322 E. 5th St., 308-832-0588, located in downtown Minden only a few blocks from Pioneer Village. Built in 1891, the building has been restored into a beautiful multi-purpose facility that attracts live performances from around the country. The Opera House can cater breakfast for your group. Minden knows how to celebrate Christmas. In fact, it's officially known as the "Christmas City." During the holiday season, the downtown district is ablaze with more than 12,000 lights for the annual "Light of the World" Christmas Pageant. This truly impressive sight has been a holiday staple in Minden since 1946.

During World War II, central Nebraska housed several German prisoner of war (POW) camps. Many POWs settled in the area and became productive and valued residents. The [Nebraska Prairie Museum](#), 308-995-5015, in Holdrege has an impressive collection from Camp Atlanta, originally located five miles from Holdrege. Works of art by POWs, as well as a variety of other exhibits, are displayed. The museum also has several historical buildings on its grounds.



The [Heartland Museum of Military Vehicles](#), 308-324-6329, in Lexington is an impressive collection of military equipment and machinery. Lexington also is home to [Mac's Creek Vineyards and Winery](#), 308-324-0440. Make sure you take time to sample their excellent Nebraska-produced wines and tour the vineyards and production facilities. Explore the history of Dawson County at the [Dawson County Historical Museum](#), 805 N. Taft St., 308-324-5340.

Cozad is home of painter Robert Henri, who founded the Ash Can style of painting and became a major influence in the art world. In fact, his works hang in galleries in New York City and Paris, France. His childhood home is the [Robert Henri Museum and Historical Walkway](#), 218 E. 8th St., 308-784-4154, where several prints of his art are on display, along with other Henri-inspired art.

One of the few Pony Express stations, 308-537-3505, still standing in Nebraska is located in Gothenburg's charming city park. Original historic items are on display and your clients can send postcards to friends and family back home postmarked with the original Pony Express stamp. The **Sod House Museum**, 308-537-2680, at the Gothenburg Interstate 80 exit shows visitors how the pioneers lived and survived on the treeless Great Plains. Both attractions have gift shops.

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Birthplace of the rodeo, North Platte is a great group tour stop. Colonel William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody spent many years in North Platte where he originated the rodeo. His ranch, [Buffalo Bill State Historical Park](#), 308-535-8035, is the focal point of the city. You can tour his house, as well as his beautifully maintained historic barn. During the third week of June, the entire community dons their western duds for NEBRASKAland Days, 308-532-7939. It’s ten days of western



fun, ethnic celebrations and live entertainment! If a hands-on experience with trains is what you want, don’t miss the **Railroad Museum**, 308-535-6719, in Cody Park where you will find Union Pacific’s Challenger 3977—one of the largest steam locomotives ever built. Elk, peacock, geese, deer, and a variety of other critters call the park home. Hint: They’ll like you better if you feed them.

Made famous by Bob Greene’s book *Once Upon a Town*, the North Platte World War II Canteen display is housed at the **Lincoln County Historical Museum**, 2403 N. Buffalo Bill Ave., 308-534-6579. The interpretative display details the story of the Canteen and its volunteers who, for 51 months, 24 hours per day, 7 days a week throughout World War II, met every U.S. military train to provide food, treats and hospitality to passengers. A community of less than 15,000 served more than six million service men and women free of charge. Don’t miss the [20th Century Veterans’ Memorial](#), 2811 S. Jeffers St., 308-532-6579, which is dedicated to the men and women who have served their country. The memorial features larger than life bronze statues and wall murals that honor the five branches of the armed forces. A “Walk of Honor” that is lined by thousands of commemorative bricks shows the names of veterans.

Feel like a kid again and enjoy a spectacular view of Union Pacific Railroad’s Bailey Yard—the world’s largest railroad classification yard—from atop the 8-story [Golden Spike Tower and Visitor Center](#), 308-532-9920, 1249 N. Homestead Road. The 95-foot tall tower and visitor center feature an enclosed 360 degree view of all the action below, historical and regional railroad memorabilia, and a gift shop where your group tour can purchase that special gift for their railroad enthusiast.

Conveniently located at the intersection of Interstate 80 and Highway 83, [Fort Cody Trading Post](#), 308-532-8081, is one of the state’s largest and engagingly eclectic gift shops. Antiques, leather goods, jewelry, western gifts, novelties, books, clothing, gag gifts and a variety of other fun gifts and souvenirs can be picked up at Fort Cody. If it’s fun, it’s at Fort Cody! Make sure you walk through the Old West Museum in the back of the store to view the miniature version of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show—a 20,000-piece hand-carved animated display. Fort Cody is a definite must-see!

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The **Artist's Co-op Art and Gift Gallery**, 308-534-1946, is a showcase of original work of west central Nebraska artists. Five large gallery rooms and an outdoor sculpture garden provide great opportunities to view the works of art at your own leisure. Workshops are hosted by artist members and nationally acclaimed professional artists.

If members of your group tour have always wanted to bring back some of that Old West charm into their homes or offices, now they can at [Rustic Traditions](#), 671 Halligan Dr., 308-534-5795. Take home furniture, lamps, pottery, glass, mirrors, and other pieces created in a western flair. Snacks and light refreshments can be available with advance planning.

Enjoy a delicious dinner, lunch, or wine tasting under tents surrounded by rows of grapevines at [Feather River Vineyards](#), 5700 South East State Farm Rd., 308-534-1538.

It's off to one of Nebraska's most famous watering holes—[Ole's Big Game Steakhouse and Lounge](#), 308-239-4500, in Paxton. Ole's is known for its impressive collection of mounted animals, as well as quality food and exceptional hospitality that attracts many group tours to this unique restaurant. There is plenty of room for groups, and the delicious food will bring you back again and again.

Before heading to Ole's for dinner, make sure you stop by [5 Trails Winery](#), 104 Main St., 308-239-4999 for a glass of fine Nebraska red, white or desert wine. You also can tour the production facility and pick up some gifts for friends back home.



Once a bustling cowboy town with a very colorful reputation, Ogallala now is a family-friendly town that embraces its colorful western past. Be sure to make time to visit [Front Street](#), 519 E. 1st St., 308-284-6000, to watch **The Crystal Palace**

Revue and Shoot Out—Nebraska's longest-running summer theatre. Belly up to the bar for a sarsaparilla or other beverage to wet your whistle while you watch showgirls and desperados perform. Plan a visit to the [Petrified Wood Gallery](#), 525 E. 1st St., 308-284-9996, after the show. This natural history gallery specializes in ancient woods, fossils and American Indian artifacts. The Ogallala/Keith County Tourism Office, 204 East A St, 308-284-4066, can arrange a visit to legendary **Boot Hill** and the stately **Mansion on the Hill**.

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Ogallala is home to “Big Mac” or [Lake McConaughy](#)—the largest inland lake in the region, 308-284-8800. The lake is a water lover’s paradise and offers white sand beaches, excellent fishing and relaxing lounges on a boat in the middle of the water. The **Lake McConaughy Visitor/Water Interpretive Center**, 308-284-8800, is Nebraska’s first water museum and interprets the significance of water to the state’s past, present and future. With advance notice, the Ogallala/Keith County Tourism Office can arrange a beach party, boat rides and a tour of **Kingsley Dam**. From late December to early March, the [Bald Eagle Viewing Center](#), 308-284-2332, is open below the dam, and is one of the best locations in the region to view these magnificent birds.

View one of the largest, privately held lilac collections in the country—**The Lilacs of Meadowlark Hill**, 308-284-2524. The best time to visit is May during “Lilac Time,” when the air is heavy with the perfume wafting from these beautiful flowers.

Explore the land of grapes and honey at [South Fork Vineyard](#), 845 Road East D, 308-248-6394, near Ogallala. Not only can your group tour stroll through the vineyards while sipping a delicious glass (or two) of Nebraska wine, they can take home a variety of honeybee products. Pure Nebraska honey, flavored honey cream, honey sticks, natural soaps and lotions, beeswax candles, and savory honey spread are just some of the many bee products available at the vineyard. Afterward, spend a pleasant time picking your own grapes.

Take in colorful history and stories, breathtaking scenery, small town charm, and wine...oh my, lots and lots of wine. [The Wines of the Historic Trails](#) takes your group tour along the modern day routes of the Oregon, Mormon, and California trails via the Western Trails Scenic and Historic Byway. Eat, drink, and be merry as you explore a variety of Nebraska wines at four wineries along the trail: **South Fork Vineyard and Honey Hut**, **17 Ranch Winery**, **Last Chance Winery**, and **Prairie Vine Winery**.

Take a step back in time at a working cattle ranch located in the heart of the Nebraska Sandhills, north of Ogallala. The historical [Haythorn Ranch Tours and Figure Traditions Event Center](#), 308-355-4000, maintains a herd of more than 500 ranch-bred horses that are used in day-to-day ranching activities. It is the largest breeder of quarter horses in the U.S. and the second largest in the world. Call for reservations for large and small group tour packages.