

NEBRASKA

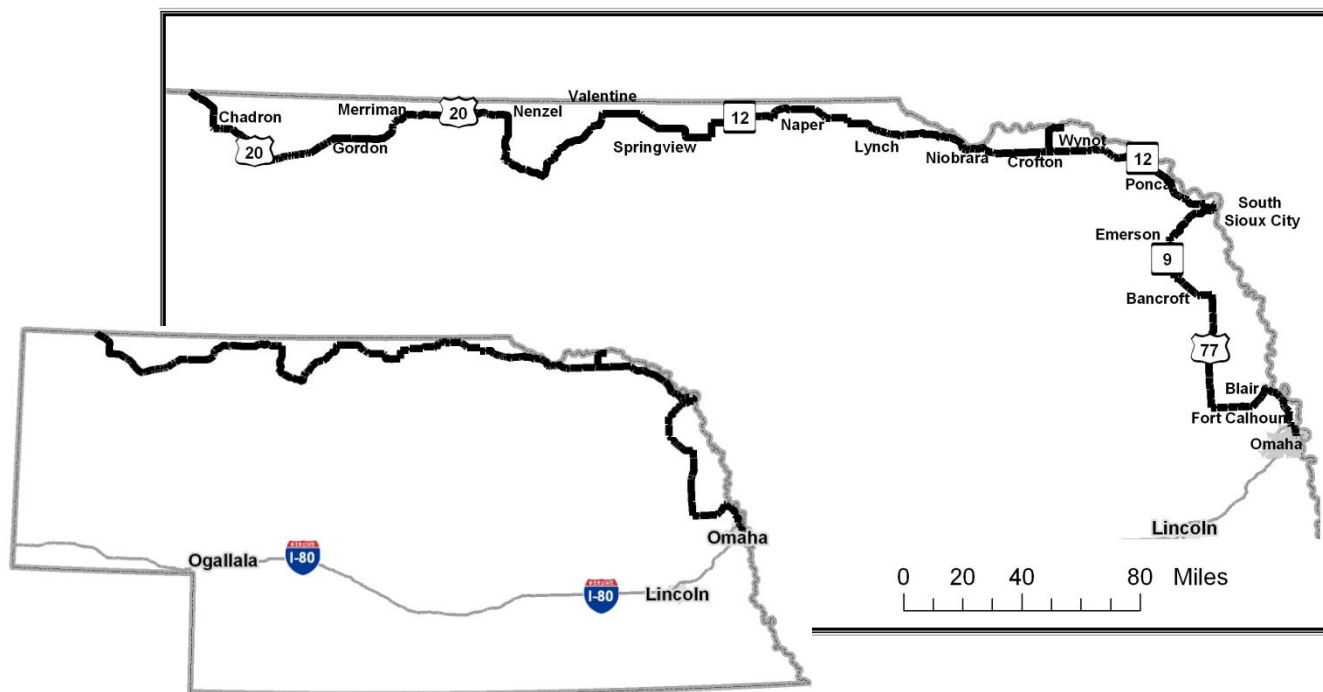
Group Travel Planner



Tour 9
Cruisin' down the Byway
A Scenic Tour of Northern Nebraska

2009

Tour 9 Cruisin' Down the Byway A Scenic Tour of Northern Nebraska



Day 1

Nestled between the picturesque **Pine Ridge**, 308-432-4401, to the south and the immense and wide-open High Plains country to the north and west, Chadron enjoys one of the most scenic locations of any Nebraska town. This community of more than 5,000 people and the surrounding area boast excellent attractions and tourism services to keep your group happy and wanting to come back for more! Established in 1926, [Chadron State Park](#), 308-432-6167, is Nebraska's first state park and full of outstanding group activities, such as paddleboats, black powder demonstrations, hiking and sightseeing. The park is nestled within towering pine trees and rugged buttes, affording group tours with ample photo opportunities. Services can be provided to groups for meals and meetings. Advance notice is required for groups.



The [Museum of the Fur Trade](#), 6321 Highway 20, 308-432-3843, is located just outside Chadron. This one-of-a-kind facility displays artifacts from the lucrative fur-

Tour 9: Cruisin' Down the Byway

trading industry that was once a thriving business in northwest Nebraska in the early 1800s. The Bordeaux Trading Post, built in 1837, stands on the museum grounds and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Attractions in Chadron include the [Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center](#), 1000 Main St., 308-432-6401, located on the campus of Chadron State College. The center is dedicated to the study of Nebraska and High Plains culture, literature and history. The Heritage Room hosts a collection of Sandoz's books and poems. The [Dawes County Historical Museum](#), 341 Country Club Road, 308-432-4999, shares the story of the area throughout several buildings of the museum complex, such as an original log house and barn, schoolhouse and railroad caboose.

World-renowned western historical author Mari Sandoz wrote about her life in Nebraska's impressive Sandhills region. A local publishing firm has an extensive collection of her works in its Mari Sandoz Room, 117 Main St., 308-282-9972. Your group tour can learn about this fascinating woman and her impact on Nebraska's literary scene. The Mari Sandoz Homestead is 30 miles south of Gordon on Highway 27, and tours are available from the Gordon Tourist Information Center, 308-282-0730. View cowboy memorabilia from the late 1800s to present day at the Tri-State Old Time Cowboy Museum, 308-360-1447. The Scamahorn Museum, 308-638-7643, is in a restored 1880s era church and chronicles the area's colorful history.

Explore the scenery along the Bridges to Buttes Scenic Byway (Highway 20) to Merriman and the [Arthur Bowring Sandhills Ranch State Historical Park](#), 308-684-3428. The park has a long history that stretches back to 1854. The visitor center, outbuildings and ranch house document the history of ranching in the Sandhills, and chronicle the lives of Arthur and Eve Bowring. Both believed strongly in community service and dedicated a great deal of time in the public forum. Eve was the first woman from Nebraska to serve in the United States Congress as a senator. Eve's collection of political memorabilia is a Who's Who in American politics.

The **Sandhills Spirit of the West**, 402-823-4131, in Nenzel is the perfect way to end your day. Experience Nebraska's Sandhills among genuine cowboy surroundings. Your tour can sit back and relax for a spell on a rustic wagon ride, and learn about the area's history, settlement and ranching ways from local cowboys and ranchers. Make sure you're plenty hungry for a hearty chuck wagon dinner, featuring Dutch oven cobbler, biscuits, coffee, cowboy beans, and a mouthwatering rib eye steak. Group reservations required.

Valentine is Nebraska's "Outdoor Capital," 308-376-2969, and offers your group a wide variety of exciting outdoor activities, including canoeing, hiking, biking, wildlife watching and even stargazing. Each July, Valentine hosts the [Annual Nebraska Star Party](#), 402-489-8197, when amateur and professional astronomers from around the world come here to view the night sky in one of the darkest places

Tour 9: Cruisin' Down the Byway

in the country—the Sandhills. Valentine also is home to Nebraska's highest waterfall located in [Smith Falls State Park](#), 402-376-1306.

Once finished, the nation's longest hiking/biking trail will pass through Valentine—the Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail will extend 321 miles from Norfolk to Chadron. A portion of this trail already is completed around the city. On February 14, all eyes are on the “Heart City” as hundreds of postcards and letters are mailed from Valentine with the official Valentine postmark.

Downtown Valentine is one attraction you don't want to miss. It boasts everything from arts and craft shops, (**The Gallery**, 226 N. Main St., 402-376-3834) and bookstores (**Plains Trading Company**, 269 N. Main St., 402-376-1424) to a cyber café and one of the area's largest western wear stores—[Young's Western Wearhouse](#), 143 N. Main St., 800-658-4398. Dining at [Peppermill Steakhouse](#), 112 N. Main St., 402-376-1440, or [Jordan's](#), 402-376-7255, and dancing or stomping your heels at an outdoor concert are just a few of the many ways to “kick up your heels” in the city.

Valentine sits in the Nebraska Sandhills, which cover an area of more than 19,000-square miles, and is the largest grass-stabilized sand dune region in North America. However, these Sandhills are not a desert, but instead sit above one of the largest underground water reservoirs in the world—the Ogallala Aquifer. The groundwater rises to the surface in many places, creating marshes, small lakes and bubbling springs.

Established in 1935, the [Valentine National Wildlife Refuge](#), 308-376-1889, covers more than 70,000 acres and is a paradise for outdoorsmen and wildlife watchers. More than 240 bird species have been identified on the various lakes and marshes.

It's a hot day. So, what's the best way to cool off? By canoeing or tubing down the Niobrara River. Trips with the [Heartland Elk Guest Ranch](#), 402-376-1124, near Valentine take your group tour past sheer cliffs, through wooded passages, and down one of the most scenic rivers in the country.

The ultimate wilderness experience awaits your group tour at [Graham Canoe Outfitters](#), 402-376-3708, near Valentine. Canoe trips, tandem and solo kayak trips, tubing trips, and some of the best times your group tour will ever experience are waiting for you! So, grab your swimming suit, sunscreen, and a camera, and have one of the best rides of your life!

Take Highway 83 five minutes south of



Tour 9: Cruisin' Down the Byway

Valentine to the historic **Bryan Bridge**, 402-376-2969, which was constructed in 1932 over the Niobrara River. The scenic overlook offers a spectacular view of the river and the old train trestle bridge that is part of the nationally designated Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail.

Southwest of Valentine, [Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area](#), 402-376-3320, is a massive reservoir set in the middle of the Sandhills. Merritt Reservoir covers nearly 3,000 acres, has an impressive 44 miles of shoreline, and offers some of Nebraska's premier fishing. Plan a meal or snack stop at the **Waters Edge Restaurant**, 402-376-3320, where you also can soak in a panoramic view of the reservoir. Located adjacent to the reservoir is [Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest](#), 402-823-4154. This 115,703-acre forest is a mixture of forest and prairie deep in the Sandhills.

Day 2

Enjoy a refreshing break at the **Turtle Butte Lodge and Café**, 402-497-4100, located in a historic building in Springview. The hotel and café offer a variety of dishes prepared with local ingredients, such as buffalo and locally raised beef. Also, at a height of 296 feet from ground to blade, the **wind turbines** west of town are the largest ones in the country.

Start your Lewis and Clark Trail Tour in Naper at the [White Horse Ranch](#), 402-832-5560, where the American White Horse is bred. A museum and guided tour will thrill your group and give them an up-close view of ranch life in Nebraska.

Located along the **Outlaw Trail Scenic Byway** (Highway 12), Lynch is home to **Old Baldy**, 402-569-3143, which served as a historical landmark for riverboats. In 1804, the Lewis and Clark Expedition stopped here and saw its first prairie dog village. Make sure you stop in town to buy one of the famous Lynch Dawgs—a stuffed toy prairie dog—developed for the 2004 Lewis and Clark Commemoration.

Located at the confluence of the Niobrara and Missouri rivers, Niobrara had to be moved twice to higher ground due to flooding. Luckily your group tour doesn't have to worry about high water as they explore what Niobrara has to offer. The [Kreycik Riverview Elk Ranch](#), 88971 517 Ave., 402-857-3850, southwest of Niobrara State Park, is a fun place to encounter wildlife close up. Load your group into a covered wagon for an enjoyable ride around the picturesque ranch to see majestic elk and bison herds. You'll never forget the experience of hand feeding buffalo as they clamor to the



Tour 9: Cruisin' Down the Byway

wagon for corn! It's truly an experience! The gift shop sells a variety of buffalo-related products, clothing, and food, such as tasty buffalo jerky (if you like it a little spicy, try the jalapeño flavor).

[Niobrara State Park](#), 89261 522 Ave., 402-857-3373, offers your group tour a wide variety of outdoor experiences, such as picnicking, swimming, boating, hiking on 14 miles of trails, fishing, horseback trail riding, and wildlife watching. The **J. Alan Cramer Interpretive Center**, 402-857-3373, offers an exceptional view of the park and highlights the history and people of the area. If you visit between Memorial and Labor Days, make sure to attend the buffalo cookout. With prior arrangements, your tour can experience the history and natural wonders of the Missouri River on the [Upper Missouri River Float Trip](#), which follows the same path as Lewis and Clark 200 years ago.

The **Ponca Earthlodge** and **Ponca Tribal Museum**, 2543 Park Ave., 402-857-3519, display the rich culture and heritage of the Ponca Tribe and their influence on this region of Nebraska. The museum displays artifacts from Ponca history, American Indian artwork, tribal archive photographs and a gift shop that specializes in American Indian artwork. Located in the Powwow area, the **Ponca Native Garden** contains many varieties of plants that were used by the ancestral Ponca, such as maize, squash, beans, pumpkins, sunflowers, strawberries, sage, and watermelon. An outer area of the garden includes plants that were beneficial to the Ponca Tribe and wildlife, such as buffalo berries, sweet potatoes, ground cherries, and wild plums.

See if Lady Luck is smiling on you at the **Ohiya Casino**, 52946 Highway 12, 402-857-3860, on the Santee Reservation. Located a few miles east of Niobrara, this 12,000-square-foot casino is owned and operated by the Santee Tribe. You can purchase authentic American Indian jewelry, blankets and other crafts. Adjacent to the casino is the **Ohiya Casino Café**, which serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. A weekend buffet and Sunday brunch are offered during the spring, summer and fall months. So, get out your bucks and start having fun! As you travel across the reservation, you will go through the **Nebraska Everglades** where the highway is lined on both sides by marshes and water.

The historic [Argo Hotel](#), 211 W. Kansas St., 402-388-2400, in Crofton is a great place for your group to spend an afternoon relaxing on the spacious front porch. This beautiful hotel has been restored into a bed and breakfast, while the restaurant is able to accommodate group tours for full meals or afternoon teas. Spend time downstairs singing along with the player piano in the restored speakeasy tavern. And don't forget to ask your host about the Argo Hotel ghost! Make plans to spend time at the [Jolene Steffen Studio](#), 55472 888th Road, 402-357-3740, near Constance, east of Crofton. Her art reflects the things that mean the most to her—wide-open sky, rolling hills, beautiful wildflowers, garden flowers, children, animals, creeks, and pastoral northeast Nebraska scenes. The vividness and quality of

Tour 9: Cruisin' Down the Byway

Jolene's works truly will amaze you! Plus, they are affordable to practically everyone, with most prices ranging from \$30 to more than \$500 for the larger pieces.

One of Nebraska's largest lakes, **Lewis and Clark Lake**, is located in the **Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area**, 402-388-4169, 7 miles north of Crofton on Highway 121. This is a prime area for bird watching, especially for bald eagles. Winter is a great time to visit when frigid temperatures freeze the lake and provide great opportunities for ice fishing, skating, and snowmobiling. The Corps of Engineers operates a power generation plant at **Gavins Point Dam**, 402-667-7873, and the **Lewis and Clark Visitor Center**, 10 miles north on Highway 12, 402-667-2546. Tours of the power plant are given Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Listed on the Nebraska Survey of Historic Places, [Bow View Farm](#), 88664 550 Ave., 402-388-4798, offers your tour a glimpse into the rural way of life. A historical walking tour of the farm's buildings and a low impact birding hike along Bluebird Trail are two activities awaiting your group tour. An on-farm store is located in a historic 1916 barn where you can purchase home-raised black oil sunflower birdseed, wild birdseed, birdfeeders, postcards, and other items. 1 mile west of Crofton on Highway 12 and 3¼ miles south on 550 Ave.

The [Corps of Discovery Welcome Center](#), 402-667-6557, in South Yankton is located at the intersection of two historic transportation routes—the Lewis and Clark Trail and the Pan-American Highway (Highway 81). The visitor center boasts a gorgeous view of the Missouri River and the surrounding countryside from the scenic overlook. Other features of the center include interpretive panels that retell the story of Lewis and Clark, an art gallery and a gift shop full of Nebraska-made products. With advance scheduling, tours from the visitor center to area attractions can be arranged.

[Prairie Blossom Trails](#), 55582 887 Road, 402-357-3702, near Fordyce is one of the few places in the country that graze Scottish Highland cattle. On your tour of the farm, you can get a firsthand view of these unique looking creatures, walk trails made by pioneer wagons of the past, or simply take in the breathtaking pasture landscape or sunset. Make sure you pick up some of the Scottish Highland beef. It's some of the best beef you'll ever eat! Group tours are offered between May 1 and October 31. Directions: (A) 3 miles south of Highways 81 and 12 junction, turn east on 887 Road, ¾ of a mile and south 1/3 of a mile; (B) 5 miles north to 887 Road from Pleasant Valley Store at Highways 81 and 84 junction.

Spend some time with certified organic farmers at [Marv and Ed's Farm](#), 55996 Highway 12, 402-357-2150 near Fordyce. You won't find any additives or preservatives here! These lifelong farmers raise a variety of organic vegetables and grains, such as corn, oats with sweet clover, alfalfa, turnips, soybeans and hay. You also can spend some time watching the many critters they raise—dairy cows and

Tour 9: Cruisin' Down the Byway

calves, herds of cattle, hens, turkeys, geese, hogs, Angora goats, and Guinea fowl. Tours are provided from May 1 to October 1. Directions: (A) 4 miles east and south of intersection of Highways 81 and 12; (B) north of Hartington, 3 miles west and south from intersection of Highways 12 and 57.

Grape growing and wine production facilities are sprouting up all over Nebraska. [Nissen Brothers Vineyards](#), 88560 566 Ave., 402-254-3426, near Bow Valley is a seven-acre family owned vineyard. Spend time with the owners learning about the process of growing grapes for wine. Directions: 3 miles north of Hartington on Highway 57 and 886 Road, then 2½ miles east to 566 Ave., then south ½ mile.

Located 2 miles east of Wynot off Highway 12, [St. James Marketplace](#), 89039 570th Ave., 402-357-3330, is located in a historical schoolhouse. Today it's home to a wonderful farmer's market, craft fair and tearoom that is ideal for an afternoon snack. A variety of historical exhibits also are on display. This unique attraction is a must-see for your group tour. If your tour comes through in late September, plan to stay for the Heritage Fest. Inquire from the ladies at the marketplace about taking a side trip on Rattlesnake Road—one of the most breathtaking backcountry roads in the region. The Wiseman Monument along the road recounts a chilling pioneer murder story. Note: The monument and scenic drive are via dirt roads, and no services are available.



Horseback riding, watching nature, kayaking, and bird watching are some of the endless possibilities your group tour can experience at [Turkey Creek Ranch](#), 402-355-2614, near Newcastle in scenic northeastern Nebraska.

Located a short drive north of Ponca on Highway 12, [Ponca State Park](#), 402-755-2284, features one of Nebraska's most comprehensive outdoor/environmental education programs, including history, biology, ecology, astronomy, geology and archaeology of the area. With more than 20 miles of recreational trails, the park provides plenty of opportunities for your group to commune with nature. During the fall months, hayrack rides are available for groups of 15 or more. As part of the park's annual Halloweenfest on the second weekend in October haunted hayrack rides are a spooky way to experience the park. Buffalo burgers, Lewis and Clark stew and fish fries are held in the summer and fall months. During spring, the park comes alive with the sounds of migratory and native songbirds.

The [Missouri National Recreational River Resource and Education Center](#), 402-755-2284, boasts a large interpretive display and exhibit area, a field laboratory and plenty of meeting rooms. Make sure you drive to the tri-state overlook along the Missouri River for a phenomenal view of the river and surrounding countryside.

Tour 9: Cruisin' Down the Byway

The [Towers of Time](#), 402-755-2284, exhibit features relief carvings of the flora and fauna of three time periods in northeast Nebraska. A waterfall, pond, fountain and walking path complement the towers. Check it out after dark when the entire exhibit is beautifully lit.

South Sioux City offers a variety of restaurants, lodging and shopping opportunities for your group tour.

Day 3

The Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska will delight and inspire you as they give you a view into their culture, way-of-life, art, and history. The [Winnebago Cultural Center and Museum](#), 402-878-2272, tells the story of the Winnebago Tribe and its rich cultural and historical heritage.

One of the goals of the Winnebago Tribe is to restore bison to the area. Visitors can quietly admire these majestic animals from a pull-off along the main highway. It truly is an amazing sight, 402-878-4075.

Afterward, spend quality time shopping in the Winnebago Village Center for hand-crafted American Indian products at the [Woodland Trails Art Center](#), 503 Ho-Chunk Plaza, 402-878-2400. This multi-attraction destination centered on the arts and fine crafts features a gallery for traveling exhibits. Separate studios give Woodland Trails' artists and craftspeople a setting to demonstrate and educate others about their works, such as pottery, painting, drawing, quilting, and beading lessons. An impressive show by the Many Moccasins Dance Troupe and a delicious fry bread lunch or dinner at the arts center can round out your group tour's fun.

Next to the arts center is [AllNative.com](#), 503 Ho-Chunk Plaza, 402-878-2400, which specializes in American Indian-made and native-themed products, such as jewelry, home décor, clothing, books, and videos. In the center of Winnebago Village Center is the [Honoring-the-Clans Sculpture Garden and Cultural Plaza](#), 402-846-5353. Twelve statues, each representing one of the Winnebago Tribe's clans, are arranged in a large circle.

Emerson, the only town in Nebraska located in three counties, is home to the **Iron Horse Bar and Casino**, 1010 S. Main St., 402-695-0180. Owned by the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, this 2,000-square-foot facility offers Las Vegas fun and excitement, Nebraska style. The friendly staff at the Iron Horse will serve you up some great food and drinks while you're going for that big pay off! Great for small group tours.

Bancroft was home to Nebraska Poet Laureate John G. Neihardt. The [John G. Neihardt State Historical Site](#), 306 W. Elm St., 402-648-3388, gives your tour a fascinating look at an individual who dedicated his entire life to understanding and

Tour 9: Cruisin' Down the Byway



helping the American Indians. His most famous book, *Black Elk Speaks*, chronicles many years of interviews with this famous Indian chief. Neihardt's study, where he wrote many of his books and poems, is located on the center's grounds. A gift store is on site where your tour can purchase exquisite American Indian jewelry and artifacts.

Enjoy a glass of full-bodied Nebraska wine and a tour of the operation at [Silver Hills Vineyards & Winery](#), 3130 County Road M, 402-374-1602, in Tekamah. The farm operation also raises corn, soybeans and cattle.

Nebraska and Iowa share [DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge](#), 402-533-4455. Located near Blair, Neb., the refuge is a great place to view wildlife year-round along the Missouri River. Also located in the refuge's visitor center is a premier archaeological display of artifacts from the Steamboat Bertrand that sank in the Missouri River in 1865. More than one million artifacts were recovered from the wreckage, and many are in remarkable condition to this day.

Fremont has a great selection of antique shops in its historic downtown district, and a lovely county museum—the [Louis E. May Museum](#)—is housed in a stately mansion, 1643 N. Nye Ave., 402-721-4515. After spending time shopping and visiting the museum, climb aboard the [Fremont & Elkhorn Valley Railroad](#), 1835 N. Somers Ave., 402-727-0615, for a picturesque 16-mile ride through northeast Nebraska in a diesel powered train. The tour includes a half-hour stop in Nickerson. Between May and October, you can depart on an exciting two-hour journey. Caboose and climate-controlled group coach charters are available year-round. The [Fremont Dinner Train](#), 650 North H St., 402-727-4245, can provide a full dining and riding experience for your group. Special events include murder mysteries, USO shows, dinner theatre, winetasting and seasonal shows.

Good times will be had by all as your tour speeds down the Platte River, the wind blowing through their hair. Admire eagles as they soar overhead looking for food or a comfy branch to watch you tear down the river. Wildlife, great scenery, relaxation and a rip roarin' good time are at [Bryson's Airboat Tours](#), 402-968-8534. Spend some quality time surrounded by the arts at **Gallery 92 West**, 92 W. 6th St., 402-721-7779. Enjoy a good time at [John C. Fremont Days](#), 402-727-9428, each July.

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**

Tour 9: Cruisin' Down the Byway

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 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-feet 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

Tour 9: Cruisin' Down the Byway

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 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.

Tour 9: Cruisin' Down the Byway

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, 402-332-5999, 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.