

# NEBRASKA

## Group Travel Planner



### Nature Tourism Opportunities



## Nebraska Nature Tourism Group Tour Opportunities

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From the world class Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha to the state's growing wine industry, Nebraska offers a wide variety of nature tourism opportunities. This publication is designed to help make planning and operating your nature tourism tour through Nebraska as easy and profitable as possible.

We will gladly provide you with additional information if there is something you need to know that is not included in the manual.

We look forward to working with you!

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### **Agate Fossil Beds National Monument**

[Agate Fossil Beds National Monument](#), 301 River Road, 308-668-2211, south of Harrison, is a fossil lover's paradise. Fossilized mammals from 19 million years ago are embedded and easily visible in the walls and canyons of the 3,000-acre national monument. There are miles of easy-to-navigate hiking trails throughout the property and the visitor center interprets the history and significance of the area. Agate Fossil Beds also tell the story of "Captain" James Cook—a former professional hunter, guide, Army scout and owner of the nearby Agate Springs Ranch. For 50 years, the ranch was a haven for American Indians, such as Chief Red Cloud. Cook welcomed and fed his guests, and in return, they repaid his generosity by presenting him with gifts throughout the years. In time, these gifts became a sizable and important collection of American Indian artifacts, which are now permanently displayed in the visitor center. This is truly a unique collection and a must-see exhibit! Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### **Alda**

The [Nebraska Bird Observatory at the Crane](#)

[Meadows Visitors Center](#), 888-382-1820, in Alda

(6 miles west of Grand Island) offers a variety of

Sandhill crane-related activities on 250 acres of

pristine or restored prairie along the Platte River.

Witness the awesome sights and sounds of

"Wings over the Platte"—an award-winning

celebration of the world's largest crane migration (a



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half million Sandhill cranes). Year-round programs and special events are available in the interpretive center. Suggested tour time: ½ hour (programs), 2-3 hours (guided tours), and 2 hours (Crane Lore Round the Campfire). As you visit the sights around Grand Island, keep your eyes peeled for 30 majestic Sandhill cranes all decked out for **Crane Mania**.

### Amherst

Come on down and enjoy life on the farm at [Harvest Moon Farms](#), 308-826-2068. A delicious catered picnic lunch, 7-acre corn maze, and scenic hayrack ride through the pumpkin patch are in store for your tour. Visit Grandma's Kitchen and the Country Store for great food and gift ideas. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### Ashland

Delicious chuckwagon dinners, yodeling and toe tappin' cowboy shows await your group tour at **Double D Ranch**, 6790 Grover St., 402-944-6144. So don your best cowboy hat and get ready to sing along and eat some of the most scrumptious food this side of the Mississippi! Suggested tour time: 3 hours. If a tasty glass of fine wine and a relaxing setting are more your group's style, come on by for a sample at [Four Winds Vineyard](#), 1033 County Road 5, 402-944-9463. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### Avoca

Pumpkins, fall produce and decorations, a wooded walking trail, picnic grounds, antiques, and gifts await your group tour at an 1881 family farmstead. **Bloom Where You're Planted Pumpkin Patch & Barn Store**, 911 108<sup>th</sup> St., 402-267-4104, is a great escape back to the farm! Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### Bayard

To experience what it was like as a pioneer, nothing compares to the [Oregon Trail Wagon Train](#), 308-586-1850, one mile from Chimney Rock. Put on your best western duds and step back in time to the 1850s as your group boards a Conestoga wagon train for a bumpy ride alongside actual wagon ruts. Your group will enjoy campfire songs, stories and the most mouth-watering meal prepared over an open fire. It's the perfect way to end your day as an illuminated Chimney Rock lights up the night. Reservations required. Suggested tour time: 2 hours.



### Blair

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

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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. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### **Bloomfield**

Get an up-close view of one of the few grass-based dairies in the upper Midwest at [Bruns Dairy](#), 88088 538 Ave., 402-373-4906, near Bloomfield. Impressive grassland vistas and an abundance of green grass, colorful prairie flowers, and some of the most docile dairy cattle you've ever seen will make you think you've taken a trip to Ireland instead of northeast Nebraska. The dairy is home to the first New Zealand style milking parlor in Nebraska and soon, an on-farm cheese plant will offer visitors fresh cheese made from the milk of the Bruns' dairy herds. Tours of the dairy farm are available from May 15 to October 1. Directions: 6 miles west on Highway 84 to 538 Ave. from Bloomfield, farm is 100 yards south on gravel road. Suggested tour time: 2 hours.

### **Bow Valley**

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 home to one of the state's newest vineyards. 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.



### **Brewster**

Renowned as the smallest county seat in the nation, Brewster offers scenic views of the North Loup River, and is rich in history of horse thieves and saloonkeepers. Two businesses cater to the group tour market—[Uncle Buck's](#), 308-547-2210, and the **Sandhills Guest Ranch**, 308-547-2460. Uncle Buck's is a great place to enjoy a mouth-watering meal while surrounded by rustic, Old West charm. The Sandhills

Guest Ranch offers horseback rides, cookouts and storytelling with advance notice. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### **Brownville**

Marvel at the colors of the setting sun on the horizon as you sip a delicious glass of Nebraska-made wine on the deck at [Whiskey Run Creek Winery](#), 702 Main St., 402-825-4601.

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### **Bryon Bridge Scenic Overlook**

Take Highway 83 five minutes south of 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. Upon completion, this trail will extend 320 miles from Norfolk to Chadron, and will be the longest rails-to-trails (converting former railroad tracks into trails) in the country. Suggested tour time: ½ hour.

### **Burwell**

Just north of Burwell is the immense [Calamus Reservoir](#) and the historic Garfield County Fairgrounds, home each July to [Nebraska's Big Rodeo](#). The [Dream Weavers Cabin](#), 308-346-4383, has herb/tea/wildflower gardens, weavings and homeopathic remedies. The **Calamus Dam and Fish Hatchery**, 308-346-4226, at Calamus Reservoir is a multi-million dollar fish hatchery where your tour can observe how fish are raised in captivity.



Have an old fashioned, foot stompin' good time at [Calamus Outfitters](#), Highway 96, 308-346-4697. This cow/calf operation offers cattle drives, brandings and calving season experiences for your tour, as well as trail rides through the majestic Sandhills. The cream-can socials and pitchfork steak suppers are not to be missed! Suggested tour time: 3 hours.

### **Callaway**

If cattle, cowboys and miles of open space trip your group tour's trigger, make plans to head on down to [Ridder Ranch](#), 79225 Rye Valley Rd., 308-836-4430, near Callaway for a truly unforgettable experience working on a Sandhills cattle ranch. Take a turn at being a true cowboy; you'll never want to return to the city again!

### **Chadron**

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



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ample photo opportunities. Services can be provided to groups for meals and meetings. Advance notice is required for groups. Suggested tour time: 1-3 hours.

### Champion

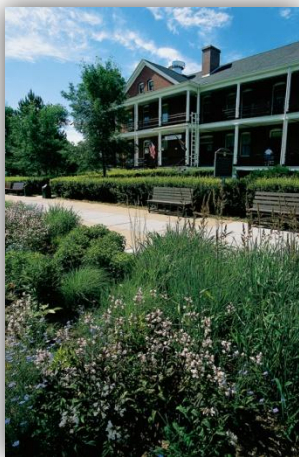
Site of the state's last water-powered flourmill, [Champion Mill State Historical Park](#), 308-882-5860, chronicles the history and story of the mill. From its beginning in 1886 through 1968, the mill produced outstanding flour products sold throughout the region. Today visitors can take a guided tour through the facility, relax on a bench underneath one of the many shade trees that surround the nearby pond, or buy a souvenir sack of ground flour to take back home. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

### Clarkson

Clarkson enjoys two major claims to fame—its rich Czech heritage and the renowned [Bluebird Nursery](#), 519 Cherry St., 402-892-3457. The Clarkson Chamber of Commerce can arrange a Czech breakfast for your group (make sure you eat a kolach, a delicious Czech pastry) and arrange a tour of the outstanding nursery. The Bluebird Nursery is one of the largest in the Midwest, and they ship seeds and plants around the globe. As you tour this quaint community, you'll notice the influence that the nursery has had on it. Clarkson is one of Nebraska's more colorful communities and boasts some of the best-kept gardens and green spaces in the state. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### Comstock

You'll know you're getting close to Comstock when you see an impressive collection of windmills looming on the horizon. Boasting more than 100 of these sentinels of the prairie, the [2nd Wind Ranch](#), 800-658-4443, has the largest freestanding windmill collection in the world. Suggested touring time: 1 hour.



### Crawford

Take the **Bridges to Buttes Scenic Byway** to Crawford, home of Nebraska's largest state park—[Fort Robinson State Park](#), 308-665-2900. It was at Fort Robinson where the great Lakota warrior Crazy Horse surrendered in 1877. A stone marker shows the spot where he was mortally wounded. Fort Robinson also was the site of the famous Cheyenne Outbreak and home to the "Buffalo Soldiers," an African-American garrison in a segregated army. Many activities are available at "Fort Rob," including buffalo stew cookouts, theatrical presentations at the Post Playhouse (group rates available), historic tours and museums, and Jeep rides through the majestic,

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pine-covered buttes.

Enjoy an exclusive three-day guided trail ride through the Land of Crazy Horse and northwest Nebraska's ruggedly beautiful high country. [High Country Ranch Ride](#), 617 West Ash Creek Rd., 308-665-1580, is a unique opportunity that will give your group tour a chance to live like a true Old West cowboy. Homespun entertainment, great food cooked outside, and some of the most stunning scenery in the world—what more can you ask for? Saddle up, your horse awaits!

### Crofton

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.

### Ericson

What do you do with an extra stock tank? Why, you put a picnic table and chairs in it, fill it with your friends, and take in on a leisurely float down the river! Safe and enjoyable for tours of all ages, tanking will certainly be a memorable experience your group tour will talk about for years to come! [Get Tanked](#), 308-653-5469, near Ericson takes you on a fun-filled 4½-mile trip down the Cedar River to Lake Ericson.

### Exit 426

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 motorcoach can drive through the safari, or, with prior arrangements, your group can board a tram for a guided tour. A gift shop and café are available. Suggested tour time: 1 hour. [Eugene T. Mahoney State Park](#) is one of Nebraska's most popular state parks, offering a variety of outdoor activities. Suggested tour time: 1 hour. The city of Ashland offers a number of fun-filled and exciting group tour opportunities to explore. Spend time sipping wine, relaxing, and shopping for gifts at [Four Winds Vineyard](#), 1033 County Road 5, 402-944-9463 in Ashland.

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### Fairbury

Make sure to spend some time at the [New Earth Clay Pottery and Art Gallery](#), 515 4<sup>th</sup> St., 402-729-3034, in downtown Fairbury. This pottery business has been around for more than 25 years, and features more than 25 Nebraska artists' artwork, including pottery, ceramics, glass, sculpture, paintings, photographs and jewelry. Pottery demonstrations and tours are available upon request.

### Fordyce

[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,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile and south  $\frac{1}{3}$  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 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.

### Fort Kearny State Recreational Area

[Fort Kearny State Recreational Area](#), 1020 V Road, 308-865-5305, is located only a short drive from the state historical park. If you visit Nebraska during March or early April, you can witness the spectacular annual Sandhill crane migration. Fort Kearny State Recreational Area is an ideal bird viewing area. An abandoned railroad line across the Platte River has been converted into a hiking and biking trail and provides excellent bird viewing opportunities for your group. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.



### Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge

As you enter the [Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge](#), 402-376-3789, you'll cross the Niobrara River on Cornell Bridge. Nearby is one of several access points

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for canoeing and tubing along the scenic river. Fort Niobrara was established in 1912 with six bison, 17 elk and a few deer on land donated to the federal government. Today, the refuge spans more than 19,000 square miles and is home to the Great Plains bison, the black-tailed prairie dog, elk and other resident wildlife. In addition, more than 200 species of migratory birds have been identified in the refuge. Groups can view wildlife up-close in a drive-through exhibition pasture. Don't forget your camera! Advance reservations are appreciated. Suggested tour time: 1-2 hours.

### Fremont

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 from which 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. Suggested tour time: 2 hours.

### Fullerton

It's time to get wet—and get tanked! Try something totally different at [Broken Arrow Wilderness](#), 1025 N. Fourth St., 308-536-2441, near Fullerton. Spend the afternoon floating down the Cedar River in a horse tank—yep, a horse tank. This is one of Nebraska's unique recreational pastimes, and one that no one on your group tour will soon forget. It's safe, it's fun, so let's get tanked! (If tubing is more your style, you can do that, too.)

### Gibbon

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. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.



[George Spencer Vineyard and Tasting Room](#), 7155 Pawnee Rd., 308-468-5612, is a central Nebraska treasure that features internationally acclaimed Nebraska wines. Wine tasting, vineyard tours, a delicious dinner, and gift shop are yours to enjoy. Reservations for dinner are required. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

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### Grand Island

Experience pioneer life on 200 acres at the [Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer](#), 308-385-5316, which is one of the top 10 living history museums in the country. You can walk through an 1890s railroad town, push a handcart on the Mormon Trail, have a better understanding of 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. Add 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. Tour time: 1-3 hours.



### Gretna

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.

### Halsey

Halsey is the gateway to the [Nebraska National Forest](#)—the largest hand-planted forest in the nation, 308-533-2257. This oasis in the Sandhills offers groups a variety of fun-filled activities, including nature trails and a panoramic view of the surrounding landscape from atop an observation tower. Picnic and restroom facilities are available. Suggested tour time: 1-2 hours.

### Hastings

[Hastings Museum/Lied Super Screen Theater/J.M. McDonald Planetarium](#), 1330 N. Burlington Ave., 402-461-4629. Hastings is a lively community that regularly caters to the group tour market. The Hastings Museum of Natural and Cultural History has one of the best natural history collections in the region,

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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 landscape, paleontology dig areas, a simulated spring that bubbles from the Ogallala Aquifer 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. Suggested tour time at the museum: 2 hours.

### Haythorn Ranch

Take a step back in time at this working cattle ranch located in the heart of the Nebraska Sandhills, north of Ogallala. The historical [Haythorn Land & Cattle Company](#), 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. Suggested tour time: 3 hours.

### Holbrook

Visit the [GROW Nebraska](#) store, 416 Central Ave., 888-476-9632, in Holbrook where your tour can purchase locally made and Nebraska-made crafts, products and souvenirs. Call ahead to make sure the store is open for your tour’s arrival.

### Hyannis

The tiny hamlet of Hyannis is home to the **Verde Valley Guest Ranch**, 308-458-2220, a working cattle ranch that was established 115 years ago. Groups can enjoy a

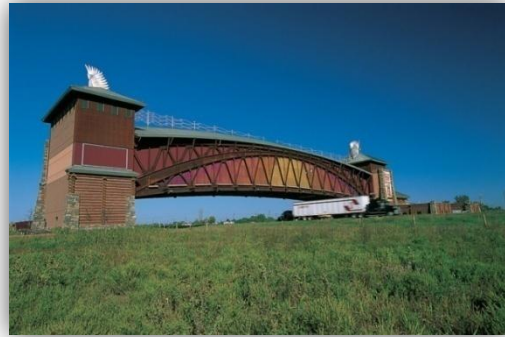
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variety of activities, including hiking, wildlife watching or witnessing the hard work involved with raising cattle. Advance group tour notice is required, and meals can be arranged with prior notice. Suggested tour time: 1-2 hours.

### Kearney

Just east of Kearney, you will literally drive under one of Nebraska's unique group tour attractions—[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 and 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. Suggested tour time: 1-1½ hours.



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.” This is Cabela's second Nebraska store; the original is in Sidney. Suggested tour time: 45 minutes.

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.

### Kimball

As you approach Kimball you'll notice Nebraska's newest “[Wind Farm](#),” 308-474-4759, on the horizon where seven large wind turbines convert the ever-present Nebraska wind into energy. Each turbine stands nearly 350 feet tall, with the blades and turbine weighing more than 40 tons. You must make prior arrangements for on-site access.

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### Lewellen

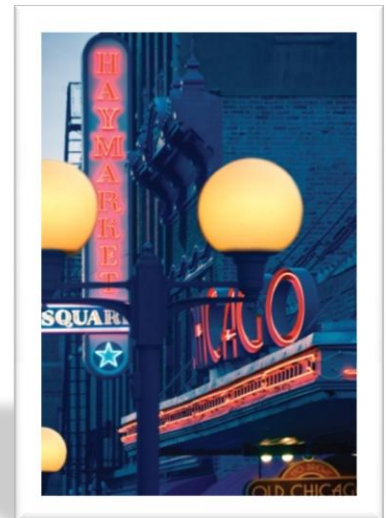
Grab your overalls and spend the day being Old McDonald on the farm at [17 Ranch](#), 5052 Rd. 197, 308-778-5543, in Lewellen. Immerse your group tour in the day-to-day operations of a working cattle ranch, from feeding and caring for livestock to tagging calves. Make sure to ask for a personalized ranch vacation for your group tour. Afterward, head to the **17 Ranch Winery**, 304 Main St., 308-778-5542, in downtown Lewellen to wet your whistle with delicious Nebraska wine and talk about your day down on the farm.

### Lexington

Lexington boasts two fabulous wineries—[Mac's Creek Vineyards and Winery](#), 308-324-0440, and [Millenium Wines Vineyard](#), 308-324-6094. So make sure you take time to sample their excellent Nebraska-produced wines and tour the vineyards and production facilities.

### Lincoln

Lincoln is Nebraska's state capital and second largest city. You can while 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, unique 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 spot. Lincoln also boasts many fine lodging properties that cater to the group tour market. If you're looking for unique Nebraska-made products, look no further than [From Nebraska](#), 140 N. 8<sup>th</sup> St., 402-476-2455, in the Haymarket. You're sure to find something special to take home to remember your trip.



The [Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center](#), 11700 SW 100<sup>th</sup> 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 also boasts more than 350 species of plants and more than 170 bird species. A short drive north of Lincoln takes you to [James Arthur Vineyards](#), 2001 W. Raymond Road, 402-783-5255. The winery features a winetasting room, gift shop and peaceful hiking trails. [Prime Country Vineyard](#), 402-826-3567, sits on 480 acres of beautiful rolling hills southwest of Lincoln in Denton. Enjoy whiling away the time sipping a variety of delicious wines in the tasting room. Suggested tour time at each attraction: 1 hour. Get "lost" in a labyrinth carved into more than 22 acres of corn

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with more than 3 miles of twists and turns at [The MaiZE at Benson Farms](#), 6000 S.W. 140<sup>th</sup> St., 402-795-3276. Bring a flashlight at try it in the dark! Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### Litchfield

Enjoy the true farming experience at **Fulton Farms**, 308-446-2520, where pasture tours, history tours, and birding and wildlife viewing opportunities are some of the many fun activities that will delight your group tour. Suggested tour time: 2-3 hours.

### Merriman

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. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area

[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. Suggested tour time: 1-2 hours. Located adjacent to the reservoir is [Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest](#), 402-823-4154. This 115,703-acre forest is a unique mixture of forest and prairie deep in the Sandhills. Suggested drive time through forest: 1 hour.

### Minden

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 existing Buick and 350 other antique autos, 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 gift shop is also on-site. Suggested tour time: 3 hours.



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### Mullen

If an authentic western adventure and cowboys are what your group tour craves, head on down to [Double R Ranch](#), 866-217-2042, near Mullen for a ranching experience that will take you back to the days of the Old West! Help with a cattle round up or move, check on windmills and the miles of fence, brand calves, check and feed the cattle, harvest hay, or just sit back and relax watching baby calves play together in the pasture. On this ranch adventure, there's something for everyone!

After a rewarding day on the ranch, your group tour can enjoy a hard-earned canoe trip down the **Middle Loup and Dismal Rivers**. Located in the heart of Sandhills Country, Mullen offers canoeing adventures, 308-546-2206 (Glidden Sandhills Motel). The Dismal River appeals to a high adventure trip, while the Middle Loup is more sedate and makes for a great group outing. A new adventure trend is floating down the river in a stock tank. These 7-9 foot tanks are virtually unsinkable and will keep you dry.

Round off the evening with a nice glass of award winning wine at [The Last Chance Winery Tasting Room](#), 114 N.E. 1<sup>st</sup> St., 308-546-2960.

### Naper

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.

### Nebraska City

Nebraska City boasts a variety of exciting attractions and activities, plenty of history, shopping opportunities and beautiful scenery—all in one charming community. Nebraska City's pride and joy is [Arbor Lodge State Historical Park and Arboretum](#), 2600 2nd Ave., 402-873-7222. Home of J. Sterling and Carolyn Morton, the 52-room Victorian-style mansion is a memorable stop for any group visit. J. Sterling Morton was the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture under President Grover Cleveland and helped establish Arbor Day as a holiday. There are quiet walking trails, gardens and nearby orchards with an "Apple House" where travelers can enjoy a variety of apple treats and buy souvenirs. Make sure you tour the Arbor Day Farm "Tree Adventure," which includes touch-screen exhibits, a film that shows the significance of trees and other exciting information about the environment. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

Make sure to spend some time sipping wine at one of Nebraska's finest wineries—[Arbor Trails Winery](#), 6450 J Road, 402-873-8888. Suggested tour time: 1 hour. Experience firsthand the journey of Lewis and Clark at the [Missouri River Basin Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center](#), 100 Valmont Dr., 402-874-9900, which sits atop an 80-acre site overlooking the Missouri River. The center focuses on the recorded scientific discoveries of plants and animals made during the journey. Enjoy hands-on exploration activities, interactive exhibits, a life-size replica of the

## Nebraska Nature Tourism Group Tour Opportunities

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keelboat used by Lewis and Clark, and a 48-foot Plains Indian Earth Lodge. Suggested tour time: 2-3 hours. The **River Country Nature Center**, 114 S. 6<sup>th</sup> St., 402-873-3000, is open by appointment only and houses more than 400 preserved specimens of native Nebraska birds, mammals, fish, amphibians and reptiles in replicas of their natural habitats. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

Apples, peaches, cherries, plums, grapes, cauliflower, lettuce, onions, pumpkins, squash, peppers, and more...oh my! Load up on delicious fresh fruits and vegetables at [Kimmel Orchard](#), 5995 G Road, 402-873-5293. A new shuttle path was developed to teach your group tour about the history and operation of the orchard. Benches, scenic resting spots, and picnic areas dot the hiking trail to let your tour enjoy spring's blossoms or the beautiful autumn colors. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### Nenzel

The [Sandhills Spirit of the West](#), 402-823-4131, is the perfect way to end your day before the next day's tour. Experience Nebraska's Sandhills among genuine cowboy surroundings where 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. Suggested tour time: 3 hours.

### Newcastle

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.

### Nickerson

The [Apple Barn at Fontenelle Orchard](#), 402-727-5272, features fresh, tree-ripe fruit that you can pick yourself. Tours of the orchard are available upon request. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

### Niobrara

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 go 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



## Nebraska Nature Tourism Group Tour Opportunities

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herds. You'll never forget the experience of hand feeding buffalo as they clamor to the 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). Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

[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. Suggested tour time: 1 hour. 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. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### North Platte

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. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour. During the third week of June, the entire community dons their western duds for NEBRASKAland Days, 308-532-7939. It is 10 days of western fun, ethnic celebrations and live entertainment! 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.



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### Ogallala

Ogallala also 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 help arrange a beach party, boat rides and a tour of **Kingsley Dam**. Suggested tour time: 2 hours. 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 off these beautiful flowers. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

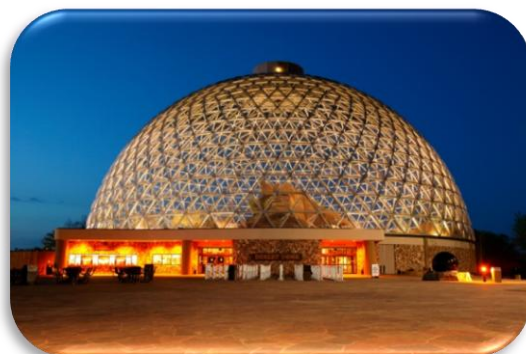
Explore the land of grapes and honey at [South Fork Vineyard](#), 845 Road East D, 308-248-6394, near Ogallala. Not only can your group tour stroll through the vineyards while sipping a delicious glass (or two) of Nebraska wine, they can take home a variety of honeybee products. Pure Nebraska honey, 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 from the vineyard.

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**.

### Omaha

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. 10<sup>th</sup> 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 the newly opened **Hubbard**



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**Gorilla Valley.** The zoo also boasts an outstanding big cat collection, open-air aviary, and the **Lozier IMAX® Theater**. The zoo's newest exhibit, **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. Suggested tour time: 3-4 hours.

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 100-acre [Lauritzen Gardens](#), 100 Bancroft St., 402-346-4002, includes an arboretum, bird sanctuary, rose garden, children's garden, herb garden, spring flowering 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 gift shop also is available. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

The preserve at the [Neale Woods Nature Center](#), 14323 Edith Marie Ave., 402-453-5615, 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. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

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. 30<sup>th</sup> 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. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

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

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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. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

### Oshkosh

Come and see the birds with [Bentley Birding Tours](#), 308-772-3926, near Oshkosh in scenic western Nebraska. Experience the peacefulness of Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Blue Creek, the Sandhills, and the North Platte River as your group tour searches for that rare bird species, or just a great day communing with nature.

### O'Neill

[Cross J Ranch](#), 48769 889<sup>th</sup> Rd., 402-336-1807, near O'Neill will satisfy your group tour's desire to get back to nature, live like a cowboy, marvel at impressive elk and buffalo herds, take a trail ride through miles of pastureland and meadows, learn the art of quilt making, bread baking, and campfire cooking, or just sit around simply enjoying the natural silence that surrounds them. Whatever your group tour's desire, Cross J Ranch can fulfill it!

### Pawnee City

Home of film stars Irish McCalla and Harold Lloyd, Pawnee City also is home to a very impressive historical museum complex. The [Pawnee County Historical Museum](#), 402-852-3131, is comprised of 16 historic buildings that display antique furnishings, tools, vintage vehicles, rare photos, books, unique handcraft items and a variety of other artifacts. Suggested tour time: 2 hours.

Enjoy the only winery and microbrewery in Nebraska! The [SchillingBridge Winery and Microbrewery](#), 62193 710<sup>th</sup> Rd., 402-852-2400, offers Nebraska produced wines and handcrafted microbrews surrounded by more than eight acres of grapevines. The centerpiece of the landscape is an 1890 Limestone Rock Island Railroad bridge. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### Pierce

Wine making in Nebraska? You betcha! Located northeast of Pierce is Nebraska's first vineyard—[Cuthills Vineyards](#), 54663 853 Road, 402-329-4181. Walking tours of the vineyards are available, and depending on what time of year your group stops, you may be able to witness the winemaking progress. Fun things to do include sampling wines, relaxing on the spacious patio overlooking the vineyards and eating a delicious catered meal in the historic barn. Suggested tour time: 2 hours.

### Ponca

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

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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, the second weekend in October, haunted hayrack rides are given. 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. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

### Ravenna

Grapes, berries, brambles, wildflowers, birds, fresh fruit pies, and warm cobbler—oh, and don't forget glass after glass of tasty Nebraska wine as you take in the scenic South Loup River Valley. [Cedar Hills Vineyard](#), 48970 375<sup>th</sup> Rd., 308-452-3181, near Ravenna gives your group tour all that and more! While there, ask to sample a strawberry or blackberry sangria—they're definitely worth it! Spend an equally enjoyable time at another Ravenna winery, [The Last Chance Winery](#), 48970 375<sup>th</sup> Road, 308-380-1718.

### Raymond

Experience everyday life while visiting a certified organic farm at [Branched Oak Farm](#), 17015 NW 70<sup>th</sup> St., 402-783-2124, near Raymond. An on-farm store sells food and products grown directly on the farm.

### Rose

While away the time riding in a Conestoga wagon to view a herd of nearly 1,000 bison at the [Hutchinson Buffalo Ranch](#), 402-273-4574. Other stops along the guided Perfect 10 Buffalo Tour include enjoying a drink from a natural artesian well, the chance to pet a tame bison named Miracle, and an incredible view of the Sandhills from Pike's Peak—the highest hill on the ranch.

### Royal

Scientists claim that [Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park](#), 402-893-2000, near Royal is one of the richest fossil finds of its kind in the northern hemisphere. Millions of years ago, a giant volcano in Idaho spewed volcanic ash into the area for several months, suffocating thousands of camels, horses and other prehistoric mammals. The ash encased the animals intact, and today visitors can go to the "Rhino Barn" to watch staff diligently uncover whole skeletons. There also is a visitor center/gift shop at the facility. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour. Go wild at [Zoo Nebraska](#), 4030 Highway 20, 402-893-2002, where you can view chimpanzees,

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monkeys, tigers, parrots, birds of prey, reptiles, wolves and much more. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

### Scottsbluff/Gering

Explore the history of farm and ranch equipment with vintage horse-drawn and steam-powered engines in the [Farm and Ranch Museum](#), 2930 M St., 308-436-1989, at the base of Scotts Bluff National Monument. If your group tour comes during the third weekend in September, make plans to watch live demonstrations of various farming equipment during the annual Harvest Festival. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.



Enjoy pine-covered canyons and rugged rock buttes at the **Wildcat Hills Nature Center**, 308-436-3777, a short drive south of Gering. Nestled within the [Wildcat Hills](#), the nature center is located in one of the most beautiful regions of Nebraska. A wide variety and abundance of native wildlife can be enjoyed from the information center's deck or along the more than 3 miles of hiking trails throughout the park. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

Two museums in Gering that are worth visiting are the [Wyo-braska Museum of Natural History](#), 850 U St., 308-436-7104, which houses more than 300 mounted zoological specimens from around the world. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

The [Riverside Zoo](#), 1600 S. Beltline Highway West, 308-630-6236, is an impressive facility that features more than 300 animals representing 97 animal species from around the world. Excellent picnic facilities and walking paths are available. Suggested tour time: 2 hours. Enjoy a panoramic view of Scotts Bluff National Monument as you sip a refreshing glass of wine at the [Prairie Vine Vineyard and Winery](#), 308-623-2955. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

The **Fillingham Exotic Animal Farm**, 308-623-1164, in Morrill, west of Scottsbluff on Highway 26, offers guided tours of exotic animals throughout the 275-acre farm. Some of the rare animals include a Z-donk, a zebus and an onyx. Reservations for guided tours are required. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

### Shubert

[Indian Cave State Park](#), 402-883-2575, includes more than 3,000 acres along the Missouri River. This pristine area is home to a variety of activities, such as camping, hiking, backpacking, picnicking, and nature and wilderness activities. There are 20 miles of hiking trails in the park. The fall months are particularly spectacular, and history buffs will enjoy the restored schoolhouse and general store from the old river town of St. Deroin. During the summer months, old-time crafts are

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demonstrated to visitors. You can reserve a group picnic shelter if needed. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

### Sidney

Sidney is home to [Cabela's](#)—the world's largest outdoor outfitter, 115 Cabela Dr., 308-254-7889. This Nebraska-based international mail-order business started as a home-based business selling fishing lures through the mail. Today Cabela's has a mailing list of more than 3 million people from around the globe, and visitors to Sidney can shop in the giant retail store located right on Interstate 80. Bargain hunters and outdoor enthusiasts will have a great time at Cabela's. The store's centerpiece is a giant man-made mountain featuring dozens of mounted animals climbing to its peak. Dining and restroom facilities are available. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.

Spend time getting better acquainted with your green thumb at [Ricky and Lucy's Country Greenhouse](#), 11732 Road 32, 308-254-2204. All perennials, annual plants, herbs, and vegetables are organically grown at the greenhouse, which means a healthier you and a healthier environment. Learn the art of processing fresh herbs and spices before heading out to the orchards to pick your own fruit and vegetables. Nothing tastes better than when you pick it yourself!

### Smith Falls State Park

[Smith Falls State Park](#), 402-376-1306, boasts the state's tallest waterfall. Water cascades 70 feet from the cliff top and empties into the scenic Niobrara River. Smith Falls is accessible via a national historic bridge that crosses the river and a wooden walking path that ends beneath the falls. Public restrooms are available at the park office/information center. Suggested tour time: 1-2 hours.

### Sparks

Try your hand at canoeing, tubing, or kayaking down the National Scenic Niobrara River. [Dryland Aquatics](#), 800-337-3119, near Sparks, one of Nebraska's smallest towns, will show your group tour one of the most unbelievable rivers in the world where six ecosystems meet, and impressive waterfalls and springs cascade down steep canyon walls. A camera is definitely worth taking along!



### Springfield

In addition to a beautiful view of the surrounding countryside, the [Soaring Wings Winery](#), 17111 S. 138<sup>th</sup> St., 402-253-2479, offers wine tastings, tours and a gift shop. Meander quietly along the walking paths at [Springcreek Gardens & Nursery](#), 12275 Main St., 402-253-8000, where a new plant or surprise is around every corner. The full service nursery and landscape design center offers more than 450 varieties of perennials, shrubs and landscape trees. Suggested tour time at each attraction: 1½ hour.

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### Stamford

Relive the days of the American Plains Indians at **Living History Tepee**, 308-868-9400. Agricultural tours, a working family farm, and pumpkin patch will delight everyone on your group tour. Spend a relaxing autumn afternoon searching for just the right pumpkin or enjoying a hayrack ride at **Pumpkin Corners**, 308-868-4121. Suggested tour time at both attractions: 1½ hour.

### Stockville

[Perk's Prairie Paradise](#), 308-367-8782, is truly one of Nebraska's hidden historic gems. This privately-owned tribute to Nebraska's pioneer spirit and history boasts 19 structures that visitors can walk through, including a one-room schoolhouse, sod house, church, saloon, two-story house and a replicated "pioneer street" featuring a boardwalk along false building facades. The buildings depict a surveyor's office, millinery shop, dentist office and carpenter's shop, among others. Seeing definitely is believing! A refreshment break can be provided. Suggested tour time: 2½-3 hours.

### Stuart

Experience a day in the life of the Plains American Indians during the 1800s through hands-on cultural learning classes, such as flint knapping, fire making, tools and weapons, primitive pottery, medicinal uses of plants and more. [Spirit in the Wind](#), 87255 46<sup>th</sup> Ave., 402-924-3180, is a great living history opportunity for your group tour. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour

### Superior

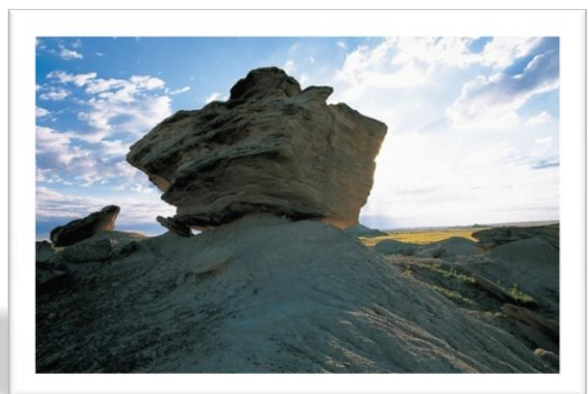
Enjoy a delicious glass of wine on the patio overlooking a stunning view of the vineyards [Superior Estates Winery](#), 200 W. 15<sup>th</sup> St., 402.879.3001. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

### Tekamah

Enjoy a glass of full-bodied Nebraska wine and a tour of the operation at [Silvercreek Hill Vineyards](#), 3130 County Road M, 402-374-1602. The farm operation also raises corn, soybeans and cattle. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour

### Toadstool and Hudson-Meng

[Toadstool Geologic Park](#), 308-432-0300, northwest of Crawford, resembles the famous South Dakota Badlands and is one of the most dramatic landscapes in Nebraska. Over the centuries, the clay and sandstone in the area have been eroded by wind and rain to form toadstool-shaped formations. The park also contains valuable fossil deposits and the longest known mammal trackway of the Oligocene epoch—more than one mile. A one-mile loop



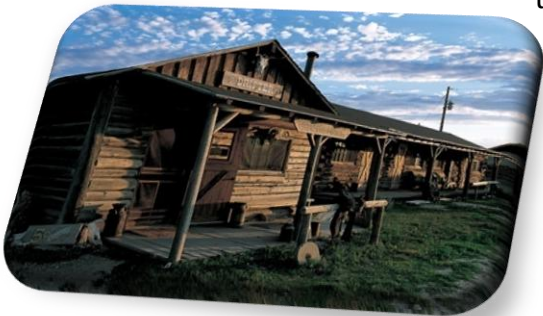
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trail from the campground highlights many fine examples of eroded clay/sandstone formations. A reconstructed sod house gives a glimpse into the past when prairie homesteaders used the only abundant building material available—sod. A hand water pump and full-accessible vault toilets are available. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

[Hudson-Meng Bison Kill Site](#), 308-432-0300, is located a short drive northwest of Crawford. More than 10,000 years ago, a great catastrophe killed hundreds of bison, the largest mammals on the Great Plains. More than 600 bison skeletons have been unearthed here and the mystery of how and why they died in one place at one time is still under investigation. Feel free to make your own suggestions! Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

Along the way to Hudson-Meng Bison Bonebed, make sure you stop at [High Plains Homestead](#), 308-665-2592, to enjoy some of the best pie in the world at the **Drifter Cookshack**. While there, spend some time visiting the recreated Old West village on



the property, which features a working blacksmith shop, antique store and the Dirty Creek Saloon, where you can enjoy a cool, refreshing non-alcoholic drink. Make sure to stop by the old-fashioned general store to pick up that special gift or rustic souvenir. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

Note: All but three miles to Hudson-Meng Bison Bonebed, Toadstool Geologic Park and High Plains Homestead are on a well-

maintained gravel road (Highway 2/71). No travel on the gravel roads should be attempted during or after rain.

### **Tri-Cities Region (Kearney, Hastings and Grand Island)**

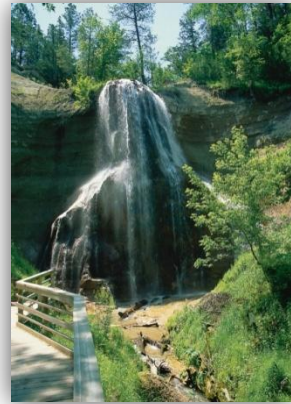
The Central Nebraska Tri-Cities Region offers group tour planners a vast selection of tour options. Each of the three cities has excellent overnight accommodations and meal options that are ideal for your group. The spring months are an excellent time to visit central Nebraska and spend your time with a half million Sandhill cranes that use the area as a stopover on their migration between early March and mid April. Just a few minutes south of Kearny and Grand Island near Hastings, you can witness the awesome spectacle of more than 10 million ducks and geese as they migrate through the Rainwater Basin. Each of the three cities offers excellent wildlife viewing options that can be catered to suit your group's needs. The Sandhill cranes migration is truly a remarkable site and one that your group will cherish for years to come.

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### Valentine

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 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.



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 await! So, grab your swimming suit, sunscreen, and a camera, and have one of the best rides of your life!

### Valentine National Refuge

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. Suggested tour time: 1-2 hours.

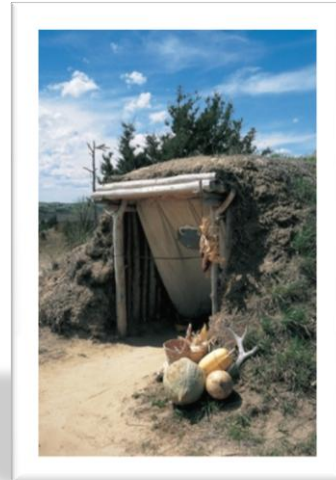
### Wayne

Home of the popular Wayne Chicken Show each July, Wayne also boasts a historic downtown district. The **Wayne State College Arboretum**, 1111 Main St., 402-375-7384, has an herb garden, nature center, trails and hundreds of varieties of plant life. Suggested tour time: 1 hour. **Garden Perennials**, 402-375-3615, is three acres of gardens and thousands of perennial flowers. Group tours of both facilities are available upon request. Suggested tour time: 1 hour.

## Nebraska Nature Tourism Group Tour Opportunities

### Wellfleet

Wellfleet is home to a unique Nebraska attraction, [Dancing Leaf Earth Lodge and Cultural Learning Center](#), 6100 E. Opal Springs Road, 308-963-4233. Your group will experience primitive American Indian life. Groups may enjoy nature hikes, canoeing and delicious buffalo stew dinners. Enjoy the earth lodge and learn about the importance of the medicine wheel. Guided tours of the area can be scheduled with prior notice. Suggested tour time: 1½ hour.



### Winnetoon

With only 59 residents, Winnetoon, 402-847-3368, is a sleepy Nebraska town, but a great stop for any group tour! Your first stop should be the post office/general store/antique store, then stroll along the boardwalk to explore the many other buildings of this unique cowboy town. If you time it right, you might catch the “**Cowboy Chainsaw Carver**” at work as he uses his chain saw to turn an ordinary block of wood into a work of art. Suggested tour time: 45 minutes.

### Wynot

Located 2 miles east of Wynot off Highway 12, [St. James Marketplace](#), 89039 570 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. Suggested tour time: 1 hour (marketplace), 1 hour (Rattlesnake Road). Note: The monument and scenic drive are via dirt roads, and no services are available.



### York

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. 5<sup>th</sup> 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 reasons—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.