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Explore the Legendary Southfork Ranch: A Journey into Television History and Texan Charm

Imagine stepping into a world where glamour, intrigue, and Texas hospitality converge. Welcome to Southfork Ranch, a place where the line between reality and fiction blurs, bringing to life the iconic home of the Ewing family from the hit television series "Dallas." Nestled in the heart of Texas, just a short drive from Dallas, Southfork Ranch offers an unforgettable experience for fans of the show and newcomers alike.

From the moment you arrive at this legendary ranch, you're transported back to the glitz and drama of the 1980s, where larger-than-life characters lived, loved, and battled for power under the vast Texan sky. As you stroll through the beautifully manicured grounds and marvel at the sprawling mansion, you can't help but feel a sense of nostalgia for the era that made "Dallas" a global sensation. Here, you can explore the very rooms where J.R., Bobby, Sue Ellen, and the rest of the Ewing family plotted their next moves, and perhaps imagine yourself as a character in your own dramatic story.

But Southfork Ranch is more than just a piece of television history—it's a vibrant destination that

offers something for everyone. Enjoy a guided tour of the mansion, where you'll hear fascinating behind-the-scenes stories from the show, or take a leisurely walk around the picturesque grounds, perfect for snapping memorable photos. For those seeking a taste of true Texan hospitality, the ranch hosts special events throughout the year, including BBQ cookouts, trail rides, and music festivals that capture the spirit of the Lone Star State.



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Volume XLVIII, Number 2 • November/December 2025

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Magazine



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COVER PHOTO

The Nativity at The Basilica & National Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation, Carey, Ohio. This Jubilee Year, designated an official Pilgrimage Site by Bishop Daniel E. Thomas, marks 150 years since the Miraculous Statue's arrival and 100 years since the church's dedication. Pilgrims here may receive a plenary indulgence.

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The editorial staff at BUS TOURS MAGAZINE are always looking for news items and editorial material on places that want bus tour groups to stop. Please phone (815) 946-2341 or send material to editorial@busmag.com.

Buzz on the Bus

News and notes for bus tour planners

Elvis Presley's Graceland **Memphis, Tennessee**

Recently, Graceland welcomed fans from around the world to Memphis for the annual Presley Week celebration. As part of the festivities, Graceland debuted two new exhibits inside Elvis Presley's Memphis entertainment complex.

Colonel Parker's World of Showbusiness shares the story of Presley's legendary – and often controversial manager, Colonel Tom Parker. The exhibit traces his journey from his early years in Holland and work on the carnival circuit, through his time managing country stars like Eddy Arnold and Hank Snow, and ultimately to his defining role as the manager of Presley.

Serving as Presley's manager from 1955 until his death in 1977, Colonel Parker was a larger-than-life figure who played a crucial role in the direction and success of the King of Rock 'n' Roll's career. While he is hailed for turning Presley into a global sensation, Colonel Parker remains a controversial figure in the Presley world, as he faced significant criticism for his management approach and financial practices.

The Colonel's story comes to life in the new exhibit through artifacts from his collection. See canes, hats, and pipes that defined the Colonel's look, along with items from his office and the colorful lab coats that he designed and wore on Presley's movie sets. Exhibit highlights include his typewriter, awards, rare photographs from his office and even the 1976 Cadillac Presley gifted to him.

Graceland in Red 1974 is the second exhibit to open at Graceland during Presley Week 2025. When Presley purchased the house in 1957, his mother Gladys' conservative style prevailed with the traditional blue and white décor that one sees when visiting Graceland today.

However, in 1974, Graceland underwent dramatic redecoration with Presley selecting rich colors, plush textures and new statement pieces for his home. The living room was transformed into a French Provincial theme, featuring red velvet furniture, red satin draperies, oil lamps, mermaid tables, peacock-stained glass panels, and red shag carpet. The décor was bold and vibrant, reflecting Presley's unique style – and a definite break from the conservative style of his mother.

The red décor was in place until 1982, when the living room was reverted to the original blue and white aesthetic before Graceland opened to the public. The red furniture and décor went into warehouse storage. Pieces of the red furniture have been used in small displays

at Graceland over the years, but this is the first time guests are able to see a full replica of how the living room looked in 1974.

In addition to these two new exhibits, Graceland refreshed the *Presley Dressed to Rock* display in March. All exhibits are now open for touring. Tour tickets available at [Graceland.com](https://www.graceland.com).



Walt Disney Family Museum **San Francisco, California**

The Walt Disney Family Museum has announced the release of *Walt Disney's Trains: A Grand Circle Tour Through His Life and Legacy* – a beautifully illustrated book that explores Walt Disney's lifelong passion for trains and the profound impact it had on his films, theme parks and personal life.

Walt Disney's Trains features more than 200 rare artifacts, photographs, sketches and personal stories from The Walt Disney Family Museum archives, The Walt Disney Company, and private collectors. Building upon the beloved 2014 exhibition *All Aboard: A Celebration of Walt's Trains*, one of the most successful exhibitions in the museum's 15-year history, this new book offers Disney fans and train enthusiasts an intimate look at a lesser-known yet deeply influential aspect of Walt Disney's life.

Mote Science Education Aquarium **Sarasota, Florida**

After a move 14 miles inland from coastal Sarasota to the Nathan Benderson Park, at the intersection of Sarasota and Manatee counties, the new 11-acre Mote Science Education Aquarium (SEA) campus officially opened to the public on October 8.



otters, manatees, sea turtles and more than a dozen sharks while bringing in new animals like a giant Pacific octopus and penguins.

Founded in 1955 in a one-room trailer in Placida, Florida, by world-renowned ichthyologist Dr. Eugenie ("Genie") Clark, Mote has become one of the most unique and impactful independent marine research and science education institutions in the world. □

The Trivia Question for this issue is located on page 18.

Looking for more information?

Fill out and send the Reader Service Card at the back of the magazine.

Mote SEA will transform Mote's ability to provide informal science education and enhanced levels of ocean literacy to much larger and more diverse populations from around the world. The 146,000-square-foot facility will enable individuals of all ages and backgrounds to engage with the ocean and experience a window into Mote's globally significant marine science research and conservation initiatives.

The facility moved hundreds of species of marine animals from its waterfront public facility to the new Mote SEA, including river



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Faith-Based Attractions

The Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Foundation Peoria, Illinois

Whether you are traveling alone or as a group, you are invited to make a Sheen Pilgrimage – for an hour, a day or more. This is a holy ground, rich with the life and legacy of one of the church's most beloved sons: Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.

Start at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception (celebratesheen.com/tomb), the mother church of the Diocese of Peoria. This sacred space was Fulton Sheen's childhood parish and is now his final resting place. The beautifully-restored cathedral inspires awe and lifts the heart toward heaven.

After celebrating Mass at the cathedral, enjoy a guided tour, including the St. Thomas More Chapel, where an impressive relic collection connects visitors with the saints. Do not miss the stunning stained-glass windows that tell the story of the Gospel's journey across the globe.



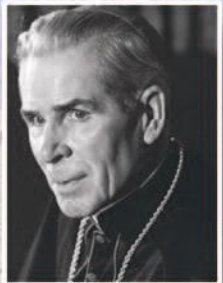
PILGRIMAGE TO FULTON J. SHEEN

VISIT

ST. MARY CATHEDRAL
His final resting place
607 NE Madison Ave, Peoria IL

THE FULTON SHEEN MUSEUM & GIFT SHOP
The largest collection of his personal artifacts
419 NE Madison Ave, Peoria IL

ST. MARY CEMETERY
His parents' and family gravesites
421 N. Sterling Ave., West Peoria, IL



THE ARCHBISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN FOUNDATION
CelebrateSheen.com

Guide: Faith-Based

A highlight for many is a quiet moment of prayer at the Tomb of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen – a moving and powerful experience.

Just a block away, visit the Fulton Sheen Museum, maintained by the Archbishop Fulton John Sheen Foundation (celebratesheen.com/museum). It houses the largest collection of Sheen's personal artifacts in attractive exhibits. Visitors especially enjoy themed sections such as When I Was a Child, Traveling the Globe, For God and Country, The Byzantine and others.

Before you leave the museum, browse the gift shop, where you will find books, audio/video resources and unique souvenirs to commemorate your visit.

Continue your pilgrimage with a visit to St. Mary's Cemetery in West Peoria, where you can pay your respects at the graves of Sheen's parents, grandparents and extended family.

Are you looking into extending your journey?

Explore more sacred sites in downtown Peoria, such as:

- Sacred Heart Church for a convenient noon Mass during the week
- St. Joseph Church, the city's oldest parish
- St. Mark's Church, home to the Fra Angelico Shrine, where Fulton Sheen celebrated his first Christmas Mass and funerals Mass for both of his parents.

Book your customized Sheen Pilgrimage today at celebratesheen.com. □



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Photo courtesy
of Mike Lacey

Rail & Sail

Conway Scenic's *Winter Mountaineer*

by Brian Solomon

Conway Scenic Railroad now runs over New Hampshire's scenic Crawford Notch in all seasons. So why not consider taking a trip through a snow-covered landscape over Crawford Notch on a 1950s streamlined passenger train this winter.

Conway Scenic Railroad has been a popular northern New England heritage railroad since it began historic railroad excursions from its Victorian railroad station in North Conway, New Hampshire, on August 4, 1974. In its early days, the railroad focused on the 11-mile round trip down the old Boston & Maine Conway Branch in the lower Mount Washington Valley. In 1995, the railroad expanded excursion operations by reopening the dormant former Maine Central Mountain Division into the White Mountains. This rugged and very scenic line follows the course of the Saco River up the Mount Wash-

ington Valley to its headwaters at Crawford Notch.

For 30 years, Conway Scenic operated seasonal excursions to Crawford during the summer and autumn. In the year 2020, the railroad renamed its popular Crawford excursion as the *Mountaineer*, which had been the name of the historic Boston-White Mountains summer season train jointly operated from the mid-1930s until the early 1950s by Maine Central and Boston & Maine railroads.

Conway Scenic has gained worldwide fame that encouraged expansion of the operating season. In late-2024, the railroad opted to run its Crawford excursion through the winter. This delighted visitors, who for the first time in more than half a century could enjoy the scenic splendor of Crawford Notch in Winter from the comfort of a classic North American streamlined passenger train.

The success of winter operation encouraged Conway Scenic to run its *Mountaineer* in all seasons during 2025 and 2026. The

Winter Mountaineer begins operation after Thanksgiving and will run Saturdays through February, offering visitors stunning views of the Mount Washington Valley, culminating with the rocky crags at the Gateway in Crawford Notch. Winter is a great time to visit the White Mountain region. Bus tour operators now have more options for their guests to enjoy one-way and round trip journeys on Conway Scenic Railroad.

For group tours contact Jack Duffin at jack@conwayscenic.com / (603) 986-7327.

Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Chama, New Mexico

Tucked into the rugged beauty of the American Southwest, the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad is more than just a tourist attraction – it is a living, breathing piece of history. Stretching 64 miles between Chama, New Mexico, and Antonito, Colorado, this narrow-gauge railroad offers a journey through time, weaving through breathtaking

mountain passes, deep gorges and rolling meadows much like it did in the 1880s.

Originally built in 1880 as part of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad, the line was crucial in opening up the region to trade and travel. Though freight and passenger service declined by the mid-20th century, the railroad was saved from abandonment in the 1970s by a bold move from the states of Colorado and New Mexico. Today, it stands proudly as a National Historic Landmark, and one of the most authentic steam rail experiences in the world.

What sets the Cumbres & Toltec apart is not just its stunning scenery – it is the authenticity. The trains are powered by coal-fired steam locomotives, pulling cars that have been painstakingly restored to their original glory. Passengers are not just observers but participants in a historic ritual: the smell of coal smoke, the rhythmic chug of the engine and the sweeping views all combine to create an immersive, sensory experience.

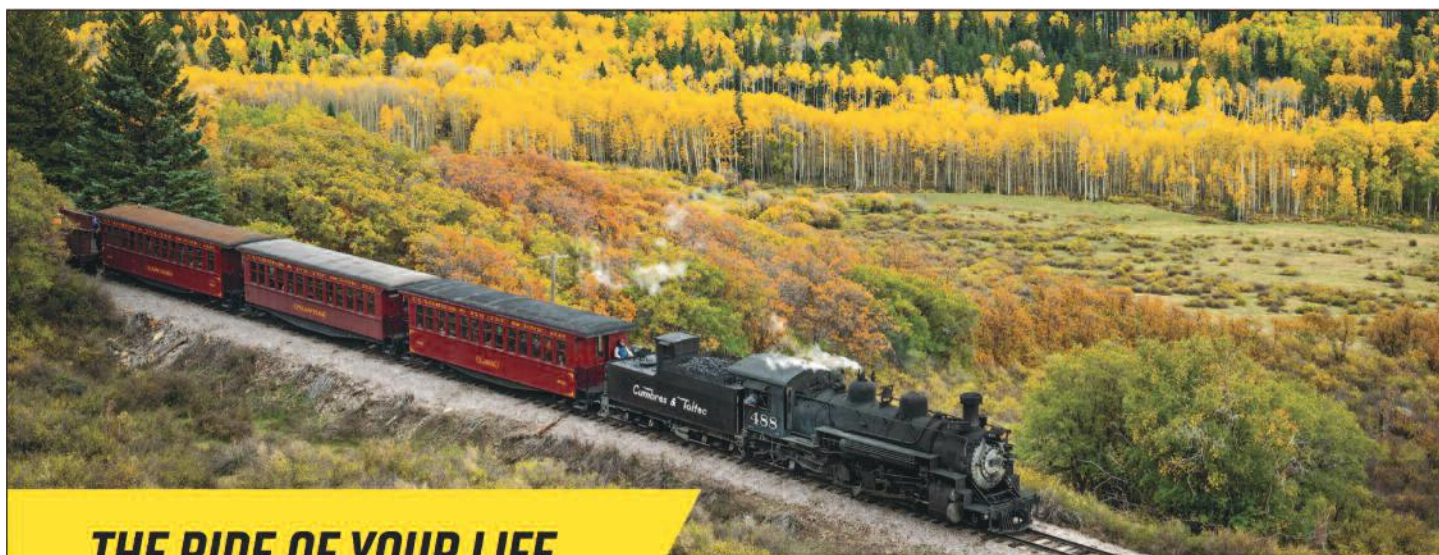


Cumbres & Toltec
Photo courtesy of Nick D'Amato

The railroad is also a reminder of how much care and effort it takes to preserve our cultural heritage. Volunteers and skilled craftspeople work year-round to maintain the track, rolling stock and buildings. The railroad provides not only tourism revenue

to small towns like Chama and Antonito but also a sense of identity and pride.

As the world speeds toward modernity, the Cumbres & Toltec reminds us that there is value in slowing down. In a single day, it offers a rare chance to connect with Amer-



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Photo courtesy of Nick D'Amato.

Climb aboard the historic Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad which operates in the scenic landscapes of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. Journey back in time experiencing the Old West as it was in 1880, as you venture over the highest mountain pass reached by rail, cross gorges and trestles, blast through tunnels, and chug across alpine meadows and high deserts. Depart from Antonito, Colorado or Chama, New Mexico. Group rates available!

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The Riverboat Twilight Le Claire, Iowa

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Guide: Rail & Sail

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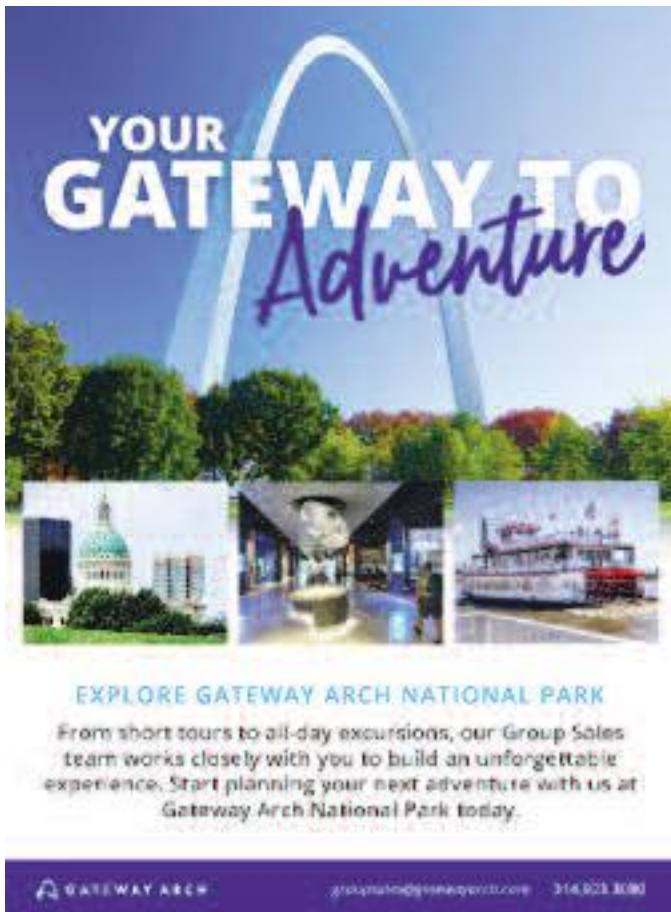
Two-Day Signature Cruise

This journey begins at LeClaire, Iowa, boyhood home of William F “Buffalo Bill” Cody. The Captain is your expert guide to the valley landscapes, locks and dams, historic river towns and wildlife including bald eagles, pelicans, great blue herons and more.

Enjoy live entertainment, games, two snacks, lunch and dinner before arriving in historic Dubuque, Iowa. Accommodations are at the riverfront Grand Harbor Resort, with your luggage waiting in your room. The evening is yours to enjoy and explore the city of five flags: France, Spain, Great Britain, Napoleon and USA.

Day two begins with breakfast and time to explore the architecture, shopping and history of Iowa’s oldest city. Admission is included to Iowa’s #1 attraction, the must-see National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium.

Re-board for the return journey and take in all the sites that you missed on the trip upriver. Enjoy lunch and dinner served at your table. Arrival back in LeClaire is at approximately 6:30 p.m. Cruising May through October with departures on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, this is the most popular cruise and many dates sell out well in advance.

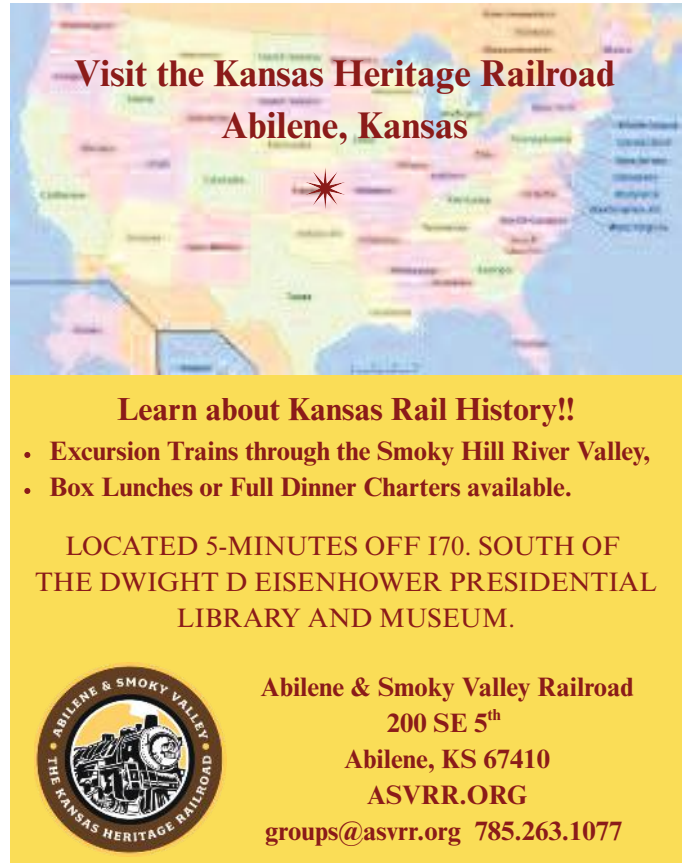


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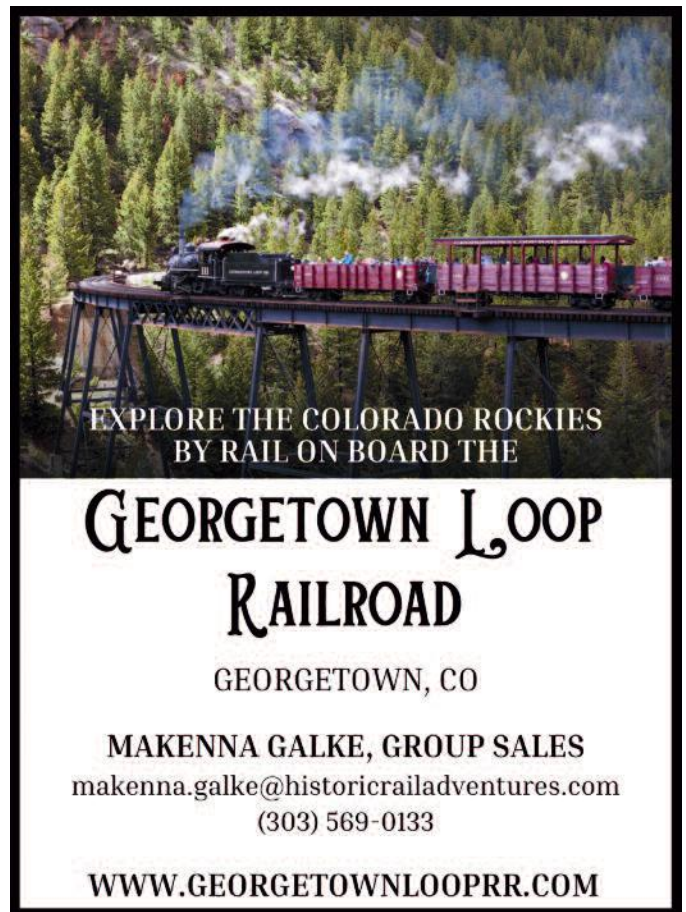
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Guide: Rail & Sail

One-Day Cruise

This cruise heads north from Dubuque through one of the most beautiful areas of the Mississippi River. It includes continental breakfast, two snacks, full lunch, historical narration, great scenery, eagles, live music and more relaxation than you have allowed yourself in years.

1 ½ Hour Sightseeing Cruise

The cruise travels north taking in the wildlife and river towns of Port Byron Illinois, Princeton, Iowa and Cordova, Illinois. The Captain provides history and interesting facts about the river and its commerce. There is plenty of time to relax, enjoy a complimentary glass of iced tea or lemonade or to purchase a beverage at the full-service bar.

New York State Tour Boat Association

New York State provides an unparalleled range of boating experiences, from the breathtaking Niagara Falls to the iconic Statue of Liberty, all of which are made enjoyable, fun, and safe thanks to the efforts of the New York State Tour Boat Association members. The members offer a unique experience on all tours, whether they are on lakes, canals, oceans or close to waterfalls. The variety of options available is one of the main factors that contribute to the enjoyment of these excursions. There is a tour to suit every interest, whether you are looking for the serene beauty of the Finger Lakes, or the historic charm of the Erie Canal.

Most cruises feature professional guides that enhance the experience, making each tour both educational and enjoyable. They are renowned for their captivating storytelling and in-depth understanding of the local ecology and history. Most offer on-board refreshments to make for a comfortable and restful ride. In addition, unique and unforgettable experiences can be had on themed tours and special events, like sunset cruises and wildlife viewing.

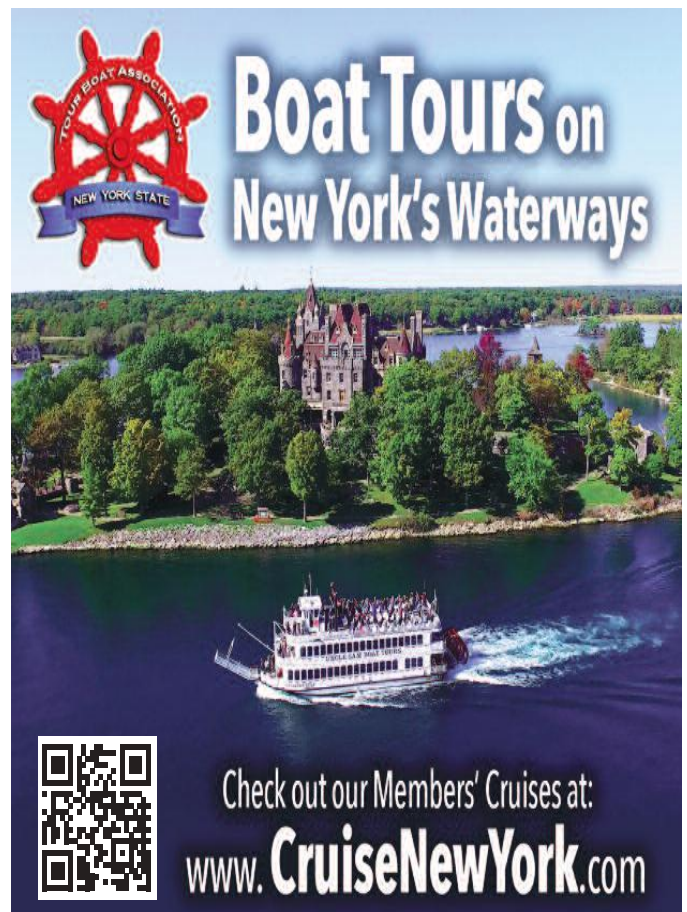
Tour groups are welcome at a majority of the New York State Tour Boat Association Members. Each tour boat operator can provide the details and special programs offered to BUS TOURS MAGAZINE tour groups.

New York State is a fantastic destination for all cruising enthusiasts. Experience the natural wonder of the Adirondack Mountain Lakes, Long Island Sound, Thousand Islands Region or enjoy the panoramic views of the New York City skyline from the water. Your New York



State Tour Boat Association member cruise will be managed with the highest standards of safety and enjoyment.

For more information view cruisenyork.com or e-mail cruisenyorkstate@gmail.com. □



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The Midwest is made for bus travel with wide open roads, welcoming towns and a mix of big cities and quiet countrysides. It is the perfect region for group tours, with welcoming locals, group-friendly attractions and plenty of space to stretch out, making touring by bus not only easy but truly enjoyable with the warm hospitality the Midwest is known for.

When you add up all of these components, you have a trip that is comfortable, memorable and easy to plan from start to finish. You are invited to plan your next bus trip with these Midwest attractions in mind.

Grissom Air Museum

Peru, Indiana

At the Grissom Air Museum, you can explore historic aircraft from the Cold War era, learn what its like to be called an “airman” and jump into a cockpit and take off in a static display.

While the museum offers many experiences and exhibits, including 29 Aircraft, a B-58 Rocket Sled, Guard Tower and more, you will not want to miss the lineup of exhibits and special events.

Learn about General William Kepner and his reaching 61,000 feet in a hot air balloon in 1934 (the highest anyone has been in the day). Take in some great collections regarding the B-58 Hustler and the crewmen that flew it.

The Warbird Cruise-In (August 1, 2026) the annual car show. Come out and see hundreds of classic cars, trucks, and motorcycles. Enjoy food, DJ, great airplanes and do not forget to check out the indoor exhibits and the gift shop.

Jeep, Jets and Jams (summer of 2026) kick off at 9 a.m. with Jeep registration. Make sure to arrive early to secure your spot next to the plane of your choice. At 10 a.m., the gates open to the general public. Enjoy music, food and the indoor exhibits.

The museum is also building a STEM-focused learning center this winter and will take about a year to complete. It will house our TB-58 (the oldest remaining survivor of the B-58s).



Gateway Arch

Marvelous Midwest Locations

If you want to find out more, view grissomairmuseum.com, e-mail director@grissomairmuseum.com

or phone (765) 689-8011.

Guide: Marvelous Midwest



Grissom Air Museum

Convention I-X Center Cleveland, Ohio

Start Your Engines: America's Largest Indoor Piston-Powered Show Returns March 27-29, 2026.

Bus groups, car clubs and travel planners – get ready for a road trip worth revving up for. The Car Parts Warehouse I-X Piston Powered Auto-Rama returns March 27-29, 2026, to the iconic I-X Center in Cleveland, Ohio, for its 60th anniversary celebration of all things powered by a piston.

This massive indoor showcase spans 600,000 square feet – that is more than 10 football fields of cars, bikes, trucks, tractors, military

A colorful advertisement for The J.M. Smucker Co. Store. The top features a red and white checkered border. The text reads: "THE J.M. SMUCKER Co Store", "BUS GROUPS WELCOME!", "LEARN ABOUT OUR MORE THAN 120 YEARS OF COMPANY HISTORY IN OUR SELF GUIDED MUSEUM", "SHOP YOUR FAVORITE PRODUCTS FROM OUR ICONIC BRANDS LIKE SMUCKER'S, JIF, FOLGERS AND MORE", "CREATE YOUR OWN PERSONALIZED JAR OF SMUCKER'S® OR JIF® WITH YOUR PICTURE OR BUILD YOUR OWN CUSTOM GIFT BASKET!". Below the text is a photo of the store building, which is a two-story white house with a red roof and a large arched entrance. The text "THE J.M. SMUCKER Co" is on the building. To the right of the building, it says "CURBSIDE DROP OFF AND BUS PARKING AVAILABLE". At the bottom, it says "Open Mon-Sat. 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. 333 Wadsworth Rd. Orrville Ohio 330-664-1500", "www.jm-smucker.com/store-and-cafe", and "Located on Route 57, a Quarter Mile North of Route 30".



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A logo for the Grissom Air Museum. It features a stylized white propeller with a blue star in the center, set against a blue background with white stars. The word "Grissom" is in a large, red, italicized font, and "AIR MUSEUM" is in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font below it.

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AIRPARK

vehicles and more. If a piston makes it go, it is in this show.

Whether you are coming from Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh or beyond, this centrally located event is perfect for group travel. Just minutes from Cleveland Hopkins International Airport and major interstates, the I-X Center is easily accessible and designed for motorcoach convenience, with free bus parking and generous group discounts.

This show is more than horsepower – it is heritage. The I-X Center itself was once a WWII bomber and then a tank plant, making it the perfect setting for a show themed “Forged & Fabricated for 60 Years into Dazzling Diamonds.” Visitors can walk through military displays, meet vehicle owners, and explore one of the largest Designated Military Zones of its kind, raising funds for veterans' charities.

The Auto-Rama is a hit with every demographic – from gearheads and seniors to students and families. Student Career Day on Friday, March 27, connects high school and college students with real-world professionals in automotive, engineering and skilled trades, offering both inspiration and education.

For tour organizers, the event offers easy logistics, a wide audience appeal and an unforgettable experience packed with interactive exhibits, live demos, classic machines and endless photo ops.

Ready to plan your trip? Learn more, book your group or explore Student Day opportunities at pistonpowershow.com.

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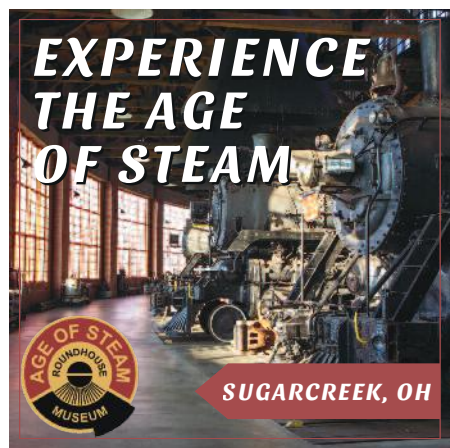
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MORE INFO AT PISTONPOWERSHOW.COM

Guide: Marvelous Midwest

Age of Steam Roundhouse Museum Sugarcreek, Ohio

Step back in time at the Age of Steam Roundhouse Museum in Sugarcreek, Ohio. Founded by Jerry Joe and Laura Jacobson, this impressive site is the first roundhouse built in the U.S. since the 1950s. The 18-stall roundhouse features an operational 115-foot turntable, more than 24 historic steam loco-



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motives and a working restoration shop where vintage equipment is brought back to life. Every detail of the design transports visitors to the golden era of railroading.

Open seasonally from April through November, it is a must-see stop for history lovers. For more information view ageofsteamroundhouse.org.

Chula Vista Resort Wisconsin Dells

Set along the banks of the Wisconsin River, Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells offers tour operators everything they need to deliver a memorable Midwest group experience – convenient planning, versatile amenities and warm Wisconsin hospitality.

As one of the largest independent resorts in the region, Chula Vista welcomes groups of all sizes with more than 600 guest rooms, suites and condominiums – many featuring scenic river or poolside views. With motorcoach tours in mind, the resort provides ample complimentary coach parking, easy passenger drop-off zones and coordinated check-in assistance with luggage and Express Check Ins to keep group arrivals smooth and efficient.

Tour planners appreciate the resort's flexible group dining options, including private banquet spaces, sunset river boat dinner cruises that launch directly from Chula Vista Resort docks and on-



Chula Vista Resort

site restaurants like Kaminski's Chop House and their famous Las Vegas-style 90-foot Breakfast Buffet. Chula Vista's dedicated group sales and planning team assists with customized itineraries, meal planning and scheduling to ensure each stop flows seamlessly within a tour's route.

Holidays in Pella

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December 3, 4, & 5, 2026 | visitpella.com/christmas



Guide: Marvelous Midwest

On-site recreation makes it easy to balance activity and leisure. Groups can enjoy the resort's indoor and outdoor waterparks, visit the newly opened Navi Spa for massage or facials, or a round of golf at the historic Coldwater Canyon Golf Course. Whether it is a scenic boat ride on the Wisconsin River, or a relaxing stroll along the mile-long River Walk just outside your guestroom door, Chula Vista Resort has everything tour operators and their guests need for easy access and comfortable surroundings, just a few miles from the downtown Wisconsin Dells River District.

From motorcoach-friendly amenities to turnkey group planning support, Chula Vista Resort stands out as a trusted destination for tour operators seeking an all-in-one Wisconsin Dells experience that is both scenic and service-driven. Come visit Wisconsin Dells' premier resort destination – family owned since 1951.

For group sales and motorcoach inquiries, visit chulavistaresort.com or phone (866) 382-4852. ☐

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Trivia Question for The November Issue

What popular bus tour attraction in the Midwest combines a historical site with a riverfront, entertainment and lodging?

For the answer go to:
[https://bustoursmagazine.com/
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Great Rivers & Routes



There is only one place in the U.S. where the Mother Road of Route 66 meets the Great River Road and that is in the Great Rivers & Routes region of southwest Illinois.

This is a land full of stunning scenery and the perfect place to embrace jaw dropping views along America's three great rivers and national highway. Take a scenic drive along the Meeting of the Great Rivers National Scenic Byway and see why this 33-mile stretch of roadway is one of *USA Today's* Top 10 Drives.

Groups can also walk in the footsteps of some of the great historic figures of the past in Alton where Abraham Lincoln once practiced law. The region is also home to the first leg of the Lewis & Clark journey to map the mysterious western U.S.

Meet the life-sized statue of Robert Wadlow in Alton – once the world's tallest man who measures eight feet, 11.2 inches tall.

Be sure to stop at Pere Marquette State Park Lodge & Conference Center – where large groups can enjoy a relaxing meal at the historic lodge and restaurant – famous for its family-style fried chicken dinners. Spend the night at the Lodge which offers free bus parking.

Groups can also explore this land of giants along Route 66 as it celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2026. Stop at the group friendly Pink Elephant Antique Mall full of vintage wares, old-fashioned candy and Route 66 gifts.

Discover the Last 100 Miles of Route 66 at the new It's Electric Neon Sign Park in Granite City – home to ghost neon signs and full of larger than life examples of Granite-ware and Tinker Toys. Make a pit stop at

the revitalized West End Service Station which serves as a welcome center and Route 66 museum and has ample parking for buses.

Dine out along the journey at classic Route 66 diners and restaurants, including the 100-year-old Ariston Café which can accommodate groups of 50 or less. Linger along the rivers and sip an organic craft beer while munching a fresh sandwich at the group-friendly Old Bakery Beer Co. in Alton. Or simply sit beside the river and sip a cocktail and enjoy some chips and Dock Salsa at The Loading Dock Bar & Grill where there is ample seating for large groups and plenty of parking on-site for buses.

Book your next bus tour group where three great rivers and four scenic byways come together in scenic southwest Illinois. □



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Museum of the American G.I.

College Station, Texas

Imagine standing beside a roaring WWII Sherman tank or holding your breath as a Vietnam-era Ontos comes to life. At the Museum of the American G.I. in College Station, Texas, home to Texas A&M University and the George Bush Presidential Library, history is not just preserved; it rumbles to life.

Step into history at the Museum of the American G.I., where America's military past doesn't just sit behind glass – the artifacts bring our nation's veterans' stories to life. The museum is a destination for families, students, veterans and tour groups who want to experience history in a powerful and unforgettable way.

Living History in Motion

The museum is home to one of the finest collections of restored, fully operational military vehicles in the nation. From a WWI Nash Quad to WWII Sherman tanks, M18 Hellcats and a Vietnam-era Patrol Boat, visitors can stand beside machines that once shaped the battlefield. Rare vehicles like the WWII M8 Howitzer Motor Carriage, M3 Gun Motor Carriage, Vietnam-era Ontos and a WWI French Renault tank make this collection truly exceptional.

What sets the museum apart is its ability to bring these machines to life. During the annual History in Motion (fall) and Living History Weekend (spring) events, engines roar, tanks fire and artillery blasts echo across the field – offering a heart-pounding, sensory-rich connection to the past that few museums can match.

Group Visits Made Memorable and Accessible

With ample bus parking, accessible facilities and welcoming staff, the museum is a perfect stop for group travel. We take group interests into consideration, developing personalized tours and offering behind-the-scenes insights that ensure students, veterans, history buffs and casual travelers alike walk away with not just knowledge – but a lasting impression.

Experience History Up Close

Whether you come for the roar of a Sherman tank, the silence of the dog tags or the stories of heroes, the Museum of the American G.I. offers a powerful connection to America's past. More than a collection of artifacts, it is an experience – one that brings history to life through vintage vehicles, moving memorials and unforgettable personal stories. It combines the thrill of live history with the weight of remembrance and the warmth of community, making it a destination that inspires, educates and moves visitors of all ages.

For anyone who loves history, honors service or simply seeks an experience unlike any other, the Museum of the American G.I. is not just worth a visit – it is a must-see, bucket-list destination.



Military Attractions

For more information, visit americangimuseum.org or e-mail info@americangimuseum.org.

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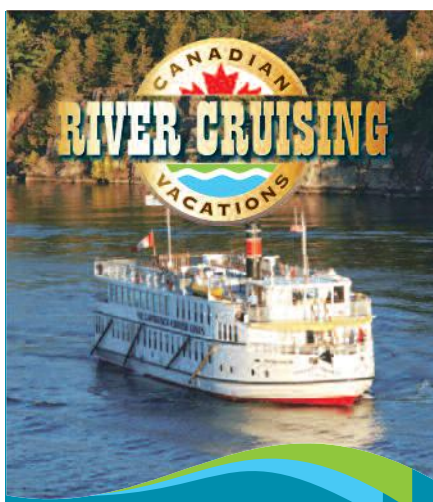
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Places for Summer 2026

Huntsville Botanical Garden Huntsville, Alabama

Nestled in the heart of Huntsville, Alabama, Huntsville Botanical Garden is a vibrant oasis of natural beauty, cultural richness and unforgettable experiences. A perfect addition to any bus tour itinerary, the Garden offers visitors a unique opportunity to escape, discover and connect with the natural world.

Open year-round, prepare to be greeted by stunning landscapes that shift with the seasons. From spring blooms to fall foliage, the ever-changing scenery ensures there is always something new to admire. Take a leisurely stroll along winding paths through themed gardens like the Bush Azalea Trail, the enchanting Purdy Butterfly House (open seasonally) or the serene Aquatic Garden. For those who want to get closer to nature, step under the Garden's forest canopy and enjoy a walk on one of the nature trails. For birdwatchers, the Lewis Birding Trail offers a chance to spot local and migratory species in their natural habitat.



Huntsville Botanical Garden

Beyond its natural splendor, the Garden is also a hub of cultural and educational experiences. Groups can enjoy guided tours led by knowledgeable staff, uncovering the stories behind the plants, sculptures and seasonal exhibits. Whether it is a horticultural workshop, a photography opportunity in the lush surroundings or a simple moment of tranquility, every visit promises discovery and delight.

No trip is complete without indulging in the Fern & Feast Bistro, where fresh, locally-inspired cuisine offers the perfect way to recharge. Before boarding your bus, be sure

to stop by the Gift Shop, brimming with unique souvenirs, gardening tools and eco-friendly products to remember your visit.

Huntsville Botanical Garden is not just a stop – it is an experience. It connects visitors to the beauty and wonder of nature while providing an escape from the everyday. Whether your group is seeking relaxation, inspiration, or just a breath of fresh air, the Garden delivers it all with a welcoming spirit and a touch of Southern charm.

As you plan your next bus tour, make room for Huntsville Botanical Garden. It is

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Guide: Places for Summer 2026

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Lowell Observatory Flagstaff, Arizona

With a legacy that begins nearly 20 years before Arizona became a state, Lowell Observatory is a classic roadtrip stop where the spirit of the open road meets the wonder of the night sky. Perched atop Mars Hill in



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Lowell Observatory

Flagstaff, just a short turn off Route 66, this historic destination invites travelers to trade neon lights for starlight and experience the universe through exhibits, discoveries and unforgettable skies.

Founded in 1894 by visionary astronomer Percival Lowell, the observatory has long drawn curious minds westward. Over the past 130 years, Lowell has hosted landmark discoveries, including Clyde Tombaugh's 1930 discovery of Pluto and V.M. Slipher's evidence that our universe is expanding. Today, it continues to advance space science while sparking curiosity in road-trippers, families and lifelong learners alike.

In 2024, Lowell opened the Astronomy Discovery Center, a 40,000-square-foot hub for free-choice learning. Here, exhibits are inclusive and multi-sensory, inviting guests to learn at their own pace. Kids can build and launch rockets in the Orbits Curiosity Zone, while adults can ponder their place in the universe in the Stardust Lab Astronomy Gallery.

On the rooftop, the Dark Sky Planetarium offers open-air, laser-guided constellation shows, guided by live educators under the real night sky. Recline in heated seats as you take in the same Milky Way that Route 66 travelers once glimpsed from desert highways. Inside, the Lowell Universe Theater surrounds audiences with a two-story, 160-degree LED screen for journeys across the cosmos.

Each night, the Open Deck Observatory comes alive with a suite of six modern telescopes aimed at star clusters, nebulae and galaxies. Nearby, a look through the historic 24-inch Clark Refractor connects you to a golden age of astronomy, including founder Percival Lowell's trailblazing Mars research and the training of the first astronauts to walk on the Moon.

Lowell's reputation as a premier astrotourism destination has earned recognition from *TIME*, *Newsweek*, and *PHOENIX Magazine*. Perfectly situated along the Mother Road, it has become a must-see stop where classic Americana meets the cosmos.

For all its high-tech tools and accolades, Lowell's magic is truly timeless: a place where curiosity is celebrated, wonder is shared and every visitor leaves feeling part of something vast and beautiful.

Book your ticket today at lowell.edu.

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Guide: Places for Summer 2026

Choose Redding, California

With high desert, lush river valleys, rolling foothills, massive forests, and even volcanic wonders, UpState California has to be seen to be believed. The picturesque city of Redding serves as the region's hub and perfect base camp for all of the wonder UpState California has to offer.

Start your tour by exploring the many attractions in Redding. Begin your day at the Sundial Bridge – this glass decked pedestrian bridge is a larger-than-life piece of art, beloved by visitors and locals alike. Once you've seen the bridge, head next door to Turtle Bay Exploration Park. This 300-acre campus includes an underground aquarium, Native American history and exhibits, rotating art collections, wildlife habitats, and the McConnell Arboretum and Botanical Gardens.

After exploring the museum, continue on to Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. There you can go hiking, mountain biking, and even horseback riding. But the main attraction is definitely Whiskeytown Lake – with 36 miles of shoreline it's perfect for swimming, fishing, paddling, and boating.

For the next stop on your tour, head out of Redding to explore one of the gems of UpState California – Lassen Volcanic National Park. An hour outside of Redding, Lassen boasts incredible mountain scenery reminiscent of Yosemite as well as fascinating thermal wonders similar to Yellowstone with just a small fraction of the visitors. Explore alpine lakes, bubbling mud pots – you can even hike to the top of an active volcano.



Choose Redding

Once you have seen Lassen, head back towards Redding and explore the attractions around Shasta Lake. Start with the free tour of Shasta Dam – here you will get to see to the dam's inner galleries and learn about its hydroelectric powerhouse.

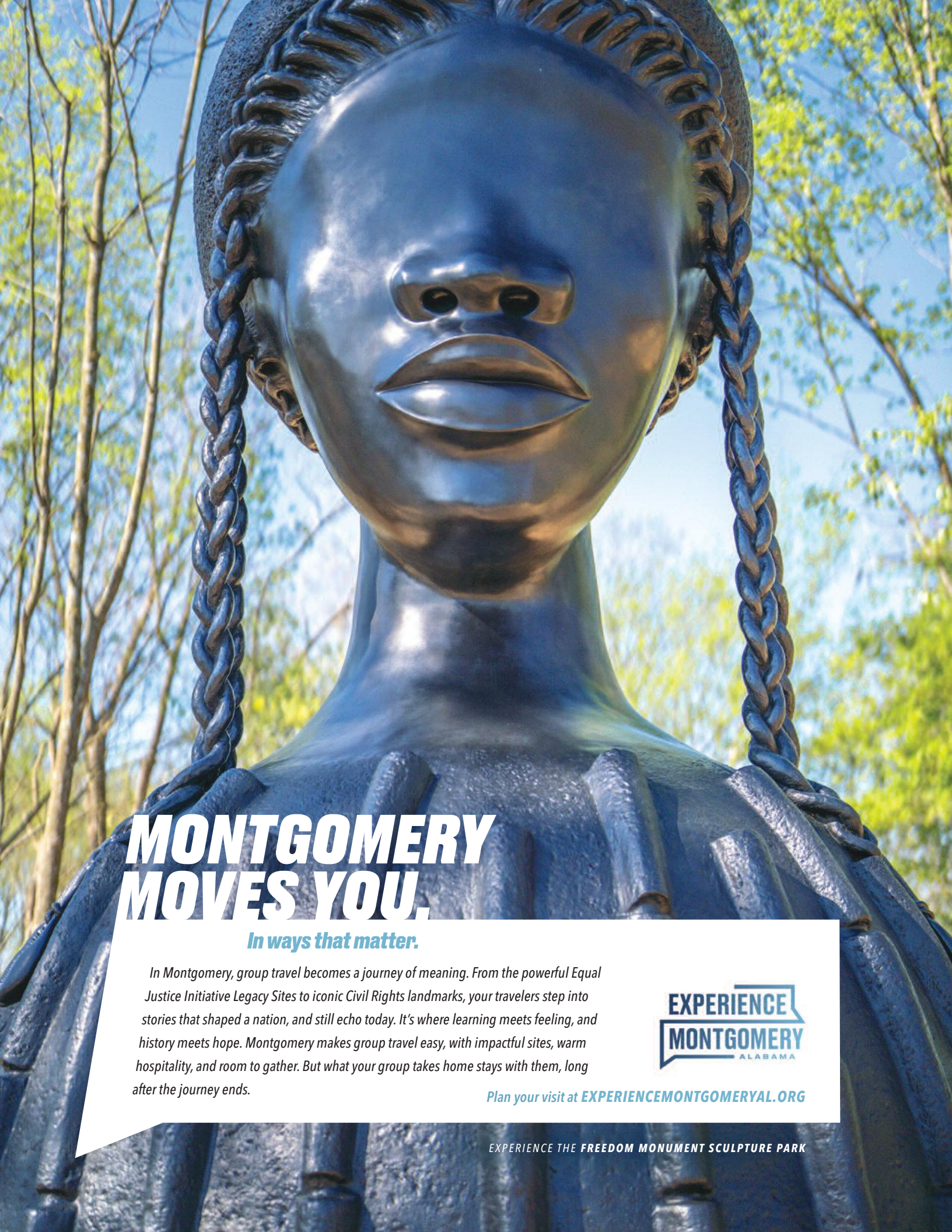
Finally, no visit to Shasta Lake is complete without a trip to see Lake Shasta Caverns National Natural Landmark. Start the tour with a catamaran cruise across Shasta Lake, then hop on a bus and make your way to the beautiful and historic limestone caves. Once there, you will be taken on a guided tour of caves that have been 250 million years in the making! □

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Gardens

Vizcaya Museum and Gardens Miami, Florida

When planning a group visit to Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, it is easy to focus solely on the iconic Main House and waterfront gardens. Just across South Miami Avenue lies a hidden gem that can elevate your experience – the Vizcaya Village Farmers Market.

Open every Sunday from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., the market takes place in Vizcaya's historic Village grounds, once the agricultural center of the estate. Today, this charming setting comes alive with local flavor – literally. From farm-fresh produce and artisanal baked goods to handmade crafts and holistic wellness items, the market offers an authentic Miami experience that pairs perfectly with a day of exploration.

What makes the market a great group-friendly add-on is the variety of programs offered onsite. Start the morning with an invigorating outdoor yoga class nested in the farm quad. Guided tours of the village are available during market hours, sharing its history and future as a community hub. For families, a rotating schedule of kid-friendly activities – from planting workshops to crafts and storytime – ensures there is something for everyone.

The village is just a short walk from the east side of the estate, making it easy to include in your visit. Whether your group is interested in wellness, history, shopping local or simply enjoying the peaceful, farm-like setting, the market offers a unique blend of culture and community. You can even stop at the Vizcaya Village Café for a quick bite.

Add it to your itinerary as a morning kickoff, midday break or final stop before



departure. With shaded seating, ample parking and accessible restrooms, the market is designed to accommodate groups comfortably.

For tour operators seeking to enrich the Vizcaya experience with local color and

engaging activities, the Vizcaya Village Farmers Market is the perfect Sunday addition. Learn more at vizcaya.org/market. □



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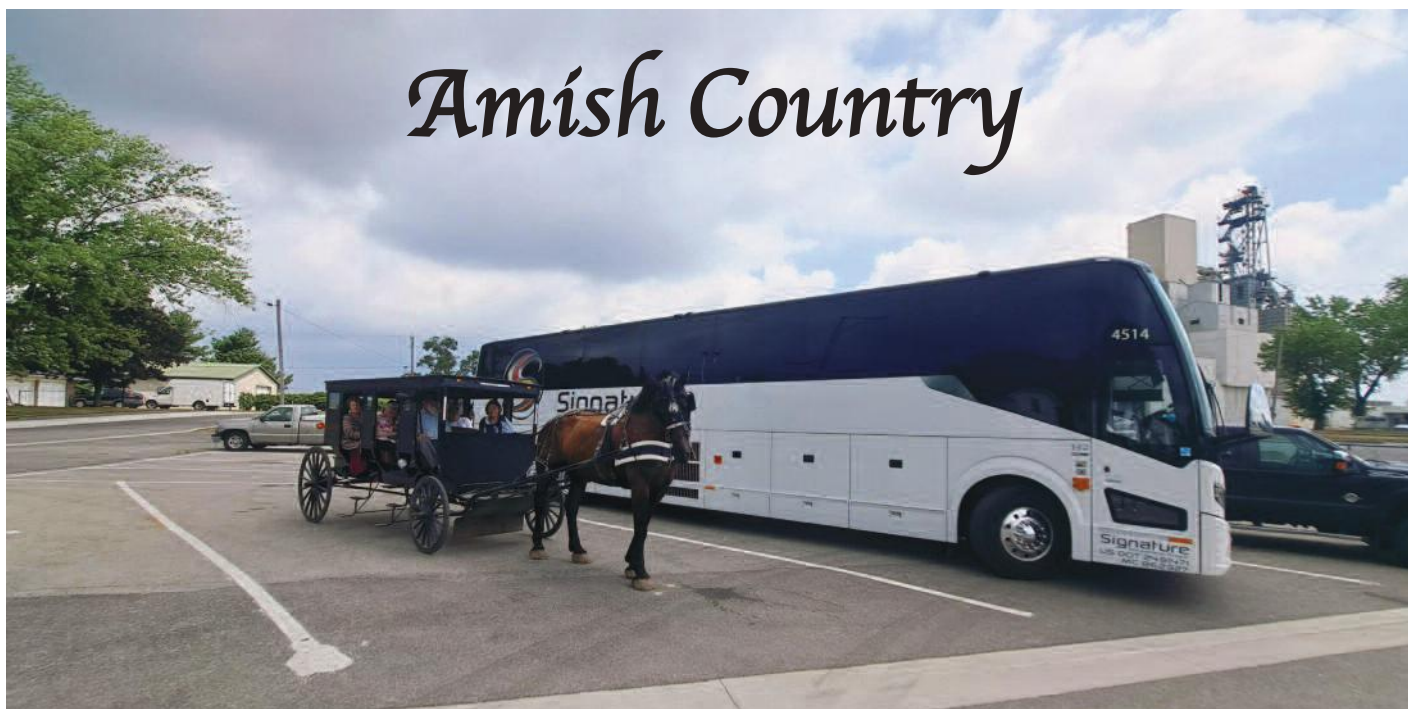
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Amish Country



A Must-See Group Tour Experience in Shipshewana

Planning an unforgettable autumn getaway for your group just got easier. Every September and October, Shipshewana, Indiana, in the heart of Amish Country, rolls out giant, painted hay bales – literally – for its Straw Bale Art and Autumn Adventures. This one-of-a-kind event is perfect for motorcoach groups seeking a fresh, fun and fully customizable fall experience.

The charming small town transforms into an open-air art walk, showcasing 30+ larger-than-life straw bale sculptures scattered throughout the countryside. Designed by local artists and businesses, these whimsical creations – like Buttercup the Cow, Buzz Lightyear or Willy Wonka – are sure to spark smiles and countless photo ops. The driveable tour winds off the beaten path through scenic rural roads bursting with fall color, offering step-off stops at group-friendly shops, attractions and farm markets.

For group leaders, this event is a planner's dream. The Shipshewana/LaGrange County Amish Country CVB provides full itinerary planning, step-on guides and group-exclusive perks like private meals inside Amish homes and hands-on cultural experiences – from buggy shop tours to quilting demos. The

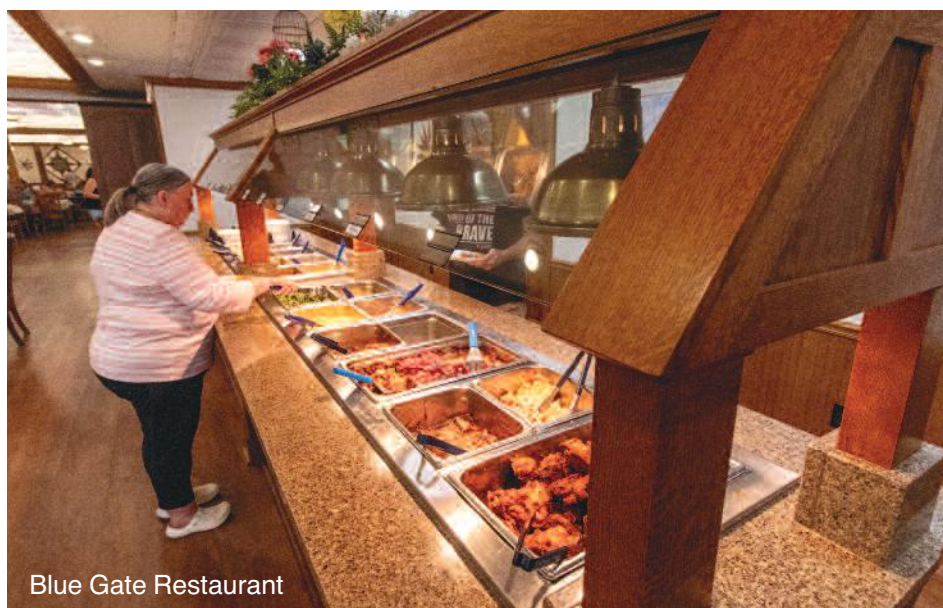
logistics are seamless, and the hospitality is second to none.

Build a multi-day itinerary featuring ABA "Best of the Best" Award winners, including the renowned Shipshewana Flea Market (open through September 30) and the Shipshewana Antique Auction, held weekly year-round. Add in family-friendly musicals at the Blue Gate Theatre or top-name concerts at the Blue Gate Performing Arts Center, and cap it all off with a hearty Amish buffet dinner at the Blue Gate Restaurant – a must for any group itinerary.

Need flexibility? The straw art displays are available for two full months, ideal for week-

day or weekend departures. Area hotels offer group rates, motorcoach parking and warm hospitality geared toward tour groups.

With low costs, vivid scenery and customizable experiences, Straw Bale Art and Autumn Adventures in Shipshewana delivers big on charm and ease. It is a fall favorite your group will want to revisit year after year. For more information contact Group Sales Manager Judy McConnell at (260) 768-4008, VisitShipshewana.org or e-mail at judy@lagrangecountycvb.org. □



Blue Gate Restaurant

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- Meet **friendly farmers**, each with a unique story to tell.
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Montgomery, Alabama

For group tour planners, finding a destination that educates, entertains and leaves a lasting emotional impact is no small task. Montgomery, Alabama delivers on all counts. With its powerful historical landmarks, thriving cultural scene and walkable downtown packed with Southern charm, Montgomery is the kind of place that turns bus tours into transformational journeys.

This is more than just a stop on the map. It is a destination where your travelers will not just tour, they will connect. They will stand where Rosa Parks sparked a movement, where Dr. King preached hope and where new chapters of courage are being written every day. Montgomery's legacy as the birthplace of both the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement gives it unmatched historical weight, and today's Montgomery blends that past with a vibrant, welcoming present.

Your group can walk in the footsteps of heroes at the Rosa Parks Museum, reflect at the Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Sites and gather at the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church. These are not just attractions; they are emotional experiences that resonate long after your passengers are back on the bus.

While history is a powerful draw, Montgomery offers so much more. The city's cultural energy shines through in its world-class arts venues like the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. Annual events such as the MLK Weekend, Juneteenth Celebrations and the Commemoration of the Montgomery Bus Boycott provide meaningful moments for themed tours and commemorative group experiences.

For planners, Montgomery is an easy sell. With more than 8,000 hotel rooms – including the new Elevation Convening Center & Hotel designed for rest, reflection, and reconnection – plus group-friendly attractions, parking and dining, logistics are simple. Many of the city's top sites are located within the walkable downtown district, where visitors can step off the motorcoach and right into a full day's worth of activities without needing to reboard.



Montgomery, Alabama skyline

Historical Attractions and Museums

Need variety for longer stays? Plan a stop at the Montgomery Zoo or enjoy a relaxing riverboat cruise along the Alabama River. Outdoor enthusiasts in your group will appreciate the new Montgomery Whitewater Park or the city's growing trail system, perfect for stretching legs and enjoying Alabama's natural beauty.

Centrally located at the crossroads of interstates 65 and 85, Montgomery is easily accessible and within a day's drive of major Southeastern cities. MGM Regional Airport also provides air access for fly-in/fly-out components of longer itineraries.

What truly sets Montgomery apart is its people. The educators, tour guides, artists, and entrepreneurs who bring this city to life and engage meaningfully with groups. Here, your travelers will not just hear history; they will feel it, and they will meet the voices carrying it.

Bring your passengers to a destination that moves them, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. Experience Montgomery, Alabama – where group tours explore with purpose.

American Village Montevallo, Alabama

American Village is a unique attraction in the heart of Alabama on 188 acres in Montevallo, 30 minutes south of Birmingham.

Housed here is a nationally pioneering American History campus focused on building good citizens through immersive and engaging experiences, where visitors discover the power and drama of America's journey for independence, liberty and self-government.

In 2024, Alabama Governor Kay Ivey proclaimed American Village "The Semiquincentennial Celebration capitol in Alabama." What does that mean? American Village is THE place in Alabama to visit in the year leading up to America's 250th Birthday – July 4, 2026.

The distinctive campus includes more than 20 historically-inspired buildings – Mount Vernon, the Courthouse at Williamsburg, Concord Bridge, the President's Oval Office – and although these facilities play a key role in presenting the ideas and stories of America's founding, American Village is not about its buildings. It is instead about building in the hearts and minds of Americans – young and old – a sense of stewardship of what George Washington called "the sacred fire of liberty."

Here you will enjoy family-friendly, interactive and engaging programs for all ages. Meet patriots of the past such as George and Martha Washington, John and Abigail Adams, Alexander and Eliza Hamilton, Phillis Wheatley and James Armistead Lafayette, learn

Guide: Historical Attractions & Museums

about apothecary medicine, march with the Continental Army, experience the National Veterans Shrine and so much more.

In the replica Independence Hall, visitors travel from the Boston Massacre to the protest of the Stamp Act and the Boston Tea Party, to Paul Revere's Ride and the Shot Heard 'Round the World, through the American Revolution and the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The experience is multi-sensory – see, hear, smell, touch and feel America's revolutionary history.

American Village is open to public Monday through Friday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the school year; Tuesday through Saturday 9 a.m. to

4 p.m. in June and July; and Monday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday 12-4 p.m. during the Spring Festival of Tulips.

Tours of any size are welcome! Phone at

(205) 665-3535 ext. 1031 for special accommodations and programs.

For the calendar of events, visit americanvillage.org. □



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Free Bus Attractions in the Upper Midwest

by Larry Plachno
Photos by the magazine staff



John Deere Tractor and Engine Museum

When your magazine staff travels, we are always on the lookout for attractions that are good for bus groups. Here are a few places we visited recently that are not only appropriate for bus groups but do not charge any admission fees.

John Deere Tractor and Engine Museum Waterloo, Iowa

Conveniently located on an exit ramp near the junction of highways 63 and 218 in Waterloo, the John Deere Tractor and Engine Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. There is more than

enough room in the parking lots for buses. The museum itself is spotlessly clean, there are large restrooms and a gift shop but no food available. It is an ideal along-the-way stop to break up a longer trip.

While you might expect the line of old tractors, which is terribly impressive, the museum also has a fascinating section with

old household items including early washers. In addition to the historical tractors there is an interactive test of pulling power, an opportunity to sit on a conventional farm tractor and even an opportunity to walk up a flight of stairs and sit in a modern, huge tractor complete with air conditioning and GPS.

This is an obvious attraction for an agricultural group but our passengers said that they expected to be bored and were pleasantly surprised. Count on a stay of 60-90 minutes or more for the average group. For information phone (319) 292-6126.

Spam Museum and Visitor Center Austin, Minnesota

The Spam Museum is located in downtown Austin, Minnesota only a few minutes drive south from Interstate 90. It is open daily, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Sunday. Bus parking is at the rear or at a cut-in curb alongside. While there is no food service, there are good restrooms and a gift shop.

Expectedly, this museum tells the story of Spam canned meat. Nine areas offer information and photo options. Learn about the history of the Hormel family. Be impressed about the many companies that are part of the Hormel group. Find out that there are many different varieties and flavors of Spam. Learn how people cook Spam in different ways. Join an interactive session where you can replicate packing cans of Spam. See the booths that tell the story of Spam in different countries, including Asia where Spam was introduced by American GIs during World War II. If you are lucky, you might even have one of the "Spambassadors" offer you a sample of Spam.

Our experience is that the visitors got more than they expected. Hours afterward they were still talking about what they saw and asking, "Did you know?" Do not be surprised if some of your passengers visit the gift shop and bring back a package of different varieties of Spam.

Depending on your group you can look at a stay of 60 to 90 minutes. For more information phone (507) 434-6528.



National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion Champion (New Franken), Wisconsin

This is the only approved Marian apparition site in the United States and as such is the American equivalent of Lourdes, France and Fatima, Portugal. This story begins with apparitions in 1859, one year after the 1858 apparitions of the Virgin Mary to Saint Bernadette at Lourdes. Since then the site miraculously survived the Peshtigo Fire of 1871 and has witnessed many cures and healings.

As the shrine is becoming better known, it has been expanding. Since our last visit, the site now has a meeting building as well as a separate building for history. There are parking areas in front and back with the back parking lot having dedicated space for buses. A rest area building is located adjacent to the front parking lot.

Food service is available in the Schoolhouse Cafe but it is limited to snacks, pre-packaged sandwiches, salads and some microwavables. For groups, the staff can offer a catered meal in a separate room. There also is a gift shop with a wide variety of items.

A chapel was built over the apparition site that is now protected in the lower level and known as the Oratory. Very close to the bus parking area there is an entrance near the center of the chapel with a short flight of stairs going down. At the rear there is a ramp for wheelchairs and scooters. Religious services including a Mass and benediction are held upstairs in the chapel. There are statues and prayer areas outside as well as a walking Stations of the Cross at the rear of the property.

The shrine is located east of Green Bay and west of Door County, a popular area for bus groups. There are other religious locations in Green Bay including the St. Francis Xavier Cathedral and the National Shrine of St. Joseph as well as Holy Hill to the south. Length of stay varies greatly from group to group. Some groups may stay only two hours if they have other places to visit while other groups may spend several hours and attend some of the services. For more information phone (920) 866-2571. □

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Crystal Grand Music Theatre

Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin

The Crystal Grand: A Jewel of Wisconsin Dells Nestled in the heart of Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, the Crystal Grand Music Theatre has grown into one of the Midwest's most celebrated performance venues. Since opening its doors in 1994, it has developed a reputation for pairing big-name artists with an intimate atmosphere, creating concerts that feel both personal and unforgettable. With seating for roughly 2,000, it is large enough to attract national touring acts, yet small enough to ensure that every seat feels close to the action.

Over the years, the Crystal Grand has hosted an impressive array of talent. Country stars, rock legends and beloved pop icons have all graced its stage, making it a destination for music fans from across the region. LeAnn Rimes, whose soaring vocals have defined hits like "How Do I Live" and "Can't Fight the Moonlight," brought her powerful presence to the theater, proving that a mid-sized venue can deliver arena-level energy.

Lee Brice brought his You, Me & My Guitar tour to Wisconsin Dells, filling the Crystal Grand with chart-topping country anthems. His performance highlighted what makes the theater so special – the chance for fans to experience their favorite artists in a space that feels both grand and personal.

Gary Allan, another country favorite known for hits like "Watching Airplanes" and "Every Storm (Runs Out of Rain)," has also drawn enthusiastic crowds to the Crystal Grand. His rugged vocals and heart-



felt lyrics resonate perfectly in a venue designed for both sound and intimacy.

However, the Theatre's reach extends beyond country music. Acts like REO Speedwagon, Jay Leno, Pat Benatar, Jackyl, Nate Bargatze and Shane Smith and The Saints have all taken the stage, underscoring its reputation as a diverse hub for live entertainment.

Recognition has followed. The Crystal Grand was nominated for Academy of Country Music Theater of the Year in 2023, a testament to its growing influence within the music industry.

For Wisconsin Dells, the Crystal Grand is not just a music theater – it is a place where memories are made and music truly comes alive. □

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Broadway Grand Prix is the ultimate family attraction. Race to victory on the seven go kart tracks, become a legend on the two 18-hole mini golf courses or get the highest score in the Grand Prix arcade. Broadway Grand Prix offers all the greatest Myrtle Beach attractions and games so there is plenty of fun for all ages. It is conveniently located across from Broadway at the Beach. The Place to Race – for all ages.

Myrtle Waves is South Carolina's largest water park with 23 slides and attractions for all ages and 1.2 million gallons of water. Myrtle Waves offers two kiddie areas, tube slides, body slides, thrill slides and an all-new mat slide. If you are looking for a more relaxing day, there are plenty of cabana rentals, a Lazy River, Wave Pool and Beer Garden. New to Myrtle Waves is The Venue, the perfect space for a large group outing with plenty of customization options to make it the best group outing.

Catering is offered to group reservations at both locations, including, but not limited to: Pig Pickin' BBQs, steak and potato dinners, grilled or BBQ chicken, burgers and hot dogs, chicken wings, Chicken Bog, pizza, beer, wine and liquor.

Interested in booking a group outing with us? View BroadwayGrandPrix.com or MyrtleWaves.com for more information. □

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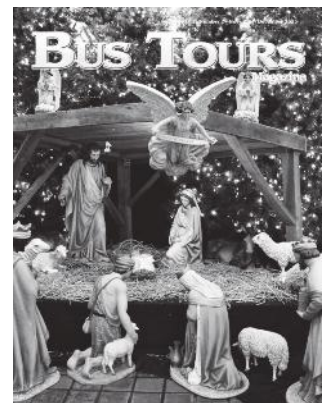
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