

Title:

The Prairie and Prosperity of Illinois

Word Count:

792

Summary:

The Land of Lincoln sprawls over 56,400 square-miles primarily of prairie, but half of its population of 12 million is concentrated in the greater Chicago area. Let's explore the five regions of downstate and then discover Chicagoland.

Keywords:

Group Travel Tours ,Singles Group Travel, Travel Tour Groups, Corporate Travel Planning, Tourism Destination Marketing, Travel Planning Business, Small Group Adventure Travel, Tourism Marketing Plan,

Article Body:

The Land of Lincoln sprawls over 56,400 square-miles primarily of prairie, but half of its population of 12 million is concentrated in the greater Chicago area. Let's explore the five regions of downstate and then discover Chicagoland.

Southern

This region is home to the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail, which is a 25-mile trail through the Shawnee National Forest that visits five wineries. They are Alto Vineyards, Owl Creek Vineyards, Winghill Vineyard, Von Jakob Vineyard and Pomona Winery. The newest winery is the new Blue Sky Vineyard in Makanda, a Tuscan-themed winery featuring a 360-degree mural in its tasting room. Many of the wineries stage special events during September, which is Illinois Wine Month.

Nearby Metropolis is the official adopted Home of Superman. Stop for a photo with the 15 foottall Superman statue and cross the street for the Super Museum, featuring Superman memorabilia and props. There is a Superman Celebration here each June, with superhero-themed entertainment and celebrity appearances.

Southwest

More than 1,000 eagles migrate to the Alton and Grafton areas to spend the winter on the bluffs along the Great River Road. Pere Marquette State Park offers eagle-watching programs from late December through February. The new National Great Rivers Museum in Alton tells the story of the Mississippi River

through over 20 interactive, animated displays. Tours of the Melville Locks and Dam allow guests to view the river traffic from atop the eight-story dam. Nearby, the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Hartford tells the story of the famous journey that began in Illinois. Groups can explore a full-scale model of one of their keelboats, watch a film entitled *At Journeys Edge* and view a replica of Camp River Dubois.

Cahokia Mounds in Collinsville are the remains of an ancient Mississippian Indian culture that existed here from 700 to 1400 A.D. Sixty-eight of the original earthen mounds have been preserved, including the 100 foot-tall Monks Mound. Each August, artisans demonstrate fire starting, pottery making and flint knapping on Archaeology Day.

The National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville has twelve different devotional areas. The Lourdes Grotto is a replica of the religious site in France. A free guided trolley tour is available through the 200 acres of grounds. Each year from November to January, the shrine features carriage rides, caroling, a display of decorated trees and outdoor light sculptures that tell the Christmas story in an event called Way of Lights.

West

The Illinois River Road Scenic Byway, a natural preserve along the banks of the Illinois River, was recently designated a National Scenic Byway. The byway allows visitors to travel the routes of the French voyageurs and it parallels the Illinois River Country Nature Trail, a chain of over one hundred linked nature sites that offer outdoor recreation. Along the route is Dickson Mounds Museum in Lewiston that traces the 12,000-year history of Native Americans in the Illinois River Valley in one of the finest on-site archaeological museums in the country.

Bishop Hill is a historic country village that highlights its Swedish heritage through restored colony buildings, museums, crafts and antique shops and restaurants run by the descendants of the towns founders. The Carl Sandburg Home is in Galesburg, where you can view the Pulitzer Prize-winning author's birthplace, tour the visitors center and visit the perennial garden where he is buried. Another famous American, lawman Wyatt Earp, was born in Monmouth. His four-room home features period furniture and memorabilia. Earp became famous for his gunfight at the OK Corral in Tombstone, Ariz.

The history of Moline is inextricably linked with John Deere, whose plow changed farming. The John Deere Pavilion shows vintage and modern Deere equipment, along with other agricultural exhibits.

Wildlife Prairie State Park in Peoria offers an 1800s pioneer farmstead, with one-room schoolhouse and log cabin. During its Frontier Days, native Illinois animals such as cougars, bison, black bears and others are on display.

When the Mormons fled upstate New York in the early 1840s, they settled in the small river town of Nauvoo. The Historic Nauvoo Visitors Center displays artifacts and offers a live musical about old Nauvoo during the summer. The Joseph Smith Historic Site Visitors Center tells the story of the movement in Nauvoo and of Smith, the groups first president. Horse-drawn carriage rides and guided walking tours are offered. Baxters Vineyards here dates from 1857, making it Illinois oldest winery. Next door is Nauvoo Glassworks, where visitors watch artisans craft art glass. Follow the river south to the East End Historic District in Quincy. National Geographic Magazine named it one of the ten most architecturally significant corners in the nation, where one can view homes spanning every period of design since the 1850s.

This article is sponsored by: <a href="http://www.grouptravelblog.com">www.grouptravelblog.com</a>