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Top 10 Places to Visit in Kansas

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Kansas offers a lot more than just fields of wheat and sunflowers. This prairie state has a colorful history, sprawling grasslands and sophisticated urban centers for travelers to explore. To get to many of Kansas' must-see attractions, you'll need a car, as you will find long stretches between populated areas and little to-no-public transportation outside of major cities.

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

The Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve (nps.gov/tapr) in northern Chase County, 16 miles west of Emporia, is one of the best places to get a close look at the Kansas prairie. At the preserve, you can explore the grassland that once covered 140 million acres of the United States and get a first-hand look at some of the 150 species of birds, 500 species of plants and 31 species of mammals that call the prairie home.

Quivira National Wildlife Refuge

Almost a quarter of North American shorebirds, including pelicans, gulls and herons, that are found east of the Rocky Mountains, stop off at the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (fws.gov/quivira) during their annual migrations, making the wetland refuge a favorite spot for bird-watchers. The refuge covers a flag-shaped slice of land in central Kansas, southeast of the town of Great Bend.

S.P. Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden

Considered one of the eight wonders of art by the Kansas Sampler Foundation, S.P. Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden (garden-of-eden-lucas-kansas.com) in Lucas is a folk art mecca. Wander around the garden of enormous concrete sculptures, most depicting Biblical and political scenes. Prohibited from burying his deceased wife in his backyard by town law, Dinsmoor removed her from the town cemetery himself and encased her coffin in a concrete sculpture so no one else could move it. Over time, he added more and more concrete sculptures to the land around her mausoleum and named his creation the Garden of Eden.

Lindsborg

Swedish immigrants played an important role in Kansas' history, and the charming town of Lindsborg (lindsborgcity.org) is an ideal place to appreciate Swedish-American history. Sample Swedish cuisine, see how early settlers from Sweden adapted to New World living and explore Swedish art and culture in this little town that's been called one of the eight wonders of Kansas. The vividly painted Wild Dala horses -- wooden horse sculptures carved and painted in traditional Swedish style -- scattered through town are a favorite spot for impromptu photo shoots.

Kansas Speedway

If you feel the need for speed, head for the Kansas Speedway (kansasspeedway.com) in Kansas City. This tri-oval race track hosts NASCAR races during the spring and fall and other racing events throughout the year. In addition to the action on the track, you can take a tour of the racetrack, sign up for a driving class on the track or just hang out in the Speedway's attached casino.

Dodge City

One of the most notorious spots in Kansas is Dodge City (visitdodgecity.org), once known as the wildest town in the Wild West. Grab a drink at the saloon, watch mock gunfights complete with costumed cowboys in the streets or wander through Boot Hill cemetery, where the graves date back to frontier days.

Oz Museum

For Frank Baum fans, the Oz Museum (ozmuseum.com) in Wamego is a must. The museum houses one of the largest private collections of "The Wizard of Oz" memorabilia in the world. In addition to items and photos from the 1939 film starring Judy Garland, you'll find items from earlier silent film versions of the book.

Wichita

In Wichita, two museums give you a closer look at two of the forces that shaped history in the West: cowboys and Native Americans. Learn more about life for the Plains Indians before and after colonial penetration at the Mid-America All-Indian Center (theindiancenter.org), then head over to the Old Cowtown Museum (oldcowtown.org) to get a sense of life in an 1870s cattle town.

Botanica, The Wichita Gardens

A trip to Botanica, The Wichita Gardens (botanica.org) is like a trip to more than 24 different gardens. The nine-acre garden includes a wide variety of gardens, including a butterfly garden, children's garden and rock garden. Trying to spot bullfrogs in the Boeing Pond is a favorite activity for children.

Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site

It looks like an ordinary school, but Monroe Elementary School in Topeka made headlines in the 1950s as the center of a national controversy that ended with the U.S. Supreme Court's segregation-ending decision. Today, the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site (nps.gov/brvb) offers a look at the history and significance of segregation in the United States.



Visitors will find numerous places to explore in Kansas.