

Happy trails to you: Some working ranches in the western Badlands of North Dakota welcome visitors to participate in a real cattle roundup, sleep in log cabins and go trail riding.



Tourism Dollars Go a Long Way in the Peace Garden State

by *Natasha Anderson*

AFFORDABILITY ALWAYS HAS BEEN A top priority for travelers, and with the recent economic downturn in the United States and many global markets, value has become even more important. This is just one more reason for tour operators and independent vacationers to choose North Dakota as a destination.

The often overlooked state was named the “most affordable vacation destination” by the American Automobile Association for the third year in a row in 2008. “Because of our state’s low lodging and food prices, families can have the peace of mind that they can take a vacation without breaking the bank,” said Sara Otte Coleman, director of tourism for the North Dakota Department of Commerce. “Plus, with the money saved on these items, they’ll be able to enjoy more of our legendary experiences, while creating priceless memories.”

In addition to low prices for food and accommodation, visitors can cut costs further by taking advantage of North

Dakota’s many free events and activities, which are listed in the new North Dakota Group Travel Guide along with itinerary highlights. This tool incorporates themed itineraries with tour routes mapped out for easier planning and features annual events and festivals, a U.S. mileage chart, receptive operators and a list of attractions that can be added to tours with no extra expense.

One example is the Norsk Hostfest, which takes place in Minot, Sept. 29 through Oct. 3. This event features seven stages of free entertainment, including music and dancing, plus front-door drop off and motorcoach parking. More than 200 internationally recognized artisans, craftsmen and chefs participate in the celebration, resulting in excellent shopping and dining options. Guests will find Norwegian sweaters, jewelry and fine art pieces, as well as four sidewalk cafés, a Scandinavian kitchen and a Swedish bakery.

Katherine Satrom, president of Bismark-based Satrom Travel and Tour, recently developed an itinerary centered



JASON LINDSEY/MINOT CVB, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The annual Norsk Hostfest in Minot celebrates Scandinavian culture through song, dance, food, and arts and crafts. Right: The famous *P-51 Mustang* is one of many historically significant aircraft that will be on display during the Fargo AirSho, which will take place Aug. 22–23 at Hector International Airport.

on the Norsk Hostfest. The multi-day package includes a journey to Drayton to attend a play based on the books of Lauraine Snelling, a North Dakota author whose Norwegian heritage inspired her stories of Scandinavian settlement in the Red River Valley.

“There’s a strong interest in this culture and heritage in our region, so it was a natural transition to want to present this play to visitors,” said Satrom, whose goal is to create itineraries with depth and educational value that appeal to both local and in-bound groups. The above package also includes a “sod-buster” dinner featuring Norwegian fare and a tour of the University of North Dakota Aeronautical Center and the Ralph Engelstad Arena.

Deanne Felchle, group tour marketing manager for North Dakota Tourism, has seen a lot of interest in the Fargo AirSho, which takes place Aug. 22–23 this year. The show features stunt pilots, U.S. and Canadian air demo teams, interactive airplane displays, Warbird flyovers and skydiving. Historic, internationally known aircraft from the Fargo Air Museum including the *Super*

The following organization has placed advertising in support of this travel guide.

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Corsair, *P-51 Mustang* and *TBM Avenger*, will be on display. Felchle has created a package for groups to attend the show that includes accommodations, front-door drop off at the event, a motorcoach parking area, a reception area and excellent seating.

Mystery tours to North Dakota are a great option for budget-conscious groups, and Sylvia Garcia, director of tourism sales for the Fargo-Moorhead CVB, recently introduced one that contains versatile attractions that allow visitors to choose their activities. This one-day itinerary, entitled “Going in Circles,” begins with a morning at the Red River Zoo, where guests can ride a restored antique carousel. Other stops include Scheels, the world’s largest all-sports store, which contains a 1953 park-style Ferris wheel, the North Dakota Horse Park and the Dairy Queen where the Dilly Bar was created in 1955.

Packages with a historic component can benefit from the introduc-

tion of Wild West Shootouts, held on alternating Saturdays from May 23 through Sept. 26, in Jamestown’s Frontier Village. Attendance to the shootouts is free, as is admission to the village, an attraction featuring original buildings from small prairie towns throughout the area. Gift shops and snacks are on site, and stagecoach and pony rides and live music are available in the summer.

Other historic sites include the recently opened Osco-Zero Missile Alert Facility in Cooperstown, a Minuteman III missile system built in the 1960s that represents North Dakota’s role in the Cold War, the new Chateau de Mores Interpretive Center in Medora and an Interpretive Center at Fort Abercrombie, which opened to the public in May 2008.

Despite the economic recession, Felchle is optimistic regarding travel to North Dakota, due to the state’s affordability and its ranking in a 2008 Cambridge University study as the friendliest state in the nation. These two attributes are a winning combination for travelers as well as tour operators who want ease of planning and first-class hospitality wherever they go. ©

What's New in Medora

Medora's additions and renovations to local venues are adding to its already strong list of tour product. The Chateau de Mores Interpretive Center and the Medora Musical Welcome Center both opened in 2008 and have been well received, according to Deanne Felchle, group tour marketing manager for North Dakota Tourism.

"The welcome center shows how the 'Medora Musical' came about, but that's only part of the story; then you have the costumes and how the fashion and the songs have changed," she said.

The center pays tribute to the people that have been key to the musical's success—the creators, the performers and the loyal audience. Displays tell the colorful history of the "Medora Musical," including the passion of creator Harold Schaefer, along with the history of the Burning Hills Amphitheatre, which now has an escalator for increased accessibility. Guests can explore costume displays, a video of past musical productions and



THEODORE ROOSEVELT MEDORA FOUNDATION

Visitors can view costume displays, a video of past productions and a photo collection at the new Medora Musical Welcome Center.

an impressive photo collection.

In addition, the Medora Musical Welcome Center offers a large variety of clothing, gifts, souvenirs and full-ticketing services for various Medora attractions and events.

The Chateau de Mores Interpretive Center, an 8,600-square-foot facility with 3,000-square-feet of space for permanent and temporary exhibits, explores the history and legacies of the Marquis de Mores, a French nobleman and entrepreneur who ran businesses in the town he

named after his wife, Medora. The center includes interactive exhibits that expand on the story of the Marquis and his family, artifacts from his life and temporary exhibits. The facility is open year-round with adjusted hours each winter.

The Rough Riders Hotel is not only receiving a facelift in the coming months, but it also is expanding to include more rooms, conference facilities and a larger dining room. Built in the late 1800s, the historic property, which has become a North Dakota landmark, will undergo two phases of renovation. Phase 1 of the project is scheduled for completion in spring 2009. Visitors will be able to enjoy gourmet cuisine and stay in one of eight upscale rooms—all part of the original structure. Phase 2 includes the addition of conference facilities and 68 rooms, which will be completed by June 2010.

For more information contact Kristen Davis, Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation, 701.623.4444, www.medora.com, member since 1975.

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