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Special Supplement
LEISURE GROUP TRAVEL
June 2015

Tour Guide
because many folks these days are several generations removed from even knowing anyone who has farmed, excursions into the Iowa countryside can be eye-opening additions to any itinerary. Farms and other ag-related attractions provide insights on the state’s agricultural past and how our food is grown today. Agritourism is all about connecting travelers with life down on the farm—it’s big business in Iowa.

On tours of Hawkeye Buffalo Ranch, near Fredericksburg in the rolling hills and timber country of Northeast Iowa, guests on the 1.5-hour tour learn about the history of the bison and the heritage of this family farm, which dates back to 1854, when owner Dan McFarland’s great-great grandfather lived in a sod house. On a wagon ride into the woods they get to hand-feed the buffalo. Tours also include a Lakota Sioux smudge ceremony, a traditional ritual of spiritual and physical cleansing.

McFarland manages the growing herd of grass-fed bison and Polled Hereford cattle with daughter Martha. She said, “We can regularly accommodate bus tours of 40 people and serve up to 80 with special features, circulating groups by including a tour of the farm or a taste testing and demo of bison meat. We love having bus tours and we can always adapt tours to whatever a tour guide needs. I would say our charm is being a truly authentic farm experience—we work the buffalo first and welcome guests because we love this lifestyle and want to share it with others. Chickens will follow our guests around and you’re getting the same welcome as a cousin would if they came to visit our place.”

The ranch also can provide a catered meal that includes buffalo meat. Its small store sells buffalo steaks, burger and jerky, plus farm/buffalo-themed gifts.

At Tyden Farm No. 6 in Dougherty, groups will discover one of America’s true unsung innovators and his patents for inventions during his railroad and manufacturing days. The story includes how Col. Emil Tyden transformed eight farms in North Central Iowa into big operations between 1915 and 1936, providing employment to many during the Great Depression. Tyden Farm No. 6, on the National Register of Historic Places, stands as it did in 1936. Visitors see a 20-minute movie on Col. Tyden and his farms, view antique farm equipment in the Big Red Barn, and see museum exhibits of a 1940s farm family. They also enjoy the
whimsical gardens and find out what a summer kitchen was like in the 1920s. A catered meal and demonstrations of spinning and butter making can be arranged. Complimentary cookies and drink are always served.

Nelson Pioneer Farm and Museum in Oskaloosa showcases Iowa farm life in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The 18 buildings on the grounds include the 1850s home and barn, a schoolhouse, country stores with early 1900s goods, blacksmith and stagecoach shops, a post office, log cabin and Quaker meetinghouse. Early vehicles and farm equipment also are displayed.

Agriculture’s past, present and future is on display at Heartland Acres Agribition Center in Independence, just east of Waterloo. At this 16-acre complex, tour groups learn about corn shelling and dairy farming, view antique tractors and farm implements, and encounter the whole gamut of livestock, from cows and pigs to goats and chickens. The classic car museum represents a vintage gas station.

Other agritourism stops in the Waterloo area include Hansen’s Farm Fresh Dairy in Hudson, a working family farm where groups can view the entire process of getting the milk from the cows to the bottle and to delivery trucks. A special hands-on tour lets guests milk a cow, feed a baby calf, make butter, and even pet wallabies and kangaroos. In Waterloo, where many are employed at John Deere manufacturing plants, factory tours are given at the John Deere Tractor Assembly Operations and John Deere Engine Works. John Deere Tractor & Engine Museum, Hawkeye Community College Farm Laboratory and Kenny Krass’ Private Tractor Collection also appear on ag-related itineraries in Waterloo.

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Agritourism is an Iowa Growth Industry

Pioneer farming skills are showcased at Living History Farms, an open-air agricultural museum in Urbandale, just outside of Des Moines.
When you think of farming, what comes to mind? If it’s not GPS systems, research analysis, state-of-the-art equipment and biotechnology, it’s time to change your mindset! Get ready to learn more than you thought possible about the food you eat. With the agricultural innovation coming out of Ames and Des Moines, this area claims to be the “bio-tech headquarters of the world.”

Iowa State University in Ames is a key player in agriculture education. See for yourself on the BioCentury Research Farm, where you will learn about the integration of biomass production, harvest, storage and conversion into one complete system. You also get the opportunity to see on-site plots of biomass crops and biorenewable processing facilities.

Pay a visit to the ISU Meats Laboratory, a federally inspected facility where you can see the latest design in thermal processing equipment. View an analysis of the physical and chemical properties of meat and observe the slaughter house floor where beef, pork, lamb and veal are all processed. An Iowa State University Animal Science Teaching Farms tour includes several farm sites used for hands-on classes and demonstrations of the production systems with livestock such as beef cattle, sheep and swine.

At Iowa State University Dairy, learn just how milk makes its way from the farm to your table. As part of Iowa State’s Live Green! Initiative, the animal farms, ISU dining and BioCentury Research Farm provide organic materials for the Iowa State Compost Facility, which generates approximately 2,000 tons of finished compost per year.

Iowa State University Ag Engineering and Agronomy (AEA) Research Farms host demonstrations focusing on a variety of perennial crops. Witness more than 1,200 acres of intensive plot research, plus corn, soybean, oat, sorghum and biomass perennial crop demonstrations.

Iowa State University Horticulture Station has a broad variety of research on its extensive apple orchards, vineyards, fruit and vegetable plantings, turf grass research, ornamental plantings and a 15-acre lake.

Have your group see why Des Moines is leading the nation in both agriculture and biotechnology. The city is home to many world headquarters for agriculture and biotech companies — many of which offer group tours — and to a precision-farm learning center, Monsanto Learning Center, which is the only one of its kind in the world.

Des Moines is home to The World Food Prize. Conceived by Iowan Dr. Norman E. Borlaug (recipient of the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize), The World Food Prize honors individuals who have made vital contributions to improving the quality, quantity or availability of food. Explore exhibits at the Hall of Laureates, including The History of Agriculture Timeline and The Greatest Global Challenge: How we will feed nearly 9 billion people by the year 2050. While you’re here, enjoy gardens, murals, photo galleries and learn the awe-inspiring stories of Iowa’s world-renowned scientists and leaders who have been named World Food Prize Laureates.

Also in Des Moines is the Downtown Farmers’ Market, ranked No. 2 in the nation. Iowa producers from 58 counties across Iowa offer fresh fruit, vegetables, wine, cheese, baked goods, meat and more every Saturday, May through October.
Visit this cultural center & museum that chronicles & preserves the history of German-Americans in the Midwest! Call us at 563-322-8844 to book your tour today! A special experience in a small footprint. Accessible and budget-friendly! A small jewel not to be missed!

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Lodging:
Greenfield, Illinois
Meal times and snack stops are often the exclamation points of an Iowa itinerary. In cities and small towns, at resorts and farms, there’s plenty of good eating to be had. Treat your palate with farm-fresh foods, sip Iowa-made wines and maybe even try a lavender sugar cookie.

Cedar Rapids is a dream for the culinary-minded traveler, offering a variety of premium experiences. Groups might start with a visit to NewBo City Market in the historic Czech Village/New Bohemia Main Street District, a cultural corridor that straddles the banks of the Cedar River just south of the downtown business district. Promoting access to healthy, locally grown foods, it occupies a former industrial building that covers a whole block. A showplace for small food entrepreneurs, the year-round market, according to its website, “is made up of fab foodies, persnickety purveyors of all things good and green, cupcake divas and creators of other really cool stuff.” Shops include NewBo Cheese Co., That One Cupcake Place, Caribbean Kitchen, Roasters Coffee House, and Betty and Bob’s Better Bread.

There’s a seasonal farmers’ market in the Market Yard.

The National Czech and Slovak Museum, in the heart of Cedar Rapids’ Czech Village, hosts group meals served by one of the city’s Czech catering companies. The Village Meat Market also dishes up authentic Czech meals. Czech Village’s landmark Sykora Bakery is famed for its kolaches in a variety of flavors, from cream cheese and poppy seed to prune, fig and rhubarb.

A number of Cedar Rapids restaurants take pride in sourcing locally, from the angus beef to the ground flour. You’ll find that farm-to-table dining experience at places like Bata’s, which uses produce from nearby New Bo City Market vendors; the highly regarded Cobble Hill; and The Class Act, situated on the Kirkwood Community College campus. Groups also like Farmer’s Daughter’s Market in Hiawatha, a great breakfast and lunch place with homemade quiche, soups and baked goods. In this beautiful barn building, combine your farm-fresh meal with shopping for antiques and gifts. Tours and tastings are available at three area wineries—John Ernest Vineyard & Winery, Fireside Winery and Cedar Ridge Vineyards (which also makes small-batch spirits, including Iowa’s first bourbon). Did you know that Iowa has more than 300 wineries?

In the scenic Loess Hills region of Western Iowa, groups can get familiar with the aronia berry. What’s an aronia berry? Well, it’s touted as the one of the most nutritionally dense fruits on the planet, and you can learn all about it at Sawmill Hollow Family Farm in Missouri Valley. America’s first commercial aronia berry farm has more than 13,000 bushes that produce the dark purple berry, hailed for its antioxidant strength and considered the ultimate superfood based on scientific research. On
personalized tours of the organic farm, guests can sample aronia berry wine, juice, smoothies and other foods in the tasting room. Products for sale include syrup, salsa and jelly, plus extract supplement and capsules. Eaten raw, the rough-textured fruit, also known as the chokeberry, is tart and dry.

For an up-close look at a versatile herb, tour Loess Hills Lavender Farm, another purveyor of a purple crop in Missouri Valley. It cultivates more than 2,000 lavender plants, whose oil is used in skin care and bath products. The most common culinary application on the farm is its “Almost World Famous Lavender Sugar Cookie,” made with dried lavender buds. These are served to bus groups, along with lavender lemonade. The herb is also used in flavoring tea. A private high tea, with hors d’oeuvres, tea, lemonade and desserts, can be arranged. The farm has served lavender cupcakes, lavender lemon bars and lavender ice cream, not to mention chicken and pork sandwiches seasoned with lavender, rosemary and thyme.

Groups touring the steep, sharply-ridged Loess Hills, recognized the world over for its superior agricultural soil, also may want to visit wineries like Breezy Hill Vineyard in Minden and Loess Hills Vineyard & Winery in Crescent.

Rathbun Lakeshore Grille at Honey Creek Resort State Park sizzles as a culinary hot spot in South Central Iowa. Located on Lake Rathbun, the state’s second largest lake, Honey Creek is considered Iowa’s greenest resort, widely recognized for its eco-friendly activities and practices. Foodies know Honey Creek for its creative cuisine, with many dishes based on Iowa-grown or produced items. Groups can arrange a cooking demonstration (perhaps a pasta, appetizer or dessert) in the banquet kitchen or take part in a hands-on cooking class and enjoy the results afterwards. Patrick Koffman, food and beverage director, said, “We have also done classes as a team-building exercise where the attendees are broken into teams and each team has to make a specific dish.”

Signature dishes on Rathbun Lakeshore Grille’s menu include Honey-Fried Walleye, a walleye fillet dipped in a honey-egg mixture, lightly breaded and pan-fried until flaky, then drizzled with honey. The Green Tomato Parmesan features fried green tomatoes and melted Italian cheese with a zesty tomato sauce on a bed of linguine. For an excellent rendition of an Iowa specialty, try the Classic Iowa Pork Tenderloin Sandwich, breaded with cracker crumbs. Breakfast favorites include Midwest Eggs Benedict—poached eggs and grilled pork tenderloin on English muffins, with sun-dried tomato hollandaise sauce. Honey Creek guests can work off this good food by participating in resort activities, from nature and team-building programs to golf, kayaking and other water sports. The resort offers 105 guest rooms and 28 luxury cottages with full kitchens.

Bring the whole herd to Iowa!

Group Tour Itineraries
Agriculture - Fresh Food - Eco-friendly & more!

From posing for selfies at the American Gothic house to grazing on fresh food at a farmers market, groups visiting Iowa will taste, tour and take away a whole new appreciation for where food comes from and how it gets from the farm to the table. So, don’t wait around ’til the cows come home—let IGTA help you start planning a tour to Iowa today!
FARM TO TABLE
Central Iowa - 3 days
Greater Des Moines – Ames

East of Des Moines, learn about the famous blue cheese at Maytag Dairy Farms and sample the product. Then visit a corn, soybean or cattle farm. At the World Food Prize Hall of Laureates in Des Moines, discover Norman Borlaug’s lifelong passion for feeding the world. Dine on locally grown food, perhaps at a farm-themed restaurant, the first 100% compostable restaurant in Iowa or a restaurant in which 90% of the ingredients come from local farms. Tour the John Deere Works, one of the only plants in the world producing sprayers, cotton pickers and tillage equipment, or visit Monsanto Learning Center to see how precision farming is so important to feeding the world. Make a snack stop at a shop that serves over 100 artisan and farmhouse cheeses. If you are in town on Saturday morning from May to October, enjoy the Des Moines Farmers’ Market, one of the best in America. Experience the Midwest’s rural past at Living History Farms outside of Des Moines. The third day is in Ames, where groups can visit the BioCentury Research Farm or ISU Meats Laboratory.

Top Itineraries in Iowa

IOWA NATURAL WONDERS AND AGRI-CULTURAL HERITAGE
Western Iowa – 2 Days
Council Bluffs, Honey Creek, Missouri Valley, Elk Horn, Manning

Along the Missouri River we’ll discover the beauty of the Loess Hills while visiting Hitchcock Nature Center in Honey Creek. Learn about the fragile ecosystem, view wildlife and explore hiking trails. Then it’s on to a lavender farm to smell the fragrant fields and sip on lavender lemonade. Visit a creamery and taste artisan cheese from goats raised on chemical-free alfalfa. At another farm we get to know the aronia berry, a fruit packed with antioxidants. Overnight is in the Council Bluffs area. Iowa’s Danish heritage is preserved in Elk Horn, where the 1848 Danish Windmill processes grain as it was done 160 years ago in Denmark. In Manning we’ll go inside an authentic German Hausbarn, built in the 17th century when it was common for families to live with their livestock. Nearby is the William A. Leet and Frederick Hassler Farmstead District, a well-preserved, early 20th century farm built as a country estate meant to impress and reflect the most progressive ideas in farm buildings and livestock production.
BARNS, BIRDS, BUGGIES AND HAY BALES
South Central and Eastern Iowa – 2 days
Fairfield, Eldon, Moravia, Chariton

At the historic Maasdam Barns at the Evergreen Ridge Stock Farm, get a look at an early 20th century draft horse breeding business. Next, strike your own American Gothic pose in front of the Eldon house made famous by Iowa artist Grant Wood. Costumes and pitchfork available. Spend the afternoon and evening at Honey Creek Resort, an eco-friendly place on Rathbun Lake. Activities include bird watching, star gazing, kayaking and geocaching. The culinary staff can create a hands-on cooking class. Day 2 takes us to an Amish community in Lucas County for a farm tour and visit to a general store. Then visit a cattle ranch where Corriente cattle, the original cattle breed in North America, are raised. Enjoy a meal of grilled hamburgers and chili from Corriente beef, which is low in cholesterol, calories and fat. Lucas County is home to two of the state’s designated Bird Conservation Areas (BCA), so bring your binoculars. In fall enjoy the Hay Bale Art Contest with creatures and famous characters created from hay bales. In Chariton get a behind-the-scenes tour of a distribution facility of one of the nation’s largest grocery chains. ●

DIG IN! AG INNOVATION TOUR FOR PROFESSIONALS
Eastern & Central Iowa – 5 days
Dubuque – Waterloo
Ames – Quad Cities

Start in Dubuque with visits to the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium, followed by majestic botanical gardens and a river cruise. In Waterloo tour John Deere manufacturing plants and the John Deere Tractor & Engine Museum. A two-day stay in Ames includes research farms, Iowa State University facilities and the Farm Progress Show at the Central Iowa Expo Site. En route to the Quad Cities stop at Kinze Manufacturing’s headquarters. Quad Cities highlights include a lunch and tour at the Maxwell family’s Cinnamon Ridge Farms. Then explore the John Deere Pavilion and Store, tour John Deere Harvester Works or Seedling Division, and visit Deere & Company World Headquarters. End your stay with a sunset dinner cruise on the Mississippi River aboard the Celebration Belle. ●
National Balloon Classic
Indianola
July 24-Aug. 1, 2015
Iowa’s largest ballooning event wows visitors with more than 100 hot-air balloons, including eye-popping special shapes. Enjoy musical entertainment, an open-air market and the Nite-Glow Extravaganza. (nationalballoonclassic.com)

Iowa State Fair
Des Moines,
Aug. 13-23, 2015
Iowa’s largest event attracts over a million people who come for the carnival rides, stage entertainment and classic fair food. More than 70 on-a-stick items range from corn dogs to pork chops. Grandstand headliners this year include Reba, Carrie Underwood, Alabama, Meghan Trainor and Def Leppard. (iowastatefair.org)

Covered Bridge Festival
Winterset, Oct. 10-11, 2015
Winterset, home of the brand new John Wayne Birthplace Museum, spotlights the Madison County bridges made famous in the novel and 1995 Clint Eastwood/Meryl Streep movie. Guided bus tours stop at some of the six bridges. In addition, there are foods, crafts and live music, plus cannon-firing and sheep-shearing demonstrations. (madisoncounty.com)

University of Okojobi Winter Games
Okojobi, Jan. 29-31, 2016
Named for a fictitious university, this wacky event puts a different spin on winter carnivals. The frigid fun in Iowa’s Great Lakes region includes broomball (on ice), flag football, softball, snowmobile races, a bean bag toss and polar plunge. Go indoors for the chili cook-off and chocolate classic. (uofowintergames.com)

Pella Tulip Time
May 5-7, 2016
Parades, quilt and flower shows, Dutch foods, and tours of Pella Historical Village and Pella Opera House bring busloads to town every spring. Also enjoy demonstrations of wooden shoe making and other crafts. The Grandstand Show features street scrubbing, Dutch dancing and a Dutch cheese market reenactment. (pellahistorical.org)

Orange City Tulip Festival
May 19-21, 2016
With thousands of tulips in bloom, the community celebrates its Dutch roots with ethnic costumes, dancing and foods. A carnival midway, nightly musical theater and a dozen replica windmills add to the festivities. (octulipfestival.com)

Tivoli Fest
Elk Horn, May 28-29, 2016
This Danish community celebrates its heritage with Danish foods, folk dancing, a parade and fireworks. Tours of the Danish Windmill and Museum of Danish America are other highlights. (danishvillages.com)
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