

Plan a Grand Time in



Island Oasis



Kids Kingdom



State Fair



Stuhr Museum



Crane Nature Center

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GREATER GRAND ISLAND CVB

some folks boast that it is “the best waterpark between Des Moines and Denver.”

Guests can brave the waves in the 350-thousand-gallon wave pool or relax and unwind along the 750-foot lazy river. For thrill seekers, there are two six-story high-speed slides and four giant 150-foot slides. Youngsters can enjoy the zero depth acres that include spraying fountains and a wacky wet otter slide. Plus they can build sand castles in the sand, stroll across the lily pads or test their skills on the log walk. There’s also an area for sand volleyball and an array of concessions for snacks.

In Stolley Park, **Kids Kingdom** is a 28,000-square-foot, themed playground featuring a castle, a pirate ship, a Viking ship, slides, swings and an obstacle course. It’s a great setting to unwind and enjoy a picnic — while kids play and burn off their extra energy. The park also offers a miniature railroad line and a wading pool.

Historical treat

For history buffs — or parents who want their kids to get a glimpse of the past — the **Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer** is a living history museum that has been called “one of the top 10 places to relive America’s past.”

Situated on 200 acres in Grand Island, the Stuhr Museum depicts late 19th-century life on the prairie. The main building introduces visitors to the inspiring story of the men and women who settled the Great Plains, contains two art galleries, a museum shop and an auditorium where visitors can view “Land of the Prairie Pioneer,” a short film that provides an overview of the museum’s attractions.

The museum grounds also include the 40-acre Railroad Town, which is a re-created 1880’s prairie town modeled after the communities that developed along the Union Pacific Railroad’s rights-of-way. Complete with 60 shops, homes and buildings, many of which have been moved to the site, restored and decorated with

GRAND ISLAND

by **Kindra Gordon**

Grand Island, Neb., is probably best known for the spring migration of Sandhill cranes that flock to the area. In fact, *Forbes FYI* named Grand Island the No. 1 place in the world for bird watchers.

But come July, it will be Hereford enthusiasts flocking to this Nebraska city for the 2012 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE). The event will be held at Grand Island’s new multi-million-dollar

state fair facilities that opened in 2010. The Hereford shows and youth contests are set for July 2-8 with 650 youth and 1,200 Hereford cattle anticipated.

While it’s a busy week of showmanship, leadership and friendship, there’s always a little time for some fun away from the cattle barns. Here are some ideas to add to your itinerary:

Great for kids

Grand Island does indeed have a waterpark — **Island Oasis** — and

period furnishings, Railroad Town features a train depot and a bustling business district. Costumed merchants and housewives as well as a blacksmith and a marshal stroll the grounds, relating their stories and memories of life on the plains.

Visitors can also tour the railroad and the antique farm machinery and auto exhibits and visit a complex of eight structures (circa 1857-1867) that re-create one of the rural “road ranches” that were built along the pioneer trail to service travelers heading west.

Nature up close

The **Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center** (located south of I-80 Exit 305) is the place to view cranes up close. While the migration activities peak in March, summer visitors can still learn all about cranes and other natural wonders at the spacious Interpretive Center, which houses exhibits on cranes, waterfowl, endangered species,

prairie grasses, prehistoric wildlife, wetlands and more.

The center’s seven miles of hiking trails provide public access to prairie, forest and wetland habitats — there’s even a handicapped accessible footbridge across the Platte River and a 35-foot viewing tower. A large bird feeding station also acquaints visitors with migrating songbirds.

For fun shopping and dining options, Grand Island offers the “**Merchandise Mile**,” located along the Highway 281 corridor. Here you’ll find everything from boutiques to national retailers. **The historic downtown district** in Grand Island boasts unique shops, antiques and great architecture including a refurbished historic movie theatre and fun dining spots like The Chicken Coop — a combination sports bar and microbrewery.

Visit visitgrandisland.com for more information about Grand Island. **HW**

Looking for a grand meal while in Grand Island? Try:

Napoli’s Italian Restaurant

3421 Conestoga Dr.
Grand Island, NE 68803
308-675-1771

** They also have a location in Hastings, Neb.*

El Toro Mexican Restaurant

3425 W State St.
Grand Island, NE 68803.
308-381-2333

** They also have a location in Hastings, Neb.*

Balz Sports Bar & Cafe

3421 W State Street
Grand Island, NE 68803
308-398-2259

Rivals Sports Bar & Grill

3100 Osborne Dr E # 100
Hastings, NE 68901
402-834-0526

Take a tour

Two unique tours are being planned in conjunction with the Junior National Hereford Expo in Grand Island. Both tours will be offered on Tuesday, July 3.

As home to the CNH (Case New Holland) North America Combine Center of Excellence, Grand Island offers the opportunity to tour a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility. Three distinct models of combines (New Holland CR, Case IH 2300, and Case IH AFX 8010) are manufactured on the same assembly line, making the Grand Island facility the only CNH plant to utilize mixed model production. Modern technology to aid in the processes includes an automotive grade e-coat paint system, laser cells, robotic welders and wireless testing systems. The Grand Island facility has approximately 800 employees and over 800,000 sq. feet of manufacturing space. This tour will be free and will last about two hours. A morning tour will be offered, and an afternoon tour may be added if there is enough interest.

The second tour being planned will visit two local wineries and include a gourmet meal over the lunch hour.



Moonlight Ridge Vineyard (moonlightridgevineyard.com) is a family-owned business located six miles north of Grand Island. The Miletta



Vista Winery at St. Paul, Neb., is just north of Grand Island and offers a scenic Nebraska view from its patio. Both entities are newcomers to the wine business — within the last decade — and will share their stories and the process to make great wine. A fee for this tour will be charged to cover the cost of lunch and the wine tastings.

Nebraskan Jill McMahon, whose family is involved in junior Hereford activities, is coordinating these tour events. For more information, contact her at jill_mcmahon@yahoo.com or 402-771-2388. Visitors can also coordinate tours to these locations on their own.

Additional attractions

Visitors to Nebraska might also enjoy visiting the Great Platte River Road Archway at nearby Kearney. The structure was built over Interstate 80 and pays tribute to the pioneers who passed through Nebraska on their way west. The museum also features stories of the building of the railroad and the creation of the first transcontinental road and today’s modern transportation system.

And, did you know that Hastings, Neb., was the birthplace of Kool-Aid? You’ll learn more about that and other fascinating facts at the Hastings Museum, which also includes a large domed planetarium and a theatre with a 70-foot-wide screen. **HW**