

Gearing Up for Grand Island

Nebraska will host the 2015 JNHE June 27-July 3, 2015.

by Kindra Gordon

Heartland hospitality will welcome Hereford youth and their families to Grand Island, Neb., June 27 through July 3 for the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE). Fonner Park, which annually hosts the Nebraska State Fair, will serve as headquarters for the event. This state-of-the-art facility opened in 2010 and has earned acclaim as one of the best livestock show facilities in the country.

While Hereford activities will take center stage for those attending the JNHE, if your schedule allows for a little extra fun with friends, Grand Island won't disappoint.

Start by gaining a little more knowledge about Nebraska agriculture at the Raising Nebraska exhibit located at Fonner Park. Open year-round, this 25,000 square foot exhibit greets visitors with a full-size section of a center irrigation pivot. The exhibit debuted at the 2014 Nebraska State Fair and is designed to teach visitors

about the state's agriculture industry — from the manufacturing of pivots, tractors and combines to the food that is grown to feed the world. The Agri-House display surprises a lot of people by showcasing the many different products that are a result of agriculture.

Yes, there's a waterpark

Grand Island does have a waterpark, Island Oasis, which offers six acres of fun in the sun. Guests can brave the waves in the 350 thousand-gallon wave pool or



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relax and unwind along the 750-foot lazy river. For thrill seekers, there are two six-story highspeed 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 is also an area for sand volleyball and 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. The park also offers a garden-size railroad line that circles the park. The Sweet Tooth Shop offers concessions and train souvenirs.

Also in Grand Island, Skate Island offers roller skating and mini golf, and the city boasts three bowling alleys and four golf courses.

Trains and cranes

There are two unique attractions that Grand Island is known for — trains and Sandhill cranes.

Railroad enthusiasts from around the world trek to Grand Island to observe and photograph the large number of freight trains. An average of 140 trains pass through the city every 24 hours. Grand Island's train-viewing hotspot is known as The Diamond, where the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe tracks cross over the Union Pacific tracks.

The Union Pacific Railroad cuts through the heart of the city along the original transcontinental mainline. The newest locomotives can be seen here, as well as some old steam trains. The Burlington Northern-Santa Fe is predominately a coal-hauler heading to the Powder River Basin of Wyoming. The Boeing Train runs from Wichita, Kan., to Seattle, Wash., hauling fuselages.

The city's 1911 Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Depot remains, known as the Burlington Station. Saved and renovated by the Hall County Historical Society, it now serves as a reception



Trains

hall and home to the Tri-City Model Railroad Association. The association's intricate model railroad display depicts Grand Island railroads circa the 1940s.

The migration of Sandhill cranes also brings many visitors to Grand Island each spring. The

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Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center

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. The center also offers a butterfly garden and a small herd of bison, and inside you'll find an art gallery, static wildlife displays and a gift shop.

Get to know history

You'll step back in time at the Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer, 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 and 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 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 railroad, antique farm machinery and auto exhibits.

For dining and shopping, 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.

For more information about Grand Island, visit its convention and visitors bureau at visitgrandisland.com. **HW**



Stuhr Museum