



“All Aboard the Hereford Express” is the theme for the 2018 JNHE July 1-7, 2018.

by **Kindra Gordon**, photos courtesy of VisitGrandIsland.com

A grand event is being planned July 1-7, 2018, in Grand Island, Neb., when Hereford youth and their families will be welcomed to the city for the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE). Fonner Park, which has earned acclaim as one of the

best livestock show facilities in the country and annually hosts the Nebraska State Fair, will serve as headquarters for the event.

As a tribute to Grand Island’s history as a railroad town, the theme for this year’s JNHE is “All Aboard the Hereford Express.” The summer showcase is expected to bring more than 900 Hereford youth from 40 states to the event to exhibit 1,500 head of Hereford cattle and to participate in leadership and educational competitions.

While it’s an action-packed week of showing, judging, competing and learning, there’s always time for finding some local fun and fantastic food, as well. Here are six Grand Island highlights:

Trains, trains, trains

Grand Island is truly a town of trains with both Union Pacific



Fonner Park



The Diamond



Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center



Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer

intricate model railroad display depicting Grand Island railroads (open by appointment).

Relive history

Grand Island's **Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer** (stuhrmuseum.org) is a living history museum that has been called "one of the top 10 places to relive America's past." Spread across 200 acres, the museum depicts late 19th-century life on the prairie via several historic buildings and many costumed merchants and townspeople reenacting the bygone era.

Start your tour at the main building, which introduces visitors to the inspiring story of the men and women who settled the Great Plains, a museum shop and contains two art galleries.

Next, head to the 40-acre Railroad Town, which is a recreated 1880's prairie town modeled after the communities that developed along the Union Pacific Railroad's rights-of-way. Complete with 60 shops, homestead 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 grab a meal at the Silver Dollar Café and marvel at the antique farm machinery and auto exhibits in many of the buildings.

Visit the cranes

Another signature experience unique to Grand Island is the migration of Sandhill cranes through the area each spring. The **Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center** (cranetrust.org, 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.

Surrounding the Crane Trust Center, ten miles of mowed

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and Burlington Northern Santa Fe having rail lines that run through the city. The railroad first reached this Nebraska town in July 1866. Today, on average, 140 trains pass through Grand Island every 24-hours — most are hauling coal out of Wyoming. Grand Island's train-viewing hotspot is known as **The Diamond**, where the Burlington Northern Santa Fe tracks cross over the Union Pacific tracks. It's a neat spot to observe and to photograph the large number of freight trains. The Diamond is located east of downtown at 3rd and Oak Streets.

To see an authentic train depot, **Burlington Station** (605 N. Plum St.) is the city's 1911 Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Depot. It was renovated by the Hall County Historical Society, and now serves as a reception hall and houses an

How Grand Island got its name

The Platte River, which flows across the lower one-third of Nebraska, is the longest braided river in North America, made up of numerous small channels splitting off and then rejoining one another. It is formed by the confluence of the North Platte River and the South Platte River in western Nebraska. The city of Grand Island was long ago named for a long, narrow island in the Platte River. It was called La Grande Isle by French fur traders in the 1800s. **HW**



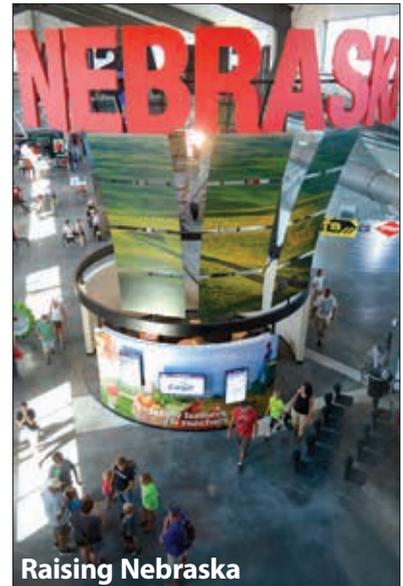


Island Oasis

grassland trails crisscross the prairie for runners and walkers of all ages to experience the unique tall grass prairie and riverine habitat and to explore Nebraska's historic Shoemaker Island. The center also features a butterfly garden (a great place to relax or enjoy a picnic) and a small herd of bison. An art gallery and a gift shop are located inside the visitor center.

Entertain the kids

On a hot July day, nothing beats Grand Island's waterpark, **Island Oasis**, which offers six acres of fun



Raising Nebraska

in the sun. Kids can ride the waves in the 350,000-gallon wave pool or relax 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 splash around in the spraying fountains and on the child-size otter slide. Other amenities include an area for sand volleyball and concessions for snacks. It is open at noon daily, located at 321 E. Fonner Park Rd.

In **Stolley Park**, Kids Kingdom is a 28,000-square-foot themed playground featuring a castle, pirate ship, 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. Older kids may enjoy the disc golf course, basketball court, tennis court and baseball field. Also in Grand Island, **Skate Island** offers roller skating and miniature golf.

Learn about Nebraska agriculture

You don't even have to leave the Fonner Park grounds to take a little side trip and learn more about Nebraska agriculture at the **Raising Nebraska** exhibit. 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 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.

There are also the Grain Bin Theatre, showing short films about agriculture across Nebraska; the Combine Ride, where people can sit in a cab and feel what it's like to harvest corn; and several interactive kiosks that make learning fun.

Find food and shopping

For unique shopping and dining, head to Grand Island's historic downtown, dubbed **Railside**. Along Third Street, an array of antique stores and boutiques can be found amidst many great refurbished architectural buildings. Fun downtown dining spots include The Chicken Coop — a combination sports bar and microbrewery — McKinney's Irish Pub, Sin City Grill and for coffee or lunch — and especially dessert — The Chocolate Bar. Additionally, the Texas T-Bone Steakhouse (at 1201 S. Locust St.) ranks first on TripAdvisor for Grand Island restaurants.

Editor's Note: Go to visitgrandisland.com for more information about Grand Island.

Great Platte River Road Archway



More to see

Visitors to Nebraska may enjoy visiting the Great Platte River Road Archway in 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, the creation of the first transcontinental road and today's modern transportation system.

And, did you know that Hastings, Nebraska, 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**