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Group Travel Experiences Abound in Illinois

New motorcoach tours help travelers navigate the state

CHICAGO (June 13, 2002) – The sky is the limit and the road is your path to Illinois' finest destinations and unique group tour treasures. Groups of all sizes and interests can marvel at Chicago's historic and modern skyscrapers, or walk through Rockford's Haight Village for a glimpse into its Swedish-American past; taste sinfully good chocolates from the Long Grove Confectionery and sample a fruity merlot along the Southern Illinois Wine Trail; or follow Abraham Lincoln's footsteps in Central Illinois. These are just a few of the many experiences group travelers will discover when visiting Illinois.

This year, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, Bureau of Tourism and Team Illinois are making it easier for group travelers to navigate the state by introducing exciting new and improved motorcoach tours, products, attractions and exhibits.

Unique Tour Offerings

Chicago

- The **Shedd Aquarium** and the **Hancock Observatory** have joined forces to provide a **High Seas Adventure** for groups year-round based on availability. For \$16.50 per person, groups can enter into the amazing world of aquatic life at the world's largest indoor aquarium, then drive to the Hancock Observatory for breathtaking views of the city. Groups will begin their journey with a marine mammal performance in the Shedd's world-class Oceanarium, then they can get up close and personal with hundreds of underwater creatures, including beluga whales, sea otters, penguins, sharks and eels. Then it's off to the Hancock Observatory for an eye- and ear-popping view 1,000 feet into the sky. Guided tours are offered Monday through Friday and include two complimentary packages for the escort and motorcoach driver. For more information, call 312-692-3333 or visit www.hancock-observatory.com or www.sheddnet.org.
- Experience the **Roaring '20s** with **My Kind of Town Tours** in Chicago. Available now through December 18, 2002, narrated group tours begin at the Chicago Historical Society for the

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“Fashion, Flappers and All That Jazz” exhibit. Next, groups will learn about Chicago’s skyscrapers while en route to the Museum of Broadcast Communications, where visitors will view the “History of the Radio” exhibit and can create their own personalized radio show recording. Afterward, groups can relive the decade while eating lunch at Andy’s, a renowned 20’s-style jazz club where performers take the stage. For more information, call 847-432-7003 or visit www.mykindoftours.org.

Chicagoland

- Located in Buffalo Grove, the Long Grove Confectionery offers the **Chocolate Walkway Tour**, which is packed with sweet treats for groups. A guided tour of the newly expanded 85,000 square-foot facility allows visitors to view the entire chocolate making process, and an onsite film details the Confectionery’s 27 years of chocolate pioneering. For a sweet ending, visit the outlet store and sample the first-rate chocolates. For more information, call the Long Grove Confectionery at 888-373-3102 or visit www.longgrove.com.
- In celebration of its 20th anniversary, Tempel Farms offers new **Guest V.I.P. Packages** that are perfect for groups. Upon arriving at Tempel Farms, a tour guide will provide a brief history of the farms, then escort your group to the performance area to view the horse ballet. Post-show, Temple offers a self-guided tour through the stables with an up-close look at prize-winning stallions. End the afternoon with a catered lunch at the Tempel Farms guesthouse overlooking the farm’s 6,000 acres. Group V.I.P. packages are available for \$29 per person exclusively for Wednesday and Sunday performances at 10:30 a.m. from June 19 through August 28. For more information, call Tempel Farms at 847-224-5330 or visit www.tempelfarms.com.

Northern

- Another sweet stop on the state map is the **Blackhawk Chocolate Trail** in Northwestern Illinois. The tour follows a tasty trail spanning several counties including Carrol, Lee, Ogle and Whiteside, where several old-fashioned soda and chocolate shops add to the charm. Motorcoach groups can customize their itineraries to incorporate stops at local attractions, including the Ronald Reagan Historic Home Site and the John Deere Historical Home Site. For more information contact the Blackhawk Waterways Convention and Visitors Bureau at 800-678-2108 or visit www.blackhawkwaterways.org.
- Travel around the world without leaving the state during **Rockford’s Four Fun-Filled Days** tour. Groups can take in the city’s Swedish-American heritage with a tour of Rockford’s Swedish Historical Society’s Erlander Home Museum, then visit other local attractions including the Burpee Museum of Natural History and the world-renowned Anderson Japanese Gardens. Groups will end each evening with dinner at an eclectic local restaurant. For more information, call the Rockford Convention and Visitors Bureau at 800-521-0849 or visit www.gorockford.com.

Central

- Illinois’ **Looking for Lincoln** tour offers a glimpse of Abraham Lincoln’s life in Illinois with customized two- or three-day tours covering 11 Central Illinois communities. Knowledgeable guides begin the tour in Springfield, where Lincoln practiced law, started a family and owned his first and only home. Additional Springfield Lincoln sites include the Old State Capitol, the Lincoln Tomb, and the new Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, which opens November 18, 2002. The tour concludes with a historical look into Lincoln’s law career with stops at

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courthouses in Mt. Pulaski, Beardstown and Decatur. Other communities on the Lincoln tour include New Salem, Charleston, Lerna, Bloomington, Athens, Lincoln and Vandalia. For more information, call the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau at 800-545-7300 or visit www.visit-springfieldillinois.com.

- Visit the largest and oldest Amish Settlement in the state on the **Illinois Amish Experience** tour. Groups start their two-day tour with shopping at Amishland's Country Village, which sells Amish furniture, quilts and antiques. Next, a free tour of the Johnny Gruelle Raggedy Ann and Andy Museum will help visitors get in touch with their inner child. End the weekend with a Sunday stroll through the Rockome Gardens featuring 15 acres of flower and rock gardens, live entertainment, buggy rides and home-cooking at the family-style Rockome Restaurant. For more information on customized group itineraries through the Amish Country Village, call 217-253-6965.

Western

- Millions of John Deere owners and fans can gather at the new **John Deere Collectors Clubhouse** in Moline. This tribute to the famous green machine features a showroom of vintage tractors, an over-the-counter parts department, an interactive restoration area, and a specialty retail shop. The Clubhouse also features a library containing literature on John Deere tractors, equipment and parts, and onsite researchers can provide access to historical information for Collector Center Members. The Clubhouse is a perfect stop for groups visiting Western Illinois. For more information, call the Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau at 800-747-7800 or visit www.johnderepavillion.com.
- Tour some of Western Illinois' finest homes during Peoria's **Grandview Special** tour. A guided trolley tour offers a look into the historic homes on Grandview Drive, taking visitors along the Illinois River and through the neighborhoods of Detwiller Park and North Prospect. After the tour, groups can place their bets at the Par-A-Dice Casino or enjoy a dinner cruise on the Spirit of Peoria, a replica of a turn-of-the-century stern wheel. For more information, call the Riverfront Visitors Center at 309-676-4040 or visit www.peoria.org.

Southwest

- Discover Illinois' past on the **Heritage Tour** through St. Clair and Monroe counties. Groups will have lunch in Fairview Heights, and then tour Cahokia Mounds, a 2,200-acre site that was once the home of an ancient civilization. Additional stops include the Cahokia Courthouse, which was Illinois' first courthouse; the Church of the Holy Family, one of Illinois' oldest Catholic churches; and the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows. For more information, contact the Southwestern Illinois Tourism and Convention and Visitors Bureau at 800-442-1488 or visit www.switchb.com.

Southern

- Groups can explore Illinois' many rolling hills, hiking trails, artisan shops and wineries during the **Adventure Illinois** tour in Southern Illinois. First, escorts will lead groups on a hike through the more than 5,000 acres of spectacular scenery in the Trail of Tears State Forest. After refueling, start the next day with a hearty breakfast at the Giant City Lodge where groups can visit the Coben Museum for a history lesson in American Indian artifacts, pioneer tools and local pottery. Last but not least, a stop at the award-winning Alto Vineyards provides groups with a

look into local wine production. For more information, call the Carbondale Convention and Tourism Bureau at 800-526-1500 or visit www.cctb.org.

Illinois Events for Group Tours

Throughout the year, Illinois boasts many not-to-be-missed seasonal festivals and local happenings. Listed below are highlights of Illinois' top-rated events through the beginning of 2003 that are perfect for group travelers.

- **Music Everywhere: Summer in Chicago 2002**
 - Music Everywhere will engage visitors of every age this summer as street bands, choirs and musical acts fill Chicago's city parks, plazas, hotels, restaurants and retail locations. Visit Chicago May 30 through September 29 and celebrate summer with a song in the city. For more information, call 877-CHICAGO or visit www.877chicago.com.
- **Illinois State Fair**
 - From August 9 through 18, the Illinois State Fair in Springfield celebrates its 150th year by offering nine days of excitement perfect for groups. The fair features rodeos, auto and truck races, tractor pulls and theme areas including *Main Street U.S.A.*, which takes fairgoers back to the days of old-fashioned fun, and *My Kind of Town Chicago* where food vendors offer a true "Taste of Illinois." Main stage entertainment includes Lee Greenwood and Stardust, among others. For more information, call 217-782-6661 or log onto www.state.il.us/fair.
- **Chicago Air and Water Show**
 - The 44th Annual Chicago Air & Water Show, the oldest and largest free admission air exhibition of its kind, will take place August 17 and 18 along Chicago's lakefront. Make your way to North Avenue Beach, from Fullerton Avenue to Oak Street, for the best views of daring feats performed by flight teams and boat stuntmen. For more information, call 877-CHICAGO or visit www.choosechicago.com.
- **On the Waterfront Festival**
 - Rockford's On the Waterfront Festival is Illinois' largest music festival. Featuring 300 local, regional and national musical acts, this festival covers 10 music stages and 30 city blocks. Celebrate the Labor Day weekend, August 29 through 31, in downtown Rockford and enjoy great tunes along the river. For more information, call 800-521-0849 or visit www.onthewaterfront.com.
- **St. Charles Scarecrow Festival**
 - More than 100 handmade scarecrows will greet groups visiting St. Charles during the 17th annual Scarecrow Festival, from October 11 through 13. Along with a vote for the best cornfield creature in five separate categories, this unique fall festival offers live musical entertainment and the Autumn on the Fox Art & Craft Show, featuring the handiwork of more than 200 Illinois artisans. For more information, call 630-377-4373 or visit www.scarecrowfest.com.

Magnificent Mile Lights Festival

- Catch Mickey Mouse as he travels north this winter to kick-off Chicago's holiday season with the annual Chicago Magnificent Mile Lights Festival on November 23. The festival features Walt Disney World stage shows, live ice-carving demonstrations, carolers and a special visit by Santa and Mrs. Claus. Stay for the light show when Mickey Mouse, in his ninth year as master of ceremonies, signals the official start of the season by illuminating more than 200 trees along the Magnificent Mile, from Oak Street to the Chicago River. For more information, call 312-409-5560.

- **Belleville Way of Lights**

- The 32nd annual Way of Lights Christmas Display is scheduled for November 22 through January 5 at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville. Travelers can experience the glowing serenity of the lights as they journey by motorcoach, car, trolley or horse-drawn carriage through winding roads illuminated by more than one million twinkling white lights to a breathtaking Nativity scene set in a cave. For more information, call 618-397-6700 or visit www.oblatesusa.org.

- **Chicago Winter Delights**

- Celebrate the culture and seasonal excitement of Chicago from January through March by taking advantage of 2-for-1 admissions at various tourist attractions and discounted hotel rooms, plus complimentary desserts and appetizers at participating restaurants. This citywide promotion includes "Light Nights on the Magnificent Mile" with weekly Saturday evening fireworks, spectacular lights displays and glowing orbs. For more information, call 877-CHICAGO or visit www.877chicago.com.

- **Rockford Snow Sculpting Competition**

- Rockford's 17th Annual Snow Sculpting Competition draws teams from around the world on January 15 through 18 in Sinnissippi Park. Attracting close to 100,000 visitors annually, this international event features four days of chilly competition between serious sculptors. Motorcoach tours are invited to drive through and vote for their favorite work of art. For more information, call the Rockford Convention and Visitors Bureau at 800-521-0849 or visit www.rockfordparkdistrict.org.

Group Tour Resources

A variety of travel planning tools are available to help organize the perfect motorcoach trip in Illinois.

- **Team Illinois**

- Team Illinois, the motorcoach tour marketing organization for Illinois, works to develop partnerships and encourage group travel throughout the state. For more information about Illinois motorcoach tours, call 800-524-0790 or 866-TOURSIL.

- **Group Tour Planner section on www.enjoyillinois.com**
 - The group tour planning section on Illinois' tourism Web site includes information on everything from important numbers and links to instant weather reports and transportation tips. Group planners can also find useful contact information for motorcoach companies and stations that provide services in every region of the state.
- **Chicago Travel Professionals Guide**
 - This guide lists accommodations, museums, attractions, dining and festivals throughout Chicago. To order this guide, visit www.choosechicago.com.
- **Chicago Motorcoach Parking Map**
 - This downtown Chicago map illustrates all lodging and bus loading/unloading areas, free and paid parking lots, and lists important phone numbers and services for motorcoach planners and drivers. To order this free guide, visit www.choosechicago.com.
- **Illinois Travel Kit**
 - The free Illinois "Travel Kit" includes *Illinois NOW!*, an Illinois Travel Guide, Illinois State Parks Guide, Summer in Chicago Brochure, Illinois Coupon Book and an Illinois Road Map. To order a kit, call an Illinois travel counselor at 800-2CONNECT or visit the Illinois Web site at www.enjoyillinois.com.

There are many group tours, seasonal happenings and travel tools available to help plan your next Illinois motorcoach excursion. For more information, visit the "Group Tour" section of the Illinois Web site, www.enjoyillinois.com, or call an Illinois Travel Counselor at 800-2CONNECT.

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*The Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs (DCCA),
Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant
economic and quality of life benefits for Illinois residents.*