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**RING IN THE NEW YEAR WITH EXCITING ILLINOIS GROUP TOUR OFFERINGS**

*With Broadway musicals, culinary adventures, farm tours and historical journeys, the Land of Lincoln is perfect for groups in 2003*

**CHICAGO (January 7, 2003)** – From old-fashioned cookouts on the plains of southern Illinois to exciting Broadway shows in the diverse and exciting city of Chicago, Illinois offers a great new selection of activities and destinations perfect for groups of all sizes and ages. Groups can experience a real “Chuck Wagon” cookout on the prairie, visit some of the state’s most glorious gardens, explore Lewis & Clark’s Illinois, or take a trip down the “Mother Road” – all this year in the Land of Lincoln. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (prior name: Department of Commerce and Community Affairs), Bureau of Tourism and Team Illinois are pleased to present this new selection of exciting group tour products, attractions and exhibits.

**Highlighted 2003 Tour Offerings**

**Chicago**

- **Hemisphere Education Travel Broadway Theater Packages** – The best of Broadway is coming to Chicago, and Hemisphere Education Travel offers the perfect package for school groups. The Broadway Theater Package offers student tour groups a chance to see one of several Broadway shows arriving in Chicago – including Disney’s The Lion King, Starlight Express, Miss Saigon, and Mamma Mia – along with lunch at the Hard Rock Café or the Rainforest Café. Packages offered include motorcoach transportation to and from your location, lunch and a ticket to the selected performance. Groups can opt to include a guided highlights tour of Chicago before the show. For more information and prices, call Hemisphere Educational Travel at 800/323-6439 or visit [www.educationaltours.com](http://www.educationaltours.com).
- **The Ultimate Shopping Experience at Water Tower Place** – With a new \$17 million renovation, Water Tower Place along Chicago’s Magnificent Mile has everything serious shoppers need. Groups visiting Water Tower Place can enjoy The Ultimate Shopping Experience, a free brochure filled with exclusive savings and free gift offers at many of the stores throughout the center, from a free sample of chocolates at Harry & David to a 20 percent discount at Crabtree & Evelyn. In addition, Water Tower Place offers free shipping of any purchases, as well as a free gift for anyone spending more than \$100 at the mall. For more information, call Water Tower Place at 312/440-3584 or visit [www.shopwatertower.com](http://www.shopwatertower.com).

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- **Tiffany Tour of Chicago's Loop** – Groups can view the beautiful stained glass artwork of Louis Comfort Tiffany housed in some of Chicago's most famous buildings during this two-hour walking tour. During

the excursion, a Chicago Architecture Foundation docent will explain the history behind the art glass designed – crafted and/or installed by the Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company – and visit the buildings where they are housed. The guided tours are offered in cooperation with the Art Institute of Chicago, the City of Chicago and Marshall Field's, and will take place on Wednesdays beginning March 5, 2003. For more information and prices, call the Chicago Architecture Foundation at 312/922-3432, x243 or visit [www.architecture.org](http://www.architecture.org).

- **Wild Reef – Sharks at the Shedd** – For a face-to-face encounter with one of the most diverse shark displays in North America, groups should visit the John G. Shedd Aquarium this spring to see the new “Wild Reef – Sharks at the Shedd” exhibit. The 75,000-gallon tank will offer guests a diver's-eye view of a Philippines coral reef, filled with live coral and more than 500 species of beautiful reef fish. Special rates are available for groups. For more information and prices, contact the Shedd Aquarium at 312/692-3333 or visit [www.shedd.org](http://www.shedd.org).

### **Chicagoland**

- **Culinary Tour of the North Shore** – For students of culinary arts or those who just love food, the Culinary Tour of the North Shore is a perfect group excursion. The newest tour offered by Chicago's North Shore Convention and Visitors Bureau takes groups to several culinary locations in Chicago's northern suburbs, including The Spice House, a family operated spice shop, and Kendall College, where chefs from the School of Culinary Arts will treat groups to a cooking demonstration. The tour is designed to fit the schedule and size of any group and can be modified for time and content. For more information and prices, call Chicago's North Shore Convention and Visitors Bureau at 847/763-0011 or visit [www.visitichicagonorthshore.com](http://www.visitichicagonorthshore.com).
- **Heritage Tractor Adventure** – This one-of-a-kind experience takes groups on a 120-mile journey along Illinois' historic I & M Canal route to watch a tractor procession. Max Armstrong of Chicago's WGN Radio will lead the second annual Tractor Adventure, which departs from Joliet's Chicagoland Speedway and concludes at Starved Rock State Park in Utica. Groups can follow the hundreds of tractors via motorcoach during the five-day journey, traveling between 30 and 50 miles per day. Several different itineraries are available for groups. For more information and prices, call the Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau at 800/535-5682 or visit [www.heritagecorridorcvb.com](http://www.heritagecorridorcvb.com).
- **Paramount Arts Centre Tours** – Dating back to 1931, the art deco-style Paramount Arts Centre in western Aurora is an architectural gem. Groups can learn about the building's rich history during backstage tours of the theater, which for 40 years offered a variety of entertainment including talking pictures, vaudeville, concerts and circus performances. After undergoing a \$1.5 million renovation in 1976, the theater now hosts nationally known concerts and touring Broadway shows. For more information and prices, call the Paramount Arts Centre at 630/723-2461 or visit [www.theparamounttheatre.com](http://www.theparamounttheatre.com).

### Northern

- **DeKalb Farm Tours** – See first-hand what modern-day agriculture is all about during a group tour of an actual operating farm, led by a farmer himself. DeKalb Farm Tours, located just one hour west of Chicago, has hosted tour groups from around the world who come to see the workings of a true Midwest farm. One of the highlights is a guided two-hour tour of a dairy farm during which guests will learn about the milking process, from viewing calves to watching milking demonstrations. For more information and prices, contact DeKalb Farm Tours at 815/756-6361 or visit [www.dekalbfarmtours.org](http://www.dekalbfarmtours.org).
- **Glorious Gardens in America's Heartland Tour** – This tour, offered by the Rockford Convention and Visitors Bureau, takes group travelers to some of Northern Illinois' most colorful gardens and sites. The five-day itinerary includes visits to Chicago's Sears Tower Skydeck, Garfield Park Conservatory, Lincoln Park Zoo and the Chicago Botanic Garden, followed by tours of Rockford's colorful Sinnissippi Gardens, Klehm Arboretum and the world-famous Anderson Japanese Gardens – rated the #2 Japanese gardens in North America and Europe by the Roth Journal of Japanese Gardening. The schedule can be customized for groups, and dates are flexible. For more information and prices, contact the Rockford Convention and Visitors Bureau at 800/521-0849 or visit [www.gorockford.com](http://www.gorockford.com).

### Central

- **Amishland Country Tours** – Tied to their heritage by history, faith, a simple way of life and plain dress, the Amish thrive in central Illinois. Amishland Country Tours offers a great way for groups to experience the area's culture and attractions. Packages offered to groups include a one-night stay at a Tuscola hotel; a buffet and live entertainment at Amishland's Country Village, featuring 80,000 square feet of Amish arts, crafts, furniture and food; discount coupons for the Factory Stores at Tuscola; free admission to nearby Rockome Gardens; and a variety of add-ons including free passes to the Raggedy Ann and Andy Museum in nearby Arcola. Complimentary greeter service is also included, as well as special gifts for tour escorts and drivers. For more information and prices, contact Amishland's Country Village at 800/500-3705 or visit [www.amishcountry-il.com/tourpackages.htm](http://www.amishcountry-il.com/tourpackages.htm).
- **The Best of Route 66 Tour** – Groups can “get their kicks” on historic Route 66 with the Best of Route 66 Tour. Motorcoach groups can customize their itinerary to include many of the route's historical and cultural attractions, including stops at Lou Mitchell's, the Chicago diner at the official start of Route 66, the Dixie Truckers Home in McLean, with its hall of Route 66 memorabilia, and Bill Shea's Gas Station Museum, a comprehensive assortment of gas station items collected over the last 50 years. The tour can also include a day in Springfield visiting the area's numerous Lincoln sites. For more information and prices, call the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau at 800/545-7300 or visit [www.visit-springfieldillinois.com](http://www.visit-springfieldillinois.com).

### Western

- **Western Illinois Whirlwind Tour** – Groups can sample the best of western Illinois during the Western Illinois Whirlwind Tour, offered by the Galesburg Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. This three-day itinerary brings motorcoach tours to local historic destinations such as Bishop Hill, a restored settlement founded in 1846 by Swedish religious dissenters and the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site, the birthplace of one of Illinois' most famous authors. Meals at several local restaurants are included, and a Mississippi River dinner cruise along the Celebration Belle in Moline caps off the experience. For more information and prices, contact the Galesburg Area Convention and Visitors Bureau at 309/343-2485 or visit [www.visitgalesburg.com](http://www.visitgalesburg.com).

### **Southwest**

- **Lewis & Clark Great Rivers Tour** – Wood River, Illinois was the official launching point of Lewis & Clark’s Corps of Discovery in 1804. Now, as the nation plans to celebrate the bicentennial of their famed expedition, groups can experience Lewis & Clark’s Illinois during the Great Rivers Tour. This historical three-day tour starts in downstate Alton, with two days of touring the area and a stop at the new Lewis &

Clark Interpretive Center in Hartford. Other highlights of this tour include visits to the Cahokia Courthouse – the oldest standing U.S. State Territorial building in Illinois – and the Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, where the remains of the most sophisticated prehistoric native civilization north of Mexico are preserved. For more information and prices, contact the Alton Convention and Visitors Bureau at 888/253-9358 or visit [www.altoncvb.org](http://www.altoncvb.org).

- **National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows** – With a renovated facility, a new exhibit – Resurrection of the Shroud – and a new gift shop and full-service restaurant, the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville is a perfect destination for groups. Each year nearly one million people visit the Shrine, one of the largest outdoor shrines in North America. Free group tours begin with a 25-minute welcome orientation, led by one of the facility’s guides, followed by a narrated one-hour trolley ride through the 200 acres of natural beauty surrounding the grounds. Step-on guides are also available. For more information, call the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows at 800/682-2879 or visit [www.oblatesusa.org](http://www.oblatesusa.org).

### **Southern**

- **Chuck Wagon Cookout** – Groups looking to learn about the history of the American cowboy can spend the evening with Cookie the tour guide and the cowboys at the “Chuckwagon Roundup” during the Chuck Wagon Cookout. Taking place at the Marion-area Bowman Farm, this experience allows groups to see life as it was on the 1800s prairie with an evening of cowboy entertainment including bluegrass music, story telling, rope throwing and iron branding. Groups can also take a ride on an authentic pioneer covered wagon and travel the farm’s countryside, bordering the hills and bluffs of the Shawnee National Forest. Dinner, served around the campfire, includes a selection of period food including smoked and barbeque beef, beans, corn “doggers” and chili soup. For more information and prices, call the Williamson County Tourism Bureau at 800/433-7399, or visit [www.wctb.org](http://www.wctb.org).

### **Group Tour Resources**

A variety of travel planning tools are available to help organize the perfect group tour 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 tour operators looking to visit Illinois, Team Illinois offers group tour planners and guides complete with travel and contract information. For more information about Illinois motorcoach tours, call 800/524-0790 or 866/TOURSIL.
- **Group Tour Planner section on [www.illinoistourism.org](http://www.illinoistourism.org)** – The group tour planning section on Illinois’ travel professionals 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 gas stations providing services in every region of the state.

- **Chicago Travel Professionals Guide** – This guide lists accommodations, museums, attractions, dining establishments and festivals throughout Chicago. To order this guide, visit [www.choosechicago.com](http://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](http://www.choosechicago.com).
- **Illinois Travel Kit** – This all-purpose kit includes a comprehensive statewide guide to attractions and accommodations, an official Illinois road map, and a copy of *Illinois Now!*, the state’s free seasonal magazine devoted to travel in Illinois.

Group travel in Illinois has never been easier, with a host of travel tools available to help plan your 2003 Illinois excursion. For more information, visit the “Group Tour” section of the Illinois Web site, [www.illinoistourism.org](http://www.illinoistourism.org), or call an Illinois Travel Counselor at 800-2CONNECT. With general information on touring in Illinois and event listings searchable by region or activity, [illinoistourism.org](http://illinoistourism.org) helps groups of all sizes plan their trip with just a few clicks on the Web site.

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