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## **Illinois Dishes Up Tasty Group Travel Offerings**

*Eat your way through Illinois' unique dining spots: Medieval castles, chuckwagon adventures, award-winning steakhouses and more*

**CHICAGO (January 23, 2004)** – Group travelers can sink their teeth into a variety of specialties while touring Illinois. From home-cooked Amish goodies and the state's oldest winery to dinner theaters and Chicago's finest dining, Illinois offers a variety of group friendly restaurants that are sure to whet the palette.

### **Chicago**

- **The Walnut Room, Marshall Field's State Street** – Groups diners can enjoy reduced rates on the recently updated lunch, dinner and tea menus in a private dining room at Marshall Field's Walnut Room. New chef Elizabeth Fitzgerald gives the traditional menu of favorites such as potpie and meatloaf a gourmet twist with introductions of duck confit and rosemary-grilled petite filet mignon. The Walnut Room is a popular choice for groups, particularly during the holidays when lunch is served "under" the traditional Marshall Field's Christmas tree. For more information and special rates, call The Walnut Room at 312-781-3125 or visit [www.marshallfields.com](http://www.marshallfields.com).
- **Phil Stefani Restaurants** – Food, family and tradition are ingredients that make Phil Stefani's Signature Restaurants satisfying to group travelers at many diverse locations from the Loop to Lake Michigan. Groups can enjoy views of the Chicago skyline and Lake Michigan at Riva on Navy Pier. Featuring a variety of premium seafood, steaks and an extensive wine list, the nautically inspired dining room allows guests to dine in a 40-foot-long exhibition kitchen showcasing meal preparation and serving as a raw bar. Tavern on Rush in the Gold Coast neighborhood is an upscale, contemporary American steakhouse, featuring a sprawling bar, multi-level seating and an outdoor patio. Nearby, 437 Rush is designed to echo the feel of an Italian Steakhouse. With its beautiful outdoor piazza off Michigan Avenue, this bi-level establishment offers a close stop for group tours along the Magnificent Mile. For more information, call Phil Stefani's Restaurants at 312-222-0707 or visit [www.stefanirestaurants.com](http://www.stefanirestaurants.com).
- **Tony n' Tina's Wedding** – Playing at Chicago's Pipers Alley Theater, this popular interactive production offers customized packages for group tours. The three-hour experience introduces guests to two wacky Italian families while all – actors and audience – dine at a pseudo reception. Group packages can include a pre-show warm-up in the bar, catastrophe-laden marriage ceremony in the Chapel of Love, and a reception at Vinnie Black's Collosium. For more information, call Pipers Alley Theater at 312-664-0773 or visit [www.tonyntina.com](http://www.tonyntina.com).
- **Odyssey Cruises** – Voted by the Society of American Travel Writers as one of the "Top Ten Most Spectacular Panaromic Views in America," the Chicago skyline is perhaps best captured by boat on Lake Michigan. Odyssey Cruises, offered year-round, departing from Navy Pier on a two- or three-hour escape for lunch, dinner or the moonlight. Groups dine on appetizers, entrees and desserts prepared daily onboard,

**Governor Rod R. Blagojevich**

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while sipping award-winning wines, dancing to live music, and taking in breathtaking views. Special senior and student group package rates are available. For more information, call Odyssey Cruises at 888-741-0281 or visit [www.odysseycruises.com/home](http://www.odysseycruises.com/home).

### Chicagoland

- **Safari Tram Tour at Brookfield Zoo, Brookfield** – Groups visiting the Chicagoland area won't want to miss dining with the animals at Brookfield Zoo. After touring the zoo's 200 acres of exotic animal exhibits and lush grounds, groups are dropped off at the gift shop for complimentary postcards and a box lunch served in the Oak Grove tented picnic area. Groups participating in Chicagoland's only safari tour receive general and dolphin show admission, and a one-hour narrated zoo tour with stops at immersion exhibits. Free parking is offered and group tour drivers receive a free admissions package. For more information and prices, call the Brookfield Zoo at 708-485-0263, ext. 355, or visit [www.brookfieldzoo.org](http://www.brookfieldzoo.org).
- **Winberie Restaurant and Bar, Oak Park** – Located in historic Scoville Square, Winberie's is a great dining option for groups touring the Frank Lloyd Wright and Ernest Hemmingway attractions in Oak Park. Winberie's atmosphere reflects the friendly, casual atmosphere of a stylish Euro-American bistro with simple, warm decor. Groups can customize their lunch or dinner from a menu of Country French and Italian cuisines such as coq au vin, chicken marsala, salmon in parchment and braised beef with vegetables. The "Sweet Endings" menu offers groups homemade desserts and international specialty coffees, and the wine list includes an international selection of affordable varietals from California, France and Italy. The cozy dining rooms with harvest gold painted walls, subtle lighting and a collection of unique European poster art can be reserved for groups up to 60. For more information, call Winberie's at 708-386-2600 or visit [www.selectrestaurants.com/cafew/index](http://www.selectrestaurants.com/cafew/index).
- **Medieval Times, Schaumburg** – An attraction in itself, this dinner theater hosts the new "Knights of the Realm" tournament, a story of love, war and personal growth. As guests of the "King," tour groups eat minestrone soup, roasted chicken, spare ribs and dessert. Dinner is served while the six knights of the realm compete to expose a traitor and win the love of the princess. "The Royalty Package" is one of seven packages that offers discounted admission to groups, preferred seating, a "cheering banner" to support their favorite knight, and a commemorative program. A special pewter gift is included in the Royalty Package as well as a 10 percent discount in the gift shop. For more information, call 800-544-2001, ext. 307, or visit [www.medievaltimes.com](http://www.medievaltimes.com).

### Northern

- **The Rafters Restaurant, Lena** – This restored barn offers classic American comfort food with specials such as barbeque ribs topped with a house sauce, cheese and bacon mashed potatoes, and Rafters mac and cheese. Special dining rates are offered to groups; shopping and motorcoach parking is plentiful. For more information, call 815-369-5330 or visit [www.raftersonline.com/door](http://www.raftersonline.com/door).
- **Bubba's Pasta, Seafood & Smokehouse, Galena** – Bubba's provides a touch of Bourbon Street to this quaint and picturesque city in Northern Illinois. Groups can dine privately in the upper-level French Quarter area or relax in the lower-level New Orleans Bourbon Street Café area. Customized menus, including house specialties such as blackened salmon with pineapple mango salsa, and reduced rates are offered to group and motorcoach tours. For more information, call 815-777-8030 or visit [www.vinnyvanucchis.com/bubbas](http://www.vinnyvanucchis.com/bubbas).
- **Cliffbreakers River Restaurant, Rockford** – Overlooking the Rock River, Cliffbreakers is furnished with antique-lined walls and architectural artifacts from around the world. Groups can book private dining

quarters such as the “aquarium booth,” where saltwater fish swim around diners. Depending on their day of visit, motorcoach and group tours can customize their menus with items such as the carvery turkey and roast beef stations, seafood buffets or a Champagne brunch. For more information, call 815-282-3033 or visit [www.cliffbreakers.com](http://www.cliffbreakers.com).

### **Central**

- **Hardy’s Reindeer Ranch, Rantoul** – Open year-round for group tours, Hardy’s offers a range of unique packages. The Reindeer Experience Tour on the 100-year-old farm encourages groups to get to know the ranch’s herd of Alaskan reindeer with visits with reindeer experts and into animal pens. Carved out of cornfields in Central Illinois, the ranch also offers wiener-roast packages, featuring a huge bonfire, homemade hotdogs and s’mores. Another group option is the ranch’s chuckwagon-style meal in the banquet hall complete with tin plates and bandana napkins. Afterwards, guests can kick up their heels and enjoy toe-tapping entertainment by local musicians. For more information, call 217-893-3407 or visit [www.reindeerranch.com/groups](http://www.reindeerranch.com/groups).
- **Route 66 Treats, Central Illinois** – Located along the famed Route 66, Funk’s Grove Maple Sirup Farm offers interactive maple sirup-making demonstrations followed by pancake breakfasts and a unique look at the area’s legacy. A few miles down the road, travelers can stop at the Dixie Trucker’s Home for a slice of apple pie or a cool ice-cream sundae. Located in MacLean, the Dixie Trucker’s Home hosts a Route 66 museum – a roadside memorabilia collection that keeps visitors entertained while they wait for a seat. Nearby is Springfield’s Cozy Dog Drive-In, the original home of the Cozy Dog – a hotdog on a stick now found nationwide at many county and state fairs. The world-famous Cozy Dogs, along with fresh-cut french fries, hamburgers, homemade chili, bean soup and pork tenderloins, are a delicious end to a culinary trip down the Mother Road. For more information, call 800-545-7300 or visit [www.visit-springfieldillinois.com/home](http://www.visit-springfieldillinois.com/home).
- **Amish Interpretive Center Tours, Arcola** – At the first museum in Illinois dedicated to the Amish culture, groups are given an in-depth look at the religion and the lives of the Amish. A video helps guests separate fact from myth about the Amish culture. Artifacts are also on display, such as one of the oldest known Amish suits, a rare 100-year-old buggy and a reconstruction of a typical Amish home, allowing guests to experience the culture firsthand. Groups can also enjoy the warmth of a country meal in an Amish home. The family-style meal includes chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, dressing or noodles, salad, vegetable, homemade bread with apple butter, pie and beverages, all made at Illinois Amish farms. For more information, call 888-452-6474 or visit [www.amishcenter.com/tour](http://www.amishcenter.com/tour).

### **Western**

- **The Packinghouse Dining Company, Galesburg** – Established in an authentic turn-of-the-century meat packing plant, The Packinghouse serves as a notable attraction and restaurant for groups touring Seminary Street and the Carl Sandburg Historic Site in Galesburg. Special dining rates are available to group tours for house specialties such as custom-cut chops and steaks, turkey potpie and homemade ice cream. Free motorcoach parking and a meal for the driver is also offered. For more information, call 309-342-6868 or visit [www.seminarystreet.com/packinghouse/home](http://www.seminarystreet.com/packinghouse/home).
- **Baxter’s Vineyards, Nauvoo** – Illinois’ oldest winery is a small family-owned winery in the state’s Western region. Established in 1857 by Emile Baxter, the winery continues to be run by the family. Groups can take advantage of the free wine tasting and self-guided tours, then settle down for a five-course dinner

with house wine served on the patio, weather permitting, or in the family home. Motorcoach parking is available. For more information, call 217-453-2528 and [www.nauvoowinery.com/index](http://www.nauvoowinery.com/index).

- **Celebration Belle, Quad Cities** – This non-gaming, luxury riverboat offers lunch, brunch, dinner and special dance and event cruises with sit-down meals and delicious buffets that specifically cater to group tour needs. Travelers to the Quad Cities for a visit or as part of the Grand Excursion 2004 can enjoy the Celebration Belle’s river ambiance. Special rates are offered for groups of 20 or more and onsite parking is available. The Celebration Belle is open year-round including dockside service during the winter. For more information, call 309-764-1952 or visit [www.visitquadcities.com/dining\\_nightlife.htm](http://www.visitquadcities.com/dining_nightlife.htm).

### **Southern**

- **Giant City State Park Lodge, Makanda** – The lodge offers some of the best fried chicken in Southern Illinois at its all-you-can-eat buffet. Special rates are offered to groups and motorcoach parking is ample. After the meal, groups can take a guided tour of the Giant City State Park, go on a horseback riding adventure or hike through the park’s 18-miles of trails. For more information, call 618-457-4836 or visit <http://dnr.state.il.us/lands/Landmgt/PARKS/R5/GC.htm>.
- **Chuck Wagon Cookout, Marion** – The Chuck Wagon Cookout – located at the Marion-area Bowman Farm – offers groups a chance to learn about the history of the American cowboy. This experience, weather permitting, allows groups to see life as it was on the 1800s prairie, with an evening of cowboy entertainment that includes bluegrass music, story telling, rope throwing and iron branding. A selection of period food, including smoked and barbeque beef, beans, corn “doggers” and chili soup, are served around the campfire; groups can also take a ride on an authentic pioneer covered wagon. Tours travel the farm’s countryside, bordering the hills and bluffs of the Shawnee National Forest. For more information, call the Williamson County Tourism Bureau at 800-433-7399, or visit [www.wctb.org](http://www.wctb.org).

### **Southwest**

- **Eckert County Store & Farms, Belleville** – Eckert’s Country Store & Farms, the largest family-owned and operated pick-your-own fruit farm in the nation, offers a unique bit of Americana, with free wagon rides, admission to the garden center, and customized group learning sessions. With plenty of motorcoach parking, family-friendly activities and educational seminars, groups of all types can enjoy the many facets of the farm before sitting down to enjoy its fruits. The full-service restaurant is perfect for gatherings of all sizes; groups in a hurry can grab a quick snack at the Custard Shop. For more information, call 618-233-0513 or visit [www.eckerts.com/group tours](http://www.eckerts.com/group tours).

### **Group Tour Resources**

A variety of travel planning tools is 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 866/TOURSIL or visit [www.tourillinois.com](http://www.tourillinois.com).
- **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.
- **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. For a free copy, call 800-2CONNECT or visit [www.enjoyillinois.com](http://www.enjoyillinois.com).

Group travel in Illinois has never been easier, with a host of travel tools available to help plan 2004 Illinois excursions. For more information, visit **[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, Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.*