

Great Plains

Includes ➔

Missouri	637
St Louis	640
Kansas City	651
Iowa	656
North Dakota	661
South Dakota	664
Nebraska	675
Omaha	675
Kansas	680
Wichita	680
Oklahoma	685
Tulsa	687

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Q39 (p654)
- ➔ Alba (p658)
- ➔ Ted Drewes (p646)
- ➔ MB Haskett Delicatessen (p665)

Best Wide-Open Spaces

- ➔ Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve (p684)
- ➔ South Dakota's Hwy 14 (p667)
- ➔ Nebraska's Hwy 2 (p678)
- ➔ Nebraska's Panhandle (p679)

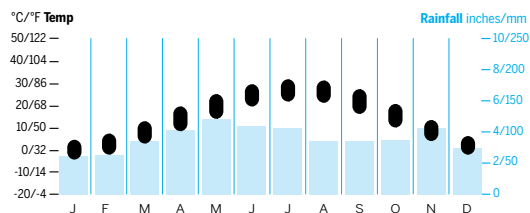
Why Go?

To best comprehend this vast and underappreciated region in the heart of the US, you need to split the name. The first word, 'great,' is easy. Great scenery, great tornadoes, great eats, great people: all apply. The problem is with 'plains.' 'Humdrum' and 'flat' are two words that come to mind. Neither applies. Amid the endless horizons and raw natural drama are surprises such as St Louis and Kansas City, the Alpine beauty of the Black Hills and the legacy of Route 66.

Great distances across the beguiling wide-open spaces are the biggest impediment to enjoying this enormous region, which includes the states of Missouri, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma. Many sights lie near the interstates, but many more are found along the ever-intriguing small roads (the 'blue highways' of lore). Your inner great explorer, à la Lewis and Clark, will thrill to every new delight.

When to Go

St Louis



Nov–Mar

Attractions cut back hours, or close. Blizzards shut down roads for days.

Apr–May, Sep–Oct Average highs of 55°F (13°C) in the north, warmer in the south; fewer visitors.

Jun–Aug

Thunderstorms and even tornadoes; sultry days with blooming wildflowers.

History

Spear-toting nomads hunted mammoths here 11,000 years ago, long before cannon-toting Spaniards introduced the horse (accidentally) around 1630. Fur-frenzied French explorers, following the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, claimed most of the land between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains for France. The territory passed to Spain in 1763, the French got it back in 1800 and then sold it to the USA in the 1803 Louisiana Purchase.

Settlers' hunger for land pushed resident Native American tribes westward, often forcibly, as in the notorious relocation of the Five Civilized Tribes – Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole – along the 1838–39 Trail of Tears, which led to Oklahoma from back east. Pioneers blazed west on trails such as the Santa Fe across Kansas.

Earlier occupants, including the Osage and Sioux, had different, but often tragic, fates. Many resettled in pockets across the region, while others fought for lands once promised.

Railroads, barbed wire and oil all brought change as the 20th century hovered. The 1930s Dust Bowl ruined farms and spurred many residents to say: 'I've had enough of this crap – I'm heading west.' Even today, many regions remain eerily empty.

Local Culture

The people who settled the Great Plains usually faced difficult lives of scarcity, uncertainty and isolation; and it literally drove many of them crazy. Others gave up and got out (failed homesteads dot the region). Only fiercely independent people could thrive in those conditions and that born-and-bred rugged individualism is the core of Plains culture today. Quiet restraint is considered an important and polite trait here.

Getting There & Around

The main airport is Lambert-St Louis International (p648), but visitors from abroad will be better off flying to Chicago, Denver or Dallas and connecting to one of the region's myriad airports or hitting the open roads.

Greyhound (www.greyhound.com) buses only cover some interstates, but **Jefferson Lines** (www.jeffersonlines.com) and **Burlington Trailways** (www.burlingtontrailways.com) take up some of the slack. They both honor Greyhound's Discovery Pass.

Amtrak (www.amtrak.com) routes across the Plains make getting here by train easy, but getting around impractical.

MISSOURI

The most populated state in the Plains, Missouri likes to mix things up, serving visitors ample portions of both sophisticated city life and down-home country sights. St Louis and Kansas City are the region's most interesting cities and each is a destination in its own right. But, with more forest and less farm field than neighboring states, Missouri also cradles plenty of wild places and wide-open spaces, most notably the rolling Ozark Mountains, where the winding valleys invite adventurous exploration or just some laid-back meandering behind the steering wheel. Maybe you'll find an adventure worthy of Hannibal native Mark Twain as you wander the state.

History

Claimed by France as part of the Louisiana Territory in 1682, Missouri had only a few small river towns by the start of the 19th century when the land passed to American hands and Lewis and Clark pushed up the Missouri River. Missouri was admitted to the Union as a slave state in 1821, per the Missouri Compromise (which permitted

MISSOURI FACTS

Nickname Show-Me State

Population 6.1 million

Area 69,710 sq miles

Capital city Jefferson City (population 43,300)

Other cities St Louis (population 319,000), Kansas City (population 467,000)

Sales tax 4.23% to 9.6%

Birthplace of Author Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain; 1835–1910), gunslinger Calamity Jane (1852–1903), scientist George Washington Carver (1864–1943), author William S Burroughs (1914–97), author Maya Angelou (1928–2014)

Home of Budweiser, Chuck Berry

Politics Leans Republican

Famous for Gateway Arch, Branson, BBQ

Official dance Square dance

Driving distances St Louis to Kansas City 250 miles, St Louis to Chicago 300 miles