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Check Out What’s New in Kansas This Year

Solar Eclipse, Chisholm Trail 150th Highlight the Adventures

Make plans for a packed itinerary of Kansas adventures in 2017, eclipsed by the solar eclipse itself that will darken the state’s northeast corner on August 21. It’s the first time a total eclipse has swept coast-to-coast since 1918, bringing its spectacular show and celestial celebrations to Atchison, Hiawatha, Kansas City, Leavenworth, Marysville, Troy, Wathena and surrounding skies.

The eclipse reaches the state at 1:02 p.m. on Monday, August 21, and covers 41 miles before exiting the border at 1:09 p.m. Short but sweet, indeed, but Kansas communities in the path of totality plan full-fledged watch parties for the throng of eclipse chasers expected to arrive here for one of the best and longest views. Atchison, for instance, will celebrate its 2 minutes and 19 seconds of darkness with festivities and viewings at Benedictine College, Mount Saint Scholastica Convent and Amelia Earhart Airport (<www.TravelKS.com/solareclipse>).

Another pathway, this one etched deep in Kansas soil, marks its 150th anniversary in 2017. All along the storied Chisholm Trail, Kansas’ historic cow towns get set to revive their rowdy roots with longhorn cattle drives, chuck wagon dinners, gun fights, parades and cowboy music and poetry. Catch the action in Abilene (September 1-3), Caldwell (May 5-7), Clearwater (September 16-17), Ellsworth (August 18-19), Wellington (July 12-16), Wichita (September 2-3 at Old Cowtown Museum and October 6-8 in Historic Delano) and other stops along the trail ([www.ct-150.com](http://www.ct-150.com))

A traveling exhibit, “The Chisholm Trail: Driving the American West,” traces the Texas-to-Kansas trail from its 1860s beginnings. Currently debuting through March 7 at the Symphony in the Flint Hills gallery in Cottonwood Falls, the exhibition next travels across Kansas to Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum, Wichita, March 9-May 2; Caldwell Opera House, Caldwell, May 4-June 27; Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, August 24-October 17; Kauffman Museum, Newton, December 14, 2017-April 3, 2018; and Boot Hill Museum, Dodge City, September 20, 2018-November 13, 2018, with other locations to be announced.

Symphony in the Flint Hills continues its Chisholm Trail 150th salute at its annual outdoor concert by the Kansas City Symphony on June 10. This year’s event at Deer Horn Ranch in Geary County features special guest and country western singer Michael Martin Murphey ([www.symphonyintheflinthills.org](http://www.symphonyintheflinthills.org)).

Other attractions plan anniversary shindigs of their own. Fort Scott National Historic Site commemorates the 175th anniversary of the fort’s founding with a military parade May 30, living history re-enactments during Good Ol’ Days June 3 and an 1840s-themed candlelight tour December 1-2. Boot Hill Museum marks the 70th anniversary of its 1947 ground-breaking with a free evening of live entertainment, gunfights, new exhibits and a hamburger feed on March 23, along with other western fun throughout the year.

In Concordia, the National Orphan Train Complex hails a trio of milestones at its June 1-4 celebration: the 10th anniversary of the Orphan Train Museum, 30th year of the Orphan Train Heritage Society and 100th of the Union Pacific Depot. Also, life-size statues depicting orphan train riders are popping up around Concordia, with 60 expected to be installed by summer ([www.orphantraindepot.org](http://www.orphantraindepot.org)).

Hike, bike or ride horseback through some of the state’s stunning scenery on the 117-mile Flint Hills Nature Trail that runs from Osawatomie to Herington. Although portions are in varied stages of development, the rail trail is now open for 91 miles from Council Grove to Osawatomie. The crushed limestone route crosses the tall grass prairie, farmland, wooded stretches and at the eastern end near Ottawa, the Marais des Cygne river valley. A family bicycle ride and relay run October 7 at communities along the trail celebrates the grand opening (<http://kanzatrails.org/flint-hills-nature-trail>).

Recently acquired by the Nature Conservancy of Kansas, the iconic land formation known as Little Jerusalem near Oakley is expected to open to the public this summer. The 330-acre valley of 100-foot-deep canyons and towering spires and buttes is the largest Niobrara chalk formation in Kansas, and had no previous public access.

Let someone else do the driving on sightseeing and back-road tours around Kansas! The new Prairie Earth Tours takes riders aboard a 14-passenger bus to off-the-beaten path destinations in the Flint Hills and beyond. Based in Emporia, the tour company offers a rotating list of options, such as Kansas Craft Brewery Tours or The Flint Hills Experience, or private groups can create their own custom outing ([www.prairieearthtours.com](http://www.prairieearthtours.com)).

In the town of Lucas, known for its folk-art funkiness, the World’s Largest Collection of the World’s Smallest Versions of the World’s Largest Things moves into a new downtown museum space this spring. Displayed in temporary and mobile units in the past, the quirky collection will feature the fully-playable, 18-hole replica of the Goony Golf course, miniature replicas of Kansas monuments, more than 60 of the World’s Smallest Versions of the World’s Largest Things, an array of circus wagons and the attraction’s Mobile Museum ([www.worldslargestthings.com](http://www.worldslargestthings.com)).

Wichita’s original 500-square-foot Pizza Hut building is being relocated to the new Innovation Campus at Wichita State University and turned into a museum. Wichita brothers Frank and Dan Carney started Pizza Hut in 1958. Expected to open late this year, the museum will house the founders’ sizeable collection of Pizza Hut mementos and artifacts.

Also, in spring, watch for the opening of the Evel Knievel Thrill Show and Museum in Topeka and the release of the 400+-page “Kansas Guidebook for Explorers 2” by the Kansas Sampler Foundation. The foundation also stages its final Kansas Sampler Festival May 6-7 in Winfield ([www.kansassamplerfestival.com](http://www.kansassamplerfestival.com)).

Among new exhibits now open across the state: “The World’s Largest Dinosaurs” through September 4 at the Museum at Prairiefire in Overland Park; and “Apollo 1: Valiant Pioneers” through June 15 at the Cosmosphere in Hutchinson, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the fatal Apollo 1 test mission. The Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum in Abilene debuts two year-long exhibits starting in spring: “Eisenhower and the Great War” March 2017-March 2018 and “Chisholm Trail 150th: The Cowtown that Raised a President” April 2017-May 2018.

In December, Exploration Place in Wichita unveils a totally renovated aviation exhibit, “Design Build Fly.” Dozens of interactive stations, a factory setting, a deconstructed full-sized plane and a lab modeled after the real-world process of plane design fill the 5,100-square-foot permanent gallery. Currently at Exploration Place, travel back in time to a frigid world with “[Discover the Ice Age](http://exploration.org/exhibits/discover-the-ice-age/),” a national traveling exhibit on display through April 30 ([www.exploration.org](http://www.exploration.org)).

Sports fans have plenty to cheer about. See some of the country’s best college golfers when Garden City’s Buffalo Dunes Golf Course hosts the 2017 National Junior College Athletic Association’s Division I Golf Championship May 16-19. Also, the nation’s top young track athletes, ages 7-18, compete in the USA Track and Field National Junior Olympic Championships July 24-30 at Rock Chalk Park in Lawrence.

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