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Check Out What’s New in Kansas This Year

Get set to road-trip across Kansas in 2018, discovering a roaring dinosaur theme park, Wichita’s new $20 million arts center, a Pizza Hut museum and a star-gazing adventure at a Flint Hills ranch.

In addition, a new endeavor, the [Big Kansas Road Trip](https://www.kansassampler.org/page.php?id=591), steers visitors May 3-6 to the south-central counties of Barber, Comanche and Kiowa. Replacing the long-standing Kansas Sampler Festival, the Big Kansas Road Trip invites visitors to descend on the three counties to explore their shops, attractions, history and scenic back roads. Simply pick up itineraries of things to do at the county seats that weekend and set out on self-guided tours. “The idea is to get people onto back roads and into Kansas towns to actually see places (not just look at brochures), to actually eat in local cafes and to talk to and get to know the locals,” explains organizer Marci Penner, director of the Kansas Sampler Foundation. “We’ll move it around to different showcase counties each year, hoping to get people hooked on exploring our state.”

Kansas’ largest city itself boasts plenty to keep explorers busy. Start at Wichita’s [Mark Arts](https://www.markartsks.com/), the just-opened 40,000-square-foot prairie-style arts center, formerly the Wichita Center for the Arts. The modern building houses nine art studios, a 5,000-square-foot gallery for national exhibitions and an event space. Now showing through March 26 in the gallery: the “Mark Arts Kansas Invitational,” featuring more than 100 works by prominent artists who have lived or worked in Kansas. Admission is free.

The very first [Pizza Hut](http://www.wichita.edu/thisis/stories/story.asp?si=3798) building, soon to be Wichita’s newest museum, will tell the story of the world-famous pizza chain, started by two Wichita State University students. Located on the Wichita State University campus, the museum is set to open by summer 2018 and will include artifacts and the humble story behind the local business’s rise to become the world’s largest pizza franchise.

Also in the Air Capital of the World, [Exploration Place](http://exploration.org/) science museum’s new $2 million “Design Build Fly” exhibition gives visitors a hands-on look at how airplanes are designed, built and flown.

The state’s newest family attraction roars to life Memorial Day in the Wichita suburb of Derby. Thirty life-size animatronic dinosaurs will roam the $6.5 million [Field Station Dinosaurs](http://fieldstationdinosaurs.com/Kansas) theme park. Visitors to the 14-acre dino domain can dig for fossils, walk the paths beside the life-like giants, learn about dinosaurs unique to Kansas and play a themed miniature golf course.

On a swing through the iconic Flint Hills, unsaddle awhile at the [Flying W Ranch](http://www.flinthillsflyingw.com/announcements/2018-star-gazing) near Clements for an evening of star gazing in the pitch-black skies. With the aid of a computerized telescope and local astronomer, tour the constellations, planets, their moons and galaxies in this tallgrass prairie setting. The experience (offered September 14-15 and October 12-13) includes supper, a wagon or horseback ride and entertainment.

Get a savory sampling of other agritourism adventures and products grown and produced in Kansas when the state’s trademark [“From the Land of Kansas”](https://fromthelandofkansas.com/) program hosts its 40th anniversary party at the state capitol Tuesday, January 30. The public is invited to stop by the rotunda from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. to sample products and meet the makers of everything from handcrafted lotions and soaps to pet treats and specialty foods to agricultural enterprises.

Emporia, the birthplace of [William Allen White](https://visitemporia.com/people/william-allen-white/), celebrates the 150th birthday of its famed journalist throughout 2018, kicking off with a birthday bash and unveiling of a White exhibit February 9 at the Emporia State W. A. White Memorial Library & Archives. On February 10 and 17, two-hour narrated driving tours of Emporia by Prairie Earth Tours celebrate White’s legacy. And on February 11, Red Rocks State Historic Site, the former home of White, hosts a short play festival.

Sports fans have plenty to cheer about in 2018. [Wichita](https://www.visitwichita.com/) hosts a full roster of sporting championships, highlighted by the first and second rounds of the NCAA Division 1 Men’s Basketball Championship March 15 and 17. Also in Wichita: the 2018 Midwestern and Pacific Coast Synchronized Skating Sectional Championships January 24-28, USA Water Ski and the American Water Ski Association National Championships August 7-11 and the United States Bowling Congress 2018 US Open October 24-31.

In [Lawrence](https://unmistakablylawrence.com/), big-time youth basketball tournaments will attract some of the most highly-sought-after young athletes and well-known college basketball coaches. The hoops season includes Midwest Live! April 27-29, expected to draw 300 teams; Jr. NBA Regionals June 15-17, with teams from eight Midwestern states; and the Hardwood Classic July 19-22 and 26-29, starring highly-recruited youth players and many Division I coaches.

Also on the horizon:

--Celebrate the 50th anniversary of the National Trails System Act in the [Santa Fe Trail](http://www.santafetrail.org/states/kansas.html) towns of Council Grove, Larned and Elkhart. On April 20-22, rendezvous in Council Grove for stagecoach rides, blacksmith demonstrations, living history re-enactments and music by the Tallgrass Express String Band. Also that weekend in Council Grove: a Kansas City Barbeque Society-sanctioned competition and the Seth Fest music and food festival. Larned salutes the 50th anniversary of the Trails System at its biennial history seminar September 20-22. Scholarly presentations, history talks, dinners and field trips round out the gathering. And, on October 5-7, Elkhart hosts a regional celebration with live music and tours of the 108,000-acre Cimarron National Grassland, which contain a continuous 23-mile section of the Santa Fe Trail.

--Two events move across the border from Missouri to their new home at a lakeside setting in LaCygne, Kansas: [Tumbleweed County Music Festival](http://tumbleweedcountry.com/) June 15-16 and [Dancefestopia](http://dancefestopia.com/) and its 45,000 attendees September 6-9.

--It’s the year to catch two events not offered annually. Birders can spot hundreds of species in the Milford Lake area at the biennial [Kansas Birding Festival](http://kansasbirdingfestival.org/) (held in even-numbered years) on April 27-28. In a natural amphitheater set against the Red Hills, Medicine Lodge re-enacts 300 years of history at its [Peace Treaty Pageant](http://peacetreaty.org/) September 28-30 (staged every three years or so). Also part of the town’s frontier festivities: the Kansas Championship Ranch Rodeo (September 28-29) and the Peace Treaty Powwow (September 28-30).

--Starting in late spring or summer, the [Eisenhower Presidential Museum](https://eisenhower.archives.gov/museumredesign.html) in Abilene will undergo a year-long redesign to update its galleries and exhibits. While the museum will be unavailable during the project, exhibits will be located in the Eisenhower Library gallery space, and the remaining 22-acre campus and buildings will stay open.

--Topeka’s Mariachi Festival gets a new name, [Tacos y Tequila](https://www.visittopeka.com/things-to-do/tacos-y-tequila-passport/). Mariachi Flor de Toloache, an award-winning, all-female mariachi group from New York, will headline this year’s September 15 event.

--Topeka’s new downtown anchor, the $28.6 million [Cyrus Hotel](http://cyrushotel.com/#/), is expected to open on Kansas Avenue in summer 2018.

--Kansas City, Kansas’ state-of-the-art [National Training and Coaching Development Center](https://www.sportingkc.com/ntcdc) is the new soccer training home of Sporting Kansas City. Set to open in March 2018, the center will also host clubs and national teams from around the world and includes five full-size soccer fields and an 80,000-square-foot building. In addition, the nearby 52-acre Wyandotte Youth Soccer Complex features 12 playing fields for youth soccer.

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