

# “A Tale of Two (River) Cities”

## *A Tour Along the Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway*

Situated mid-way along the Minnesota River, are two of Minnesota’s finest river cities, New Ulm and Mankato! The river route has recently been honored with the status of being a National Scenic Byway and that should say something about the beauty and treasures it holds!

You begin your multi-night tour in New Ulm, which by the 2000 Federal Census, is “the most German city in America”! There are three “group friendly” hotels from which to choose, that either have an on-site restaurant or are within one block of one. The two-hour city tour is the best way to familiarize yourself with this “city of charm and tradition” and highlights will include the nationally-famous Hermann Monument, the Glockenspiel, August Schell Brewery and sites associated with “The Dakota Conflict of 1862”.

Lunch is at the Kaiserhoff Restaurant for a sample of their famous ribs or their German and American favorites. Some shopping along Minnesota Street in the many “Specialty Shops” is a nice way to relax after lunch. At 3:00 pm, meet at the Glockenspiel, a musical, performing clock, for your ride along the river valley to the 1870’s Harkin Store. Costumed guides will give you the story of this lovely site, situated right along the Minnesota River and part of the prestigious Minnesota Historical Society collection.

Now, you head back to New Ulm to check-in to your hotel and a rest before the evening’s entertainment. You can arrange for a supper with ethnic meal choices and a musical accompaniment ranging from a concertina soloist to the 40-person male singing group, “The Concord Singers”!

Day two will have you out-and-about the countryside. The first stop is in Hanska, a Norwegian village 13 miles south of New Ulm. A welcome reception will be awaiting you in the “stabbur”. This is a traditional, two-story, log storage barn in the middle of the city’s park. Your guide will board your coach for a tour of the area’s strong Norwegian history including an 1870’s pioneer cabin, a quaint antique museum at the Unitarian Church, the interesting Union Hall and a meal at the “Troll Hus Café”. Souvenir shopping at “Alicia’s Little Taste of Norway” is available after lunch.

We leave “Little Norway” behind for another surprising adventure this afternoon. About 30 miles west, outside the small town of Sanborn, sit the “Sod Houses on the Prairie”. There are two full-size, recreated sod houses that portray life on the Minnesota prairie in the mid-1800s. People never fail to be impressed with the ruggedness with which our pioneer forefathers had to live!

The afternoon winds down with a surprise visit to the “Rich-Nes Alpaca Farm” near Morgan. You will be told the story of these cute natives of the South American mountains. Alpaca are smaller cousins of the llama and you’ll visit and pet them in their barns and then be amazed at the super-soft wool items for sale in the gift shop.

The evening’s meal is a more relaxed affair with off-the-menu items at the nearby Perkin’s Restaurant. You’ll sleep well tonight after the full day of touring!

Day three starts off with a drive along one of the prettiest parts of the Minnesota River Valley, Highway 68. Halfway between New Ulm and Mankato, you’ll have a lovely visit at the Morgan Creek Vineyard. This is Minnesota’s only underground winery and after walking amongst the grape vines, you’ll see the wine making process and have time for some sampling before leaving for Mankato.

You’ll continue your journey along the beautiful Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway with a stop at Minneopa State Park. This state park features southern Minnesota’s only waterfalls, as Minneopa means “double waterfall”. After relaxing at this beautiful park, you’ll be ready for a delicious lunch at “The

Peddler of Rapidan”. The Peddler is a quaint café in Rapidan, featuring delicious soups and sandwiches. When you’re finished with lunch, you’ll want to browse the drafts and antiques for sale in the restaurant! Following lunch, you’ll visit the Rapidan Dam, and if you’re still hungry, you’ll want to stop in at the nearby Dam Store for a piece of their famous pie.

You’ll continue your afternoon as you arrive in greater Mankato and visit the “R.D. Hubbard House” and “Carriage House”. The Hubbard House is the oldest example of a Victorian Mansion in the area, featuring turn of the century furniture, beautiful gardens, and early automobiles. You’ll then tour the “Guns of the Pioneer’s Old West Gun Museum”. This old west gun museum, gift shop and gun shop has been recognized in True West Magazine and is an attraction you won’t want to miss!

After a day of travel and touring, you’ll want to check into your hotel to relax before dinner. There are many fabulous hotels that are ready to meet the needs of your group. All hotels will pamper you with first-class service, and many will offer you welcome receptions, nearby restaurants and shopping, and even special gifts!

The “Carousel Café Food Court” in the River Hills Mall will be a great destination for dinner.... choose everything from tacos and pizza to Chicago style hot dogs and ethnic specialties! There is something for everyone to eat, and of course, plenty of delicious snacks and desserts after your meal! The Carousel Café would not be complete without a beautiful carousel, so you will enjoy watching kids ride while you eat. If you’re in the mood, bring out the kid in yourself while you take your own ride!

You can’t just have dinner at the River Hills Mall without taking time to shop! You will spend your evening shopping many stores in the mall and “hilltop” shopping district. Whether you enjoy specialty shops, bookstores, discount shops or sporting goods stores, you will find what you need here!

You will begin your second day in greater Mankato as a step-on guide meets you at your hotel for a tour of the area. You’ll see the historic buildings, interesting attractions, and hear informational stories as you visit the sites in greater Mankato. Following your tour, you will have the chance to visit “Old Town Mankato”, complete with many unique specialty and antique shops. After some shopping, you will visit the “Cray Mansion”, now home to the YWCA. You’ll tour this impressive Queen Anne Style Mansion and then have the opportunity to enjoy lunch in this unique setting!

You will spend your afternoon at “Farmamerica” in Waseca, where you will experience an indoor/outdoor living history center of agriculture. Everyone will have a great time at this interpretive center! After visiting Farmamerica, you will want to check out the unique shops in this small town.

When you return to greater Mankato, you will have a chance to freshen up before enjoying dinner at a local restaurant. Choose from a catered meal at the “Butler House Bed & Breakfast”, an Italian Restaurant or a local restaurant with a delicious menu for all appetites! After dinner, you will take in an evening performance. Whether you prefer theatre, ballet or symphony, greater Mankato will have a great performance for your group! If you want something more private, you can even bring a local musical group, speaker or entertainer to perform for your group. The evening opportunities are endless!

You will need a good night’s sleep after a busy day! Between the German fun of New Ulm, the city fun of greater Mankato, and the beauty in between...what an adventure!