



Discover with Nature in Nebraska

Located between Grand Island and Kearney, Nebraska, The Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies are a chain of grasslands and wetlands that are managed for biological diversity. The stretch of the Platte River known as the Big Bend Reach is the most important migratory bird area along the United States portion of the Central Flyway of North America. The Platte and its adjacent wet meadows in the Big Bend region provide habitat for millions of migratory birds including some 500,000 Sandhill cranes and millions of ducks and geese. It is an important stopover location for migrating whooping cranes during the spring and fall migration.



Photos: Sandhill Crane in Flight, CA © Frank Schulenburg/TNC Photo Contest 2021; Watching Cranes Through a Blind, NE © Chris Helzer/TNC

Trip Highlights

- Visit Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo, a world-famous zoo with a strong conservation mission.
- Immerse yourself at The Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve, one of the largest TNC preserves in the country.
- Experience hundreds of thousands of Sandhill Crane as they roost, feed, and sing along the Platte River.
- Enjoy the crane spectacle from The Conservancy's private blinds, tucked on the edge of the Platte River.



Northern Great Plains Rising

Nestled in the Northern Great Plains, Nebraska hosts a rich mosaic of prairies, wetlands and rivers. Globally, grasslands are some of the least protected and most threatened places on the planet. North America's prairielands face similar losses from agriculture and incompatible development. In Nebraska, the Platte River's prairies provide critical habitat for migratory birds and insects. The diversity of grassland types found here give scientists a living laboratory to test new ideas and demonstrate restoration approaches that other conservation practitioners can use in their work elsewhere. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is supporting a multistate initiative across Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Wyoming to ensure the region's most important grasslands remain protected, resilient and connected.

Among Nebraska's iconic landscapes, the Sandhills stand apart. Nearly 20,000 square miles of mostly intact prairie-covered dunes characterize this region. The Sandhills lie on top of the Ogallala Aquifer, which holds nearly one billion feet of water. Here, you'll find Nebraska's greatest density of wetlands. Remarkable wildlife such as thousands upon thousands of sandhill cranes migrate, nest and breed here every spring.

Photo: Sandhill Crane Sunset Flight, NE © Mark Davis

Itinerary Overview

DAY 1

Sunday, March 22

Welcome to Nebraska! Please plan to arrive in Omaha by 5:00 PM. Those arriving early will have a chance to visit the local Lauritzen Gardens or the famous Joslyn Art Museum, depending on the weather and your interests. Tonight, enjoy a welcome dinner as you get to know your fellow travelers, TNC host, and expert naturalist guides. Dive into the current work taking place to conserve Nebraska's wetlands and prairies with local TNC staff before getting a good night's rest for our first full day of adventure tomorrow.

Overnight at Courtyard Marriott Downtown, Omaha

DAY 2

Monday, March 23

After breakfast, visit Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo, a world-famous institution with a strong conservation mission. Following our experience, we'll head west, passing through the agricultural lands and woodlands of the scenic North Loup River. Welcome to the matchless Sandhills region of Nebraska! Simple and comfortable, enjoy some rural American hospitality at the local Cobblestone Inn & Suites and dinner at a nearby restaurant.

Overnight at Cobblestone Inn & Suites, Ord

DAY 3

Tuesday, March 24

This morning, we will head northwest to Valentine, making our way to the Niobrara Valley. In Valentine, enjoy lunch and check in to your hotel for the next two nights before visiting TNC's Niobrara Valley Preserve. One of the largest TNC preserves in the United States, Niobrara Valley preserve is a model for grassland management. Enjoy a presentation from local staff on the conservation work taking place in the area, including the use of prescribed fire, protecting the Upper Elkhorn watershed, and preserving the Sandhills region.

Weather permitting, partake in an optional hike before ending your day with a Bison burger cookout and sunset social overlooking the Niobrara River and Norden Chute.

Overnight at The Niobrara Lodge, Valentine



Tribal Buffalo Lifeways Coalition

Historically, herds of buffalo, elk and pronghorn were native grazers across Nebraska's prairies. These lands evolved under grazing, and they require grazing to remain healthy. Buffalo are both a cultural and ecological keystone species, and they play a central role in many Native Nations' creation stories, ceremonies, diets and lifeways as a sacred relative.

In 2024, the InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC,) Native Americans in Philanthropy, TNC and the World Wildlife Fund formed Tribal Buffalo Lifeways Collaboration to stabilize and expand Tribal-led buffalo restoration and support cultural, spiritual, ecological and economic revitalization within Native communities.

Since 2020, partnerships with organizations such as ITBC and Tanka Fund have facilitated the return of over 2,300 buffalo from TNC preserves in Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Oklahoma to Indigenous peoples. These partnerships nurture health and well-being through the rematriation of buffalo to the land and their original stewards.

Photo: Porcupine at Niobrara Valley Preserve, NE © Chris Helzer/TNC

Itinerary (cont.)

DAY 4

Wednesday, March 25

*Optional Activity: For our birders, depart early in the morning for a field trip to see sharp-tailed grouse displaying on lek.

After breakfast, begin your morning with a presentation by the Niobrara Valley Preserve's stewardship manager on TNC's work with bison before heading out on a bison tour. Get up close with bison as you explore the world's largest and most intact temperate grassland.

After lunch at preserve's headquarters and a discussion about TNC's work with Indigenous partners, take in the scenery during a leisurely stroll along hiking trails with stunning vistas.

Overnight at The Niobrara Lodge, Valentine

*Activity limited to 6 participants. Please let us know at registration if you would like to participate.

DAY 5

Thursday, March 26

This morning, we'll say goodbye to Valentine before heading south to Grand Island. After checking into our hotel and enjoying lunch together, we'll depart for a fabulous evening at the Derr House. Tour TNC's Platte River Prairies operations, including a demonstration from staff of how native seeds are processed to support high diversity prairie restoration efforts. TNC Nebraska's Director of Science, Chris Helzer, will accompany us on a prairie walk and deliver remarks on the beauty and complexity of prairies.

After the walk, warm up with tea and hot chocolate before an early catered dinner at Derr House and a presentation about TNC's Sandhill Crane conservation efforts.

After dinner, we'll settle into the Conservancy's private blinds tucked on the edge of the Platte River before birds begin to arrive, then watch as vast numbers pack into the river's sand islands. Sunset colors illuminate the beauty of this epic wildlife spectacle.

Overnight at Candlewood Suites, Grand Island



Itinerary (cont.)

DAY 6

Friday, March 27

In the early morning hours, we'll experience our first "Crane Rise" from private blinds at TNC's Platte River Prairies. Pre-dawn crane music turns into a crescendo of wake-up calls as the cranes awaken and leave their riverine roost sites.

After this special morning experience, return to the cozy ambiance of TNC's Derr House on the preserve. Over a catered brunch, learn more about the biology and conservation of Sandhill Cranes and other species along Nebraska's Platte River system.

This afternoon you can choose to relax, or to learn about the early settlers of the Great Plains at the Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer, one of Grand Island's top attractions. Dinner is at a favorite local restaurant.

Our own early birds can enjoy an optional guided morning drive to watch behaviors and interactions of the cranes at their feeding sites.

Overnight at Candlewood Suites, Grand Island

DAY 7

Saturday, March 28

After breakfast, we'll pack our luggage and begin the drive back to Omaha. Bid farewell to your fellow travelers and the adventures you shared before heading home or wherever your travels take you next! Please book your flights no earlier than 12pm.

Photo: Dorman Prairie Grass, NE © Chris Helzer/TNC



Trip Cost

Double Occupancy: \$3,990/person

Single Occupancy: \$4,870/person

This cost includes:

- Accommodations
- Group airport transfers
- Group ground transportation
- All meals beginning with dinner on Day 1 and ending with breakfast on Day 7
- Park, preserve, and other activity fees
- Miscellaneous program expenses
- Professional guide services
- TNC hosts

This cost excludes:

- Travel to and from Omaha, Nebraska
- Travel insurance (Highly Recommended)
- Incidentals
- Alcohol
- Gratuities

Registration: Please email travel@tnc.org to register.



Photos (from top to bottom): Sunflowers at Niobrara Valley Preserve, NE © Chris Helzer/TNC; Bison at Niobrara Valley Preserve, NE © Mark Godfrey; Cranes on the Platte River, NE © Chris Helzer/TNC; Upland Sandpiper Resting on a Fence Post © Chris Helzer/TNC



Payment & Cancellation Terms

To make trip payments or cancel your registration, please contact Naturalist Journeys at travel@naturalistjourneys.com or call 866-900-1146.

Deposit:

- A deposit of \$750 per person is due at the time of registration.
 - Cancellation 121+ days prior to trip start: Deposit is refundable, less a \$250 per person cancellation fee (and 3% payment handling fee, if applicable).

Full Trip Payment:

- Full trip payment is due 120 days prior to trip start.
 - Cancellation 0-120 days prior to trip start: Full trip cost is non-refundable.

Contact Information

As you plan for your journey with The Nature Conservancy and Naturalist Journeys, please feel free to reach out with any questions.

TNC Discover with Nature Team
travel@tnc.org

Naturalist Journeys Team
travel@naturalistjourneys.com or 866-900-1146

TNC Travel Values

● Access

Travel with renowned Conservancy experts and local partners for an exclusive, on-the-ground experience. You won't just see amazing places, you'll see how you are helping save them.

● Impact

Witness how your commitment to our planet and your passion for conservation are making a difference in the wild places and communities you are impacting.

● Knowledge

Learn how we are applying the latest cutting-edge science to affect global change and drive conservation.

● Inspiration

Immerse yourself in local cultures and awe-inspiring landscapes to foster your own connection to our world.

● Globally Minded

Elevate your understanding of our work by observing first-hand how TNC and our partners act locally and how we turn local results in to global impact by scaling solutions that work.

Photo: Davis Mountain Preserve, TX © Jerod Foster



TNC Traveler Expectations

Group travel with The Nature Conservancy provides our donors with the opportunity to experience, alongside fellow supporters, the places TNC is working collaboratively to advance our conservation mission. Within these curated trips is the chance to engage with a community of active individuals and conservation staff who enjoy teaching and learning about the important conservation work we do and exploring the outdoors.

In order to ensure an enjoyable trip environment that supports learning and enrichment, we need your partnership. We ask that all participants review TNC's Code of Conduct prior to joining a trip. We also encourage you to carefully review all trip information to make an informed decision as to whether travel with TNC and a specific trip's characteristics and activities are right for you. Following the Code is an expectation and responsibility for everyone in the larger TNC community, including our staff, partners, vendors and supporters. To that end, by registering for a TNC trip, you agree to uphold the Code.

While the entire Code of Conduct is important, the tenets that are especially relevant to TNC group travel are:

- respect for each other,
- respect for the world around us, and
- acting with integrity.

The following traveler expectations are intended to provide guidance for how those tenets translate to group travel but are by no means an exhaustive list. By participating in a TNC trip, you make a commitment to act in accordance with the TNC Code of Conduct to your fellow travelers, as well as to TNC staff, partners, community members and vendors. Any violation of or disregard for the Code of Conduct may result in removal from a trip and/or denial of future TNC travel participation.

TNC Traveler Expectations (cont.)

● **Respect all people, places and perspectives.**

Each participant on a trip is an integral part of the travel experience. Demonstrating respect and consideration is imperative not only for nature, local communities and cultures in the places we visit, but also for fellow travelers, staff, partners, community members and vendors. Everyone will bring different goals, backgrounds, experiences and abilities, and it is important that the group respect each individual's perspectives and needs throughout the trip. Sometimes trip participants become lifelong friends, and we encourage the camaraderie and community built through these shared experiences!

● **Harassment in all its forms, including discrimination and microaggressions, is not tolerated.**

There is no place on any TNC travel experience for disrespect to or bullying or intimidation of fellow travelers, TNC staff, partners, community members or vendors. All travelers agree to support an environment free from any behavior that could make an individual feel unsafe or diminish their dignity. If you experience or observe this type of behavior on a trip, please report it to your trip host or guide.

Examples of behavior that will not be tolerated include, but are not limited, to:

- Racial discrimination in any form (jokes, comments and/or actions)
- Verbal abuse of any traveler, staff, partner, community member or vendor
- Actions or statements that exclude or divide people because of their differences or differing perspectives
- Jokes about gender or sexual orientation or that include sexual innuendo
- Discriminatory actions or statements based on gender or sexual orientation
- Unwelcome physical contact or physical intimidation of a sexual nature

● **Act in accordance with the applicable law of the location(s) of the trip.**

Your trip location(s) may have different laws from your home location. You are expected to be aware of and adhere to the trip destination's laws throughout the experience, even when locations change throughout a trip.

● **Employ an attitude of flexibility.**

At times, there may be changes in the itinerary when deemed necessary or advisable for the comfort and well-being of trip members. We appreciate your understanding, flexibility and adaptability in order to make the trip safe and enjoyable for you and everyone else.

TNC and its tour operators reserve the right to deny registration or remove a tour participant from a trip should such person's behavior, health or mental condition impact the safe and equitable operation of the trip.

Thank you for your attention and understanding, and please let a TNC travel representative know if you have any questions in advance of registering at travel@tnc.org.

