

NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



FACT SHEET **Rockford, Illinois, USA**

LOCATION

Rockford, Illinois, the seat of Winnebago County, is located in north-central Illinois at the intersection of Interstate Highways 90 and 39 and US Highway 20. Downtown Chicago is about 90 minutes east of Rockford, and Chicago's O'Hare International Airport is just an easy 60-minute drive away.

POPULATION

Rockford's population is 152,000, making it Illinois' third-largest city. Winnebago County's population is approximately 269,000 and includes the towns of Machesney Park, Loves Park, Rockton, Roscoe, South Beloit, Pecatonica, Cherry Valley and Winnebago. The metro area population is more than 400,000.

ECONOMY

Rockford has a diversified economic base. It has many factories that make aerospace and automotive components and systems, precision machine tools, chewing gum, packaging and potato chips. The city is a leader in health care, with three major hospitals and a medical college. Some of the USA's most fertile farmland surrounds the city, producing corn, soybeans, cattle, hogs, chickens, eggs and dairy products.

HISTORY

In 1834, New Englanders settled on both banks of a shallow, rocky stretch of the Rock River, where there was a natural ford. They named their settlement "Midway Village", because it was halfway between Chicago and Galena (then a mining boomtown). By 1837, the village had grown and was renamed "Rockford".

ETHNICITY

Rockford has one of the highest per-capita concentrations of Swedish-Americans in the USA. Between 1852 and the early 1900's, thousands of Swedish immigrants settled in Rockford. The Swedes' woodworking skills made Rockford a leading furniture center with more than 90 furniture factories in existence prior to 1950, when they began the transition to high-tech precision metal working. Italians came to the area by the thousands between 1878 and 1912, establishing businesses that still bear their names and social clubs that reflect Italy's various regions. Germans, Irish, Poles and other Eastern Europeans also immigrated to Rockford in significant numbers. WWI and the construction of Camp Grant (a large army base) saw the first significant migration of African-Americans from the South.

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Today, Rockford is a vital, multicultural community of people with roots in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

EDUCATION

Rockford has several colleges, including Rock Valley Community College, Rockford College, the Northern Illinois University at Rockford and the University of Illinois College of Medicine.

CLIMATE

The climate is moderate, with summers from 70° - 80°F and winters from 10 ° - 30° F. (Although it occasionally gets as hot as 100° F and as cold as -20° F.) Average annual precipitation is 35 inches.

ACCOMMODATIONS

With 30 brand-name hotels, three bed-and-breakfasts and 3,000 rooms, the Rockford Region offers many affordable lodging options.

CONVENTIONS & MEETINGS

Rockford's MetroCentre seats 10,000 arena-style. The Indoor Sports Center and the Hononegah Dome each offer 60,000 square feet of pillar-free space. Five hotels have conference centers: Clock Tower Resort (30,000 square feet); Cliffbreakers Riverside Resort (25,000 square feet); Holiday Inn of Rockford (meeting space for 600); the Radisson (10,000 square feet) and Ramada Inn of Greater Beloit (meeting space for 600). Located in the heart of Rockford's hotel campus, Giovanni's Restaurant & Conference Center has 15,600 square feet, and partners with the nearby Courtyard by Marriott for lodging.

SPORTS TOURNAMENTS

Illustrated Magazine, and hosts amateur sports tournaments throughout the year, primarily soccer, softball, baseball, tennis, golf, wrestling, volleyball, rugby, bowling, chess, waterskiing and rowing. Two outdoor sports complexes, SportsCore One and SportsCore Two, feature 205 acres of playing fields. The Indoor Sports Center and Hononegah Dome each have 60,000 square feet for indoor soccer, volleyball, in-line hockey, etc. Rockford is also home to minor league baseball, ice hockey, basketball and arena football.

TRANSPORTATION

Three airlines serve the Chicago Rockford International Airport, with flights to Las Vegas, Orlando, St.Petersburg/Clearwater, Cancun, Denver, Phoenix/Mesa and Myrtle Beach. On the ground, Coach USA offers: 17 daily shuttles to and from Chicago's O'Hare Airport; five daily shuttles to Chicago's Union Train Station; eight daily shuttles to and from Chicago's Midway Airport. Rockford is an auto oriented city; taxi and city bus service are available, and car rental is available at the airport and several hotels!

THE ARTS

The ornate 1927 Coronado Theatre hosts big-name entertainment and Broadway road shows. Rockford Art Museum is the largest in Illinois, outside of Chicago. New American Theater presents plays from fall through spring, while Starlight Theatre has a

lively summer season under a star-shaped retractable roof. Rockford has a symphony, ballet and many galleries and arts festivals.

MUSEUMS

Burpee Museum of Natural History is home “Jane”, the most complete and best-preserved juvenile Tyrannosaurus Rex in the world. Child magazine says the two-story Discovery Center is one of the top four children’s museums in America. The Rockford Art Museum is the largest art museum in Illinois outside of Chicago. Midway Village Museum shows what life was like in 1900, with a 24-building outdoor village. Built by a wealthy industrialist, Tinker Swiss Cottage is a rare example of “Victorian Exotic” architecture. The Historic Auto Attractions Museum showcases cars of the rich, famous and infamous. The Erlander Home Museum preserves the city’s Swedish heritage, and the Ethnic Heritage Museum honors seven of the area’s ethnic groups.

OUTDOOR RECREATION

With more than 20,000 acres of parks and forest preserves, the Rockford Region is a great place to play. Magic Waters, one of the Midwest’s largest waterparks, just keeps getting bigger and better. Rockford Speedway hosts NASCAR races, while Blackhawk Farms Raceway has motorcycle, go-cart and sports car races. Rockford is called “Illinois’ Holiest City” because of its many excellent, affordable golf courses. Rock Cut State Park is one of Illinois’ largest state parks, with camping, fishing, swimming, hiking and more.

SHOPPING

Shop 'til your heart’s content at the popular CherryVale Mall or browse the unique boutiques at Edgebrook Shopping Center. Rockford also has lots of discount chains, off-price outlets and “big box” stores. Interesting specialty shops are scattered throughout the region. Kegel Motorcycle Company is the world’s oldest Harley-Davidson dealership. And, when it comes to antiques, the area has nearly 50 shops and three big malls.

GARDENS

Once known as the “Forest City,” Rockford is now known as the “City of Gardens.” In 2005 and 2007, Rockford won the America in Bloom Award, and in 2004, the Roth Journal of Japanese Gardening chose Rockford’s 12-acre Anderson Japanese Gardens as the best in North America. Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden’s 150 acres shelter rare and unusual trees and shrubs from around the world; the only comparable site is in France! Sinnissippi Gardens & Lagoon brighten the banks of the Rock River. There are several annual garden tours and fairs.

ANNUAL EVENTS

There’s always something happening in the Rockford Region, with special events and festivals nearly every weekend. Top annual events include: PaleoFest, a dinosaur extravaganza, in February; Classics & Chrome, a classic car show, in April; On the Waterfront, one of the Midwest’s largest music festivals on 30 city blocks along the Rock River, in late August/early September; Head of the Rock Regatta, a huge national rowing competition, in October.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR VISITORS

Car Rental: Generally, car rental rates are lower in Rockford. After Chicago (where you don't need a car) if you plan to drive around the Midwest, take the O'Hare or Union Station shuttle to Rockford and rent a car at Avis, Budget, Enterprise, Hertz, National or a small local car rental company.

Tips & Gratuities: American tipping customs are different from those in other countries, and are very subjective. Many entry-level hospitality employees receive less than minimum wage and rely upon tips. Use these guidelines. Restaurant waiters/waitresses: 15% for good service, 20% for outstanding service. Hotel porters: \$2 per bag. Hotel maids: \$2 per night, more for extra requests. Hotel room service: most hotels automatically include a gratuity and delivery fee; if not, 15%. Taxi drivers: 15%, or for very short rides, round it up to the next dollar or so.

Credit Cards: The most commonly accepted credit cards in the American Midwest are MasterCard, Visa, Discover and American Express.

To Exchange Currency:

1. Exchange currency at your arrival airport, such as Chicago or Minneapolis/St. Paul.
2. Use your bank card, cash card or automated teller card (ATM) to withdraw US dollars from machines in America. You may be charged a fee of US \$1.50-\$2.50 for each transaction, but your bank will automatically give you the most current exchange rate. These machines are everywhere, just as they are in your country!
3. Use your credit card to pay for rooms, meals and other purchases. Your credit card company will automatically give you the most current exchange rate.
4. As a last resort, you may exchange currency from Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom at the main AmCore Bank, 501 S. 7th St., Rockford, IL 61104. Phone 815.968.2241.
5. Outside major airports, places with "Currency Exchange" signs seldom exchange international currency. (They cash checks, issue money orders, collect utility bills, etc.)

International Phone Cards: May be purchased at most discount stores (such as Target, K-Mart, Wal-Mart) and convenience stores (gasoline stations).

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For more information:

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