



MEDIA CONTACT

Kelli Hilliard
Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism
P: 785-296-4922
Kelli.Hilliard@TravelKS.com

Wild, Wild West Still Alive With Cowboys and Cowtowns in Kansas

2015, Kansas ... More visitors to Kansas are reliving the Wild West heritage of the state, with many communities offering an authentic Old West experience.

Cowboys, cattle drives, and cowtowns are all part of the legend of the Old West in Kansas. The infamous cattle drives from Texas to Kansas created the Kansas cowtowns establishing their reputations as the “wickedest” and “wildest” towns on the frontier. Although the cowtowns have quieted down somewhat, the romance of the Old West and a working cattle industry are still alive and well, and can be experienced throughout Kansas.

In the open prairie of the Flint Hills, cowboys can still be seen working the cattle, much like their counterparts from the 1800s. The Moore Ranch in Bucklin and the Flying W Ranch in each offer city slickers the opportunity to participate in real cattle drives. Guests at ranch bed and breakfasts are given the opportunity to participate in daily ranching activities or to just spend time relaxing. The Circle S Ranch near Lawrence is a luxurious country inn located in the middle of a 1,200-acre cattle ranch. Guest can watch the ranch hands work with the ranch’s 400-head of cattle and 20-head of buffalo, or they can hike or bike on the many trails throughout the property. The Clover Cliff Ranch is located in the beautiful tallgrass prairie of the Flint Hills. The setting looks like a movie set – but it is not – it is real and fabulous! Here guests can ride horses (from the nearby Flying W Ranch), and explore the massive outdoor space on foot to enjoy panoramic views of the majestic rolling hills filled with wildflowers and wildlife.

Few towns capture the spirit of the American cowboy as Dodge City. Stroll the streets of the Boothill Museum, a re-creation of the original frontier town where fact and fiction go hand-in-hand. Not only does Boot Hill provide an insight into the genuine Old West, it also has fun with the fictional Old West as seen in the TV series *Gunslinger*. Dodge City celebrates its history with Dodge City Days each summer.

The larger-than-life cowboy legends of the Old West were born on the frontier plains and in the cattle towns of Kansas. Wichita grew from a cattle town to the largest city in the state. A visit to the Old Cowtown Museum, a 17-acre living history village will have visitors humming "*Home on the Range*" all the way home. Historic Abilene showcases the

history of the Chisholm Trail at the Dickinson County Heritage Center. Museums with exhibits relating to the Chisholm Trail can also be found in Wellington and Caldwell.

The Wild West wouldn't be wild without the outlaws. The Dalton Brothers gang stands out as perhaps the most infamous in Kansas history. In October 1892, they attempted to rob two banks at the same time. Visitors can learn more of the Dalton story at the Dalton Defenders Museum in Coffeyville. Nearly 300 miles to the west in Meade, the home of the Dalton brothers' sister, Eva Dalton Whipple, is restored to its original 1887 appearance. The tour of this hideout home also includes the gang's underground escape tunnel leading from the house to the barn.

For many Kansans, the Old West remains part of modern day life. Professional, regional, high school, 4-H, and ranch rodeos demonstrate the skills of rodeo cowboys and real working cowboys. The Flint Hills Rodeo in Strong City is the oldest continuously held rodeo in Kansas.

The Dodge City Rodeo is rated one of the top PRCA rodeos in the country. Other major professional rodeos take place in Strong City, Medicine Lodge, Phillipsburg, Pretty Prairie, Coffeyville, Abilene, and Mound City. In ranch rodeos, contestants must be actual working cowboys and compete as teams rather than as individuals.

Craftsmen in Kansas produce western goods that are known around the world for their quality and authenticity. A few of the outlets for cowboy accoutrements are found at the Rusty Nail Boot & Saddle in Dodge City, where custom chaps, saddles, tack, and hats are made on the premises. Wichita home to Hatman Jack's, is the third-largest hat store in the country that can custom-fit a hat just for you!

Although the cowtowns and cattle drives were relatively short-lived, the excitement of the era lives on through the numerous events and activities held around the state.

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