



MO Culture

Destinations: Cape Girardeau, Independence and Branson

Day 1

Arrive in **Cape Girardeau**, one of Missouri's earliest settled areas. The Mississippi River has played a significant part in the city's history, especially in the early commerce of steamboats. Riverboats can still be seen docked along the riverfront.

Enjoy a city tour with a Visit Cape representative as your guide. Downtown sights include eclectic shops, restaurants, pubs, art galleries and the **Mississippi River Tales Mural** – comprised of 24 outdoor mural panels. The expansive "Missouri Wall of Fame" honors famous Missourians. www.visitcape.com/discover/murals

The pavilion at **Capaha Park** is the perfect setting for a boxed lunch. The green space is Cape Girardeau's oldest park, dating back to 1914, and spans 39 acres – plenty of space to stretch your legs.

Next make your way to the **Crisp Museum**, located on the Southeast Missouri State University campus. The museum highlights the history of southeast Missouri and showcases a variety of art from local to international artists. Create a masterpiece of your own with an art activity. <https://semo.edu/museum/>

Check into the hotel and freshen up before a memorable dinner at a group-friendly restaurant with storyteller and musician extraordinaire **Jerry Ford**. Jerry weaves a tale of life gone by in Cape Girardeau, about 75% of which he says is true ... the other 25%, well, you will just have to speculate. A talented musician, Jerry can help you and your group wine-d (pun intended) down for the evening.

End your day with a candlelight tour and refreshments at **The Glenn House**. This historic home, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1883 for a local merchant and banker. Today it houses a historic museum that depicts what life was like during the Victorian period (specifically 1860-1900). www.glennhouse.org

Overnight in Cape Girardeau.

Day 2

After breakfast, depart Cape Girardeau for Independence, Missouri (340 miles). **En route**, be sure to visit an attraction that interests your group. Options include (in order of proximity to Cape Girardeau): Missouri's National Veterans Memorial and the American Tractor Museum, Perryville; Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park; National Museum of Transportation, St. Louis; Crane's Museum & Shoppes, Williamsburg; Les Bourgeois Vineyards, Rocheport; and Warm Springs Ranch, Boonville.

Arrive in **Independence** mid-afternoon for a tour of the **Midwest Genealogy Center**, a nationally recognized destination for family historians. Visitors have been discovering their own heritage with the complimentary genealogy resources offered at this premier regional facility. www.mymcpl.org/genealogy

Now that you're thinking about your family tree, retrace the paths of pioneers (and possibly your ancestors) with **Pioneer Trails Adventures**. Traverse the city aboard a covered wagon, with historical – and theatrical – commentary by an experienced guide. www.pioneertrailsadventures.com

No need to load the coach; the covered wagon will drop you off at your next destination, the **National Frontier Trails Museum**. The Santa Fe, California and Oregon Trails can all be traced to Independence. The museum features a 17-minute film, interpretive exhibits, covered wagons and artifacts “rescued” from along the trails. Lewis and Clark Models and reproductions of maps, drawings and journal entries are also displayed. www.ci.independence.mo.us/nftm

After a long day, it's time to enjoy a hearty meal as the pioneers would – with a **Chuck Wagon BBQ Dinner**. Grab a plate, circle the campfire and listen as a banjo band plays nearby. Dance and dine to your heart's content before heading to the hotel.

Overnight in Independence.

Day 3

Immerse yourself in the Victorian era this morning with a tour of **Vaile Mansion**. Built in 1881, this ornate 31 room mansion is one of the best examples of Second Empire architecture in the country, boasting colorful ceiling paintings, hand-detailed wood-grained trim, period furnishings and enchanting tales of Victorian life in the heartland. www.vailemansion.org

What often makes a house a home is the décor found inside. During the Victorian period, family members often hung wreaths made from their ancestors' hair as a memorial. Yes, hair. Preserving this fading art form, **Leila's Hair Museum** houses an extensive collection of hair wreaths and jewelry pieces. Some of the locks can even be traced to famous individuals, like Queen Victoria, four presidents and multiple celebrities, such as Marilyn Monroe. www.leilashairmuseum.net

For lunch, head to **The Court House Exchange** for a hearty meal (pub fare) in a casual atmosphere. The restaurant has been serving customers since 1899 and is known for their delicious burgers. www.courthouseexchange.com

Now that you've seen all things hairy, it's time to familiarize yourself with Harry ... Truman, that is. The perfect place to start is the **Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum**, which recently underwent a \$33 million renovation. The library is dedicated to preserving the history of our nation's 33rd President, from his humble beginnings as a farmer's son to leading the U.S. during the final months of World War II. President Truman also made advances to the civil rights movement, ending segregation in the armed services in 1948. The site is also the final resting place of President Truman and his wife, Bess. www.trumanlibrary.gov

During Truman's presidency, he often returned to their family home – called the “Summer White House” – during holidays. A tour of the **Truman Home** offers a glimpse of personal belongings and the modest living of the “people's president.” The home is operated by the National Park Service and is a National Historic Site. www.nps.gov/hstr/the-truman-home.htm

Explore antique stores, boutiques and quaint shops along **Historic Independence Square**. Be sure to stop at **Clinton's Soda Fountain**. The building once housed a pharmacy and soda fountain where Harry Truman worked during his youth. Clinton's serves up soda phosphates, malts and even Harry's Favorite – a butterscotch sundae with chocolate ice cream. <https://visitindependence.com/shopping/independence-square>

Savor American modern cuisine at **Vivilore**, located in the historic Englewood Art District. Locally sourced ingredients create the base for an unforgettable meal. The restaurant also houses an art gallery and gift shop, which sells local art, antiques, upscale home décor and jewelry. www.vivilore.com

Overnight in Independence.

Note: Independence has various cultural festivals throughout the year. Plan your visit during the Samoan Island Friday Festival, Independence Cultural Heritage Festival or SantaCaliGon Days Festival to partake in the fun.

Day 4

Grab a bite to eat before departing Independence for Branson (215 miles). **En route**, you'll find a selection of attractions to break up the drive. Options include (in order of proximity to Independence): YaYa's Alpaca Farm, Garden City; Osceola Cheese Company; Fantastic Caverns, Askinosie Chocolate/Historic C-Street, History Museum on the Square and Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium, Springfield; and Lambert's Café, Ozark.

Don't take too long on the road, because **Branson** awaits! Arrive in the afternoon for your first stop: **Aquarium at the Boardwalk**. A massive octopus sculpture greets you at the door for the beginning of your under-the-sea voyage. Thousands of sea creatures await inside. www.aquariumattheboardwalk.com

As you enter the **Titanic Museum Attraction**, each person is given a boarding pass featuring the name of an original passenger. You can find out more about your passenger as you move throughout the museum before discovering at the end of your visit whether or not that person actually survived the catastrophe. It adds a very personal aspect to what otherwise might seem like just a long-distant event in history.

As you tour the museum, you'll climb through various sections of the ship, many built to actual scale of the original vessel – like the dramatic Grand Staircase. From the engine room to cramped lower-class quarters and then up to more spacious first-class cabins, the museum mixes detailed reproductions with actual artifacts and ephemera related to the ship. A number of interactive exhibits deepen your understanding of that night. Guests have the chance to sit in a full-sized lifeboat like those found on the ship, dip a hand in 28-degree water, try to maintain balance on different slopes of ground that reflect the angle of the ship as it sank and explore the replicated ship's bridge. There is nothing quite like it. www.titanicbranson.com

Reach new heights on the **Branson Ferris Wheel**. Dusk is the perfect time for a ride, to catch spectacular sunset views of the Ozark Mountains and lights along 76 Country Boulevard. The Ferris wheel, which once resided on Chicago's Navy Pier, is decked out with 16,000 LED lights offering a visual show. <https://bransontracks.com/rides/ferris-wheel/>

Entertainment comes with your meal when you opt for a dinner and show. Choose between **Dolly Parton's Stampede**, **Showboat Branson Belle** or the **Hughes Brothers Celebrity Dinner Theatre**.

Overnight in Branson.

Day 5

Start your day at **Dogwood Canyon Nature Park**, a 10,000-acre expanse of rugged unspoiled Ozarks landscape, featuring trout fishing, walking and biking on the canyon floor. Tram tours and old west cattle drives meander through hilltop prairies. Horseback riding is also available. www.dogwoodcanyon.org

Make your way to **Branson Landing** for lunch. The waterfront boardwalk offers a number of restaurants to choose from. After your meal, spend time exploring the specialty shops and be sure to check out the fountain show if you're there at the top of the hour (first show begins at noon). www.bransonlanding.com

It's a short drive to **Historic Downtown Branson** (walkable distance for active groups). Browse locally-owned shops and stop in at **Dick's 5 & 10** for a dose of nostalgia. This mercantile carries over 50,000 items, so you'll find a little bit of everything.

www.explorebranson.com/historic-downtown-branson

Family-owned and internationally awarded **St. James Winery** produces 500,000 gallons of wine per year. Tour their facility and discover your favorite variety with a tasting. www.stjamesbranson.com

Boasting more theater seats than Broadway, Branson's shows offer music from nearly every era and style performed daily by both rising young entertainers and legendary stars. The many choices of music include: pop, country, rock 'n roll, gospel, patriotic, Broadway, western, big band, swing, bluegrass, jazz, classical and more.

Comedians are a Branson mainstay, both as headliners and as specialty acts during some of the zany variety shows.

Select an **evening show** that appeals to your group. Well-known favorites include: Presleys' Country Jubilee, The Duttons, The Haygoods, Clay Cooper, Anthems of Rock and the Amazing Acrobats of Shanghai. In addition, a number of major touring artists can be seen throughout the year. www.explorebranson.com/shows

Overnight in Branson.

Day 6

After breakfast, depart for home with fond memories of Missouri.

