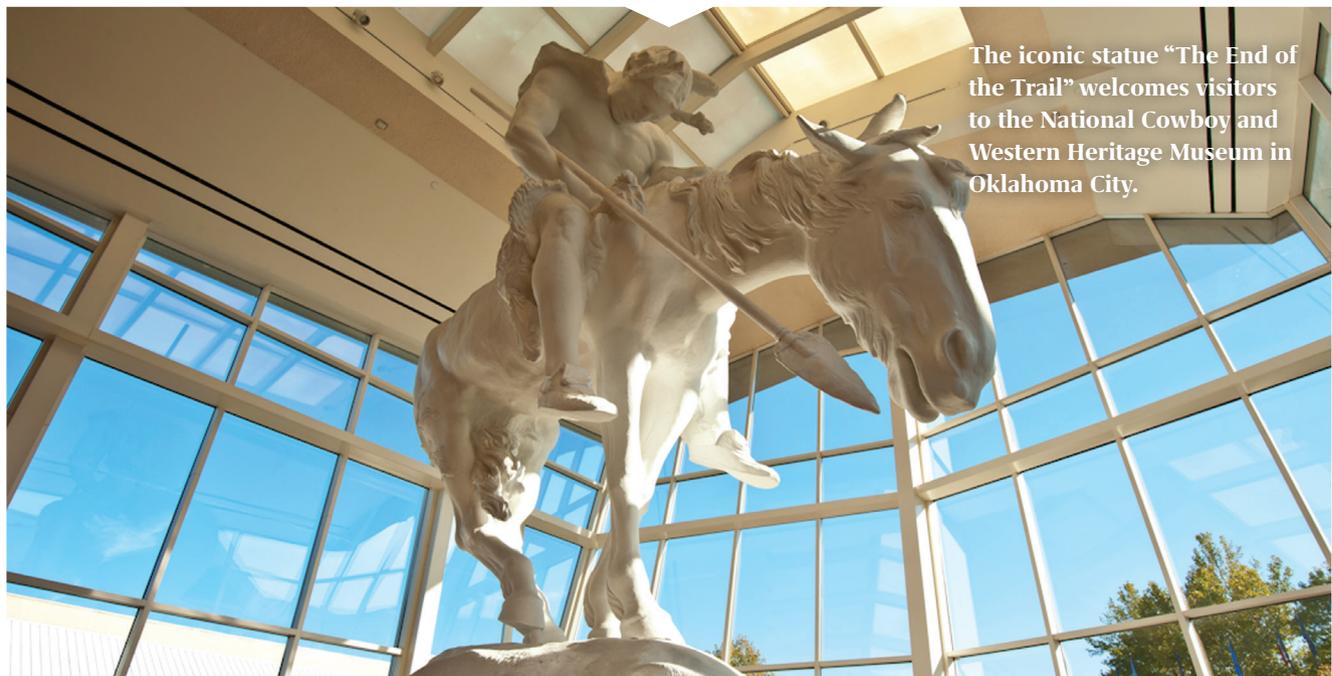


WIDE OPEN SPACES

TRAVELERS WILL SEEK THESE WESTERN HALLMARKS



The iconic statue “The End of the Trail” welcomes visitors to the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City.

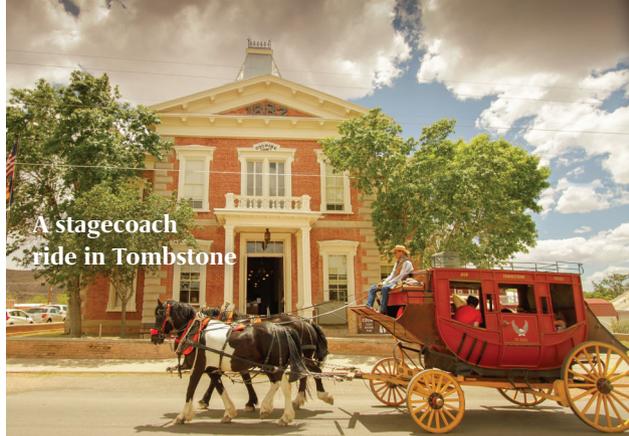
COURTESY NCWHM



BY PENNY MUSCO

You’ve seen the movies and TV shows. Perhaps you’re familiar with the “Yeehaw Agenda,” the current resurgence in cowboy culture personified by singers such as Kacey Musgraves and Lil Nas X. Maybe you think you know plenty about the West.

But the following Western heritage sites will educate you about the real West. So saddle up your group and head ‘em on out to encounter the best of the West.



A stagecoach ride in Tombstone

COURTESY ARIZONA OFFICE OF TOURISM

TOMBSTONE TOMBSTONE, ARIZONA

As the Tombstone Chamber of Commerce puts it, this rough-and-tumble Old West town is “too tough to die.” The good guys and the bad seeds live on, and they invite your group to join them.

The former mining camp’s sites are clustered over three blocks, making for a walkable visit. Tombstone Courthouse State Historic Park recounts the saga of scout and prospector Ed Schieffelin, whose friends warned that if he went to the region, “all he would find out there would be his tombstone,” hence the name bestowed on the settlement he founded.

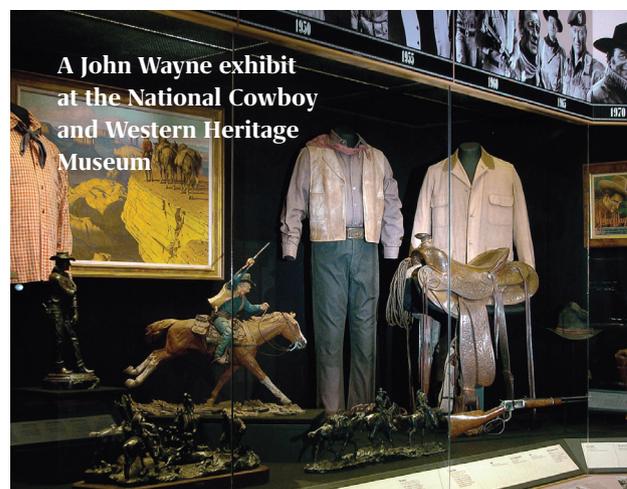
Visitors learn more about the 10,000 or so citizens, not all of them outlaws, who lived in Tombstone during its 1880s heyday. Out back, they see where lawbreakers met their fate at the end of a rope. Their headstones reside at Boothill Cemetery.

At the O.K. Corral, “Doc” Holliday and the Earp boys battle it out with the McLaurys and the Clantons in daily reenactments of their infamous shootout. Travelers can stop to count the bullet holes in the disreputable Bird Cage Theatre, then stick around for a spooky nighttime tour.

Visitors also can hitch a ride to all the hot spots. Tombstone Trolley Tours offers a 30-minute, three-mile narrated excursion, and gunslingers clash three times a day in the company’s Western theme park. A one-hour Ghost and Murder trolley tour winds its way to 13 of the most haunted locales. Groups can also go below ground with a candle-lit walk into an 1880s pit at the Good Enough Silver Mine, which also conducts a six-mile trolley tour above ground to over 55 landmarks. Friday and Saturday nights bring the one-hour Tombstone After Dark tour, capped by a campfire ghost story.

Annual events include Schieffelin Days — usually in April but this year moved to October — which features donkey and burro racing, and October’s Helldorado Days. In-town street gunfights are reenacted on Vigilante Sundays, and during Wyatt Earp Days and Showdown in Tombstone, Memorial and Labor Day weekends, respectively.

TOMBSTONECHAMBER.COM



COURTESY NCWHM

NATIONAL COWBOY AND WESTERN HERITAGE MUSEUM OKLAHOMA CITY

James Earle Fraser’s imposing sculpture “The End of the Trail” is the first thing visitors see upon entering the soaring, sun-lit lobby of the Oklahoma City’s National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. The sculpture depicts an exhausted Native American slumped astride his equally weary horse on the edge of the ocean, reflecting the prediction that someday, the Indians would be pushed into the Pacific.

The museum portrays our country’s westward march from both the pioneer and indigenous perspectives. Galleries detail American cowboy history as well as the West’s “original sport”: the rodeo. Works by masters such as Albert Bierstadt, Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell populate the Art of the American West section. Native American heritage and culture are explored in depth in dual exhibit spaces, and 19th-century firearms get their own section.

Groups can walk the streets of a replica cattle town, adjacent to the newest addition, Liichokoshkomo’ — a Chickasaw phrase for “Let’s Play” — an outdoor intertribal village area with lots of hands-on activities.

One intriguing display is of 1,300 different strands of barbed wire, the invention that transformed the land. From the Texas prairie to Dakota Territory, “everybody had their own design,” said Visitor Services director Shannon Strain, acknowledging the museum’s astounding collection.

You’ll find John Wayne, Roy Rogers, Dale Evans and others in the “Western Performers Gallery,” a study in how the West has been depicted in movies and literature.

Upcoming exhibits extending into 2021 include “Art and Ancestry,” a look into North American prehistoric tribes, and two about Western women — “Blazing a Trail,” on the West’s female suffrage movement, and “Find Her West.” The Chuck Wagon Festival over Memorial Day weekend and December’s Cowboy Christmas Ball are popular yearly events.

NATIONALCOWBOYMUSEUM.ORG



The Alamo at dusk

BY RICHARD NOWITZ

THE ALAMO SAN ANTONIO

Built as Mission San Antonio de Valero in 1718, the compound now known as the Alamo transitioned into a frontier outpost and garrison under Spanish rule. Mexico's Alamo Company took up residence after the country won independence from Spain. The legendary attack of March 6, 1836, occurred during Texas' fight for sovereignty.

Lone Star states used the base to ward off attacks by its southern neighbor and Native Americans. When the Army moved to Fort Sam Houston, the complex was sold off to various entities until it was finally purchased by the state in the 1880s.

Entrance to the Alamo Church and the museum at the Long Barrack Exhibition is free, as are the introductory movie and the grounds, site of daily living history encampments. History talks are given four times each day. The Commemoration, every February 23-March 6, remembers

the 1836 battle with interactive experiences, ceremonies and some fee-based events. "There is no better time to visit the Alamo," said CEO Douglass McDonald.

Groups of any size may purchase individual audio tours; groups of five to 20 can book a private tour. Reserve a public guided tour for 20 to 30 people or, if your group numbers 20 to 75 or so, opt for the exclusive after-hours tours available during the peak season of Memorial Day through Labor Day weekends.

THEALAMO.ORG

AUTRY MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN WEST LOS ANGELES

You probably hear Gene Autry, the "Singing Cowboy," warble "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," "Frosty the Snowman" and "Here Comes Santa Claus" every Christmas. What you may not know about the man — who played the straight-shooting hero in dozens of films, had his own television program in the 1950s and at one time owned the Los Angeles Angels baseball team — is that he also collected Western art and memorabilia. In 1988, he brought together objects from his and other Western stars' collections to form the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum in Griffith Park, now known as the Autry Museum of the American West.

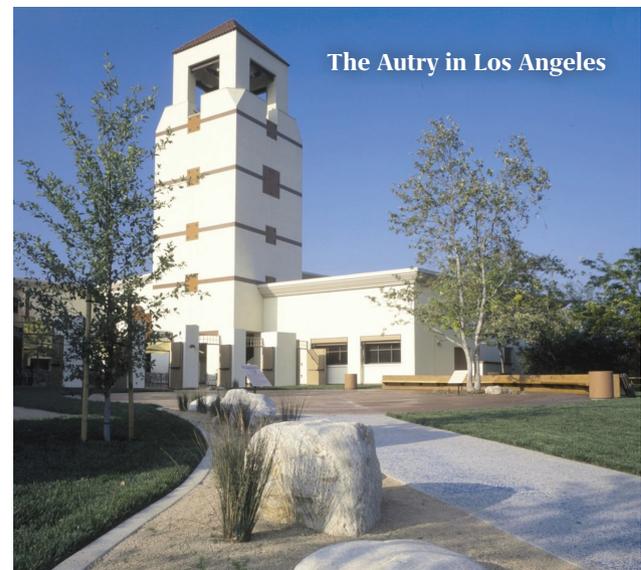
Two galleries focus solely on California, but most of the museum is devoted to the entire Western region. The "Journey Gallery" centers on the people and events that influenced the West in the mid to late 19th century, with colorful clothing, an elaborate stagecoach and highlights of Native American cultures. Annie Oakley's gold-plated gun with pearl grips is on display, and Samuel Colt's game-changing revolver, "the handgun that won the West," gets its own section. View 400 years of Pueblo pottery plus Native archaeological discoveries at the Historic Southwest Museum Mount Washington location, open only on Saturdays but free of charge.

Groups of 10 or more receive reduced entrance fees at

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The Autry in Los Angeles

COURTESY DISCOVER LOS ANGELES

The Pioneer Trails Adventure at the National Frontier Trails Museum



COURTESY PIONEER TRAILS ADVENTURE

the main campus and can choose among one-of-a-kind tours or arrange a curator talk. A great time to visit is in July and August, when Sizzling Summer Nights' al fresco dance parties will have visitors grooving to salsa and Latin fusion beats. November's yearly American Indian Arts Marketplace draws 200 artists from over 40 tribal nations marketing a selection of artworks and jewelry.

THEAURY.ORG

NATIONAL FRONTIER TRAILS MUSEUM
INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

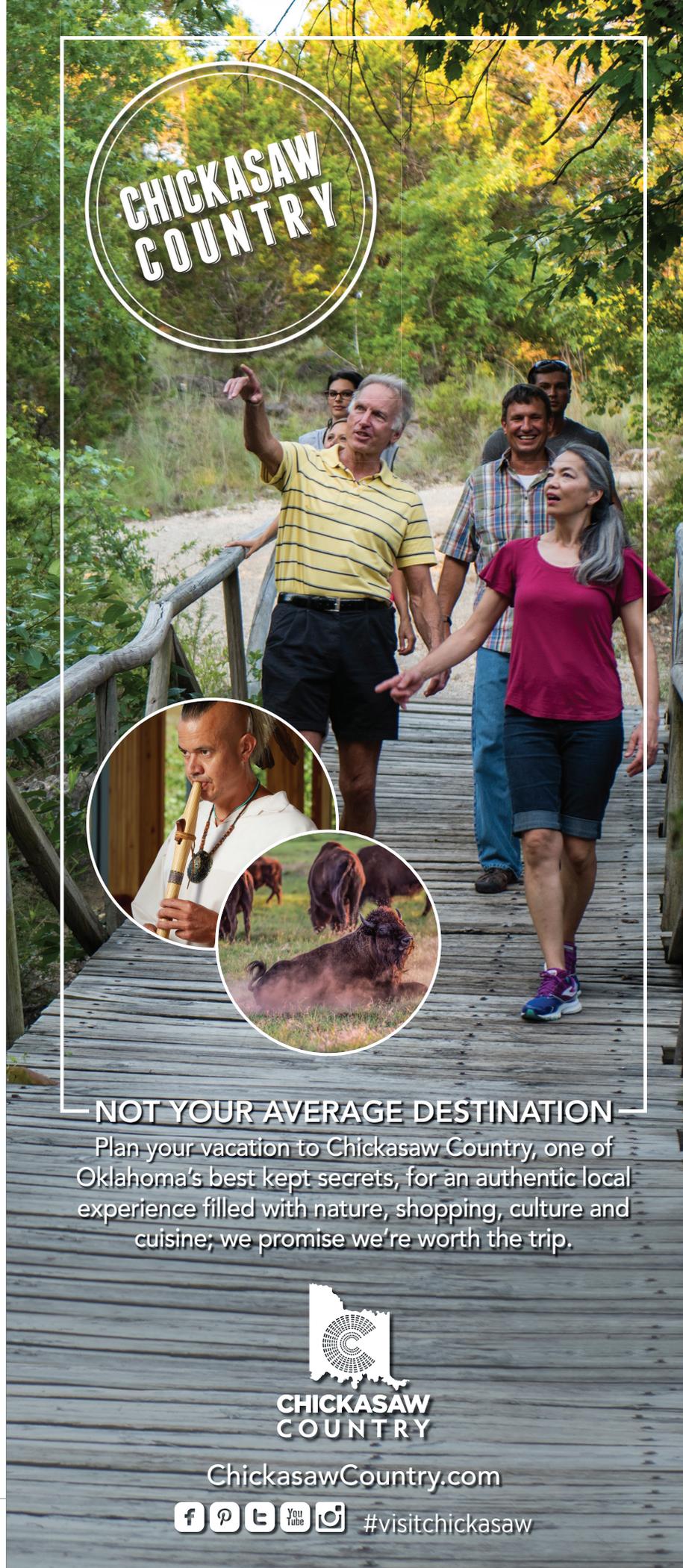
Independence, a 15-minute drive from Kansas City, was the jumping-off point for hundreds of thousands of people on fraught journeys into unknown lands. The museum narrates the pioneers' experiences, especially those who took the Oregon, California and Santa Fe Trails —the latter commemorates its bicentennial in 2021. Wagon ruts, or swales, still in evidence along a quarter-mile pathway from Courthouse Square to the museum, testify to the many coaches that set out.

Visitors begin by watching the film "West," then go on to galleries on the Lewis and Clark expedition, the roles of fur trappers and traders in western expansion, and the cross-country trek of Mormons seeking religious freedom. Passages from diaries, plus era-specific objects, bring the history and stories alive. Also on the grounds is the Chicago and Alton Depot, a two-story train station restored to its 1879 appearance.

The museum offers a packaged admission and covered-wagon tour in conjunction with Pioneer Trails Adventures. The guided excursion travels along streets trod by the likes of Wild Bill Hickok and the notorious James brothers and can take in numerous stops along the way. Among those are the 1859 Jail, which once housed renegades Frank James and William Clark Quantrill and is alleged to be haunted, and the Harry S. Truman National Historic Site, home of our 33rd president and his family. A chuck wagon meal featuring Kansas City barbecue is another option.

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