

Platte River Cranes: A Migration Spectacular with Naturalist Journeys

March 10 – 16, 2024
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Each spring, approximately one million Sandhill Cranes descend upon Nebraska's Platte River. By March, 80% of the world's population crowds a 150-mile stretch of the river, creating a migration spectacle that is simply mind-boggling to witness. This is the largest gathering of cranes anywhere in the world! Here, the cranes rest and feed before they continue on to breeding grounds in Canada, Alaska, and even Siberia.

Although cranes dominate the sky and landscape at this time of year, there are over 20 species of ducks and geese, bright and beautiful in breeding plumage, that can be seen during March. Bald Eagle and American White Pelican are on the move, along with other bird species like the Harris's Sparrow that winter on the plains.

We base this tour out of Lincoln to keep the drive-time down and the airport quiet. It's a lovely city and galleries and restaurants abound. You may even want to come in early to enjoy the atmosphere and several excellent museums at your leisure.

Tour Highlights

- Visit Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie and enjoy the trail system through tallgrass prairie and plentiful feeder birds near the visitor center
- Witness the sights and sounds of Sandhill Cranes as they feed, dance, spar, and soar along the Platte River
- Experience the cranes waking up on their river roost in the morning and returning to it in the evening from spacious and comfortable viewing blinds
- See an array of migrating waterfowl along or near the Platte River
- Experience a morning with Greater Prairie-Chicken
- Opt to visit The Archway, which highlights the migration of people westward and more

Tour Summary

7-Day / 6-Night Platte River Migration Tour

\$2,890 DBL / \$3,490 SGL, from Lincoln

Airport is Lincoln Airport (LNK)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Sun., Mar. 10 Arrival in Lincoln, Nebraska

Arrive in Lincoln, the state capital of Nebraska. Our expert guides are at the airport to welcome you. After getting settled into your room you can take a short walk to enjoy the historic Haymarket District or relax at the hotel prior to dinner. We plan a welcome dinner at a favorite restaurant in the Haymarket area.

Accommodations at Embassy Suites, Lincoln (D)

Mon., Mar. 11 Spring Creek Prairie | Crane Trust

This morning we enjoy breakfast at the hotel, then pack up for our two-hour drive to Kearney. Your guides share their knowledge of the birds and the prairie along the way. Our first stop west of Lincoln is at Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie, where we walk the trails and watch bird activity at the feeders.

Next we enjoy a restaurant lunch en route and then head to the Crane Trust Nature and Visitor Center where we hear about the conservation work they are doing along the Platte River. The group also gets an in-depth introduction to the Sandhill Cranes we see in the coming days.

After we are finished at the Crane Trust, it's on to Kearney to settle into our lodging, unpack, and unwind. Tonight we enjoy dinner as we get to know our guides and travel companions.

Accommodations at the Hampton Inn, Kearney (B,L,D)

Tue., Mar. 12 Sunrise on the Platte River | Crane Behavior

We start our day at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary where we experience our first sunrise with the cranes. The walk to the viewing blind is approximately a quarter of a mile one way. After a couple of hours in the blind, we return to the visitor center to see what birds are at the feeders.

After our visit to Rowe, we return to Kearney for brunch and then have a couple of hours of down time back at the hotel.

In the afternoon we head out to find cranes in the fields to look for the behaviors the group learned about the day before. Tonight we enjoy dinner and a relaxing evening at a delightful local restaurant.

Accommodations at the Hampton Inn, Kearney (Br,D)

Wed., Mar. 13

Sunrise on the Prairie | The Archway Option | Evening with Cranes

This morning we drive north of Kearney to experience sunrise with Greater Prairie-Chickens displaying on their lek. The walk to the viewing blind is approximately 200 yards one way. After an hour or so in a blind, we return to Kearney for brunch.

After brunch, we again have a couple of hours to rest. In the afternoon, we have the option to visit The Archway Monument, followed by an early dinner. After dinner we travel to the Crane Trust for an evening with the cranes.

Accommodations at the Hampton Inn, Kearney (Br,D)

Thurs., Mar. 14

Harlan County Reservoir | Free Evening or Optional Evening with Cranes

This morning enjoy breakfast at the hotel, with a more leisurely rising time before we head south to Harlan County Reservoir to search for waterfowl and other early migrants. We grab lunch while we're out and about and on our return to Kearney, we stop at a Prairie Dog town located in the Rainwater Basin where we also hope to see Burrowing Owl.

Tonight dinner is at a restaurant that is just a short walk from the hotel. Afterwards you can choose to relax or die-hard crane fans can venture back out at sunset to watch the cranes come back to roost in the river.

Accommodations at the Hampton Inn, Kearney (B,L,D)

Fri., Mar. 15 Sunrise with the Cranes | Celebratory Dinner | Ft. Kearny Bridge

We start our day with a return to Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary to enjoy one more morning with the cranes. There is time after the tour to peruse the gift shop in the visitor center as well as check out what's at the feeders before we head back to Kearney for brunch.

After brunch, we again have a couple of hours to rest. In the afternoon we seek out cranes in the fields to observe their behavior.

We celebrate our great week with an early dinner and then return to the Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail Bridge over the Platte River for one last evening with the cranes.

Accommodations at the Hampton Inn, Kearney (Br,D)

Sat., Mar. 16 Departures

This morning, we return to Lincoln for flights out after noon, arriving at the airport by 10:30 AM. (B)

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$2,890 DBL / \$3,490 SGL, from Lincoln, Nebraska. Cost includes: all accommodations; all meals as stated in the itinerary; group airport transfers; ground transportation; professional guide services; park, preserve, and other activity fees; and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour price does not include: round trip airfare to and from Lincoln, Nebraska, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portage, telephone charges, or alcoholic beverages. Gratuities for your guides and other staff are not included; these are at your discretion, but highly appreciated and recommended.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive in Lincoln no later than 5:00 PM on March 10. Please plan on departures after NOON on March 16.

Photo Credits

Sandhill Cranes on the River, Ed Pembleton (EP); Burrowing Owl, Greg Smith (GS); Red-winged Blackbird, GS; Western Meadowlark, Hugh Simmons Photography; Flying Sandhill Cranes, GS; Cranes at Sunset, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese, Peg Abbott (PA); Wild Turkeys, PA.

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