



Long Weekend Winter on a Silver Platter

Bed and Breakfasts serve up warmth and comfort in the Flint Hills

Most of us spend less time outside in the winter months. Daylight hours are all too brief. It's more difficult to get around with sleet and snow on the roads and ice can linger on the trails for weeks. Sometimes it's down right hard to get motivated to make outdoor plans when the weather is unpredictable.

Bed and Breakfast establishments specialize in pampering and comfort -- a change of scenery is an added bonus. Following are some lesser-known accommodations in the Flint Hills that also offer great ideas for outdoor activities or winter outings. Bundle up their warmth and comfort -- then take it outside!



■ 1878 Historic Sage Inn Bed & Breakfast

Just south of Topeka on the Native Stone Scenic Byway, this former stagecoach station has welcomed wanderers for more than a century. The limestone inn has five guest rooms furnished with antiques, each with a private bath. Lush features like a spa, stone patio, a waterfall fountain, deck, hammock and garden swing tempt visitors to linger in the warmer months, but what's an explorer to do in the winter?

Make a reservation for horseback riding or bundle up for a carriage ride; fitting for the elegant and old-time ambiance of the guesthouse. Sunset or moonlight rides are another option through outfitter, Happy Trails. (www.happytrailrides.com)

Tall Grass and Oak Creek Bison Ranch are both near the Sage Inn. With some notice, your hosts can arrange a mini-tour of the ranch for bison viewing.

Take a stroll through the woods for wildlife watching along Mission

Creek. An old cemetery and stone schoolhouse are also in walking distance. Follow the country road (K-4) west to Echo Cliff Park. Snowshoes or cross county skis might come in handy at the small park where Mission Creek rolls below a bridge of iron to meet Echo Cliff (a sandstone feature about 70-foot high.) Fishing from the bridge and fossil hunting are common past-times at the park. Several miles west at Eskridge, Lake Wabaunsee allows ice skating when conditions are right.

The Native Stone Scenic Byway (K-4) is a favorite for auto tours and cyclists. The Byway was designated for its historic value as well as scenery. Because wood and trees were scarce in the Flint Hills, enterprising settlers used the plentiful stone and rock instead. Homes, walls and fences, bridges and buildings were constructed of native limestone. A delight for photographers, many of these rustic, stone structures still stand today. The Byway travels 48 miles along K-4 and K-99, passing through Dover, Keene and Eskridge to Alma. Plan to take a self-guided, walking

tour of Alma, "City of Native Stone."

Day trips from 1878 Historic Sage Inn

Visit the Konza Prairie Biological Station for outstanding hikes in the Flint Hills. Six miles of trail climb above the Kansas River Valley, or descend to clear-running creeks wandering limestone and flint outcrops (photo page 8.) The old homestead will make a scenic backdrop for stunning red cardinals and wild turkey.

[The Konza preserve is four miles north of I-70 on McDowell Creek Road; visit www.ksu.edu/konza/keep.]

Council Grove, well known for its charm and history on the Santa Fe Trail, offers a self-guided tour featuring historic sites. In fact, the city itself is actually designated as a National Historic Landmark. The Neosho River crossing made the Santa Fe Trail perilous and is today marked with a paved, landscaped and lighted walkway. Stop at the Kaw Mission State Historic Site to learn more about Native American cultures, view Santa Fe Trail exhibits and artifacts or obtain information for your visit.

[From the Inn, follow K-4 west for 20 miles to K-177 and proceed south for 12 miles. See www.kawmission.org.]

MORE INFO: On the National Register of Historic Places, the Sage Inn has also been awarded several industry awards. The rate is \$85 - \$125 per room, per night.

Address: 13553 SW K-4 Highway, Dover, KS 66420

Web: www.historicsageinn.com

Phone: (785) 256-6050

Right: Wind creates a hazy day for hiking on the Southwind Trail at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve.

Below: Spacious dining hall in the bunkhouse (Photo courtesy of Flying W Ranch.)



■ Flying W Ranch and Bunkhouse

Located in the Cottonwood River Valley of Chase County, the Hoy family has raised cattle since arriving in the 1870s. Today, they welcome guests on their 9,000-acre, Flint Hills ranch in an effort to share their ranching heritage and foster an understanding of the prairie. The Flying W Ranch offers an authentic and active cowboy experience to those guests who are interested and willing to participate. Adults share in the daily chores and children are gleeful when asked to feed the dogs, donkeys, chickens, horses and calves. The Flying W Bunkhouse can be reserved for up to 16 persons with 5 bedrooms, two bathrooms and a complete kitchen. Catered meals can be arranged from gourmet to casual

fare; campfire, chuckwagon cooking or picnic lunches are some of the common requests.

In addition to helping with the chores, guests can hike miles of the property, fish the ponds, or arrange horseback riding. The family says, "One can really get a sense of the space when you top a hill on the back of a horse." Trail rides are \$75 per person for a two-hour ride.

Bundle up for a tour in a horse-drawn wagon or hitch a ride in the back of the Prairie Drifter, a 1956 grain truck, to tour miles of remote, historic Flint Hills relics. Make time for a historic walking tour of the ranch, or just enjoy the solitary, sublime beauty that stretches across the horizon in the unspoiled Flint Hills.

Daytrips from the Flying W Bunkhouse

Just fifteen miles away is the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. Through the month of December, the ranch house will be decorated for the holidays using the natural materials available from the period. Imagine the stillness cast over the preserve in winter. The whistling wind or the shriek of a hawk may be the only noise you hear. [Backcountry trails are open to hiking only on the weekends, November through April, 9 AM to 3:30 PM. The 2-mile, Southwind Nature Trail and the historic home are open daily, year-round except major holidays.]

On the outskirts of Cottonwood Falls, Chase State Fishing Lake is one of the prettiest watering holes in Kansas. If the sun is shining, take a bike ride on



Above: View of Marion Reservoir from the Willow Walk Trail. Right: Photo courtesy of Country Dreams Bed & Breakfast; view of sunroom and patio.

the country roads from the ranch to the lake for stellar views of the Flint Hills. Cottonwood Falls' brick-lined square is worthy of a visit. In town, check the Emma Chase Café for live music on the weekends and great food all week.
(www.emmachasecafe.com.)

MORE INFO: The bunkhouse is located in Chase County. The rate is \$55 per person.

Web: www.flinthillsflyingw.com

Phone: 620-274-4357

■ Country Dreams Bed and Breakfast

Aptly named, this dream home in the country offers respite on a private, spring-fed lake with lots of room to roam. A group as big as 16 may be accommodated with 5 bedrooms and as many bathrooms. Their

complimentary, hearty breakfast will warm you up for your outside excursions, and may include waffles and pancakes, bacon and eggs. Evening meals may also be planned with advance notice. (Bring your own alcohol.) A sunroom that overlooks the lake is likely to be your favorite hang-out, but patios and decks will tempt you to venture outside. The small, 19-acre lake is 25-feet deep and is stocked with bass, crappie, bluegill and catfish. No fishing license is required on private property. The owners offer guests two boat docks, a fishing boat with trolling motor, paddle boat and rowboat. An abundance of wildlife thrives on the 480-acre property. Bring your cross-country skis! Special arrangements can be made for hunting (license required.)

Picture perfect country roads will excite the avid road biker or motorcycle enthusiast. Clover Road connects with 240th Road, which follows a watershed at the base of the Flint Hills all the way to Elmdale.

Bird watching is excellent nearby at Marion Reservoir, which has a 500-acre waterfowl refuge on the west side of the lake (closed to hunting.) French Creek Cove is adjacent to the refuge with amenities and can be a great place to put in a boat or kayak for wildlife watching. On the east side of the lake at Cottonwood Point, the 1-mile, Willow Walk Trail traces

the lakeshore before it loops back into open field. The trail is open for bird watching and hiking year-round.

Daytrips from Country Dreams

Less than an hour away in Hesston, Dyck Arboretum of the Plain is the only arboretum in Kansas that makes its focus the native trees, flowers and shrubs of the Great Plains. Still ponds, foot bridges, a walking path and visitor center are scenic even in winter. The Education Center is used for seasonal art exhibits and music programs, so check their calendar for evening activities too. The grounds are open year-round, sunrise to sunset.

[Visitor Center hours are Monday through Friday, 1 to 4 PM. Guided tours may be arranged by calling (620) 327-8127. Non-members; \$2. Travel U.S. 56 west to I-135 south. Web: www.dyckarboretum.org.]

About 30 miles away, Maxwell Wildlife Refuge offers guided tours on Saturday morning for bison and elk viewing from the comfort of a tram (\$8). The hour-long, narrated tour climbs a gravel road overlooking the refuge in the Smoky Hills. While there, you can also hike a gravel road that envelopes McPherson State Fishing Lake. Or, hike the 1.5-mile Gypsum Creek Trail that begins at the end of the lake. The trail serves up views of the clear, sandy creek as it passes through a wooded area over sand hills.

[Travel west on U.S. 56 to Canton. Turn north on K-85, also 27th Avenue.]

MORE INFO: Country Dreams is a member of Kansas Bed & Breakfast Association. Weekend rate: \$75. Address: 2309 Clover Rd., Marion, KS 66861.

Web: www.countrydreamsbedandbreakfast.com

Phone: (800) 570-0540

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