

**FIRST LOOK!** TOP TRAILER TRENDS FOR 2015

# TRAILER LIFE

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MARCH 2015

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## ON THE ROAD AGAIN

**Tour:** Great Smoky Mountains

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**Learn:** Iowa's Amana Colonies

**+ 11 HISTORICAL HOT SPOTS**

# THE AMANA COLONIES

Lush farmland, historic architecture, unique shops and German-American cuisine make these seven captivating villages on the Iowa prairie an adventuresome escape back in time

article by Elisabeth Daniels



**J**ogging down a quiet sidewalk in east-central Iowa, I could see 6-foot-tall rows of corn in the fields ahead, gleaming with golden light as the sun was setting. Streaks of purple and orange filled the sky, and the scent of fresh-mowed grass floated on the evening breeze. In that moment, it was easy to understand why German-speaking Europeans known as the Community of True Inspiration

settled the Amana Colonies in the mid-1800s.

An RV rally brought me, my husband, two dogs and one cat to the Amana Colonies. With a large, well-groomed campground and an on-site events center, it was the perfect place for a rally. Throw in seven charming Old World villages to explore in close proximity, and it's no surprise that more than a million visitors are drawn to this national historic landmark each year.



[Above] After shopping at the Kitchen Sink, relax in the courtyard with a glass of wine from White Cross Cellars. [Right] Everywhere you look in the colonies, pastoral views abound.

### A HISTORY LESSON

The Inspirationists' journey to Iowa began in Germany in 1714 with the advent of a religious movement based on the gift of inspiration. As the movement grew, those who believed in this gift were persecuted for their faith. They fled to the freedom of America in 1843, first forming an enclave in New York and then expanding to Iowa where they could buy farmland at a reasonable price. With fertile soil and the abundance of stone, wood and water, Iowa had everything they needed to build their new community.

Seven villages were established just a mile or two apart in a rich river valley. Together they formed the

Amana Colonies. The Inspirationists believed in communal living, so property and resources were shared. Residents had all of their needs taken care of — housing, education, health care and meals provided at more than 50 communal kitchens. In return, men and women were assigned jobs within the community. Although no one received a wage, income from farming, wool and calico production, clock making and brewing supported the colonies. Top-notch workmanship became an Amana hallmark and remains so today, a testament to the biblical term "amana," interpreted by the colony's founders to mean "remain true."



PHOTO TOP & BOTTOM COURTESY AMANA COLONIES CO.

### Getting There

From Interstate 80, take Exit 225, turning north on Highway 151. Travel 5 miles until you reach the intersection of highways 151 and 6. Turn left on Highway 6 to go to South Amana, West Amana and High Amana. Turn right to go to Homestead, Amana, Middle Amana and East Amana.



## ESCAPE TO ANOTHER TIME

The Great Depression ended the communal way of living, but the houses and other elements of the lifestyle were well preserved — enough so that the Amana Colonies were added to the National Register of Historic Places. The communal kitchens are now restaurants, and high-quality handicrafts are still made in the area. Approximately 1,700 people live in the colonies today, and nearly half the locals are descendants of the original German colonists.

Although they no longer attend 11 religious services a week, men and women still enter the churches through distinct doorways and sit in separate pews. Singing is done a cappella, without musical accompaniment. Each village has its own church in the center of town, but don't look for stained-glass or steeples. There are no elements that identify the buildings as churches.

We learned all this on a guided walking tour of Amana, the largest of the colonies. The tour left from the visitor center, a restored corncrib, and, while waiting for our guide, we browsed through maps, restaurant menus and brochures for area businesses.

The 1-mile stroll, worth every bit of the \$7-per-person charge, took us past buildings dating from the mid- to late-1800s. Many have been converted to commercial spaces, but their exteriors remain intact. The historic clapboard homes are made with rock from area quarries and locally fired brick. Almost all of them have trellises, providing vine support for the grapes used in Amana wines.

## HOME AWAY FROM HOME

The Amana Colonies RV Park and Event Center is easy to access off Interstate 80, 20 miles southwest of Cedar Rapids and 17 miles west of Iowa City. It's just minutes from Amana proper and sits on 60 acres near scenic Lily Lake and the Kolonieweg. All of the 136 full-hookup RV sites are grassy, most have a picnic table, and there's plenty of space between rigs. There's even room enough for large groups.

Pets are welcome, and you're free to walk them wherever you'd like as long as you clean up after them. At night, we'd hear cows mooing in the adjacent fields, and our dogs would stop midstride, ears high, heads cocked, fascinated by the noise coming from the dark shadows.

Because the sites and most of the roads are gravel, it can get dusty. There's no cable, but the free Wi-Fi was pretty good when we were there, especially considering how many campers there were during the week of the rally. As far as other amenities, there's a laundry facility on-site, as well as a dump station, and propane is available.

800-471-7616; [www.amanarvpark.com](http://www.amanarvpark.com)



In the late-1800s, the Amana Colonists built a 7-mile-long canal stretching from the Iowa River near West Amana, through Middle Amana, then through Amana. (Right) One of your first stops in the Amana Colonies should be the Amana Heritage Museum.



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## THE AMANA COLONIES

### PRESENTS FROM THE PAST

Once we knew our way around town, my husband and I visited the Amana Heritage Museum, which is made up of three 19th-century buildings. Don't miss the gardening and wine-making exhibits showcased in the original washhouse/woodshed. After that, you might want to hike or bike along the Millrace, a 7-mile canal that powered the Amana Mill in the 1860s. Or go for a run on the Kolonieweg, or Amana



(Top) Next door to Ackerman Winery, the Heritage Wine, Cheese and Jelly Haus offers more than 30 varieties of domestic and imported cheeses, including *bierkäse*, or beer cheese. (Above middle) Stock up on traditional specialties like farmer-style spaetzle egg noodles, a southern German favorite. (Above) There's corn of every variety in the Amana Colonies, including metal stalks for the garden.

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Colonies Recreation Trail, a scenic, paved 3 miles that's commonly known as "colony way."

If you prefer shopping, there are more than 60 one-of-a-kind boutiques in the colonies. Pop in to the Amana Furniture and Clock Shop for handmade tables, chairs and grandfather clocks. The Amana General Store features a year-round Christmas room, along with gift baskets, books about Amana and Milkhouse Creamery candles. We especially enjoyed Kitchen Sink, a kitchen-accessory store. They're known for their huge selection of cookie cutters, supposedly the largest selection anywhere.

### EAT AND DRINK LIKE A LOCAL

After being on our feet for a good part of the day, we stopped in at Ackerman Winery for some refreshment. We really liked the black-raspberry wine, but there are also dandelion blossom, mango, cranberry and other exotic fruit wines — even rhubarb, which is claimed to be an Amana favorite. Or sample the tasty brews at the Millstream Brewing Company, Iowa's oldest brewery. Relax on the deck with a pitcher of beer while noshing on locally made ham, bacon, sausage and cheese that you can pick up at the Amana Meat Shop and Smokehouse.

We kicked off most mornings with lattes at Serena's Coffee Café and fueled our afternoons with wedding-cake ice cream — a buttercream base with chunks of vanilla wedding cake and thick swirls of raspberry — from the Chocolate Haus. The handcrafted gourmet chocolates they sell were as blissful as the ice cream.

If you'd rather sit down and be waited on, Amana offers plenty of options, and each one has its specialty. On a Saturday morning, there's nothing better than the Colony Inn's famous family-style breakfast. Come hungry between 7 and 11 a.m. for fried eggs, fruit, Amana sausage, bacon, fried potatoes, English muffins with homemade jam and, best of all, plate-sized German pancakes,

paper thin and supremely crispy. If you're still hungry, feel free to ask for seconds without worrying about the tab — refills are included. For lunch, we enjoyed salads with spaetzle at the Ronneburg. Be sure to request the homemade German dressing, a light and flavorful blend of tomato, oil, vinegar and white zinfandel. After dinner at the Ox Yoke Inn, pick up one of their delicious pies to go.

### LET US ENTERTAIN YOU

Dramas, comedies, musicals and kid-friendly shows — the Old Creamery Theatre has it all, and it's located across from the RV park. Plays are performed seasonally, and it's nice to get up close and personal with the actors in the intimate venue.

There are all kinds of other events going on in the colonies, with something exciting happening nearly

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## THE AMANA COLONIES

every month. Make plans for Maifest in May, Oktoberfest in October or Winterfest in January. Get a jump on the holidays at Prelude to Christmas, taking place each year in early December. Enjoy candlelit streets, Santa, the Tannenbaum Forest and Christmas shopping.

Music fans can spend Sunday afternoons at the Fireside Winery enjoying light appetizers and live entertainment with the Unplugged music series from March to October. Love art? Take a free self-guided tour through the galleries and artist studios in all of the villages on the third Friday of every month from May through August. Are you wild about wine? Don't miss the Vintner's Dinner, a five-course food-and-wine pairing at the Ox Yoke Inn. Enjoy specially prepared items not normally featured on the menu with White Cross Cellars wine. If golf is your game, book a tee time at the Amana Colonies Golf Course.

We truly enjoyed our trip to the Amana Colonies with its spacious campground, historic buildings, excellent restaurants, distinctive shops, enlightening museums and loads of exciting activities. 📞

### TRAVEL INFORMATION

**Amana Colonies Visitors Center**  
800-579-2294  
[www.amanacolony.com](http://www.amanacolony.com)

**Amana Heritage Museum**  
Open daily, April 1 through October 1; open Saturdays only, March, November and December.  
319-622-3567  
[www.amanaheritage.org](http://www.amanaheritage.org)

**Kolonieweg**  
Amana Colonies Recreation Trail  
319-622-3965  
[www.amanacolonytrails.org](http://www.amanacolonytrails.org)

**Old Creamery Theatre**  
319-622-6262  
[www.oldcreamery.com](http://www.oldcreamery.com)

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