

International Conversation Cafe

Lifestyle Topic: The Culture of Kansas



When we talk about the Midwest, we are talking about the 12 states highlighted in the map on the right. Sometimes these states are referred to as the “Heartland,” because it is in the middle of the US. You can see that Kansas is one of those states. Overall, it is known for heavy industry in the cities and large areas of agriculture elsewhere.



One part of the Midwest is called, the Great Plains which starts west of the Mississippi River and extends west to the Rocky Mountains. Sometimes it is called a prairie because the land is flat or rolling, often treeless and covered with grass. For thousands of years, it was home to bison and the Plains. Many of these tribes lived a nomadic life following the bison.

Kansas didn’t really get settled by Europeans until the mid-1850s and most towns were founded in the 1880s. Before this time there were people that explored and opened up Kansas for settlement. For example, Lewis and Clark, two early government explorers, camped in what is now Kansas City in 1804. Zebulon Pike crossed Kansas in 1806 and labeled it as “The Great American Desert.”

Early exploration gave way to trails, routes that people followed to get to destinations that were further west. The Santa Fe Trail, 1821, led to the Southwest. Army forts were established along the way to protect travelers from robbers and Native Americans. Fort Riley is one of the forts.

In the 1870s, towns like Abilene, Dodge City, and Kansas City were destinations for cowboys herding cattle up from Texas to meet the railroad which could bring their cattle to eastern markets. These towns had a reputation for being lawless and wild, especially when cowboys who had been on the trail for months arrived.

Farming eventually replaced the importance of cattle drives after the Civil War. Immigrants from Germany, Sweden, and other parts of Europe found Kansas attractive because of the homesteading act which enabled people to own 160 acres, provided they could cultivate the land and live on it for five years. There was an ethic of hard work, religion, and intolerance of alcohol that helped to mold the culture of the Midwest, along with the ability to endure hardships such as the Great Depression and Dust Bowl. Today Kansas is a mix of farmers, craftspeople, and business owners.

What is the landscape of your region?

What historical event has shaped your city or rural areas?

Famous Facts About Kansas

1. In 1990, Kansas wheat farmers produced enough wheat to make 33 billion loaves of bread, or enough to provide each person on earth with six loaves.
2. Pizza Hut opened its first store in Wichita, Kansas.
3. Kansas ranks second nationally in the average number of tornadoes per year.

4. The phrase, "There's no place like home," is talking about Kansas. It is a quote from the book, *The Wizard of Oz*, by Frank L. Baum.
5. Superman was from Smallville, Kansas which was supposed to be two hundred miles west of Wichita.
6. Kansas is generally thought to be a flyover state by those not in the Midwest. Many people fly over it heading east or west instead of making Kansas a destination.
7. The night sky is full of stars that you can see.
8. One President, Dwight D. Eisenhower and two astronauts, Steve Hawley and Joe Engle are from Kansas.

Tell some famous facts about where you are from.

How to Behave and what to Say in Kansas

1. A tornado warning means that you should take shelter, not go outside and take pictures.
2. "Pop," is soda in Kansas.
3. Weather is a main topic of conversation found in Tweets, Facebook, Instagram, and just everyday conversation.
4. Kansans are incredibly friendly and courteous.
5. *The Fair* is a place where you can go on carnival rides, eat deep fried foods, and watch a rodeo. *The Fair* is not talking about following rules.

Many churches are the result of European immigration in the 1800s.

The Lutheran church came with people from Germany.

The Mennonite church also came with people from Germany.

The Evangelical Covenant Church and the Evangelical Free Church came with people from Sweden.

The Methodist Church came from Great Britain.

What kinds of churches is your region known for?

Foods are the result of European immigration and a farming lifestyle.

Chicken fried steak, which is chicken flattened, fried and served with gravy and mashed potatoes.

Chicken and noodles are served over mashed potatoes.

Barbecue Meats

Bierocks, which is bread filled with cabbage and meat.

Cinnamon rolls

What kinds of food is your region famous for?

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