

## Iowa Ag Tours – Embrace the Tractor

Posted by Ric Garrido

- See more at: <http://boardingarea.com/loyaltytraveler/2014/04/14/iowa-ag-toursembrace-the-tractor/#sthash.QW4kZQac.dpuf>

Iowa was much, and much more, of what I anticipated to see on a four-day, three-night sponsored [Iowa Ag Tour](#). The tour was geared for people working in agriculture with visits to tractor factories, working farms to see farming equipment, public university research facilities to learn about new agricultural innovations and sufficient aesthetic outings to gardens and restaurants built into the tour to offer a bit of Iowa 'city culture' to contrast with the isolated farm culture of the state.

This post is an overview of the Iowa Ag Tour itinerary. I'll work on additional pieces focusing on some of the specific destinations from the tour including a butterfly garden at Iowa State University in Ames, a restaurant in Waterloo with a spray painted ceiling inspired by the Sistine Chapel from a young Bosnian hip-hop dancing artist refugee, the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium in Dubuque and an 'Embrace the Tractor' piece on tractors and interesting people I met who are passionate about historic tractors and tractor culture.

### **Corn, pigs and what else is there in Iowa?**

The reaction I received telling friends and people that I spent four days seeing Iowa reveals little travel envy from most, to a straightforward "That's not a place I ever considered going for vacation!"

This Iowa Ag Tour was not a typical group tour for tourists. The tours are marketed to groups of foreigners visiting the U.S. and Americans interested in learning about large-scale industrial farming practices. Of the four Americans on my tour, two were print journalists and two of us were bloggers. Eight other attendees were foreigners working in the travel industry and travel media with two from Brazil, two from China, one person each from Mexico, Dominican Republic, Malaysia and Czech Republic.

This series of posts on Iowa Ag Tours is not Loyalty Traveler content I expect to be a page views generator. My interest in attending the tour and writing about Iowa is to share some of the experience of being a Californian in America's heartland. Iowa may not be on anyone's bucket list of travel destinations, yet there are some interesting places to see and wonderful people to meet in Iowa, as in most destinations.

Iowa grows 20% of the corn in the USA. Perhaps, more importantly to the tour purpose is to share American manufacturing to farmers worldwide. The yellow and green colors of John Deere tractors were indelibly emblazoned in my mind after three days in Iowa on an Iowa Ag Tour.



*I am embracing the tractor.*

Of particular interest to me with the Iowa Ag Tour were the reconnections I made with my undergraduate studies at University of California Davis where I studied fermentation and food science in the 1980s and worked in a dairy science laboratory for several years before becoming an elementary school teacher.

### **Waiting for spring flowers**

The weather was cold and gray outside for much of the travel time across Iowa with cold winter weather deeply rooted in early spring. The arborists, horticulturalists and farmers we met in Iowa were all patiently waiting for the last snowfall of the year and planting season to begin. Note: Today, April 14, snow fell across much of Iowa in a day mostly still in the 20s and 30s. The Decorah Eagles cam photo later in this post reveals recent snow.



*Round bales in field for cattle feed. Research presented by Iowa State suggests rectangular bales are safer to handle, take less space to store and last longer. Problem is more difficulty in creating rectangular hay bale. Of course, there is a farm machine that will do that task. This is one example of the type of innovation university research in Iowa develops to improve farm productivity.*

### **Iowa Ag Tour route**

Iowa Ag Tour started with group arrival and pickup at Chicago O'Hare (ORD) Airport meet, greet and departure.



*Iowa Ag Tour covered more than 700 miles in 80 hours.*

### **Day 1:**

Chicago O'Hare ORD – Dubuque, Iowa

Dubuque tour, Hotel Julien dinner, Holiday Inn Dubuque overnight.



*Dubuque County Courthouse, Iowa 1891.*

The Holiday Inn Dubuque located downtown was the only opportunity to wander around an Iowa town on my own. The other two nights in Waterloo and Ames were suburban hotels around shopping malls. In Dubuque, I was able to photograph the historic old town on a night walking journey.



*Dubuque, Iowa Masterpiece of the Mississippi*

**Day 2:** Dubuque to Waterloo, Iowa. Toured Port of Dubuque to see a paddle wheel riverboat, but still too early in the year for a cruise on the Mississippi River. Visited the [National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium](#). Lunched in the new riverfront Dubuque Convention Center. Visited Kenny Kass farm with his personal antique tractor collection. He has two warehouses of tractors from the early 20th century. Dinner at Galleria de Paco, Waterloo. Overnight at Country Inns & Suites.



National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium



This logo on an old tractor from [Kenny Kass' antique tractor collection](#) in a farm warehouse near Waterloo, Iowa caught my attention with its reference to 'Flour City' Minneapolis where I toured [Mill City Museum](#) in February.



[Galleria de Paco](#), Waterloo, Iowa

**Day 3:** Waterloo, Iowa visit to John Deere tractor factory, then to Iowa State University to visit [Reiman Gardens](#) and the [Christina Reiman Butterfly House](#). Visits to university research farms and centers around Ames, Iowa. Dinner at Olde Main Brewery, Ames, Iowa. Overnight at Hilton Garden Inn Ames.



[Christina Reiman Butterfly House](#), Iowa State University



[Iowa State BioCentury Research Farm](#) flooded me with memories of my laboratory employment days. This research facility is conducting studies on ways to develop more commercial products from ethanol fuel production.



[Della Viti Wine Bar, Ames](#) is Iowa's first and only self-serve wine bar. Buy and use a debit card to fill your glass at your convenience.

**Day 4:** Ames, Iowa Visit to Cinnamon Ridge Farm and John Deere Pavilion, Moline, IL. Drive back to Chicago.



[Cinnamon Ridge Farms](#) demonstration of John Deere seeder. This is about \$400,000 in farm equipment to complete the task of seeding corn fields. Modern tractors are mostly automated by computer and GPS. The farmer simply sits in the driver's seat and keeps hands off the wheel once tractor is programmed for task.

### **Embrace the Tractor**

There could have been no better way to end the Iowa Ag Tour than seeing a bridal party taking photographs outside the [John Deere Pavilion](#) in Moline, Illinois. When I asked the bride, "Why the John Deere Pavilion?" Her reply was John Deere represents the Quad Cities and her feelings are "Embrace the Tractor".



*Bride outside John Deere Pavilion being photographed with MTV stars Max and Nev of Catfish, the TV Show who happened to be visiting the Pavilion at the same time as our Iowa Ag Tour group.*

### Eye on Iowa

Truly, I enjoyed my days spent traveling around the Hawkeye State in a modern bus outfitted with WiFi, power outlets, microwave, toilet and a group of 14 travelers, about half international visitors and half Americans. There was a lot of driving involved. The comfort of the bus made it an opportunity to work, write and watch [Decorah Eagles cam](#) over miles of road through many square miles of cornfields. All three eaglets in the eyrie (eagle nest) hatched between April 2 and April 7, 2014.

**Decorah Eagles**  
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LIVE

Decorah Eagles cam shows eyrie in snow on April 14, 2014.

Discovering Iowa's bald eaglet hatching season began on the same day as my arrival in Iowa made the cold weather and gray skies more bearable. Eagle webcam in Decorah, Iowa made the eaglet arrivals a global broadcast and the Iowa new births gave our early April tour a momentous boost.

Iowans told us visitors of a harsh winter and the state felt like a place emerging from hard winter weather in early spring.

Farmers had not yet started planting corn in early April. A few more months and the state will be covered in fields of dreams.



*On the old farm equipment. This photo taken at [Kenny Kass' tractor collection barn](#).*

### **Agricultural Tours Gaining Traction**

Agricultural tours are receiving more attention across the USA. At the U.S. Travel Association convention in Chicago, there were also Ag Tours being promoted for Illinois. I learned this is a growing area of tourism in California too. [University of California Agricultural Tourism Directory](#) lists dozens of places to visit for farm tours.

### **[Dig In! Iowa's Ag Innovation Tour](#)**

Thanks and Loyalty Traveler shout out to:

Allyson Walter, [Ames Convention & Visitors Bureau](#) for escorting our tour around Iowa and providing a local's perspective.

[Burlington Trailways](#) for a great bus ride and staff on the tour with Christine Valenca, Iowa tour guide and Randy Kester of Burlington Trailways bus tours. Christine is a native of France who relocated to Iowa two years ago. Randy also organizes baseball park tours if that piques your interest.

**Blogger disclosure:** The Iowa Ag Tour was a complimentary tour organized in conjunction with the U.S. Travel Association's IPW 2014 convention in Chicago. Bus travel, meals and three night's lodging were complimentary.