

# Special Places In America's Heartland

They are sometimes referred to as the “flyover states,” but if your roots are in the Midwest, you know that America’s heartland is home to some very special places. You probably also have fond memories of summer vacations in state parks, on sparkling lakes, and maybe even on farms where the corn was “knee high by the 4th of July.” Here are a few of my personal favorites.

## Wichita, Kansas

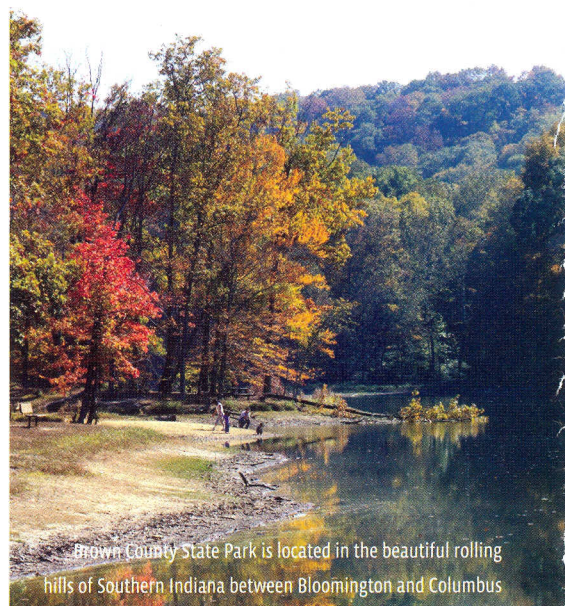
Dorothy would have a hard time believing she was still in Kansas if she could see the Broadway musicals on stage at the Music Theatre of Wichita (MTW). Producing artistic director Wayne Bryan got his start at San Diego’s Old Globe Theatre and performed on Broadway before settling in the Midwest. Now in its 40th season, MTW draws standing-room-only audiences from across Kansas and neighboring states. The secret is Bryan’s Broadway

experience and long-standing connections. Hundreds of successful theatre artists polished their skills and found their careers during summers in Wichita.

Broadway leading ladies Kristin Chenoweth (*Wicked*, *Glee*) and Kelli O’Hara (*South Pacific*, *The Light in the Piazza*) both began their careers at MTW. Matt Bogart (memorable as James Joyce in *Himself and Nora* at The Globe) continues to co-star as one of Broadway’s *Jersey Boys*, but got his Equity card in Wichita. The new crop of Broadway shows includes no fewer than 30 MTW alumni, who are following in their singing-dancing-acting footsteps.

Each show in the current MTW season includes at least one former collegiate alum who has graduated, “made good,” and is returning “home” for the summer.

These include Chris Peluso (*Assassins*, *Mamma Mia*) and Nicholas F. Saverine (*Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables*) as Joe and Max in *Sunset Boulevard*;



Brown County State Park is located in the beautiful rolling hills of Southern Indiana between Bloomington and Columbus

Emily Mechler (hired for the upcoming Broadway revival of *Evita*) as Kira in *Xanadu*; and Lawrence Cummings (*Smokey Joe’s Cafe*) and Justin Robertson (*Forever Plaid*) as Sebastian and Scuttle in Disney’s *The Little Mermaid*. ([www.musictheatreofwichita.org](http://www.musictheatreofwichita.org))

## Brown County, Indiana

Located in the rolling hills of Southern Indiana, an hour south of Indianapolis, Brown County is home to the state’s most popular park and its best-known artist colony. When I was a student at nearby Indiana University, my favorite off-campus outing was a walk in Brown County State Park followed by a meal of fried chicken and biscuits at the Nashville House Restaurant. When I returned to the area last October for a family wedding, ➤

Music Theatre of Wichita produces five Broadway-quality musicals every summer



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAMSHANSEN STOCK PHOTOS, J BRANSON, MIKE ROEMER, AND COURTESY OF THE BROWN COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU



❏ I discovered my palate had outgrown that menu, but I had a deeper appreciation for the beauty of the park. With fall colors at their peak, I relished hiking trails covered in crunchy leaves and admired splashes of red, gold, and orange reflected in Ogle Lake. The little town of Nashville (think Julian) has grown and is now home to dozens of art galleries. ([www.browncountystatepark.com](http://www.browncountystatepark.com))

The park is located midway between Bloomington (home of I.U.) and Columbus, home of Cummins Diesel Engines. We stayed at the Hotel Indigo in Columbus — a pet-friendly hotel where a Bischon named Miles makes it his business to welcome guests.

Thanks to the foresight and generosity of Cummins' founder, Columbus boasts buildings designed by, among others, Eero Saarinen, I. M. Pei, Robert Venturi, Cesar Pelli, and Richard

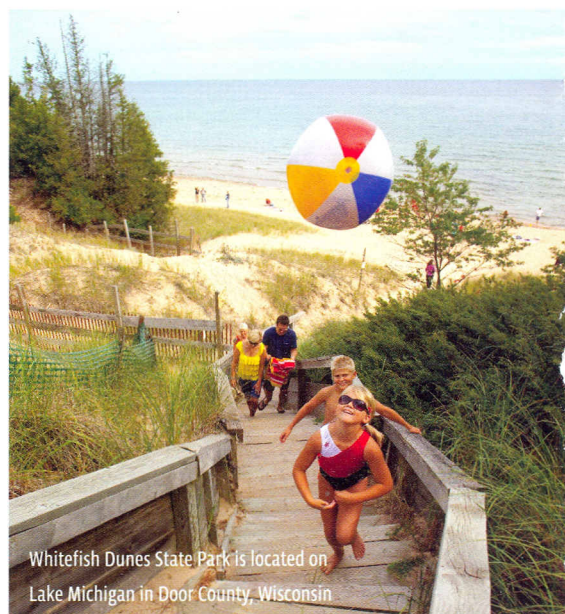


Orchard Country Winery & Market in Door County, Wisconsin, is a good source for local cherries

Meier. The American Institute of Architects ranks this "Athens in the Prairie" sixth in the nation for innovation and design. ([www.columbus.in.us](http://www.columbus.in.us))

### Door County, Wisconsin

With more than 300 miles of coastline on Lake Michigan and Green Bay, Door County is a scenic wonderland and a popular Midwest destination. Here — in one of the last places on earth without billboards, traffic congestion, and fast food — families hike, bike, go birding, and visit historic lighthouses. The best sandy beach is on Whitefish Bay; canoes and hiking boots make it possible to explore Newport State Park Bird Refuge, and the Peninsula Players perform in Fish Creek. The Birch Creek Music Performance Center in Egg Harbor is both a summer music school for young musicians and a venue for popular jazz concerts. ([www.peninsulaplayers.com](http://www.peninsulaplayers.com), [www.birchcreek.org](http://www.birchcreek.org))



Whitefish Dunes State Park is located on Lake Michigan in Door County, Wisconsin

When I'm in Door County — traveling on two-lane highways, buying cherries from farm stands, and walking through fields of Queen Anne's lace — I feel a little like Dorothy when she woke up and found herself safely at home. I am filled with a new and genuine appreciation for America's heartland and its very special places. ELIZABETH HANSEN



Door County visitors who want to explore Lake Michigan choose between sailing, kayaking, and yachting