



Your Insider's Guide to Visiting the Amana Colonies

By June Hershberger

Welcome to our free "Insider's Guide to Visiting the Amana Colonies" where you'll find essential tips on what you absolutely need to know when you plan your next trip to the Colonies.

Hello,

We're Marc and June Hershberger. We've lived in the Amana Colonies since 2014, soaking up the rich history and culture of this area. We have a 15-room country inn B&B in the heart of the Colonies and welcome people from all over the world. We hope to be able to welcome you too, very soon.



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This guide is designed to help you get the most out of your trip to the Amana Colonies, so here's what you'll find inside.

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## 1. Introduction

“Just down the road, but a whole world away”, the seven villages of the historic Amana Colonies are nestled along the picturesque rolling hills of the fertile Iowa River Valley. For over 150 years the Colonies have been a treasure on the Iowa prairie, welcoming visitors to a unique experience.

Marc and I discovered this area anew when we moved back to Iowa in July of 2014 to purchase **Die Heimat Country Inn**, which is the original and premier B&B of the Amana Colonies, running since 1960. Our inn was built in 1856 as a stagecoach stop and then was a communal kitchen for the Amana folks until 1932. When we arrived, it needed a lot of TLC and Marc is a creative artist and hands on expert who can do anything this place needs. He has worked hard and it shows – Die Heimat keeps improving! We are both eager learners and jumped right into learning the history of this area and finding out about everything there is to see and do so that we can share that with you, our guests.

Although our last name, Hershberger, is German, we have no connection with the Amana folks even though we have been warmly welcomed and feel at home in this community. We are from just south of here in the Amish and Mennonite community. Yes, we are Mennonites and are easily able to answer one of the first questions that we get from our guests – **What is the difference between the Amish and the Amana folks?** [CLICK HERE](#) to read our blog to find the answer to that question.

## 2. Where are the Amana Colonies located?

Located just minutes from I-80, (and 25 minutes from the larger cities of Iowa City and Cedar Rapids), visitors are offered the opportunity to step back from today’s busy pace and to relish the comfort of locally crafted food and drink, furniture, art and more. The Amana Colonies offer a unique history and culture found nowhere else in the world. You will experience a rare peace in the Colonies and at our inn.





Here you can truly escape the daily routine and experience quaint villages, meet artists, sample hearty German food, locally crafted beer and wine. Or, you can simply stroll down our quiet streets or walk our outdoor trails, enjoying the peace and tranquility of days gone by. The Colonies have something for everyone and guests come for many different reasons. I'd like to give you an overview of what we love about this area and what there is to do when you visit.

### **3. How did the Amana community begin?**

#### **History in a nutshell . . .**

The Amana folks are a 300-year-old religious group with historical ties to the Lutheran church in Germany. They were called the "Community of True Inspiration" because God's word was spoken to them, not only through the Bible, but through their inspired leaders. Upon immigrating to America, they settled first in Ebenezer, New York in 1842. Twelve years later they moved west to their current home in southeast Iowa in 1855. Within a few years all seven villages were established where the group was free to practice



their religion, be self-sufficient, and live communally.

They were communal for almost 90 years, a feat few other utopian groups of the day attained. This meant that jobs were assigned by the church elders, family groups ate in communal kitchens and everyone shared with each other and had all their needs met. There is an



excellent museum in the village of Amana where a video speaks of the communal history as well as the "Great Change" in 1932 when the communal system was transformed into two entities: a profit sharing corporation that still manages the 26,000 acres of land purchased and the businesses begun in the 1850s, and the church which still meets for worship on Sunday mornings. There is a living history that is still very much practiced.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read much more about the history of the Amana Colonies.

Today the Amana Colonies are on the National Register of Historic Places. The area depends on tourists who come to learn about and experience the story they want to share, which includes a rare opportunity to relax and rejuvenate.



## 4. The Many Festivals of the Amana Colonies . . .

Locals love to invite visitors to share in their heritage, their German festivals, foods and customs. **Oktoberfest**, celebrated the first weekend in October, is by far the largest festival and the most established Oktoberfest celebration in Iowa. The beer flows freely, German polka bands can be heard along the street and in the large festival tent. Men and women dress in their traditional German lederhosen and dirndls, as they ride the floats on the parade Saturday morning. If you don't like crowds this would be a weekend to avoid - from the time the keg is tapped on Friday afternoon to the last band playing on Sunday afternoon, there are as many as 30,000 people filling up the streets of our little village of Amana! Oh, and be sure to book your room a year in advance if you want to stay in the Colonies!



[CLICK HERE](#) to read more about the wonderful Amana festivals . There's Maifest, Wurst Fest, Prelude to Christmas and more.



## 5. What other activities can I find in the area?



Although the Colonies are always bathed in flowers of summer, **Colonies in Bloom** features select private flower gardens that are open to the public. Since garden displays change through the summer, as various flowers reach their peak at different times, Colonies in Bloom is held the last weekend of June and also the last weekend of

July. Maps are provided by the Visitors' Center that indicate the participating homes. A German flag in the front lawn indicates there is more beauty out back



that you are invited to view. You'll want to make sure to visit the couple just down the street from us, who have a peaceful water feature and extensive gardens with benches to sit and enjoy the babbling brook and green shade.



**Throwback/Model A Day**, in mid-August, brings 80-100 Ford Model A's and their owners to Amana where they line up along the street and admire each other's vintage cars and invite visitors to admire them as well. We often have a parking lot full of Model A's here at Die Heimat that

weekend, which we always find quite fun. There are special activities and food to take you back in time.



Each Labor Day weekend in early September, **Fresh Paint; a Plein Air Event** is hosted in Amana. The outdoor art event attracts over 50 artists whose weekend's work is displayed at the Sunday evening reception and show. It's fun to see the many artists creating beautiful works of art throughout the colonies that

weekend. The public is invited to the Sunday evening event where the artwork is available for purchase.

## 6. Hungry? Where to Dine in the Colonies . . .



There are four large restaurants in Amana, The **Ox Yoke Inn**, the **Ronneburg**, the **Millstream Brau Haus**, and the **Indigo Room**. These are all delicious! Which one I recommend depends on what you are in the mood for when you ask me for my favorite. The **Ox**



**Yoke Inn** and the **Ronneburg** feature family-style traditional German foods like brats, smoked pork chops, sauerbraten, schnitzels as well as fried chicken, fish, salads, sandwiches, and scrumptious desserts. Family- style service grew out of the communal kitchen days when the Amana folks sat down and ate three family-style meals together every day. Later, although the communal kitchen tradition stopped, visitors wanted to experience a form of it, and you will too, at these restaurants. Fortunately, you can also order a single entrée off the menu, because really who can eat all that food that just keeps coming and coming?! The **Millstream Brau Haus** features a pub style menu with local Millstreams brews on tap. The **Indigo Room** is the restaurant in the new Millwright Hotel. It serves a more upscale menu of "Amana-cana" food. The **Electric Thread** is the whiskey bar at the Millwright Hotel.

[CLICK HERE](#) for a list of Amana restaurants with their contact information.

## 7. And Where To Enjoy A Drink . . .

The Amana folks have a long history of being brewers and vintners. As you drive by the historic sandstone, brick, or cedar wood houses you will see wooden trellises lining the side of the house with grapes growing up the side. The grapes are used for making jams and jellies and also wine. The story is that in communal days each person had a punch card designating how much wine they could receive each year; men got 20 gallons and women 12 gallons. Additionally, most folks made their own wines at home. Amana wines are



sweet and fruity, but there are some newer wineries that feature more traditional German wines for a wider range of tastes.





There are multiple wineries in the village of Amana, including White Cross Cellars, Village Winery, Ackerman Winery, Prosit, and Fireside Winery in the Village. They all offer free tasting and stock other goodies including cheeses, wine accessories, jams, food mixes

I assure you,  
award-winning  
personal



and specialty items.  
there is an  
wine for every  
preference!

The **Millstream Brewery** is Iowa's oldest micro-brewery and has been around since the mid-1980s. They have a beer garden and deck seating and live music on the weekends. They don't serve meals, but they are right next to the Millstream Brau Haus.



[CLICK HERE](#) to read more about Amana Wines and Beers.

## 8. How many Villages make up the Amana Colonies?

**Actually, There Are Seven Villages . . .**



So far, I've mostly talked about what is in the largest village named **Amana**, but there are actually seven villages in all. The whole area has a population of around 1800, so we are talking about small villages. Amana is the main one and people often refer to it as Main Amana. All the restaurants are located there, as well as the **Woolen Mill, Furniture Store and Clock Shop, General Store, Meat Shop and Smokehouse** (all owned by the Amana Society and running since the 1850s) [CLICK HERE](#) to find out more about these shops.

There are also many newer and privately owned stores like **Catiri's Art Oasis, The Noble Stone, Creative Colony** featuring Iowa artisans, **Midwest Leather Co., Yana's Clothing Boutique, Clothes Encounter, Gallery on Main, Village Shop and Fudge Factory, Chocolate Haus**, a bakery, nine antique shops, **Heritage Designs** quilt shop, and other specialty shops.

Before you get stuck in Amana, make sure you travel "the 17-mile loop" through the other villages and see what they have to offer . . .

[CLICK HERE](#) to learn about the many gems the smaller villages have to offer. You won't want to miss traveling to all of them!

## 9. Love the Outdoors?

One of my most favorite things about this area is the outdoors—both the scenery and the activities. The **Homestead Nature Trail** is a 3-mile

loop in the woods that overlooks the Iowa River that displays a different view each season of the year. I've walked it in the spring and summer as well as through the snow, in winter. Each time, it's beautiful and refreshing.

**The Lily Lake** is most beautiful when it blooms with yellow lotus lilies in late July and early August. There is a walking trail



around the lake that takes me about 45-50 minutes and follows the Millrace for part of it. I love doing this all year long as each season is unique and special to me whenever I walk the trail.

There is a **bike trail** that connects **Amana** with **Middle Amana**, with plans for



more trails connecting the Colonies with the towns around us. Recently **Amana** marked a gravel bike trail, which is a popular sport in these parts. Each summer we have **B.R.I.C** (Bike Ride Iowa County), a 36 miles ride between towns throughout the county.

I'm not a golfer, but you may be, so I must tell you about the beautiful, rolling golf course just north of **Middle Amana** that I've heard is quite a challenge AND has to be one of the prettiest places to play.



Like to camp? There's even the **Amana RV Park** for those of you who like to camp.

## 10. The Fine Arts: Our Theatre . . .





## **The Old Creamery Theatre**

**closed during covid and will not be re-opening.** The Amana Society has re-named the building, given it a face-lift and hopes to offer occasional shows and other events in this venue. The name is now the **Amana Performing Arts Center.** Scheduling for use of the building is done through the Amana RV Park, just across the road.

Maybe you are an artist and want to attend some of the many classes offered through our **Arts Guild.** [CLICK HERE](#) to see the current list of offerings.

## **11. Planning a Special Event?**

**Amana Colonies** is home to multiple event centers and wedding venues. It's the ideal destination for weddings, receptions, family reunions, car clubs and niche groups wanting a place to gather in an area where there are many things to see, many things to do, and many things to learn about.



**We no longer manage the Next Door**

**Event Center right beside our inn.** [The Amana Heritage Society is re-purposing it into a museum.] **However, the Homestead Welfare Club, just down the street has a large meeting room, full kitchen and large yard that can be rented for your gatherings when you stay with us at Die Heimat. The number to call for more information is 319-622-3620.**

## **12. Planning Your Trip Here? . . .**

There are many reasons to visit the **Amana Colonies** and there is something for everyone. You can easily spend two full days exploring the colonies and even more



if you take in everything at a deeper level totally immersing yourself in the history and culture.

We are only 25 minutes from **Iowa City**, home of the **University of Iowa** and the **Hawkeye** sports teams and the **University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics**. Just beyond **Iowa City** is the **Herbert Hoover Presidential Birthplace and Library**.

**Cedar Rapids**, one of Iowa's largest cities, is 25 minutes the other direction.

Besides a wonderful **art museum**, there is the **Czech & Slovak Museum, African American Museum**, and **Brucemore Mansion**.

**Kalona**, the Amish community, 35 minutes south of us makes a nice day trip from here. We often get asked the difference between the Amana people and the Amish. They are completely different groups but often get confused. You can read about the differences in the two communities when you [CLICK HERE](#).



### **13. And In Conclusion . . .**

The Amana Colonies are "just down the road, but a whole world away". We are almost equidistant from the major Midwestern cities of Omaha, Nebraska; Kansas City, Missouri; Chicago, Illinois; St. Louis, Missouri and Minneapolis, Minnesota which makes us a great 2-3 day destination and a perfect meeting place for family and friends.

Here at **Die Heimat Country Inn**, Marc and I warmly welcome you. Our simple, yet beautiful inn has 15 rooms to choose from and we serve you a full hot breakfast each morning as well as share the history and charm of this community.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read about the unique history of our inn.

Oh yes, Die Heimat Country Inn is listed in the book "1,000 Places to See Before you Die". Read more about that special distinction when you [CLICK HERE](#).



I hope you've enjoyed reading our free Insider's Guide to the Amana Colonies and that we've inspired you to come visit soon. Please do take a look at our website – [www.dieheimat.com](http://www.dieheimat.com). When you visit we always have a current list of what is going on during your stay; many restaurants have live music on weekends and other events pop up now and then that we share with you.

We are looking forward to welcoming you to our inn in the Amana Colonies and of course, if you have any questions, we'd love to hear from you. ☺



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