Follow the Mississippi River between Iowa’s southern and northern borders on the Iowa portion of the Great River Road National Scenic Byway. You will find world-class vistas, charming river towns, magnificent limestone bluffs, and so much more. Part of a 3,000-milelong network of federal, state, and county roads, the Great River Road stretches the length of the Mississippi River from Lake Itasca in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. The views of the river are ever changing along the 328-mile route in Iowa. You may be looking down from the bluff at a panoramic scene or be right on the riverfront where you can dip your toes in the water. One constant as you travel this world-renowned route, is the stories you’ll hear of the Mighty Mississippi and the nation it helped build.
**NATURAL BEAUTY**

The Mississippi River, which defines this byway, is the ribbon of life for people, plants, and animals that call the river home. As you travel the Great River Road you are also following the Mississippi Flyway, a major corridor for migratory birds. Two national wildlife refuges on the Mississippi River in Iowa offer safe resting and feeding habitat to ducks, geese, and other birds making their way to Canada, Mexico, and beyond. The refuges and other public lands offer wildlife viewing, as well as opportunities to hunt, fish, paddle, and more. If you like your outdoor adventures a little less on the wild side, many towns have transformed their riverfronts into parks with extensive bicycling and walking trails.

**FOLLOWING HISTORY**

It’s hard to escape history on the Great River Road because people have inhabited the Mississippi River valley for thousands of years. You’ll find evidence of prehistoric Native Americans at Effigy Mounds National Monument in northeast Iowa and Toolesboro Indian Mounds about 7 miles east of Wapello. You’ll also be following in the footsteps of the first Europeans to visit Iowa, French explorers Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet. Later, immigrants from Germany, Ireland, France, and Scandinavia settled into the beautiful spaces along the byway. Sixteen national interpretive centers and countless museums along the byway retell the histories of the people who have lived here.

**MOVING ON THE RIVER**

The river has also changed over the years as people have tried to tame it, mainly for transportation. A stop at one of the 11 lock and dam systems is worth your time. Some offer tours and at others you may happen to see barges carrying their loads of corn or coal. Learn more about transportation at one of the riverboat museums in Dubuque and Keokuk. Today, you are as likely to see recreational boats as working vessels. You may spot canoes, kayaks, sailboats, fishing boats, and jet skis on the water. If you’ve got a hankering to take a ride yourself, you’ll find a variety of options up and down the river, ranging from pontoon ecotours to a dinner cruise on a replica steamship.

**CHARMING RIVER TOWNS**

The tug of the river also affects businesses you’ll find along the byway. Bed and breakfasts, hotels, and guest cabins are often situated with a view of the water. Restaurants feature catfish and offer outdoor decks for warm weather dining. Local artists are inspired by the natural beauty. You can visit galleries and studios along the way to purchase works from watercolors and photographs to pottery and jewelry. Whether it’s history, recreation, scenery, art, or even shopping; the river takes center stage on your journey along the Great River Road National Scenic Byway.