



ALL ABOUT  
*Rockford, Illinois*

Real. Original.  
**ROCKFORD**  
ILLINOIS, USA

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

# General Information



**ROCKFORD**

## LOCATION

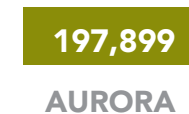
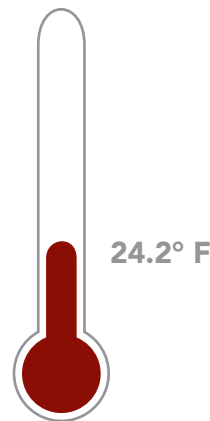
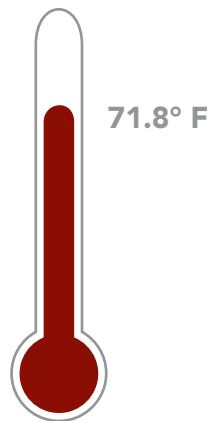
Rockford, Illinois is conveniently located in north-central Illinois at the intersection of **Interstate highways 90 and 39 and US Highway 20**. Downtown Chicago is about 90 minutes east of Rockford, and Chicago's O'Hare International Airport is just an easy 60-minute drive. Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin are each about an hour to the north and northeast respectively.

## POPULATION

Rockford's population is 152,000, making it **Illinois' third-largest city**. Winnebago County's population is approximately 292,000 and includes the towns of Machesney Park, Loves Park, Rockton, Roscoe, South Beloit, Pecatonica, Cherry Valley and Winnebago. The metro area population is more than 350,000.

## CLIMATE

The climate is moderate, with average summers temperatures of 71.8° F and winters of 24.2° F. Average annual precipitation is 35 inches.



# History & Economy



## HISTORY

In 1834, New Englanders settled on both banks of a shallow, rocky stretch of the Rock River, where there was a natural ford. They named their settlement "Midway Village", because it was **halfway between Chicago and Galena** (then a mining boomtown). By 1837, the village had grown and was renamed "Rockford".

## ECONOMY

Rockford has a diversified economic base. The Rockford region is contiguous to the **Chicago Metropolitan Area**. Its location allows for easy access to regional, national and international markets. It has many manufacturing facilities that make everything from **aerospace and automotive components and systems to precision machine tools, chewing gum, and potato chips**. The city is a regional **leader in health care**, with three major health systems and the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford. Urban and rural, some of the USA's most fertile farmland surrounds the city, producing **corn, soybeans, cattle, hogs, chickens, eggs and dairy products**.



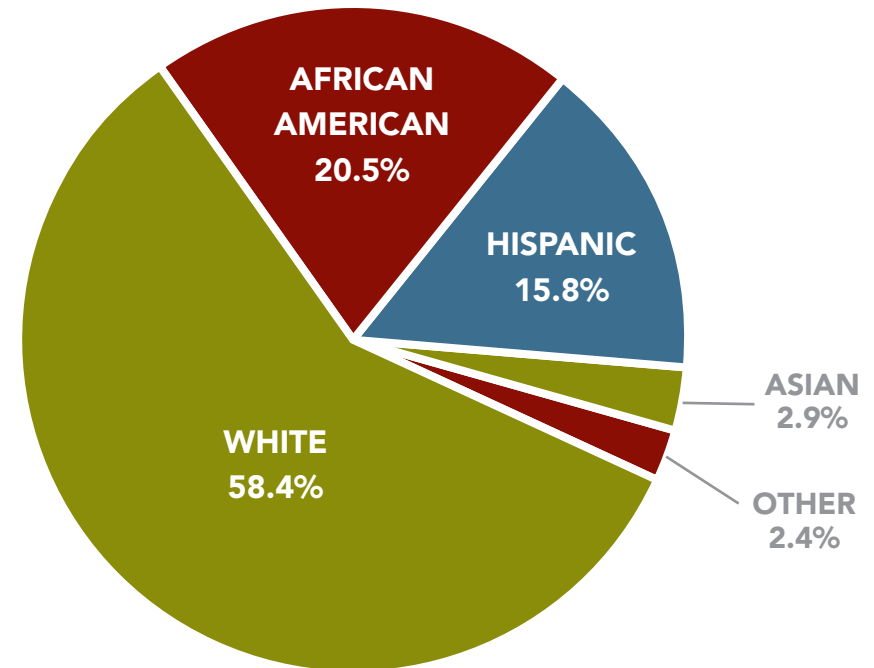
# Ethnicity



Rockford has **one of the highest per-capita concentrations of Swedish-Americans in the USA**. Between 1852 and the early 1900s, thousands of Swedish immigrants settled in Rockford. The Swedes' woodworking skills made Rockford a leading furniture center with more than 90 furniture factories in existence prior to 1950, when they began the transition to high-tech precision metal working. **Italians** came to the area by the thousands between 1878 and 1912, establishing businesses that still bear their names and social clubs that reflect Italy's various regions. **Germans, Irish, Poles and other Eastern Europeans** also immigrated to Rockford in significant numbers. WWI and the construction of Camp Grant (a large army base) saw the first significant migration of **African-Americans** from the South.

Today, Rockford is a vital, multicultural community of people with roots around the globe.

## ROCKFORD ETHNIC MAKEUP



# Why Visit Rockford?



There are countless reasons why people visit Rockford, Illinois. Tens of thousands of **athletes flock to Rockford** during the warm-weather months. Rockford has many terrific facilities for soccer, volleyball and softball.



Big-name entertainment and mega-events at the **Coronado Performing Arts Center** and the **BMO Harris Bank Center** draw audiences from a 100-mile radius.



Shoppers are drawn to Rockford's critical mass of **locally owned and chain retail stores**.



Meeting planners book Rockford because it has urban appeal, but is **more affordable and less chaotic than Chicago** and its metro area. At the same time, Rockford is centrally located and easily accessible, with a CVB that delivers with its high level of professional services.



Families visit Rockford because there are so many **inexpensive indoor and outdoor attractions**, plus affordable family packages at hotels.

# Museums



BURPEE MUSEUM

**Burpee Museum of Natural History** is home to “Jane”, the most complete and best-preserved juvenile Tyrannosaurus Rex in the world. Forbes magazine says the two-story **Discovery Center** is one of the top four children’s museums in America. **The Rockford Art Museum** is the largest art museum in Illinois outside of Chicago. **Midway Village Museum** shows what life was like in 1900, with a 24-building outdoor village. Built by a wealthy industrialist, **Tinker Swiss Cottage** is a rare example of “Victorian Exotic” architecture. The **Historic Auto Attractions Museum** showcases cars of the rich, famous and infamous. The **Erlander Home** Museum preserves the city’s Swedish heritage, the **Laurent House** is Frank Lloyd Wright’s only structure designed and built for an individual with a disability, and the **Ethnic Heritage Museum** honors seven of the area’s ethnic groups.



TINKER SWISS COTTAGE



LAURENT HOUSE

# Shopping & The Arts

## SHOPPING

Shop 'til your heart's content at the popular **Cherryvale Mall** or browse the unique boutiques at **The Shops of Edgebrook**. Rockford also has lots of discount chains, off-price outlets and "big box" stores. Interesting specialty and locally owned shops are scattered throughout the region. **Kegel Motorcycle Company** is the world's oldest Harley-Davidson dealership. And, when it comes to antiques, the area has nearly 50 shops and three big malls.



## ARTS IN ROCKFORD

The ornate 1927 **Coronado Theatre** hosts big-name entertainment and Broadway road shows. **Rockford Art Museum** is the largest in Illinois, outside of Chicago. **Starlight Theatre** has a lively summer season under a star-shaped retractable roof. Rockford also has a symphony, ballet and many galleries and arts festivals.



# Gardens & Outdoor Fun

## CITY OF GARDENS

Once known as the “**Forest City**,” Rockford is now known as the “**City of Gardens**.” In 2005 and 2007, Rockford won the America in Bloom Award, and in 2004, the Roth Journal of Japanese Gardening chose Rockford’s 12-acre **Anderson Japanese Gardens** as the best in North America. **Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden’s** 150 acres shelter rare and unusual trees and shrubs from around the world; the only comparable site is in France! **Sinnissippi Gardens & Lagoon** brighten the banks of the Rock River and the newly opened **Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens** graces our riverfront. There are several annual garden tours and fairs.



## OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

With more than **20,000 acres of parks and forest preserves**, the Rockford Region is a great place to play. **Magic Waters**, one of the Midwest’s largest waterparks, just keeps getting bigger and better. **Rockford Speedway** hosts NASCAR races, while **Blackhawk Farms Raceway** has motorcycle, go-cart and sports car races. Rockford is called “**Illinois’ Holiest City**” because of its many excellent, affordable golf courses. **Rock Cut State Park** is one of Illinois’ largest state parks, with camping, fishing, swimming, hiking and more.





# Popular Events



STROLL ON STATE



ROCKFORD REGATTA

There's always something happening in the Rockford Region, with special events and festivals nearly every weekend. Top annual events include: **PaleoFest**, a dinosaur extravaganza, in February; **Classics & Chrome**, a classic car show, in April; **Head of the Rock Regatta**, a huge national rowing competition, in October; **Screw City Beer Festival**, a craft beer festival in downtown featuring 130 beers, in September; **Stroll on State**, a new holiday event downtown with ice skating, shopping, performances, and a downtown tree lighting. Summer favorites include the weekly **Rockford City Market** in downtown Rockford featuring local growers, artisans and vendors, held on Fridays; **Friday Night Flix** in Davis Park, a free family-friendly movie on the lawn, Fridays at dusk; and **Dinner on the Dock** at Prairie Street Brewhouse, on Thursdays.

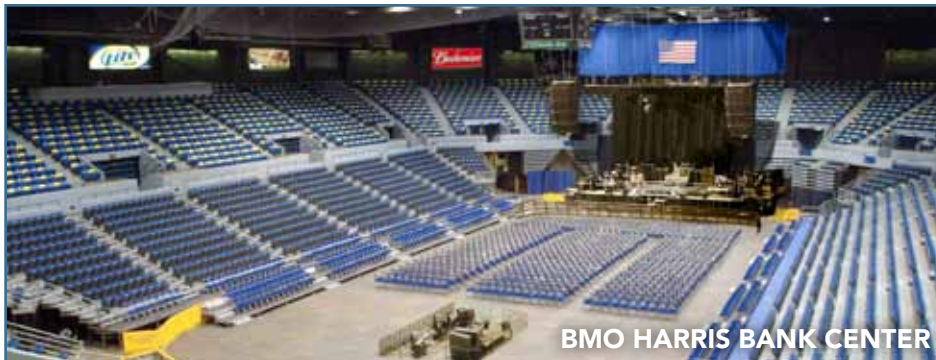


ROCKFORD CITY MARKET

# Meetings & Sports

## CONVENTIONS & MEETINGS

Rockford's **BMO Harris Bank Center** seats 7,500 arena-style. The **Indoor Sports Center** and the **Hononegah Dome** each offer 60,000 square feet of pillar-free space. Several hotels have conference centers: **Cliffbreakers Riverside Resort** (25,000 square feet); **Holiday Inn of Rockford** (meeting space for 600); the **Radisson** (10,000 square feet). Located in the heart of Rockford's hotel campus, **Giovanni's Restaurant & Convention Center** has 15,600 square feet, and partners with hotels for lodging.



BMO HARRIS BANK CENTER



GIOVANNI'S

## SPORTS TOURNAMENTS

Voted **best Midwest City for Sports Venues** by Sports Illustrated Magazine, Rockford hosts amateur sports tournaments throughout the year, primarily soccer, softball, baseball, tennis, golf, wrestling, volleyball, rugby, bowling, chess, waterskiing and rowing. Two outdoor sports complexes, **Sportscore One** and **Sportscore Two**, feature 205 acres of playing fields. The **Indoor Sports Center** and **Hononegah Dome** each have 60,000 square feet for indoor soccer, volleyball, in-line hockey, etc. Rockford is also home to **minor league baseball** and **ice hockey**.



SPORTSCORE TWO

# More About Rockford



## EDUCATION

Rockford has **several institutions of higher learning**, including Rock Valley Community College, Rockford University, Northern Illinois University at Rockford, University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford, EmbryORiddle Aeronautical University, Judson University, St. Anthony College of Nursing, Upper Iowa University and Rockford Career College.

## TRANSPORTATION

Three airlines serve the **Chicago Rockford International Airport**, with flights from Cancun, Denver, Fort Myers, Las Vegas, Orlando, Phoenix, Puerto Vallarta, Punta Cana and Tampa Bay. On the ground, **Coach USA** offers: 17 daily shuttles to and from Chicago's O'Hare Airport, and nine daily shuttles to Chicago's Union Train Station and Chicago's Midway Airport. Rockford is an auto-oriented city; **taxi and city bus service** are available, and **car rental** is available at the airport and several hotels.



## ACCOMMODATIONS

With 30 brand-name hotels, three bed-and-breakfasts and 3,000 rooms, the Rockford Region offers many **affordable lodging options**.

# Famous Rockfordians



RICK NIELSEN

← Rock 'n' Roll superstars **Cheap Trick** started as a garage band in Rockford and original band members Rick Nielsen and Bun E. Carlos still live here.

- Olympic athletes include: skaters **Janet Lynn**, **Kathy Malmberg**, **Sandy Lenz** and **Gordy McKellen**; divers **Ron Merriott** and **Rob Bollinger**; boxer **Kenny Gould**; luger **Deb Genovese**.

- **Chad Knaus**, Jimmie Johnsons' NASCAR crew chief is from Rockford and graduated from Jefferson High School.



DANICA PATRICK

← NASCAR racer **Danica Patrick** is from Rockton and graduated from Hononegah High School.

- Other sports stars include: world heavy weight kickboxing champion **Brad Hefton**, trampolinist **Alexandra Nicholson**, power tumbler **Jill Hollenbeak**, golfer **Mark Taylor**.

- **Admiral George Dufek**, an Antarctic explorer, founded a base on the icy continent in 1958 and named it "Little Rockford."



ROCKFORD PEACHES

← The **Rockford Peaches**, a top-flight women's baseball team formed in 1943 by Chicago Cubs owner Phil Wrigley, started a run that lasted for 12 years. (The team was featured in the movie A League of Their Own starring Tom Hanks, Madonna, Geena Davis and Rosie O'Donnell.)

- **Kevin Uliassi**, the balloonist who set the world record in 2000 for the longest solo flight, launched his balloon from a quarry in Loves Park.

- **Jane Addams**, Nobel Laureate and founder of Chicago's Hull House, was in Rockford College's (now Rockford University) first graduating class.

- **John B. Anderson**, who ran for U.S. President as a third-party candidate, was a multi-term Rockford Congressman.

- Former US Secretary of Labor **Lynn Martin** taught school in Rockford and was a Congresswoman.

- Actor **Aidan Quinn** and his theatrical siblings are Rockford natives.

- **Michelle Williams**, singer and actress once part of the group Destiny's Child, graduated from Auburn High School.

- **Marin Mazzie**, Tony Award winning actress and singer known for her work in musical theater.

- **Jodi Benson**, singer best known for being the voice of Disney's Ariel, the Little Mermaid.

- **Barbara Hale**, an actress who played Perry Mason's secretary Della Street on the long-running TV series, graduated from Rockford High School.

# Helpful Hints



## CAR RENTAL

Generally, car rental rates are lower in Rockford. After Chicago (where you don't need a car) if you plan to drive around the Midwest, take the **O'Hare or Union Station shuttle to Rockford** and rent a car at Avis, Budget, Enterprise, Hertz, National or a small local car rental company.

## INTERNATIONAL PHONE CARDS

May be purchased at most discount stores (such as Target, K-Mart, Wal-Mart) and convenience stores (gasoline stations).

## TIPS & GRATUITIES

American tipping customs are different from those in other countries, and are very subjective. Use these guidelines. Restaurant waiters/waitresses: 15% for good service, 20% for outstanding service. Hotel porters: \$2 per bag. Hotel maids: \$2 per night, more for extra requests. Hotel room service: most hotels automatically include a gratuity and delivery fee; if not, 15%. Taxi drivers: 15%, or for very short rides, round it up to the next dollar or so.

## CREDIT CARDS

The most commonly accepted credit cards in the American Midwest are **MasterCard, Visa, Discover** and **American Express**.

## TO EXCHANGE CURRENCY

1. Exchange currency at your arrival airport, such as Chicago O'Hare or Minneapolis/St. Paul.
2. Use your bankcard, cash card or automated teller card (ATM) to withdraw US dollars from machines in America. You may be charged a fee of approximately US \$1.50-\$2.50 for each transaction, but your bank will automatically give you the most current exchange rate.
3. Use your credit card to pay for rooms, meals and other purchases. Your credit card company will automatically give you the most current exchange rate.
4. Outside major airports, places with "Currency Exchange" signs seldom exchange international currency. (They cash checks, issue money orders, collect utility bills, etc.)





Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

*The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is a private, non-profit organization that champions efforts to promote and further develop the Rockford Region as an overnight visitor destination. RACVB generates positive economic impact for the community through investments in tourism marketing, sales, promotion and advocacy.*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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