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## Touring the Great State of Missouri

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With gas prices teetering on the edge of four dollars a gallon, many Missourians have decided to pack away their suitcases and stay home this summer. But what you may not realize is that a great and exciting vacation could be waiting for you right around the corner. Our state offers a variety of activities designed for children and adults of every ages — from exploring state parks, floating winding rivers, exploring unique caves, visiting beautiful gardens, sampling award-winning wineries, and attending fun fairs and festivals — Missouri has it all.

More than 20 state parks dot the region of the 28<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District. Missouri state parks provide visitors with open spaces and cultural opportunities. Our state parks help preserve Missouri's natural and historical wonders that have both national and international significance. Our state's park system has been ranked as one of the top four state park systems in the country. With more than 200,000 acres available statewide to the public offering homes of famous Missourians, Civil War battlefields, gristmills and covered bridges, deep forests, glades, prairies, blue streams and lakes — you are bound to find something to fit everyone's needs.

Visitors can also enjoy the 45 scenic rivers winding across our state. Several of these river systems run through the 28<sup>th</sup> district, including the Sac, Niangua, and Marais des Cygnes rivers. Each of these river systems are ideal for secluded backcountry camping, great fishing, and breathtaking float trips.

Missouri has more than 5,600 recorded caves, including 20 show caves, which are open to the public for guided tours. Many of these caves can be found in state parks, on state conservation and wildlife refuge areas, and on federal lands such as in the Mark Twain National Forest or the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. According to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, caves play a key role in providing a healthy environment because they serve as habitats for threatened and endangered animal species as well as provide opportunities for studying and gaining a better understanding of the geology of Missouri. Crystal Cave, Fantastic Caverns, and Bridal Cave are natural wonders found near our senate district.

Many consider gardens as plots of land containing multiple types of beautiful, fragrant flowers. However, Missouri is a top agriculture state with a wide variety of agritourism destinations. Several areas in our senate district provide visitors a chance to break away from the hustle and bustle of every day life and visit an area of our state that provides some real rural Missouri hospitality, while at the same time, visitors can learn about the inner workings of farms, award-winning wineries, orchards, and gardens. Agritourism is possible throughout the year — families can choose a Christmas tree in the winter, pick that perfect pumpkin or gather ripe apples in the fall, and visit the many well established farmers' markets in the spring and summer to get the freshest ingredients. The possibilities are endless.

Missouri's fairs and festivals provide family entertainment in every part of the state. These fun-filled events give you a chance to catch up with old friends and well as make new acquaintances. You can also enjoy musical entertainment, motor sports, rodeos, livestock shows, arts and crafts and pageants of all types. Several of Missouri's festivals even have heritage themes that inform visitors of our state's rich cultural background. Perhaps the most attended festival event during the summer months is Missouri's State Fair in Sedalia, which runs Aug. 7-17 this year.

So get out your suitcases. You can have an affordable and memorable vacation this summer. Missouri has many exciting opportunities to offer. Go online to [visitMO.com](http://visitMO.com) and check out money-saving vacation packages, select guides that will help provide in depth information about your upcoming destinations, and click on the trip planner to build your ideal Missouri getaway,

If you have questions or comments about what Missouri vacation destinations have to offer for you and your family, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: [delbertscott@senate.mo.gov](mailto:delbertscott@senate.mo.gov).

*Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.*

