

Kansas City: Crown Center District Walking Tour

Introduction

Hi. Welcome to iziTRAVEL's Historic Kansas City: Crown Center District Walking Tour, presented by ListenUp Audio. We're so glad you'll be joining us today! I'm _____ and I'll be your guide. A few notes before we get started. This tour takes approximately an hour and a half to complete. You can stop at any time and start again at the same spot later. If you'd like, you can put your phone in your pocket and just listen from here. I'll be giving you clear directions and the audio will automatically start playing when you get close to the next point of interest. If a site is closed or your path is blocked, don't worry. Just go around it. The tour will pick up at the next location. And this is important: PLEASE make sure you stay aware of your surroundings at *all* times and obey *all* traffic signals.

(pause)

Welcome to Kansas City's Crown Center District. As one of Kansas City's largest districts, Crown Center has quickly grown to become a home base of sorts for the city, harboring some of its best entertainment, shopping, and cultural experiences. On our tour through its winding streets and pathways, we'll explore some of the district's most veritable landmarks, many of which date back to the early 1900s.

Whenever you're ready to begin, make your way to the corner of St. Paul and W 22nd Street. Our first stop will be Kansas City's famous Freight House building.

Freight House

We begin our tour of Kansas City's Crown Center District with a visit to the Freight House. Built in the late 1880s, it was once a historical railroad building for the city. As trains passed through Kansas City on their nationwide journeys, freight was unloaded and stored here for transport to nearby warehouses. Having fallen into extreme disrepair in the subsequent years, the Freight House was purchased in the mid-1990s by an investment group with an exciting, new vision.

This vision took only a few short years to realize, and soon the Freight House was completely transformed. Today, the Freight House is home to three of Kansas City's top restaurants. Beginning with Lidia's Kansas City, guests are treated to an elegant, celebrity chef-inspired menu of fine, Italian cuisine. If barbeque is more to their liking, nearby Fiorella's Jack Stack Barbecue has exactly what they're looking for. Last but not least, the European Grunauer restaurant offers a taste of Austrian dishes, something of a rarity in the

American Midwest. With so many meals to choose from, it's no wonder that The Freight House remains one of Kansas City's finest dining experiences.

Whenever you're ready to continue, exit the Freight House building via the main entrance back onto W 22nd Street. Turn left and walk along the sidewalk, passing Jack Stack BBQ. You should reach the far corner of its back parking lot. On the far end, you should see a catwalk that crosses over the railroad tracks towards Union Station. Cross the catwalk, and make your way inside.

Union Station

Moving right along with our tour, we find ourselves at Union Station. Built in the early 1900s, Union Station originally began as a station for the Kansas City Terminal Railroad. Accommodating hundreds of thousands of passengers each year, it saw most of its traffic during the first and second World Wars. As such, the station shares a commonality with the nearby Liberty Memorial monument, standing in dedication to the nation's WWI vets, many of whom pass through the station on their way to pay their respects.

Sadly however, the station also shares a legacy with tragedy, as it was the setting for one of the most infamous killings in Kansas City history. Known as the Union Station Massacre, passengers watched in horror as noted mobster Frank Nash was gunned down while under escort from FBI agents and Kansas City police officers. In the shootout that followed, Frank and four other law enforcement officials were ultimately killed. Though an arrest was eventually made, theories persist that the true perpetrators were never truly caught. As such, the mystery and myth surrounding the massacre continue to this day.

What remains perfectly clear, however, is the station's new identity. Fully renovated in the mid-1990s, the new Union Station continues to offer transport to and from Kansas City's biggest tourist attractions. Majestic once more, it features a host of elegant, new amenities. Its 95-ft. ceilings never cease to amaze. Likewise, its three, 3500-pound chandeliers are truly breathtaking. Adding to this, a six-foot wide clock rests comfortably on the station's central arch. If that weren't enough, the station plays equal hosts to some exciting exhibits and shows. From movies, to live theatre and shopping experiences, the new Union Station is the perfect combination of legacy and innovation.

Whenever you're ready to continue, head out from the main entrance to Union Station towards the corner of W Pershing Rd. and Main Street. Cross W Pershing Rd onto the paved walkway, and you should see a large fountain on your right.

Henry Bloch Wollman Fountain

Leaving one innovation behind for another, we arrive now at the Henry Block Wollman Fountain. Named for the founder of the H&R Block tax preparation company, the fountain honors the contributions of the American philanthropist and his impact upon the city. Resting comfortably in an ellipse of black granite, its 232 jets are concentrated neatly into three rings.

These three rings are then controlled by a computer, which in turn changes the display of the water periodically. As it splashes across the smooth surface of the black granite, a mirror image paints a breathtaking photo of the monuments on either side. Completed in the early 2000s, the fountain was also designed as a way to bring Kansas City's plentiful fountains to a whole, new level. Often referred to as "The City of Fountains," Kansas City has a rich legacy in fountains and a deep culture surrounding them. As such, the Henry Bloch Wollman Fountain rivals even some of the greatest fountains of Las Vegas. To date, it has become one of the city's most appreciated landmarks.

Whenever you're ready to continue, head out along the paved walkway towards the National World War I Museum and Memorial. You should see both just over the hill.

National World War I Museum and Memorial

Honoring the soldiers of World War I and their sacrifices, our next stop is none other than the National World War I Museum and Memorial. Originally known as the Liberty Memorial Museum, its doors were officially opened to the public during the mid-1920s; a few short years after the war had ended. To date, the museum has the honor of being named the first in America ever dedicated to the First World War. Since its inception all those years ago, countless renovations have taken place, leading to an exciting collection of WWI artifacts and memorabilia.

Of these exhibits, favorites like its *Main Gallery* paint a vivid portrait of WWI and its global impact. Original documents and artifacts tell the war's story through multiple points of view, with recreated trenches and interactive tables providing equal, historical backdrop. Likewise, the museum's *They Shall Not Pass* exhibit aptly describes two pivotal battles from the beginning of the war, adding a personal touch to its immense and storied history. Totalling more than 75,000 artifacts and growing, the National World War I Museum and Memorial marks one of the largest collections of Great War items ever compiled.

This collection doesn't stop inside however, as the Liberty Memorial on the museum's rooftop serves as its most veritable piece. Dedicated at the museum's inception, it was established due in large part to the "unbridled patriotism" of Kansas City residents. Many had felt that the city owed a significant debt to the war's soldiers and veterans, and the Liberty Memorial Association soon followed. Raising an impressive \$2 million in just two weeks, it didn't take long for the memorial to take shape.

Towering at 265 feet, it rises effortlessly into the Kansas City sky. Its foundation is constructed out of sawed granite, while its top emits a bright, red and orange light each and every night. Seen from a distance, this light gives off the impression of a burning pyre. As one of Kansas City's most historic locations, the National World War 1 Museum and Memorial remains a staple of the city to this day.

Whenever you're ready to continue, make your way further along the walkway to where it meets Kessler Rd. Turn left and continue walking past the baseball diamonds. You should come to a crossing soon after. Cross over Kessler Rd, then continue onwards down the pathway as it winds along towards W 29th Street.

Penn Valley Park

We now take a moment to relax and enjoy the view at beautiful Penn Valley Park. As one of Kansas City's earliest plots of land, the park was conceived from a historical area formally known as the Penn Street Ravine. Heavily forested at the time, it was originally used as a traveling route for pioneers heading west along the Santa Fe Trail. By the 1890s, the ravine also played host to a collection of early houses, much of which quickly became far too dilapidated to be of any real use.

Sensing the land's potential for greater usage, architects and park commissioners put forth new ideas for the land, the result of which is the park you see before you today. Currently spanning 176 acres, it provides a large variety of amenities and recreational activities. Locals routinely flock to its resident skate park and playground, while the tennis courts and picnic shelter provide their own carefree escapes. Likewise, the park holds regular events throughout the year, with performances from the nearby Kansas City Symphony, as well as a host of art shows and sales. Adding to this, the park is home to a few of Kansas City's most beautiful memorials. Many of these act as their own tourist attractions within the park, and we make our way to one of them now.

Continue down the pathway until it meets W 29th Street. Take a right, then follow the pathway to where it meets Broadway Blvd. and W 29th Street. Cross over and take the stairs, continuing to follow the pathway towards the corner of W 30th Street and Penn Valley Dr.. Cross here and turn right. Make your way around the traffic circle continue until Penn Valley Dr. ends at Pennsylvania Ave. Turn right onto Pennsylvania Ave, then continue until you see the large statue on horseback.

The Scout

Standing here at the statue of a man on horseback, we're instantly reminded of Penn Valley Park's pioneer roots. Aptly named The Scout, the statue calls back to a time when Kansas City was quite new, depicting a Sioux Indian on horseback surveying the land. Conceived in the early 1900s, the statue was originally sculpted for the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. After winning the Gold medal for its design, it was transported to Kansas City, where it was initially placed as a temporary exhibit.

As luck would have it, the statue turned out to be much more of a hit in Kansas City than originally anticipated. In the wake of its arrival, citizens were so taken with it that they decided to purchase it outright. \$15,000 was raised, and the transaction was soon completed. Now resting comfortably in Penn Valley Park, the statue continues to peer hard over the Kansas City skyline. It continues to act as an honorary Kansas City mascot to this day.

Whenever you're ready to continue, make your way back down Pennsylvania Ave. to where it meets W 31st St. Cross and continue along W 31st St. You'll see another large fountain on your left.

Firefighter's Fountain

Located at the south end of Penn Valley Park, we come to another of Kansas City's famous fountains. Known officially as the Firefighters Fountain, it stands in memorial to the brave men and women of the city's firefighter units. As a tribute to those who've given their lives in the line of duty, the fountain was a collaborative effort. Citizens and philanthropists alike came together to help in its creation, and it has quickly become a staple of the city in that time.

Cast in bronze and stone, the fountain is crowned by the twin sculptures of firefighters at work. As one kneels to pump water onto unseen flames, another statue points to guide his partner's hand. Surrounded by 48 jets of water, the figures loom over an 80-foot, granite basin. Just north of the fountain, another firefighter stands in reverence, his head bowed and his hat in hand. Behind the bowing sculpture, a curved, stone wall depicts the names of fallen firefighters, its surface adorned with commemorative, bronze plaques. As one of Kansas City's most elegant tributes, the Firefighters Fountain continues to inspire future generations. As an equal symbol of community spirit, it remains one of Kansas City's finest treasures.

Whenever you're ready to continue, continue walking along W 31st Street. Cross over Broadway Blvd., then cross over Penn Valley Dr. and Wyandotte St. Turn left onto Wyandotte St. Continue onward until you see The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City on your right. Our next destination is their Money Museum.

The Money Museum

Having paid our respects to the city's firefighters, we now visit the Money Museum. Located within beautiful Penn Valley Park, the museum is also a part of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. Opened in the spring of 2008, it remains one of the newer attractions of the city's Crown Center District.

Spanning 3,000 square feet, the museum features hands-on exhibits for people of all ages, inviting them to learn more about the Federal Reserve and the economy in general. Tours come in both guided and self-guided form, offering the opportunity to peer into the region's largest cash vault. Likewise, guests are treated to a fun exercise in "designing money," with equal opportunity to test their

strength at lifting a solid, gold bar. Ever educational, the Money Museum provides an interesting history to Kansas City's regional banking system.

Whenever you're ready to continue, exit the bank and follow the small pathway that leads towards the corner of Main St. and Memorial Dr. Cross over, then turn right onto E 27th St. Continue onwards, then turn left onto Grand Blvd. You should pass by a very large parking lot on your right. Cross over Grand Blvd. at the following crossing, then continue onward. You'll pass by Crown Center.

Crown Center

Anchoring the district, we come to the iconic Crown Center shopping complex. First established in the late 1960s, Crown Center is the full realization of founder Joyce Hall's dream to transform Kansas City's southern downtown. As one of the largest redevelopment projects in the city's history, it originally began amidst Hall's disgust at the surrounding area.

In the early days, Crown Center's current home looked very different. Ruttid parking lots lay everywhere, and abandoned warehouses seemed to permeate the atmosphere with a feeling of neglect. Realizing a drastic change was needed, Hall and his brother set forth to construct the now bustling complex. The project has since breathed new life into the city, acting as a catalyst for a drastic change in Kansas City's urban core. Crowned with the famous Hallmark company logo, the complex now plays host to a massive conglomerate of retail, hotel, residential, and entertainment venues. Known locally as a "city within a city," it continues to live up to its reputation, entertaining some 5 million guests per year.

Whenever you're ready to continue, enter Crown Center via the entrance across from Crown Center Square. Our goal here is the Hallmark Visitors Center on the 3rd floor.

Hallmark Visitors Center

If you've ever given a friend or family member a card, chances are that you're familiar with our next destination. Known as the Hallmark Visitors Center, the Center acts as the headquarters for the Hallmark Cards company. As one of America's premiere creative companies, Hallmark was founded in the early 1900s by American businessman Joyce Hall, who conceived the idea after moving to Kansas City with a dream and two shoeboxes full of postcards.

As luck would have it, those shoeboxes became a multimillion-dollar empire, spreading love, humor, and good fortune across the globe. Hallmark cards now span 30 languages and 100 countries worldwide. Here at the Visitors Center, guests are treated to an inside look at the company's roots and more. Exhibitions in some of Hallmark's finest partnerships are on full display. The Center's *Peanuts and Snoopy* exhibit explores the artistry of Peanuts comic artist Charles M. Schulz. Likewise, the Center's "Hallmark Live" exhibit

allows guests to meet the creators behind some of their most beloved products. Adding to this, a display of some of Hallmark's most popular Keepsake Ornaments continues to mesmerize craft enthusiasts to this day. With quality, educational fun for the whole family, the Hallmark Visitors Center remains a staple of any Kansas City tour.

Whenever you're ready to continue, make your way back down to the 1st floor of Crown Center. Our goal here is the Halls Kansas City store located there.

Halls Kansas City

Deeper into our exploration of the Hallmark brand, we come to the iconic Halls Kansas City. Praised for its reputation as a "contemporary, high-shopping experience," this department store division of the Hallmark Cards company has quickly become synonymous with luxury. Having been established just a few short years after its parent division, Halls Kansas City is also one of the city's oldest retail stores. It regularly hosts a large collection of high fashion products, ranging from clothing, to jewelry, and even cosmetics. In fact, many compare its shopping experience to that of other famous brands like Bloomingdale's and Neiman Marcus.

Retail isn't all Halls is known for however, and recent renovations have provided it with some truly fantastic bonuses. Its second floor now boasts an aquarium courtesy of Sea Life Centres. Likewise, the same floor plays host to all the fun and excitement of Legoland Discovery Centre. To this day, Halls Kansas City remains one of the city's most exciting retail adventures.

Whenever you're ready to continue, exit Crown Center back onto Grand Blvd. Continue along Grand Blvd., crossing over E Pershing Rd. Our next destination will be the park on your left.

Washington Square Park

Nearing the end of our tour, we take a moment to visit historic Washington Park. Established in the early 1920s, the park began as an effort by the Patriots and Pioneers Memorial Foundation to find a suitable location for their Washington statue. Several locations were suggested throughout the city, and it was soon decided that the statue had to be placed at the property on the north side of Pershing Road. Deeper into negotiations, it was further agreed upon that the statue had to be facing south at all times.

It was here that the roots for Washington Park began, despite the property having no official name for quite some time. Following the statue's commemoration, the property was often referred to as "Washington Square" or even "Washington Plaza." Ultimately adopting a combination of the ideas, the park was opened to the public in the mid-1920s. Since then, it has served as one of the city's most beautiful recreational spaces, crowned by the statue of George Washington on horseback.

Whenever you're ready to continue, walk to where the park meets the corner of Grand Blvd and E 22nd St. Take the small crossing, then continue along Grand Blvd. Our next destination is the giant, Western Auto Building on your right.

Coca-Cola /Western Auto Building

Wrapping up our tour of Kansas City's Crown Center District, we arrive at one of the city's most iconic landmarks. Built in the early 1900s, the current Western Auto Building was originally designed as an office space for the Coca Cola Company. Its proximity to nearby Union Station made it a perfect location for the business, and the business thrived for several decades. As such, the building has widely been dubbed "The Coca Cola Building" by many of the city's residents. Like all businesses however, changes were needed, and the building was sold to new owners just a few years later.

New ownership usually means new developments, and the Western Auto Building is no exception. Beginning in late 1920s, the Western Auto Supply Company took over the building completely, placing its large sign on the building's rooftop. Their business continued there for the next thirty years, and the building was yet again sold to new owners. Opting to breathe new life into the area, these owners have stayed true to the vision of the building's original architect. With a primary focus on sustainable development and new urbanism, the property has since been developed into luxurious condominiums. Still bearing the large, Western Auto sign atop its roof, the building can easily be spotted from as far away as Interstate 35.

This marks the end of our tour of Kansas City's historic Crown Center District. We hope you've enjoyed yourself, and should you wish to make your way back to where we started, please continue via the following directions: Continue along Grand Blvd. until it meets E 20th Street. Turn left at the corner of E 20th St, then cross over Main St. and Walnut Street. Turn left onto Baltimore Ave., then continue onwards. You'll arrive once again at the main entrance of the Freight House building.