

# Little Sweden: Home of the Wild Dala Horses

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By Dana Sease

The community of Lindsborg, Kan., is known as the home of the nation's only herd of Wild Dala horses. But don't go there expecting to see a vast field of rare, roaming horses.

Dala horses are not real animals. The Wild Dala horses are fiberglass statues that are about four feet tall and can be seen throughout the town. The idea to create the statues came from Chicago, which had statues of cows on Michigan Avenue.

Outside tours of the Wild Dala Horses are available on Saturdays when the weather is nice. According to Ellen Morgan, interim director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Lindsborg, the Dala statues are a popular tourist attraction.

"Some people come to Lindsborg on a mission to find all the Dalas in town and take a picture of each one," Morgan said. "It's a fun thing to do."

There is an unveiling ceremony held for each new Dala horse, and each one has a clever name. For example, one of the artistic Dala horses is called Salvador Dala. Each Wild Dala horse is decorated by one of the many local artists.

"All of the Dalas are done differently, but they're all very colorful. You won't find any that are black or gray," Morgan said.

The Wild Dala horse is an icon of Sweden that was originally carved of wood. The town of Lindsborg – also called Little Sweden, USA– adopted the Dala horse, a symbol of folk craft in Sweden, as a logo that represents identity and welcome. The Dala horse logo can be found on multiple things in Lindsborg, such as stationery, the sides of trucks and police cars.

Visitors to Lindsborg will see more than Wild Dala horses while walking around the town. They will experience a combination of Swedish history and

culture. There are many people of Swedish descent in the community who have honored their Swedish customs and heritage.

In 1869, nearly one hundred Swedish immigrant pioneers settled in Lindsborg, a town nestled in the Smoky Valley region of north central Kansas. The settlers had a love of music, and many of Lindsborg's founders were craftsmen, educators and musicians. A passion for music and art is still prevalent in Lindsborg today.

The community, which now has a population of approximately 3,200 people, is home to many artists. The Swedish influence in Lindsborg is evident in a number of ways – from the shopping and food to the art galleries and festivals.

There are stores and shops in the town that carry Swedish items. Swedish pancakes are a popular dish in Lindsborg, and Swedish pancake mix is easy to find in the grocery stores, as is Swedish coffee.

A number of art galleries and studios are available for visitors to see. The McPherson County Old Mill Museum is another destination in Lindsborg for visitors. It stands on the banks of the Smoky Hill River and preserves the early heritage of the county, with a special emphasis on the period from 1870 to 1910.

The museum is open every day year-round, Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m.- 5 p.m. and Sundays from 1-5 p.m. Admission for adults is \$2, admission for children (ages 6-12) is \$1, and ages 6 and under can tour the museum for free.

Each spring, the museum hosts Millfest, a family event celebrating the history of the mill and the pioneer heritage of the region. Millfest is held the first weekend in May and features guided tours of the mill in operation. Professional millers run the mill without grain, and tours are available for visitors ages 13 and older. Other activities include a traditional arts and crafts fair, musical entertainment and food.

Another festival that is based on Swedish heritage occurs on Midsummers Day, which is always held on the third Saturday in June. It is the annual Swedish-American celebration that welcomes the return of summer.

Midsummers Day includes an art fair, crafts, folk music, folk dancing, and a

smorgasbord of food.

Considered the favorite holiday in Sweden, the Midsummers Day celebration is patterned after the Swedish holiday and opens with a procession of the Lindsborg Swedish Folk Dancers. The daytime portion of the celebration takes place in Swensson Park Street, and the evening activities take place at Heritage Park, located across from the Old Mill Museum.

According to Ellen Morgan, the community of Lindsborg has been described as being more Swedish than Sweden.

"It's small town America with a lot of Swedish emphasis, heritage, shopping and food," Morgan said. "It's a friendly town."