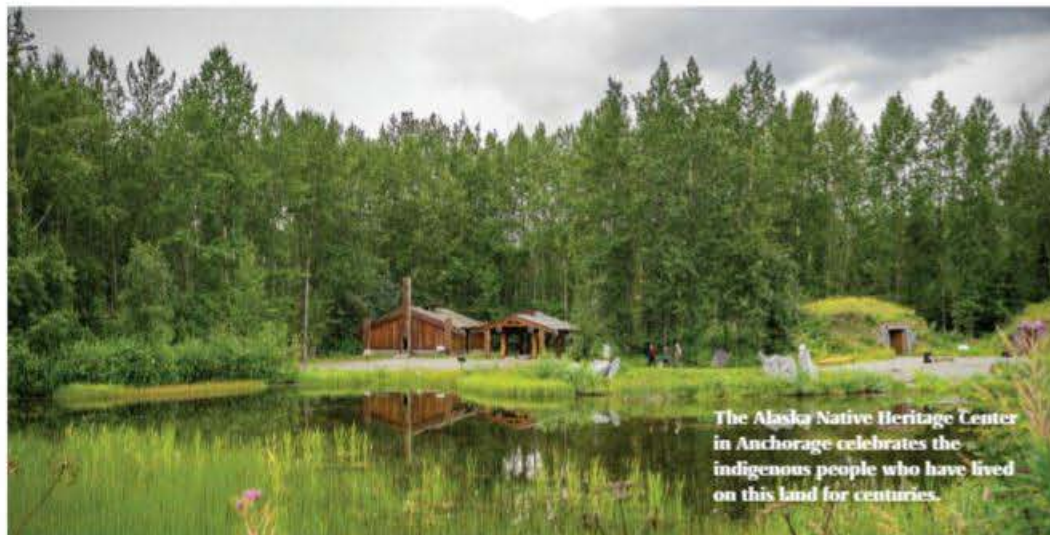




# BEAUTIFUL BEGINNINGS

NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURES OFFER INTERPRETIVE LANDMARKS



The Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage celebrates the indigenous people who have lived on this land for centuries.

BY JUNO KIM, COURTESY ANHC

BY ROBIN ROENKER

**T**he United States is home to a rich and diverse array of Native American tribes and cultures. Exploring their stories offers a chance to learn a rich part of America's story, one that's sometimes glossed over in traditional history books.

A trip to any of the country's thriving Native American Cultural Centers proves that the stories, customs, artwork and traditions of Indigenous Americans aren't just a part of American history; they're a vital, vibrant part of our country's modern cultural fabric. Here are five your group should visit.



Basketry on display at Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum



Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's exterior



A hiking trail outside the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

PHOTOS COURTESY AH-TAH-THI-KI MUSEUM

## AH-TAH-THI-KI MUSEUM CLEWISTON, FLORIDA

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum outside of Clewiston, Florida, from Fort Lauderdale, offers visitors an opportunity to experience the Florida Everglades and the culture of the Seminole Tribe of Florida firsthand.

Situated on the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki — in Seminole, "a place to learn" — Museum features 6,000 square feet of gallery space with more than 180,000 unique artifacts and archival items that speak to the culture and history of the Seminole people.

Permanent exhibits explore tribal history and aspects of earlier life for the Seminole Tribe: early tools and modes of transportation, methods of hunting and gathering foods and how alligator hunting became part of the Seminole's cultural tradition.

Outside, visitors can enjoy a stroll along a one-mile raised boardwalk, which winds through a 60-acre cypress dome. It's not uncommon to see native Everglades wildlife nearby, including birds, alligators and even a black bear. The path leads to a re-created Seminole village, where Seminole artisans demonstrate the craftsmanship behind handmade goods including beaded jewelry and baskets.

"I think the main takeaway that we always want visitors to have is that the Seminole Tribe is still here and that they're thriving," said Kate Macuen, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's director. "They have this truly amazing, deep and rich history and culture."

Guided group tours of the museum and boardwalk, including insights into how the Seminole people have used the native plants and animals of the Everglades to survive and thrive, are available by reservation.

On the first Friday and Saturday of November each year, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum hosts the American Indian Art Celebration, which features artisans from the Seminole Tribe and other Indigenous tribes.

"We focus on dancers and singers, and we do alligator wrestling shows," said Macuen. "It's just a really fun two days to explore and celebrate both Seminole art and culture as well as other tribal and Indigenous cultures throughout the United States."

[AHTAHTHIKI.COM](http://AHTAHTHIKI.COM)

## AKTA LAKOTA MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTER

CHAMBERLAIN, SOUTH DAKOTA

The Akta Lakota Museum and Cultural Center in Chamberlain, South Dakota, helps “conserve and present the historical and contemporary story of the Northern Plains people,” said Dixie Thompson, the museum’s director.

Operated as a public outreach project of St. Joseph’s Indian School, a residential school that serves Native American children in the first through eighth grade, the museum focuses primarily on the Lakota Tribe.

Engaging exhibits feature representative tribal art and cultural artifacts that depict life on the Great Plains from before Euro-American contact through modern times. Highlights include an authentic buffalo hide teepee, children’s decorated clothing, an exhibit of traditional tribal games for children and native tools and implements of daily life.

“Our exhibits illustrate how Native Americans have adapted over the past 200 years to successfully preserve their traditions and cultural heritage through modern art forms and show how they continue to practice their sacred ceremonies today,” Thompson said.

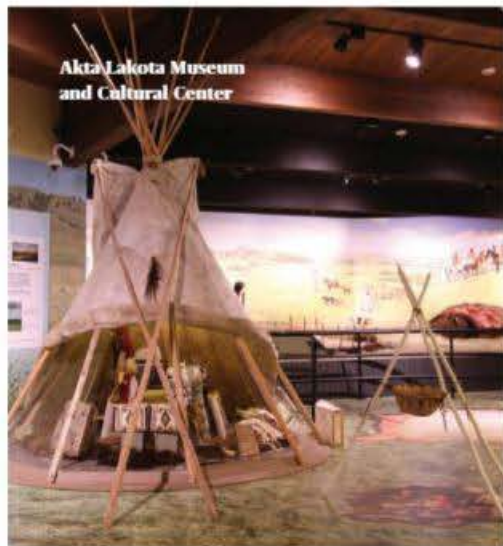
Upcoming rotating exhibits include *The Gift*, based on the Lakota narrative of the seven sacred rights from the White Buffalo Calf Woman, which will run through November.

The on-site gift shop features handmade art, quilts, purses, jewelry and more crafted by members of local tribes.

On Tuesdays, the museum hosts a story hour in which elders from the Native community share books celebrating Lakota legends or cultural traditions. Although geared toward children, the event is suitable for everyone.

“People of all ages love it,” Thompson said.

[AKTALAKOTA.STJO.ORG](http://AKTALAKOTA.STJO.ORG)



COURTESY AKTA LAKOTA MUSEUM & CULTURAL CENTER



BY WAYDE CARROLL, COURTESY ANHC

## ALASKA NATIVE HERITAGE CENTER ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

Alaska visitors can explore 10,000 years of the area’s history through the stories, history and culture of its Indigenous people at the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage. This museum celebrates the vibrancy of the state’s modern Indigenous tribes by celebrating and showcasing their songs, art, cultural artifacts and dance.

Open to the general public mid-May through early September each year, the heritage center offers a great introduction to the five major Indigenous cultural groups of Alaska.

Visitors might wish to start their tour in the heritage center’s theater, where the film “Stories Given, Stories Shared” offers an overview of the history and rich culture of the Alaska native people, as well as stunning panoramic views of the pristine Alaskan wilderness.

Native Alaskan artisans are often on hand to demonstrate and sell their crafts in the Hall of Cultures, offering an opportunity to take home an authentic souvenir.

Guests can explore six authentically styled native dwellings situated around Lake Tiulana on the Heritage Center grounds. Center staff can share details about the unique cultural traditions of the various native Alaskan tribes, including the Athabascan, the Inupiaq, the Tlingit, the Haida, the Alutiiq and the Tsimshian Peoples.

During the summer, guests can enjoy demonstrations of Alaskan native dancing or even join in on the fun of a traditional Alaskan native game.

[ALASKANATIVE.NET](http://ALASKANATIVE.NET)



BY ASHLEY HEIMBIGNER, COURTESY ANHC



BY JOE WIGGLESWORTH, COURTESY IPCC

## INDIAN PUEBLO CULTURAL CENTER ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

In the heart of Albuquerque, New Mexico, the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center serves as a gateway to the 19 Pueblos of New Mexico.

“We offer a great place to be able to feel the special aura that these pueblos have,” said Beverlee McClure, the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center’s vice president of cultural and community engagement.

Here, visitors can enjoy an immersive experience with pueblo culture, from enjoying a native dance ceremony in the courtyard to tasting traditional Indigenous dishes prepared by celebrated chef Ray Naranjo of the Santa Clara pueblo. Groups can even book hands-on cooking classes at the center’s newly added Indian Pueblo Kitchen.

Pueblo artisans share daily demonstrations of jewelry-making, basket-making and other traditional crafts during summer months, offering guests a chance to interact with living curators of pueblo cultural traditions.

Guided tours of the museum’s richly developed permanent and rotating exhibits are available. Highlights include exhibits of pottery and art from each of the pueblos, as well as the history behind the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. One spotlights the contributions of Pueblo women, including

# ROOM TO EXPLORE

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Plan your vacation to Chickasaw Country, one of Oklahoma's best kept secrets, for an authentic local experience filled with nature, shopping, culture and cuisine; we promise we're worth the trip.

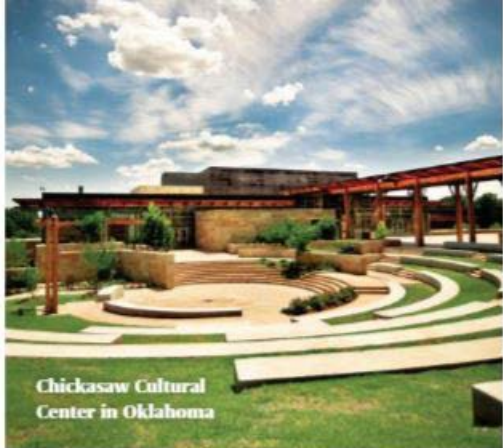
U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, the First Native American cabinet secretary in American history, who is a member of the Laguna Pueblo.

"It's a beautiful exhibit, and we're really excited for our guests to be able to experience it," said McClure.

One of the most popular docent-led tours takes groups to explore the more than 20 indoor and outdoor murals on the grounds that have been painted by pueblo artists.

"It's a really unique experience because, in addition to enjoying the beauty of these murals, guests also get to learn the significance of the imagery for each particular pueblo," McClure said.

[INDIANPUEBLO.ORG](http://INDIANPUEBLO.ORG)



Chickasaw Cultural Center in Oklahoma

COURTESY CHICKASAW CULTURAL CENTER

## CHICKASAW CULTURAL CENTER SULPHUR, OKLAHOMA

In Sulphur, Oklahoma, the Chickasaw Cultural Center preserves and celebrates the traditions and legacy of the Chickasaw people.

Guided, customized tours of the cultural center and expansive grounds are available.

Guests can explore a re-created Chickasaw village and get an in-depth tour of the museum's 96,000-square feet of exhibits spotlighting native art and cultural artifacts. Most visits will start at the Chikasha Poya — "We are Cherokee" — Exhibit Center, which takes visitors on a journey of the Chickasaw experience from ancient times through the present.

Docents are on hand to explain the significance of Chickasaw symbols found in the artwork on display throughout the museum. While sitting within a replica 18th-century tribal council house, visitors can enjoy a video spotlighting Chickasaw history, traditions and culture.

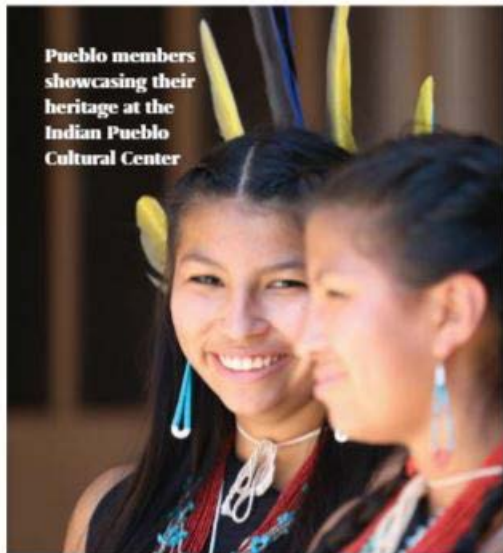
Many of the museum exhibits encourage active, hands-on exploration; for instance, push-button "language stations" help visitors try their hands at speaking Chickasaw.

At the outdoor "hayip," or pond, guests can walk out onto the Oka' Aabiniiili — "a place for sitting on the water" — pavilion to enjoy a moment of reflection on the beautiful, tranquil grounds.

There are also ample opportunities to witness living presentations of Chickasaw music and dance. The campus' outdoor amphitheater often hosts concerts and dramatic performances, including native Choctaw hymn singing and traditional native stomp dances. And the large, indoor Anoli' Theater frequently screens Native-based films and other cultural demonstrations.

When hunger strikes, visitors can take a break at the on-site cafe, which specializes in fresh-made Chickasaw-inspired dishes.

[CHICKASAWCULTURALCENTER.COM](http://CHICKASAWCULTURALCENTER.COM)



Pueblo members showcasing their heritage at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center



A Zuni pueblo demonstration