

Experience Wisconsin Dells Aboard A “Duck”

(NAPSA)—For more than 100 years, the scenic sandstone bluffs that frame the Wisconsin River in the state’s central region have been a natural draw for visitors. Early travelers navigated the river by canoe, and eventually steamboats and other motorized craft helped turn the Wisconsin Dells into a popular tourist destination.

Today, visitors can tour the lush forests and fern valleys on land and splash into the water to continue their trip aboard a unique World War II amphibious vehicle called a “duck.” The seven-ton, six-wheeled amphibious vessels are officially termed D.U.K.W.’s, a military code signifying the vehicle’s features: D=1942, the year ducks were built; U=amphibian; K=front wheel drive; and W=rear wheel drive. For the GI’s who first used them, they became affectionately known as “ducks.”

Wisconsin Dells is now home to the largest fleet of tour ducks in the nation. With more than 90 ducks, the Original Wisconsin Ducks shuttle thousands of visitors each season on a land-and-water tour of the spectacular caverns and towering cliffs in and around the river.

“This is truly a unique and exciting way to see the historical beauty that nature has carved out along the river,” said Dan Gavinski, general manager of the Original Wisconsin Ducks.

It’s also a good history lesson about how ducks were vital to past war efforts, Gavinski said. Ducks have an impressive wartime record, participating in large amphibious operations both in Europe and the Pacific during World War II and the Korean War. Ducks were one of the only types of vehicles that could maneuver over coral reefs and sandy areas in the Pacific during the 1940s and thus were a vital asset to U.S. military operations.



Photo credit: Trumble Photography

The nation’s largest fleet of amphibious tour ducks, the Original Wisconsin Ducks, give Wisconsin Dells’ visitors an up-close look at the magnificent sandstone bluffs lining the Wisconsin River.

On D-Day, June 6, 1944, more than 2,000 of the vehicles traveled along with the troops, successfully delivering them and their supplies to the hard-to-reach beaches of Normandy, France. A total of 370 ducks participated in the Allied crossing of the Rhine between March 7 and March 31, 1945.

Today, the only battles fought involve who gets to sit in the front seat of an Original Wisconsin Duck. The one-hour, eight-and-one-half mile Duck ride offers visitors a unique look into Wisconsin’s history and geology. The tour takes passengers along the same route that loggers rafted more than 100 years ago. Riders pass ghost towns, including the once thriving City of Newport, and areas significant to native Indian tribes.

The signature sandstone cliffs of the Dells are the scenic products of a prehistoric era. A Cambrian glacier carved out the land surrounding the riverbed, and millions of years of changing climate and water conditions shaped the region into one of the most beautiful natural geological sites in the country. Early French-Canadian

fur traders dubbed the area the “dalles” meaning “a slab or tile-like rock.” The name evolved into Wisconsin Dells.

“The backdrop of our tour is breathtaking; however, I still think the highlight for most passengers is ‘splashdown,’” said Gavinski, referring to the point in the tour when the duck is driven right into the water creating a small yet thrilling splash for passengers.

Becoming a pilot for one of these vessels is no easy task. Original Wisconsin Duck drivers must endure extensive training before they can begin touring with passengers. The tour has been in operation for 55 years and maintains a perfect water-safety record.

“We conduct six weeks of rigorous training for our drivers as part of an overall standard of excellence,” said Gavinski, who has worked closely with local, state and federal agencies on issues regarding operation and safety standards for ducks.

For more information about the Original Wisconsin Ducks, please call (608) 254-8751 or visit www.wisconsinducktours.com.