

Annual Nordic Fest in Decorah, Iowa

By Karen Oswald

On the last weekend in July for the last 41 years, the town of Decorah, Iowa has held its 3-day Nordic Fest <http://www.nordicfest.com/> - a city-wide festival celebrating the area's Scandinavian heritage. It features delicious food, lively entertainment, traditional crafts, a colorful parade, and a Saturday night torchlight parade and fireworks.

Other activities include street dances, a Bunad show, guided walking tours, antique and craft shows, Nordic dancer performances, 5/15K Runs, and much more. This was my first trip to the Nordic Fest. My cousin drove down from Minnesota, and we really enjoyed the festival.



Next year's dates are July 23,24, and 25, 2008. The festival is always crowded, so, be sure to reserve your hotel room many months in advance (dorm rooms are also available at Luther College, with a shuttle van running continuously between the college and downtown Decorah). Two of the Lutheran Churches in town each offer Norwegian Dinners - they do sell out, so buy your dinner tickets early in the day. The dinner that I went to was truly delicious!

The Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum is also located in Decorah. Vesterheim, which means "western home," is the nation's most comprehensive museum dedicated to a single immigrant group. It includes a main complex of 16 historic buildings in downtown Decorah, as well as a farmstead and country church outside of the city. The museum houses artifacts/exhibits and preserves living traditions through various educational opportunities for students and adults, including classes in Norwegian culture and folk art, such as rosmaling, knifemaking, woodworking, carving, and textiles. Additional information is available at www.vesterheim.org or by calling 563-382-9681.

Decorah is about a six hour ride from our area, with very beautiful scenery (big rolling hills and farms) regardless of whether you drive west to Galena and then north up the west bank of the Mississippi, or whether you drive north past Rockford to Madison Wisconsin and west from there. This second route passes two other great places that I also encourage you to

stop and see: Little Norway <http://www.littlenorway.com/> (a Norwegian farm and Stave Church on the National Register of Historic Places, nestled in a very Norwegian-feeling Nissedahle) and Mt Horeb <http://www.trollway.com/> (a historic Norwegian immigrant town, complete with trolls and shopping). I have been to both a number of times, and highly recommend them.