

Only one trailhead leads to the summit. At less than two miles, the path is relatively short, but you'll ascend more than 1,000 feet during the hike. As the site is often used for spiritual ceremonies, visitors will notice prayer cloths, tobacco ties, and other offerings. Guests are asked to respect these objects and not disturb or photograph the items. While these various landmarks represent great opportunities to learn about the state's Native American culture, it's the annual events which truly allow you to experience the heritage firsthand.

The Black Hills Powwow is a perfect example. Held in Rapid City, this annual celebration is open to everyone and represents one of the best opportunities to witness the pageantry of the state's premier American Indian cultural event. The powwow attracts thousands from across the country, including dancers, singers, artisans, and more.

After experiencing the powwow, head east for one of the most picturesque and educational drives in all of South Dakota. Running north and south through the central part of the state, the Native American Scenic Byway offers travelers incredible views of the Missouri River as well as South Dakota's diverse landscapes. The route, which takes you through the lands of the Yankton, Crow Creek, Lower Brule, Cheyenne River, and Standing Rock Sioux Tribes, also leads to learning opportunities in the forms of the Akta Lakota Museum in Chamberlain and the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. Drivers may also spot wildlife such as prairie dogs, pronghorn, and deer.

Visitors are likely to see bison, which hold a culturally significant role for the tribes of South Dakota. American Bison are believed to have existed in North America for 500,000 years. At their peak, the bison are estimated to have numbered at 60 million. After the Westward Expansion, the total number of bison dwindled to less than a thousand. This had a significant impact on South Dakota's tribes, who depended on the animal for survival.

Today, South Dakota is home to one of the world's largest privately held herds, while the number of bison in North America has surpassed 380,000. Travelers can find bison across the state, but areas like Custer State Park and Badlands National Park provide the most scenic settings for bison encounters.

Once you've spent time with the National Mammal of the United States, be sure to stop in Chamberlain, where you'll find a spectacular combination of art and history.

Standing at 50-feet tall, the Dignity Sculpture is a stainless-steel statue made by sculptor Dale Lamphere to honor the cultures of the Lakota and Dakota people. The most stunning part might be Dignity's quilt. This piece is made up of 128 stainless steel blue diamond shapes that sparkle in the daytime and light up at night. Many more experiences and historically-significant locations exist in the state, but you'd be hard-pressed to find a better place to end your expedition.

Travelers interested in experiencing a vacation rich in history and cultural relevance are guaranteed a worthwhile trip in South Dakota. To learn more about the state's fascinating American Indian culture, read more about the destinations and events detailed in this article. To start planning your own cultural journey, visit TravelSouthDakota.com.



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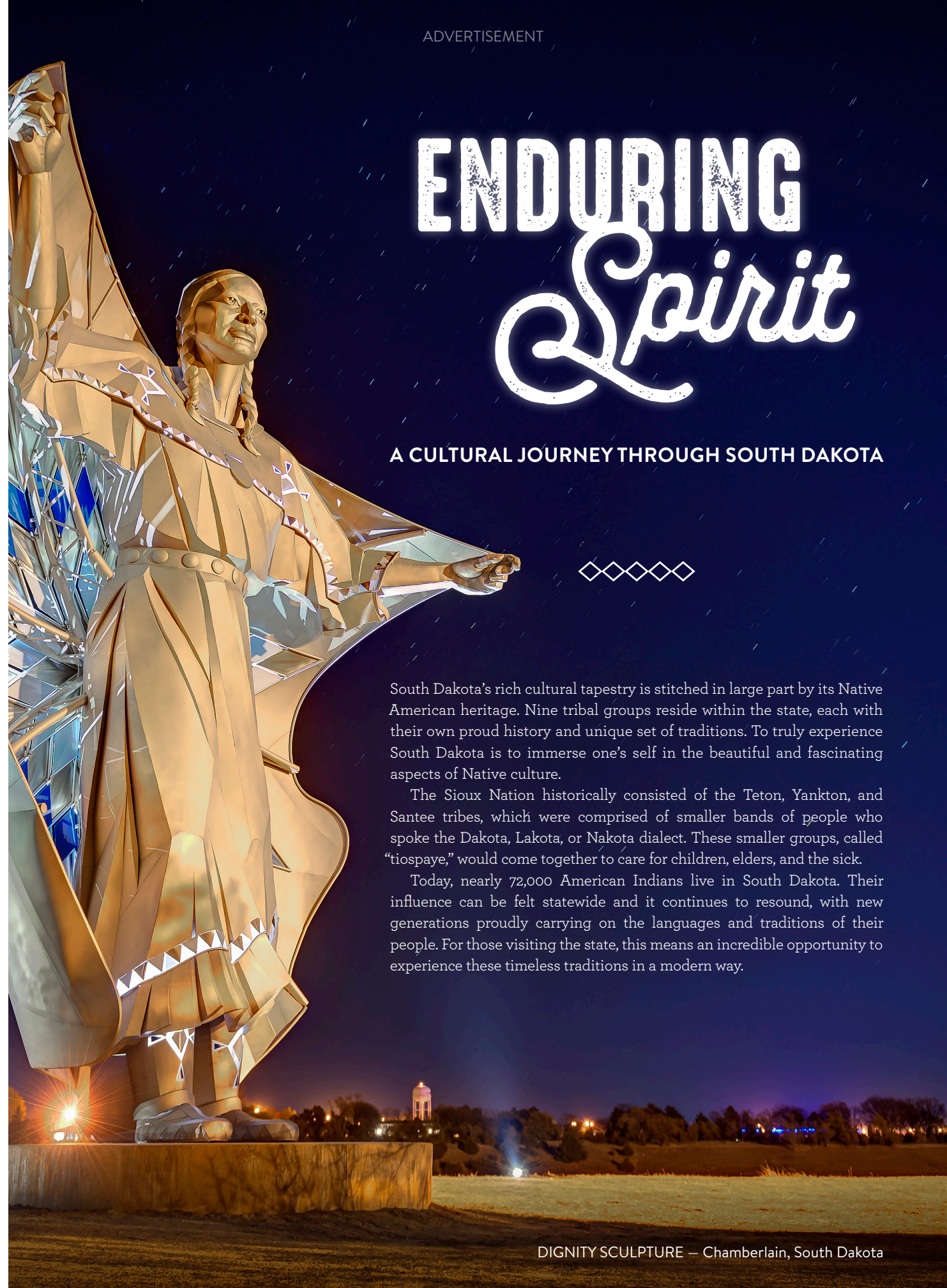
A CULTURAL JOURNEY THROUGH SOUTH DAKOTA



South Dakota's rich cultural tapestry is stitched in large part by its Native American heritage. Nine tribal groups reside within the state, each with their own proud history and unique set of traditions. To truly experience South Dakota is to immerse one's self in the beautiful and fascinating aspects of Native culture.

The Sioux Nation historically consisted of the Teton, Yankton, and Santee tribes, which were comprised of smaller bands of people who spoke the Dakota, Lakota, or Nakota dialect. These smaller groups, called "tiospaye," would come together to care for children, elders, and the sick.

Today, nearly 72,000 American Indians live in South Dakota. Their influence can be felt statewide and it continues to resound, with new generations proudly carrying on the languages and traditions of their people. For those visiting the state, this means an incredible opportunity to experience these timeless traditions in a modern way.





These are the silent spaces. Where towering pines and prairie grasses do the talking. Where sacred winds carry ancient songs. Places so great, they'll leave you speechless.

BLACK HILLS

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BLACK ELK PEAK, South Dakota

Visitors will find a variety of Native experiences, ranging from the intimate to the towering. True adventurers should start their cultural journey at Black Elk Peak. Formerly known as Harney Peak, this stunning landmark is now named for Nicholas Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux holy man celebrated as one of the country's most influential Native American leaders. At an elevation of 7,242 feet, it is the highest point east of the Rocky Mountains. The granite peak is considered sacred to many, as it's believed to be the place where Black Elk experienced a life-changing vision.

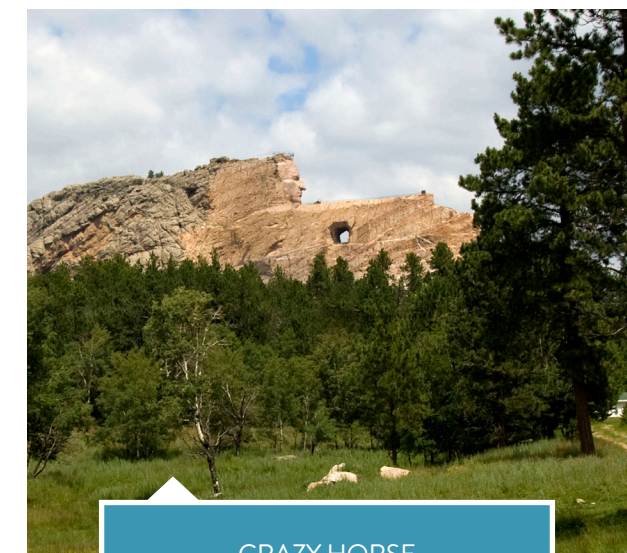
Today, the summit is topped by an accessible stone tower which was completed during the mid-1930s and currently provides visitors with an unparalleled view of the surrounding area. At just under four miles, it's a challenging hike, but one that's definitely worth taking.

Not far from the area is another iconic destination where the state's rich Native American culture stands proud. Crazy Horse Memorial is the world's largest sculpture-in-progress. At 563 feet tall, this colossal peak contains the monument depicting the visionary leader who dedicated his life to preserving Lakota traditions.

Work on the memorial began in 1948 in a spot chosen together by sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski and Lakota Chief Henry Standing Bear—a legendary statesman and champion of Native American culture. More than 70 years later, the site now houses a sprawling campus complete with a welcome center, the Indian Museum of North America, and the Native American Educational and Cultural Center, which provides educational and cultural programming to students and visitors alike.

For the most spectacular view of the carving, visit on September 30th for the 6th annual Fall Volksmarch. This autumn hike is one of only two chances this year to make the 6.2-mile trek up the mountain, stand in the shadow of the sculpture's massive face, and walk out onto his arm that safely holds you 500 feet above the ground.

Travel 80 miles to the north and you'll come upon another significant landmark at Bear Butte State Park. "Mato Paha" (or "Bear Mountain") is the Lakota name given to Bear Butte - a sacred formation that attracts scores of American Indian tribal members who often use the mountain for religious ceremonies. Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse all visited Bear Butte at one point, adding to its cultural significance and allure.



CRAZY HORSE NATIONAL MEMORIAL
BEAR BUTTE STATE PARK

