

Mini-Cassia

Mini-Cassia's towns owe their life to the Snake River, whose waters wind through the south end of Minidoka County and the north end of Cassia County. Dams on the Snake provided the irrigation and electricity that turned the desert to green and lit its growing towns close to a century ago. And now the river is sustaining a new kind of life: destination tourism. The city of Burley, positioned in a bend of the river, capitalizes on the Snake with a number of riverside parks – including a golf course and botanical gardens – plus the docks and marina that make it a boating, fishing, and water-skiing destination.

There's Lots to See and Lots to Do

Mini-Cassia is well known among the ranks of outdoor adventurers because of its world-class rock climbing challenges among the granite spires of the City of Rocks National Reserve. City of Rocks also provides incredible scenery, camping and hiking, and reminders of the California Trail pioneer experience. Nearby, the new Castle Rocks State Park boasts giant climbing spires that rival its more famous neighbor, as well as equestrian trails, plentiful wildlife, and other treats for lovers of the outdoors. Elsewhere in Mini-Cassia, winter and summer recreation at Pomerelle Mountain Resort, Lake Cleveland, and Mount Harrison round out the adventure.

But there's plenty in Mini-Cassia for travelers of other tastes, too. Take the historic Rupert Square, for instance. It's an unusual sight in Idaho: a city block of public park, still surrounded by many of its lovely old brick buildings. Plaques on many of the structures explain their colorful histories and tout their status on the National Register of Historic Places. Among the stores lining the square, you'll find salons and shoes, books and barbershops, flowers and furniture, cars and cafes, pizza and a picture studio. And many other offerings as well, including a handful of shops that cater to Mini-Cassia's growing Latino population.

Four attractions might rank as the chief destinations at Rupert Square. One is a quilt-fabric shop dubbed The Gathering Place, where rows upon rows of colorful bolts are a quilter's dream. It's aptly named; you're likely to find the place abuzz with activity and quilt talk. Another attraction is the 1920 Wilson

Theatre, a gorgeous red brick structure with stained glass windows, an unusual shape, and fantastically eye-catching decoration. The theater – undergoing restoration funded by sundry community fundraisers – is evidence of Mini-Cassia folks' healthy community spirit. At Rupert Square, also look for the Drift Inn restaurant and bar housed in a former bank from 1909, the historic district's oldest surviving building. The original, intricately painted bank-vault door remains in place, and portions of an old tile floor are visible. And, of course, the grassy Square itself – embellished with old-style streetlights and shaded by plentiful trees – is a destination in its own right. You'll find fountains and flower gardens, wooden statues, and a gazebo stage with rows of benches for spectators.

Summer visitors to Mini-Cassia have even more options for fun, whether their tastes lean to adventure, agriculture or the arts. In mid-June, Oakley's Historic Home Tour is a surprisingly popular attraction, drawing hundreds of people for a look inside the tiny town's grand old Victorian homes. In late June, the Idaho Regatta – one of the state's headline sporting events – brings the roar of dozens of speed-hungry river racers to Burley. In late July, Burley visitors might opt either for the Idaho International Dance and Music Festival, or for the Spudman Triathlon, in which close to a thousand competitors start with a swim in the Snake River. In mid-August, the Cassia County Fair honors Mini-Cassia's agricultural heritage with livestock shows, rodeo, and Western entertainment.



SOUTH CENTRAL IDAHO COMPASS POINTS

Two County Museums

Mini-Cassia's pioneer and agricultural legacy is best showcased at the two counties' historical museums. Each captures something of the determination and ingenuity of this area's settlers.

On the grounds of the rustic-styled Cassia County Museum, in Burley, are wooden sidewalks, a railroad caboose, and old cabins relocated from various points in the county. Walk inside one cabin and you'll find the accoutrements of a pioneer home: bed, table, trunks, luggage, dirt floor and an old wood stove with a soup pot on top. Another cabin – which once served as a commodity titling office for the Mormon church's farmers – is set up as a general store, displaying such merchandise as seeds, farm equipment, ice skates, ink, mousetraps, spices and colorful bolts of fabric. Inside yet another cabin are the blackboards, desks, bookshelves and water bucket that identify it as a schoolhouse, a purpose that

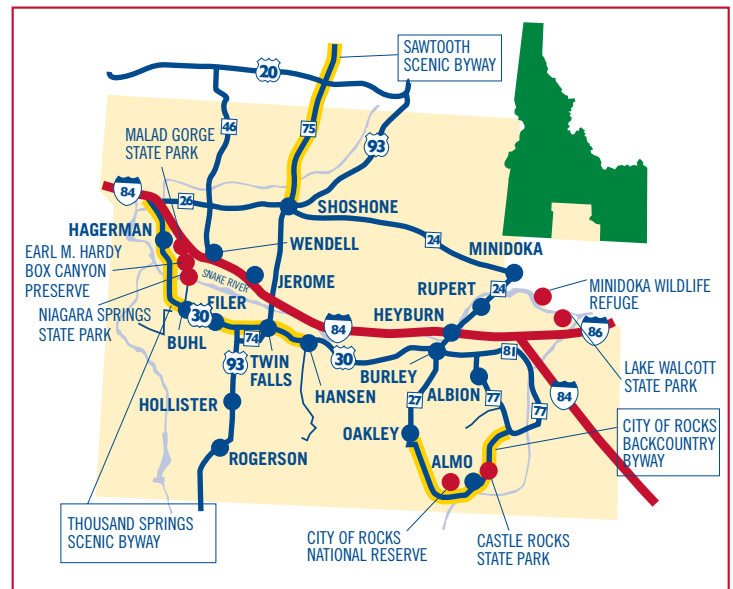
building actually served. The front of the main museum building is styled like a set of frontier shops. Inside is a plentiful and amazingly varied collection of local historical artifacts. Special displays include a collection of World War II uniforms and an entire Pullman car that once toured the country carrying what promoters said was the mummified body of John Wilkes Booth.

At the museum's Minidoka County counterpart, in Rupert, you'll find an entire railroad depot, the county's first jail (yes, you can step inside, but you'll want out pretty quickly), a scaled-down replica of a pioneer church, and a homesteader's cabin. Also among the Rupert museum's collection – a delightful hodgepodge where the thrill of discovery is possible – are such items as medical supplies, farm implements, taxidermy, a 1930s jukebox, a doll collection, and a permanent wave machine from the early 20th century – a truly frightening monster of hardware.

Get Off the Beaten Path

When the Reclamation Service began work on Minidoka Dam in 1904 – to capture the waters of the Snake River for irrigation and hydroelectricity – construction workers camped on a dusty patch of desert nearby. Planting trees eased the heat of the desert sun, and the reservoir that formed behind the dam became an oasis in the sagebrush. Within a decade, that noisy construction camp had evolved into a park well used by local settlers for boating, swimming, fishing, and the simple joys of trees, grass and shade.

A visit to Lake Walcott State Park – as the oasis is known today -- is still well worth the drive. You'll find tent spots and RV hookups, both with views of that soothing lake of blue, as well as covered picnic pavilions, playground equipment, a Frisbee golf course, a basketball court, and numerous walking trails winding through the verdant park. You'll also see the Civilian Conservation Corps' stone walls. In the 1930s, a camp at Walcott Park housed CCC crews who completed projects on the dam and canals and constructed wildlife feeding and nesting areas.



That's because the same reservoir that drew southern Idaho's sun-baked settlers a century ago also attracted a large number and variety of wildlife, setting the stage for this area's establishment as the Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge in 1909. Migratory waterfowl are chief among the refuge's wildlife. Secluded, lush bays can attract 100,000 molting ducks and geese from July through September. More than 500 tundra swans use the refuge during spring and fall migrations. Bring binoculars and walking shoes, and you'll spot plenty of other birds and mammals as well.