

Travel

10 great places to touch base with the best

Batter up! Spring training is over, and the boys of summer have just started Major League Baseball's new season. Need more than a game to satisfy your obsession? "Baseball's history is what separates it from other sports," says **Chris Epting**, author of *Roadside Baseball: A Guide to Baseball Shrines Across America* (The Sporting News, \$16.95). "We talk about Ruth, Mantle, Mays and Ebbets Field as if they still exist. For fans, making pilgrimages to historic baseball sites is like a rite of passage, a chance to pay homage to the great gods of the game." The traditional trek to Cooperstown is a must, Epting says, but it's not the only game in town. Here, he shares with USA TODAY's **Shawn Sell** more of baseball's special spots.

Roger Maris Museum

Fargo, N.D.

"This hometown tribute to Yankee slugger Roger Maris, accessible to all and free at his request, is an exhibit of videos, photos, bats, balls, trophies and artifacts located in the West Acres Shopping Center. Maris, who shattered Babe Ruth's single-season home run record in 1961, was born in Hibbing, Minn., but grew up here." 800-783-6450; rogermarismuseum.com.

Babe Ruth Birthplace and Museum

Baltimore

"The Sultan of Swat was born Feb. 6, 1895, in this brick row house that belonged to Ruth's grandparents. Today, it's an excellent museum featuring rare photos, films, radio broadcasts and other Ruth-related treasures. Located near Camden Yards, this is also the Baltimore Orioles' museum." 410-727-1539; baberruthmuseum.com.

Rickwood Field

Birmingham

"The oldest stadium in America, built in 1910 for the (White) Birmingham Barons baseball team, also became home to the Birmingham Black Barons in 1924. Satchel Paige and Willie Mays thrilled fans here while playing in the American Negro Leagues. Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb and other legends also visited this field, now on the National Register of Historic Places." 205-458-8161; rickwood.com.



In Kansas City: Visitors to the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum can take in the American Jazz Museum in the same complex.

Negro Leagues Baseball Museum

Kansas City, Mo.

"This museum recounts the formation and history of the Negro Baseball League prior to 1945, when the Brooklyn Dodgers signed Jackie Robinson. Displays include rare Negro League pennants, autographed baseballs, photos and a videotape about the league's history narrated by Bernard Shaw." 888-221-6526; nlbm.com.

Elysian Fields (former site)

Hoboken, N.J.

"In 1842, Alexander Cartwright and Daniel 'Doc' Adams drafted rules for a game called baseball. On June 19, 1846, the Knickerbocker Baseball Club played the first organized game against the New York Nine at Elysian Fields at the corner of 11th and Washington streets. A plaque marks the spot where the field was."

Louisville Slugger Museum

Louisville

Bats, bats are everywhere, from the 120-foot behemoth in front of the museum to the miniature Slugger each tour visitor takes home. "In 1884, the Hillerich & Bradsby Co. started making Louisville Sluggers, and today 2,000 wooden bats are produced daily. Visitors can tour the factory or stroll through the baseball history museum." 502-588-7228; sluggermuseum.org.

Nolan Ryan Exhibit Center

Alvin, Texas

"The center, built by the Ryan Foundation and donated to the Alvin Community College in 1996, chronicles the life and baseball career of Alvin's favorite son in many state-of-the-art exhibits, including an interactive one in which the visitor 'feels' a Ryan fastball in a catcher's mitt." 281-388-1134; www.alvin.cc.tx.us/ryan/nolanbg.htm.

Field of Dreams

Dyersville, Iowa

"If you build it, he will come." The movie may have been referring to a baseball legend, but it's tourists who now flock to the site where Kevin Costner's 1989 movie was filmed. Fans can run the bases, play catch, bat or just sit in the bleachers and dream. The house and cornfield also are open to visitors; the field is open daily from April to November." 888-875-8404; fieldofdreamsmoviesite.com.



By Bill Kloubeck, West Acres Shopping Center

In Fargo, N.D.: The Roger Maris Museum has a replica of his locker circa 1961.

Forbes Field (former site)

Pittsburgh

"From 1909 to 1970, Forbes was home to the Pittsburgh Pirates and the scene of one of baseball's most dramatic moments: Bill Mazeroski's Game Seven home run in the 1960 World Series to beat the Yankees (a sidewalk plaque marks the spot). Though the field is gone, remnants remain on the grounds of the University of Pittsburgh, including part of the outfield wall and the flagpole." forbesfieldforever.com.

Ted Williams Museum

Hernando, Fla.

"The museum, just a few blocks from where Williams lived, is laid out like a baseball diamond: Each base represents a different chapter in The Splendid Splinter's legendary career. In addition to displays and memorabilia, video monitors run classic clips of Williams and other legends." 352-527-6566; twmuseum.com.

USA TODAY To check the season schedule, visit baseball.usatoday.com; for more "10 great" lists, go to 10greats.usatoday.com