

SLO Mainstays

In any season these attractions help define the quintessential SLO experience:

HEARST CASTLE: Prepare to be amazed by conspicuous consumption at its most opulent. William Randolph Hearst's never-ending construction project will boggle your mind. Several tour options are available. All require advance reservations.

THE BEACH: More than 100 miles of oceanfront delivers exquisite views and plenty of options. From San Simeon near Hearst Castle to Nipomo, there are a dozen or so towns including Pismo Beach (with its famous clams) and the bird sanctuary at Morro Bay.

MADONNA INN: Lovers of mid-20th century kitsch find paradise in the gaudy excess of the Madonna Inn just outside San Luis Obispo. The first known establishment to offer theme rooms, its Caveman suite remains popular. So, too, the men's lavatory near the restaurant, with its faux waterfall. This bit of Americana is a must.

GUADALUPE-NIPOMO SAND DUNES: The Golden State's second largest expanse of shifting sand extends 18 miles along the waterfront in southern San Luis Obispo County. They include campgrounds, a vehicular recreation area, (dirt bikes anyone?) and a boardwalk for those who'd rather not get sand in their shoes. Movie fans can search for remnants of the 1923 *The Ten Commandments* filmed here.

CAMBRIA: This artist's colony with a Victorian vibe hugs the highway between the Pacific and the hills. It's home to quaint galleries, restaurants, and shops and serves as launch point for an adventure behind the wheel. Santa Rosa Creek Road winds eastward from town through forests, past orchards, vineyards and historic rancheros. The first five miles are relatively flat. As you climb, the switchbacks begin. Prepare for a view worthy of the white knuckle adrenaline rush. ■

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Adventure Alert!

Live it UP in Michigan's U.P.

by Colleen Birch Maile

Here's a survey for you. Answer the following to gauge your vacation style: Grave adventure? Love nature? Care about history? Reply "yes" to any of the above? Then start making plans to visit the Keweenaw Peninsula—the far northern tip of Michigan's U.P.

When it comes to outdoor action there's never an off-season. Michigan's deep woods and Lake Superior's gorgeous south shore make a phenomenal backdrop for a bevy of activity. Each season holds its own brand of splendor. Autumn transforms the region's hardwood forests into a vivid blaze of orange, red and gold, punctuated by the occasional evergreen.

In fall, outdoor fun inevitably benefits from a leaf-peeper vibe. Dozens of trails, well suited for hikers of all abilities, wind throughout Houghton and Keweenaw counties. Of special interest, the Estivant Pines Nature Preserve near Eagle Harbor, 30 miles north of the Houghton County Airport in Hancock. The Estivant Preserve protects more than 500 acres of huge virgin white pine—one of the last remaining groves in Michigan. There are plenty of other trails closer to Houghton and its sister city Hancock, including the easy 1.5-mile course through Sturgeon Slough Wildlife Area just three

miles south of Houghton. For more information, consult the UP Michigan Trails Association website www.uptrails.org.

Mountain biking enthusiasts find plenty to love here too. The Copper Harbor Trails system ranks among only 48 pathways in the world to be designated an Epic Trail by the International Mountain Biking Association. Its 25 miles carry riders along Lake Superior, through deep woods, across wooden bridges, beside streams and inland lakes and near historically significant sites. Copper mining fueled the peninsula's development at the turn of the 20th century. Now abandoned railways convert to phenomenal mountain bike trails, including the 41-mile Bill Nicholls Rail Trail between Houghton and Mass City and the 14-mile Jack Stevens Trail linking Hancock with historic Calumet. Learn more about two-wheel excursions from the Michigan Mountain Bike Association at www.mmba.org.

It's not necessary to break a sweat to take in autumn's wonders. The Keweenaw serves up several spectacular autumn drives. Among the most breathtaking, U.S. Highway 41 between Copper Harbor and Delaware is designated a Scenic Heritage Route due largely to the amazing canopy of foliage covering the passageway. Brockway Drive,



The Polar Bear Dive at Heikinpäivä celebrates midwinter in Finnish style.

a picturesque nine-mile loop west of Copper Harbor, has repeatedly been recognized for its exceptional views by publications ranging from *The New York Times* to *Michigan Living*. The roadway climbs to an elevation of 1,300 feet (700 feet above the surface of Lake Superior.) On a clear day, it's possible to see Isle Royale National Park 50 miles away.

Autumn foliage varies from year to year. Typically mid-October brings the season to a close and ushers in winter. Snow falls deep in copper country. U.P. residents, known as "yoopers," enthusiastically embrace the more than 300 annual inches of white stuff. Some roadways such as Brockway Mountain Drive close for the season. Locals and others in the know enjoy its astounding views from snowmobiles. Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are popular too. Trails are seemingly everywhere. Check out McClain State Park in Hancock for exquisite Lake Superior vistas and Swedetown in Calumet for a variety of groomed paths plus 5K of lighted trails for night skiing.

The region is also home to some of the Midwest's best downhill skiing. Mount Ripley in downtown Houghton offers lots of family fun, while Mount Bohemia, approximately 30 miles from the airport, is the place for extremists and thrill seekers. Home to the Midwest's only triple

black diamond run, it also boasts extreme back-country skiing and a vertical drop of 900 feet—the steepest in the Midwest. There are no beginner runs. Keweenaw Mountain Lodge in Copper Harbor, 40 miles north of the airport, is home to a snowboard terrain park and ice-skating venue.

Ten other area rinks range from neighborhood facilities to the indoor arena at Michigan Technological University (open to the public on Sunday afternoons). The school fields an ice hockey team worth watching and adds college-town culture to the region. It also puts on one of the nation's most amazing winter carnivals (the 91st annual rendition will be held February 9-12 2012).



Finnish kicksleds at the Heikinpäivä festival.

The event comes on the heels of the Finnish-American community's Midwinter Heikinpäivä celebration. A week of events begins January 28, 2012 and includes a polar bear dive on the Hancock waterfront, parade and all the food and fun associated with most family-friendly festivals. In addition, there are uniquely Finnish activities—classes in woodcarving, tating, and Finnish food preparation plus entertainment including a traditional hymn sing-along, Finnish buffet and a tanssit (dance).

In many snowy locales, springtime means mud season pure and simple. However, when the Keweenaw's deep drifts thaw, the area's waterfalls are at their best. Most of the peninsula's ten falls are

HEIKINPÄIVÄ IMAGES: JAMES KURTZ/THE FINNISH-AMERICAN REPORTER