



Pick Your Pleasure in Traverse City

by Amanda Bjerke

Traverse City, Michigan may be the Midwest's best vacation haven—especially in summer when its lovely location at the head of Grand Traverse Bay offers low humidity, balmy breezes and plenty of sunshine. A fortunate bit of climatic serendipity typically delivers temperatures hovering around 80 degrees and cloudless days. Good weather enhances a landscape marked by luxuriant rolling hills, golden beaches and translucent water. It's easy to see why thousands of visitors flock here each year.

The natural environment creates a perfect backdrop for recreation, and Traverse City caters to all ages and interests with a huge roster of things to see and do. As gateway to the Leelanau and Old Mission peninsulas, it offers easy air access to more than 200 miles of Lake Michigan waterfront, including the spectacular Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. This gorgeous mélange of soaring sand, cobalt water and verdant forests poses lots of fun options. Climbing the dunes affords amazing views.

Other hiking trails meander through dense woods and flat plains. The more sedentary traveler can get a sense of this place by driving the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive, a seven-and-a-half mile loop that climbs to the top of a 450-foot bluff. The national lakeshore park also includes the restored logging village Glen Haven, a former company town that now gives visitors insight into late 19th-century Michigan life. The South Manitou Island Lighthouse, also part of the Sleeping Bear Dune preserve, is now a museum and no longer functions as a lighthouse. However, the facility's lantern continues to shine from May through November.

Traverse City's location, at the far western end of the Eastern Time Zone, means you have to wait quite a while to see that lighthouse beacon glow. Summer days are long. Sunset lingers well past nine and that means more time to play. Besides all the water sports you'd expect on a peninsula, this area is also a cyclist's paradise and a golfer's dream. Trails crisscross the region. The Traverse Area



Opposite page: Vineyards share space with one of the area's renown cherry orchards. Above: Picking cherries; Horse Shows by the Bay event; National Cherry Festival parade

Recreational Trail (TART) is among the best maintained and easiest for visitors to navigate. The paved path (boardwalk through marshy areas) offers a ten-mile route along Grand Traverse Bay, through downtown Traverse City to Acme Township. Bike rentals are available at Brick Wheels on Eighth Street in Traverse City.

As the capital of Michigan's Golf Coast, Traverse City offers 18 courses within 20 miles of the airport. Several have achieved national commendations. All benefit from beautiful vistas. The availability of public courses and an assortment of budget-stretching packages at high-tone, golf-centric resorts make it easy for everyone to enjoy time on the greens.

When the sun finally sets, Traverse City bustles with nightlife. Fine dining establishments, nightclubs and casinos are all part of the mix. And as if Traverse City's enviable lifestyle weren't enough to lure visitors, the city and the surrounding area add to the recreation ante with a calendar crammed chock-a-block with special events.

The granddaddy of Traverse City good times is the National Cherry Festival. Now in its 83rd year, it salutes an enterprise that has remained a mainstay since 1852, when the first European settler, missionary Peter Dougherty, planted the original orchard. In the early 20th-century, the local timber industry crashed and the economy plummeted. Ingenious locals looked to their lovely orchards and tasty fruit to entice visitors. Folks have been coming ever since. The National Cherry Festival, to be held July 2 through July 9 this year, features more than 150 events including an air show, arts and crafts fair, concerts, sports competitions, picnics, pow-wows and parades. Many are cherry-centric. There's a pie contest, Cherries D'Vine, a showcase of regional cherries and grapes, and a Cherries Grand Buffet. Cherry chili anyone? How

about some cherry tiramisu? The menu varies from year to year, but the selections are always awesome, and a bit astounding.

The cherry festival established Traverse City as a tourist destination in the early 20th century. The community's popularity has never waned. There is always a reason to celebrate here. All summer long, Traverse City events shine a spotlight on all that makes life on this peninsula so special. Although the region remains home to most of Michigan's 3.8-million tart-cherry trees, the hillside orchards now share space with award-winning vineyards and wineries. The fruit of the local vine is heralded during Old Mission Blossom Days, the weekend of May 14 this year. A mere \$15 buys entrée to tastings at all seven Old Mission Peninsula wineries and a souvenir wine glass.

The following weekend the lake-shore village of Empire produces its Annual Asparagus Festival, a spring-time ritual that includes games, dinners and a gathering of poets writing odes to the green veggie. On May 28, Eastport hosts the Antrim County Petoskey Stone Festival. This tribute to Michigan's state stone includes a day of Petoskey hunting, stone skipping, demonstrations and prizes.

The Leelanau Peninsula BirdFest, one of the nation's most unique events of its kind, kicks off June 1 and continues through June 5 with a full complement of field trips, hikes and lectures from experts and environmentalists. As part of the adventure, a tall ship, two-masted schooner carries participants to Bellows Island for a close-up encounter with Double-crested Cormorants and nesting Caspian Terns.

The homage to local wines continues with the Leland Food and Wine Festival, June 11 and Divas Uncorked, June 17. Aimed at the fairer sex, it's held at Old Mission Peninsula wineries.



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Empire Bluff at Sleeping Bear Dunes

The same weekend, the Hot Air Balloon Rally fills the sky with mass ascensions and a nighttime balloon glow that rivals the stars.

Fourteen miles from Traverse City, the Polish-American community in Cedar, kicks up its heels with Polka Fest June 30 through July 3. Continuous oompa-pa music accompanies hearty food, plenty of drink and traditional dancing.

Among the region's most prestigious events, Horse Shows by the Bay, June 30 through July 31, attracts thousands of the nation's best equestrians competing in show jumping, dressage and Grand

Prix events. There are special exhibitions and a family day full of activities for young horse enthusiasts. Spectators are welcome at all weekend Feature Events. Admission to most presentations is just \$5.

It's not easy to sit indoors on a sunny Traverse City day. Yet, the Traverse City Film Festival manages to lure movie buffs from the beaches, golf courses and trails with an outstanding selection of independent, foreign and documentary films. The event, held July 26 through July 31 this year, also includes premieres, parties, panel discussions and lectures. Many events are held at the vintage State Theater and the City Opera House. For those who can't bear to head inside, free family movies are shown al fresco every night at Open Space Park. It's located along the serene shore of West Grand Traverse Bay.

From the peaceful respite of beaches and sand dunes to high-energy festivals and celebrations, Traverse City always gives visitors an opportunity to pick their pleasure. No wonder they keep coming back. ■

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