



Discover Harbor Country's WINTER Side

T BY DIANNA STAMPFLER • PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARBOR COUNTRY CVB

Tucked away in the southwest corner of Michigan's mitten is a quaint collection of towns affectionately known as Harbor Country. A thriving mecca for summer travelers for generations, Harbor Country also boasts a wealth of winter activities along the shores of Lake Michigan.

The 1952-acre Warren Dunes State Park in Sawyer – the northern border of Harbor Country – is the hot spot for cool fun in the winter. Miles of ungroomed cross-country ski and snowshoeing trails meander through the woodlands and alongside the shoreline, including one six-mile trek designated exclusively for skiing.

You will also find some of the best natural hills for sledding and

tubing at Warren Dunes, making it the ideal family-friendly destination. The park offers rentals of both snowshoes and tubes for \$8.

Visitors will be awe-inspired by the way Mother Nature covers the sand dunes – some rising as high as 260-feet above Lake Michigan – with a blanket of snow. Combine that with the ice formations that are crafted along the shoreline, and you have an unparalleled photo opportunity.

Ungroomed ski trails can also be found at nearby Warren Woods Nature Area near Union Pier – a 480-acre tract of virgin beech and maple forest (the last of its type known to exist in Michigan). Considered a National Natural Landmark, Warren Woods is a hidden treasure to Harbor Country.

A Michigan State Park pass is required for entry for both (www.michigan.gov/dnr).

The 89-acre Robinson Nature Preserve – owned by The Nature Conservancy – is located on East Road in Chikaming Township, near Lakeside. Its beech-maple forest and oak upland make it the ideal place for cross-country skiing, as it travels through the woods and along scenic ravines.

Nearby, the 263-acre Chikaming Township Park & Preserve, located on Warren Woods Road, includes Galien River frontage and a 5.3-acre lake, making for a pristine winter setting. The park and preserve are open from sunrise to sunset.

The New Buffalo Lakefront Park and beach, located on the north end of Whittaker Street just across from the Galien River Bridge, also welcomes skiers who are looking for more open spaces and views out across the frozen Lake Michigan.

Within just a short drive from Harbor Country, additional trails – both groomed and ungroomed, tubing hills, hiking trails and ice skating – can be found in communities like Niles, Benton Harbor, Stevensville and Berrien Center.

Snowmobilers are also drawn to Harbor Country. One trail runs from New Buffalo east to Three Oaks and then back to Galien, starting at Route 39 near I-94. A trail also extends from Galien across the state line toward South Bend, Indiana. Permits are available at several Harbor Country area businesses.

After a day of traipsing through the snow-covered countryside, warm up at one of Harbor Country's quaint B&Bs, historic inns or hotels.

Harbert House B&B (www.harberthouse.net) in Harbert boasts a cozy living room fireplace, a beautiful winter landscape out every window and easy access to cross country ski trails. Bring in a group of family or friends and fill up all five guest rooms (accommodating 12 individuals) and owner and chef Nancy Watson will provide a festive dinner for you all.

Plan a winter retreat or spa get-away with New Buffalo Inn & Suites (www.newbuffaloinn.com), in New Buffalo. All six guest suites at the main inn have gas fireplaces, perfect for relaxing beside with a good book, a classic movie on the television or a nap on a snowy afternoon.

In addition to the fireplace, the Miss Eber Knight room, named for New Buffalo's first woman settler, also offers a two-person Jacuzzi tub, skylights for stargazing, king-size bed and private deck. The SS Post Boy room pays tribute to Captain Whittaker with a great room with limestone fireplace, a private deck overlooking the inn's back garden, a kitchen with dining area and a private queen-sized bedroom and bathroom with a 2-person Jacuzzi tub.

The Inn also offers six quaint cottages throughout New Buffalo. The 2-story Taylor Cottage features four guest rooms and two full master baths, each with 2-person jetted tubs and three fireplaces – two in

various living areas and a third in one of two master bedrooms.

Whether staying at the inn or one of its cottages, you can add a variety of spa services to enhance your stay. The on-site spa delivers dozens of options on its extensive menu of therapies to purify your body, mind and spirit – including massages, facials, hydro-therapy and healing treatments. There's even a couple's massage and dry sauna treatment, for those romantic winter get-aways.

Many of the homes in the Blue Fish Vacation Rental (www.bluefishvacations.com) portfolio offer fireplaces and even hot tubs, for warming up on cold winter nights. "Lofty Heights" in Sawyer is perched high above the tree tops and is adjacent to Warren Dunes State Park. With a wood-burning fireplace and hot tub (spectacular views included), this 3-bedroom, 2.5-bathroom home makes a great romantic or family retreat destination.

The "Unforgettable Cottage" in Union Pier features an indoor steam shower, outdoor hot tub and wood-burning fireplace, in a cozy and comfortable atmosphere. The three-bedroom bungalow "Sunny Side" in Lakeside also offers a wood-burning fireplace and outdoor hot tub, just two blocks from the Lake Michigan shoreline.

At The Harbor Grand (www.harbor-grand.com), a boutique, Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired hotel in downtown New Buffalo, several sweet winter traditions await.

Settle into a fireplace room overlooking the snow-covered harbor, relax in a whirlpool tub and then wrap yourself in one of the hotel's fluffy guest robes. Or, head down to the indoor pool and hot tub for some warming aqua-therapy. In-house massages are available, for singles and couples, upon request.

Who says ice cream is just a summer treat? If the urge arises, you can request room-service delivery of Ben & Jerry's (24/7), with a variety of flavors available. In the morning, order breakfast in bed with the Michigan blueberry bread

and coffee from Uncommon Grounds in nearby Saugatuck.

Snuggle into the cozy leather sofa by the fireplace in the hotel's Terrace Room and enjoy a specialty coffee drink – such as the warming and mouth-watering Vosges Haut Chocolat. S'mores are also served up nightly, November through April, on the Terrace patio (complimentary for guests and just \$6 for non-guests).

If your visit to Harbor Country falls within the month of February, be sure to check out the various activities planned around the inaugural "Harbor Country Chocolate Classic." Every weekend throughout the month will feature classes, tastings and other programs focused on one of the sweetest treats – chocolate!

For more information about Harbor Country, visit www.VisitHarborCountry.org. □

