



Beaver Island Chamber of Commerce, Frank Solle

The east shore of Lake Michigan, which stretches from Berrien County north to the Straits of Mackinac, is the largest freshwater dune system in the world. With towering sands that rise several hundred feet above the lake, there are countless locales to soak up the sun during the day and then watch it set across the western horizon as night falls.

### *Silver Beach, St. Joseph*

For more than 100 years, vacationers have flocked to Silver Beach in St. Joseph for its sugar-sand beaches that stretch for 2,450 feet along the freshwater shoreline. In those early years, the Silver Beach Amusement Park graced this space, offering family-friendly activities that would last all day long and into the evening.

Today, new generations can enjoy the **Silver Beach Carousel**, walk the pier to the historic range lights, look up into Michigan's tallest kaleidoscope and watch the colorful changing patterns before settling in on the beach to watch the sun sink into the horizon, reflecting on the shimmering waters of Lake Michigan.

### *Mount Baldhead, Saugatuck*

Perched proudly in downtown Saugatuck, Mount Baldhead is a 600-foot tall sand dune that overlooks Lake Michigan to the west and the Kalamazoo River to the east. Atop this bluff, a large white ball still stands—a former World War II radar station that was established to detect planes coming over the Great Lakes. Today, it is most commonly used by boaters as a location marker as they travel the local waterways.

While in the area, be sure to check out the award-winning Oval Beach, take a dune ride or riverboat excursions, and then plan the trek of a mere 300 or so steps to the top of Mt. Baldy's summit for breathtaking views that stretch out for miles in all directions.

### *Grand Haven State Park*

After a day of exploring downtown Grand Haven, including the nightly presentation of the **"World's Largest Musical Fountain"** on Dewey Hill, head west along the Grand River boardwalk toward the expansive 48-acre State Park. The park, consisting entirely of beach sand, provides scenic views of Lake Michigan and the Grand Haven pier and range lights. If your visit is in the winter, stay parked in your car and take in Mother Nature's sunset show or bundle up and take a walk along the snow-covered beach.

## *Silver Lake Sand Dunes, Mears*

One of the largest deposits of living dunes encompasses some 2,000 acres of rolling sands, 1.5 miles wide and three miles long, bordering Lake Michigan and Silver Lake. This area is home to the 1874 Little Sable Point Lighthouse, where visitors can climb to the top of the tower for a keeper's view of the vast shoreline and beyond.

One of Silver Lake State Park's biggest draws is the 450-acre off-road vehicle area, where dune buggies reign. The windblown sand, undulating ridges and valleys, wispy dune grass and scrub brush create a desert-like environment where adventure seekers can tear it up all day long, before lining up to watch the sun set in the west.

## *Arcadia Bluff Overlook, Manistee County*

Plan an afternoon exploring the Arcadia Marsh Nature Preserve or the CS Mott Nature Preserve at Arcadia Dunes in northern Manistee County, each just off the M-22 scenic drive. A roadside rest area just north of the village of Arcadia features an observation platform ideal for viewing shoreline towns such as Frankfort to the north. Accessible year round, visitors report seeing passing freighters below, eagles flying above and breathtaking sunsets no matter the season.

## *Empire Bluff, Empire*

In the heart of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, the 1.5-mile Empire Bluff trail leads to an overlook some 400 feet above the sandy shoreline of Lake Michigan. On a clear day, South Manitou Island comes into view off in the western distance, while South Bar Lake and the Robert H. Manning Memorial Light is visible to the north. The trail is open year-round, and is ideal for snowshoe treks with the family. No matter the season, Empire Bluff is a popular sunset viewing spot, just

bring a flashlight for the trip back down to the park entrance.

## *The Emerald Isle, Beaver Island*

On the east side of Beaver Island, Michigan's Emerald Isle, the aptly Irish-named Donegal Bay is considered one of the prettiest spots on the island. Here, Mt. Pisgah, an overgrown sand dune that rises 700 feet above the beach, is the highest point on the island. Located just a quarter mile from shore, this climbable bluff provides an adventurous and romantic place to end the evening, as the sun says goodbye for the day.

## *Legs Inn, Cross Village*

As one of the oldest settlements in Michigan, Cross Village—located on the scenic M-119 “Tunnel of Trees”—has long-standing ties to the Native American Ottawa Indians, and was once a thriving fishing and lumber town. After enjoying a traditional Polish dinner at the **Legs Inn** restaurant, step out back and soak up the beauty of the expansive gardens as well as the panoramic views of Lake Michigan and several islands that dot the waterways in the distance. From the old school viewfinder, you can see four of the state's many lighthouses, as well as have a front row seat for sunset.

## *Fort Holmes, Mackinac Island*

The historic Fort Holmes is noted as the highest point on Mackinac Island, originally built in 1814 by British forces during the War of 1812. The locals consider this one of the “hidden gem” spots where late afternoon visits turn into evening opportunities for watching the sun set behind the silhouette of the five-mile Mighty Mackinac Bridge. Rebuilt during the summer of 2015, Fort Holmes is under the auspices of the Mackinac State Historic Parks, with grounds open year round for public gatherings.

Dianna Stampfer, Promote Michigan

