



Grape Lakes Adventures

EXPLORING THE RECREATIONAL SIDE OF MICHIGAN
WINE COUNTRY / *By Dianna Stampfler*

THE UNIQUE CONDITIONS CREATED by the Great Lakes provide the ideal setting for growing grapes and crafting them into award-winning wines. Over time, forces of nature have also shaped Michigan's shorelines, sculpted towering dunes, carved mile after mile of slow-flowing rivers and peppered the waters with islands of all shapes and sizes.

While there are many scenic spots in Michigan, one has gained international attention. In 2011, the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore was named the "Most Beautiful Place in America" by viewers of *Good Morning America*. The 30-plus miles of sugar-sand beaches and majestic dunes that stretch through Benzie

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Opposite page: Voted “The Most Beautiful Place in America,” the Sleeping Bear Dunes are easily accessible by foot, boat or motor vehicle. This page: From camping and RV-ing to kayaking, Michigan wine country has myriad recreational opportunities.

SITES FOR ADVENTURE

Michigan Department of Natural Resources
www.michigan.gov/dnr



Snap the tag above for the DNR's MI Camping and Recreation Locator app.

Travel Michigan
www.michigan.org

Association of RV Parks & Campgrounds—Michigan
www.michcampgrounds.com

Becoming an Outdoors Woman
www.michigan.gov/bow

Great Lakes Nordic Ski Council
www.skinordic.org

League of Michigan Bicyclists
www.lmb.org

Michigan Association of Paddlesport Providers
www.michigancanoe.com

Michigan Association of Recreational Vehicles & Campgrounds
www.marvac.org

Michigan Mountain Biking Association
www.mmba.org

Michigan Trout Unlimited
www.michigantu.org

North Country Trail
www.northcountrytrail.com

Thumb Area Tourism Council
www.thumbtourism.org

Upper Peninsula Travel & Recreation Association
www.uptravel.com

West Michigan Tourist Association
www.wmta.org

and Leelanau counties are just a stone's throw from the state's largest wine region.

A hike to the top of Empire Bluffs affords panoramic views that extend for miles. Or if you want a nautical approach to the view, consider paddling the Platte or Crystal rivers. Each provides quiet solitude and a glimpse at the natural wonders that abound. Finish the day by soaking up the sunset at one of Lake Michigan's beaches with a bottle of locally crafted wine—a perfect way to end a day of touring.

Near the dunes and elsewhere, Michigan boasts an extensive and often interconnecting system of bike trails (which double as cross-country ski trails in winter). That includes

linear trails under the auspices of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The TART—which sounds like a cherry orchard tour but actually stands for the Traverse Area Recreational Trail—includes routes that traverse the Leelanau and Old Mission Peninsula wine regions and beyond. In central West Michigan, the Hart-Montague Trail passes by rural countrysides, orchards and vineyards. The Falling Water Trail near Jackson's Pioneer Wine Trail region focuses on the area's rich Native American and railroad history.

With more than 38,000 miles of rivers and streams, Michigan is a fisherman's paradise. Cast a line on nearly 50 rivers in the Northern



Michigan has four-season fun — from fishing to snowshoeing, and everything in between.

Lower Peninsula rated as “Blue Ribbon Streams” by the DNR. Five of these are also recognized as “Wild & Scenic Rivers”—the Au Sable, Bear Creek, Manistee, Pere Marquette and Pine. The Au Sable also has the distinction of being the founding location of Trout Unlimited (in Grayling, 1959). No matter which fishing adventure you choose, you’ll find a fine Michigan wine pairs well with the day’s catch.

Backpacking the various rural sections along the North Country Trail (NCT), which stretches nearly 600 miles along Michigan’s two peninsulas, is a unique adventure. The NCT national headquarters in Lowell (east of Grand Rapids) is located near the halfway point of the 4,600-mile, seven-state route, which extends from New York to North Dakota.

Among the route’s highlights: the Manistee National Forest, the M-119 “Tunnel of Trees” north of Harbor Springs (a top spot for fall color tours), the Jordan River Pathway—considered by many as the “jewel” of the trail, and the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore along Lake Superior. Jump off the beaten path in the U.P. to seek out dozens of picturesque waterfalls or spend a leisurely afternoon combing the beach for treasures. At the end of your Yooper adventure, stop by one of the four wineries that call this remote area their home for a sample and a souvenir.

Pitch a tent, hook up the RV or even sleep under the stars at one of Michigan’s public and private campgrounds—there are more than 1,000 located in and around the state’s four federally recognized viticultural regions—Fennville, Lake Michigan Shore, Leelanau Peninsula and Old Mission Peninsula (see article on *terroir*, pg. 26). Among the popular activities for campers is fishing, boating, sightseeing and wine touring.

Did you know you’re never more than a half-hour from a State Park, State Forest Campground, State Recreation Area or trail system? These protected areas are a crown jewel, offering unparalleled experiences.

A visit to Warren Dunes State Park in Berrien County offers three miles of shoreline with dune formations rising 260 feet above Lake Michigan. Six miles of trails meander through this nearly 2,000-acre park.

The 33-mile Kal-Haven Trail stretches along a former railroad bed from Kalamazoo to South Haven. Walk, cross country ski or saddle up as you cross bridges (including the historic Donald F. Nichols Covered Bridge) and pass through quaint towns and historical points of interest.

The Waterloo State Park near Jackson is home to the Gerald Eddy Discovery Center, as well as four campgrounds, nearly a dozen inland lakes and miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails that traverse the park’s 20,000 acres.

Earlier this year, Michigan designated its newest state park, the 4,200-acre Rockport State Park, just north of Alpena. Its deep-water protected harbor and Besse Nature Area will make this a popular addition.

The DNR (recently recognized as a 2011 National Recreation and Park Association Gold Medalist) has introduced a “First Time Campers Program”—an edu-vacation service that offers hands-on instruction on setting up camp, rental gear and two nights of camping at one of 18 state parks. They’ll also be handing out samples of “Pure Michigan Caramel Apple” ice cream—the recently crowned official ice cream of Michigan State Parks—during a statewide RV tour to help promote the popular “Recreation 101” outreach/education program.

Techies take note! The MI Camping and Recreation Locator app—available for Blackberry, Android and iPhone—provides quick access to information on state parks, forest campgrounds, boat launches and outdoor activities like area beaches, hiking trails, horseback riding and more. The app also includes online searches, maps, GPS tracking and click-to-call phone numbers. Download it from your service provider, or find links at www.michigan.gov/campandrelocator.

No matter what your recreational preferences, Michigan is a four-season vacation playground! Winter offers more than 43 ski resorts; countless trails for cross country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling; and extreme ice-related events. For a unique winter excursion, there are even a dozen or so dogsledding operations around the state. After a day on the trails or slopes, warm up with one of your favorite Michigan wines—many of which are served at the state’s destination resorts.

As you plan your Pure Michigan adventure, make www.Michigan.org your first stop for accessing thousands of tourism properties and destinations just waiting to be explored!

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