



## Dinner with a view

When fresh snow covers the ground around Hillman, it's not unusual to see a group of enthusiastic revelers in a carriage drawn by a team of Belgian draft horses on the grounds of Thunder Bay Resort. Their unique sojourn takes them 2½ miles through the wooded countryside to a cozy abode called the Elk Antler Cabin, where a roaring fire and a mouth-watering dinner await.

En route, the guests of Thunder Bay Resort ([thunderbayresort.com](http://thunderbayresort.com)) are given a rare opportunity to view one of the Midwest's private elk herds with 35 head on the resort's 160-acre enclosed preserve along the eastern edge of the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

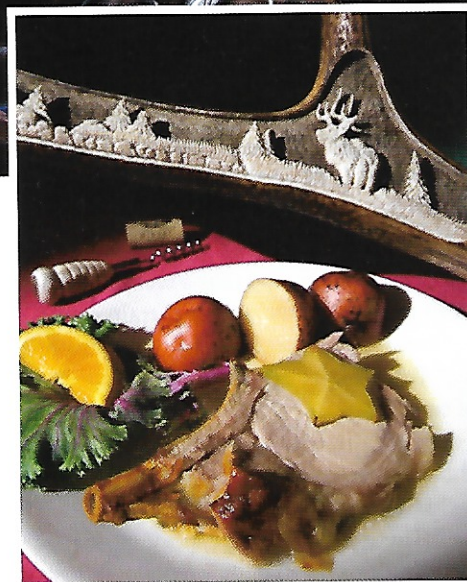
"We usually have snow on the ground throughout the season," said owner Jack Matthias, who has offered these unique tours for nearly 30 years. "But sometimes not enough to pack a base for sleigh runners. So, we may have to go back and forth between sleighs and carriages, but once you are seated, it is hard to tell which you are on."

For more than 30 years, visitors have

flocked to the region for this unique, award-winning experience, the only place east of the Rocky Mountains to do so. During the four-hour event, guests are educated and entertained about local elk history and lore while dining on a gourmet five-course meal prepared on a 125-year-old wood cookstove by Jack's son, Spencer. Each course is paired with a wine hand-selected from one of the wineries that dot the nearby Sunrise Coast along the Lake Huron shoreline.

Offered daily the week of Christmas and weekends all winter long, the Gourmet Elk Viewing Wine Dinner is ideal for couples, families and large groups. Overnight accommodations in a variety of chalets, cabins and villas create a prolonged experience. Those looking for something more might enjoy the resort's Murder Mystery Weekends (Jan. 3-5 and March 13-15), which also include the Elk Viewing Dinner Ride on Saturday night.

Nearby, Treetops Resort ([treetops.com](http://treetops.com)) in Gaylord also offers Wilderness Sleigh Ride Dinners during the winter season. Guests gather at the remote Project Nature property



Gourmet sleigh rides (top) are family-friendly events that lead to a cozy fire and 5-course dinner with wine at a rustic cabin in the woods (above).

for a bonfire and hot beverage before boarding a horse-drawn sleigh for a 25-minute ride through the snow-covered forest where a four-course meal, paired with local beer and wine, awaits at the Wilderness Cabin — offered Saturdays, Jan. 4-March 7 (excluding Feb. 1).

"The beauty of northern Michigan is on full display with a culinary and winter outdoors experience that is all around," said Elliott Moore of Dallas, Texas. "Christmas-card worthy." ≈

— Dianna Stampfler