

# Southwest Michigan

## Road Trip Adventures

From the lakeshore to the countryside — and everywhere in between — the state's southwest region is loaded with small-town charm, family-friendly attractions, and natural beauty waiting to be discovered and explored

BY DIANNA STAMPFLER





## Harbor Country: The Hamptons of the Midwest

With its expansive sugar sand beaches, towering dunes, meandering waterways, bustling marinas, and quaint communities, Harbor Country — also referred to as the Hamptons of the Midwest and Michigan's Riviera — is a summer vacation paradise.

Stretching 16 miles along the Lake Michigan shoreline, this collection of eight idyllic small towns includes Michiana (just north of the Indiana state line), Grand Beach, New Buffalo, Three Oaks, Union Pier, Lakeside, Harbert, and Sawyer (home of the Warren Dunes State Park). The largest of these is New Buffalo (population 1,690), situated at the crossroads of I-94 and U.S.-12 — a route once traveled by prehistoric mastodons, early Native Americans, enslaved people escaping via the Underground Railroad, and prohibition-era rum runners.

Outdoor recreation is a major draw for bikers, hikers, and paddlers. Kayakers and stand-up paddleboarders can explore the Galien River Marsh Water Trail, which flows between Glassman Park and the New Buffalo public boat launch — not far from downtown shops, hotels, and eateries. For a different water adventure, New Buffalo Sailing Excursions offers two-hour trips, including a sunset cruise, aboard a 31-foot vessel, for up to six guests.

Three Oaks, which sits 7 miles inland from New Buffalo, is the artistic hub

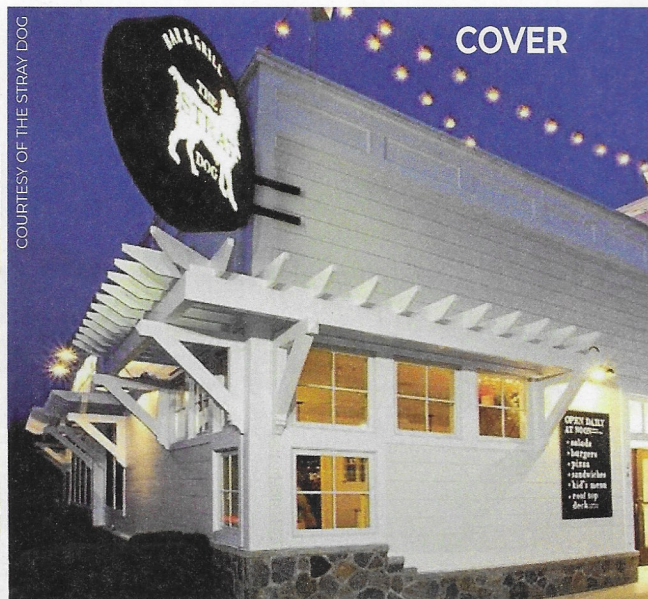
**TOP LEFT:** The Mt. Randall Loop at Warren Dunes State Park in Sawyer is just one of many stunning beaches in Harbor Country. **TOP RIGHT:** The Stray Dog in downtown New Buffalo is within walking distance to Lake Michigan.

**RIGHT:** Paddling along the Galien River Marsh Water Trail is a popular summer activity.

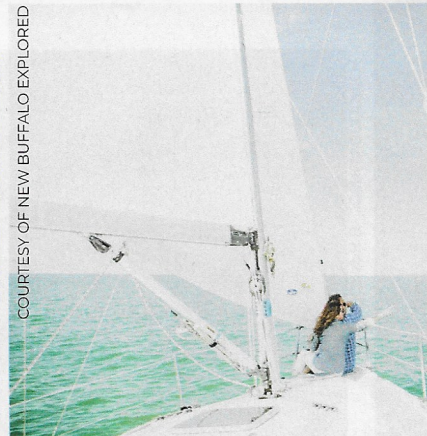
**BELOW LEFT:** Behind-the-scenes tours, craft cocktails, mouthwatering dishes, and a unique putting green make Journeyman Distillery in Three Oaks a top-rated destination.

**BELOW RIGHT:** Take to the waters of Lake Michigan with New Buffalo Sailing Adventures.

**BOTTOM:** Boutique hotels, including The Marina Grand in New Buffalo, dot the shoreline throughout Harbor Country.



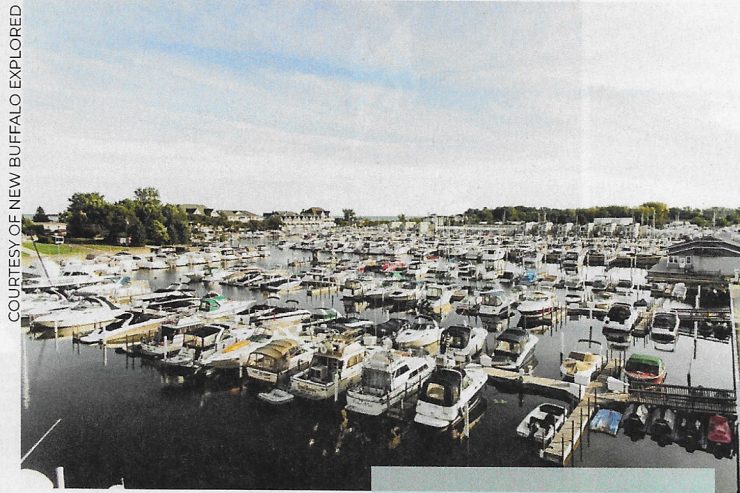
COVER



of the region, with two noted theaters and an award-winning distillery, among other locally owned businesses.

The Vickers, an intimate 126-seat movie house, shows everything from foreign and indie films to documentaries, popular movies, and new releases. The Acorn — Three Oaks' creative space and entertainment venue housed in the former Warren Featherbone Co. factory that manufactured buggy whips and corset stays until 1957 — regularly welcomes internationally renowned





COURTESY OF NEW BUFFALO EXPLORED

musical acts and artists, as well as comedians and other live performance shows.

**BOATER'S PARADISE** The New Buffalo Municipal Marina is within walking distance of the downtown shopping district.

Journeyman Distilling — one of nearly 50 beverage producers in a regional Makers Trail — also occupies a space in the historic 1883 factory building. Here, certified kosher spirits are crafted into signature cocktails like the Lavender Gimlet, Founding Father, and Purple Rain. Welter's Folly, a 30,000-square-foot, 18-hole, family-friendly putting course inspired by the well-known Himalayan putting green at St. Andrews in Scotland, adds to the summer fun. Behind-the-scenes tours, which include spirit samplings, give insight into the distillation process and the menu at the Staymaker Restaurant, serving up favorites such as bagels and lox for brunch or Detroit-style pizza with Featherbone Bourbon crust for dinner.

For global fare, Cafe Gulistan in Harbert — 6 miles north of Three Oaks and 8 miles north of New Buffalo — offers a traditional Kurdish menu including mouth-watering baklava. Open March through October, Redamak's in New Buffalo serves world-class, award-winning burgers — they don't take credit so be sure to bring cash or be prepared to use the on-site ATM. Within walking distance of New Buffalo Beach, The Stray Dog Bar & Grill overlooks the Galien River and features a rooftop patio perfect for dinner, dessert, drinks, and unparalleled sunsets.

A handful of charming historic inns continue to welcome overnight visitors to Harbor Country. Chicago gangster Al Capone was said to hide out at the 31-room Lakeside Inn, where bootleggers would dock their boats and guests would help haul cases of booze back for prohibition parties. The Inn at Union Pier boasts the largest collection of functioning antique Swedish Kakelugn wood-burning fireplaces — 13 of the 16 guest rooms are equipped with these unique and romantic heat sources.

In downtown New Buffalo, The Marina Grand and The Harbor Grand boutique hotels offer modern lodging, plus on-site dining overlooking the plethora of boats docked there during the summer season. One of the sweetest amenities at The Harbor Grand is the Ben & Jerry's Hotline providing ice cream delivery to your room. Add in a service or two at the Foundation Spa and you have the makings for the ultimate pampering retreat.

Venturing out from New Buffalo, visitors can choose from a handful of routes, each offering distinct travel experiences. Heading north, I-94 and I-196 traverse through the Lake Michigan Shore Wine Trail, passing through St. Joseph, Benton Harbor, South Haven, Douglas, and Saugatuck. Following U.S.-12 east provides a pastoral experience with noteworthy attractions just off the beaten path en route to Coldwater in Branch County.

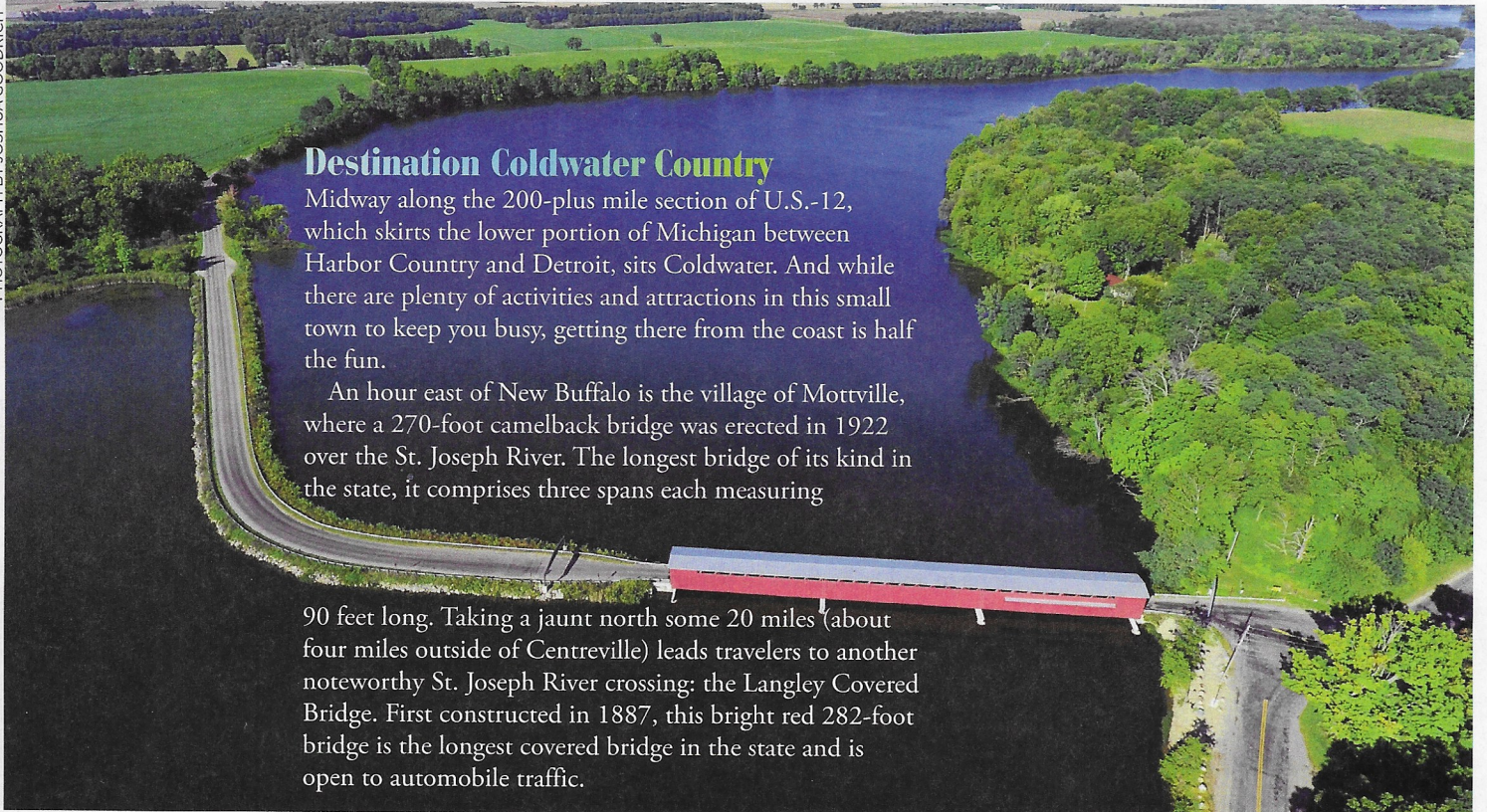
## Destination Coldwater Country

Midway along the 200-plus mile section of U.S.-12, which skirts the lower portion of Michigan between Harbor Country and Detroit, sits Coldwater. And while there are plenty of activities and attractions in this small town to keep you busy, getting there from the coast is half the fun.

An hour east of New Buffalo is the village of Mottville, where a 270-foot camelback bridge was erected in 1922 over the St. Joseph River. The longest bridge of its kind in the state, it comprises three spans each measuring

90 feet long. Taking a jaunt north some 20 miles (about four miles outside of Centreville) leads travelers to another noteworthy St. Joseph River crossing: the Langley Covered Bridge. First constructed in 1887, this bright red 282-foot bridge is the longest covered bridge in the state and is open to automobile traffic.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSHUA GOODRICH



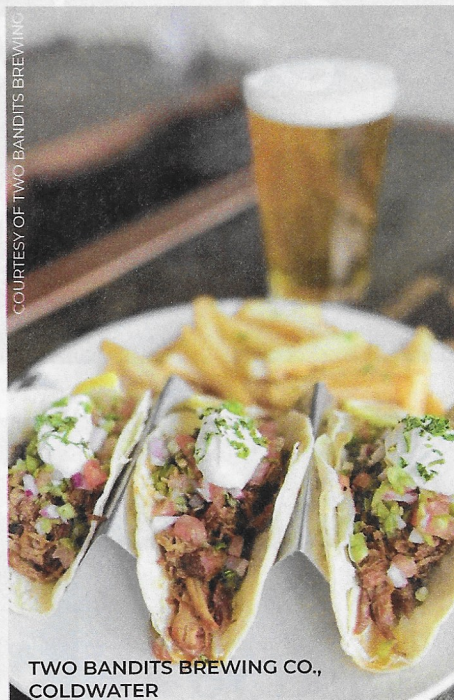


MUNRO HOUSE, JONESVILLE

Heading further northeast about 13 miles, meandering backroads navigate to Colon, aka “The Magic Capital of the World.” Magician Harry Blackstone Sr., who was born in nearby Three Rivers, settled in this small town in the 1920s and with Percy Abbot founded the Blackstone Magic Co., today known as Abbott’s Magic Shop. Colon grew to be a gathering place for many of Blackstone’s friends and colleagues and in 1937 they hosted their first Magic Get Together. This event held during the first weekend of August still draws dozens of performers and hundreds of spectators. More than two dozen magicians are even buried in Colon’s Lakeview Cemetery.

The shining star of Coldwater is the Capri Drive-In, one of only a dozen or so such theaters in Michigan, located right on U.S.-12 (17 miles east of Colon). Operated by the third generation of the Magocs family, who opened as a single-screen operation in 1964, the Capri now shows nightly double features on its two screens from April through October.

For a different type of theater experience, the 500-seat Tibbits Opera House remains a highlight of downtown Coldwater, just as it has since 1882. This summer, theatergoers can enjoy Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* and *Encanto*, as well as limited performances of *Lend Me a Tenor* and *Grease*. Classic films, concerts, recitals, and other live performances are held throughout the year, in addition to rotating exhibits in the Arts Alive gallery. There’s even the Ghost Light Bar offering concessions (named as such because the Tibbits is rumored to be haunted).



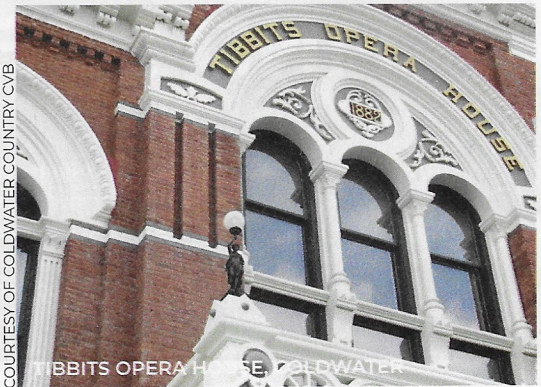
TWO BANDITS BREWING CO., COLDWATER

A stone’s throw from Tibbits is Two Bandits Brewing Co., offering everything from cheese curds and Bavarian pretzels to charcuterie, sandwiches, salads, and steaks. The craft beers here are brewed by Navy veteran Bob Garza who owns the joint with friend and business partner, Mark Young. At any given time, there are about 10 different styles on tap, including Czech Mate, a Czech-style pilsner; The Outlaw, a dark and hoppy brew with roasted malt flavors of dark chocolate and coffee; and Aces High, a light refreshing summer ale, the first beer ever produced by Two Bandits.

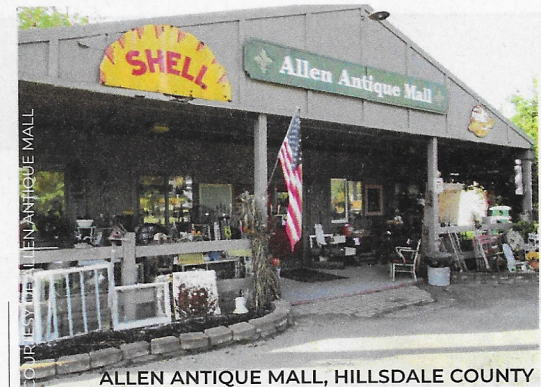
A short 18-minute drive from Coldwater, the village of Allen in Hillsdale County is a must for treasure hunters. Known as the “Antique Capital of



CAPRI DRIVE-IN, COLDWATER



TIBBITS OPERA HOUSE, COLDWATER



ALLEN ANTIQUE MALL, HILLSDALE COUNTY

Michigan,” it is home to several vintage and resale shops. During the second week of August, thrift seekers may also enjoy the Heritage Trail Garage Sale, which spans dozens of cities along a 180-mile stretch of U.S.-12.

One of the more unique inns in Hillsdale County is the Munro House B&B in Jonesville. Dating back to the early 1830s, this historic inn harbored hundreds of runaway slaves during the Civil War. The Munro family lived here until 1945, and it later served as the local American Legion Post, before falling into disrepair. It was ultimately lovingly restored as a private home and its five charming, fireplace-equipped guest rooms have served as a resting place for travelers since 1985.

## Discover Historic Marshall

Less than 30 miles north out of Coldwater via I-69 — or by way of M-99 out of Jonesville — the city of Marshall lays claim to the country's largest National Historic Landmark District, in the small urban category. More than 800 residential, civic, religious, and commercial buildings in a variety of architectural styles can be found throughout the downtown area. Each September during the weekend after Labor Day, the community opens the doors to a handful of these buildings for its annual Historic Home Tour, one of the longest running such events in Michigan.

Incorporated in 1836, Marshall was once in the running for the state capital but lost that distinction to Lansing by a single vote. Early settlers were so confident that they'd land the honor, they even built a Governor's Mansion and Capitol Hill School. These are now among several noteworthy public museum sites, along with the Honolulu House built in 1860 with a unique combination of Hawaiian, Italianate, and Gothic Revival styles; American Museum of Magic, a must-visit for those who ventured through Colon; and Calhoun County Fairgrounds, home of Michigan's oldest continually operating fair, dating back to 1839.

Established in 1909 as a restaurant and hotel — and even boasting a bowling alley at one point — Schuler's is also located in Marshall. One of Michigan's most iconic businesses, the company was led by three generations of the Schuler family until Sue Damron, a longtime employee, acquired ownership in 2019. Five new boutique guest rooms will open this summer, under the moniker The Royal Hotel. The pub and restaurant menu continues to offer signature favorites such as Heritage Cheese

spread with house-made crackers, barbecue meatballs served in a pewter cup, classic Swiss onion soup, and roast prime rib, as well as decadent desserts like carrot cake and pecan balls.

Just a few blocks away and overlooking Marshall's famed Circle Fountain constructed in the exact center of Calhoun County, The National House Inn (circa 1835) was a halfway stop between Chicago and Detroit and later became an important layover along the underground railroad. Today this oldest brick building in the county features 15 uniquely designed guest rooms inside its stately red brick walls.

Michigan is home to more than 350 breweries, and Marshall's Dark Horse Brewing Co. is well known thanks in part to *Dark Horse Nation*, a one-season show that aired in 2014 on The History Channel. Inside the taproom, handmade mugs adorn the ceiling under which guests savor soups, salads, pizza, wings, and amazing mac and cheese made with homemade crispy pork belly blended with creamy Colby and cheddar.

On the outskirts of town is one of the state's most unique attractions: Cornwell's Turkeyville USA, a full-fledged dinner theater offering hilarious performances and hearty turkey dinners complete with all the fixings. Those with a sweet tooth and a bit of ambition might end the meal by ordering a Super Tom. This mega dessert — with its 13 scoops of ice cream covered with five toppings, crushed peanuts, whipped cream, and of course a cherry on top — is free for anyone who can down the entire thing in less than 15 minutes. Turkeyville also offers a 14-acre campground and event site where flea markets, car shows, antique tractor and machinery shows, craft fairs, and other fun community activities are held between April and October.



DARK HORSE BREWING CO., MARSHALL



GOVERNOR'S MANSION MUSEUM, MARSHALL



SCHULER'S RESTAURANT & PUB, MARSHALL



HONOLULU HOUSE MUSEUM, MARSHALL

COURTESY OF CHOOSE MARSHALL

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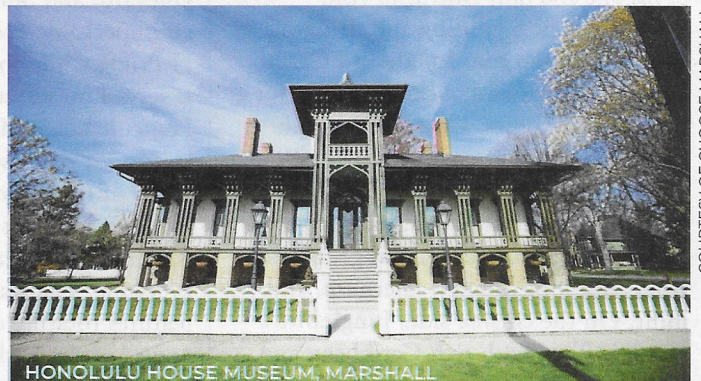
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COVER



BRICK AND BRINE, RADISSON PLAZA HOTEL AT KALAMAZOO CENTER



BRONSON PARK, DOWNTOWN KALAMAZOO

## Yes, there really is a Kalamazoo!

From Marshall, trek west along I-94 for 35 miles to Kalamazoo, where Gibson Guitars and Checker Cabs were once manufactured, where Derek Jeter learned to play baseball, and where Bell's Brewery launched Michigan's current craft brewing culture. The city's well-known slogan — "Yes, there really is a Kalamazoo!" — has been around for more than 40 years and is a cheeky nod to the No. 1 Glenn Miller song "(I've Got a Gal in) Kalamazoo," which was released in 1942.

Downtown Kalamazoo is always active with pubs, breweries, restaurants, and events like the free Sunday afternoon concerts in Bronson Park. Pack a picnic or grab takeout from a local eatery like Maru Sushi or Water Street Coffee, settle in on a blanket, and enjoy the various family-friendly shows (June through August). This historic park even once hosted Abraham Lincoln for a Republic Rally four years before he was elected president, and a statue honoring his 1856 speech will be dedicated on August 27 — the anniversary of his one and only Michigan visit.

For an exciting dining and drinking experience, pop into JungleBird Caribbean restaurant and cocktail lounge for a taste of the tropics. Cocktails here are as flavorful as they are colorful. Puka Punch — a recipe from the famous Tiki-Ti bar in Los Angeles — is an 11-ingredient beverage featuring rum, lime, orange, passion fruit, pineapple, honey, falernum, and mint. On the cuisine side, JungleBird's menu is filled with rich Caribbean and Miami flavors, including seafood dishes,

flautas, tostadas, and of course, a Cuban sandwich.

Across the street, the Kalamazoo Radisson Plaza Hotel with 340 newly renovated guest rooms is the anchor of the downtown area. Brick and Brine is the hotel's hottest restaurant, featuring a modern layout and several seating areas to accommodate romantic dates as well as small group gatherings. The whipped feta served with honey, thyme, lemon, and grilled focaccia is a diner's favorite, and artisan pastas such as lamb ragu and lobster ravioli are sure to satisfy. Meat lovers will find plenty of options, including roasted duck, a 14-ounce heritage tomahawk pork chop, and lamb chops, each served with perfectly paired and plated sides. An impressive wine, beer, and beverage list is also available.

For a more intimate experience, check out Henderson Castle, perched on a hilltop on the edge of downtown. Built in 1895 as the private 11,000-square-foot Queen Anne-style home for Frank and Mary Henderson, this elegant boutique inn is known as the "Jewel of Kalamazoo." In addition to its 10 guest rooms, visitors will find a spa, pool, vineyard, and Spirits Lounge as well as an impeccable French-inspired menu at H Prime Chophouse. Afternoon high tea is served on select dates, and owner/chef Francois Louis Moyet even offers cooking classes for those who want to learn his tricks of the trade.

When it comes to museums, the Kalamazoo area has something for everyone. The Kalamazoo Institute of Art features rotating exhibits and collections, as well as the Kirk Newman School of Art. Highlights of the Kalamazoo Valley

Museum include the Mystery of the Mummy, Children's Landscape, and a state-of-the-art planetarium. South of town 6 miles, the Air Zoo Aerospace & Science Experience is one of the state's most noted attractions with interactive exhibits, simulators, and more than 100 rare spacecraft and aircraft, including the world's only SR-71B Blackbird. Sitting on a picturesque 90-acre campus 17 miles northeast of downtown Kalamazoo, the Gilmore Car Museum in Hickory Corners is the nation's largest auto museum with more than 400 vintage and collector vehicles and motorcycles. They also host Wednesday Night Cruise-ins and provide an opportunity to get behind the wheel at the Model T Driving School.

Hikers and bikers up for an adventure can hit the 33.9-mile Kal-Haven Trail, which follows a former rail line between Kalamazoo and the Lake Michigan port town of South Haven. Passing through several small communities and rural countryside, the route also features a historic covered bridge near the South Haven trailhead.

If driving to South Haven, the "Blueberry Capital of the World," follow M-43 west for nearly 40 miles and then jump on I-196 and head north to the twin cities of Douglas and Saugatuck (connected by Blue Star Highway and separated by the Kalamazoo River). If a pit stop is needed along the way, make it Paw Paw and St. Julian Winery's production facility and tasting room. Michigan's longest operating winery offers tasting room samples from its massive wine, spirit, and cider portfolio, as well as weekend tours of the whole operation.

## The Art Coast: Saugatuck & Douglas

For generations, artistic and creative types have found the Saugatuck-Douglas area a welcoming haven to explore and share. The Ox-Bow School of Art and Artists' Residency — an affiliate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago — has been offering a wealth of programming in a variety of mediums for over a century while the Saugatuck Center for the Arts features public and private events in an abandoned pie factory that was transformed in the early 2000s.

Saugatuck's Oval Beach, with about 100 yards of Lake Michigan frontage, has long been rated among the top in the country by noted outlets such as Condé Nast, *National Geographic*, and even MTV. A mere 303 wooden steps up the bluff brings visitors to Mt. Baldhead, aka Mt. Baldy, where the panoramic views from the observation deck are unparalleled. Getting to both natural sites is easy. The Saugatuck Chain Ferry, which has been in operation since 1838 and is the only remaining such ferry in the country, transports passengers across the Kalamazoo River and runs Memorial Weekend through Labor Day.

While Michigan offers mile after mile of sand dunes, very few places allow for vehicle access — but Saugatuck Dune Rides provides a 40-minute thrill ride that travels near the lost ghost town of Singapore, aka Michigan's Pompeii. For adventure of a different kind, the Star of Saugatuck takes 90-minute narrated tours down the Kalamazoo River and out onto Lake Michigan aboard an 80-foot, 120-passenger sternwheel paddle boat.

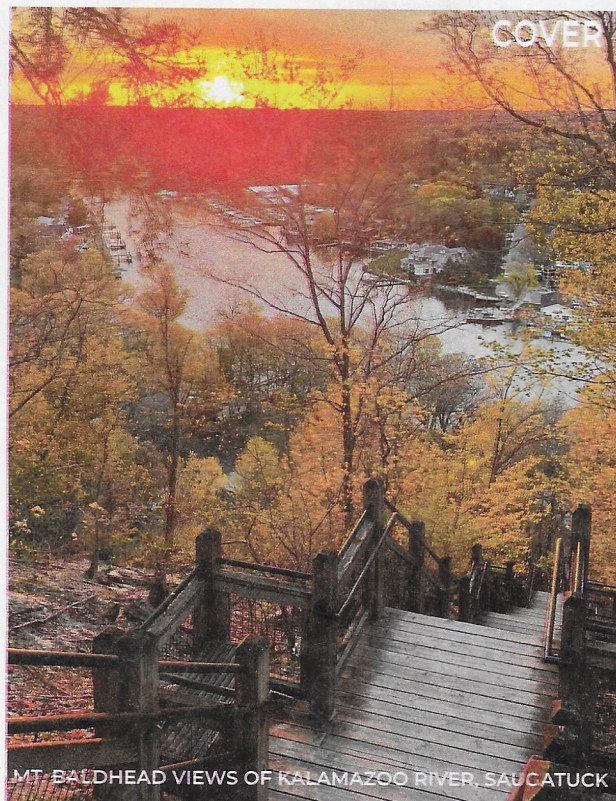
For a memorable meal, head to The Southerner, situated along the Kalamazoo River and operated by 2012 James Beard-nominated chef Matthew Millar. With a focus on southern cuisine, the decor is reminiscent of grandma's kitchen with mismatched floral-patterned dishes, blue mason jar glasses, and country-style cloth napkins. But it is the food that sets this place apart. Top of the menu is Nana's Fried Chicken Dinner served with two sides such as braised greens, grits, cabbage slaw, or baked beans.

The Saugatuck-Douglas area is home to several historic inns, bed-and-breakfasts, and resorts, including The Hotel Saugatuck — a newly renovated luxury 18-room adults-only inn dating back to the 1920s. Strolling to downtown Saugatuck takes a matter of minutes — about a mile, each way — where charming shops, bookstores, galleries, and restaurants are waiting to be explored. There's even a Social District, which allows visitors to grab a cocktail or glass of wine or beer from a licensed establishment and meander around a defined downtown area.

These two colorful towns are also among the most LGBTQ-friendly in the state, and the premier destination is The Dunes Resort — one of the largest gay and lesbian resorts in the country. Situated on a 20-acre wooded lot on the south side of Douglas, this popular resort featuring various bars, decks, a lounge, and a pool is a hub of activity with themed parties, karaoke, drag queen bingo, and more.

If time permits, head north out of town to the historic Felt Mansion, which was constructed between 1925 and 1928 for the family of self-made millionaire Dorr Felt. In later years, the property operated as the Saint Augustine Seminary, then as a prison, and later as offices for the State Police. For years, it sat vacant until it was rediscovered and restored into a historical showplace. Guided and self-guided tours are offered on select dates, with special events throughout the year. The Felt Mansion also sits adjacent to the Saugatuck Dunes State Park, and as you hike from the parking lot to the beach, be on the lookout for prickly pear cactus, which grows wild in the sandy terrain.

A visit to the Saugatuck-Douglas area wouldn't be complete without a day trip to Fennville, an agricultural and culinary tourism hotspot less than 10 miles inland. This small town is home to Fenn Valley Vineyards, Virtue Cider, Evergreen Lane Creamery, and Crane's Pie Pantry Restaurant & Winery, as well as Salt of the Earth, a rustic American eatery with an ever-changing farm-to-table menu and an impressive live music schedule. ●



MT. BALDHEAD VIEWS OF KALAMAZOO RIVER, SAUGATUCK

PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIN DIMMER



THE OX-BOW SCHOOL OF ART AND ARTISTS' RESIDENCY

COURTESY SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS CVB



SAUGATUCK DUNE RIDES

PHOTOGRAPH BY CRAIG WATSON COURTESY OF SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS CVB



THE SOUTHERNER, SAUGATUCK

COURTESY OF THE SOUTHERNER