



FIELD GUIDE

Exploring Michigan:
Tips, trends, and tidbits

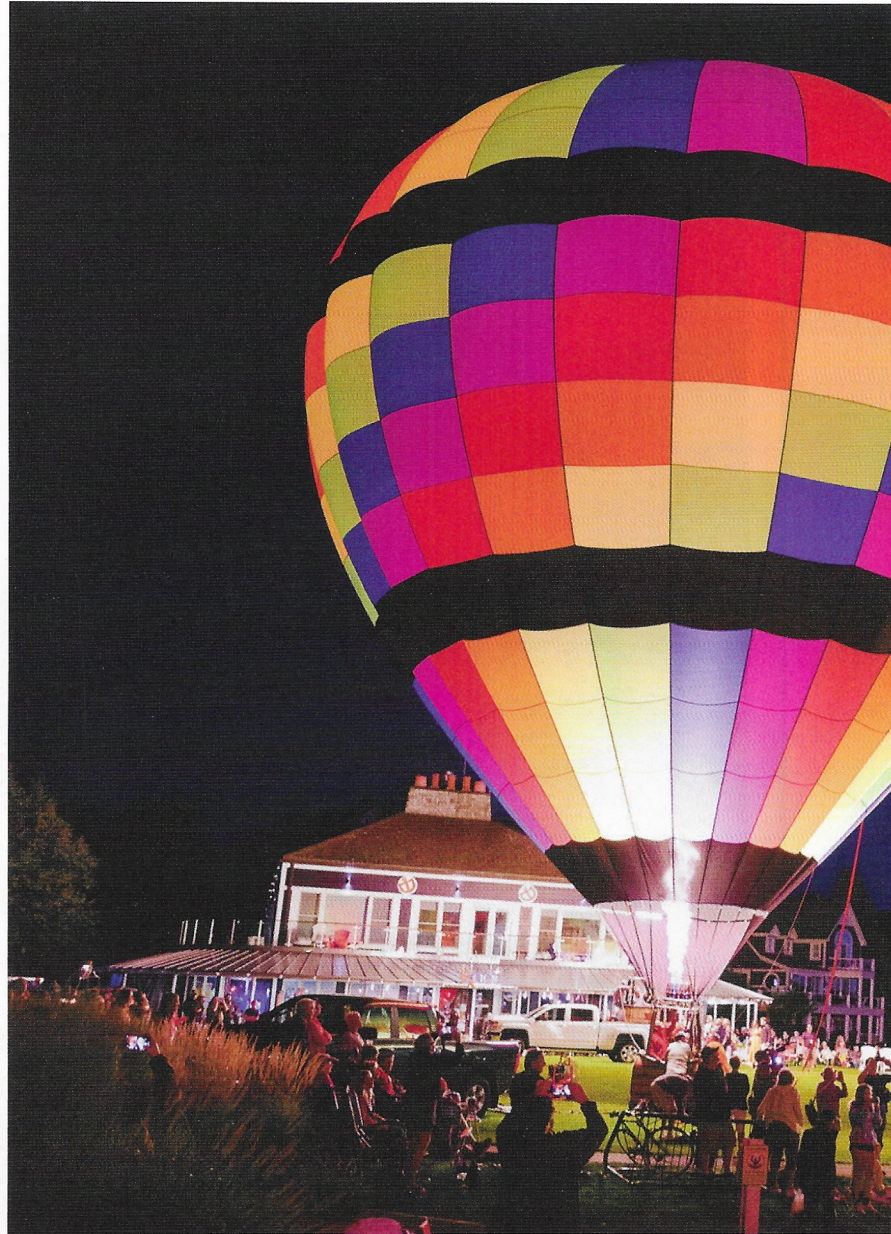
Beautiful Walks: An updated 40-page “Mainland Trails of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore” guide covers 15 beautiful treks in Leelanau and Benzie counties. The revised \$6.95 booklet, coordinated by the Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes (friendsofsleepingbear.org), in partnership with michigantrailmaps.com, includes mile-by-mile trail descriptions, difficulty ratings, and color photos with detailed maps showing contour lines, elevation figures, mileage flags, and location icons for scenic views, ghost forests, shipwrecks, and more. It’s available at the Lakeshore’s Philip A. Hart Visitor Center in Empire, the Dune Climb, the DH Day Campground, Glen Haven historical village, and area shops, or at michigantrailmaps.com/books-and-guides.

Another Accolade: The 158-acre Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids earned honors this summer as the country’s top sculpture park in *USA Today’s* Readers’ Choice 10Best awards competition. It was one of 20 sculpture parks in the U.S. nominated by *USA Today* readers. The top 10 were then selected by 10Best editors. The No. 1 ranking is another prized award for Meijer Gardens, and recognizes its natural setting, world-class sculptures, children’s gardens, and visitors’ experiences. The outdoor campus, tropical conservatory, and permanent artists collections are delights to explore. meijergardens.org

Bad Bugs: With destructive infections of the spotted lanternfly, Asian long-horned beetle, and hemlock wooly adelgid festering around the state, the Michigan DNR encourages residents to look for and report these and other invasive species that can destroy the state’s trees, hops, and grape vines. View the invasive species watch list and learn about the bad ones at michigan.gov/invasives.

— Compiled by Ron Garbinski

Have news that pertains to
Michigan travel and exploration?
Send a note to MSwoyer@Hour-Media.com.



Autumn Air

Little Traverse Bay comes alive
with color during the annual Balloons
Over Bay Harbor celebration

By Dianna Stampfler

For Derrick Jones, the sky’s the limit when it comes to pursuing his hobby. He was just 8 years old when he began crewing on the ground for local balloon pilots in Battle Creek and, four years later, he took his first balloon flight — setting the course up, up, and away for a lifelong passion.



Above: Bay Harbor Village's Sept. 22-24 festival includes two night glow tethered events that may include up to 14 hot-air balloons.

Since he became a licensed aeronaut (pilot) at the age of 21, Jones has clocked in more than 950 flight hours and has founded several ballooning events in Michigan, including Balloons Over Bay Harbor, near Petoskey, first held in 2019.

Michigan's only shoreline balloon festival is scheduled for Sept. 22-24 (weather-dependent). It's expected to attract thousands to the Lake Michigan shore near the Village at Bay Harbor for a series of family-friendly, high-flying events, all free to the public "The balloons inflate and lift off from our marina lawns by the water," says Michelle Denise, marketing manager for Bay Harbor Co. "It's a very exhilarating feeling being so close to them. The night glows, which is when the balloons are illuminated while being grounded on the marina lawns, are beautiful."

The act of inflating one of these massive balloons is a sight to see. Measuring about 50 feet wide and as much as 80 feet tall,

Below: Spectators are encouraged to take photos and videos of the weekend activities that are open to the public.



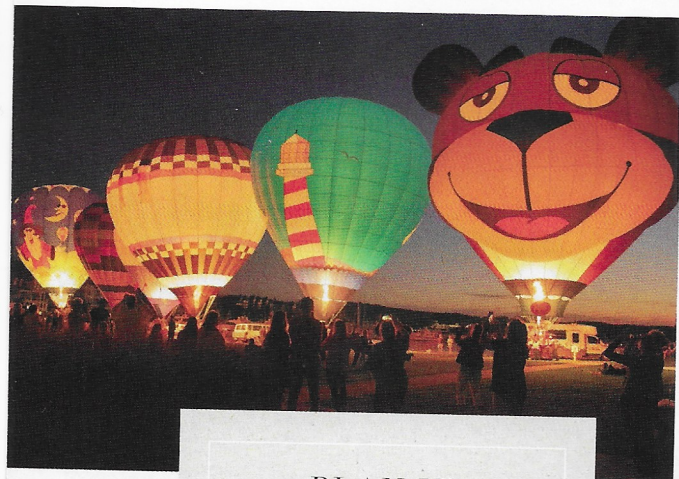
including the wicker gondola (basket), each nylon or polyester balloon is laid out flat on the ground while the crew opens its skirt (mouth) and uses high-powered fans to fill the envelope (balloon) with air.

During this process, the balloon becomes vertical and is tied in place until the crew boards and departs on their aerial journey. The public is invited to bring blankets or chairs to sit on and observe the inflations, which take 20 to 40 minutes per balloon. Snapping photos and capturing videos is encouraged.

A common balloon size is the AX-7, weighing about 550 pounds and holding about 77,000 cubic feet of air. They're operated by a crew of three or four people on the ground. During flight, a balloon will ascend to about 3,000 feet and travel at a speed of three to eight miles per hour, depending on wind speeds. The balloons use a gas burner to increase and decrease elevation. Typical launch events last 45 to 60 minutes.

As breathtaking as the balloon launches are from the ground, balloonists say the view from the sky is mesmerizing. On a clear day, they can see for miles, soaking up views of Lake Michigan's deep

Below: The Friday and Saturday night glows feature illuminated hot-air balloons, some that are 80 feet tall, while being grounded to the marina lawns. Viewers often call this sight “simply beautiful.”



PLAN IT!

The Sept. 22-24 launches for the fourth annual **Balloons Over Bay Harbor** are planned for Friday and Saturday afternoons at 5:30 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday mornings at 7:30 a.m., just 10 minutes after sunrise. Two Illume Night Glow tethered events will take place Friday and Saturday from 8-8:30 p.m., not long after sunset. All of the family-friendly events are weather-dependent and open to the public. info@bayharbor.com

blue waters and sandy shoreline between Charlevoix, Petoskey, and Harbor Springs, and over sprawling waterfront golf courses surrounded by a wide expanse of northern Michigan trees ablaze in autumn color.

“Bay Harbor is a hidden gem, a crown jewel of our beautiful state of Michigan,” says Jones, one of 14 pilots participating in this year’s festival. “Balloons Over Bay Harbor is a unique event held in an exclusive area where the flying is like no other in our state.”

Throughout the weekend, pilots and their crews will be on hand to answer questions and take photos with spectators and Balloonatics (fanatic balloon enthusiasts) of all ages.



Above: The balloons inflate and lift off from the Bay Harbor Village marina lawns near the water.

“I loved that there were all different colors of hot air balloons soaring into the sky and lighting up the night,” says 10-year-old Natalie Babcock, who has been to every Bay Harbor balloon festival with her mom, Becky. “The balloons were very majestic and I love that I was able to get up close to them.”

Other Balloons Over Bay Harbor activities include artist-led, step-by-step instructions for creating a painting of hot air balloons, an evening sip-and-paint for adults, face painting, balloon twister, lawn games, an artisan market, live music, and the Autumn Glory 3K Color Fun Run fundraiser on Saturday morning. Food trucks will be on hand Friday afternoon and most of the day Saturday. ≈