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Diversity in the Great Lakes Bay Region

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The 40-foot-high Canopy Walk in Midland || Courtesy of the Great Lakes Bay Regional Convention & Visitors Bureau

Midwestern hospitality, history, and culture can be found at every turn throughout the Great Lakes Bay Region, which encompasses Bay, Midland, and Saginaw counties, as well as six communities (Bay City, Midland, Saginaw, Chesaning, Frankenmuth, and Birch Run).

Transportation: MBS International Airport in Freeland provides daily service for the Great Lakes Bay area from Detroit Metro Airport via Delta Air Lines and Chicago's O'Hare International Airport aboard United Airlines. Other regional commercial airports are within a 90-mile drive.

Vibe: "Michigan's Great Lakes Bay Region offers a laid-back and relaxed vibe that perfectly complements its stunning natural beauty," says Annette Rummel, CEO for Michigan's Great Lakes Bay Regional Convention & Visitors Bureau. "With its charming small towns, vibrant cities, and picturesque waterfronts, the region invites visitors to unwind, explore outdoor adventures, and indulge in local cuisine and culture."

Hotels: The Great Lakes Bay Region boasts 5,000 guest rooms, many with accompanying meeting space, on-site dining, and other amenities. A major expansion is underway at the Bavarian Inn Lodge & Restaurant in Frankenmuth, which will be unveiled next fall and feature Michigan's largest indoor water park—including a swim-up bar. The property also offers 360 European-themed guest rooms, dining, two lounges, an arcade, and 15,000 square feet of meeting space.

The 150-room DoubleTree by Hilton Bay City-Riverfront can handle groups of up to 550 with 14 meeting room configurations (17,000 square feet in total). The AAA Four Diamond H Hotel, a Dolce by Wyndham in Midland, offers 103 guest rooms and suites, 12 meeting rooms (10,000 square feet total, accommodating 270), and on-site dining.

Venues: Among larger spaces are the Great Hall Banquet & Conference Center in Midland, Horizons Conference Center in Saginaw, and Dow Event Center in Midland. Fishers Hall inside the Frankenmuth Historical Museum or the Pere Marquette Depot in Bay City are more intimate venues. Saginaw boasts cultural event centers like Saginaw Art Museum, Andersen Enrichment Center, and Temple Theatre, with The State Theatre in Bay City or Midland Center for the Arts nearby also offering an artistic flair. Spaces like Apple Mountain Resort & Conference Center or Back Orchard Barn, both in Freeland, and The Golden Glow Ballroom, located southwest of Saginaw, provide a rural experience.

Restaurants: Aster in Midland is all about locally sourced and seasonal foods. Prost! Wine Bar & Charcuterie in downtown Frankenmuth, and now also in Bay City, specializes in just what the name implies. Located in Old Town Saginaw, Artisan Urban Bistro features fine dining. The region is also home to more than a dozen wineries, breweries, and distilleries. Among the oldest is Frankenmuth Brewery, originally founded in 1862.

Must-Sees and -Dos: The 1,400-foot-long, 40-foot-high elevated Canopy Walk—touted as the longest elevated pathway in the country—is a must-visit with admission tied to Dow Gardens, both open year-round. The Saginaw Valley Naval Ship Museum in Bay City offers self-guided tours, while the Michigan Heroes Museum in Frankenmuth is devoted exclusively to experiences of men and women from Michigan. Castle Museum has three floors of history for attendees wanting a stroll through the past. Other notable attractions include the Alden B. Dow Home & Studio and Chippewa Nature Center, both in Midland; Birch Run Premium Outlets; and Bronner's Christmas Wonderland in Frankenmuth.

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