



R.B. Annis Gallery at Michigan Maritime Museum;  
Left: Lake Michigan and Black River waterfronts;  
Below: Black River Barn South Haven

## A Coastal Classic

South Haven is a treasured shoreline host city **BY DIANNA STAMPFLER**

**S**outh Haven—aka, the Blueberry Capital of the World—has been attracting groups for generations. Set in the heart of Michigan's fruit belt, the port city features a thriving downtown, two city beaches, a historic pier and lighthouse, boatloads of recreational activities, and some of the most stunning sunsets in the state.

**VIBE:** As Jennifer Sistrunk, executive director of the South Haven/Van Buren County Convention and Visitors Bureau describes it, South Haven offers memorable meeting experiences in which business and relaxation go hand in hand. "Our picturesque Lake Michigan setting makes every event feel like a retreat," she says. "Our walkable downtown allows attendees to seamlessly transition from meetings to lakeside leisure—whether it's exploring charming shops, dining at area restaurants, or unwinding on the beach—all without ever needing a car."

**TRANSPORTATION:** Gerald R. Ford International Airport in Grand Rapids is 62 miles away and provides nonstop routes from 36 cities, and South Haven also is easily reachable by car via Interstate 196. Locally owned Moveportz operates private car and shuttle services for getting around the city.

**HOTELS:** The charming English Tea Room inside Heart of the Haven Retreat Lodge seats 20 for meetings and is within a walkable distance of downtown. Perched overlooking Lake Michigan, the 52-room Lake Bluff Inn & Suites includes an outdoor venue for up to 40. Situated on a 30-acre estate with 1,000 feet of private beach north of downtown, Sleepy Hollow Beach Resort has one- to four-bedroom cottages and condos, as well as gathering space for nearly 100. For a taste of the outdoors, glamping (luxury camping) is offered at DayDreamer Domes, The Fields of Michigan, and Off Map Glamping.

**VENUES:** The recently rebuilt Michigan Maritime Museum on the banks of the Black River features several indoor and outdoor spaces, while South Haven Center for the Arts is a distinctive backdrop for small receptions. Black River Barn South Haven is set on a picturesque 5 acres, with a main hall for up to 350 attendees, along with outdoor spaces.

**RESTAURANTS:** Sistrunk recommends HawksHead Golf's restaurant, which offers semiprivate dining areas for groups from 12 to 60, along with an outdoor concrete pad for gatherings of up to 300 under a tent. Several area restaurants, including Phoenix Street on Broadway, Barrio Tacos + Tequila + Whiskey, and Kitchen Tribes, provide catering for events.

**MUST-SEES & -DOS:** Friends Good Will, a replica of a 19th-century merchant sailboat, accommodates 28 for ventures on Lake Michigan. Or, take a cruise on the Sun Setter, an ex-U.S. Navy utility launch boat that hosts 45-minute scenic day cruises and 75-minute sunset excursions. For kayak, canoe, paddleboard, and floating mat rentals, the SoHa Surf Shop accommodates. Those wanting to stretch their legs can bike or hike the Kal-Haven Trail between South Haven and Kalamazoo. Many craft beverage producers operate in the region, including Michigan's oldest winery—St. Julian Winery—which is a stone's throw from Warner Vineyards in Paw Paw. [southhaven.org](http://southhaven.org)



PHOTOS: South Haven/Van Buren County Convention and Visitors Bureau