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The 2026 Petoskey Area Bucket List

12/18/25

My first visit to the Petoskey Area was in the late 1990s, when a business trip brought me to Stafford's Perry Hotel during the fall season. As I traveled north along US-131, I crested a hill on the outskirts of town, and a 180-degree view of the autumn colors met my gaze. I was awe-struck, mesmerized, and inspired. I think that was the moment I decided someday I wanted to live here. It took me another 15 years or so before that dream became a reality.

I've lived "Up North" now for nearly a dozen years and have enjoyed all four seasons of the Petoskey area. Yet, there are a lot of things I haven't yet experienced...so I'm challenging myself to do something "new" (to me) every month in the coming year. Often, we overlook the opportunities in our own backyard, but for 2026, why not be a "tourist in your own region" and celebrate where you live!

1. Enjoy tunes and a signature cocktail at the [Malted Vinyl](#) lounge in Petoskey.

As the child of a DJ, I grew up spinning records. There's just something special about the sound of music coming from a turntable, especially when sipping on a cocktail. They even host BYOV nights!

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Little Traverse Wheelway has incredible views along Lake Michigan's Little Traverse Bay. Photo credit: Petoskey Area Visitors Bureau

3. Observe a celestial show at [Headlands Dark Sky Park](#) near Mackinaw City.

Whether ~~you're seeing out the~~ Northern Lights, Milky Way, Perseids Meteor Shower

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(mid-August), or the rise of a full moon, Michigan's first Dark Sky Park—perched along the Lake Michigan shoreline—provides the ideal backdrop for stargazing.

4. Meet friends for dinner at [Dam Site Inn](#) in Brutus.

I've proudly been to most restaurants in Emmet County, with the exception of Dam Site Inn. This iconic eatery has been welcoming guests for all you can eat family style dinners—including finger-licking fried chicken, with all the fixin's—since 1953.

5. Hike [Avalanche Mountain Preserve](#) in Boyne City to watch the sun set.

At the top of the 462-step climb sits a stunning overlook with panoramic views over Lake Charlevoix. If you time it right, you can soak up the “golden hour” of light but be sure to bring a flashlight as you'll have to descend after dark.

6. Experience the relaxing ambience of [Lavender Hill Farm](#) in Boyne City.

Lavender is one of my favorite flowers and scents, so it is embarrassing that I've never made it out to Lavender Hill Farm. Throughout the summer, they offer guided golf cart tours, The Series Concerts, Movie Nights, Lunch & Lavender, Lavender Fest Fridays and even Holiday Sip & Shops and Wreath Workshops.

7. Enjoy Movies in the Park at Dark in Petoskey's Pennsylvania Park.

I have my blanket and popcorn ready and am anxiously awaiting the 2026 Friday night movie schedule. There's something about outdoor movies that just screams summer in northern Michigan...not to mention staying out late to soak up the warm breeze blowing in off the bay.

8. Take the granddaughters to [Oden State Fish Hatchery](#).

Kids are naturally drawn to wildlife—especially fish! As one of only six fish hatcheries in the state of Michigan, this is an Emmet County hidden gem...and admission is FREE (just be sure to bring quarters for fish food...a highlight of the experience). Families can enjoy guided hatchery tours, weekly nature programs, interactive displays and exhibits, and even sightings of birds like bald eagles and osprey.

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9. Tour the Shay Hexagon House in Harbor Springs (now the Ephraim Shay Works Museum).

I'm a history buff, and while I've heard of Ephraim Shay and his locomotive endeavors, I've never visited his home-turned-museum before. Shay designed this six-sided stamped steel paneled house in 1892, and it remains proudly standing at 396 E. Main Street (M-119). It is even listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

10. Walk across the SkyBridge at Boyne Mountain in the Fall.

I think I may be the last person living in northern Michigan who has yet to walk across the 1,200-foot long, 118-foot-high pedestrian bridge. The world's longest timber-towered suspension bridge is open year-round, but fall provides the picturesque views that lured me to the area years ago.



SkyBridge Michigan in the fall is such an epic time to visit. Photo credit: Petoskey Area Visitors Bureau

11. Check out the Balloons Over Bay Harbor.

Last September we were walking into Odawa Casino for a concert when we caught a quick glimpse of one of the hot air balloons floating across the sky. When on site, you can also observe the Illume Night Glows on the Marina Lawn which is a stunning site to see. Maybe I'll even sign up for a tethered balloon ride!



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12. Celebrate the Winter Solstice with a Lantern Walk at the [Seberon "Boo" Litzenburger Nature Preserve](#) in Harbor Springs (part of the [Little Traverse Conservancy](#)).

What better way to officially welcome winter than to take a lantern-lit stroll through the woods along a casual 1-mile trail (out and back). The hike begins at the historic 1915 one-room Five Mile Creek Schoolhouse and is open to all ages.



A snowy walk at Seberon Boo Litzenburger Nature Preserve. Photo credit: Little Traverse Conservancy

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