

BEST *of the* MIDWEST

FROM THE EDITORS OF *Midwest Living*® MAGAZINE

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- Where to stay
- What to do

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Door County

Cars aren't allowed at Rock Island State Park, two ferry rides away from the mainland (920/847-2235; wiparks.net).

If you ask people who spend every summer in Door County why they keep coming back, their response is the same as if you'd questioned eating turkey on Thanksgiving: "Are you crazy?"

Start with the location. About 150 miles north of Milwaukee (and about 230 north of Chicago), the 70-mile-long Door Peninsula juts north into Lake Michigan, creating the narrow triangle of Green Bay along its western shore and leaving the rest of the lake to the east. That makes for spectacular sunrises and sunsets over glittering water—plus pretty white-stone and sandy beaches for sunbathing, swimming and strolls—all within easy access of millions of Midwesterners.

Then there's the history. Many of the pioneers who settled here in the 18th and 19th centuries came from New England, and their white clapboard architecture has earned Door County the moniker "Cape Cod of the Midwest." The quaint maritime villages of Sturgeon Bay, Egg Harbor, Fish Creek, Ephraim and Sister Bay cluster along the shore like actresses posing for photos, church steeples perfectly poised amid the trees. Throughout the county, five state parks—including designated wilderness area Newport State Park—preserve rugged scenery, and small farms sell orchard-fresh cherries and apples.

And finally, there are the tourists. Without doubt, Door County is crowded on busy summer weekends, when the population—normally around 30,000—swells as high as 100,000. But that tourism industry supports a fabulous variety of shops, galleries, pretty inns and family-friendly resorts, not to mention DIY art studios, cooking classes and outfitters. You could easily come on a July weekend and go on a kayak trip, make a mosaic mirror, learn to bake the perfect soufflé and get all your Christmas shopping done early—and still have time for a traditional whitefish boil and a snooze on the beach.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE DOOR COUNTY VISITOR BUREAU



SWEET DEALS Wine tastings (Left) Download a map of the area's seven wineries from the Door County Visitor Bureau website (doorcounty.com) and tour them at your own pace (tours at Simon Creek Vineyard and Winery are free). Lantombach's Orchard Country Winery and Market offers free tastings (up to eight per person). **Wilson's Restaurant and Ice Cream Parlor** With its old-fashioned jukeboxes, Wilson's has been an Ephraim landmark since 1906. For a cheap lunch, order a flame-broiled burger and a thick malt or fresh-brewed root beer (920/854-3041; wilsonsiocream.com).

TRIP GUIDE

Where to start Door County Visitor Bureau (800/527-3529; doorcounty.com).

What to do **American Folklore Theatre** Nestled in the woods at Peninsula State Park, this 750 seat, open air theater has an idyllic setting for its feel-good, humorous musicals about Midwest history and culture (920/854-6117; folkloretheatre.com).

Door County Coffee and Tea In Carlsville, Door County's premier coffee roaster has an observation window where you can watch the process. Be sure to spin through the gift shop for some books, coffee paraphernalia and fresh beans (800/856-6613; doorcountycoffee.com).

Door County Maritime Museum Steer a steamship, check out exhibits on area lighthouses and learn about shipbuilding in Sturgeon Bay (920/743-5958; dcrmm.org).

Door County Trolley Take scenic tours in the day or ghost tours at night, daily June through October. Winery and lighthouse

tours available (920/868-1100; doorcountytrolley.com).

Edgewood Orchard Galleries Near Fish Creek, a beautifully restored fruit barn-turned-gallery showcases work by more than 150 artists from Wisconsin and around the country (920/868-3579; edgewoodorchard.com).

Hands On Art Studio Would-be artists can choose from art projects including fused glass, metal sculpture, mosaics and ceramic pieces. Special events include weekly Adult Nights, seasonal Rock and Roll Art Nights and Art Camp sessions for kids, in Fish Creek (888/868-9311; handsonartstudio.com).

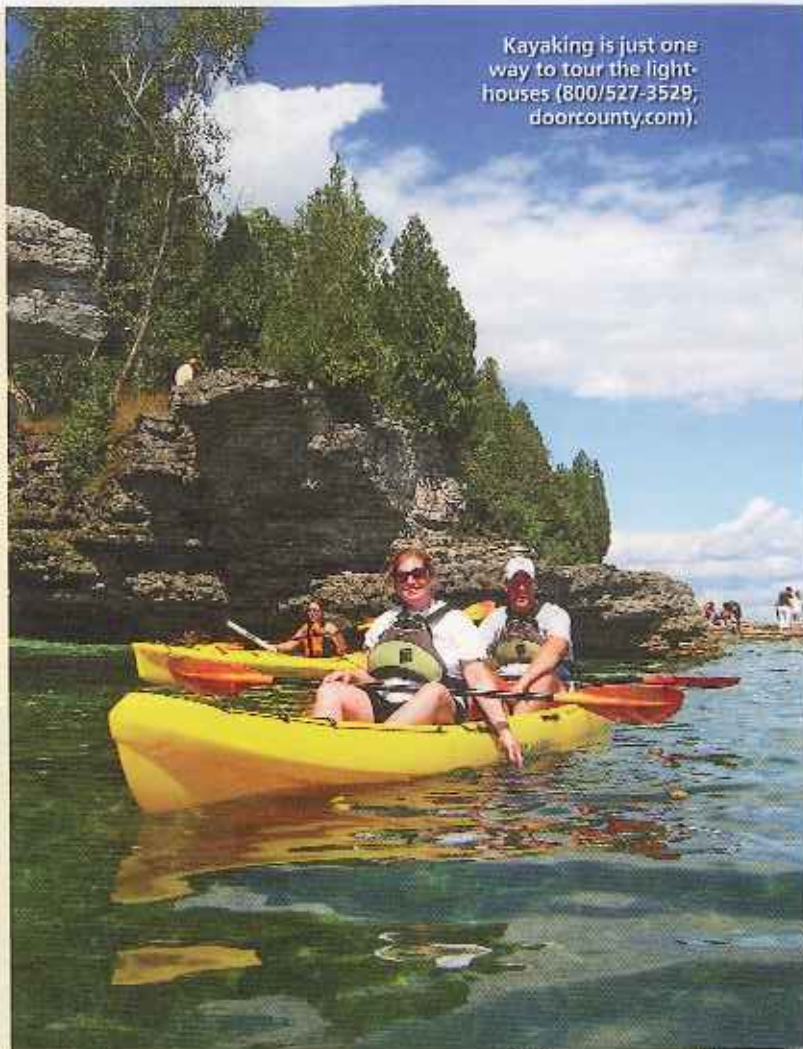
Newport State Park Northeast of Ellison Bay near the peninsula's tip, Newport appeals to outdoorsy types, with secluded camping, hiking, biking and kayaking (920/854-2500; wiparks.net).

Orchard Country Winery and Market Door County's famed Montmorency cherries are picked, packaged and made into wine at this popular Fish Creek farm market and bakery (920/868-3479; orchardcountry.com).

Peninsula Players Theatre Now in its 75th year, this is the country's oldest professional resident summer theater. The setting is gorgeous: in the woods on the shore of Green Bay outside Fish Creek, with outdoor tables, a bar and a giant bonfire at intermission (920/868-3287; peninsulaplayers.com).

Peninsula State Park Hiking, biking, boating, swimming, fishing, golf, a nature center and the historic Eagle Bluff lighthouse are among the highlights of this Fish Creek park. Campers should make reservations, as it's the state's most popular campsite (920/868-3258; wiparks.net).

Savory Spoon Cooking School The head chef, guest chefs, artisan cheesemakers and a resident chocolatier lead classes in a charming 1877 schoolhouse in Ellison Bay (920/854-6600; savoryspoon.com).



Kayaking is just one way to tour the lighthouses (800/527-3529; doorcounty.com).

THE TICKET

One of my favorite hidden gems of Door County (and there are many) is the Birch Creek Music Performance Center. Teenage musicians travel here for advanced summer training from nationally known performance artists and educators. The program began in 1976. I love to go to the students' public performances in the 500-seat Dutton Concert Barn in Egg Harbor, or at other venues throughout Door County (920/868-3763; birchcreek.org).

— BARB SANFORD

Shoreline Scenic Cruises Sights include the lovely coastline; Peninsula State Park's limestone cliffs and caves; Chambers, Horseshoe and Little Strawberry islands; and historic Eagle Bluff Lighthouse. The first mate gives a spirited, informative narrative and some interesting trivia (920/854-4707; shorelinecharters.net).

Washington Island Accessible by a 40-minute ferry ride from Northport Pier and Gills Rock, this 35-square-mile island offers beaches, museums and farms. The trip covers once-treacherous waters that mariners dubbed "Death's Door" (920/847-2179; washingtonislandchamber.com).

Whitefish Dunes State Park This Lake Michigan shore park attracts more annual visitors than any other day-use park in Wisconsin, but its beech forests and wetlands, plus 1.5 miles of sandy beaches and 1.5 miles of rocky shoreline, still feel quiet (920/823-2400; wiparks.net).

Where to eat **Blue Horse Bistro and Espresso** Take a shopping break with coffee brewed dark and rich. Sometimes steaming lattes come topped with a horse profile in cinnamon. Try to get one of the coveted second floor tables overlooking the harbor, in Fish Creek (920/868-1471; bluehorsebistro.com).

BEST OF THE MIDWEST Wisconsin

Villages like Ephraim look all the more like New England in autumn, when foliage turns fiery red and orange.



Fred and Fuzzy's Waterfront Bar and Grill This waterside restaurant prides itself on being a hidden gem. It's a great place to enjoy casual cuisine, like a steak and blue-cheese sandwich, or the three-cheese deluxe grilled cheese. The drinks definitely have a kick. Sister Bay (920/854-6699; fredandfuzzys.com).

Inn at Cedar Crossing This historic inn and restaurant has a great location in downtown Sturgeon Bay, near shops, galleries, museums and the waterfront. Their huge, marvelous breakfasts include fabulous morning buns from an on-site bakery. From \$115 (920/743-4200; innatcedarcrossing.com).

Inn at Kristofer's Many dishes at this waterfront fine-dining spot in Sister Bay feature local ingredients such as whitefish and cherries. Cooking classes and culinary weekends are available (920/854-9419; innatkristofers.com).

Top Deck Restaurant and Bar Savor lakeside dining and high-end twists on classic area flavors at the remodeled Gordon Lodge 7 miles north of Baileys Harbor. One menu standout: ribs slathered in Door County cherry-barbecue sauce (800/830-6231; gordonlodge.com).

Where to stay Alpine Resort This full-service 1921 Swiss style resort in Egg Harbor has cottages, guest houses and hotel rooms, with a pool, tennis courts, bicycles and 36 holes of golf. From \$104 (888/281-8128).

Blacksmith Inn on the Shore Nice extras at this Baileys Harbor lodge include in room whirlpools and gas fireplaces, plus bikes, kayaks, sleds and snowshoes for

guests. From \$245 (800/769-8619; theblacksmithinn.com).

Door County Lighthouse Inn Bed and Breakfast In Egg Harbor, the inn was built to capture some of the romance of 10 lighthouses that guided ships through the surrounding waters. From \$135 (866/868-9088; dclighthouseinn.com).

Eagle Harbor Inn Breakfast at this historic Ephraim B&B includes treats such as from-scratch cherry granola. From \$98 (800/324-5427; eagleharborinn.com).

Whistling Swan Horses pulled this inn across frozen Green Bay in 1907 to its current location in Fish Creek. From \$140 (920/868-3442; whistling Swan.com).

White Gull Inn The elegant Fish Creek inn features sweeping porches and antiques-furnished rooms. The inn hosts fish boils four nights a week during the summer (and on Fridays the rest of the year). From \$155 (888/364-9542; whitegullinn.com).



MORE PLACES WORTH THE TRIP

To find our top towns, we sampled food around the Midwest. Burgers. BBQ. Sausage with cherries, cherries in salsa and salsa on tacos. And, because we know you love it, a whole lotta pie. Here are some of our favorites.

Greasy-good burgers

Nick's Hamburgers, Brookings, South Dakota

The classic (dubbed a "Nickburger"), in a too-cute diner with red vinyl stools (605/692-4324; nickshamburgers.com).

Cozy Inn, Salina, Kansas

85-cent sliders, loaded with pickles and onions (785/825-2699; cozyburger.com).

Booche's Billiard Hall, Columbia, Missouri

A just plain good burger, on waxed paper in a beloved alumni hangout (573/874-9519).

Kowpee Hamburgers, Lima, Ohio

The original (or so they say) olive-topped burger (419/228-1778).

The Wheel Inn Drive-In, Sedalia, Missouri

The Guber Burger, with a schmear of peanut butter. You've got to try it to believe it (660/826-5177).

Finger food

Hartland BBQ, Omaha

Succulent smoked pulled chicken, plus amazingly good baked beans loaded with apple chunks (402/397-5765).

Rip's Tavern, Ladd, Illinois

Darn good fried chicken, with fries and white bread, on a paper plate (815/894-3051; ripstavern.com).

Gojo Ethiopian Cuisine, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Spongy injera flatbread, for scooping up spiced meats and veggies (616/459-3383; gojoethiopiancuisine.com).

Coffee companions

The Lark and Pear, Sawyer, Michigan Coconut plum cake—with a latte (269/426-3710).

Inn at Cedar Crossing, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin

Raspberry buns—with hot chocolate (920/743-4249; innatcedarcrossing.com).

World's Best Donuts, Grand Marais, Minnesota

Maple swirl pastry—with a cup of joe (218/387-1345; worldsbestdonutsmn.com).

Grand Central Coffee Station, Storm Lake, Iowa

White chocolate-apricot cookie—with tea (712/732-0160; grandcentralcoffee.com).

WheatFields, Lawrence, Kansas

Cinnamon roll—with a mocha (785/841-5553; wheatfieldsbakery.com).

Pie by the slice

Das Dutchman, Essenhaus, Middlebury, Indiana

Amish-made raspberry cream (800/455-9471; essenhaus.com).

Jesperon's, Petoskey, Michigan

Cherry berry with a perfectly flaky, homestyle crust (231/347-3601).

A Slice of Pie, Rolla, Missouri

Light and fluffy coconut meringue (573/364-6203; asliceofpie.net).

Desserts by Ann, Dayton, Ohio

Strawberry-rhubarb with almond (937/361-7785; dessertsbyannk.com).



Nut-lovers' nirvana: Ozark Turtle Sundae from Randy's Frozen Custard.

Ice cream delights

Randy's Frozen Custard, Osage Beach, Missouri

Raspberry, made with real berries (573/348-0711). **Ivanhoe's, Upland, Indiana** 100 shakes, 100 sundaes, 200 reasons to make the drive (765/998-7261).

Toft's Dairy, Sandusky, Ohio Fun flavors like raspberry-swirl Wedding Cake (419/625-5490; toftdairy.com).

Krekel's Frozen Custard, Decatur, Illinois Lemon frozen custard—and a car with a huge rooster head on top (217/423-1719).

Uncle Ray's Dairyland, Fenton, Michigan Made-to-order ("Strawberry-blueberry, extra blueberries") frozen yogurt (810/629-1701; uncleraysdairyland.com).

Great breakfasts

Mornin' at Maggie's

Omelette Shoppe, Bay City, Michigan

Frittatas (flat-style omelets) made with sausage, pear, Gorgonzola and fresh rosemary (989/892-3142).

Rapid City KOA,

Rapid City, South Dakota

Huge pancakes made for campers by a cowboy! (605/348-2111; rapidcitykoa.com).

Meadowlark, Dayton,

Ohio Shrimp in a tangy tomato sauce over cheddar grits, with

sesame toast (937/434-4750; meadowlarkrestaurant.com).

Egg Toss Cafe, Bayfield,

Wisconsin

The Orchard Platter, with buckwheat cakes, eggs, chicken-apple sausage and real maple syrup (715/779-5181; eggtossbayfield.com).

Comfort food

Marie Catrib's, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Fudgy chocolate pudding, which is extra-rich, thanks to duck eggs (616/454-4020; mariecatrib.com).