

# Cool it, MICHIGAN

Your guide for beating the heat with summertime adventures



 MediaNews Group

10 lakes so great you'll forget  
the beach

**PAGE 13**

Saddle up: A spectator's guide  
to Michigan's horse shows

**PAGE 18**

Concert of Colors is a  
charcuterie board of free  
music fun

**PAGE 31**



## SUMMER TRAVEL » STORY INDEX

- **Cool off this summer** at these Michigan beaches, swimming holes **Page 4**
- **Don't miss these Michigan** beach town gems this summer **Page 6**
- **Oakland County pools** deliver vacation vibes close to home **Page 10**
- **10 lakes so great** you'll forget the beach **Page 13**
- **10 destinations** that hit their absolute peak in summer **Page 16**
- **Saddle up for summer:** A spectator's guide to Michigan's horse shows **Page 18**
- **Strawberry fields for everyone:** Michigan U-pick fruit farms thrive amid challenges **Page 22**
- **Why I still camp** and why it's good for all ages **Page 25**
- **Michigan's best rainy day** activities for kids **Page 26**
- **Michigan Activity Pass** connects residents to culture and adventure at a discount **Page 28**
- **Pine Knob, Michigan Lottery and Meadow Brook** tickets discounted to \$30 **Page 30**
- **Concert of Colors** is a charcuterie board of free music fun **Page 31**
- **The hotel Henry Ford** built 90 years ago has reopened with a fresh renovation **Page 32**
- **People form human chain** to move 9,100 books to new store **Page 34**
- **Your guide to traveling** in the summer of 2025 **Page 37**
- **6 tips for your next** driving vacation **Page 39**
- **Why taking a vacation** is good for you **Page 40**
- **5 new travel tools** to save time and money this summer **Page 41**
- **Some quick rules** to successful train travel **Page 42**
- **A 'ruthless' guide** to flying without bag fees **Page 44**
- **How to not kill** your houseplants when you take a vacation **Page 45**
- **How to plan** an engaging vacation **Page 47**
- **10 simple tips** for taking better travel photos **Page 48**



## SUMMER TRAVEL

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# SPLASH!

## AROUND MICHIGAN



A boy enjoys the fun of Silver Beach along Lake Michigan in St. Joseph. The beach stretches 1,600 feet along the lake and includes lifeguards during summer months, as well as amenities like outdoor showers and restrooms.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB STEFKO — PURE MICHIGAN



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL

# Cool off this summer at these Michigan beaches, swimming holes

**By Susan Thwing**  
For MediaNews Group

Michigan's summers are made for water. With more than 11,000 inland lakes and miles of Great Lakes shoreline, the state offers no shortage of spots to swim, wade or float. For many residents and travelers alike, cooling off in one of Michigan's many swimming holes is a seasonal ritual — whether it's jumping into a quiet river, lounging on a sandy beach, or taking a dip beneath a waterfall.

The variety of swimming options spans the state, from urban parks in Detroit to remote Lake Superior beaches.

Recommended by Pure Michigan, here are some of the most interesting and accessible places to swim across the Lower and Upper Peninsulas:

## LOWER PENINSULA

### Silver Beach — St. Joseph

Located along Lake Michigan, Silver Beach is a popular destination for families and visitors looking for a broad, sandy shoreline and generally calm swimming conditions. The beach stretches 1,600 feet along the lake and includes lifeguards on duty during summer months, as well as amenities like outdoor showers and restrooms. Summer water temperatures hover around 69°F — chilly, but manageable for most.

### Belle Isle Park — Detroit

Just minutes from downtown Detroit, Belle Isle offers a unique mix of natural and urban environments. The designated swim beach on the island park is open from Memorial Day through Labor Day and features shallow waters ideal for casual swimmers. Visitors often combine a swim with visits to the island's aquarium, conservatory or bike paths.

### Lake Ovid in Sleepy Hollow State Park — Clinton County

Tucked away in mid-Michigan, Lake Ovid provides a quieter alternative to more crowded beaches. The lake sits within Sleepy Hollow State Park and features a large, maintained beach with shallow water, making it a favorite for families or anyone looking for a relaxed afternoon swim. Hiking and fishing are also popular in the surrounding area.

### William Mitchell State Park — Cadillac

Between Lake Cadillac and Lake Mitchell lies William Mitchell State Park, home to a sandy swim beach on Lake Mitchell. The waters here are relatively calm, and the area is known for its camping, fishing, and wildlife viewing. With fewer crowds than some of the larger Lake Michigan beaches, it can be a good option for a more laid-back experience.

### Oscoda Beach Park — Oscoda

On the Lake Huron shoreline, Oscoda Beach Park offers an easy-to-access swim spot just steps from the town's downtown. The gradual slope of the lake bottom, plus features like a splash pad and boardwalk, make this a convenient and family-friendly location. The park also includes a skate park, picnic tables and other recreational options.

### Ocqueoc Falls — Presque Isle County

This site is notable not just for its natural beauty, but for being the only universally accessible waterfall in the U.S. where visitors can swim. Located in northeast Michigan, Ocqueoc Falls has a boardwalk, ramp and shallow pools at the base of the falls. The surrounding forest offers hiking trails for those looking to explore more of the area.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RYAN RESATKA — PURE MICHIGAN

Families enjoy the beach offerings at Belle Isle in Detroit.

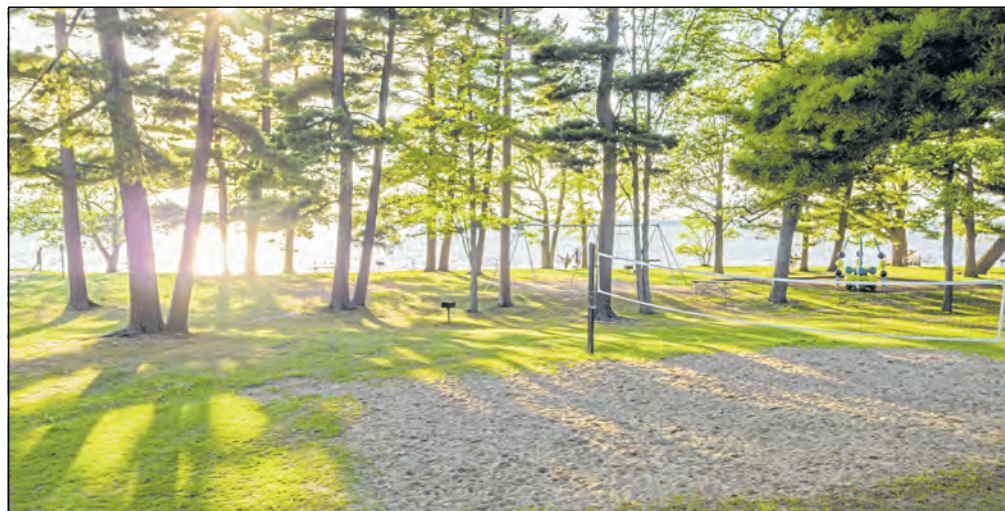


PHOTO COURTESY OF KYLE GILMORE — PURE MICHIGAN

William Mitchell State Park is a popular fishing, boating and camping destination. The 334-acre park is situated between Lake Mitchell and Lake Cadillac and provides an excellent opportunity to view a variety of wildlife on the outskirts of Cadillac. An historic canal connects the two lakes and runs directly through the park.





PHOTO COURTESY OF PURE MICHIGAN

Escanaba's Ludington Park is typically active during the summer, especially among local families.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PURE MICHIGAN

Best known for the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum and its historic lighthouse, Whitefish Point also offers access to Lake Superior's rugged shoreline. On clear days, it's possible to see Canada across the lake.

## Platte River — Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

A lesser-known swimming destination within one of the state's most visited parks, the Platte River offers calm, shallow waters ideal for tubing or wading. The river runs through Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and eventually empties into Lake Michigan, making it an especially scenic place to spend a summer afternoon.

## Petoskey State Park — Petoskey

On the shores of Little Traverse Bay, this state park includes a mile-long beach with a designated swim area and space to wander. The park is known for its dune formations and is also a popular spot for searching for Petoskey stones. While the main swimming area includes amenities like a beach house and playground, there are also more secluded spots to explore.

## UPPER PENINSULA

## Municipal Beach — Escanaba

## Van Riper State Park — Lake Michigamme

This inland lake in the central Upper Peninsula is surrounded by forest and has a remote feel, despite being relatively easy to access. With islands and undeveloped stretches of shoreline, Lake Michigamme appeals to those looking for a more rustic or solitary swimming experience. The state park includes a campground and hiking trails.

## Whitefish Point — Lake Superior

Best known for the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum and its historic lighthouse, Whitefish Point also offers access to Lake Superior's rugged shoreline. The beach here is quiet, often windy and scattered with driftwood and colorful stones. The water is cold — even in July — but the views are striking. On clear days, it's possible to see Canada across the lake.

## Planning Your Swim

While Michigan's natural swimming spots are generally well-maintained, it's worth checking local conditions before heading out. Many beaches use a flag system to indicate water safety, especially on the Great Lakes, where rip currents can occur. Some locations have lifeguards, while others are swim-at-your-own-risk.

Accessibility has improved in recent years, with more beaches offering mobility mats and accessible facilities. Whether you're traveling with young children or seeking a remote adventure, the state's wide range of swim spots makes it easy to find something that fits.

And with summer heating up, there's no better time to explore them.



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL

# Don't miss these Michigan beach town gems

By Susan Thwing  
For MediaNews Group

Surrounded by four of the five Great Lakes with more than 3,200 linear miles of coastline, it is no exaggeration to say that Michigan is abundant in warm sandy beaches, dunes, cliffs and bluffs. With an

estimated more than 125 million tourists visiting Michigan each year, many to the expanse of mitten shores, those beaches can get busy.

While there is no shortage of beach locales to round out your summer, if you're looking for some less traveled, less crowded stops, here are five not-to-miss beach towns to include on your sandy bucket list:

## Manistee

Fishing, canoeing, hiking, biking, swimming and exploring historic landmarks — you'll find it all visiting the city of Manistee located in Manistee County, off of the Lake Michigan shoreline. Located on the west coast of the state about one hour south of Traverse City, and 1 ½ hours north of Muskegon, this city has more than 130 acres of parks that rest along the shorelines of Lake Michigan and the Manistee River Channel.

Manistee is home to three beaches: First Street Beach, Fifth Avenue Beach and Man-

made Lake Beach. The beaches, enhanced by weekly cleaning with a high-tech beach cleaner, boast easy access to sugar sand. Concession buildings and comfort stations combine with sheltered picnic tables, plus barrier-free walkways, providing access for all to the water. In addition, free parking and Wi-Fi are available.

Added attractions include the historic Victorian city along River Street, restaurants, antique stores, gift shops, bakeries and the North Pier and Catwalk — one of only four remaining catwalks on the west Michigan coast of Lake Michigan.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

While there is no shortage of beach locales to round out your summer, if you're looking for some less traveled, less crowded stops, here are five not-to-miss beach towns to include on your sandy bucket list.





PHOTO COURTESY OF PURE MICHIGAN

Located at the northern tip of the Michigan Thumbcoast, visitors to Port Austin can enjoy expansive beaches, paddling adventures, dunes, sea caves and more.

## Port Austin

Located at the northern tip of the Michigan Thumbcoast, visitors to Port Austin can enjoy expansive beaches, paddling adventures, dunes, sea caves, an off-shore lighthouse and water trails. The town of Port Austin is filled with gift shops, a farmer's market, a variety of parks, camping accommodations and activities to make the excursion full of fun and adventure for Michigan families.

Notable attractions to visit include areas such as Grindstone City and harbor, the restored lumber town museum of Huron City, and Lighthouse County Park which features the historic Pointe Aux Barques Lighthouse.

Favorite beaches can be found at Bird Creek Park, a seven-acre day-use park. The park has a wooden boardwalk that visitors can walk halfway around the park along the beach. Roofed picnic shelters overlooking the beach are great spots for a quick lunch or dinner. The park also is home to the Port Austin Splash Pad.

Other options include McGraw Park, known for its beautiful sandy beach which is accessible through steps and sandy slopes from the parking area.

**The town of Port Austin is filled with gift shops, a farmer's market, a variety of parks, camping accommodations and activities.**

## Elk Rapids

Mix sandy shores with outdoor adventures including exploring unusual, creative artwork, and you have a day in Elk Rapids.

The Elk Rapids area offers more than 300 miles of non-motorized trails for paddling, hiking, mountain biking and birding. Located in the middle of East Grand Traverse Bay, Elk Lake, and Bass Lake, it is a wonderful spot for hikers, boaters, sunbathers and explorers alike.

In town, visitors can wander through quaint shops and enjoy dining in unique restaurants. For beachgoers, the coast has a plethora of shimmery sand at Elk Rapids Day Park. The Day Park is 15 acres of forest and dunes and a quarter mile of beach frontage along East Grand Traverse Bay. A bathhouse near the pavilion offers modern facilities in season and the parking lot is open May through October. A pedestrian entrance allows the use of the park year-round. Visitors also say Elk Rapids Day Park is one of the best beaches in the region to catch a sunset.

In addition, Art Rapids!, a local nonprofit group, worked with Antrim County officials to develop an outdoor sculpture park, the "Walk of Art" in 2013. The exhibit consists of more than 30 sculptures along the trails. The art exhibit is continually changing as pieces are selected by a jury and placed on display for one to three years. Most of the sculptures are for sale. In addition to the sculptures, Art Rapids! also hosts workshops and events in the Elk Rapids Day Park.

Of special note, Elk Rapids is identified as a Pure Michigan TrailTown.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

From smaller Great Lakes beaches to even lesser known inland gems, there are endless possibilities throughout the state to enjoy beaches less traveled.





PHOTO BY DANNETTE HOFFMAN

Located on the west coast of the state, Manistee has more than 130 acres of parks that rest along the shorelines of Lake Michigan and the Manistee River Channel.



## Alpena

Located in northeast Michigan, Alpena is a modern city that retains the essence of a relaxing sanctuary filled with beach days, dining, shopping and reconnecting.

Unique to this community is its designation of three Dark Sky Preserve Parks. Receiving the designation in 2016, Negwegon State Park, Rockport State Recreation Area and Thompson's Harbor State Park became areas protected from artificial light pollution to provide clear night sky stargazing.

The Alpena area is host to seven lighthouses to explore, more than 100 miles of groomed trails, waterways for kayaking and canoeing, and opportunities to fish, snorkel, bird watch, bike and hike.

Beachgoers can find a number of locations along the Thunder Bay River and Lake Huron. Notable parks include Mich-E-Ke-Wis Park (located on State St./US-23-S) which offers a swimming beach, volleyball courts, horseshoe pits, a children's play area, a bike park, a picnic area, an open area for kite flying, and a shelter building; Blair Street Park (located on State Street) for swimming, picnicking and walking along the pier; and Starlite Beach (also on State Street) to swim, picnic and play in a splash pad.

When visitors are ready to leave the beach and trails, downtown Alpena is home to shops and waterfront and outdoor restaurants for dining and wine tasting, live music, theater, street performers, concerts and movies in the park.

## Harbor Beach

The first must-do in Harbor Beach is a walk down the 1,015-foot Trescott Pier to view a spectacular sunrise or sunset. Visitors can also enjoy a scenic boat ride out to the offshore lighthouse, which is open to explore. From the pier, guests can leisurely watch freighters pass by, do some fishing, or just take a stroll on the pier.

Also notable to the area are three shallow-water shipwrecks. Each can be easily reached from shore by kayak, canoe or boat. Ready to view is the George H. Waud, a 139-foot 1866 wooden schooner that was stranded in 1902. It is located approximately 270 feet from shore about six feet below the surface. A 148-foot wooden schooner, the Dorcas Pendell, which ran aground in 1913, is approximately 2,000 feet from shore. And the John Wesley, a 135-foot wooden schooner stranded by a heavy gale in 1901, is an estimated 35-minute paddle from shore.

Harbor Beach's freshwater, man-made harbor is a favorite fishing spot — both by boat or directly from the break wall. Biking, canoeing and hiking are also popular activities.

For sun worshippers, Judge James H. Lincoln Park is at the east end of Trescott Street, just a short walk from downtown, and located on the Harbor View Trail. The park has a sandy swimming beach and areas for picnicking and playing in the sun.

When visitors are ready for non-nature entertainment, outdoor dining, a tour of the historic areas and shopping opportunities are abundant.



PHOTO BY DANNETTE HOFFMAN

Located on the west coast of the state, Manistee has more than 130 acres of parks that rest along the shorelines of Lake Michigan and the Manistee River Channel.



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL



PHOTO COURTESY OF OAKLAND COUNTY PARKS

Waterford Oaks Wave Pool

# Oakland County pools deliver vacation vibes close to home

**By Lana Mini**  
For MediaNews Group

**O**akland County is redefining the summer staycation with luxury pools that rival high-end resorts. From boutique apartment complexes to public aquatic centers upgraded with resort-style amenities, residents are finding vacation-worthy escapes right in their own neighborhoods.

Public pools throughout the county are offering destination-worthy experiences.

The Troy Family Aquatic Center, for example, is a summer staple for families, with its sprawling outdoor pool complex, tube slides, splash pad and zero-depth entry pool ideal for young swimmers. The park-like setting with picnic areas makes it a full-day experience for residents of all ages.

In Waterford, Waterford Oaks County Park offers one of Michigan's only outdoor wave

pools, complete with gentle rolling waves, a sandy beach area, and a children's water playground.

Farmington Hills provides several options, too, including the Heritage Park Splash Pad and the indoor Costick Center Pool, ensuring residents have year-round access to family-friendly aquatic fun.

Royal Oak resident Sylvia Stefonivich spends her weekend free time with friends at the Troy pool renting the cabanas.



"I'd rather spend Saturday under a cabana with friends than at home scrolling," Stefoniwich said. "It's like an all-inclusive resort under a cabana for hours right in Troy."

Even smaller community centers and swim clubs throughout Birmingham, Novi, and Rochester are investing in high-quality aquatic facilities that rival many vacation destinations.

For others, resort-style living extends right to their front door. Some luxury apartment communities in Oakland County are embracing the trend with high-end pool amenities designed to create a summer escape at home.

At The Griffin Royal Oak, residents enjoy

a pool experience that feels more like a boutique resort than a typical apartment community. Many apartment homes feature balconies that overlook the resort-style pool courtyard, where poolside games and resident barbecues create a vibrant, social atmosphere all summer long.

"Today, people aren't just searching for a place to live — they're looking for a lifestyle," said Mike Hashemi, property manager at The Griffin Royal Oak. "In the summer, our poolside cabanas, lounge areas and outdoor social spaces create a resort-like atmosphere. Coming home feels more like a getaway, and that kind of experience is exactly what resi-

dents are looking for."

As Oakland County continues to evolve, these resort-style amenities — whether public or private — are becoming an increasingly desirable part of the local summer lifestyle.

And, for those who opt for nature over poolside, did you know Oakland County has more lakes than any other in Michigan? Of all 387 lakes — 70 are still unnamed. The lakes, a significant feature of the county, formed by melting glaciers from the last ice age approximately 17,000 years ago.

With so many options available, residents don't need to travel far for a little taste of vacation this season.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GRIFFIN ROYAL OAK

At The Griffin Royal Oak, many apartment homes feature balconies that overlook the resort-style pool courtyard, where poolside games and resident barbecues create a vibrant, social atmosphere all summer long.





Kayaking is popular along the formations and caves of the Apostle Islands off the shore of Lake Superior in Wisconsin.  
TRAVEL WISCONSIN — TNS



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL



lakes  
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beach

By **Andrea Sachs,**  
**Hannah Sampson**  
*The Washington Post*

here are only five oceans in the



world, but there are millions of lakes. They are big and small, round and oblong, highly

developed and untouched, and surrounded by mountains, deserts, forests and cities. The options are limitless, and so are the vacation possibilities.

When choosing a lake, you can let nostalgia take the wheel or approach the task more pragmatically.

Stacey Barber, AAA's vice president of travel services, said to start by outlining your priorities. Determine your top land and water activities and your preferred vibe.

"Are you looking for a family-friendly lake? Do you want to go on a fishing trip? Do you want a more lively scene or something more peaceful and scenic?" Barber said.

To further narrow the list, take into account the seasonality of the lake and, if you plan to swim, the water temperature. Also check the calendar: Many destinations host festivals, such as for wine (the Finger Lakes), raspberries (Bear Lake) and ice (Lake Superior).

Here are 10 of our favorite lakes in North America:



PHOTO COURTESY OF PURE MICHIGAN

Lake Superior's most striking landscapes lie along the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore.



# Lakes

FROM PAGE 13

## Lake Superior (multiple states and Ontario)

Lake Superior's superlatives are stunning: It's the world's largest freshwater lake by surface area, holding 3 quadrillion gallons, and the coldest and deepest of the Great Lakes. So, where even to begin with such an immense body of water — 31,700 square miles of surface — that touches Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Ontario? Andrew Harper travel adviser Carolyn Consalvo said the answer for some clients is to see it from a cruise ship. She has clients booked on Viking Cruises Great Lakes sailings this summer and fall, visiting multiple lakes including Superior. "It's a bucket-list item for a lot of our clients," she said.

Those who prefer a land-based approach can take the self-guided, 1,300-mile Lake Superior Circle Tour around the lake's border. Disaster lovers may enjoy the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum on a Michigan stretch of shore — or they may want to dive some of the lake's hundreds of shipwrecks themselves. National park aficionados can add a difficult-to-reach one to their list with a visit to Isle Royale. The 21 islands of Apostle Islands National Lakeshore in Wisconsin include sea caves, bluffs and lighthouses to explore.

Visit the Sleeping Giant in Ontario. Witness a 120-foot waterfall in Minnesota at Grand Portage State Park, rich with Ojibwe history. You'll wish you planned two weeks to tackle this one giant lake.

## Lake Memphremagog (Quebec and Vermont)

This long and narrow glacial lake covers more than 38 square miles, stretching from Vermont to Quebec, with the majority of the water in the Canadian province. Travel adviser Caroline Weilert, of the luxury agency Fora X, recommends experiencing it from Magog at the north end. The city is in the Eastern Townships, a region east of Montreal, where some British loyalists fled after the Revolutionary War, making it a good fit for history buffs. Weilert visited during an anniversary trip two years ago and loved the "throwback retro vibe" that mixed with "buzzy" restaurant, microbrewery and shopping scenes.

"It had this charm about it that was welcoming, and the scenery was breathtaking," she said. In the summer, visit one of the beaches, rent a kayak or take a day cruise on the water, or explore walking paths or miles-long cycling routes. In the winter, opt for ice skates, snow scooters or skiing in nearby Mont-Orford. Verso, a boutique hotel in Magog, offers lake views and a short walk to restaurants in town.

## Pokegama Lake (Minnesota)

For travelers who perk up at the phrase "There's no place like home," there may be no lake like Pokegama (including the other Minne-

sota lake with the same name farther south). The 6,612-acre body of water off the Mississippi River sits just a few miles from the Judy Garland Museum in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, where "The Wizard of Oz" star spent her early years. A carriage from the film is on display, and a "Ruby Slipper Theft Guided Tour" adds to the intrigue.

Fora travel adviser and Grand Rapids resident Lindsay Vaughn wrote to The Washington Post that the lake is "a serene environment ideal for a peaceful retreat" and praised the "really clean" beaches. On the water, explore some of Pokegama's bays by kayak, boat or stand-up paddleboard. Or lounge on the shores of Tioga Beach. Fishing for walleye, northern pike and other species is popular when it's warm and when it's icy. Land activities include hiking, ATV trails and snowshoeing in winter. The two-room Green Heron Bed and Breakfast promises lake views, birdwatching and resident pets. In town, Vaughn likes Hotel Rapids, a boutique property with a yurt for private-event rentals or for cocktails and card games when it's not booked.

## Lake Martin (Louisiana)

Some of the state's largest alligators inhabit the swampy Lake Martin, which is part of the Cypress Island Preserve in St. Martin Parish. To protect new gator mothers and their hatchlings, the Nature Conservancy closes the Levee Trail during the summer, but many of the 200 acres of open water are open year-round. Tour operators lead visitors through stands of cypress and tupelo trees in kayaks, canoes and crawfish skiffs. Thousands of birds, including 13 waterbird species, drop by during their migrations or set up permanent residence. Every evening, the sun drops its curtain against Lake Martin's dramatic backdrop.

Besides the Nature Conservancy's visitor center, amenities are minimal, but the lake is in the midst of Cajun country. Drive a few miles to Lafayette for live music and dance lessons at Blue Moon Saloon and Guesthouse, or head to Buck and Johnny's in Breaux Bridge for a Zydeco breakfast or pizza with such regional toppings as crawfish and alligator sausage.

## Cayuga Lake (New York)

Each of the 11 Finger Lakes can stand on its own or be paired together like rainbow trout and chardonnay, both of which you can get in this popular fishing and wine-producing region.

At 40 miles from end to end, Cayuga Lake is the longest Finger Lake and is plenty deep (435 feet) for hooking fish, boating and scuba diving. If you're worried about Old Greeny, a mythical sea monster, go ashore to Seneca Falls, the birthplace of the American suffrage movement; the college town of Ithaca; or Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, a birdwatching haven with a wildlife drive that's three miles each way.

"Twilight Zone" fans should spend a night in Interlaken, where the show's creator, Rod Serling, summered and is buried. The travel experts at Andrew Harper recommend the Aurora Inn, across the way, along with a bottle of riesling from Quarry Ridge Winery.







The Austin skyline from Lady Bird Lake. Ten miles of hiking/biking trails line the lake.

CHRISTOPHER V. SHERMAN — VISIT AUSTIN/TNS

### Donner Lake (California)

The name comes from the doomed “Donner Party” of families who migrated west in the mid-19th century, many of whose members met their fate along the lake’s east end. The history is on display at Donner Memorial State Park’s visitor center and the Pioneer Monument, where one of the members’ cabins once stood. But this nearly three-mile-long alpine lake in the Sierra Nevada is hardly a downer. Less than 20 miles from the much larger and more famous Lake Tahoe, Donner Lake offers stunning views, warmer water and fewer crowds as an alternative.

“You don’t have to get there to reserve a spot at 7:45 (a.m.),” said Nadia Schwartz, a Fora travel adviser who has a vacation home nearby. Her favorite season at Donner Lake is summer, when visitors can bicycle, explore miles of trails and spend time in or on the water. Winter offers snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and nearby downhill ski areas, including one that hosted the 1960 Winter Olympics. Truckee, where the lake is located, has a historic downtown, free shuttles to the water and, Schwartz said, a burgeoning food scene. If camping at the state park isn’t your speed, vacation rentals are abundant, or Schwartz recommends the adventure-focused Gravity Haus Truckee-Tahoe.

### Bear Lake (Utah and Idaho)

Bear Lake’s address is Mountain West, but its turquoise-blue water belongs in the tropics. The lake owes its nickname, “the Caribbean of the Rockies,” to the suspended limestone particles that reflect the water’s color back to the surface. Its glassiness will comfort visitors concerned about what lurks beneath, especially because the Bear Lake Monster purportedly roams these parts.

The lake is a patchwork of protected natural areas, sandy beaches and recreational hubs where visitors can rent boats, water trampolines and beach wheelchairs. You can pitch a tent or hook up an RV at Bear Lake State Park in Utah or Idaho, or upgrade your accommodations at Conestoga Ranch, a glamping resort in Garden City that offers luxury tents and wagons with campfire valet service. When not on the water, seek out a raspberry shake, a specialty in the southern — or Utah — half of the lake.

### Lady Bird Lake (Texas)

This reservoir on the Colorado River sits smack-dab in the middle of Austin, with the downtown skyline never far from view. A pastoral streak, however, runs through the 5-mile body of water and the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail that borders it. The complementary attractions draw an es-

timated 5 million visitors a year, in addition to herons, egrets, hawks, damselflies and other wildlife. “It is an incredible urban lake to explore,” said Meredith Carey, deputy editor at Tripadvisor, “and there’s a ton of infrastructure.”

Swimming and motorized vessels are not allowed on Lady Bird Lake, but most human-powered water sports are. Carey recommends renting from the Austin Rowing Club, which also leads tours, such as a paddle timed to the sunset flight of the Congress Avenue Bridge bats. The shores are lined with rental outfitters, hotels, restaurants and bars. At Perch, fuel up with a coffee and bagel, then head to the dock below and board a vintage electric boat that epitomizes Austin cool.

### Lake Quinalt (Washington)

The glacier-fed Lake Quinalt, in Olympic National Park, is a blue island in a sea of green, buffeted by a temperate rainforest that boasts some of the world’s tallest trees. Several conifers in Quinalt Valley appear on the Champion Tree Registry, including a 191-foot-tall Sitka spruce tree on the lake’s eastern shore.

The 31-mile Quinalt Rain Forest Loop Drive encircles the lake (plus a portion of a river), which the Quinalt Indian Nation owns and runs. The tribe permits swimming, wading and walking but bans unregistered boats, including canoes and kayaks. Several campgrounds and historic accommodations provide shelter on the shoreline. In October 1937, Lake Quinalt Lodge hosted President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Less than a year after his lakeside lunch, he established Olympic National Park.

### Table Rock Lake (Missouri and Arkansas)

Table Rock Lake is a youngster compared with its surrounding landscape, the millions-of-years-old Ozark Mountains. But since its creation in the late 1950s, when the Army Corps of Engineers dammed the White River, the lake has not wasted a minute building up its banks with amusement park attractions, marinas and sprawling resorts. One of the most ambitious enterprises is Big Cedar Lodge, which Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris opened nearly four decades ago and continues to expand.

The lake has more than 800 miles of shoreline, but you won’t feel like a minnow in a giant aquarium. In addition to its smaller waterways and tucked-away coves, Table Rock is divided into four areas — or five, if you count underwater. Divers can explore a submerged grove of oak trees, several sunken ships and a Missouri town called Oasis that lived above the waterline in pre-lake times.



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL

# a Peek at Peak

## summer season destinations

By **Andrea Sachs,**  
**Natalie B. Compton**  
*The Washington Post*

Hawaii, California, Portugal — some places are fabulous to visit all year round. But not everywhere can be so lucky.

Take, for example, the Midwest.

For much of the year, this cluster of the country gets hit with harsh winters, severe springs and over-too-fast falls. But come summer? The Midwest bursts to life with festivals, lake days and firefly-flecked nights.

Nowhere is this more true than Chicago, where residents pour outside to patios and parks at the first sign of warmth. By June, the beaches along Lake Michigan, which sit steps from skyscrapers, are filled with visitors and locals.

"It's truly magnetic," said Helen Nguyen, founder of Preserve Travel, who has lived there for the past three years.

The Midwest is not the only part of America to experience this peak summer phenomenon.

Here are 10 places across the country (and Canada) that appreciate the extra sunshine the most:

### Chicago

Arctic air swirls through Chicago with a vengeance in the winter, and the whipping cold keeps its grip on the city through the spring.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW BUFFALO EXPLORED

New Buffalo Beach is one of nine public beaches within a 15-minute drive. They offer great views of Lake Michigan.

Locals are rewarded with a summer so glorious you can feel the energy in the air.

"Everyone's out," Nguyen

said. "The city feel so alive."

There are free events and activities all summer long, from fireworks at Navy Pier

every Wednesday and Saturday, to music festivals and museum days.

But for all-time summer

vibes, head to the ballpark to eat a Chicago dog and see the Cubs or the White Sox play.

### New Buffalo

Michigan is rife with Great Lakes beaches: on Mackinac Island and in Saugatuck and Grand Haven, for example. But Nguyen sends clients to another favorite, just 70 miles from downtown Chicago. In New Buffalo, visitors can lounge on the sand overlooking Lake Michigan, go sailing or hike in nearby parks.

The area has reasonably priced vacation rentals — and llama farms — as well as charming bed-and-breakfasts like Goldberry Woods, an inn on an organic farm where guests can stay in luxury suites, cottages or one of two vintage campers.

### San Juan Islands, Washington

A jewel of the Pacific Northwest, the San Juan Islands "are truly something special," said Mark Williams, co-author of the LG-BTQIA+ travel book "Out in the World."

During the warmer months, the Salish Sea is teeming with Chinook salmon, orcas and kayakers. Three main islands connected by ferry celebrate the artistic community with gallery walks (San Juan and Lopez islands), an arts festival (San Juan Island) and studio tours (Orcas and Lopez islands).





ANTONIO PEREZ — CHICAGO TRIBUNE

A tour boat prepares to pass under the Wells Street Bridge along the Chicago River on July 23, 2024.



RAMSAY DE GIVE, FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The grounds at Bishop's Lodge in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



SONGQUAN DENG — DREAMSTIME/TNS

Quebec City, Canada.

Farmers spotlight their produce, including a pear discovered by an Orcas Island grower, at markets and farm-to-table establishments.

For a wisp of winter without the cold, climb to the top of Mount Constitution on Orcas Island. The islands' highest point affords views of Vancouver, the mainland and the snow-capped peaks of Mount Baker and Mount Rainier.

### Santa Fe, New Mexico

While its Southwest neighbors struggle with extreme heat, Santa Fe keeps relatively cool in the summer. Lindsay Messina, co-founder of Fioraé Luxury Travel, says visitors can expect average highs in the 80s.

All summer long, the city teems with art shows, live music, outdoor movies, artisan markets, and beer, food and wine festivals. Once the sun goes down, look up; Santa Fe is a premiere stargazing destination.

The region's celestial beauty is best appreciated outside the city from one of New Mexico's "dark sky parks," certified by the International Dark Sky Association. Or you can hop on Santa Fe's new StarGazer train. During the two-hour tour, train riders have access to an outdoor open-air flatbed car for an unobstructed view.

In August, the 102nd Santa Fe Indian Market features jewelry, pottery, textiles, paintings, sculptures and other creative works by more than 1,000 artists from at least 200 Native American tribes. Indigenous musicians will also perform on stages in Santa Fe Plaza; models will strut their stuff in a fashion show; and food vendors will sell fry bread, Frito pies and Pueblo stews.

### Milwaukee

Milwaukeeans eat frozen custard all year, but

during the summer, they don't need an ice pick to consume the eggy cousin of ice cream.

Custard is best enjoyed by the water. In Milwaukee, visitors can choose among three rivers or Lake Michigan. Bradford Beach, the city's largest public beach, is a hot spot for volleyball and migratory birds. Since 2020, it has offered free use of beach wheelchairs.

Traveling south, visitors can choose among smaller sunbathing spots such as McKinley Beach before hitting Henry Maier Festival Park. The 75-acre fairground hosts nonstop events, including the annual Summerfest, which takes place over three weekends and features 600 musical acts.

### Boise, Idaho

Even with the extra hours of daylight, you'll need several days to fully explore the Boise River Greenbelt, the city's main recreational artery. The 25-mile pathway runs from Lucky Peak State Park, a watersports hub on a dammed lake, to Garden City.

At the northern terminus, you can river surf or stand-up paddle on a man-made wave at Boise White-water Park. The paved route overlaps with the Urban Wine Trail, a collection of wineries and meaderies with tasting rooms.

Several stops along the Boise Idaho Potato Trail are also accessible from the greenbelt. The restaurants, breweries and other eateries put an innovative spin on the spud. The state's primary crop appears on pizza and as an ale, a doughnut and an ice cream creation that looks deceptively like a baked potato.

### Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Angela Hughes, owner of Trips & Ships Luxury Travel, recommends the centuries-old seaport town for "its unique blend

of historical charm, cultural richness and scenic beauty."

Sightseeing cruises putter around the Piscataqua River, a liquid state line shared with Maine, and the Isles of Shoals, a nine-pack of islands six miles off the coast. For history buffs, the Strawberry Banke Museum is like a Yankee Williamsburg, with costumed "roleplayers" and artisans demonstrating traditional crafts.

The guided tour calendar for the Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire fills up during the summer, or if you prefer to walk at your own pace, follow the map to the two dozen downtown sites.

In Prescott Park, theater fans can discover high-caliber productions at the Players' Ring, but without the sweaty Broadway masses.

### Minneapolis

Freezing rain. Unforgiving wind. Sleet. Ice. These are some of the words that describe a Minneapolis winter.

Minnesotans embrace the cold, but ask locals about the summer, and you'll get descriptors like "heaven," "priceless" and "magical."

"There can be an infectious buzz about it," said Minnesota native and St. Paul resident Kyle Potter, editor in chief of Thrifty Traveler.

Potter points to the city's many breweries and restaurants designed with summer in mind, with massive patios overlooking the Mississippi River or garage door walls that get rolled up as soon as the temperatures allow. And, of course, there's the Minnesota State Fair to round out the season with a bang, or at least a bucket of chocolate chip cookies.

For a true taste of Minnesota summer, "get a rental car, drive two-ish hours north and go see Lake Superior," Potter said, recommending stops in Duluth or

Grand Marais to jump into the frigid waters or explore them by canoe.

"But you don't have to go far at all," Potter added. "Just within city limits, within half of an afternoon you can knock out three of Minnesota's 10,000 lakes."

### Camden, Maine

After spending the winter months getting buried under snowstorm after snowstorm, Maine transforms into the poster child for the quintessential East Coast summer.

Most visitors flock to Portland for the piping hot food scene or north to Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park. For less traffic, try Camden on Penobscot Bay along Maine's Mid-Coast.

The town has cool restaurants and wine shops, quaint ice cream stands and plenty of places to buy lobster-themed paraphernalia. Stay in one of Camden's many historic inns or rough it at a campsite in nearby Camden State Park, which is within walking distance of the town.

### Quebec City

The provincial capital of Quebec is often touted as an alternative for Paris. Similar to its European counterpart, the city's outdoor cafes, gardens and parks flourish in the warmer months. A section of the St. Charles River trail, which runs from Lake Saint-Charles to the Old Port, switches from cross-country skiing to inline skating and cycling.

On the St. Lawrence River, shuttles transport visitors to such attractions as Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, a cathedral touted as the oldest pilgrimage site in North America.

For a dip, the Promenade Samuel-De Champlain recently opened a section called Station de la Plage, which features an Olympic-size infinity pool with a sandy beach along the river banks.



MICHIGAN TRAVEL

# Horsin' Around

A spectator's guide to Michigan's horse shows

DYLAN BUELL — GETTY IMAGES

Horse shows differ in the level of action. Some are simple shows where horses are led around a field, while others are more exhilarating offering jumping and other acts.





A horse is washed prior to the start of a show.

SPENCER PLATT —  
GETTY IMAGES



**By Susan Thwing**  
*For MediaNews Group*

**T**here's a certain magic to a summer morning at a horse show — the scent of fresh hay, the gentle clink of bridles, and the thunder of hooves warming up in the ring. For those uninitiated in the equestrian world, horse shows can seem a little mysterious, but Michigan's vibrant and welcoming show circuit offers the perfect place to jump in as a spectator.

With events ranging from casual open shows to a world-class Olympic-level competition, there's something for lifelong horse lovers and curious newcomers alike. And as local horse show professionals, Liz Gear of ShoMe Horse Shows and Taylor Fabus of Fabus Farms explain, there's no better time to come watch the beauty and precision of horse and rider in action.

### The show behind the show

Before the first class is called, months of preparation have gone into what spectators see in the arena. Gear knows this better than most. Alongside her husband Kurtis, she owns and operates ShoMe Horse Shows, a Michigan-based show series that welcomes hundreds of horses and exhibitors to each event.

"My husband and I both showed as youths," she said. "Despite our equestrian background, horse show management was something we fell into by accident. We got our start when my mother-in-law asked us to help her run the show office for an event she was involved with. ... We launched EKG (Elizabeth & Kurtis Gear) Equine Services the following year. We started with a small four-show contract with the Ranch Horse Association of Michigan. To be honest, we had absolutely no idea what we were doing, but we stuck with it and quickly picked up additional contracts, including one for the Michigan Quarter Horse Association's six shows. After three years of managing shows for various associations, we purchased the ShoMe Horse Shows."

"I didn't realize how much went on behind the scenes until I was in it," Gear said, explaining that they're always planning, ordering awards, hiring judges and setting up software. "I'm never not managing awards."

ShoMe Horse Shows hosts four all-breed pleasure-type shows annually. These events emphasize rider skill and horse responsiveness over speed or jumps,

and welcome a wide array of breeds, with many horses coming from "stock-type" lines like Quarter Horses, Paints and Appaloosas.

"But you'll also see some fine horses like Arabians and Morgans — it's a great mix," Gear said.

Fabus, owner of Fabus Farms, a horse show judge, and a lifelong Michigan horsewoman, agreed.

"I host mainly open horse shows, which are open to all ages of exhibitors and all breeds of horses. They are typically all-around shows offering many classes," she said. "It takes a great deal of industry knowledge, as well as event management experience, to organize a successful horse show. ... Typically a horse show manager like myself is responsible for building and designing the event, creating a budget, securing venue and insurance, marketing the event, taking reservations and entries, hiring appropriate staff, ordering awards, and then day-of operations. It's a huge undertaking, but can be very rewarding, both professionally and personally!"

### Yellowstone fan? Reining Horse Shows in Midland

Fans of Taylor Sheridan's *Yellowstone* will find a taste of that Western world in Midland, where the Michigan Reining Horse Association hosts reining competitions throughout the summer. The sport combines cowboy grit, athletic horse-and-rider





PHOTO COURTESY OF FABUS FARMS

Taylor Fabus is the owner of Fabus Farms, a horse show judge, and a lifelong Michigan horsewoman.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHOME HORSE SHOWS

A young rider gets a hive-five at ShoMe Horse Shows.

## Horses

FROM PAGE 19

teamwork, and showmanship straight out of a Dut-ton Ranch scene.

The Liberty Derby, one of MRHA's premier events, will be held at the Midland County Fairgrounds from July 10-13. Spectators are welcome to attend. Organizers note that any class labeled "futures" or "derby" promises elite competitors, bigger prize money, and action-packed performances, typically held Friday and Saturday nights. With categories like the Open & Non-Pro Derby and the Kimes Ranch Green 2 Shootout, the stakes are high and the talent is world-class.

Visit [mrha.org](http://mrha.org) for full schedules and details.

### Olympic-level jumping in Traverse City

Visitors can experience elite equestrian action set against one of Michigan's most scenic backdrops at one of the Traverse City Horse Shows. Held at the upgraded Flintfields Horse Park from June through September, this 12-week series features Olympic-level show jumping, more than \$7 million in prize money, and some of the world's top riders and horses.

Just a short drive from the beaches of Lake Michigan and vibrant downtown Traverse City, the venue blends high-caliber sport with Northern Michigan charm. Entry to Flintfields Horse Park is free and open every week starting at 8 a.m. Wednesdays. For a nominal ticket price,

guests can enjoy VIP seating with elegant hospitality, ringside bars and lounges, and an on-site concierge.

The shows are designed with families in mind — Sundays are dedicated to family fun, with kid-friendly activities, special guests, and entertainment that make the sport exciting and accessible to all ages.

Learn more at [traversecityhorseshow.com](http://traversecityhorseshow.com).

### What to expect as a spectator

One of the best things about horse shows? They're almost always free and open to the public.

"It is very rare for a horse show to have an admission fee, and most are open to the public. We encourage spectators and love to have new faces in the stands,"





PHOTO COURTESY OF FABUS FARMS

Fabus Farms offers a camp where attendees will learn the basics of a horse show.

bus said. “Bring a comfortable chair or a bleacher seat. ... There are typically food vendors at most horse shows, so bring some cash and support these great small businesses.”

Fabus also said visitors should stop by the show office and ask for a schedule or a “show bill” to help them keep track of what’s happening in the arena.

If you’re hoping to catch a specific class, though, be prepared to wait.

“There’s no strict timetable,” Gear said. “Class times depend on how many entries there are, how quickly judging moves — it’s very fluid.”

That said, some parts of the show day are especially fun to watch.

“Our nightly special events are really when the excitement amps up. These

events have a traditional competitive aspect, but also a nontraditional twist that makes them so fun. Spectators are welcome and encouraged to watch these from the stands,” Gear said.

While open shows may not have the heart-pounding pace of a rodeo or show jumping event, Fabus said, the nuance is in the details.

“It’s not always fast and flashy, but if you love horses, you will see we are extremely fortunate in Michigan to have a very healthy open show industry, one of the biggest and most successful in the entire nation,” she said. “There are so many horse shows to see within our state and these events provide a great deal to many local economies, I encourage you to visit a horse show and check it out.”

**“It’s not always fast and flashy, but if you love horses, you will see we are extremely fortunate in Michigan to have a very healthy open show industry, one of the biggest and most successful in the entire nation. There are so many horse shows to see within our state and these events provide a great deal to many local economies, I encourage you to visit a horse show and check it out.”**

— *Taylor Fabus*

#### How to be a great guest

Spectators play a key role in setting the tone for a successful show. Horse shows may be open and welcoming, but horses themselves are still animals — prey animals, in fact — and sud-

den noises or movements can spook even a seasoned mount.

“Umbrellas are a big one,” Fabus said. “It might be hot and sunny, but opening an umbrella ringside can really scare a horse. The same goes for plastic bags, running kids, or loud noises.

Just be mindful.”

“Don’t walk through the warm-up ring or try to pet a horse without asking,” Gear added. “Most horses are friendly, but some have quirks, and safety has to come first.”

Spectators are always welcome to explore the

grounds, but both Gear and Fabus encourage people to check out the show office if they’re curious or have questions.

#### Where to find horse shows near you

- ShoMe Horse Shows — All-breed open pleasure shows in Michigan, [shome-horseshows.com](http://shome-horseshows.com)

- GLASS-ED Dressage — Regional dressage competition schedule, [glass-ed.com](http://glass-ed.com)

- Traverse City Horse Shows — National and international show jumping, [traversecityhorseshows.com](http://traversecityhorseshows.com)

- Michigan Quarter Horse Association — Breed-specific events and youth competitions, [miquarter-horse.com](http://miquarter-horse.com)

- Michigan Reining Horse Association — Reining competitions, [mrha.org](http://mrha.org)



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL

# Gone Pickin'

Strawberry fields are for everyone: Michigan U-pick fruit farms thrive amid challenges

DANIEL MEARS — THE DETROIT NEWS

Calliope Mancini, 19 months old, plays with her dad Marius Mancini of Troy during a visit to Blake's U-pick strawberry fields in Armada. The first fruits of summer are becoming ripe for the picking at Michigan U-pick farms.





**By Candice Williams**  
*The Detroit News*

**O**n a warm June morning, Taylor Allen and her 2-year-old daughter, Nella, stooped between rows of strawberry plants at Blake's Orchard & Cider Mill in Armada. Dressed in matching red and white gingham dresses, the two picked strawberries with a group of friends as Nella helped herself to a few bites of the sweet fruit.

"It's just a Michigan, special thing to do because not every state has strawberry picking," said Allen of Warren. "A day like this is beautiful. And then we go home, we eat strawberry jam and she eats the strawberries, too."

The summer U-pick season has begun in Michigan, with strawberries leading the way. Farms across the state are welcoming visitors back into the fields this month for the summer tradition.

"Strawberries is a special time," said Kaley Duncan of Blake's Orchard. "It kicks off the summer for a lot of people. ... It's one of the first crops that brings the farm to life. And we roll into cherries and raspberries and vegetables and apple picking. So it really is what brings the property to life."

Fruit growers across the state are feeling optimistic about the season, with positive outlooks for strawberries, cherries, blueberries and apples, said Theresa Sisung, industry relations specialist with the Michigan Farm Bureau.

Even once the fruit is ripe, Sisung said farmers can't let their guard down. For example, growers in some areas, particularly north of Grand Rapids and into the Traverse City region, experienced recent frost and hail damage and are closely monitoring incoming storms.

"They have to watch the weather constantly," she said. "First, it's 'Let's make sure we can get the crop coming and growing.' ... 'Let's make sure we don't have a frost event that kills the crop.' And then it's 'make sure we don't get hail, and make sure we don't get a whole bunch of wind. And we need some sun and we need some warm weather.' So from the start until the end, they're worried about the weather."

### 'Relying on Mother Nature'

The U-pick season in Michigan typically begins in early to mid-June with strawberries and raspberries later in the month, followed by cherries and blueberries in July. Apples and pumpkins follow in early fall.

Despite a colder-than-average spring, growers say this year's strawberry crop is looking good.



**FIELDS » PAGE 24**

DANIEL MEARS, THE DETROIT NEWS — THE DETROIT NEWS/TNS

Mike Martell of Clinton Township takes to the fields at Blake's in Armada during a visit with his wife, Maryette.



# Fields

FROM PAGE 23

"It all depends on the weather," Duncan said. "With farming, you're relying on Mother Nature to provide the right conditions. And it's really just a waiting game sometimes, with the warmth to come and the berries to turn red. There's plenty of blossoms and green berries, but it takes that heat to ripen them up on the vines."

At its Armada location, Blake's offers 35 acres of strawberry fields, with multiple varieties that ripen at different times, allowing for about a month-long period for picking.

U-pick customers are encouraged to check their local farm websites, social media pages or hotlines for updates on the latest crops.

Derrica Hamilton of Detroit said she was anxiously watching and waiting for U-pick strawberry season to start. She recently brought her three children and her mother to Blake's to pick strawberries. Working in an area identified as a "best picking" spot, they filled a large container with bright red berries.

"As soon as we found out what day they were opening for picking, we were praying that the weather would hold up and that we could come out to do it," she said.

Hamilton said she and her husband have made fruit-picking a family tradition for nearly a decade, starting when their oldest children were small. They visit a few U-pick farms in Michigan, she said.

"I love keeping us as close to nature as we can, and it just kind of helps us slow down the fast-paced life and keeps us close to natural food, healthy foods that grow," she said. "And it's a fun activity for all ages — from the baby to the senior."

## 'Fun on the farm'

Shannon Rowe of Spicer Orchards in Fenton said there might be an added benefit to the season's slightly delayed start.

"A cool spring weather has definitely affected growing season a bit, but just like that, we still have a nice crop," she said. "And the flavor, oh my gosh, the flavor this year is just fantastic. I actually think the cool spring allows them to flavor up a little bit more."

Spicer Orchards is a 300-acre farm that's retail-based and focused on the U-pick experience, Rowe said. Largely an apple grower, Spicer has 12 acres of strawberries, 15 acres of cherries, 10 acres of blueberries and about 20 acres of peaches. Raspberries, which cover around 8 scattered acres, tend to overlap with other fruits and can be "hit or miss," depending on the week and the weather, Rowe said.

In northern Michigan, strawberry U-



PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHIGAN AGRITOURISM

Strawberries are a tasty treat enjoyed by many.

pick season at King Orchards is expected to be in full swing by late June, said Juliette King-McAvoy, vice president of sales and marketing for King Orchards in Antrim County.

King-McAvoy said she expects a strong crop based on a good bloom and hopes the season will last longer than usual as long as there aren't prolonged periods of extreme heat.

The farm offers U-pick strawberries, sweet and tart cherries, raspberries, apricots, peaches and nectarines through the summer, before offering apples in early September. There's no division between U-pick and commercial picking, and the staff typically allows customers to pick first before crews harvest the remaining fruit, King-McAvoy said. King Orchards also offers hard cider and wine tasting.

"We sure hope people come on out and have some fun on the farm," she said.

In the heart of Michigan's Thumb, Turner's Blueberry Farm is preparing for blueberry season next month.

"Everything is on track for a mid-July opening," said Daniel Stocking, owner of Turner's Blueberry Farm. "We've had good pollination and the weather's been cooperative so far. Now we just need Mother Nature to stay on our side."

Stocking and his wife, Amy, purchased the farm in 2022 from her aunt and uncle. In recent years, the crop has been good, despite the challenges of frost and deer, he said. The farm sits on 30 acres, with

about 10 acres dedicated to blueberries — roughly 8,500 bushes.

Turner's Blueberry Farm is nearly 100% U-pick, catering to regular customers who come from across the Thumb, as well as what Stocking noticed is an increasing number of new customers from Metro Detroit. He said they keep their operations simple.

"We realized this is a staple of the community," he said. "People have been coming here for decades, and we didn't want to change what already worked."

Stocking said he largely maintains the fields himself, along with his wife and children. During picking season, they receive extra help from family.

## Staffing for the season

The need for labor varies from farm to farm.

Nancy Nyquist, labor policy specialist for the Michigan Farm Bureau, said many growers rely on a local domestic workforce to harvest and package crops. Farms are turning to the H-2A guest worker program to fill seasonal roles when they can't find enough U.S. workers.

"The H-2A visa program allows U.S. agricultural employers to bring foreign workers to the U.S. for temporary or seasonal work when they cannot find enough qualified U.S. workers," she said. "It is costly for the farmer to participate, but necessary to ensure there are fresh fruit and vegetables for consumers."

Nyquist said she hasn't heard of any staffing issues at U-pick farms this year.

King Orchards employs about 90 people, including 30-35 seasonal workers hired through the federal H-2A visa program. The visa is used primarily for field labor, King-McAvoy said. The farm is fully staffed for the season and has come to rely on the program, though rising costs have been a concern.

This year, the hourly wage for workers in the visa program is \$18.15, down from \$18.50 last year, but up from \$17.34 in 2023.

"We're very fortunate," she said. "The H-2A program does not have a cap like the H-2B program, and so we are able to get as many workers as we need through that program."

Back at Blake's, Duncan said the farm is fully staffed, with about 17 H-2A workers currently on-site and up to 30 expected by fall. They arrive in waves, she said, beginning in March or April, then again in May, and a final group just ahead of the fall apple harvest.

"We really couldn't do it without them," she said.

In addition to farm labor, Blake's hires as many as 800 seasonal workers across its retail operations — from cashiers and cooks to event staff.

"We have a lot of seasonal employees that come back year after year," Duncan said. "So they'll work now through the end of the fall or into the end of the year, through our Christmas season."



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL

# Why I still camp and why it's good for all ages

By Ed Cullen

Next Avenue

Summer in the Deep South starts to loosen its grip in September and I think, "Will this be my last fall to camp?" I've been asking myself that since my early 60s. I turned 78 in August.

It's easy to fall into the trap of "Is this my last time to do this?" or "How many more times will I do this in my life?"

I took my first, best and, maybe, last bicycle camping trip in my 40's. It never entered my mind that I was probably doing it for the last time. It was such a good solitary trip where everything went right, that I haven't found it necessary to do it again. So far.

When things go wrong on a camping trip, I lie in my tent checking the light on my wristwatch until dawn. When it's too hot, the insects are particularly bad or noisy people camp close by, it's easy to say enough.

At end of day, my buddies and I sit around a campfire readying old muscles before attempting to rise. Before first light, we lie in our sleeping bags smiling at the sounds of our mates wrestling out of their bags to crawl groaning from their tents.

"Why do we do this?" we silently ask ourselves.

I have an ancient dome tent that long ago lost its ability to repel rain or even heavy dew. So, I rig a tarp over a rope stretched between two trees. I pitch my old tent beneath the waterproof shelter.

## 'Why do I camp?'

My rig takes more

time to put up than my friends' ultra-light, expensive backpacker tents, but I get the bonus of a front porch where I read away afternoons in a small canvas chair.

On a cool sun-doused fall afternoon, I read on my tent porch in a forest clearing and don't think, "Why do I camp?"

I don't question driving out of town in a lovely, old pickup truck. I don't question walking into a favorite country store to get ice or a pound of coffee to replace the one I left on the kitchen counter. As I pull into a primitive campground, I don't wonder why a wild turkey has chosen this moment to reveal itself.

I ride a mountain bicycle more carefully than I once did. Tent camping places me near old roads sunk deep in loess soil where Kaintucks walked home after floating down the Mississippi River to New Orleans with farm products, coal and livestock. The flatboat men sold their craft for lumber and started the long walk home on the roads I love to ride.

## Three friends weigh in

I polled three friends who camp for this story. Robert first camped with the Boy Scouts. He was 11. Al, a fit hiker in his 70s, had never camped until he retired 8 years ago. Sharon, in her early 60s, camps in Michigan.

Al has been a long distance bicycle rider and an urban walker covering distances from his house to places in Baton Rouge that his friends consider long car trips.

Al camps with Robert



GETTY IMAGES

"We lie in our sleeping bags smiling at the sounds of our mates wrestling out of their bags to crawl groaning from their tents."



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

Whether camping solo or with friends and family, there's a solitude of enjoyment to it.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Michigan is an ideal place for boondocking, dry camping and car camping because of the amazing forests and countless inland lakes, streams and rivers.

who has all the cooking gear. Robert values Al for his friend's hiking prowess. Robert's no slouch as a woods walker, but he feels there's a better

chance of making it back to camp if Al's along.

Sharon grew up in south Louisiana camping with her family in Florida, north Louisiana and

Colorado. Memories of camping led her to take a course in backpacking. As she got older, Sharon tired of carrying a 30-pound pack.

"I became less enamored with backpacking," she said. "I enjoy hiking if it's short and I can spend my time relaxing or hiking without the pack."

Sharon camps alone much of the time in state campgrounds, national parks and forests. She lives a short walk from Lake Michigan.

"I enjoy camping," she said, "because I love the way it slows everything down and reduces life to its simplest levels." Sharon usually camps with just Beignet (part boxer, lab and other breeds). She likes camping with people who like to camp.

"If the person is not a fan of camping, it can be miserable," she said. "I've learned to only camp with people who really like camping. First timers can go with someone else," she laughed.

Like Sharon, Robert is an experienced camper who sometimes camps alone, but in recent years his companion is often Al and, sometimes, me.

## 'It changes my senses'

"I camp," he said, "because it changes my senses. Food tastes better in the woods. Colors are more vivid. Crickets are much louder. And time shifts from linear to something quite elastic. One thing that's changed is that I used to go camping to challenge myself to accomplish specific goals, like hiking a certain number of miles in a

day. Now, I have no specific goals. I go purely to enjoy myself."

Robert and I like camping gadgets. We know it's time to pack up when we've played with all our new pieces of cooking gear, knives, folding saws, compasses, GPS devices, solar batteries and rechargeable lanterns.

Al became a fan of camping with his first trip in his late 60s.

"I enjoyed the unexpected things, like a bush in the woods covered with flowers," he said. He liked the hilly climbs in the Kisatchie National Forest in north central Louisiana. He got the surprise of his life walking down a ravine when a Great Blue Heron, feeling suddenly claustrophobic, flew past Al to make for a patch of blue sky above the ravine.

One second, Al was concentrating on his footing in the ravine, the next this great bird was exploding past him.

Asking people why they camp is like asking dancers, artists, writers or musicians to talk about what they do. Some things express themselves best in the doing.

I like campsites with people at the end of day. During the day, I like campsites when my companions have drifted away leaving me on the front porch under my tarp. Unread book in hand, I sit surveying my borrowed kingdom of trees and filtered sunlight on the forest floor.

Why do I camp? I camp to return to places where I've known peace and long, good days, places I need to see, feel and hear once more.



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL

# IT'S A RAINY DAY? NO WORRIES

## Here are some activities to keep the kids occupied

By Susan Thwing  
For MediaNews Group

**W**hen summer hits Michigan, families look forward to beach days, BBQs and bike rides. But what happens when the sky opens up and rain soaks those plans?

Michigan's summer weather is predicted to be especially hot and rainy in 2025, featuring "sultry and thunder-filled" days, according to the Farmers' Almanac, and families need solid indoor backup plans. Historically, Michigan summers bring around 32 days of rain. Some forecasters are saying this summer could bring even more.

Luckily, the Great Lakes State offers many enriching, exhilarating and downright fun ways to spend stormy afternoons indoors.

### Go bowling ... for free!

Bowling is always a crowd-pleaser, and it doesn't have to break the bank. Patrick Foody, general manager of Escape Troy (which includes an arcade, bowling, laser tag and a full-service restaurant), suggests families check out KidsBowlFree.com before heading out. The program allows children under 12 to bowl two free games daily during the summer. Parents just cover the cost of the shoe rental. Kids Bowl Free has participating locations across Michigan.

"It's perfect — especially if it's around dinner," Foody said. "Parents can relax and enjoy a meal while kids play laser tag or bowl. It's a place families can come and enjoy the day, no matter the weather."

### Make a masterpiece

Rainy days don't have to equal screen time. Let your child's imagination shine with hands-on creativity at local art spots.

Mini Picassos in St. Clair Shores offers drop-in hours on Wednesdays (12:30–2:30 p.m.) and Thursdays/Fridays (10

a.m.–2:30 p.m.) for \$15 per child.

Kids can explore the colorful Play Village and dive into the interactive Art Zone, filled with paints, props and fun prompts to spark pretend play and artistic expression. Reservation not required.

Many public libraries offer similar activities, many times for free. Check your local library for its full list of summertime activities.

### Check out sloths, snakes, and sea creatures

When the weather outside is dreary, head to a tropical jungle inside. The Reptarium in Utica is a one-of-a-kind indoor reptile zoo that lets kids (and brave adults) get hands-on with snakes, lizards, tortoises and even a two-toed sloth. From holding a Burmese python to petting a giant tortoise, it's an unforgettable, educational experience.

Across the street, LegaSea Aquarium is the Reptarium's brand-new companion experience, featuring exotic fish, colorful coral tanks, touch pools and marine life that spark curiosity and wonder. Families can easily spend a whole afternoon between the two spots.

### Explore Michigan's history and diverse culture

Museums might not scream "fun" to every child, but Michigan's are packed with immersive exhibits and interactive surprises that keep boredom at bay.

Start with The Zekelman Holocaust Center in Farmington Hills. This powerful museum offers age-appropriate education through first-hand survivor stories, an authentic World War II-era boxcar, and even a sapling from the tree outside Anne Frank's hiding place.

This summer's highlights include Survivor Talk Sundays at noon and a special art exhibit from American artist and writer Boris Lurie — ideal for older chil-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ESCAPE TROY

Round up your friends or come alone and join an existing team at your local laser tag facility.



A group of students board the bus made famous by civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks at The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn.

BILL PUGLIANO — GETTY IMAGES



dren and teens.

Planning a road trip? Check out these other fascinating museums:

- The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn: Home of Rosa Parks' bus, Edison's lab, and a rotating roster of STEM-focused exhibits.

- Detroit Historical Museum: See how the Motor City rose, fell and reemerged through interactive storytelling.

- Grand Rapids Public Museum: Explore Michigan's regional history and Anishinaabe heritage.

- Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum in Whitefish Point: Dive into maritime history on the shore of Lake Superior.

Want to explore cultural iden-

tity and community stories?

- Arab American National Museum in Dearborn: The only museum of its kind in the country.

- Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit: One of the largest collections in the world.

- Finnish American Heritage Center in Hancock: A gem in the Upper Peninsula.

- Polish Art Center in Hamtramck, Jewish Historical Society in Bloomfield Township and Italian American Cultural Center in Clinton Township: Great stops to explore immigration stories, crafts, and history.

Museums like these help children see themselves in history

and imagine their place in shaping the future.

### Quirky, creative, low-cost ideas

Not every rainy day requires a full itinerary. Sometimes the best memories come from spontaneous indoor fun. Try these wallet-friendly favorites:

#### Thrift store treasure hunt

Give each child \$5 and visit a local thrift store with the goal of finding the most interesting item. Encourage creativity and storytelling. Gave kids explain their pick and its "backstory." Was it owned by a wizard? Is it a rare

collector's item? The more imaginative, the better.

### Interview your oldest relative

Have your child make a list of thoughtful questions and interview a grandparent or elder. Record or write answers to create a family history booklet. This can become a short video, podcast or illustrated comic inspired by a memorable story.

### Try something new at the grocery store

Pick one item no one in the family has ever had, such as star-

fruit, goat cheese or curry paste. Learn about the country it comes from, look up recipes, and host a mini "taste test." Bonus points for letting kids cook with it or write a food review.

### Have a backward day

Flip everything around — dinner for breakfast, pajamas all day, brushing teeth with your non-dominant hand. Write names backward and try pronouncing them, or host a backward fashion show. You could even talk in backward sentences.

Whether your kids want to bowl strikes, pet snakes or paint masterpieces, Michigan offers plenty of rainy-day escapes.



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL

# A PASSPORT TO FUN!

## Michigan Activity Pass connects residents to culture and adventure at a discount

**By Susan Thwing**  
For MediaNews Group

Looking for discounts on Michigan attractions like SEA LIFE Michigan; Cranbrook Science Center; the Yankee Air Museum; or any of the state's parks, lighthouses, festivals and museums? Check out the Michigan Activity Pass.

Since its establishment in 2007, the Michigan Activity Pass (MAP) program, an initiative from The Library Network, has connected Michigan residents with cultural and recreational destinations across the state. It has evolved into a significant collaboration between libraries and local communities.

The program began as a local project in metropolitan Detroit and has since expanded statewide, providing free or discounted access to numerous venues. According to Jim Flury, technical services manager for The Library Network, MAP has undergone a substantial transformation over the years, turning into a fully online service accessible to all Michigan residents.

"In 2013, the program was converted to an all-online, statewide initiative, meaning patrons could 'check out' a MAP pass from anywhere in Michigan," Flury said.

### A growing network of cultural venues

Today, nearly 400 public libraries across Michigan participate in the MAP program, and the number of partner destinations has grown to 470. These destinations range from museums and art galleries to nature centers and state parks. According to Flury, the cultural venues involved in the program are diverse, and how they join MAP varies.

"MAP partners learn about the program in a variety of ways. Some have been recruited by library cooperatives, others by public libraries, and still others through social media," he said. This dynamic growth of participants reflects the program's increasing popularity and importance as a tool for cultural engagement across the



PHOTO COURTESY OF SEA LIFE MICHIGAN AQUARIUM

The SEA LIFE Michigan Aquarium is a popular place to visit for those utilizing the Michigan Activity Pass, which offers discounts to hundreds of places around the state.

state.

Each MAP destination determines the discount it will offer to MAP patrons. Some offer free admission; others offer a variety of discounts. After searching for a destination in MAP, click on the "Pass Options" button to see the discount details it offers. Brochures that list MAP partici-

pating destinations — grouped into lower-mitten, upper-mitten, and upper-peninsula activities — are available on the MAP Resources Page at [miactivitypass.org/resources-2](http://miactivitypass.org/resources-2). Destinations range from festivals like the Renaissance Festival to Michigan parks and campgrounds to lighthouse and maritime tours.

### Positive impact on communities

The MAP program has profoundly affected Michigan communities, particularly in terms of library engagement and community involvement. Over its nearly 17-year history, library patrons and staff have expressed gratitude for the program's oppor-



tunities.

"We've received many comments from libraries and patrons about the positive impact MAP has had on their communities," Flury said.

User testimonials highlight the personal and social benefits of access to cultural experiences.

"One patron shared: 'It's great to explore new places in our home state at an affordable rate. We look for new adventures as a family, especially during holidays and summer breaks,'" he said. "Another user, a social worker, noted the program's value for her clients: 'I suggest the MAP to people all the time. It's a great resource for those who may not have the money to go places. I educate case managers and therapists about it so that they can recommend it to others.'"

### Accessibility for all

One of the MAP program's core strengths is its emphasis on accessibility. By leveraging Michigan's network of public libraries, the program ensures every resident can benefit from it, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

"Public libraries are the great equalizers," Flury said. "All a person needs to access the benefits of the MAP program is a library card, which is free to obtain."

He said this commitment to inclusivity means that even individuals in remote areas or lower-income households can enjoy cultural experiences they might not otherwise have access to.

### Promoting local culture

The Michigan Activity Pass plays a vital role in promoting local culture and encouraging residents to explore the state's rich cultural landscape. Libraries actively promote MAP-related activities on social media, often fostering collaboration with local cultural institutions.

"MAP staff have done outreach programs at partner destinations to promote the program," Flury noted. For instance, MAP staff were invited to the Outdoor Adventure Center in Detroit earlier this year for a special event, Birding on Belle Isle. This type of community engagement strengthens ties between libraries, cultural institutions and the communities they serve, creating a cycle of mutual benefit.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOWELL NATURE CENTER

Howell Nature Center offers many activities for families, including a zip line.

Popular destinations vary with the seasons, Flury said.

"During the summer months, locations like the Huron-Clinton Metroparks see a surge in visitors. In cooler weather, institutions such as SEA LIFE Michigan Aquarium and the Howell Nature Center attract more passholders. This seasonal flexibility makes MAP a year-round resource for families and individuals looking to explore Michigan's natural and cultural offerings," he said.

### Continuous expansion and innovation

The MAP program is far from static. Each year, new partner

destinations are added, further expanding the range of opportunities available to library cardholders. Libraries are encouraged to reach out to cultural venues in their service areas and introduce them to the benefits of becoming a MAP partner.

"We add new partner destinations throughout the year," Flury said. "This steady growth ensures that the program remains dynamic and responsive to the interests of Michigan's residents."

In addition to expanding the number of destinations, MAP has embraced technological advancements to make accessing passes even more convenient. In June 2023, a new software plat-

form was introduced in partnership with Pontiac-based vendor LocalHop. This platform includes features like enhanced search capabilities and the ability for patrons to store MAP tickets in their Google or Apple Wallets.

"The new software makes it easier than ever for patrons to discover MAP destinations," Flury said.

### How to get started

The MAP program makes exploring Michigan simple. Residents can visit the MAP website at [miactivitypass.org](http://miactivitypass.org) to browse available destinations and check out passes using their library cards. A two-minute tutorial

guides new users through the process.

Flury encourages people to explore the variety of destinations available: "Patrons are just a couple of clicks away from their next MAP adventure."

The Michigan Activity Pass program enriches residents' lives, fosters community engagement, and promotes the state's local culture by providing free or discounted access to a wide range of cultural and recreational venues.

"As it continues to grow and evolve, the program stands as a shining example of how libraries can play a crucial role in making culture accessible to everyone," Flury said.



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL

# Pine Knob, Michigan Lottery and Meadow Brook tickets discounted to \$30

By Adam Graham  
The Detroit News

Dozens of summer concerts at Pine Knob, Michigan Lottery Amphitheatre and Meadow Brook Amphitheatre are being discounted to \$30 during concert promoter Live Nation's \$30 Ticket to Summer program.

The sale launched May 21.

Tickets will be available through LiveNation.com/TickettoSummer, with more concerts to be added throughout the upcoming months, according to a release.

The full list of participating area concerts can be seen below.

The \$30 includes all fees upfront, save for taxes where applicable, according to a release.

The \$30 Ticket to Summer promotion follows Live Nation Concert Week, an an-

nual promotion which featured \$25 tickets to a host of summer concerts. Locally, last year's program featured more than 130 concerts, including shows at Comerica Park, Little Caesars Arena, the Fillmore Detroit and Saint Andrew's Hall.

Participating Metro Detroit \$30 Ticket to Summer concerts, separated by venue, are as follows:

## Pine Knob Music Theatre

- July 2: "Weird Al" Yankovic
- July 16: Summer Of Loud f/ I Prevail, Beartooth, Parkway Drive, Killswitch Engage and more
- July 17: Pantera
- July 19: Kesha and Scissor Sisters
- July 24: KIDZ BOP LIVE
- July 27: The Offspring
- July 29: AJR
- Aug. 1: Cyndi Lauper

- Aug. 2: Barenaked Ladies
- Aug. 4: The Doobie Brothers with The Coral Reefer Band
- Aug. 6: Big Time Rush
- Aug. 11: Toto, Men At Work and Christopher Cross
- Aug. 13: Neil Young and The Chrome Hearts
- Aug. 15: Little Big Town
- Aug. 16: Styx, Kevin Cronin and Don Felder
- Aug. 19: Volbeat and Halestorm
- Aug. 21: The Black Keys
- Sept. 10: Tedeschi Trucks Band and Gov't Mule
- Sept. 28: Papa Roach and Rise Against
- Oct. 2: Alice Cooper and Judas Priest

## Michigan Lottery Amphitheatre

- July 3: BABYMETAL
- July 16: Primus

- Aug. 3: Slightly Stoopid
- Aug. 19: Chevelle with Asking Alexandria and Dead Poet Society
- Aug. 22: Coheed and Cambria and Taking Back Sunday
- Aug. 23: Simple Plan
- Aug. 26: Indigo Girls and Melissa Etheridge
- Aug. 27: Leon Bridges with Charley Crockett
- Aug. 31: Ted Nugent
- Sept. 6: Alison Krauss and Union Station featuring Jerry Douglas

## Meadow Brook Amphitheatre

- July 6: The Music of John Williams with The Detroit Symphony Orchestra
- July 11: Blues Traveler and Gin Blossoms with Spin Doctors
- July 19: Buddy Guy
- Sept. 5: Alabama Shakes



Bassist Chuck Garric, singer Alice Cooper and guitarist Tommy Henriksen perform during the Freaks on Parade tour stop at Pine Knob in Clarkston.

JOHN T. GREILICK — THE DETROIT NEWS/TNS



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL

# Concert of Colors is a charcuterie board of free music fun

**By Lana Mini**

*For MediaNews Group*

Farmington resident Ismael Ahmed had an idea 35 years ago: bring people of all races, ethnicities and ages together to talk, bond and realize that differences can be celebrated while recognizing shared similarities. The goal was to build cultural differences through music, dance and art.

With Michigan's Cultural Exchange Network, a collective that brings cultural leaders together for engaging conversation, and New Detroit, which works for social equity, the shared vision came to life and the Concert of Colors Detroit was born.

Fast forward to today. Concert of Colors is July 16-20 in Midtown Detroit. Ahmed's goal to create the Midwest's largest, completely free, family-friendly global music festival has come to fruition for its 34th year.

"We are extraordinarily proud to bring top musicians from their genres into Detroit for the free Concert of Colors global music festival," said Ahmed, the festival's executive director. "Come one, come all — everyone is welcome! This isn't my festival. It belongs to everyone. It is a family-friendly event, where shows are held all through Midtown's cultural institutions, including indoors and outdoors at the DIA, and the riverfront at the Aretha, all for free."

Nearly simultaneously, decades ago, when Clawson resident Sean Blackman, an Armenian musician, strapped a guitar to his back and started traveling the globe in search of the world's most interesting music, he returned inspired and began to record albums that blended music from around the world.

It wasn't long after that he formed a new lifelong friendship



PHOTO COURTESY OF SEAN BLACKMAN

Sean Blackman, left, of Clawson, and Victor Ghannam, of Sterling Heights will play music from the Middle East, Europe and Detroit at Concert of Colors on July 17 at the Detroit Historical Museum.

with Ahmed who has put Blackman on the stage at the festival numerous times, performing music from Armenia, Brazil, Senegal and more.

Blackman, who has been awarded for his work in cultural leadership and a Detroit Music Award winner, is one of dozens of artists who will perform this year. His show East Meets West will take place with award-winning artist Victor Ghannam who plays the oud, a stringed instrument, and David McMurray, a celebrated Detroit jazz musician. It's

set for 5:30 p.m. Thursday, July 17 at the Detroit Historical Museum, 5401 Woodward Ave.

Also performing during the festival are Femi Kuti, Mavis Staples, WAR, Bab L' Bluz and others at various locations around the city, including the Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre, Detroit Institute of Arts, Scarab Club, Third Man Records, Michigan Science Center, Spot Lite Detroit, Detroit Historical Society and more.

"I love this festival for three reasons. First, it's incredible music from around the world for five

days, all free in Detroit. I love the global food, art, films and shopping and the really cool, open-minded family-friendly people of all ages who come together," Blackman said.

"It's a charcuterie board of fun. There is so much to do."

When Blackman isn't performing, he's working on behalf of Concert of Colors with the festival's venues and cultural partners who work to curate the show.

"To keep this free, everyone who works on this festival does everything they can — whether

it's booking a band, promoting the event, passing out water, we're all equal," Blackman said. "We just want people to come out and hear beautiful music. Bring a lawn chair, bring a blanket for shows outside, and then cool down with the shows inside — the perfect summer mix."

For more information, visit [concertofcolors.com](http://concertofcolors.com).

*Lana Mini is a senior vice president of Marx Layne, the Farmington Hills-based public relations firm that coordinates publicity for Concert of Colors.*



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL

# REVISIT LOCAL HISTORY



PHOTO COURTESY OF BY COURTNEY CIANDELLA | TRAVELBINGER

The Dearborn Inn, famously known for being built by Henry Ford in 1931, closed to the public on Feb. 1, 2023, for extensive renovations. It reopened this year.

## The hotel Henry Ford built 90 years ago has reopened with a fresh renovation

**By Courtney Ciandella**  
*Travelbinger*

**T**he end of an era became the beginning of the next chapter for a historic hotel in Dearborn when it reopened its doors in March 2025.

The Dearborn Inn, famously known for being built by Henry Ford in 1931, closed to the public on Feb. 1, 2023, for extensive renovations, which brought new life into the walls of the legendary building.

Longtime guests wondered what the remodel would look like for the Georgian-

style property and waited two years before the big reveal. They were finally welcomed back on March 19 to some noticeable adjustments to the 135-key hotel as part of the Marriott Bonvoy's Autograph Collection. But what does the renovation mean for the building's legacy after standing tall in its original form for nearly 100 years?

### What changed?

According to a press release, Ford Land Design Team and their collaborators AvroKO, Dash Design, Kraemer Design Group, and restoration architect Quinn

Evans "meticulously" elevated the almost century-old property's design and amenities, being careful to maintain its historic elements. They also had to comply with Michigan's historic preservation guidelines, which require a certificate of appropriateness for all restorations, and the laws under the National Historic Preservation Act, signed in 1966 to preserve procedural protections of historic sites (via National Park Service ).

Additionally, the Ford family requested that little be altered to the Dearborn Inn "to maintain the character and integrity"

of the hotel, as stated in the press release. This meant keeping the checkerboard Italian marble flooring, personally selected by Ford, upon entering the building. Also, the green marble fireplace in the lobby was restored and protected, as was an original antique clock.

"Edsel (Ford's only son with his wife Clara) was extremely passionate about the black-and-white marble tile in the lobby, so that was carefully preserved, as well as the gold antique clock that is mounted above the corridor that leads to the elevators," Jennifer Kolstad, global design and brand



director at Ford Motor Company revealed to Travel + Leisure shortly before the opening about maintaining the building's original design.

Other subtle touches were added, including displays of artifacts from the Ford archives, which featured a scrapbook with letters from former guests who honeymooned at the inn and vintage hotel menus. Platner chairs and pieces from local artisans are also now fixtures in the lobby, as well as a vintage bar cart for serving coffee, cocktails, and refreshments to Dearborn Inn guests. However, the renovations weren't limited to the hotel's communal spaces, as the rooms also got a considerable makeover. As per the press release, this includes a four-poster walnut bed and Eames chairs in each, Ford Pantone blue tiles covering the bathrooms, and various artwork "inspired by the company archives."

One of the more prominent additions is the 19 suites and a grand Presidential Suite, involving a living room, kitchenette and dining area, now available to guests. According to the Dearborn Inn website, standard room rates cost as low as \$350 per night, and each room comes with a personalized voicemail for guests to feel invited and comfortable.

### Updated dining areas

The hotel's restaurant, Clara's Table, particularly pays homage to Clara, not only with the name but the stellar menu, featuring American cuisine influenced by her and Henry's travels around the world. The Dearborn Inn Executive Chef Elliot Patti also incorporates fresh food from the on-site garden, showcasing Clara's known passion for gardening and as another tribute to the horticulturalist. The restaurant offers breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with an array of homemade pastries, sandwiches, salads, short rib, Prime New York steak, desserts and other delicacies, as per their menu listed on the Dearborn Inn website.

For those who fancy a nightcap at the hotel bar, Four Vagabonds has a list of beers and craft cocktails and an overall vibe that, according to the press release, "channels the spirit of the legendary road trips taken by Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, John Burroughs, and Harvey Firestone in the early 1900s." The menu also includes small plates to be enjoyed indoors or around the campfire. Guests are also encouraged to take advantage of the inn's private dining room, which accommodates up to 20 people, who would each get curated meals by Chef Patti based on their dietary preferences.

### Remodeling a decades-old property

Much thought and close attention to detail went into the transformation of the



Henry Ford with a Model T in Buffalo, New York, in 1921.

FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF HENRY FORD MUSEUM & GREENFIELD VILLAGE

Dearborn Inn, and that's the case when renovating any historic landmark, especially to keep its original charm. Vijay Goel, entrepreneur and co-owner of lavish wedding and events venue 440 Elm in Long Beach, California — formerly an over 110-year-old church — gave us insight into the process of remodeling such a prized venue without hurting its age-old qualities.

"Generally, the remodel/adaptive reuse takes a building that has seen better days and brings it back to the peak of its former glory and adds elements that make it more usable and distinctive to shape the experience for future generations," Goel explained. In his case, the "lightly attended" church was repurposed for a broader use that now holds 900 people for a performance event and 400 for a wedding.

A similar remodel happened to the iconic Surf Club in Miami, Florida, which was transformed into a luxury Four Seasons hotel in January 2023. Former Congressman Patrick E. Murphy, who is also an executive at Coastal Construction, the company behind the project, shared an Instagram video in March about the complexities of

the remodel, which included building above the club while protecting the historic structure on the ground level. Additionally, Murphy mentioned that they excavated underneath the club for hotel parking, all while preserving the beloved Surf Club, which first opened its doors on New Year's Eve in 1930, as per an article in Ocean Drive explaining the complicated renovation.

### The old and new Dearborn Inn

For many, the memories of the original Dearborn Inn could never be forgotten. The site was one of the nation's first airport hotels, built across from the former Ford Airport. It was inspired by the New England Hotels that Henry and Clara frequented and was visited by notable names such as Walt Disney, Orville Wright, Norman Rockwell, Eleanor Roosevelt, and President Ronald Reagan, according to the press release.

Guests can also look forward to more updates to come soon, including the addition of five colonial-style stand-alone homes with 18 guest rooms and suites nodding to famous past visitors and literary icons like Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman. It

will also feature 17,000 square feet of event space for up to 850 guests for larger groups to enjoy.

Just months since the Dearborn Inn's reopening, there's already been an overwhelmingly positive response from the community. Carley Schaar, who had her wedding at the hotel in its former state, revealed her reaction to the makeover in a social media message. "I was sad because my wedding was the last weekend before the renovations," she said. "But I was excited to see what they have done, and from the pictures that I have seen, it is beautiful."

Steve Goodrich, another devoted guest who created lasting memories at the original Dearborn Inn and has visited the hotel following its reopening, told us in another online post: "The Dearborn Inn is special to my wife and I as we were married and held a reception there in 1998. (The renovations) are in the style it was back then." He also added that a particularly nice feature is that guests can print a souvenir ticket for a flight on a Ford Trimotor, one of the first all-metal airplanes (via Federal Aviation Administration ).



## MICHIGAN TRAVEL



PHOTO BY BURRILL STRONG

About 300 people showed up to take part in the book brigade.

# LINKING UP: PEOPLE FORM HUMAN CHAIN TO MOVE 9,100 BOOKS TO NEW STORE

By Sydney Page  
The Washington Post

When 300 people formed a human chain to move thousands of books from one Michigan store to another, bookstore owner Michelle Tuplin could hardly believe her eyes.

"It was so moving," said Tuplin, who has owned Serendipity Books in Chelsea since 2017.

After announcing she was moving her independent bookstore about a block away to a new lo-

cation, her regular customers all had the same question: "How can I help?"

"Everybody wanted to know what they could do," Tuplin said.

She came up with an idea to do a "book brigade," where community members would form a line and pass books from the old store to the new store.

"I had seen something similar years ago, and it was definitely something I wanted to do," Tuplin said.

She spread the word about her idea through posters and hand-

outs, as well as on social media.

"We just asked and then we crossed our fingers and hoped for the best," Tuplin said, adding that she didn't make a sign-up sheet because she didn't want people to feel pressured to attend if their plans changed.

She certainly did not expect hundreds of people to show up on a Sunday, ready to relocate more than 9,000 books from the Middle Street store to the new shop on Main Street.

Although she was anticipating a decent turnout, "it was still a

shock to see all of those supporters and people ready to help," Tuplin said.

Volunteers formed two lines across from one another, leading all the way to the new store, about 350 feet away. They passed each individual book down the line until it reached the final person, who placed it on a shelf in its new home.

Relocating all 9,100 books took just under two hours.

"It was a huge help; it was a meaningful help," Tuplin said.

In addition to many familiar

faces, people from Tuplin's past also showed up to help, including her son's second-grade teacher. Her son is now 23.

"When she gave me a hug, I just about lost it at that point," Tuplin said.

The books were transported alphabetized and based on genre. While it would have been faster to package the books in boxes, Tuplin decided that approach wouldn't have been as much fun.

"We wanted everybody to be





PHOTOS BY BURRILL STRONG

Empty bookshelves after the book brigade at the Middle Street bookstore.



Michelle Tuplin, owner of Serendipity Books in Chelsea, said she was thrilled by the turnout at the book brigade.



Relocating all 9,100 books took just under two hours.



In addition to accomplishing the task, community members got to know one another.





PHOTO BY BURRILL STRONG

Shelves filled up at the new store on Main Street.

## Chain

FROM PAGE 34

able to do it," she said, noting that a 91-year-old woman showed up to help, as well as a 6-year-old child. "If we did it book by book, they could all be a part of it."

When Patrick Conlin heard about the book brigade, he said he was excited to attend, and he brought five members of his book club with him.

"I thought, 'what a great way to be with local people,'" Conlin said. Coincidentally, the new bookstore is Conlin's old law office. He practiced law there for 20 years, until he became a judge 10 years ago. His children grew up with Tuplin's children, and he has long been a fan of Serendipity Books.

"It was a total turnout of the town," Conlin said, adding that he was the last person in line and was responsible for shelving the books in the new store. "It was so cool."

Every time a shelf was filled, "everyone would cheer," he said. Michele Friss also showed up to help.

"I have been going to the bookstore for a long time," Friss said, adding that her daughter, Kaci, works there as a bookseller.

Friss said she was stunned by both the size of the crowd and how quickly the books moved.

"It was super efficient," she said. "The event was wonderful; it was this sense of community."

Her daughter captured a video

of the book brigade, and it took off on TikTok. The video has been viewed more than 1.6 million times.

"This is phenomenal. You are rich in life. You won the lottery," someone commented.

"Many hands make light work! Love this," someone else wrote.

Tuplin said she's blown away by the response to her initiative.

"The whole town is celebrating," Tuplin said. "It feels really good."

Tuplin decided to relocate her

store to Main Street, as the space is more than double the size of her previous store. Plus, there are no stairs in it, making it more accessible. Tuplin said the move was both seamless and memorable.

"It was wholesome and heartwarming, seeing people coming together and community in action," she said. "We really needed this."

For more information, visit the store at 119 S. Main St., Chelsea or shop online at [serendipity-books.com](http://serendipity-books.com).



## TRAVEL

# IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO PLAN AHEAD

## Your guide to traveling in the summer of 2025

By Hannah Sampson

*The Washington Post*

Welcome to summer, when everyone and their uncle tries to get out and see new corners of the country or explore new parts of the world.

And sometimes, unfortunately, that uncle isn't the most seasoned globe-trotter.

"Travel volume is significantly up in the summer, but especially the mix of travelers tends to be more sporadic vacation travelers who are less experienced," said Scott Keyes, founder of the flight-shopping service Going. "All of this sort of slows the system down so all the lines and everything take quite a bit longer."

In addition to all the standard complications, this summer could bring some new wrinkles. Here's what travelers should know:

### Expect disruptions

Summer can be a miserable time to travel, with weather delays most common in July and crowds swelling to peak numbers.

Experts say travelers should take standard precautions for flying during busy travel stretches: choosing the first flight of the day when possible, carrying bags on instead of checking them and getting to the airport with plenty of time.

"I am such a big supporter of getting to the airport early, early, early," said Christie Hudson, a spokesperson for Expedia Group.

This year, it might also be smart to avoid Newark Liberty International Airport for direct flights or connections if possible. Travel analyst Henry Harteveldt told *The Washington Post* this month that travelers might consider flying to or from other New York City-area airports, or landing in Philadelphia, then taking a



NIC ANTAYA — GETTY IMAGES

A sign welcoming travelers is pictured near the Ambassador Bridge that connects Detroit and Windsor.

train, bus or rental car to northern New Jersey.

"Less convenient, but it may ultimately be a bit more reliable," Harteveldt said.

Hayley Berg, lead economist for the travel booking site Hopper, said air travelers should consider adding travel insurance that covers flight disruptions.

"Newark is not alone," she said.

"There are shortages and staffing challenges at airports all over the world."

### Remember your Real ID

So far, the long-anticipated arrival of the Real ID mandate on May 7 — which requires domestic travelers to use a compliant state-issued identification or alternative, such as a passport, at secu-

rity checkpoints — does not appear to be causing airport chaos.

The Transportation Security Administration has said it will warn people who don't have a proper ID and pull them for extra screening, which could cause delays.

What does this mean for summer travelers? Even if fliers have the necessary documents, season-

ally crowded airports could see longer waits than usual.

"It may get stricter as Real ID has been implemented now, so if you don't have your Real ID, you're going to want to get that," said Hudson, the Expedia spokesperson. It can take more than a week for states to mail the perma-





Vehicles travel across the Ambassador Bridge that connects Detroit and Windsor.

NIC ANTAYA — GETTY IMAGES

## Guide

FROM PAGE 37

nent card, and TSA doesn't accept temporary ones. Passports take even longer to process: four to six weeks in general, or two to three for people who pay more for faster service.

"Be planning these things now," Hudson said.

### Get a break on some prices

Your airfare may cost

less this summer than last year, though not by much.

Your hotel or rental car? Probably not going to see much of a break on those.

Berg said in her summer outlook that round-trip domestic flights are averaging \$265 a ticket, a 3% drop from last year and the lowest prices for summer airfare since 2021.

Plane tickets are lower than last year for flights to most of the rest of the world, too, averaging \$847 for Europe, \$1,339 for Asia, \$680 for South America and \$421 for Mexico and

Central America, according to Hopper.

Prices for flights to Canada are down a whopping 25%, reaching an average of \$305 as many Canadians avoid travel to the United States in protest of President Donald Trump's rhetoric and tariffs.

Berg's summer outlook said the price of a hotel stay is averaging about \$237 a night, similar to last year's.

"It's high," Berg said. "Really we haven't seen much relief on hotel prices since the pandemic."

Rental cars, too, are in line with the previous year at about \$47 a day.

Berg said travelers can save the most money by traveling in late August and September, and by flying and booking hotels in the middle of the week rather than on the weekend.

### Anticipate crowds

It's not clear yet whether this summer will be record-breaking levels of busy — or just the standard amount of slammed.

Last year, the trade

group Airlines for America predicted that U.S. airlines would carry 271 million passengers globally during the summer, an increase of more than 6% year-over-year.

The organization's 2025 forecast has not been released, but American Airlines said it will operate nearly 5% more flights this summer than last.

### Pay up for formerly free bags

The era of "bags fly free" on Southwest — once

a signature perk for the low-cost airline — ended May 27. The first checked bag now costs \$35 and the second costs \$45.

Keyes, the Going founder, said the policy could lead to holdups if longtime customers arrive at the airport without realizing they need to pay.

"That can add a certain amount of delays at check-in," he said.

And experts have warned that more travelers on the airline will try to shift their stuff into free carry-ons.



## TRAVEL

# 6 tips for your next driving vacation

Modern professionals are working more and taking fewer days off each year.

Allina Healthcare estimates that more than 765 million vacation days are unused by Americans each year. One of the reasons people often give for not vacationing is that travel costs too much. A 2024 summer travel report from Deloitte Insights found that after two years of strong gains in the travel sector, Americans were planning fewer trips in 2024 than a year prior, with travelers indicating the high cost of travel as their reasons for staying home.

A driving vacation, otherwise known as a road trip, can reduce the cost of travel and may amplify the fun.

These tips can make for a safe, enjoyable and memorable trip:

## Get a vehicle checkup

If you'll be relying on your personal vehicle, then it is best to ensure that everything is in good working order. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration offers a Recalls Look-up Tool to check to see if your vehicle has any critical safety issues. It's [nhtsa.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls). It's also best to make sure that tires are in good shape and filled to the manufacturer's recommended pressure. Double check all fluids and get an oil change if it is close to the time of service.

## What's the destination?

Some people find that road trips are fun even without a predetermined destination in mind. A handful of smaller stops can make for a fun, spontaneous trip. Maybe you want to drive a classic roadway like Route 66? Or take to a scenic coastal roadway like the Pacific Coast Highway or Route 1 along the eastern seaboard? Choose a destination that suits your budget.

## Consider a travel club membership

Membership in programs like



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Long road trips are full of opportunities to visit roadside attractions.

AAA or AARP enable members to get discounts on various travel services, such as car rentals or hotel stays. Members may be eligible for percentages off on meals at popular restaurant chains. Membership in these programs may help to save money.

## Plan early

Spring and summer are popular times to travel, particularly

during weeks when children are off from school. It's important to book campgrounds or other lodging well in advance if you're planning to visit popular places like national parks and other tourist-heavy areas.

## Be realistic about mileage goals

Some drivers may be on autopilot

and fall into commuting habits of trying to get from point A to point B in the least amount of time.

Slowing down to take in the scenery can make a trip more enjoyable. AARP also says to be mindful of the personal needs and abilities of drivers. Sharing the load of driving can make it possible to cover more miles in less time.

## Hit a few quirky or local attractions

The best way to see the country is to take in what's unique along the way. Although a stop at a popular fast food chain might save time, it won't offer the same memories as visiting a local haunt or roadside attraction, such as Carhenge in Alliance, Nebraska.

— Metro Editorial Services



## TRAVEL

## TIME TO RELAX: WHY TAKING A VACATION IS GOOD FOR YOU

By Beth Howard

Special to The Washington Post

Vacations can sometimes seem like more trouble than they're worth when you come home to a full inbox and a fire hose of problems requiring immediate attention.

But people who skip vacations may be missing out on important health benefits, according to a growing body of research linking regular getaways to everything from better heart health to a lower risk of metabolic disorders and even a longer life.

A 2025 review of 32 previous studies in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* also found that the immediate effects on well-being are more profound and long-lasting than previously thought.

Among the findings in one longitudinal study that followed more than 12,000 men at high risk of coronary heart disease: Those who took a vacation every year over a nine-year period reduced their overall risk of death by about 20% and their risk of death from heart disease by as much as 30%, according to the study's main author, Brooks B. Gump, a professor of public health at Syracuse University, who studies the health effects of taking vacations.

In other research, Gump and his colleagues found a similar connection between the frequency of vacations and metabolic syndrome, a cluster of conditions — high blood pressure, high blood sugar, a large waist circumference, low HDL ("good") cholesterol and high triglycerides — that raise the risk of heart attacks, stroke and diabetes.

Each additional vacation the participants took lowered the risk of metabolic syndrome by nearly 25%.

Other researchers have identified links between taking vacations and fewer stress-related physical complaints, lower levels of exhaustion and depression, and greater happiness and well-being.

Even short breaks have health payoffs. When middle managers were assigned to either take a four-day vacation or take time off at home, those who left town reported greater positive effects on stress and well-being, according to researchers at Austria's University for Health Sciences, Medical Informatics and Technology. And unlike a tan line, the vacation "afterglow" continued for as long as 45 days post-vacation.

**Bedroom benefits**

Not surprisingly, vacations may also help pay down a sleep debt, long associ-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Beachside trips are quite popular for vacations, and they can be the same for those on a staycation.

ated with a greater risk of obesity and diabetes, a 2022 study in *Nature Human Behavior* suggests.

Researchers relied on data collected from Sony SmartBands worn by some 20,000 people, covering 218,000 nights of travel, some of which may have been for business. Among the travelers, people who were sleep-deprived — sleeping less than 7.5 hours a night — clocked more hours of sleep when they were away from home. (People who typically got more than 7.5 hours nightly tended to sleep less well on the road.)

"My guess is that if someone doesn't sleep a lot at home, then sleeping someplace new might be an opportunity to catch up," said study co-author Sune Lehmann, professor of social data science at the University of Copenhagen. People who usually sleep well may miss the routines that help them doze off at home, he said.

A 2024 study by American and Dutch researchers found that couples who take vacations that involve novel, interesting or challenging experiences keep the romantic spark in their relationships, resulting in more physical intimacy afterward.

"Passion can fade even in good relationships," said study author John K. Coffey, associate professor of psychology at Arizona State University. "But the more new experiences couples had during their vacation, the greater their passion and physical intimacy were after the vacation."

The key, he said, is to engage in activities that satisfy the innate need to learn and grow, a concept known as self-expansion.

You don't have to "go big" with an expensive adventure, he said. Exploring a new city, visiting a museum or trying different cuisines can make a difference. Even bad experiences like getting lost or missing a connection can bring you closer. Coffey acknowledged that other factors could account for the intimacy boost. Having the leisure and wealth to travel in the first place might reduce a couple's stress, leading to a better sex life.

More than the immediate rewards, "vacations provide a buffer against chronic stress and inflammation — both of which wreak havoc on the body," Gump said. Vacationing turns off the spigot of stress hormones like cortisol and allows the body to reset, restoring equilibrium, he said.

With a total break from work, "you re-

gain lost psychological resources like energy and positive mood and emotions," said Ryan Grant, a doctoral student at the University of Georgia and lead author of the vacation aftereffects review study.

Vacations that involve physical activity and socializing with family or friends can be particularly good, he said, since both have been shown to improve health outcomes.

To ensure your vacation packs the maximum wellness punch, experts provided these tips:

- Minimize engagement with work. "During the vacation itself, it is key that (you) mentally disconnect from work as much as possible," Grant said. Limit the time you spend taking work calls or answering email to once a day or less. This season of the TV series "The White Lotus" provides a perfect example of how not disconnecting can be very bad for you.

- Be active. Grant's meta-analysis found that engaging in physical activity during vacation was the top predictor of better health outcomes later. (Social activity was the second most important factor.)

- If it's hard to get away for a single long vacation, schedule several short ones. Wellness benefits accrue regardless of a vacation's length, research has shown (though you may get a bigger boost the longer you are away). Some data suggests these benefits are less seen among people with high-stress jobs, however.

- Savor the memories of your vacation to extend the afterglow. Jessica de Bloom, a professor of psychology and public health at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, who has led several studies investigating the effects of vacations on well-being, says this can be very helpful to health. Picture the whitecaps or perfect waves from when you were taking surfing lessons in Puerto Rico. Or try to duplicate the indescribable mole you tasted in Oaxaca, Mexico, and feel the pleasure and delight rush back, or remember the warm wind from an hour-long bike ride you took. "Keeping a vacation diary or talking about the top three experiences of the vacation may help people to attend to and appreciate the positive vacation experience more," de Bloom said.

Regardless of the setting or circumstances, Grant said, it's the breaking up of intense periods of work with long periods of rest and recovery that makes the difference to health and well-being. "We need vacations to take care of ourselves," he said.



## TRAVEL

# 5 new travel tools to save time and money this summer

By Lebewit Lily Girma  
Bloomberg

Long before there was ChatGPT, you'd have to visit an actual brick-and-mortar travel agency to craft and book your dream itinerary.

Yet the reality is that most travelers this summer won't talk to human travel agents face-to-face, or even online, as they plan their trips. Rather, generative artificial intelligence tools will increasingly play a role in helping us decide where to go. A 2024 survey from global consulting firm Oliver Wyman LLC showed more than 41% of travelers from the U.S. and Canada had recently used this emerging technology for trip inspiration and design — up 30% from a year earlier. (One travel agency is embracing that inevitability, using AI to help turn your emotions into itineraries.)

If the latest suite of trip-planning tools is any indication, that percentage is sure to rise. A vast improvement in AI language models is adapting quickly to the ways we research our vacations. Take Gem, a Google-powered virtual travel agent, or Mindtrip, a collaborative itinerary builder that helps you map out trips with friends—the latter even uses Instagram images as fodder for inspiration. Other AI tools help travelers land the best hotel rates and fares.

Of course, AI models don't yet match the power of human travel advisers who have the pulse on their destinations and can help you identify your precise wants, but they've come a long way.

Here are the latest tools we've tested ahead of summer travel season and what we've found most useful:

## A Google-powered travel concierge

Since 2023, Google has been steadily expanding the capabilities of Gemini, its AI-powered assistant. Free with a Google account, Gemini now lets you cre-

ate a custom "Gem" for your trips—essentially a digital "concierge" that remembers your preferences, whether you're into modern art, off-the-beaten-path adventures or local eats.

Unlike Google Search, which excels at surfacing static information, it's designed for open-ended, conversational brainstorming even if you're starting with a vague idea, all while pulling from the personal profile you've fed it. Gemini of course then connects with your Gmail, Google Drive, Maps, Flights, Hotels and even YouTube. This means your itineraries, booking receipts and inspiration sources can all live in one ecosystem — and can be shared with a click.

After setting up my Gem and filling in my travel quirks — nature over museums, boutique hotels over big brands and no overly touristy sights — I asked it to plan a long, four-day weekend from Washington, D.C., to Belize, a destination I know well. My additional search parameters: a vibrant local food scene and outdoorsy activities unique to the country. Gemini suggested staying in the mountain town of San Ignacio, with a day trip to the island of Caye Caulker. The itinerary leaned heavily on Mayan sites and iconic rainforest lodges that were more remotely located in the jungle than I would have liked, while noting that I could opt for a boutique hotel closer to town. It also failed to take distance into account when it crammed the island excursion into the same day as my return flight from Belize.

Once I clarified that I was more interested in hiking and snorkeling, Gemini steered me toward Hopkins Village instead of San Ignacio. With reef access and cultural experiences offered by the local Indigenous Garifuna community, it was a much better fit. Running that request a second time yielded an entirely different (but equally credible) itinerary, a reminder that these models don't always produce identical results.

When I got more granular, asking for "community-run experiences" in Hopkins, San Ignacio and Caye Caulker, I hit a limitation: Cultural tours in smaller Belizean towns often exist informally, my AI concierge said, passed through word of mouth or local networks rather than marketed online. It then listed specific search terms to use and recommended I ask around while there.

## An all-in-one travel planner

Unlike all-purpose chatbots, Mindtrip was built specifically for travel planning, combining generative AI with content fact-checked by an actual team of human staffers, plus a visual interface that pulls maps, reviews, images and itineraries into a single screen.

A quiz at the start asks for basic personal information and travel preferences — if you're an early bird or a night owl, for instance — which helps refine recommendations that are pulled from web searches, as well as a library of roughly 25,000 human-curated destination guides. You can then chat with it to refine your options.

Use a simple menu on the left side of the screen to add places of interest and reorder them on your itinerary, which is on the right side of the screen, with a simple drag.

You can even invite family or friends into your itinerary, so you can co-design the trip and stay on the same page.

"A lot of what's happening in generative AI is very text-based," says Michelle Denogean, Mindtrip Inc.'s chief marketing officer. Mindtrip's results are showcased on a split screen — a numbered list appears on the left, with bolded text and blue check marks next to the places and activities it recommends, and a color map shows up on the right, with all those places pinned. Its value becomes even clearer once you ask more targeted questions.

When I searched for community-run experiences in Hopkins,

San Ignacio and Caye Caulker, Mindtrip outperformed Google's Gemini.

In Hopkins, it surfaced the Lebeha Drumming Center, a popular spot for taking Garifuna drum lessons. It also suggested the Palmento Grove Garifuna Eco-Cultural & Healing Institute, where I learned on a previous trip to make hudut—a coconut-based fish stew served with mashed green plantains. In San Ignacio, it recommended Ajaw Chocolate, where you can make your own chocolate and learn about the history of cacao in Belize, as well as the town's farmers market on Saturdays. I found its results more accurate than some competitors; it was able to flag that restaurants in stories I was reading had closed permanently, for example, thanks to its fact-checking army that keeps listings up to date.

## A hotel price tracker

This one is simple but useful. If you're familiar with tracking flight prices on Google, you'll appreciate that, as of March, you're now able to do that for hotels, as well. Navigate to Google's hotels search page, enter the destination and dates and toggle "track hotel prices."

Kayak offers a similar hotel price-tracking tool. Run a search for places in a specific destination, and you'll find the option to get alerts when prices change at the top of the results page.

## An Instagram Reel-inspired itinerary

Ever saved an Instagram reel in hopes of re-creating a trip or trying an activity you saw? The new "Trip Matching" tool from Expedia Group Inc. aims to do exactly that. Open the reel, hit the share button and send it directly to @expedia on the Instagram app. You'll then open your direct message with Expedia, and within a couple of minutes, you'll get a suggested itinerary based on what's in the reel you shared.

I tested this process with a reel I made from my 2023 trip to Morocco that merely shows two guitarists' minute-long performance at the family-owned luxury boutique hotel Riad Kniza in Marrakech. Expedia churned out a small description of the hotel, followed by the best time to visit and a list of top things to do in the area — with links to the activities on Expedia — as well as hidden gems and a four-day itinerary.

The downside: There were no specific tour providers or links included for the itinerary beyond the hotels, so you'll have to run that extra leg of research elsewhere.

The suggestions leaned toward cultural activities, including exploring the Medina, a hammam spa treatment and a Moroccan cooking class, but it also suggested "hidden gems" such as the Jardin Secret, a less crowded alternative to Jardin Majorelle.

When I pushed further and asked for specific providers I could book with, it said to contact vendors directly — La Maison Arabe for a cooking class, Les Bains de Marrakech and Spa Royal Mansour — or go to Expedia. That makes this tool more of a fun starting point than a one-stop shop.

## An airfare insider app

OK, this one isn't AI, but you should download it anyway if you're eyeing airfare closely, as many people are this summer. The free version of Going will deliver alerts when any domestic deals pop up, while also letting you track specific routes on exact dates.

A premium subscription (\$4.08 per month) adds international flight deal alerts, including "mistake fares" that occasionally surface at super steep discounts, while the Elite membership (\$16.58 per month) adds deals on first- and business-class fares. Another new feature, "Going With Points," helps you find and book flight deals with points and miles.



## TRAVEL

# CHOO! CHOO! SOME QUICK RULES TO SUCCESSFUL TRAIN TRAVEL

By Hannah Sampson and  
Andrea Sachs

*The Washington Post*

**T**rain travel is an excellent way to see a country. A planet-friendly way to get to work. And a sure-fire way to get thwacked in the face by the person next to you who didn't have the sense to take their backpack off in a crowd.

Then there are the seat sprawlers who try to take up extra real estate with their bags, the cafe car squatters who leave no room for anyone else to eat and — worst of all — the extroverts who run conference calls from the quiet car. At least on planes, you can't be talking on your phone.

"I think being on a long train journey, trapped inside a metal tube for several hours, seems to do something to people's behavior," said William Hanson, a Britain-based etiquette coach and author. "They sort of forget that it's not their own private royal train."

Whether you're traveling across the United States, traversing Europe, hopping up the Northeast Corridor or just taking in-town public transit, here are expert tips on how to do train travel right.

## At the train station

- Arrive 30 minutes before departure

Or an hour, if you need help with bags or tickets, Amtrak says. Nobody wants a running start to board.

- Confirm you're actually getting on the right train

Better to make sure you're on the right track now than when a conductor is inches from your panicked face.

- Leave no trace at the gate

Clean up food wrappers, coffee cups and crumbs large enough to



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

count as an amuse bouche.

- No tripping your fellow passengers

Tuck in all extremities, including legs and luggage wheels, while you're sprawled on the floor or running to board (We told you to get there early!)

- Got help? Make sure to tip.

If you are traveling Amtrak at a station that offers it, make use of the Red Cap baggage handling service. Don't forget to tip.

- Don't zone out

Pay attention to signs and announcements; that gate assignment can be stealth.

## Boarding

- This is not a stampede

When the gate number is announced, remember: You are not

an elephant. Proceed to your gate calmly and queue up.

- Don't block the doors

Make room for the people exiting the train. Riding Amtrak is not a contact sport, so don't act like an offensive lineman.

- Practice the golden rule

Be someone's hero and help carry a heavy bag up the stairs or hoist it in the overhead compartment. We all need a little kindness.

- Watch your backpack

Take off your pack, and hold it in front like a baby sling, so you don't bash the person behind you in the face.

- Four-seaters are for four people

We love space, too. But leave the four-seater open for families

or friend quartets. If a four-seater is open once the train starts moving, sit diagonal from your fellow passengers, not directly across from them, so your knees aren't kissing.

## While you're aboard

- Your bag doesn't have a ticket, so it doesn't get a seat

Store your bag above your seat or as close to it as possible. Don't stick it in the first available place you see; that space belongs to that passenger.

- But keep your ticket within reach

When the conductor starts ambling down the aisle, have your e-ticket (or paper ticket) at the ready.

- Obey the seating assignments

If you have an assigned seat, find the row and sit. Don't plop down in any available spot, or you could be inadvertently booting out another traveler.

- Don't be that person: Put on your headphones

Yes, we love "Wicked" too, but we can still hear "Defying Gravity" at low volume.

- No, seriously, put on your headphones — for calls, too.

If you must take that phone call from your accountant, talk softly and not on surround-sound speaker.

- But don't even think about a call if you're in the quiet car

If you're in the quiet car, ignore the call and text back that you are at a silent retreat and not available. That goes for real-life conversations, too, says travel writer Scott Laird. "If you're part of a lively group, leave the quiet car in peace," he said in an email.

- Don't hog the outlets

Share the outlet, especially if you are sitting next to the sole power source.

- No musical chairs

After the conductor has tagged your seat with a ticket, don't relocate. The abandoned stub confuses people looking for a seat and train staff making sure you didn't miss your stop.

- Entertain tiny riders

Yes, the passing landscape is fascinating. But if you're traveling with kids, it might only hold their attention for so long. Bring plenty to keep them occupied and meltdown-free.

- We love dogs, but keep them contained

Many routes allow pets, but make sure to abide by the rules: Amtrak says Fido or Meowser must stay entirely in a closed carrier in stations and on trains, and need to stay with their people at



all times.

- Keep your feet off the furniture

That includes the one in front of you. No kicking.

- Knock for bathrooms

Don't always trust the lavatories' occupancy lights. Knock before entering. Once inside, lock the door and double-check that it is really locked. If you make a mess, clean it up. And close the door when you exit to keep it from swinging open with the train's motion, Laird said.

- Privacy, please

Mark Smith, who runs the online train resource Man in Seat 61, says if you're sharing a sleeper cabin with strangers, you should excuse yourself while they change their wardrobe. Stand outside or take a pre-bedtime stroll.

- The dining car is for dining

Even if nonchewing activities are permitted in the dining car, don't turn a booth into an office cubicle if passengers are waiting to eat. "If the rules allow getting a laptop out and it's really quiet, that's fine," Hanson said, "but if it starts to get quite busy and people are coming in to eat, that's when you need to shut up shop and go somewhere else."

- And while we're talking about food: Your seat isn't a banquet hall

Avoid carrying on meals with strong odors or extreme mess potential. Quarters aren't quite airline-close, but be considerate. No four-course meals on your tray table, please.

- Contain your snooze

Snag a private room for a long trip? So fancy. But if you're trying to sleep among the masses, try not to drool on your neighbor — or use their shoulder as a pillow.

- Prepare for a quick exit

Don't be the turtle. Gather your things and get ready to disembark as you approach the station, as the stop might last only a few minutes. Pay attention



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

Be mindful of the space you're occupying.

to the conductor's instructions about where to exit. If you're carrying multiple bags or heavy luggage and need extra time, let those with lighter loads get off the train before you.

### On the subway

- Know how to pay before the turnstile

Research the payment and entry system in advance. Can you use your phone or do you need a card? Do you tap at the beginning and end of a trip? Knowing ahead of time will make your trip smoother, as well as those of the commuters you're joining.

- Again with the back-

packs

Is the train crowded at all? Take your backpack off or it will hit someone and they may spend the rest of the trip giving you the evil eye — or yelling at you. Hold it between your legs, rest it on your feet or clutch it close.

- Offer up your seat

Sure, you snagged a seat first. And maybe your trip will take several stops. But if you see someone struggling with loads of bags, little kids or anyone else who needs assistance, offer them your spot if you can. And if the train is crowded and no one around you is taking the nearby open

seat, sit down. "Sometimes people think they're being courteous by not taking an empty seat," said Jed Paul, a California-based physician and train fan who has gained a following on TikTok for his videos riding transit. "By standing there, they're blocking it. Sometimes it's best to just sit down, even if you don't need the seat most."

- Hold on tight

You may think you have the balance of an Olympic gymnast. But wait until the train stops and starts suddenly, and think again. Instead of trying to surf the shudders, hold on to a pole or handle; no one needs you

flying into them.

- Keep the exits clear

When boarding, let everyone who needs to get off exit before you enter. Fill all the way in if people are behind you instead of creating a barricade. Paul said people might want to linger by the door if they're taking a short trip, but they're just creating a backup. "There's like this whole empty middle section, but then people are crowded by the entrance," he said.

- Be a good local

If you're a regular on your city's transit system, try to extend a hand to visitors or newcomers. An unfamiliar train can be in-

timidating; people trying it out could use help, not a sneer. Transit is no place for gatekeeping, Paul said. "I think we could do a better job with being more patient with people who are going out of their way to try a new system," he said. "Often it's not that they're trying to inconvenience people; it's that they're not as experienced."

- Prepare for showtime

Some forms of transit are more entertaining than others. You don't have to applaud for — or tip — the breakdancers or musicians, but try to keep your hands, feet and head out of their way.



## TRAVEL

# A 'ruthless' guide to flying without bag fees

By **Andrea Sachs**  
*The Washington Post*

Travelers who fly with only a carry-on: You're packing way too much.

In the age of piecemeal pricing and limited overhead bin space, superlight fliers are cutting their carry-on luggage allowance by half. They are packing all of their belongings in a personal item, a carrier traditionally used for short hauls, such as office commutes, gym workouts or day hikes.

By downsizing, travelers can dodge the carry-on fee exacted by ultra-low-budget carriers and the basic economy tickets. (Prices vary by airline and route, but they can often cost more than a checked bag.) They can avoid a mandatory gate check on full flights. And they can be liberated from the weight of stuff.

"You have so much freedom," said Janice Moskoff, founder and editor of Gather and Go Travel, a travel blog. "You can stash it wherever you want or just carry it with you."

Shoving everything into a small satchel is no easy feat, even for people who typically avoid the checked baggage counter like a sticky trap. As I learned on a recent trip to Phoenix in United's Basic Economy (from \$35 for a carry-on), traveling with a personal item takes serious discipline, sartorial ingenuity and a certain degree of asceticism.

"You have to be ruthless," said Matt Kepnes, a budget travel expert who goes by Nomadic Matt.

If you pack thoughtfully and economically, you might never go back to such excesses as two pairs of pants.

## Trips made for personal items

Personal-item packing is best for certain types of trips. Shorter ones, for example.

My getaway to Arizona was three days. Sally French, a lead writer at NerdWallet, traveled with a single small bag for a recent four-night vacation in Palm Springs, California. She could have stretched it for another day.

"You could definitely do five days," French said. "Two weeks would be incredibly impressive."

The itinerary and weather also matter. You can squeeze more into your bag if you are planning low-impact activities in warm temperatures, such as walking tours of Athens or sunbathing in St.

Kitts. Gear-heavy outings in cold weather require more luggage space, even if you wear your thickest layers on the plane.

The more similar the outings, the better. If casual is the primary dress code, you can live off the same capsule collection. Fancier affairs might be harder to pull off, unless your party dress folds up like origami.

## Choosing the right bag

The airline industry's personal-item dimensions are not uniform. On JetBlue, purses, laptop cases, backpacks, etc., can't exceed 17-by-13-by-8 inches; Spirit passengers must adhere to 18-by-14-by-8 inches. Ryanair is even more compact, at 15.7-by-7.9-by-9.8 inches.

Despite the slight variations, the airlines are unanimous on the fit. The carrier must be snug under the seat. No part of the bag should spill into the aisle or the narrow passage in your row.

For optimal capacity within the legal limits, consider the bag's shape and material.

Rectangular bags have similar geometry to the underseat space, so they can slide right in. A soft-sided carrier like a duffel or backpack is squishable. If you carry fragile electronics, a computer sleeve is important. To stay organized, you can use packing cubes, but with so few items, they might be unnecessary.

Most packing experts gravitate toward a backpack. French uses the 35-liter Allpa from Cotopaxi. Kepnes totes an Osprey day pack. Moskoff straps on the NorthFace Borealis that, when she's not traveling, accompanies her on day treks.

Gillian Morris, a tech founder and co-author of Supernuclear, a blog about living near friends, has stayed true to the Cote & Ciel Moselle backpack that she purchased on eBay 13 years ago. Emma Topp, a social media producer at EF Ultimate Break, a tour operator that caters to 18- to 35-year-olds, relies on a medium-size duffel.

"It's so moldable," Topp said. "I fill every little nook because you only have so much space."

In a packing video, Topp demonstrates one of her space-saving techniques. She tucks smaller items, such as socks, belts and bathing suits, into an extra pair of shoes.

Though your personal item can easily transition to a sightseeing bag, you might not want to dump out all of the items at

your destination. Instead, stash a smaller sac in your pack. Morris will throw in a Baby Baggu, which can slip into your back pocket like a handkerchief. Moskoff is a fan of Ori London's canteen-round Paddington bag.

"I really like that cross-body bag for the security and the material," Moskoff said. "I can put it in the washing machine."

French will dip into her stockpile of reusable shopping totes. She often picks the grottiest ones and leaves them behind.

"We all have a canvas bag that has permanent stains on it," she said. "Take it as your beach bag, and then throw it away."

## Assembling your wardrobe

Packing savants often profess strategies that involve a series of digits that equate to a quantity of clothing items, such as 5-4-3-2-1 or 3-3-3. But superlight packers don't need multiples.

Kepnes focuses on the bare essentials, such as T-shirts, underwear and socks. He brings a pair of pants — the ones he wears on the plane.

Moskoff follows a 3:1 ratio: three (or sometimes two) tops to one pair of bottoms. They will have a "cross purpose and go together," she said. Comfort comes before style. "They are not my favorite clothes," she said, "but they can all be mixed and matched."

Morris seeks clothes that have multiple uses, such as a sports bra that can stand in for a bikini top or more intimate apparel. Topp also incorporates versatile garments. She'll bring a maxi skirt that can double as a dress and a cardigan that can she wear as an outer layer, buttoned-up shirt or cape.

French sticks with the same color palette and one pair of shoes. If two are necessary, she'll wear the chunkier or bulkier style on the plane and squish a pair of flats into her bag. She also brings clothes that are on their "last leg," such as "work-out clothes that permanently smell like sweat." At the end of the trip, she'll toss them.

With such a tightly edited wardrobe, you'll be wearing the same clothes repeatedly and often on consecutive days. Choose breathable fabrics that don't absorb scents.

Morris favors natural fabrics, such as silk, linen and wool, and sweat-wicking athletic wear.

"You can hang them up at night, and they're usually aired out and fresh by morning," Morris said.

## The 10-\$10 rule

Don't waste space on "what-if" items, French said.

If you do not know whether you'll need a certain incidental, such as a bathing suit, book or umbrella, she recommends leaving them behind and purchasing them at your destination — as long as they are covered by the 10-\$10 rule.

"If you can acquire it in less than 10 minutes and can get it for around \$10," she said, "then just buy it on location."

She said the strategy has some wiggle room. You can spend more than 10 minutes to locate the right store and pay whatever your budget allows. Just don't waste an entire morning on a scavenger hunt or sink a large sum of money into it.

One way to supplement your travel wardrobe is to buy wearable souvenirs. French bought a sundress in Thailand. Morris drops into vintage and thrift stores, mindful of not spending too much.

"I might not have enough space to travel home with the clothes," Morris said.

## Be sparing with extras

Electronics and toiletries can be space hogs.

Each gadget doesn't need its own charger. Consolidate with a product that includes different USB ports. Topp uses one cord to charge several devices, such as her iPhone, laptop, noise-canceling headphones and camera.

"I can just charge every single thing with one piece," she said.

For toiletries, use the hotel's freebies and refill from the shower pumps. Topp is partial to certain beauty brands, and she transfers the products into Cadence capsules, which snap together like Legos.

True to the minimalist ethos, the packing gurus will usually forgo souvenirs. French's big splurge is a disposable camera. If Topp buys gifts, she will roll them in her clothes.

If you are bursting at the seams, remember that duty-free purchases are exempt from carry-on limits. Or try airport gift shops and accept the offer for a bag.

"The airlines don't really count those," she said, "but that's a last-minute measure."



## TRAVEL

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# GREEN THUMB: HOW TO NOT KILL YOUR HOUSEPLANTS WHEN YOU TAKE A VACATION

By Andrea Sachs  
*The Washington Post*

One of Ashley Wearing's most memorable clients was the woman who told her she had not traveled in seven years. Before hiring Wearing, owner of Houseplant-sitter, the woman had left her husband in charge of their home and half of her plants died.

"She was paranoid that she would come back and they would all be dead," Wearing said of the customer and her 300 plants. "She called me and said, 'Oh my God, I'm so happy I can finally go on vacation.'"

As any phytophile knows, you can't jet off for weeks and leave your houseplants to their own devices.

Fortunately, many common potted plants are low-maintenance. For short get-aways of up to a week, plant-care specialists say you can stick with your standard routine.

"If you water them the night before your trip, you don't need to do anything extra," said Chelsea McKinley, plant health specialist at the U.S. Botanic Garden in D.C.

Longer vacations, however, will require a level of attention that falls somewhere between automobile and cat care.

## Conduct a health check

Before you head out of town, your plants should be in tip-top shape. To ensure your greens are healthy, consult with a nursery or plant-care app such as PictureThis, Planta or Plant Parent, which are free for a trial or basic services.

In general, the soil should be loose, not a tightly packed brick, so water can reach the root system. To avoid root rot or soil gnats, the planters should have drainage holes. The trays or saucers should be large enough to collect runoff and emptied of extra water, to protect the root zone.

"Water is so erosive, it can carve through

rock," Wearing said, "so it can definitely damage your furniture."

At least one week before your trip, inspect the leaves and branches for pests and eradicate any buggers. The treatment will vary depending on the invader, such as applying insecticidal soap to remove aphids or dabbing mealybugs with rubbing alcohol. Otherwise, you could end up with sick plants or a full-blown infestation in your apartment or house.

"Make sure there are no spider mites, mealybugs or other small insects," said Karen Mitchell, a consumer horticulture



# Plants

FROM PAGE 45

extension specialist at Purdue University. “If you have a few of them when you leave, you could have thousands when you get home.”

## Don't dry out your plants

Most standard houseplants are not fond of extreme temperatures. Set your thermostat to the mid-60s to 70s for day and about 10 degrees cooler at night. Also, distance them from blasting air-conditioning units or heater vents.

“Hot, dry air will dry plants out faster,” said Marlene Simon, curator of the Botanical Conservatory at the University of California at Davis.

For a similar reason, Simon recommends partially drawing the shades. Direct sun can parch and even burn plants sitting on a window sill. The diminished light will also help them stretch their water supply, she said.

Plants that thrive in humidity, such as ferns, African violets and bamboo, can benefit from a humidifier. Some models even come with travel-friendly timers. You can also try humidity trays (the plant sits on pebbles atop water), a bubbly fountain or an open-air aquarium. Or group them together to create a tropical microclimate similar to Key West in July.

## Don't close your shades all the way

Remember your third-grade science class on photosynthesis? Plants need sunlight to create life-sustaining food.

Many travelers close their drapes or shutters for safety reasons. Consider keeping them open a crack so some sunlight can seep in. Wearing said the sun should touch the leaves, the sweet



PHOTO COURTESY  
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spot for photosynthesis. Homeowners with smart technology can control the shades from anywhere in the world and maintain the plants' light/dark schedule.

If you plan to be away during the short, dark days of winter, Wearing suggests installing grow lights for plants that demand a lot of sunlight, such as jade plants, crotons and peace lilies.

## Water with a light touch

If plants could talk, they'd tell you to ease off on the heavy pour. It's destroying them.

“Most people over-water their plants,” Simon said. “That's the No. 1 killer of houseplants, for sure.”

Watering once a week or as needed is standard, though some drought-tolerant varieties, such as the snake plant, ZZ plant and cactus, can go several weeks

without a drink. The night or morning before your trip, check the moisture level of the soil. If the top inch is dried out, water the plant. If it's still damp, leave it alone.

“It's very hard for a plant to recover once the roots start to get mushy,” Wearing said. “It's much easier for an under-watered plant to recover.”

For easy drainage, McKinley suggests watering your plants in a sink or bathtub. If you water them in situ, dump excess liquid pooling in the saucer about 30 minutes later. Sitting in still water can deplete the plant of oxygen and lead to suffocation.

## Set up a self-watering system

For diva plants or extended trips, you should call in reinforcements — a friend with a spare key or special gardening accessories or equipment.

Laura Cammarisano, assistant professor in UC Davis's Protected Horticulture Lab, said plant owners can choose from a number of inexpensive and uncomplicated self-watering accessories, such as capillary mats or watering spikes or globes. (She recommends the terracotta variety, which slowly releases liquid.) DIYers can punch holes in a plastic bottle or create a wicking system with a container of water and strips of absorbent material such as yarn or cloth.

“These options range from free to around \$50, require no power, are very easy to install and require no maintenance except refill,” Cammarisano said in an email.

The U.S. Botanic Garden, meanwhile, uses self-watering pots for some of its indoor potted plants. “They use a special fabric to wick up the water from the reservoir inside the pots,”

McKinley explained, “so the plants soak up the water from the bottom.”

Automated irrigation systems are a bit more elaborate, but even amateur gardeners can build or operate them. Cammarisano said the main components are drippers, tubing, a controller — such as a timer — and a power source — such as electricity, battery or the sun. Before you leave your plants alone, Cammarisano recommends testing your setup for kinks, such as leaks, clogs or overwatering.

## Call a sitter for extended trips

When should you call in the plant pros? If your trip exceeds two watering cycles.

“After two weeks, you may not come back to dead plants,” Wearing said, “but your plants will be screaming at you to do something

quickly.”

Most plant sitters will arrange a consultation and provide updates while you are traveling. As you would for your child's or pet's caretaker, leave detailed instructions and any special supplies, such as bottles of distilled water or fertilizer spray.

Tiffany Ogu, founder and owner of Pets N Plants, arranges a free 30-minute meet-and-greet with new clients and sends progress reports with photos and video. If a plant's health starts to fail, she will contact the family, even if they are halfway around the world.

“I never assume or just push forward,” said Ogu, who charges \$55 for an hour-long visit, “because it could be a mistake that could harm the plant.”

## Wait before composting

Even if you did everything right, you still might come home to wilted leaves and brittle stems. For a proper diagnosis, email photos of the ailing plant to a professional, such as the U.S. Botanic Garden. Or try an app such as Agrio.

If the soil is desert-dry, McKinley said to place the infirm plant in a bowl or saucer and let it soak for 20 minutes or until the soil absorbs the water. Allow the plant to freely drain, she said, and don't water it until it dries out.

“People want to keep on watering the plant, but that's the worst thing you can do,” McKinley said. “Give it a chance to breathe after you've rehydrated it.”

If you don't see new growth within two weeks, scratch the stem. If it is green, your plant is still alive. If it's brown, then say a few words and drop it in the compost bin.

“Don't be too hard on yourself,” McKinley said. “Every good grower kills plants. Just buy another one.”



## TRAVEL



MARY ANN ANDERSON — TNS

The Whanganui River on New Zealand is the first river in the world to be granted personhood. The river's 180 miles are ideal for canoeing past the scenic beauty of the North Island.

## NOW IS THE TIME: HOW TO PLAN AN ENGAGING VACATION

Recreation is an important component of a healthy lifestyle.

The nonprofit HelpGuide.org notes that making time for recreation provides a host of health benefits, including reduced stress, improved brain function and even stronger relationships.

Despite the well-documented benefits of taking time off, millions of vacation days go unused each year.

According to an Ipsos survey conducted near the end of 2024, nearly half of working professionals in the United States expected to have unused vacation days by the end of that year.

The cost of travel has risen in recent years, and a 2024 report from Deloitte indicated that price concerns kept many would-be vacationers from traveling that summer. Though costs might re-

main high depending on how vacationers travel and where they're going, there are still ways to plan an engaging vacation without breaking the bank.

- Pick the right time of year to travel. Summer is the most popular time to vacation because school is out and work requirements tend to be a little less demanding in many industries. However, summer also is the most expensive time to travel. Fall tends to be much more affordable, and estimates from the travel aggregator Expedia indicate airfare costs in fall historically drop by 10% compared to the peak summer travel season. If summer is the only season when a vacation can be taken, consider driving to a destination to save on airfare costs.

- Plan ahead. Travelers who truly want to experience life in a different locale are

urged to plan ahead so their vacations can be as immersive as possible. Even vacationers who book stays in all-inclusive resorts can plan day trips into local neighborhoods outside resort walls to get a more authentic idea of what it's like to live, eat and play in a given destination. By waiting until you arrive at a destination to look into local attractions, you might not be able to book restaurant reservations or other excursions. Plan ahead and book as early as possible.

- Ask locals. It's easy to have limited engagements with locals when vacationing, particularly when staying at a resort. However, locals can be invaluable resources for vacationers who want to immerse themselves in the culture and cuisine of the cities or towns where they'll be staying. Ask locals for advice on lo-

cal restaurants, beaches and cultural attractions. Locals typically know where to go for a more authentic and less touristy vibe, and that can make for a more engaging trip.

- Welcome chances to get out of your comfort zone. There's nothing wrong with a vacation built around rest and relaxation, which can be the perfect antidote to the hustle and bustle of life back home. But vacationers who want something more engaging than sun-soaked afternoons on a waterfront chaise lounge are urged to embrace opportunities to escape their comfort zone. Whether it's hiking excursions, whitewater kayaking trips or parasailing sessions, there are many ways to make a vacation more engaging.

— Metro Editorial Services



## TRAVEL

# PICTURE PERFECT: 10 SIMPLE TIPS FOR TAKING BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS

By **Therese Iknoian**

*Next Avenue*

**W**hen I have a big digital camera dangling from my shoulder, people with smartphones often decide I should be the one to take a photo of them at some scenic location.

I glance at the sun's position, size up surrounding objects, tell people to move one way or the other, then take a few snaps and hand the phone back. Invariably, they say, "Wow, that's great!"

I didn't do anything magical as a professional photographer to get that great image. I just employed a few easy tricks to take better travel photos. You can, too, whether you snap away on your vacations with a smartphone or carry a digital camera.

Use the tips below for more memorable and flattering photos when you travel — and your friends will soon tell you, too, "Wow, that's a great shot!"

## Look for the sun

Placing the sun behind a subject means your subject will likely be bathed in shadow, turning into a dark silhouette. For a subject that is properly exposed, aim for the sun or other light source to be in front of the subject to illuminate it, or, if that's not possible, then at least put the light to one side or the other.

## Even out the light

Avoid placing your subject in the shadows if everything else is brightly lit. And certainly don't put a subject half in shadow and half in light. Most cameras can't even out the difference in exposure so you will end up with either a dark subject or an overly bright background.

## Keep your subject intact

Before you hit the shutter button, take one last look at all parts of your subject. Make sure toes, hands, elbows and all other parts are in the photo and not cut off. There's nothing worse than a footless mother or a beautiful sculpture with its arm cut off.

## Patrol the edges

Every professional does what's called "edge patrol." That means you let your eye scan around the edge of your composition before you snap the photo. That way you can move one way or the other if you have a tree protruding randomly into the frame, a sign half in and half out,

A "good" travel photo example.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF  
THERESE IKNOIAN



or another passerby's pack intruding on your photo.

## Take your photo, then look for another

We all do it: Turn a corner and exclaim, that's so beautiful, lift the camera and snap. Go ahead and snap it if you want, but don't stop there. Sometimes the best composition or view may be a little higher, farther down or around a corner. Scan around for a shot that may be even more impressive.

## Forget getting centered

Photographers use something called the rule of thirds. Imagine two lines dividing the frame from top to bottom and another two from left to right — making it look like a tic-tac-toe board with the screen divided into thirds. Most images are more powerful if your subject is at or near one of the points where the lines cross, rather than dead center. Some cameras and smartphones even have gridlines you can turn on to help you place your subject in the right place.

## Turn off your flash

Please. In most cases, especially outdoors, it does no good whatsoever and may even over-illuminate an area. Indoors or at special events it can be very annoying to other visitors and photographers, perhaps even ruining somebody else's photo. If you need a flash for a specific photo, then turn it back on — but just for that one photo.

## Try landscape mode

Because we mostly access our phones vertically for general use, I find most people just hold up a smartphone for a photo the same way. But if you are looking to take home a memory of a grand landscape or a view of a sprawling city plaza, you likely want more than just a lot of street and a sky in it. Turn the phone horizontally, and you will be surprised how much more impressive the photo can be.

## Watch out for hat brims and sunglasses

Even if you pay attention to the first tip about placing the light in front of your sub-

ject, a hat can ruin the best effort. You will end up with a dark shadow across a person's eyes and face when it is their smile or cheery eyes you want to immortalize in a photo. Same with sunglasses. You can't always ask somebody to take off the hat or sunglasses, but I find just asking them to tip a hat back can really help get the light on their face. And if you can get your subject to remove his or her sunglasses, you will capture their eyes. And eyes are, as they say, windows into the soul.

## Keep the horizon high or low

Slicing a photo smack down the middle with the horizon line isn't a pleasant composition. Analyze what you want to highlight. Is it a great sky? Then raise the camera to cut out more land. Is it beautiful rolling hills? Then lower the camera to pare back how much sky you will capture.

Remember, though, that rules are made to be broken. So, once you know how to get the light and subject in what is considered the right place, you may find yourself playing around with more abstract views that break the rules. That's OK, too, and can make for some striking images. Just do it on purpose.