

## **West Michigan Vacationing**

Becky Noffsinger, FAOD Conference Committee Member

[Beckylu357@gmail.com](mailto:Beckylu357@gmail.com)

For anyone planning to extend their conference trip to a vacation in Michigan, late July is peak season and Lake Michigan is perfect this time of year. Temperatures are generally in the 80's and low 90's, cooler at night, and humid. Here's a summary of popular places on the west side of the state; if you have specific questions about any of these let me know and I'll help if I can.

In general, you'll want to book camping and rentals as soon as possible.

### "Downstate"

#### **South Haven**

#### **Holland**

**Grand Haven:** Coast Guard Festival July 28 – Aug 6 – it will be very very very busy, and a lot of fun.

All three of these small cities are on Lake Michigan's shore and have beaches and trails for biking/walking. They are more populated than up north, but that means there are plenty of restaurants and shopping and things to do. They all have state campgrounds right next to the water, within a few steps of the beach. You'll pay for parking and access to most beaches here.

#### **Muskegon: Hoffmaster State Park**

We used to live near here and although Muskegon isn't my favorite city, the state park is exceptional. The state campground will be closed starting July 7, but there are private campgrounds nearby.

#### **Silver Lake State Park, Mears State Campground, Pentwater area**

This is a very popular area and includes a huge expanse of sand dunes, some that allow off-road vehicles where you can rent dune buggies for the day. Pentwater is a lovely town nearby with miles of beaches.

### "Up North"

#### **Ludington**

Ludington has it all – beaches, shopping, state park, fishing, canoeing, and it is a bigger city without feeling crowded. It's the first place most of us Michiganders consider "up north", where there's a different vibe (more relaxed, less populated, slower pace) than downstate. I've not visited the state campground, but it has a very good reputation.

#### **Cadillac and Manistee National Forest**

This isn't on the Lake Michigan shore but is a very popular camping and gaming area.

Cadillac sits on Mitchell Lake and the national forest has some really neat camping options.

### **Hartwick Pines State Park**

Near Grayling in the center of the state, not close to Lake Michigan, but this is a very cool place to learn about old growth forests. They have a campground as well. We took the kids a few years ago for the day and the ranger-led activities are a lot of fun.

### **Manistee**

Manistee has a vibrant arts community (the Ramsdell Theater is gorgeous), good restaurants, and beaches. No state parks here, but there are plenty of private campgrounds.

### **M-22**

This state 2-lane highway follows the lakeshore, from Muskegon all the way north to Traverse City, and is considered one of the prettiest drives in the state. There are plenty of small towns along the way and you might find a small beach or two where it's easy to jump out of your vehicle and into Lake Michigan. Bear Lake has a couple of Amish grocery/furniture stores, and Arcadia is very artsy with a public beach.

### **Up North Beaches**

Once you get past Manistee, every town and many places in-between have little, locally governed beaches that are easily accessible and don't always charge for parking. Some are roads that simply dead end at the beach-- you can park on the shoulder and walk to the water. Others have playgrounds nearby and picnic tables and grills for picnics. If you're feeling adventurous, some of our best memories are from beach-hopping up and down the lakeshore. Empire's beach was my favorite when the kids were little because it had a nice playground, a small inland lake with a dock they could jump off and play in shallow water, a picnic area with grills, and a beach on Lake Michigan all within a small area.

### **Frankfort / Elberta**

Full disclaimer: this is where Glenn grew up and where we lived when the kids were little, so we are completely biased. Frankfort is a small town on the north side of Betsie Bay (the deepest bay in Michigan) that gets very busy in summer. Elberta is a teeny tiny village on the south side of the bay with our favorite beach in the world. There are a lot of VRBO rentals (\$\$\$) in summer and an [RV park](#) just outside of town, plus Harbor Lights hotel right on the beach and Crystal Mountain Resort about 20 minutes away. There are a couple of local campgrounds too. The beaches and parking in both towns are completely free, but parking spaces are limited. The Benzie Bus runs a free shuttle in summer too. Sleeping Bear Dunes is within an hour from here and makes a great day trip (see below).

### **Cherry Bowl Drive-In Theater**

Just north of Frankfort is the Cherry Bowl Drive-In theater, an old-fashioned 50's style drive

in movie theater. Highly recommended!

### **Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore & Platte River Campground**

You can easily spend several days at the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Park. Platte River Campground is our favorite place to camp, but reserve early (spots open for reservations 6 months ahead of dates). Pierce Stocking Drive is great because it's all driving with little stops along the way with great views (I.e. no long hikes). Glen Arbor is a walk back in time (check out the blacksmith and lifesaving station demos), and there are a lot of fishing and canoeing options.

### **Traverse City**

Bigger city with lots to do, great restaurants, boating, beaches, wineries, shopping, etc.

### **Leelanau Peninsula**

Gorgeous, worth exploring little towns and beaches for a day or two. Check out Christmas Beach for Petoskey stone hunting!

### **Charlevoix & Petoskey**

These are more popular lakeshore communities north of Traverse City. I haven't spent a lot of time in these towns, but they have all the things you want in an up north trip.

### **Mackinac Island, Mackinaw City, and The Bridge**

This is very much worth the drive. Mackinac Island is a motor-free island accessible by ferry from Mackinaw City or, from the Upper Peninsula, St. Ignace. We usually park in Mackinaw City and ferry from there. Once on the island the Main Street has lots of touristy shops (fudge!) and a historic fort to explore. Outside of the main town area there are a lot of beautiful views, but it's a lot of walking. You can bring your own bikes or rent them by the hour, or rent a horse-drawn carriage, but for first-time visitors just riding the ferry and exploring the main town is worth the trip. It's really fun to stay overnight, but expensive, so most people stay in hotels or camp near Mackinaw City. There is a state campground near Mackinaw City in the lower peninsula, but I've not been there.

Big Mac, or "The Bridge", is a 5-mile span connecting the lower and upper peninsulas. Even if you just pay to drive across to the U.P. and come back again, it's a cool experience.

### **The U.P.**

If you're really in for a road trip and want to explore the Upper Peninsula, it's amazing! Let us know if you want to go and we can try to help. Tahquamenon Falls, Pictured Rocks, Marquette, and the Keweenaw Peninsula are popular places to explore nature and get outside.