

Day trips abundant in region

BY NANCY SUNDSTROM
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It's not just high prices at the gas pumps that are leading northern Michiganders to take more vacations and trips closer to home. The fact of the matter is that the region is enviably abundant in its options for recreation, scenery, culture, events, attractions and points of interest, no matter what you might want to explore.

Taking a day trip to do just that can be a great way to discover or become reacquainted with some of the things that thousands of visitors to the region travel here to experience. It can be easy to ignore what's in your own backyard, say those who work in the local travel and hospitality industries, but that doesn't have

to be the case.

Mike Norton, media relations spokesperson with the Traverse City Convention & Visitors Bureau, said the annual influx of visitors to the region every summer reinforces the idea that the area is an in-demand destination spot for guests from all over the Midwest and especially Michigan.

"As I look around the city of Traverse City and our downtown in particular, I'm seeing a town that has never looked as beautiful, attractive and with as much to offer," said Norton. "Then when I look beyond Traverse City in any direction, I come up with a great list of places to visit, things to do and sights to see, all that are easily accessible anywhere from a half-hour to two hours away. The

options are nearly limitless for family-friendly day trips."

Norton said he is frequently queried for recommendations on things to experience in the area, and he often suggests excursions throughout Traverse City first.

"You can spend a day being a tourist in your own town, because there's simply so much to do here," he said. "I'm always surprised by the number of people who live here, but haven't done some of the things that we have a right to brag about, such as listening to the Traverse Symphony Orchestra, walking around the campus of the Interlochen (Center for the Arts), taking a bike trip along the 12-mile TART Trail, visiting the Music House Museum or the Dennos Museum Center, or checking out the Grand Traverse Commons, which is our version of Central Park. These are just a few of

the things that knock people out when they visit here, yet a lot of locals don't know about them."

For day trips that might be of particular interest to families, the list is a fairly diverse one. Most jaunts can be easily accomplished in the space of a few hours and at a minimum expense.

Heading west will take you in the direction of Interlochen, the villages of Honor, Beulah and Benzonia, and ultimately to Frankfort.

Interlochen is home of the internationally renowned Interlochen Arts Academy and Arts Camp. In addition to purchasing tickets to an evening concert there, you can stroll through the beautiful campus grounds (with Green Lake as a backdrop) and catch impromptu performances by students who practice throughout the day. You can also visit the Scholar Shop for souvenirs, and get ice cream from the famed Melody Freeze.



Record-Eagle file photo

Frankfort is a great destination for families looking for a kid-friendly beach.

Honor, Beulah and Benzonia are cozy small towns with a wide range of quaint shops and eateries. A few "must-stops" on that route include the Cherry Bowl Drive-In in Honor (one of the few of its kind left in the United States), the bakery at the Brookside Inn in Beulah, the legendary Cherry Hut, also in Beulah, and the beautiful beach on the shores of Lake Michigan in Frankfort.

Venturing north on U.S. 31 offers a wide range of possibilities.

Just outside of Acme is the Music House Norton referred to, with its vast and unique collection of antique, vintage and one-of-a-kind musical instruments and collectibles.

Fifteen miles from Traverse City is Elk Rapids, a community that boasts a fine beach and marina, restaurants that span ethnic to pizza with everything in between, a vibrant down-

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