

SUMMERTIME IN Traverse City

By Sarah Miller



Traverse City, Michigan—There’s nothing like this coastal paradise in the middle of the country.

In summer, cherry trees swap their white blossoms for ripened fruit; orchards and European-style vineyards are just a bike ride away. While white sails dot Traverse Bay’s clear blue waters, sandy dunes share space with historic lighthouses. From fresh-boiled whitefish to streusel-topped cherry pie with a scoop of Moomers ice cream—Traverse City is a celebration of summer.

You’ll want to park your Airstream here awhile to appreciate the microclimate and geography that make up this destination. Heralded as “The Cherry Capital of the World,” Traverse City is both a bustling resort town and a quiet nature retreat—a world-class culinary destination dotted with family orchards and farms.

Small coastal towns in this pocket of Northwest Michigan, with additional camping and outdoor adventures, are just a short drive from the city. Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, which Good Morning America calls “The Most Beautiful Place in America,” is found in Empire. Sleeping Bear’s dramatic bluffs are set against 35 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. The nearby Platte River Campground has RV sites with modern amenities and close proximity to both the Platte River and Lake Michigan.

Other towns like Frankfort offer laid-back sandy beaches and the Point Betsie Lighthouse. Or head to Leland to dine and shop in Fishtown, a restored 19th-century fishing shanty village.

After hiking, take time to relax at one of the many observation rest points at Sleeping Bear Dunes. Some dunes rise to 460 feet above Lake Michigan. **TOP INSET:** Paddle the clear waters of the sandy-bottomed Crystal River located within Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Places like Crystal River Outfitters run 2-3 hour trips. **INSET:** Shop and dine at over 200 specialty shops, restaurants and galleries throughout the Front Street, Old Town, West End and Warehouse districts.





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Bike-Worthy Bites

What's better than a scenic bike ride? How about scenic views with delicious diversions? TART Trails is a local nonprofit that manages just over 100 miles of non-motorized trails in and around Traverse City.

For an easy ride, Kate Lewis, TART Trails' director of communications, recommends the Boardman Lake Loop Trail, a four-mile, mostly paved, multi-use trail that loops around the lake via bridges and boardwalks. "It's one of our most heavily used trails," Lewis says, "and you can easily get to a few really good trailside food stops."

One standout is **The Filling Station**, a former railroad station turned brewery. "They brew their own beer, make house-made flatbread pizza and delicious salads, and host fun events and live music in the summer," Lewis says. Another great spot right off the trail is **Right Brain Brewery**, an original microbrewery that's now located on 16th Street in Traverse City's SoFo District.

Next, try the **10th Street Oryana Community Co-op** for grab-and-go meals, local and organic foods, fresh-baked goods and a coffee bar. "Right outside of Oryana, you'll find art installations, picnic tables and benches," Lewis says.

For a longer ride, the Leelanau Trail stretches roughly 18 miles from downtown Traverse City to Suttons Bay. This mostly flat rail trail passes farms and orchards along the way. "A favorite spot to hit, if you're starting from the south, is **Farm Club**," Lewis says. Farm Club is a farm, restaurant, bakery, brewery and market, all-in-one. A little further up the trail, you'll find **Lakeview Hill Farm & Market** for grab-and-go items. Wine lovers can also check out nearby wineries like **Shady Lane Cellars**, **Mawby Sparkling Wines** or **Black Star Farms**.

Lewis' personal favorite is the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail, a 20-mile route through the national park. "It has everything you could want in a trail—some flat sections, then some really hilly and winding parts too," she says. "It goes past the dunes, through the forest—it's incredible."

Her go-to ride starts in Empire at 8 a.m., and heads to Glen Arbor for coffee before biking to the trail's end. On the way back, she stops for lunch in Glen Arbor, wrapping up a 40-mile, all-day adventure with a cool dip in Lake Michigan. For a shorter ride, she recommends parking in Glen Arbor and biking a few miles to reach the Dune Climb.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Relax at Brys Estate Vineyard and Winery. This family-run winery offers a tasting room, lawn bar and lavender gardens on a restored 1890s homestead. Just off the TART trail, dine at the Farm Club where over 90 percent of the vegetables and herbs served are grown on site at this stunning restaurant, bakery, brewery, market and farm. Boardman Lake Loop Trail is a four-mile, multi-use trail, perfect for biking or hiking.



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Sweet & Savory Sails

Grand Traverse Bay is a sailor's paradise and is protected from the gusty winds of Lake Michigan. Tall ships are a common sight, and you'll often spot regal schooners sailing across the bay. Traverse City has more of these mighty maritime vessels than any other port in Michigan. To appreciate the area's maritime history along with classic Traverse City bites, take to the waters.

Traverse Tall Ship Company sets out on the schooner *Manitou*, a replica of an 1800s ship. Guests can even hoist her crisp white sails if they'd like. For the brunch sail, a full meal is prepared on board using a wood-fired cookstove. For a midday cruise, **Moomers** ice cream is a family-friendly winner. The Dinner and Sail package is part land, part water with a dinner at **Harrington's By the Bay** either before or after your evening sail.

Other sailing outfitters like **Wind Dancer Traverse City Tours**, offer a wide variety of Traverse City favorites. The sunset cruise serves local wines, beers and other alcohol/non-alcoholic choices along with the famous Leelanau Raclette cheese and crackers, Archies Social House wrap, award-winning Great Lakes Potato Chips, and Murdick's fudge for dessert.



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Sleeping Bear Dunes offers the largest freshwater dune system in the world. With over 71,000 acres and 65 miles of shoreline, it's a vast natural playground ready to be explored. **ABOVE:** Crowds gather to watch the arrival of the tall ship *Alliance*, which is part of the Inland Seas Education Association, in Suttons Bay. Can't decide? Try a Moomers ice cream flight. Moomers was voted best ice cream shop in the country by *Good Morning America*.



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ABOVE: The air is fragrant with fresh-baked cherry pie from the Grand Traverse Pie Co. in downtown Traverse City in July. Visitors come to the Cherry Republic for samples and to shop for cherry products.

Wild for Cherries

Cherry salsa, cherry pie or cherry BBQ chicken—take your pick. Experience cherry culture with U-pick orchards, farmers markets and more. A cherry-filled celebration starts in late June and sometimes lasts into August. Back in 1924, Traverse City held a spring “Blessing of the Blossoms” that morphed into the National Cherry Festival we know today.

In the 1840s, a Presbyterian missionary planted the first cherry trees—the Montmorency, a tart cherry perfect for pies, preserves and juice. Traverse City proved to be an ideal climate for both sour and sweet cherries, like the golden sweet variety that is often used to make maraschino cherries. The first cherry orchards were planted in 1852, and today The Grand Traverse Region is one of the world’s largest producers of tart cherries.

National Cherry Festival

June 28-July 5, 2025, 99th Anniversary

Midway rides, races, live entertainment and all things cherry! Festivities span eight days and bring in over a half-million people.

Start your day in downtown Traverse City at **Espresso Bay** for a cup of small-batch roasted coffee with flavors like Cherry Blossom and Cherry Pie. Then have a breakfast of cherry compote pancakes at the **Flap Jack Shack**.

Stock up on everything cherry like BBQ sauce and salsa at the **Cherry Republic**, then have the cherry chicken salad at **The Cherry Public House** in Glen Arbor for lunch. Remember to get a cherry pie from **Grand Traverse Pie Co.** for later.

In the evening, grill back at the campsite, maybe BBQ cherry-sauced ribs or chicken. Then, party till the cows come home, and watch the sunset over the Plummer family farm at **Moomers**. Try rotating creamy flavors, like cherry cheesecake or cherries moobilee.



Jon Plummer

Moomers Farm Creamery makes over 160 different flavors, with over 20 flavors rotated daily. **BELOW:** Just a boy and his dog spending a perfect summer day on the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail.



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A visit to Fishtown in Leeland, Michigan, offers a step back in time with former fishing shanties now offering shopping and dining. The town still has a few working fisheries and a busy charter fishing industry which makes it a great spot for fresh seafood.



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Toast to Traverse Wines

Traverse City lies on 45th parallel, the same as Bordeaux, France, and other great wine-growing regions. Although this is a fairly new wine region—about 50-years young—the microclimate is ideal for a long growing season. “Our cool climate produces a delightful level of acidity that translates into crisp, fruity, fresh styles of wine that are fantastic when paired with food,” says Marie-Chantal Dalese of **Chateau Chantal**. Located on the Old Mission Peninsula, the winery sits high on a ridge overlooking Grand Traverse Bay where Vinifera vines produce Riesling, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir. “In summer, people come to relax with a charcuterie board and wine flight or to try one of the many summer wine cocktails,” Dalese says. Summertime brings Wine Dinners and Jazz at Sunset. 🗨️

Enjoy wine with a view at this family winery set on 75 serene acres on Old Mission Peninsula.



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