Road Trippin to Wisconsin

By Todd P. Walker

“Todd about Town”

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It is summer in Minnesota! This also means it's time to start planning your summer road trip before the discussion changes to where to see the best fall colors. I recently visited two destinations that are definitely worth considering when deciding to pack up the car and experience the great American road trip. Both destinations will take you across the Minnesota border to visit our neighboring state to the East, Wisconsin. I spent two extended weekends exploring the cities of Elkhart Lake and Door County. Both cities are about 350 miles away from St. Paul for a total time spent on the road of just over five hours.

ELKHART LAKE

In Elkhart Lake, WI you will discover a lively lakeside vacation village nestled on the shores of crystal-clear Elkhart Lake. Activities in the area include hiking and biking trails, water-sports, a luxury holistic spa, gourmet dining and even vintage auto racing. Below are some of the highlights of my visit to this charming lakeside oasis.

ROAD AMERICA

Situated on 640 grassy acres in the wooded hills of Wisconsin’s Kettle Moraine the internationally-known motorsports complex is one of the country’s longest road racing circuits with a 14 turn four-mile trek. In addition to its renowned history of pro and amateur racing, guests to the track can enjoy go-karts, ATVs, geocaching, motorcycle and driving schools.

ICE AGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

Wisconsin harbors some of best examples of landforms created by the glaciers of the last Ice Age. The Ice Age National Scenic Trail follows the furthest extent of the glaciers from the last Ice Age. It meanders through untouched wilderness, rolling farmlands, public parks, private lands, and bustling cities.
HENNING’S WISCONSIN CHEESE
No visit to Wisconsin is complete without cheese. Henning’s is a fourth-generation family owned cheese factory in nearby Kiel that has been crafting cheeses since 1914. Drop in for a tour and gain an in-depth understanding of how the freshest milk from nearby cows becomes award-winning cheddars, Monterey Jack, and Colby cheeses. Don't forget about the famous Wisconsin cheese curds and giant cheese wheels of up to 3,000 pounds.

SWITCHGEAR BREWING CO.
Located inside the historic Feed Mill, SwitchGear's atmosphere pays tribute to Elkhart Lake's history while offering a modern, industrial vibe. Featuring a brewery and taproom, SwitchGear produces a range of beers, including barrel stouts, red ales and IPAs.

THE OSTHOFF RESORT
I stayed at the Osthoff Resort in the quaint village of Elkhart on the shores of Elkhart Lake. I took advantage of the many activities and dining options available at the resort including outdoor yoga classes, kayaking, biking and a visit to the amazing Aspira Spa for a massage. Do not miss dining at the chef driven Concourse Restaurant and Lounge. Menu favorites included the honey balsamic trout, seared scallops with sweet pea risotto and veal schnitzel with pickled cucumber relish!
DOOR COUNTY

Door County, WI is often called the Hamptons of the Midwest. After many trips to Door County and a few visits to the Hamptons I think it’s time to turn the tables a bit and consider calling the Hamptons the Door County of the East. Door County is a bustling area with distinct charming villages with a rich Maritime history. Outdoor enthusiast can explore the abundant hiking options while those seeking water adventures can head out and experience beautiful Lake Michigan. On my most recent visit I dove into the Maritime past of Door County. Here are some of the highlights of my recent trip to Door County.

DOOR COUNTY MARITIME MUSEUM
Located on the working waterfront of Sturgeon Bay, the museum exhibits span the nautical history of Door County from early American Indian canoes to post World War II bulk carriers. See the newly opened in May 2021 Jim Kress Maritime Lighthouse Tower - this one-of-a-kind landmark creates a encapsulates the area’s legacy of maritime history and offers an unparalleled panorama spanning the entire historic working waterfront, from the waters of Green Bay to the Sturgeon Bay shipping canal.

ISLAND ORCHARD CIDER
Crafting Wisconsin hard apple, lavender and cherry ciders in the Normandy tradition (sparkling and dry). Their orchards on Washington Island provide the perfect rocky limestone soil and climate for their French and American cider.

RENARD’S ARTISAN CHEESE
Door County’s oldest cheese store is in its third generation of cheese makers. Enjoy a cheese panini or fresh salad from "Melt", the on-site cafe. Sample “Cherry Cheddar,” a special flavor combination that is a quintessential Door County treat and take home a bag of cheese curds!

WHITE GULL INN - FISH BOIL
This dining experience found only in Door County, features fresh Lake Michigan whitefish caught by local fishermen and cooked outside over an open fire, just as it was 100 years ago by the Scandinavian settlers of the Peninsula. The fish boil tradition began as an economical way to Feed large, hungry groups of lumberjacks and fishermen. Churches picked up the tradition to raise money, and people from all over would come to taste the local fish, potatoes and Door County cherry pie. Eventually area restaurants followed and The Door County Fish Boil became a “not to be missed” event.

PENINSULA STATE PARK
Established in 1909, this 3,776-acre state park has rocky bluffs that ascend more than 150 feet and is considered Wisconsin's most complete park with hiking, biking, boating, golfing, swimming, camping, nature programs and Sightseeing. Climb the 60-foot Eagle Tower - completed in May 2021, the redesigned structure is Wisconsin's first accessible observation tower. Climb the 95 stairs or use the 850-foot ramp to see some of the area's most stunning views from Peninsula State Park.
CANA ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE
Cross the causeway to see the lighthouse standing watch on the shore of Lake Michigan for more than 140 years. Investigate the 8.7-acre island that includes the 89-foot-tall light tower, the original home of the lighthouse keeper and his family, and the oil house where fuel for the light was stored. The highlight of any Cana Island visit is climbing the 97 steps of the tower’s spiral staircase to reach the gallery deck. The outside deck delivers a sweeping view of Lake Michigan and the Door County peninsula.

SKALIWAGS
Skaliwags focuses on upscale cuisine with Southern influence. Chef Chris Wiltfang and his team are committed to serving exceptional entrees that are sure to please. The menu changes daily to authenticate the use of freshest ingredients in-season. Dinner favorites include custom black angus steaks and local catches of the day.

BAILEY’S HARBOR SCHOOLHOUSE INN
The charming historic 1917 schoolhouse boasts large well appointed rooms located in a quiet residential neighborhood within walking distance of everything you need for a great Door County vacation. The fifth-generation Baileys Harbor family invites you to enjoy this authentic local experience. Each room has its own private entrance and deck.