



Midwest road trips

Three eastern Wisconsin drives prove that this state offers much more than dairy farms and bratwurst

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When the snow finally retreats from the fields and forests of eastern Wisconsin, the first shoots of Indian grass and big bluestem appear on the glacier-carved hills. While tourists head to the resorts and golf courses near Lake Michigan, locals prefer the trails, rural roads and historic towns

that are tucked into the prairie and woodland savannah. This is the time to explore the state's surprises, from spring-fed lakes west of Sheboygan to Dodge County's Horicon Marsh, a stopping place for migratory great blue herons and sandhill cranes. There's a palpable sense of history in these back roads, where family farmsteads from the Laura Ingalls Wilder era are still operating, some with slickly marketed you-pick orchards but more with hand-drawn signs beckoning passersby to sample spring produce and pay on the honor system.

Bisecting this quilt of Americana is the 1,200-mile-long **Ice Age Trail**, which lures hikers to its rough terrain. Also in the area is the **Ahnapee Trail**, a reinvented rail track used by bikers, runners and the occasional horse-

drawn wagon. The 30-mile-long Ahnapee passes through tiny old villages and vast wetland preserves.

We've selected three day trips that sample eastern Wisconsin's best spring drives, all within a few hours of Milwaukee, Chicago and Green Bay.



DRIVE 1

Elkhart Lake to Sheboygan

The road that passes the Victorian inns on Elkhart Lake is a fitting start to a drive through the glacial terrain rumpling toward Sheboygan. The lake offers a four-mile wooded walking trail past century-old clapboard cottages. Just east of the lake, on Highway 67, follow signs marked with a green acorn that take you off the highway and guide you to the Kettle Moraine Scenic Drive.



The terrace at
Lola's on the Lake.

Pass through tunnels of birch and cottonwood trees to reach the northernmost section of **Kettle Moraine State Forest** and a 33-mile segment of the Ice Age Trail. Hikers navigate the kettles, small craters where glacial ice chunks halted, then melted. The 3½-mile Parnell Loop leads to a 60-foot-high observation tower that's perfect for views of the eskers, moraines and swamps.

Turn north and west to pick up Highway 23, which follows the 17-mile **Old Plank Road Trail**. This road was named for the planks that once lined the stagecoach route between Sheboygan and the town of Greenbush. As you pass grand old barns built by German settlers, watch for the fiberglass cow—her name is Antoinette—at the edge of the

cheese-making town of Plymouth.

Turn southeast on County Road C, cross the Sheboygan River and continue on to Kohler. It's here that the Kohler company housed its workers, in a dormitory that's now a luxury resort. You'll also find the **Kohler Design Center**, where faucets and toilets make fine art of the ordinary.



Fontana to Fort Atkinson

With its million-dollar vacation estates on the steep bluffs overlooking the water, the community of Lake Geneva is an anomalous enclave in this rural farmstead only 80 miles from Chicago. Venture out of town and you'll drive through quietly beautiful nano-sized towns scattered between Lake Geneva

and Fort Atkinson, 40 miles northwest. Follow Lake Shore Drive west from Fontana to see humble cottages in the forested hills and the tiny town of Williams Bay.

A quick detour leads to the University of Chicago's **Yerkes Observatory**, where the world's largest refractor telescope is housed in a Gothic-style museum. There are several "Rustic Roads"—historical routes demarcated with brown signs—to follow here. Drive east to nearby Snake Road to pass massive equestrian grounds (and a few grazing Holsteins) and the grand gated entrances to some of the area's largest houses. Take in the best views down by the water, where you can walk some of the 26-mile dirt footpath (blazed by Native Americans) along Geneva Lake's shore.

Next, head north on Highway 120 alongside farms of all sorts—from alpaca to apple—to the town of Springfield and the trailhead of the 12-mile **White River State Trail**. Park at the **Pedal & Cup**, a café in the train depot, where you can rent a bike and buy picnic supplies after browsing its collection of Wisconsin antiques.

From here it's a gallery of photogenic farmhouses along Highway 120 through Spring Prairie, where you can stop for strawberries, asparagus and kohlrabi at the roadside stand run by **Geneva Lakes Produce**. Head north to Potter Road for more barn-gazing, then work your way northwest to the southernmost segment of the **Kettle Moraine Scenic Drive**. Park at the ranger station and hike about half a mile up the Ice Age Trail to an overlook onto Whitewater Lake and the migratory route of birds on their way to Horicon Marsh.

Back on the road, turn north on Clover Valley Road and look for a small wooden picnic shelter. Here

DRIVE 1

Elkhart Lake to Sheboygan

EAT

Lola's on the Lake

An upscale restaurant with locally sourced ingredients. 101 Osthoff Ave., Elkhart Lake; 920-876-5840; dinner for two, \$80*

Off the Rail Café

A busy neighborhood joint in an old train depot. 44A Gottfried St., Elkhart Lake; 920-876-3655; lunch for two, \$15

Craverie Chocolatier Café

Chocolates and pastries, plus soups and sandwiches. 725 D Woodlake Rd., Kohler; 920-208-4933; lunch for two, \$20

EXPLORE

Kohler Design Center

101 Upper Rd., Kohler; 920-457-3699; kohlerdesigncenter.com; free

Kettle Moraine State Forest

262-594-6200; dnrwi.gov

Ice Age Trail

800-227-0046; iceagetrail.org

Old Plank Road Trail

Near Hwy. 23 between Sheboygan and Greenbush

*Meal prices do not include drinks, tax or tip.



crystal-clear water gushes from the stone-encased pipe of an artesian well dug in 1895 (fill your water bottles!). Drive north and take County Road N through the bustling University of Wisconsin branch in Whitewater to Cold Spring. Finally you reach the village of Fort Atkinson, whose downtown follows the Rock River. Stop by **Café Carpe** on South Water Street to catch the singer-songwriters who play here, and sample local brews. Take Highway 12 southeast for the 50-minute trip back to Lake Geneva.

DRIVE 2

Fontana to Fort Atkinson



EAT

Simple Café

Electic decor (chandeliers fused from scrap metal) and farm-to-table dishes. 525 Broad St., Lake Geneva; 762-248-3556; breakfast for two, \$20

Pedal & Cup

A café and gathering spot for bikers and hikers pausing on the White River Trail. Hwy. 120 and Depot St., Springfield; 262-249-1111; lunch for two, \$15

Café Carpe

Bluegrass and folk musicians play here nightly. 8 S. Water St. W., Fort Atkinson; 920-563-9391; dinner for two, \$45



EXPLORE

Yerkes Observatory

Established in 1897, this satellite of the University of Chicago is far from the city lights. 373 W. Geneva St., Williams Bay; 262-245-5555; astro.uchicago.edu; free; Saturday only

White River State Trail

262-741-3114; dnr.wi.gov

Kettle Moraine Scenic Drive

262-626-2116; dnr.wi.gov

Geneva Lakes Produce

Corner of Hwys. 120 and 11, Spring Prairie; 262-723-2580; genevalakesproduce.com



A pastoral scene in southeastern Wisconsin.



DRIVE 3

Sturgeon Bay to Two Rivers

Instead of joining the traffic streaming to Door County's popular northern section, go south along Lake Michigan to find a small-town peacefulness that's lost in the peninsula's touristed towns. In Sturgeon Bay, stroll in Bay View Park, where old tugboats are tied up near the iron trestle bridge at the **Door County Maritime Museum** on Green Bay. Or take a cruise in a 1937 **Chicago Fireboat** to Sherwood Point Lighthouse. From Highway 57/42, drive south along Claybanks Road (County U), then turn east on Lake Lane to arrive at the **Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal Nature Preserve**, a 445-acre gem of pristine Lake Michigan shoreline at the mouth of the canal. Head farther south, hugging the beach, along South Lake Michigan Drive, past historic one-room clapboard shanties that have been impeccably preserved.

Continue south along County U to the small town of Algoma and the 30-mile-long Ahnapee State Trail, which runs along the remnants of an old railroad track that starts in Sturgeon Bay. In a hard-to-miss

converted gas station on Fourth and Fremont Streets, the nostalgic **Dodge Antiques & Architecturals** is filled with everything from vintage car parts to reclaimed furniture.

If you don't find what you're looking for there, keep going south of Algoma to reach the **Flying Pig**, in a large barn festooned with garden knickknacks and eclectic sculptures. Farther down the lake, work your way deeper into Kewaunee County, where the presence of early European settlers is everywhere—from historic church steeples to the delicious Czech pastries at **Tom's Bakery Shoppe**—in the hillside town of Kewaunee. For a quick view of migratory birds stopping en route from Horicon Marsh to Canada, stroll along the boardwalk in the Kewaunee Harbor & Marsh Walk at the north edge of town.

Pick up some smoked whitefish at **LaFond's Fish Market** (Andy LaFond will also take you on a charter fishing trip if you wish). En route to Two Rivers, you'll pass llama farms and soybean fields and finally the **Point Beach Energy Center**,

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where you can learn about nuclear power. Wrap up your journey on a designated Rustic Road that travels through wooded **Point Beach State Forest**. At the southernmost end, pull over to wander the soft sandy beach, which runs uninterrupted for six miles. You'd never expect to find all this in Wisconsin.

DRIVE 3

Sturgeon Bay to Two Rivers

EAT

Bluefront Café

Try the pan-fried, cornmeal-dusted wall-eye here. 86 W. Maple St., Sturgeon Bay; 920-743-9218; dinner for two, \$50

Caffe Tlazo

The grilled cheese sandwich is made with cheese from nearby farms. 607 4th St., Algoma; 920-487-7240; lunch for two, \$18

Tom's Bakery Shoppe

Authentic Czech pastries. 409 Milwaukee St., Kewaunee; 920-388-2533

La Fond's Fish Market

216 Milwaukee St., Kewaunee; 920-388-0577

EXPLORE

Door County Maritime Museum

120 N. Madison Ave., Sturgeon Bay; 920-743-5958; dcmm.org, adults, \$13

Chicago Fireboat

ridethefireboat.com, cruises from \$20

Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal Nature Preserve

doorcountylandtrust.org

Point Beach Energy Center

6400 Nuclear Rd., 920-755-6400, free

Point Beach State Park

920-794-7480; dnr.wi.gov

Dodge Antiques & Architecturals

702 4th St., Algoma; 920-604-2017; dodgestreetantiques.com

Flying Pig

N697S State Hwy. 42, Algoma; 920-487-9902; theflyingpig.biz



A World War II exhibit at the Door County Maritime Museum.

STAY



RCI affiliated resorts in southern Wisconsin include:



Holiday Inn Club Vacations

at Lake Geneva Resort 5421

Sophisticated villa units with access to amenities at the adjacent resort. 7037 Grand Geneva Way, Lake Geneva
Member Review: "We loved our stay at this resort and would recommend it to anyone visiting the area."

World Wide at Summer Oaks 3895

Fishing, boating and canoeing on Lake Wisconsin, and great winter activities. 58164 Kassner Rd., Merrimac



Heidel House Resort & Spa 0025

Twenty-acre property on beautiful Green Lake. 643 Illinois Ave., Green Lake
Member Review: "The property has the feel of a full-service hotel, with the natural, woodsy sense of a vacation cabin."

Fox Hills Resort 1245

On-site 27-hole and 18-hole championship golf courses. 250 W. Church St., Mishicot
Member Review: "If there was anything we needed, the staff got on it immediately."

For complete member reviews (as member reviews have been condensed) and additional resort listings, visit RCI.com or call 800-338-7777 (Weeks) or 877-968-7476 (Points). Club Members, please call your specific Club or RCI telephone number.

Non-RCI affiliated resorts:

Slebkens Resort

Historic Victorian resort with a new wing of condos. There are also two on-site restaurants, an ice cream shop and a café. 284 S. Lake St., Elkhart Lake; 920-876-2600; slebkens.com; doubles from \$95 per night

The Abbey Resort & Avari Spa

This property on the tranquil Fontana side of Lake Geneva had a \$40 million makeover in 2005. 269 Fontana Blvd., Fontana; 800-709-1323; theabbeyresort.com; doubles from \$150 per night

Chanticleer Guest House

A refurbished 1915 barn is the main lodge at this B&B set on 30 acres of meadows and gardens. 4072 Cherry Rd., Sturgeon Bay; 866-682-0384; chanticleerguesthouse.com; doubles from \$150 per night

Robertson's Cottages

Nine cabins on the shores of Green Bay or on a private island a 10-minute boat ride away. 4481 Cabots Point Rd., Sturgeon Bay; 920-743-5124; robertsonscottages.com; doubles from \$125 per night