

# City Insider Report Door County (WI)

When planning your next trip, you might not automatically think of this hidden Wisconsin treasure. Outside the Midwest, Door County (28,000 pop) is largely undiscovered yet is perfect for a close-to-home, inexpensive vacation. The 70-mile long peninsula between Green Bay and Lake Michigan has great appeal and in a place where people leave doors unlocked and franchises and chains stores are few, "The Door" instills a sense of calm many places simply cannot claim.

The region's heritage is a combination of Native American, French, British, Belgian and Scandinavian cultures and its first white settlement was established in 1844. Scandinavian influence is especially evident in Door's wholesome villages, architecture, surnames and cuisine.

*Door County peninsula is surrounded by Lake Michigan, 5 state parks, 11 historic lighthouses and 300 miles of shoreline.*



With 300 miles of shoreline, this "Cape Cod of the Midwest" has been popular with generations of affluent Midwesterners who built summer homes along "Millionaire's Row," a tony waterfront neighborhood. However, Door County is enjoyed by non-millionaires, too, especially between Memorial and Labor Day, when the population can reach 250,000. Door's comparison to Cape Cod is understandable, given its coastal culture of boating, beaches and bounty from local waters. This nautical ambience is beautifully balanced by dense forests, stone silos punctuating farmlands, orchards and vineyards. The county's diverse nature allows everyone — from kayakers to history buffs, art lovers to nature enthusiasts, fishermen to boutique browsers — to find things to do in Door.

From Green Bay, WI, you can drive to any of Door's villages (except Washington Island) in less than two hours. The communities incl: Southern Door, Sturgeon Bay, Carlsville, Jacksonport, Baileys Harbor, Egg Harbor, Fish Creek, Ephraim, Sister Bay, Northern Door (Ellison Bay, Rowleys Bay and Gills Rock) and Washington Island.

Our T/S correspondent **Nancy Moreland** takes us on a tour of this delightful all-season resort.

**TIP:** Some businesses operate seasonally (May-Oct). Call to confirm months of operation.

## GETTING THERE

Austin Straubel International Airport (GRB) in Green Bay (☎ 920-498-4800, [www.flygrb.com](http://www.flygrb.com)) has daily flights to/from Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Minneapolis and Orlando. Four airlines service the airport, as do several car rental and taxi companies. Traveling by car, Door is easily accessed on state highways 57 and 42.

## WHAT TO DO & SEE

To get your bearings, hop aboard the **Door County Trolley** (☎ 920-868-1100, [www.doorcountytrolley.com](http://www.doorcountytrolley.com)) in Fish Creek. The 1-hr narrated tour (\$14/adult, \$9/child) shares local highlights while motor-ing past vineyards and historic villages and gives you a chance to get a seagull's eye view of nearby islands from an impressive bluff overlook. The tour begins/ends at **Orchard Country Winery and Market** (9197 Hwy 42, ☎ 920-868-3479, [www.orchardcountry.com](http://www.orchardcountry.com)). Door is the nation's fourth largest producer of cherries; its shallow limestone deposits create favorable conditions for the county's 2000+ acres of cherry orchards. The crop is harvested in July, but you can sample juice, wine, pies or jams May-Oct.

**TIP:** Grape-growing is also booming in Door, with six local wineries. Visit: [www.doorcounty.com/pdf/brochure/Wineries](http://www.doorcounty.com/pdf/brochure/Wineries), for a pdf of a wine trail map.

If your tastes run more to apples, you're in luck. Door County has 500 acres of apple orchards. **Sequist Orchards** (11482 Hwy 42, ☎ 920-854-4199, [www.sequistorchards.com](http://www.sequistorchards.com)) in Sister Bay is a good place to start. Here, you'll have another chance to sample baked goods, preserves and wines made from local harvests. Both orchards' pleasantly rustic surroundings offer great photo opportunities.

**\$TIP:** Entrance to all of Door's 19 county parks is free. If you can only visit one, choose **Cave Point County Park** (Hwy 57, [www.door-county-wisconsin.net/cave-point-door-county.htm](http://www.door-county-wisconsin.net/cave-point-door-county.htm)) where stunning limestone sea caves stand poised over Lake Michigan's clear waters. For other free activities: [www.doorcounty.com/what-to-do/free-things-to-do](http://www.doorcounty.com/what-to-do/free-things-to-do).

Open the door to outdoor adventure at 3,776-acre **Peninsula State Park** (☎

920-868-3258, [www.stateparks.com/peninsula\\_state\\_park\\_in\\_wisconsin.html](http://www.stateparks.com/peninsula_state_park_in_wisconsin.html)). Immerse yourself in its scenic beauty on a rented bike from **Nor Door Sport & Cyclery** (☎ 920-868-2275, [www.nor-door-sports.com](http://www.nor-door-sports.com)), then ride along comfortable 10-mile **Sunset Bicycle Trail**. Or climb Eagle Tower for a fantastic view of 150 ft bluffs overlooking the waters of Green Bay. If you work up a sweat, cool off with a swim at Nicolet Beach or boat along eight miles of shoreline. This park also offers hiking, fishing, inline skating, boat rentals and an 18-hole golf course. From June-Aug, **American Folklore Theatre** (☎ 920-854-6117, [www.folkloretheatre.com](http://www.folkloretheatre.com)) presents performances in the park amphitheatre. In winter, the area is popular for snowmobiling, sledding and cross country skiing. The park has 450 campsites that can accommodate pup tents to large RVs, but reserve ahead — it's one of Wisconsin's most popular campgrounds.

## { The Cape Cod Of The Midwest }

Love lighthouses? Door County doesn't disappoint. The Peninsula's 11 lighthouses include Peninsula State Park's **Eagle Bluff Lighthouse** (<http://eaglebluffighthouse.doorcountyhistoricalsociety.org>, \$5/adult, \$2/student, \$1/child). A lighthouse keeper's life involved constant toil,

*The Cana Island Lighthouse dates from 1869. This sentinel has endured innumerable storms. Today, you can visit the keeper's house, climb the tower and walk the rocky shore to contemplate the lovely loneliness of this place.*



but today, peacefulness pervades **Cana Island Lighthouse** (☎ 920-743-5958, [www.dcomm.org](http://www.dcomm.org), \$10/adult, \$7/child). The annual **Lighthouse Festival**, the second weekend in June ([www.dcomm.org/lhw.html](http://www.dcomm.org/lhw.html)) has unique land and water tours.

Door County does a fine job sharing its history with visitors at museums, restored buildings and on tours. The **Ephraim Historical Foundation** (☎ 920-854-9688, [www.ephraim.org](http://www.ephraim.org)), a village museum, has guided tours highlighting Moravian-Norwegian history. The Pioneer Schoolhouse (1880) is so authentic, you'll think the students just left for recess.

Aside from history and outdoor recreation, Door County has a lively cultural scene. The nation's oldest professional resident summer theatre, **Peninsula Players Theatre** (4351 Peninsula Players Rd, ☎ 920-868-3287, [www.peninsulaplayers.com](http://www.peninsulaplayers.com)) in Fish Creek is part of that scene. The theatre is situated in a cedar forest along the Green Bay shoreline. Arrive early and picnic or enjoy the Beer Garden while viewing spectacular sunsets.

Find your own means of creative expression at **Hands On Art Studio** (3655 Peninsula Players Rd, ☎ 920-868-9311, [www.handsonartstudio.com](http://www.handsonartstudio.com)) in Fish Creek. Sculpt metal, dabble in mosaics, paint or design jewelry in a restored barn. On Friday "Adult Nights," local musicians perform rock and roll. The \$7 cover charge incl food and drink; the cost of your art project is extra (starting at \$3). No need to cram your precious creation into a suitcase; the owners will ship it home for you.

Even though you're crossing "Death's Door" from the safety of the **Washington Island Ferry** (☎ 800-223-2094, [www.wisferry.com](http://www.wisferry.com), \$12/adult, \$6/child) a windbreaker, hat and Dramamine can come in handy during the short ride to **Washington Island**. It's worth the effort. Richly forested with hemlocks, cedars, fir and beech trees, this alpine retreat is home to America's second oldest Icelandic settlement. Nordic culture is especially evident at **Stavkirke** (☎ 920-847-2179, <http://washingtonisland-wi.com/stavkirke-2/>). Resembling a Viking ship, the "Church of Staves" was modeled after one built in Norway in 1150 AD. While visiting the Island, stop by **Schoolhouse Beach**, which is one of only five beaches in the world covered with smooth limestone rocks. You'll gain a lot of local information on the **Cherry Train** (☎ 800-223-2094, [www.cherrytrain.com](http://www.cherrytrain.com), \$15/adult, \$7/child). The narrated tour stops at historic and scenic points of interest.

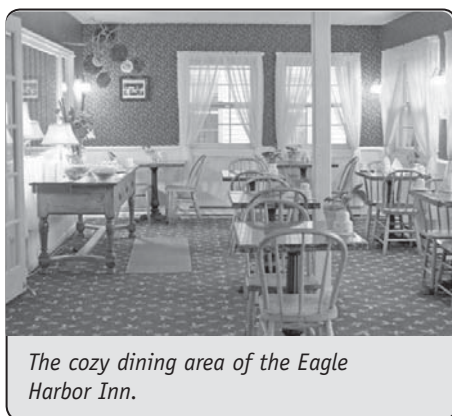
#### WHERE TO STOP & SHOP

**Fish Creek Shops** along historic Main St incl upscale clothing and jewelry boutiques, as well as sophisticated galleries

selling work by regional painters, sculptors, photographers and glass artists.

#### WHERE TO SLEEP

**Luxurious pick:** In Ephraim, the **Eagle Harbor Inn** (9914 Water St, ☎ 800-324-5427, [www.eagleharborinn.com](http://www.eagleharborinn.com)) has the charm of a B&B but with more privacy and free Wi-Fi. Spacious suites have whirlpool tubs, four-poster beds and gas log fireplaces. Innkeepers will recommend certified babysitters for parents needing a night out and will deliver floral or wine baskets for special occasions. Guests in the B&B rooms enjoy hearty complimentary bkfst and afternoon treats in the cozy dining room. Suites have full kitchens (bkfst add'l). The Inn is walking distance to shops and eateries. Rooms from \$86; suites from \$114. Ask about package deals.



*The cozy dining area of the Eagle Harbor Inn.*

**Romantic/Historic pick:** Like its elegant namesake, the intimate **Whistling Swan Inn & Restaurant** (4192 Main St, ☎ 920-868-3442, [www.whistlingsswan.com](http://www.whistlingsswan.com)) in Fish Creek possesses a tranquil beauty. The oldest operating inn on the Peninsula (built in 1887), no detail on the menu or in the renovated seven rooms (three are suites) is overlooked. Executive Chef Brett Weber's artful cuisine draws inspiration from Wisconsin produce, cheeses, fish and wild game. An evening meal by candlelight is enchanting. Rates from \$99-\$190, incl bkfst; has weekend packages and last minute specials.

**Budget-friendly:** If you don't mind no-frills decor, the **Holiday Music Motel** (30 N 1st Ave, ☎ 920-743-5571, [www.holidaymusicmotel.com](http://www.holidaymusicmotel.com)), in downtown Sturgeon Bay is perfect. This restored 1952 motel retains its retro feel. Owned by musicians, the minimalist structure has a recording studio and occasional live music events. From \$39, incl bkfst and free Wi-Fi.

#### WHERE TO EAT

**Foodie Alert:** There's more to Wisconsin than cheese, although fresh cheese curds are definitely worth writing home about. Door County restaurateurs make

good use of the region's farms and fishing grounds.

Worth a trip to the Peninsula tip, **The Shoreline Restaurant** (12747 Hwy 42, ☎ 920-854-2950, [www.theshorelinerestaurant.com](http://www.theshorelinerestaurant.com)) in Gills Rock has superbly prepared fresh local fare for lunch (salads and sandwiches start at \$7) and dinner (try pecan-crusted walleye, \$19). Arrive at sunset for the incredible views.

For a change of pace, visit hip **Wild Tomato Pizza** in Fish Creek (4023 State Hwy 42, 920-868-3095, [www.wildtomatopizza.com](http://www.wildtomatopizza.com)) for hand-tossed pizzas (starting at \$11) baked in a wood-fired oven, sandwiches, family style salads and 10 Belgian beers. The owners use Wisconsin meats and cheeses, showcase art by local kids and donate a portion of profits from their "Donation Creation" pizza to non-profits.

From mid-May-late Oct, head for **Pelletier's** in Fish Creek (4199 Main St, ☎ 920-868-3313, [www.doorcountyyfishboil.com](http://www.doorcountyyfishboil.com)) where a boilmaster prepares your dinner over an open fire while sharing local lore and jokes. Open bkfst, lunch & dinner (fish boil dinner starts at \$14).

#### For Further Information

- **Door County Visitors Bureau:** ☎ 800-527-3529, [www.doorcounty.com](http://www.doorcounty.com), [info@doorcounty.com](mailto:info@doorcounty.com).
- **Door County Library:** 107 S 4th Ave, Sturgeon Bay, ☎ 920-743-6578, [doorcountylibrary.org](http://doorcountylibrary.org).

#### DO WHAT THE LOCALS DO

- ✓ They spend summer afternoons at one of 53 Lake Michigan beaches or at Whitefish Dunes State Park, at little or no cost.
- ✓ They picnic at Cana Island Lighthouse or enjoy an inexpensive camping staycation at one of four Door County state park campgrounds.
- ✓ They eat at the local landmark, Wilson's Restaurant & Ice Cream Parlor ([www.wilsonsicecream.com](http://www.wilsonsicecream.com)). Around for 100+ years, it serves tasty burgers, sandwiches and ice cream while a vintage jukebox plays authentic 45s.
- ✓ They stash visitors at Square Rigger Lodge (6332 Hwy 57, ☎ 920-823-2404, [www.squareriggerlodge.com](http://www.squareriggerlodge.com)) in Jacksonport, on the Lake Michigan shore. Walk to the beach, shops, bakery and a park. The lodge restaurant offers nightly fish boils. Rooms from \$55; cottages from \$170.