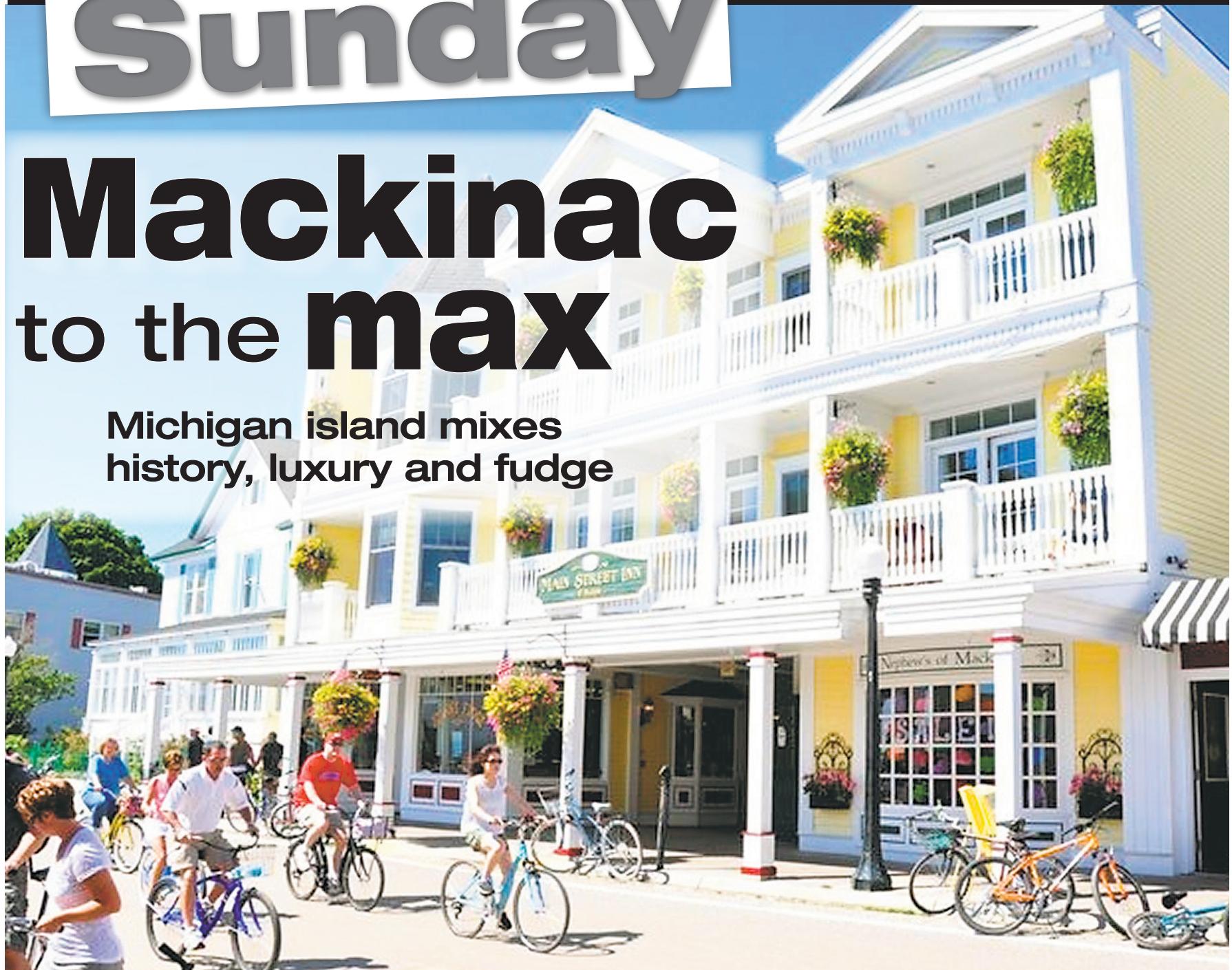


TIME OUT! Sunday

Mackinac to the max

Michigan island mixes
history, luxury and fudge



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GOING PLACES



Horse-drawn carriages are a chief means of transportation on Mackinac Island.

PHOTOS BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Sweet on Mackinac Island

Visitors to Michigan's summer island find history, luxury and plenty of fudge

By Katherine Rodeghier

Daily Herald Correspondent

"Plug your ears!" We dutifully obey and in a moment we are glad as the boom of the cannon reverberates through the crowd at Fort Mackinac.

Cannon firings on the bluff overlooking Lake Huron and antique rifle firings on the parade ground are noisy reminders that history comes to life every day at this 233-year-old fort on Mackinac Island, Mich.

Every summer day, that is. The fort, like most of the island, goes quiet the rest of the year.

During the May to October season, temperatures barely reach into the mid-70s, cooled by breezes off the Great Lakes. The island's 500 horses, the chief means of transportation since motor vehicles are banned, return from their winter quarters on Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The lilacs usually don't bloom until June. Sixty-eight varieties of the flowering trees take root on the island, some nearly 300 years old brought by French settlers.

Father Jacques Marquette founded a mission for the Huron Indians on the island in 1671 and French fur traders followed. Then the British took control, building Fort Mackinac in 1780. The Americans came after the Revolutionary War, then the British took the fort again in the first land engagement in the War of 1812. It went back to the U.S. at war's end and remained an active military installation until 1895.

Now a historic site, costumed interpreters, including soldiers nattily dressed in Prussian-inspired uniforms, walk the grounds and staff the fort's 14 historic buildings. Inside the Officer's Stone Quarters, a Kids' Quarters exhibit gives little ones an interactive area for play. A hologram of a 19th-century doctor inside the Post Hospital explains his diagnosis and treatment of soldiers' ailments — until he is upstaged by a hologram of a modern doctor who gives his assessment of these real, historic

medical cases.

The fort is owned and operated by the Mackinac Island State Park Commission. In 1875, Mackinac Island became America's second national park — after Yellowstone — but the state park has taken it over and now protects more than 80 percent of the land on the island. Just 8.2 miles in circumference, the island is a mix of woodlands, historic sites, rock formations and other natural features with a fringe of shops, restaurants and inns along Main and Market streets.

In the 19th century, Mackinac Island transitioned from a fur trading outpost to a summer resort destination. The first hotel, the Island House, opened in 1852. The Grand Hotel followed in 1887.

"Our guests were the product of the Industrial Revolution," says Robert Tagatz, the Grand's resident historian. "It was a time of unbridled capitalism."

The Victorian era spawned a new leisure class that built summer cottages and took excursions to escape the cities, which Tagatz describes as "miserable places in summer" thanks to a combination of heat, smoke and foul odors. Chicago alone had 70,000 horses stirring up dust and manure.

At the same time, "railroads were spider-webbing across the country," Tagatz says. Until railroads, "people often lived and died within 50 miles of where they were born." The railroad companies needed a network of vacation spots for these newly wealthy people to travel to in their fancy Pullman cars, and Mackinac was chief among them thanks to the luxury steamships then plying the Great Lakes.

Transportation companies built palatial hotels across the country, often operating them at a loss, just to promote their business. By 1904 there were 1,200 of these wood-frame hotels in the U.S.; now about a dozen remain, Tagatz says.

Then, as now, the Grand Hotel operated seasonally and guests often stayed for two months in the summer. Musicians were brought



The Grand Hotel will be 126 years old this July and is one of the few white-frame hotels of the Victorian era remaining in America.



Cannons at Fort Mackinac overlook Lake Huron and are periodically fired for visitors' enjoyment.

in from the mainland to entertain. "These people were romantics. They wanted fantasy, escape," Tagatz says. There were tennis matches, teas, egg-rolling contests on the lawn and lectures by notables, including Mark Twain. Women often had five changes of

clothing a day. Then came Prohibition. Alcohol arrived illegally from Canada. Maids would transport it from the dock to the Grand in baby carriages so as not to offend "the fine

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If you go

Getting there: Mackinaw City is about 430 miles from suburban Chicago. Delta Air Lines and Lakeshore Express Aviation have flights from Chicago to Pellston Regional Airport, about 20 minutes from Mackinaw City. Three ferry companies provide service to Mackinac Island from Mackinaw City or St. Ignace.

Where to stay:

- The 385-room Grand Hotel is a Mackinac Island landmark perched on a bluff above the town. Standard full American plan rates (including meals) start around \$250 per person, but there are several meal plans and packages to choose from, including Family Value Added Days, summer and fall Wine Weekend, Girlfriends Getaway Weekend and Labor Day Jazz Weekend with performances by Ramsey Lewis and Branford Marsalis; (800) 334-7263, grandhotel.com.

- Grand Hotel operates several restaurants in addition to its main dining room. The Woods has a Tudor/Bavarian feel and is located in the interior of the island. The Gate House is a casual restaurant and bar along the street between the hotel and the town. The Jockey Club is located on the first tee of The Jewel golf course. Grandhotel.com/dining

- The Tea Room at Fort Mackinac is open for lunch, serving soups, salads, sandwiches, pizza and desserts. Dine outside on a bluff overlooking the strait or inside in the former Officers' Stone Quarters. Must pay fort admission fee to enter, (906) 847-3328, mackinacparks.com.

- Mission Point Resort is a casual resort right on the lakefront. Summer rates from \$169 per night; (800) 833-7711, missionpoint.com.



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Blockhouses are among the 14 historic buildings visitors can explore at Fort Mackinac.

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sensibilities of guests taking their morning constitutional" on the hotel's famous long front porch, Tagatz says. There were secret rooms hidden by swiveling walls behind which the liquor flowed around blackjack and roulette tables. As a publicity stunt, the hotel paid police to raid them because once news of a raid hit the newspapers, the hotel's occupancy would shoot up.

The Mackinac Bridge connecting Lower Michigan with its Upper Peninsula opened in 1957 sparking a new era in tourism to Mackinac Island. Movie stars came to film, including Esther Williams who swam in the Grand's pool.

Nostalgia reigned, and still does. The Grand Hotel remains not only a place to stay on Mackinac Island, but an attraction in itself. Non-guests pay \$10 just to walk the grounds and have a meal in the main dining room where diners are still required to "dress" for dinner.

After touring the fort and

the Grand, the island's other pastimes include visits to two butterfly sanctuaries where hundreds of the colorful insects are shipped from around the world. Horse-drawn carriage tours — the drivers of the fringed surreys giving a corny commentary — are a must-do, as is shopping for fudge. More than a dozen fudge shops dot the storefronts of the town, the gooey sweets cooling on marble slabs.

Without cars, getting around on the island means walking or renting a bike from your hotel or one of several businesses close to the ferry docks. Stables also organize trail rides and have horses for individual hire. If you're handy enough with the reins you might take out a horse-drawn carriage on your own. How romantically Victorian; ladies, pack your parasol.

• *Information for this article was gathered during a research trip to Mackinac Island sponsored by the Mackinac Island Tourism Bureau and the Grand Hotel.*