

Traverse City's triple threat: wine, sand, shopping

Naperville pioneer put Michigan tourist area on the map

By Katherine Rodeghier
Daily Herald Correspondent

travel

Capt. Harry Boardman had a grand plan. In 1847, the Naperville native set out to seek his fortune cruising up Lake Michigan to Grand Traverse Bay where he purchased land and built a sawmill. He left his son in charge of what promised to be a thriving enterprise shipping lumber south to build Chicago.

But the lumber didn't arrive. According to local legend, when the captain returned to investigate, he found his son playing cards with his pals instead of sawing logs. Outraged, he sold his business leaving little behind but his name on the river flowing through what became the thriving settlement of Traverse City, Michigan.

No matter. The sawmills are long gone. The warehouses and fish canneries that replaced them are turning into tony boutiques and hip nightclubs. Even the state mental hospital, once one of the region's biggest employers, has gone condo with a marketplace of shops and restaurants.

The biggest business in Traverse City today? Tourism. Small wonder, with 181 miles of Lake Michigan and Grand Traverse Bay shoreline, 149 inland lakes and dozens of beaches, it's a summer playground. And its gentle hillsides and moderate microclimate make it ideal for producing some of Michigan's finest wines.

But first, cherries

Shortly after Capt. Boardman



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
A former mental hospital has been converted to shops, restaurants, offices and condos in the massive redevelopment project The Village at Grand Traverse Commons.



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Old fishing shanties in Leland, Mich., have been preserved and rehabbed as shops and galleries in the Fishtown historic area.

departed, a Presbyterian missionary planted a cherry tree on what became known as Old Mission Peninsula. Against all expectations, the tree not only survived, it thrived, and more followed. Today 75 percent of America's tart cherries come from within 100 miles of Traverse City, and its annual National Cherry Festival (July 1-8 this year) draws half a million visitors to more than 150 activities: parades, an air show, concerts and a cherry pie-eating contest.

Turns out the light, sandy soil good for cherries also is good for grapes and the deep, cool waters of lakes and bays add moisture to the air and take the edge off extreme temperatures. It also helps that Traverse City straddles the 45th parallel, the same latitude as the Bordeaux region of France.

Growers planted the first vinifera grapes in 1974, bringing Old World varieties to Traverse City. Now more than 40 vineyards and wineries can be found, most in two growing regions, the Leelanau Peninsula and Old Mission Peninsula.

Old Mission extends 18 miles into Grand Traverse Bay and often measures less than a mile across so its vineyards receive the benefit of lake-effect weather. Drive along its sharp spine and wineries beckon with tours and tastings along both sides of the ridge.

Mari Vineyards built a



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Massive bluffs of sand mark 64 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore near Traverse City, Mich.

3,000-square-foot cave to keep its Italian-style wines at an optimum 55 degrees. Named for the owner's Italian grandmother, the winery opened its tasting room last year constructing furnishings from walnut, spalted maple and wood from ash trees felled by the emerald ash borer. Behind the tasting bar a mosaic of 14,000 wine corks replicates the view of the bay just outside.

Brys Estate Vineyard & Winery turned an abandoned cherry orchard into rows of grape vines and a Secret Garden of lavender. Its Upper Deck, a welcoming spot to sample wine and nibble on cheese and charcuterie, extends to its Bridge Above the Vines for a view of chardonnay grapes below and the bay on the horizon. The winery's artisan 2007 Pinot Noir became the first red wine in Michigan to medal at the International Wine & Spirit Competition, one

of 450 awards Brys has won since opening in 2005.

Black Star Farms has tasting rooms on Old Mission and on the Leelanau Peninsula where it began in 1998. The entrance to this original location resembles a terraced amphitheater of vines positioned to catch maximum sunlight and bay breezes. The original farmhouse now operates as a 10-room bed-and-breakfast and the farm's Hearth & Vine Café makes a wood-fired pizza favored by chef Mario Batali who has a summer home nearby.

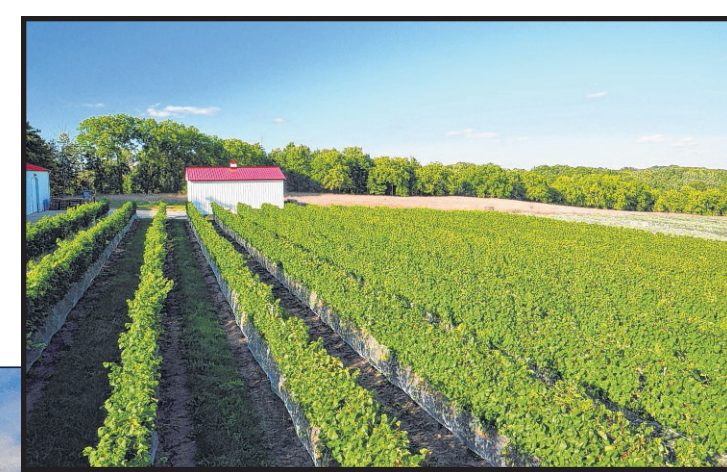
The 45 North Vineyard and Winery takes its name from the latitude that runs right through the property's Leelanau location. A three-mile Traverse the Latitude walking trail meanders through the vineyard before ending at a tasting room. Its Western theme is in deference to the owner's mother who

used to ride show horses. Ten varieties grow on 35 sustainably farmed acres here, and the winery also makes cider and fruit wines, including a sweet, top-selling peach cremant.

Playing in the sand

Beaches line Lake Michigan and Grand Traverse Bay, as well as a few inland lakes. Closest to downtown Traverse City, Clinch Park Beach stretches 1,500 feet along the shore with a splash pad for little ones, a restaurant and picnic tables. To the west, Volleyball Beach attracts players to courts where the World Cup beach volleyball tournament was held in 2005. East Bay Beach Park has a long, shallow entry into the bay, good for families with small children.

On the Lake Michigan shore, Empire Village Beach boasts spectacular sunsets and the impressive Empire Bluffs. Good



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Views of vineyards can be seen from above at the Bridge Above the Vines at Brys Estate Vineyard & Winery near Traverse City, Mich.



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Mari Vineyards, on the Old Mission Peninsula near Traverse City, Mich., is known for its Italian-style red wines but pours its share of riesling, too.

distraught mother and turned her into the dune at Sleeping Bear Point overlooking North and South Manitou Islands, her cubs. The islands remain undeveloped with no commercial services. Backpackers and campers reach them in summer by ferry.

On the mainland, visitors can climb to the top of one designated dune, an arduous trip with no shelter or water. Hikers wanting an easier experience can make a 3.5-mile round trip on the Dunes Trail or the 2.8-mile loop around Sleeping Bear Point, two of more than 100 miles of trails in the park. Many visitors are content to explore Sleeping Bear by car on Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive wandering 7.1 miles through the park with views of the dunes, Glen Lake and Lake Michigan. The road remains open from late April to early November, weather permitting.

Insane variety of shopping

The ferry to the Manitou islands departs from Fishtown, a historic section of Leland, Michigan, where commercial fishing once flourished. The old fishing shanties and net-drying sheds have been restored and now house shops, galleries and food vendors. Two fish tugs, the Janice Sue and the Joy, have been rehabbed by the Fishtown Preservation Society and sent out

Traverse City, Michigan

Visitor information: Traverse City Tourism, 101 W. Grandview Parkway, (800) 872-8377, traversecity.com/

Getting there: Traverse City is about 340 miles from suburban Chicago. One-hour nonstop flights land at the modern Cherry Capital Airport.

Where to stay: Hotels, resorts, condos and cottages, the tourist office can direct you to all. New to Traverse City is the Hotel Indigo, 263 W. Grandview Parkway, (231) 932-0500, ihg.com

fishing again.

Downtown Traverse City has 150 shops and restaurants, the largest concentration along Front Street. It keeps its small-town feel with an old movie theater and 19th-century buildings housing small, independent retailers: a toy store, a hobby shop and a bookstore. At Cherry Republic shoppers can sample almost 200 cherry products, taste cherry wine and have lunch, a pastry or a slice of pie in its cafe.

Perhaps the most unusual shopping area lies just west of downtown in a former mental asylum. Stretching for a quarter mile, the Victorian main building constructed of cream brick stands in 480 acres of wooded parkland. After the hospital closed in 1989, one of the largest mixed-use historic redevelopment projects in the nation transformed it into high-end condos and office suites at The Village at Grand Traverse Commons. The Mercato on the ground level contains a variety of small shops: florist, furrier, art gallery, bookstore, jeweler and clothing store. Restaurants include PepeNero occupying the space of the hospital's kitchen with original black and white tile floor. A farmers market operates inside the Mercato in winter, outside on the Piazza in summer. The hospital's old outbuildings also have new uses. A winery and coffee roaster run out of the former laundry, a restaurant has taken over a potato-peeling shed and the old fire station has become a brick-oven bakery.

A still-emerging shopping area, the Warehouse District, got a boost recently when a new pedestrian bridge over the Boardman River linked it to downtown Traverse City. The formerly blighted maze of alleys and neglected warehouses has been repurposed as Traverse City's hip new neighborhood. The Hotel Indigo opened last year joining galleries, clubs and boutiques. Not far from where Capt. Boardman's sawmill once stood, friends meet up to while away the day in the BLK/MKT coffee shop and Workshop Brewing Company, maybe even pulling out a deck of cards to pass the time.

The captain would not be pleased.

• Information for this article was gathered during a writers' conference sponsored by Traverse City Tourism.