



RIVER RIDE

St. Charles Riverboat Cruises sets out on daily sightseeing trips (630/584-2334; stcriverboats.com).

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River-town retreats

An hour west of the Loop, the **Fox River** provides a soothing backdrop to towns brimming with indulgent eats, stores housed in historical homes and posh places to stay.

THE COCOA-COLOR AWNING and mocha-painted bricks outside downtown Geneva's All Chocolate Kitchen hint at some of the delicacies inside: dense truffles rolled in smoky ancho chili powder and thick slices of cake ribboned with chocolate frosting. But despite the name, All Chocolate Kitchen offers more than the dark stuff, including a mellow cup of coffee brewed in a Victorian-esque beaker.

That variety of riches serves as a snapshot of the pleasures infusing the Fox River Valley, a laid-back retreat for urbanites. Three towns along the winding Fox River offer restful diversions with a nod to history: Catch a household name playing at St. Charles' historic Arcada Theater, or just 3 miles south, explore Geneva's shopping district, where boutiques fill preserved storefronts. And just minutes from Oswego's charming Main Street—with brick-paved sidewalks—is a family-run winery. Whether you have only a few hours or time enough to carve out a getaway, read on for some of these towns' best stops.

Trip guide

What to do

Arcada Theater It still feels like 1926 in this restored vaudeville palace with a vintage pipe organ, but live performances feature today's headliners. In St. Charles (630/962-7000; oshows.com).

Fine Line Creative Arts Center A renovated dairy barn in St. Charles houses a nonprofit arts school for weaving, knitting, pottery making and more (630/584-9443; fineline.org).

Fox River Trail A paved

OUT & ABOUT FOX RIVER VALLEY

path for biking, walking and jogging runs along the river through the valley. Find bike rentals in all the valley's communities; Sammy's Bikes is right on the trail in St. Charles (630/444-0690; sammysbikes.com).

Fox Valley Winery Enjoy daily tastings of sweet Niagara and dry Petit Syrah, and shop for works by local artists. This Oswego winery also holds tours on Saturdays (630/554-0404; foxvalleywinery.com).

Otter Cove Aquatic Park Float your way down a lazy river or scream down a water slide in St. Charles (630/513-4377; ottercove.org).

Pottawatomie Park From May through mid-October, you can ride a 90-passenger paddle-wheeler excursion boat or rent a canoe or pedal boat. This St. Charles park also has picnic shelters, seasonal miniature golf and a swimming pool (630/513-6200; stcparks.org).

Where to eat

Fiora's In Geneva's shopping district, patrons enjoy artisanal cheese plates and pan-seared duck breast inside a charming yellow house turned restaurant (630/262-1317; fioras.com).

The Village Grind Mix with locals in the warren of cozy rooms inside this Oswego spot that serves coffee, pastries and, in summer, gelato (630/554-6678).

Where to shop

Aggati Shoes, bags, jewelry and accessories, some imported from Italy, draw shoppers to Geneva (630/232-1700; aggati.com).

All Chocolate Kitchen Quality chocolates, gelato and sorbetto shine in a Geneva shop. Check out the life-size statues and sculptures (including Neil Armstrong)—all made from chocolate

(630/232-2395; allchocolatekitchen.com).

Little Traveler Search 36 rooms packed with apparel, antiques, toys, gourmet items and Vera Bradley bags in this Victorian mansion. A cafe serves breakfast and lunch (630/232-4200; littletraveler.com).

The Olive Mill Sample 35 olive oils and 25 balsamic vinegars, then take a bottle with you. Also: olive tapenades and olive soaps. In Geneva (630/262-0210; olivemillgeneva.com).

Past Basket Custom Kitchens In Geneva, shop for artisan-made glass, pottery and linens in a bright showroom (630/232-4191; pastbasket.com).

Prairie Stitches Quilt Shoppe Browse a large selection of quilting fabrics, sewing notions and patterns in Oswego (630/554-9701; prairiestitchesquiltshop.com).

Town House Books and Cafe This independent store in St. Charles sells a variety of books. The attached cafe serves breakfast, lunch and Sunday brunch (630/584-8600; townhousebooks.com).

Where to stay

Herrington Inn and Spa A former creamery along the Fox River in Geneva now houses a luxurious inn. Rooms have fireplaces, whirlpool tubs and wet bars. Turndown service includes milk and cookies. From \$259 (630/208-7433; herringtoninn.com).

Hotel Baker The riverside hotel in St. Charles opened in 1928 and is on the National Register of Historic Places. From \$179 (800/284-0110; hotelbaker.com). **ML**

For more information, contact the St. Charles Convention and Visitors Bureau (800/777-4373; visitstcharles.com), the Geneva Chamber of Commerce (630/232-6060; genevachamber.com) and the village of Oswego (630/554-3618; oswegoil.org).