

The Gem of Northwest Illinois

Active and passive pursuits draw summer visitors to Galena and Jo Daviess County.

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Like a leaf that refuses to lie flat, the northwest corner of Illinois curls upward, a green patchwork quilt of rolling hills and woodlands sliced by canyons and dotted with small towns where antique shops and boutiques beckon. An old stagecoach trail leads travelers past farm fields and wineries to lovingly preserved 19th-century buildings that today are shops, museums, or bed-and-breakfasts.

And just a few miles before the road reaches the bluffs of the Mississippi River where the borders of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois meet, it descends into Galena, Ill., the largest city in Jo Daviess County and a magnet for visitors.

Galena draws most of the attention in this corner of Illinois, with more than 100 storefronts along its meandering Main Street and trolley tours of historical sites. Summer visitors also venture into the countryside for active pursuits. They zip through trees on canopy tours, float over lakes and links in a hot air balloon, slide down the face of a bluff on wheeled sleds, and hike along river-carved canyons and past ancient burial mounds.

BOOMTOWN OUTSTRIPPED CHICAGO

It's hard to imagine that Galena, population about 3,500, once exceeded the size of Chicago. But in 1845, when local lead ore mines reached a peak production that supplied more than 80 percent of the lead in the United States, Galena's population topped 14,000. It was at one time the largest river port between St. Louis, Mo., and St. Paul, Minn. Fortunes were made as elegant homes were built in the styles of the day: Italianate, Second Empire, Gothic Revival, Queen Anne, and Greek Revival. A preservationist movement in the 1960s saved so many buildings that more than three-quarters appear on the National Register of Historic Places.

The 50th annual tour of Galena's historical homes will be Sept. 23 and 24 this year, but summer visitors can pick up a brochure for a self-guided walking tour at the Galena Welcome Center housed in

the Old Market House State Historic Site. Two trolley companies also offer tours, and on summer weekends, an actor portraying Gen. Ulysses S. Grant leads a guided walking tour.

Grant was one of nine Civil War generals from Galena. To honor his service as the Union's commanding general, Grant's fellow citizens gave him a stately Italianate mansion where he and his family resided until he became the 18th president of the United States. Now a museum, the home contains original furnishings.

Other historical buildings in Galena include its oldest, Dowling House, an 1826 trading post and residence. The Belvedere is an 1857 mansion containing Victorian furnishings, items from showman Liberace's estate, and green velvet drapes from the set of *Gone with the Wind*, the very same that Scarlett O'Hara pulled down to make a dress to impress Rhett Butler.

When they aren't admiring historical buildings, Galena visitors shop in its galleries, gift, and specialty stores. They might stop in at the Galena Brewing Company on North Main Street for a brewery tour, a drink, or bite to eat. Down the street, One Eleven Main (AAA Two Diamonds) specializes in menu items emphasizing regionally sourced meats, cheese, and produce.

A short drive into the country leads to fine dining at the Goldmoor Inn where beef Wellington always appears on the menu. Styled like an English country manor, the inn has 18 luxury guest suites, including two log cabins and three cottages.

OUT IN THE COUNTY

Farther away from downtown Galena, two resorts offer lodging and a long roster of summer activities.

Chestnut Mountain Resort turns from winter skiing to summer fun. Its Alpine Slide puts visitors on wheeled sleds for a ride down a curvy hard-surface track stretching 2,050 feet down to the banks of the Mississippi River. For a different perspective, the resort rents



Hot air balloon passengers float over Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa and have a view of three states.

Left: Mackenzie Arthur launched Long Hollow Canopy Tours last summer in the countryside near Elizabeth, Ill. The experience includes crossing six ziplines and a 140-foot Sky Bridge.

Below: At Chestnut Mountain Resort, visitors get a lesson on the lawn before heading off on Segway tours of the grounds.



mountain bikes, offers guided Segway tours, and sells rides on its Soaring Eagle zipline.

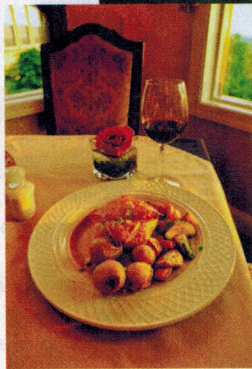
For a longer zipline adventure, Long Hollow Canopy Tours in woodlands outside the village of Elizabeth take thrill-seekers on a journey across six ziplines reaching heights of 75 feet. The course begins with a 15-foot ascent to the first platform, crosses a 140-foot Sky Bridge, and ends with a 40-foot rappel to the ground. The longest zipline takes riders 1,230 feet through the trees.

At Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa, there are four golf courses to master. Or soar above the county on a hot air balloon tour with Galena on the Fly, which meets participants at Eagle Ridge for sunrise or sunset rides.



Left: The Goldmoor Inn was built in the style of an English country manor just outside of Galena.

Below left: Visitors and Goldmoor Inn guests may have dinner in the inn's dining room. Reservations are suggested.



Those who prefer to keep their feet firmly planted on the ground head to Apple River Canyon State Park for hiking on five trails that show off the region's natural features. Jo Daviess County lies within the Driftless Area of the upper Midwest, spared by the last ad-

vance of Ice Age glaciers that flattened the surrounding land. The landscape comprises high bluffs, rolling hills, and canyons carved in rock 450 million years old along the Galena and Apple Rivers. In the 297-acre state park, mosses and lichens cover cliffs and canyons of limestone, dolomite, and shale.

Horseshoe Mound Preserve, a scenic overlook under the care of the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation, offers panoramic views and hiking trails that wind through the 40-acre property. The foundation also manages the 85-acre Casper Bluff Land &

Water Reserve where trails lead past burial mounds of native people who inhabited the area between A.D. 700 and A.D. 1000. About 20 mounds can be seen while walking the trails here.

SHOPPING AND SIPPING

The agricultural communities that sprang up around Jo Daviess County brim with small-town charm and hold a trove of treasures for lovers of antiques.

Just outside Stockton, shoppers wander through room after room in an old farmhouse open for business as Antiques Etcetera. Household goods that might have found a place in grandma's kitchen grace the shelves along with antique toys and glassware. In Elizabeth, an old school has been transformed into an antique mall. The Elizabeth's Grand Antique Co. has more than 28,000 square feet. Browse through racks of vintage clothing, shelves of collect-

ibles, and displays of jewelry and furniture.

The Upper Mississippi Valley wine region, the nation's largest viticulture area, takes in four states and encompasses Jo Daviess County. Though large in landmass, it's small in wine production with family-run vineyards of just a few acres. Visitors are welcome to visit the four wineries in the county — Rocky Waters Vineyard/Winery, Fergedaboutit Vineyard and Winery, Massbach Ridge Winery, and Galena Cellars Vineyard and Winery — for tastings. For visitors who can't tear themselves away from the shops in Galena, Massbach Ridge and Galena Cellars also operate tasting rooms right on Main Street.

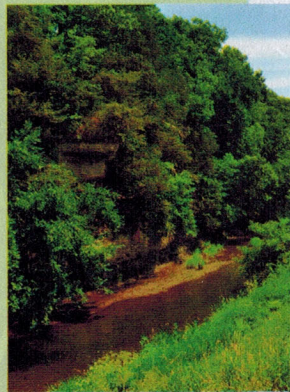
Families or couples, golf buddies or girlfriends on a getaway all find something to love about summer in Galena and Jo Daviess County. •

Katherine Rodeghier is a contributor from Western Springs, Ill.

BEFORE YOU GO

For more information, contact Visit Galena at (815) 776-9200, or visitgalena.org.

To visit Galena, first stop by your nearest AAA service office for maps, reservations, and TourBook® guides. A list of offices to serve you is on page 6. Visit AAA.com/travel for a TripTik® Travel Planner.



The Apple River cuts a path through Apple River Canyon State Park.