



Sleigh rides travel through orchards and along old logging trails at Lautenbach's Orchard Country Winery & Market in Door County, Wis.

JON JAROSH/DOOR COUNTY VISITOR BUREAU

# Wintering in Wisconsin

Embrace snow, cold at 4 of the state's top resorts

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER  
Chicago Tribune

Midwest snowbirds fly south for the winter, but if you can't or aren't willing to join them, consider a trip north instead. These four cozy Wisconsin properties welcome winter guests, and their staffs can steer you to things to do on-site or nearby. Bonus: off-season savings and fewer crowds.

**Eagle Harbor Inn:** Off the main road in the Door County community of Ephraim, this 5-acre property began as a cottage resort in the 1930s. Owners sold off the cottages in the 1990s and built six houses containing one- and two-bedroom suites to complement a nine-room bed-and-breakfast in the main lodge. In keeping with Ephraim's architecture codes, the all-white buildings resemble clapboard farmhouses. Old MacDonald never had it so good. Deep whirlpool baths, two-way fireplaces, a living room, a dining area and a kitchen make the suites comfy places to hole up for winter. The Commons building houses an indoor pool and sauna.

Afternoon treats, such as hot cider and homemade cake, are complimentary in the inn, and the staff will make reservations at Door County restaurants that remain open after temperatures drop. During summer you might wait two hours for breakfast at Al Johnson's Swedish Restaurant, but in winter, chances are you'll walk right in. Don't expect to see the iconic goats on the restaurant's grass roof, however. The beasts stay in their barn when it's cold.

The inn offers a Door County Wine Trail package with passes for tastings. At Lautenbach's Orchard Country Winery & Market, you can take a horse-drawn sleigh ride. If beer is more to your liking, order a plank of seven samples at Shipwrecked Brewery, Restaurant and Inn with your lunch or dinner.

Summer is peak season in Door County, but winter visitors find plenty to do, including guided snowshoe hikes at The Ridges Sanctuary or a tour on a heated trolley, with a sleigh ride and lunch included, from Door County Trolley. The Door County Maritime Museum stays open year-round, and you can create your own art at the Hands On Art Studio.

The town of Sister Bay has a community ice-skating rink with skate rentals. Four Door County parks have trails for winter sports, such as cross-country skiing, snowmobiling and snowshoeing. Equip-



KATHERINE RODEGHIER/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

The Osthoff, a resort in Elkhart Lake, Wis., becomes a blaze of white after a fresh snowfall.



JON JAROSH/DOOR COUNTY VISITOR BUREAU

Guided snowshoe hikes take visitors through The Ridges Sanctuary in Door County, Wis.



KOHLER CO.

Winter guests go cross-country skiing in Destination Kohler's 500-acre River Wildlife preserve.

ment can be rented from local outfitters. Pull in whitefish or trout on an ice-fishing charter.

On the first weekend in February, the communities of Fish Creek and Bailey's Harbor celebrate cold weather with winter festivals.

**Eagle Harbor Inn, 9914 Water St., Ephraim, 800-324-5427, [www.eagleharborinn.com](http://www.eagleharborinn.com); Door County Visitors Bureau, 800-527-3529, [www.doorcounty.com](http://www.doorcounty.com)**

**The American Club:** Who knew a bathtub would lead to such a luxurious resort? In 1883, John Michael Kohler enameled the inside of a cast-iron horse trough and put legs on it. Voila! The claw-footed bathtub was born, and the Kohler Co., maker of innovative bathroom fixtures, had found its footing.

In 1918, the company built a rooming house across the street from its factory to house its immigrant workers. The brick Tudor structure became a resort in 1981, earned a place on the National Register of Historic Places and soon rose to five-star status. The American Club's 240

guest rooms in American heritage decor boast bathrooms with soaking tubs and rain showers with mood lighting, all made by Kohler, of course. The Immigrant, its four-star restaurant, serves contemporary American cuisine in six dining spaces named for the European heritage of Kohler's first settlers. You'll find breakfast and a bountiful Sunday brunch in The Wisconsin Room, once the workers' mess hall.

The American Club remains the signature piece in the Destination Kohler resort complex, which includes the five-star Kohler Waters Spa in the Carriage House next door. A 2015 update added more coed spaces to meet demand of couples and groups for private spaces together.

You won't find a pool in The American Club, but the resort's Sports Core has one, along with indoor tennis courts and a fitness center. Golf on four championship courses draws guests in warm weather, but the resort's 500-acre River Wildlife preserve welcomes the cold with cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and trap shooting. Frozen Wood Lake makes a



KOHLER CO.

The five-star American Club was once a rooming house for workers of the Kohler Co. factory in Kohler, Wis.

great venue for ice skating, if you have your own skates. The American Club courtyard sets up for curling and bowling on ice.

Foodies should mark their calendars for Wisconsin Food Favorites, Jan. 29-31, with a dinner, tastings and cooking demonstrations proving the state has more than brats and beer. The In Celebration of Chocolate festival, Feb. 19-21, offers those with a sweet tooth dinners, food pairings and cocoa-themed demonstrations.

**The American Club, 419 Highland Drive, Kohler, 855-444-2838, [www.destinationkohler.com](http://www.destinationkohler.com)**

**The Osthoff:** The big, white building stretching along 500 feet of Elkhart Lake waterfront looks like a vintage property, but it's only 20 years old. Otto Osthoff built a hotel on the site in 1886 for travelers of the Gilded Age, and it continued to flourish in the 1920s, when casinos and speak-easies operated openly in Elkhart Lake, a gangster hideout. Developers acquired the land and in the 1990s built a new condo resort in the style of a grand old hotel. With 245 one- to three-bedroom suites, each with full kitchen, fireplace, dining area and living room, the Osthoff makes a great, hideout for couples and families.

Its spa, Aspira, meaning "inspired, by spirit," has a feng shui design incorporating a hammam, candlelit meditation sanctuary and spa suites with whirlpool bath, fireplace and two

massage tables.

L'Ecole de la Maison cooking school offers classes ranging from two-hour workshops to two-day courses taught by a professional chef. French desserts, anyone?

Bring your own skates to carve figure eights on the resort's pond. You can rent snowshoes at Quit Qui Océ Golf Course nearby, and find dog-sledding and cross-country and downhill skiing a short distance away.

Elkhart Lake's Schnee Days — that's German for snow — celebrates the cold season Jan. 29-31 with dog-sled demonstrations, a 5-mile run and a chili cook-off, while the Pig-in-the-Ice Festival designates Feb. 20 as a day for snowmobile races, an ice-fishing tournament, fireworks and a pig roast. You can make your own dinner the 19th-century way on an open hearth or wood-burning stove Jan. 23 and Feb. 13 at Wade House in nearby Greenbush, and visit the historic home for horse-drawn sleigh rides Saturdays and Sundays Jan. 2 to Feb. 21.

**The Osthoff, 101 Osthoff Ave., Elkhart Lake, 855-876-3399, [www.osthoff.com](http://www.osthoff.com); Elkhart Lake Tourism, 877-355-4278, [www.elkhartlake.com](http://www.elkhartlake.com)**

**Canoe Bay:** Hidden among 300 acres of private hardwood forest down back roads from the small town of Chetek, this quiet hideaway is more retreat than recreation-focused resort. And don't let the bait shops and bars in the

surrounding North Woods fool you. The only Midwest lodging in the Paris-based Relais & Chateau group of small luxury hotels, it took the Midwest's No. 1 spot in the Readers' Choice awards at Conde Nast Traveler magazine in 2015.

No kids, no pets — the 27 adults-only rooms and cottages are all about cocooning, especially in winter.

Cottages range from the 400-square-foot Escape, to the Edgewood, at 2,000 square feet plus a 1,500-square-foot wraparound deck. Most have roomy sitting areas, stone fireplaces and whirlpool baths big enough for two, and the fanciest come with spa bathrooms and steam showers. Breakfast arrives at your door in a wooden box designed by a local Mennonite woodworker. Owners bought the property, an abandoned religious retreat, in the early 1990s and remodeled the old camp buildings as the inn and the lodge before constructing the cottages, many of them inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie style with strong horizontal lines, cantilevered roofs and natural materials of wood and stone.

You can take every meal in your room if you feel like nesting, but the Dining Room serves a multicourse dinner complemented by artisanal beers and wine from a list blessed by Wine Spectator. Book ahead for a seat at the Chef's Table in the kitchen or the table for two in the Wine Cellar. You won't find a bar or hard liquor on the property.

You can spend your day curled up with a book in the library, work out in the fitness room or relax with an in-room massage. Should you choose to venture outdoors, you have free use of snowshoes to explore trails on the property. Off property, you'll be directed to cross-country (bring your own equipment) and downhill ski areas nearby.

**Canoe Bay, W16065 Hogback Road, Chetek, 715-924-4594, [www.canoebay.com](http://www.canoebay.com)**

Katherine Rodeghier is a freelance reporter.