

MIDWEST DESTINATIONS

Harbor Country: The easiest weekend getaway

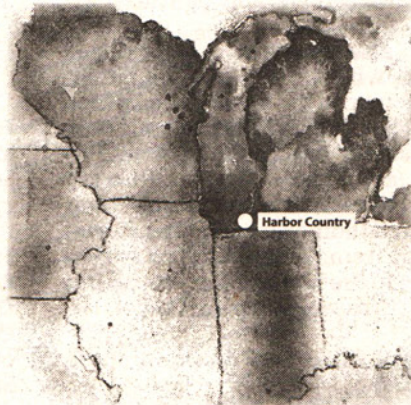


Tribune photo by Terrence Antonio James

SUMMERTIME, SUMMERTIME: The beaches in Michigan's Harbor Country provide their own kind of escape.

In a nutshell

It's only an hour-and-a-half away, and it's got more wineries (some of whose product is a bit underripe, but still ...) than you can shake a corkscrew at. Replete with all the typical vacation activities—antiquing, beachcombing, lakeside dining, et al—Harbor Country, Mich. (a.k.a. "The Hamptons of the Midwest"), fosters the easiest weekend getaway a Chicagoan could hope for. We love Three Oaks for its tiny arts community and silent film festival; we love New Buffalo for its beaches and B&Bs. And on the way home, boy, do we love Michigan City for its outlet mall.



Population: 162,500

Location: Southwestern Michigan, about 70 miles east of the Loop

Recommended for ... Families and couples

When to go: Summer for the shore, fall for the vineyards

The Tribune's 6 reasons to go

By Lauren Viera

Tribune staff reporter

1 THE SHORE

Soft, sandy beaches. Dozens of dunes. A pint-size boardwalk. And thin enough crowds to enjoy it all. In the time it takes to find parking at North Avenue Beach, you could be here instead.

2 THE WINERIES

It's not exactly Napa. Heck, it's not even Sonoma. But Berrien County's dozens of wineries offer fans of the juice—and "Sideways"-esque tasting trips—the chance to troll the Lake Michigan Shore Wine Trail with a dignified sense of purpose.

3 THREE OAKS

It's got a beautifully restored theater with an annual silent film festival; tasteful art galleries, including a satellite location of River North's Aaron Packer Gallery; and the cutest high-tea venue (Viola Cafe) this side of the Drake. This village of 1,800 folks is home to a cycling club (Three Oaks Spokes) that has charted back roads and trails all over Berrien County.

4 FOUR WINDS CASINO RESORT

A multi-million dollar casino plopped in the wilderness outside a town of 2,200? It sounds a lot worse than it is. And it looks even better. Top-notch restaurants, luxury hotel suites and gambling to boot—it's worth a stop. 866-494-6371; www.fourwindscasino.com

5 JACKSON'S FRUIT STAND

There are enough U-pick farms in this county to dirty your hands year-round. But when wading through a bramble for blueberries isn't on the agenda, Jackson's is the saving grace thanks to a plethora of seasonal fruits, vegetables and flowers, plus cheeses and meats.

6 THE SUNSETS

Unless you've got a trip to the California coast in your future, this is your best bet for seeing the sun set on the water. It's worth the drive alone.

■ For a review of New Buffalo's Marina Grand Resort hotel, see page 11.

IN THE WEB EDITION: For more on Harbor Country—and 18 other top Midwestern attractions in our new Web guide to weekend getaways—go to chicagotribune.com/midwest.