Step back in time to a land where cherry blossoms flourish, lighthouses stand tall, boutiques warmly welcome shoppers, art is a focal point, outdoor activities are never far away, and the scenery seems straight off a postcard.

THIS IS DOOR COUNTY, and it’s old-fashioned in all the right ways.
AT WATER’S EDGE
Perhaps the biggest draw to Door County is all that shoreline. Whether you just gaze at it from afar, lounge beachside, or go all in with a swim or boat ride, the water is the always-present star of the show. To help keep the boats safe that ventured here in the 19th and early 20th centuries, 11 lighthouses were constructed. Today, they add beauty and intrigue to the coast. Cana Island Lighthouse, Eagle Bluff Lighthouse, North Pierhead Lighthouse, Cave Point Lighthouse, and Baileys Harbor Range Lights are the easiest to visit, and worth it for the views.

Another amazing coastal feature: sunrise and sunset. You’ll begin and end each day with spectacular colors bursting on the horizon. It’s not uncommon for a group of people to clap while watching the sun disappear behind the water, as if it were a show put on just for them.

VERY CHERRY
As one of the top cherry-producing regions in the U.S., Door County is packed with 2,000 acres of orchards. The beautiful blooms usually make their appearance in mid- to late May, while the fruit is ready for the picking at one of many u-pick farms in mid-July to early August. Cherry pie is a staple on dessert menus around the peninsula — no one will judge if you have a slice (or two!) every day.

Cherries also show up in the offerings at the several wineries throughout the county. These sweet concoctions pair perfectly with a pleasant spring day, the kind you’re very likely to have if you visit now.

AROUND THE TOWNS
Meandering through the small communities will probably invoke a sense of nostalgia as you duck into quaint shops, gaze at artwork from your choice of galleries, or stop for a scoop of ice cream in one of Door County’s famous ice cream shops. Make something to take home at one of the do-it-yourself art studios, or just make memories watching a play or on a hike through Peninsula State Park.

Your getaway is what you want it to be. It’s three generations all enjoying the same spot. It’s 11 golf courses. It’s an R&R break. It’s daffodils and tulips coming into bloom. It’s nonstop photo opportunities. It’s a simpler time. It’s Door County — and it’s worth a trip.

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Just what is DOOR COUNTY?
IN TECHNICAL TERMS, IT’S A 70-MILE SLIVER OF LAND IN WISCONSIN that juts into Lake Michigan. But that description hardly does it justice. Then again, no single description really can. With an ambiance all its own, Door County is like nowhere else.

It’s 300 miles of shoreline. It’s rows upon rows of cherry trees. It’s epic sunsets your camera can never capture as well as your mind’s eye. It’s a collection of tiny communities with big personalities. It’s boutique shopping, art galleries, and endless recreation opportunities. It’s eating made-from-scratch meals. It’s picturesque lighthouses. It’s that nostalgic feeling.

At no point do adjectives like frenzied, rushed, or fast-paced enter into the picture. That doesn’t mean you’ll ever get bored, though. On the contrary, there’s so much to do you might not know where to begin.
Sleep TIGHT

COUNTRY HOUSE RESORT

That’s what makes Country House Resort in Sister Bay the perfect retreat. Among the 27 wooded acres, you can bid sleep to your worries and say bonjour to a secluded setting with 1,100 feet of shoreline. If leaving your precious pooch at home is one of the drawbacks of travel, you’ll be happy to know that the resort is dog-friendly, so Fido can come along and have his own Door County adventure.

The modern conveniences are there if you need them — like WiFi access throughout the property and cable TV in the rooms — but there’s plenty to do without the creature comforts of everyday life. Take a picnic lunch out to the dock, stroll along the nature trail that winds its way through the grounds, try your hand at a lawn game of shuffleboard or horseshoes, grab a bike to pedal around, or hit the tennis court for a friendly match (rackets and tennis balls are provided). If all the gazing at Green Bay makes you too to be out there, take out a free eXcoris and drift the calm waters.

All of that’s on-site, so you never have to leave if you don’t want to — but why you’re in Door County, it’s worth taking the time to get out and explore a little. A hearty supply of brochures, menus, guidebooks, and maps in the lobby will help you explore a little. A hearty supply of brochures, menus, guidebooks, and maps in the lobby will help you find the right place to hang your hat for the night. Whether you’re on the hunt for a three-bedroom cottage, a beachfront motel room, a log home on 18 acres, or a one-bedroom suite, The Shallows Resort has something that will fit you just right.

As Goldilocks discovered, sometimes it takes time to find the right place to hang your hat. For the night. Whether you’re on the hunt for a three-bedroom cottage, a beachfront motel room, a log home on 18 acres, or a one-bedroom suite, The Shallows Resort has something that will fit you just right.

Five minutes from the shops, restaurants, and vibrant music scene of downtown Egg Harbor, The Shallows has been welcoming guests for more than four decades, many of whom come back year after year. Whether you’re on the hunt for a three-bedroom cottage, a beachfront motel room, a log home on 18 acres, or a one-bedroom suite, The Shallows Resort has something that will fit you just right.

And why shouldn’t they? Here, sunrise and sunset are truly something to write home about. The well-manicured park-like grounds, with flowers everywhere you look, include 400 feet of shoreline. Plus there’s an outdoor pool, a hot tub on the water, fire pits, and a tennis court. Perhaps best of all — and surely the reason people put this spot on their return visit list — is the honey vibe. You’ll feel like you’re family, whether it’s your first visit or your 15th.

With the family you’ve brought along (dogs are welcome, too), use one of the free kayaks, canoes, or rowboats on the property to paddle around Green Bay. Or borrow a bike and pedal down Horshoe Bay Road, one of the most scenic routes on the peninsula, lined with limestone bluffs and rolling farmland. Or just sit on one of the benches and read a book.

Each room type offers something a little different, but all the waterfront accommodations come with queen or king beds, a full bath, air-conditioning, and gas barbecue grills. The three-bedroom Shallows Cottage, with its screened-in porch and wall of water-facing windows, is one favorite, but they all have their selling points. There are also five homes and cottages located off-site for even more options. You’re sure to find a lodging type you’ll love — and a place you’ll want to come back to again and again.

SHALLOWS RESORT

DOOR COUNTY IS THE KIND OF PLACE YOU COME TO UNPLUG AND UNWIND, to get away from the go-go-go pace of modern life and slow down, even if just for a couple of days.

After a day of activities or seeing the sights, you’ll be glad to return to your room, many of which have private verandas and all of which come with comfy pillow-top mattresses and feather pillows. The outdoor swimming pool and whirlpool are great for winding down, and because of the adult atmosphere at Country House Resort (guests must be 13 or older), the pool area stays serene. Jacuzzi tubs and fireplaces in some rooms are also a nice touch in the evening.

When you awake in the morning, a European continental breakfast buffet will be waiting in the lobby, with typical options including goodies such as yogurt, hardboiled eggs, toast, bagels, pastries, cereal, cheese, salads, and — what else? — cherries. You’ll be fortified for another day of beachcombing, biking, browsing the boutiques, or whatever you have on your agenda.

And, of course, you can always stick around the historic property for some quiet time. The original-owned resort dates back to 1907, when Dr. Sebold Fitchner opened Forest Gill, the precursor to Country House Resort, on a former farm that happened to be the first homestead in Sister Bay. Dr. Fitchner felt it had the potential to become a grand hotel one day — and he would surely be pleased to know that prediction has come true.

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Alpine Resort

IN THE 1910s, John Bertschinger sold a tract of land on Green Bay. When his brother Paul came to town, they took a look at the land and had second thoughts about letting it go — so they bought it back for double the price paid. It was a wise investment. Now, more than 90 years after Alpine Resort opened its doors in 1922 on Point Egg Harbor piece of property, guests still flock to the location for its lovely lake views and vintage charm. Still owned by the hospitable Bertschinger family today, the resort features a variety of accommodations — including rooms, cottages, and houses — so you can pick the option that’s best for your brood. Here, it’s all about old-fashioned fun, just as it’s been throughout the Alpine’s history. Walk along the beach, take a swim in the pool, play a board game in the game room, or just relax on the lodge porch. For the active set, there is plenty do do and see. Play a match of tennis or a round of golf on the scenic 36-hole golf course. Bikes and boats are available at no extra charge for guests who want to do some off-road exploring.

Don’t miss a meal at The Hof Restaurant, which serves up shoreline views and German specialties, among other meals. John and Paul knew they had something special on their hands all those years ago — how right they were.

http://alpineresort.com

NEWPORT RESORT

ON A HILL OVERLOOKING THE VIBRANT TOWN OF EGG HARBOR, Newport Resort is tops for families who want spacious accommodations within an easy walking distance of lots of attractions and restaurants. A cozy fireplace and library greet you in the lobby, while an indoor pool, sauna, and whirlpool are a welcome place to chill out no matter the weather. An outdoor playground gives kids a fun option for getting their energy out so they’ll be ready for a good nights sleep.

Speaking of sleep, each of the resort’s one- or two-bedroom suites contains a separate master bed-room, a gas log fireplace, a whirlpool tub, and a private balcony. Free continental breakfast is available in the mornings, or you have the option to whip up something in your fully equipped kitchen.

While many of the locations in Door County operate during late spring to early fall only, Newport Resort has great winter packages available — so come during high season and get the full experience; then return in the winter and have the Peninsula to yourself.

http://newportresort.com
Peninsula School of Art

In a place with as much natural inspiration as Door County, it’s no wonder artists have flocked to its shores for more than a century to take in the surroundings as they work on their craft. These informal artist gatherings led to a desire to create a permanent spot for artistic study, and out of that, Peninsula School of Art was born.

Open year-round in Fish Creek within a gard en setting, this school for the serious-minded artist boasts light-filled, spacious studios that are well equipped with the right tools for fine art expression of all kinds. Educators who love passing on their knowledge share the methods that have made them successful, offering high-caliber instruction that’s ideal for anyone who wants to brush up a bit on technique or branch out into a new medium. Plenty of individual attention is always a given.

In addition to classes, the school hosts educationally themed gallery exhibitions with master works, concerts, free Family Art Days, and gallery talks, among other events. Workshops last from one to five days in all fine art media including printmaking, ceramics, jewelry, and photography. Kids ages three and a half to 18 who want to fly their burgeoning creative muscles can participate in the Youth Arts program, highlighting day, painting, animation, cartooning, and more.

To celebrate the landscape of the peninsula and the tradition of outdoor painting that started in the area all those decades ago, the school presents the annual Door County Plein Air Festival, (doorcountypleinair.com), which has grown into the largest outdoor painting festival in the Midwest, attracting people from all over the region, county, and world. This year, the event runs from July 22 to 27, more than 40 artists will gather to put their spin on the lapping lake waters, floating boats, and tree-lined roads as they work to capture the beauty and character of this picturesque setting. n peninsulaartschoolofart.com

DOOR COUNTY MARITIME MUSEUM

WITH ALL THE WATER THAT SURROUNDS IT, DOOR PENINSULA IS A MARITIME MUSEUM that is a must and this one does a splendidly good job highlighting the seamen, shipbuilders, seasonal captives, and others from its headquarter towns in Sturgeon Bay.

Being marooned at this waterfront museum wouldn’t be such a bad thing. There’s plenty to see and do, with highlights including the 1949 tugboat John Peter, open May to October for docent-led tours; an exhibit on World War II shipbuilding in the area; a 19th century lighthouse lens; and a working submarine periscope pointed toward Door County’s largest shipbuilder.

The new exhibit “Pirates Ship to Shore” is also a crowd pleaser: captivating kids and adults alike as it delves into the life and times of swashbuckling sailscapers via numerous displays and interactive elements.

Also, don’t miss Door County Maritime Museum’s two additional locations. In Gill’s Rock, the exhibit focuses largely on commercial fishing. On Cana Island, you can climb the 97 spiral staircase steps to the top of the lighthouse for breathtaking views, or get your feet on the ground with a peek into the original lighthouse-keeper’s home. + dmomm.org

Door County Distillery

F or a sip of Door County — quite literally — head to Door County Distillery in Carlsville, where the spirits all fitfully embody the spirit of the place they’re made. The abundant natural resources in the area, like fresh botanicals, fruits, and grains, come together to create the only vodka, gin, brandy, and whiskey that’s actually sourced from Door County. The first series release pays homage to the clear waters of the area that are used to make the drinks by featuring lighthouse doors on the labels.

Descriptions, though, can only do so much. The best way to understand these small-batch spirits is to try them out for yourself. Drop in to the tasting room, next to sister business Door Peninsula Winery, and belly up to the tasting bar for free samples. Above, copper pipes run along the ceiling, and below, you can see down into the production area where the distilling and bottling take place.

Back at the bar, which opened to the public in 2011, you’ll find glasses with small sips. The Door County Vodka is subtle and smooth, the Door County Cherry Vodka is light and aromatic, and the Door County Gin will transport you straight to a forest along the shore, filled with flavors of pine, juniper, limestone, and assorted botanicals. The gin won Gold at the 2013 Finger Lakes International Wine Competition and Silver at the 2013 Riverside International Wine Competition.

This summer, the distillery is branching out and will offer a single-malt grain whiskey and a new oak-aged brandy. They also sell Luminous Vodka, an ultra-premium creation with a clean taste; Door County Apple Brandy, a cocktail staple with candied apple, honey, and cinnamon flavors; Door County Cherry Brandy with a signature Montmorency cherry aroma and sweet black cherry fruit finish; and Cherry Bluff Infusion Bitters, which has eight balanced botanicals combined with local cherries.

So when you drop in — it all — this is the very essence of Door County, conveniently distilled into smooth spirits. + doorcountydistillery.com

Peninsula Players

Since 1935, theatergoers have been entertained by Peninsula Players’ take on classic and contemporary plays and musicals. Over a time span, contemporary works have actually become classic.

The local gem is located between Egg Harbor and Fish Creek in a partially open-air, all-weather pavilion nestled in the forest. The sound of splashing fountains and the breathing sunsets make this a special spot — as they do everywhere in Door County, grounds, take in the water views, and grab a pre-show drink. You can even pack a picnic lunch and make it a full day out of it.

Once the sun has gone down and the play begins, you’re in for a treat. These actors are real pros who bring each scene to life, and fortunately, there’s not a bad seat in the house, so you’ll be able to find a spot at any time.

The 2013 season runs from June 15 to October 20. Given that this is a frequently recommended activity in Door County, buy your tickets early — you don’t want to miss your chance to watch the oldest professional resident summer theater. + peninsulaplayers.com

CHEERS

With spring in full swing, now is the time to plan your trip — and maybe even consider dropping by more often in the future. We’ll toast to that.

DIANE TAILLON

When you fall in love with visiting Door County (which you will), you might want to consider purchasing a vacation home there. You can come back to year after year. Market statistics show that real estate sales in Door County are on the rise. And it’s not just the price with an average of 300 miles of coastline, nice weather, and an abundance of activities: there is a great spot to set up a second home, whether you’re heading into your retirement years or have a young family and want a place for the kids to spend their summers growing up.

You could look on your own, but with a task this big, it’s often easier to have locally based help. That’s where Diane Taillon at Hunter’s Fairway Sotheby’s International Realty comes in. This world traveler (she’s been everywhere from Africa to Asia to Europe) lives in Door County and can point you toward the area that’s right for you, looking for.

If you do get a place, just be prepared for company — your family and friends are going to want to visit as often as you let them. + dianetaillon.huntersfairwaysir.com