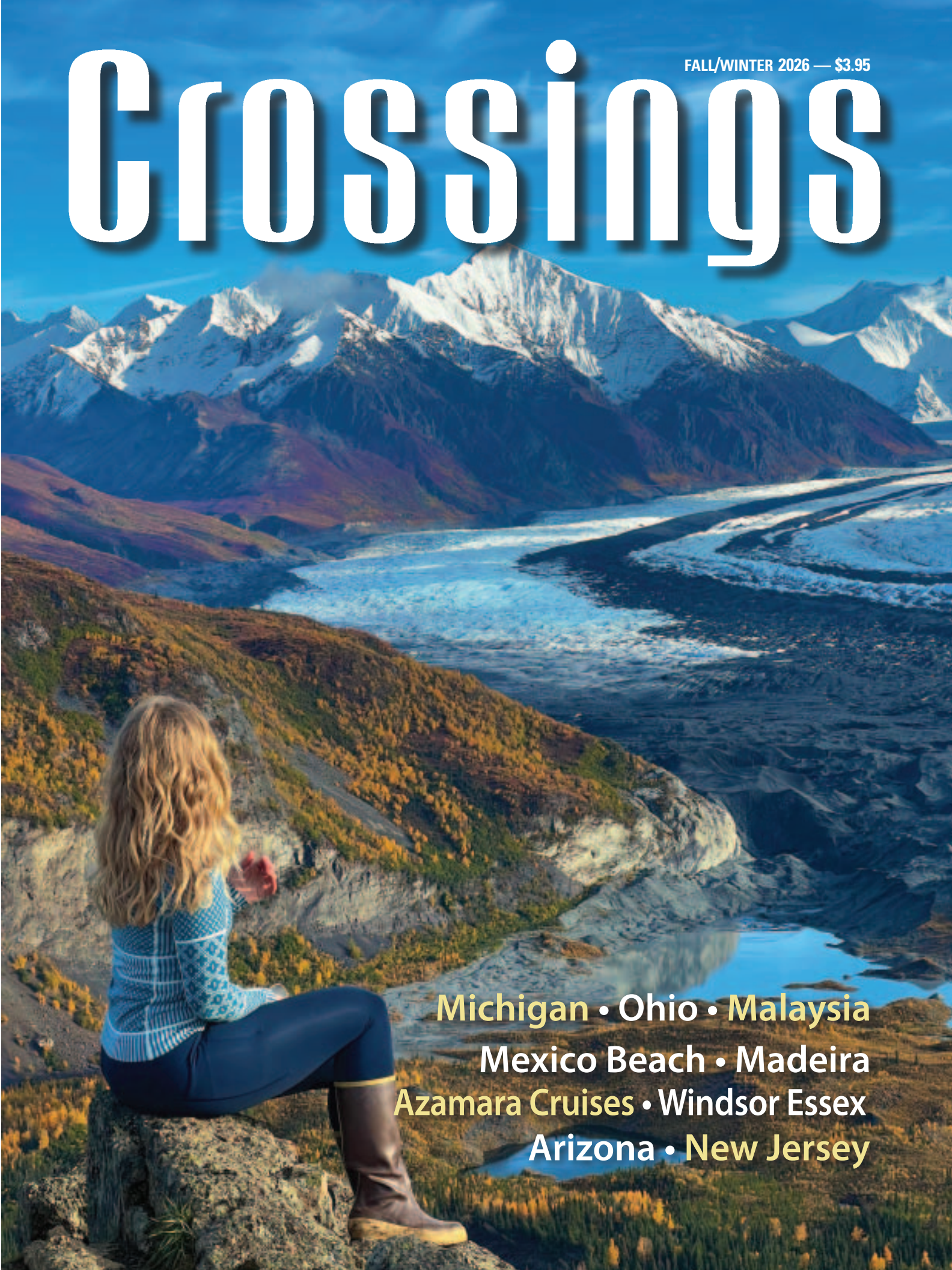
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Crossings Magazine is published by AJR Publishing Inc. Editorial and advertising offices: 1455 Normandy, LaSalle, Ontario, Canada, N9J 3N1. Annual subscription rate is $17.85 plus HST. Published three times a year in Spring, Summer and Fall/Winter. The information in this magazine has been published in good faith and every effort has been made to ensure accuracy. Manuscripts and photographs submitted for editorial consideration must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope and return postage. Copyright © 2026. The publisher will not be held responsible for loss or destruction of unsolicited material. Advertising agencies and advertisers assume full and complete liability for all content (including text, representation and illustrations) of advertisements and also assume responsibility for any claims arising thereof made against the publisher. Reproduction in whole or in part without the written permission of the publisher is strictly prohibited.

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BY **RENU SAGGAR**

the area's many indoor attractions.

At the *Adventure Zone*, kids (and kids at heart) can race go-karts, play mini golf, battle in laser tag, enjoy duck-pin bowling and dive into virtual reality games.

Step back into a time of nostalgia, disco lights and small-town fun at the *Skate Ranch*. Enjoy classic arcade games, a maple skating floor and a full concessions area.

Younger visitors can explore the *Children's Museum of Branch County*, where learning meets play. The interactive exhibits including a climbing wall and hands-on exhibits are designed to spark creativity and curiosity.

Then climb aboard the *Little River Railroad's* historic steam engine. Ride the *Pumpkin Train* for dazzling autumn views or ride the rails aboard the *Holiday Express* in December for a joyful journey with Santa and a touch of vintage Christmas magic.

Fall & Winter Fun in Michigan's Coldwater Country

UP North begins here, in Coldwater Country. Crisp air, golden leaves and snowy landscapes—fall and winter are pure magic in Michigan's Coldwater Country. Nestled in south-central Michigan near the Indiana border, this scenic region—featuring Coldwater, Bronson, Quincy, Union City, Colon, Athens and Allen—is your go-to spot for vibrant colors, history, art, cozy charm, unforgettable outdoor adventures and plenty of seasonal festivities.

Outside Adventures

With more than 100 sparkling freshwater lakes, Coldwater Country is a playground for outdoor lovers year-round. Paddle the peaceful *Union City Heritage Water Trail* or take a boat ride along the North and South Chains of Lakes in Coldwater, soaking up the vibrant fall foliage—or the peaceful silence of a frosty morning.

Fishing more your speed? Reel in bass, perch, bluegill, and walleye before warming up at a local coffee shop or setting off on your next adventure. And even when the weather turns chilly, the fish don't stop biting. No boat? No problem, as long as there's a good layer of ice on the lake for ice fishing!

Before the snow flies, tee off at one of the area's scenic golf courses: The *Coldwater Golf Course* has been one of the most beautiful and challenging golf courses in southern Michigan since 1920. *Bella Vista Golf Course* spans nearly 300 acres, and the 9-hole *Iyopawa Island Golf Course* offers a unique island experience and a fun challenge for golfers of all skill levels.

Family-Friendly Fun

Coldwater Country doesn't slow down when the temperatures fall. Cooler weather simply creates an excuse to explore



The Pumkin Train

Seasonal Festivals, Fun & Small-Town Parades

As Thanksgiving approaches, Coldwater Country's communities embrace the holiday season with craft shows, parades, festivals and hometown traditions.

Late November and early December bring holiday craft shows, including Coldwater's indoor *Christmas Market* and Union City *Batterson Memorial Christmas Bazaar.* Visitors can

browse handmade crafts, food, jewelry, soaps, home décor, seasonal gifts and more while supporting hundreds of local makers and businesses.

For an old-fashioned holiday experience, take in Union City's downtown *Santa Parade* or *Quincy Lights,* where Santa makes an appearance to light up the town, the *Holiday Parade* in Coldwater or *Grinchmas* in Bronson, a playful spin on the holidays.

Ron and Chickie's Festival of Lights is a spectacular array of twinkling displays, whimsical decorations, festive activities and visits from Santa himself create a magical atmosphere for the public on their Union City homestead.

The annual *Yuletide Evening* at the Coldwater Community Center at the Beech House, offers another dose of holiday charm. This December event offers heavy hors d'oeuvres, drinks, live holiday music and horse-drawn carriage rides throughout downtown Coldwater.

There's no shortage of winter whimsy at the historic *Tibbits Opera House*, a gem that offers live performances all year—from musicals and concerts to professional theatre and comedy shows. They have a full slate of events most weekends, including *The 1985: A Totally '80s Mixtape LIVE!* in November, *Siberian Solstice: A Trans-Siberian Orchestra Tribute* in December, another tribute band in January and *Comedy Fest* in March.

Downtown Coldwater's *Love Local Soup & Chili Even*t invites attendees to warm up with soup and chili tastings while they browse the downtown shops and vote on their favorite recipes.

For a frosty adventure, bundle up for Quincy's Chain of Lakes *Tip Up Festival* in February —complete with games, ice-fishing contests, family fun and the brave (or maybe a little crazy) *Polar Bear Splash!* Whether you participate or watch while bundled in a warm layer of clothing, the festival captures the playful spirit of a Michigan winter. With the right gear, cold weather becomes an invitation to get outside, try something new and enjoy the season.

More Art & Entertainment

Get inspired by Coldwater's thriving art scene! Grab a cup of coffee at one of the area shops, then enjoy it as you stroll through downtowns, finding colorful murals, student art and outdoor sculptures—or warm up inside the Tibbits Opera House art gallery.

Want more nostalgia? Pack some blankets and head to the *Capri Drive-In* where you can snuggle in as you watch a double feature under the stars. With twin screens and room for 1,000 cars, it's a classic movie night you won't forget.

For a little enchantment, visit *Colon*—the Magic Capital of the World. Discover spellbinding performances, quirky shops and magical experiences that make this small town truly extraordinary.

Antiques & Eats

Hunt for treasures at the *Museum Gallery* or the *Coldwater Antique Mall*, then explore downtown Quincy to browse the bookstore or shop for home décor, seasonal gifts, fashion, artisan jewelry and unique finds. Continue your shopping trip in nearby *Allen*, Michigan's Antique Capital, which is home to five massive antique malls including the impressive 25,000-square-foot *Allen Antique Barn*.

When it's time to refuel, Coldwater Country's local eateries serve anything from diner favorites to international cuisine. Whether you're craving a quick bite or a sit-down dinner, there's something to satisfy every palate

Plan Your Trip

From colorful autumn afternoons on the water or the greens to sparkling holiday displays, historic train rides, live performances and snowy winter festivals, Coldwater offers plenty to see and do after the summer fades.

Ready for colorful leaves, festive fun and cozy winter vibes? Head to *ColdwaterCountry.com* to plan your next Michigan getaway! ✍



Allen is Michigan's Antiques Capital



Executive Director Debra Prater is Retiring

After 25 years with Coldwater Country Conference & Visitors Bureau

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

Debra Prater is Coldwater's greatest champion. Now, after 25 years of dedicated service, Debra is retiring from her position as executive director of the Coldwater Country Conference & Visitors Bureau (CCCVB).

With more than 100 sparkling freshwater lakes, Coldwater Country is a year round playground for outdoor lovers. Paddle the *Union City Heritage Water Trail,* or take a boat ride along the North and South Chains of Lakes in Coldwater. Soaking up the vibrant fall foliage—or the peaceful silence of a frosty morning.

The CCCVB is a nonprofit destination marketing organization supporting local businesses in Branch County Michigan. Under Prater's dedicated leadership, the bureau saw visitor growth and brand development for Coldwater Country.

During a remarkable tenure as a locality specialist, she helped shape tourism in Branch County and the surrounding communities, including Colon and Allen, saying that "visitors don't see lines on the map. They just want to experience all the great things our area has to offer."

Prater, originally Debra Hackett, graduated from Glen Oaks Community College in 1979. During her college years, she played on the women's basketball team and enjoyed art classes, especially using the darkroom to develop her photographs. Her photography skills came in handy for many years, taking photos for visitors' guides and advertising.

Her working career began at Paramount Furniture, a manufacturer of school furniture. An assistant to the purchasing agent she got promoted one day when her boss walked off the job.

Debra married and had a son, Kirk. One day while waiting tables she met an old friend who was doing marketing for a hotel in Coldwater and needed some help. Prater took the job, but on the first day, her friend went off on sick leave and never came back – leaving her to fill that post.

Her job gave her the opportunity to make connections and she caught the eye of board members at the Coldwater Country Conference & Visitors Bureau. The organization had never had a director. Instead, it was being run by the board of directors and the Coldwater Chamber of Commerce.

That changed in April 2001 when Prater stepped into the newly created role. Almost immediately she began building it from the ground up. With a budget of only $70,000 – funded by a bed tax on hotels rooms, she teamed up with her counterparts from St. Joseph and Lenawee counties to split advertising and travel expenses three ways.

She also drew on her leadership training as president of the Coldwater Jaycees, a young people's leadership training organization, earning a 1994 "Luthy Presidential Award" given to the top 10 local presidents in the state of Michigan.

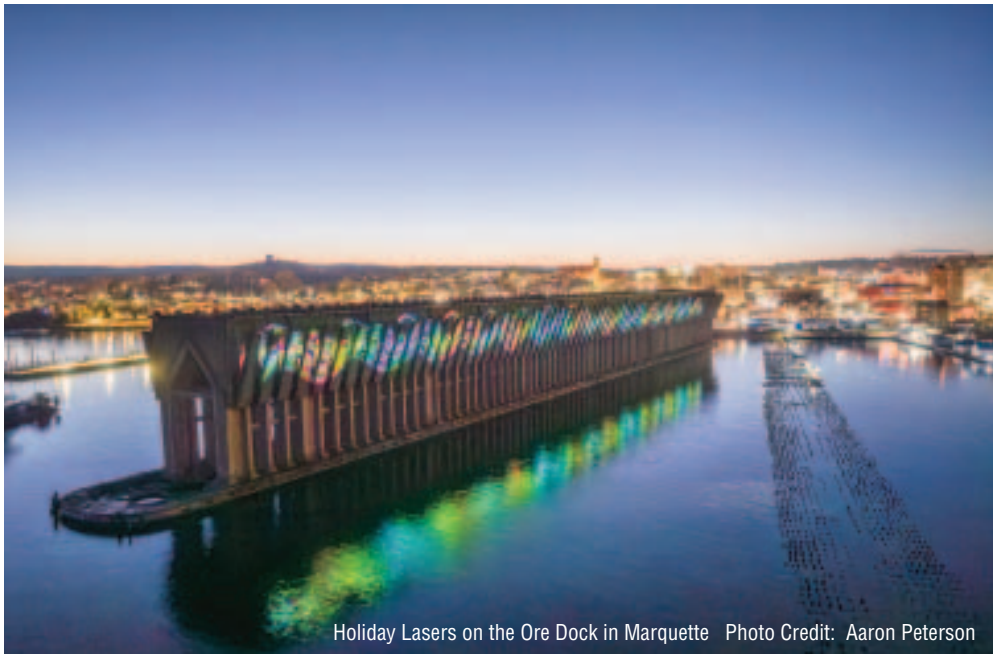
Over the past quarter century, she has quintupled the Bureau's budget built a professional destination marketing organization that handles advertising, promotions and first rate website at *www.coldwatercountry.com*.

Prater cites Branch County draws like Tibbits Opera House, Little River Railroad, Aqua Pit, Capri Drive-In, Adventure Zone, and Hidden Ponds Horse Rescue as just some of area's unique attractions.

She enjoyed the opportunity to travel which her job has afforded her, including Traverse City and Mackinac Island for the Michigan Governor's Conference on Tourism. As she approaches retirement, she hopes to mentor as the incoming executive director, "because it's my baby," she said.

Debra plans to stay busy during her retirement. She wants to volunteer to assist small businesses with inexpensive marketing ideas and creating exit plans.

Debra will continue to volunteer for the many event committees she serves on. She will also have more time for hobbies like making sun catchers, reading, kayaking and hanging out with friends. Also, on the agenda is travel throughout the States with her husband Dan, her son and daughter-in-law. "I have been very blessed in my life," she notes, "and I plan to give back as much as I can.



Holiday Lasers on the Ore Dock in Marquette Photo Credit: Aaron Peterson

Fall & Winter in Marquette County

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

Tucked along the shores of Lake Superior in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Marquette County takes on a different character with every season. Fall brings colorful forests, crisp temperatures and miles of trails to explore, while winter transforms the region with deep snow and no shortage of outdoor recreation. Add a calendar of seasonal events and holiday traditions and the colder months give travelers plenty to look forward to.

As autumn settles in, Marquette County comes alive with vibrant fall color. With 83 miles of Lake Superior shoreline, dramatic elevation changes and rugged terrain, visitors can see the changing leaves from forested trails, rocky overlooks and stretches of waterfront.

Hiking and biking trails provide plenty of opportunities to get outside and enjoy the season. The *Iron Ore Heritage Trail,* connects downtown communities with the great outdoors, spanning 47 miles and includes accessible paved segments well suited for a family walk or bike ride.

Some of the best views come from above. Just six miles north of downtown Marquette, *Sugarloaf Mountain* overlooks Lake Superior, the Huron Mountains and the surrounding fall canopy. *Mount Marquette,* rising more than 1,000 feet, offers sweeping views over the city, lake and colorful forest below. For a more accessible option, *Thomas Rock* near Big Bay features an ADA-accessible trail with panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.



Photo Credit: Credit: Aaron Peterson

Travelers can also see the changing leaves by car on *Marquette County's Fall Color Tour*, with several routes showcasing the destination at its peak. County Road 550 stretches from Marquette to Big Bay, passing Sugarloaf Mountain and Little Garlic River before reaching Lake Independence. From there, County Road 510 winds through the Huron Mountains on the return toward Marquette, completing a colorful loop through the county.

When winter arrives, Marquette County becomes one of the snowiest destinations east of the Rockies. Snow-covered forests become a setting for skiing, snowshoeing, fat-tire biking and snowmobiling, while Lake Superior's icy shoreline bring a completely different look to the area.

Cross-country routes can be found across the county, while *Marquette Mountain Resort* features 170 skiable acres with views of Lake Superior. Beyond the slopes, Marquette County is known as the fat-tire biking hub of the Midwest, with 60 miles of groomed winter trails, including the Noquemanon Snow Bike Routes and RAMBA Snow Bike Trails. Snowshoers can take a slower-paced approach at *Al Quaal Recreation Area,* home to more than 12 miles of trails, including the snowshoe-specific *Baby Lake Trail*, or follow sections of the North Country Trail through dense forest and along Lake Superior's shoreline.

Snowmobilers can cover even more ground on routes winding through the county. Trail 14 connects Marquette Township to Big Bay, Trail 417 climbs toward Mount Marquette and UP Trail 8 runs from Marquette to Gwinn through stretches of jack pine forest. The extensive network makes it easy to venture farther afield during the snowy months.

The holidays bring a full lineup of events. From November 26 - December 26, *Holiday Lasers on the Ore Dock* returns to downtown Marquette. Presented in partnership with Fresh Coast Light Lab, the artistic light projection illuminates the north side of the historic *Lower Harbor Ore Dock*. Visitors can watch from Mattson Lower Harbor Park Thursday through Saturday from 6 to 9 p.m.

Just west of Marquette, the inaugural *Ishpeming Kriskindlmarkt* will bring the Upper Peninsula's first European-style Christmas market to Ishpeming November 27-28 and December 4-5. The open-air market will feature decorated wooden vendor huts, handcrafted gifts, seasonal food and drinks, the Snowshoe Pub, live entertainment and family-friendly activities. A grand opening celebration, ceremonial Golden Keg tapping and the annual Ishpeming Torchlight Parade will also be part of the festivities.

The year comes to a close on December 31 with downtown Marquette's annual New Year's Eve Ball Drop. The 100 block of West Washington Street will close for the celebration as locals and visitors gather to count down the final moments of 2026.

Marquette County invites visitors to embrace the best of fall and winter, from colorful landscapes and outdoor adventure to local flavors and seasonal events, all set against the Lake Superior shores of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. For more information please visit travelmarquette.com.



Ride the Huckleberry Railroad at Crossroads Villiage

Experience a Nostalgic Fall & Winter Season in Flint & Genesee

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

Flint & Genesee is a four-season destination and fall and winter prove it with events and activities for the whole family to love. From hayrides to pick your own apples and hot cider and donuts to holiday train rides through historic villages lit with thousands of twinkling lights, you'll get a nostalgic feeling when you visit Flint & Genesee. Discover your next family adventure in the heart of Michigan.

In the fall, apple orchards throughout Genesee County ramp up for their busy season. The area is home to over half a dozen locally owned orchards, each with its own spin on classic apple cider and donuts. At *Spicer Orchard & Winery* in Fenton, join friends for a glass of wine or hard cider at Spicer's Tasting Room or let the kids romp in the Playland, visit farm animals and take a train ride through the orchard.

Almar Orchard in Flushing is a certified organic orchard and is the maker of *JK Scrumpy Hard Cider*, which is distributed throughout the United States.

Montrose Orchards in Montrose is known for its *Pumpkin Fantasyland* hayrides and pumpkin patch. They host unique events throughout the year, like food truck rallies and farm-to-table dinners.

With over 11,000 acres of county parks — the largest county parks system in the state of Michigan — Flint & Genesee is a great place to see the leaves change. There are many places to hike, bike and even kayak or canoe to see the beauty of autumn. *For-Mar Nature Preserve & Arboretum* in Burton, has miles of trails to explore, plus a barrier-free treehouse for views from above. Or you can head to downtown Linden or Fenton to push off on the *Shiawassee River*, both of which have fully accessible kayak launches.

Winter weather brings sparkling lights and cold nights filled with sweet treats and even sweeter festivals and events. Flushing's *Candlewalk,* lights up the Hallmark Movie-esque town with thousands of softly glowing lights, along with holiday music, s'mores, refreshments and horse-drawn wagon rides.

Another must-see holiday wonder is the lighted trail through *Creasey Bicentennial Park* in Grand Blanc. The beautifully lit trail lines the park with thousands of lights, as the park hosts *Holiday Walking Nights* for groups to experience the beauty. Each night hosts a different theme, including character night, trail of treats and a scavenger hunt.

Other places like Fenton and Linden in the southern end of the county have amazing lighted parades and fireworks to celebrate the holiday season and give a good reason to brave the cold. These events add a bit of nostalgia to the winter season and create amazing yearly traditions for visitors.

Christmas at Crossroads Village is the most honored holiday tradition in Flint & Genesee County. The historic turn-of-the-last-century village lights up each Christmas season and invites the public to explore what Christmas was like in the early 1900s. Along with cocoa, roasted chestnuts and holiday tales, the *Huckleberry Railroad,* with historic steam engines decked out in lights, is ready to take you on a lighted train ride through the countryside. This yearly event is a standout for young and old.

There are plenty of ways to enjoy the winter weather in Flint & Genesee. Several parks have cross-country ski trails and plenty of sled hills are ready to ride. Several parks also allow snowmobiling for those who are a little more adventurous.

For lovers of indoor winter activities, Flint & Genesee has plenty of places to explore. A world-class cultural center brings together numerous institutions in one place, including the *Sloan Museum of Discovery* and the *Flint Institute of Arts*. The *Flint Farmers' Market* is open year-round with plenty of food, art and handmade goods for everyone to love.

Flint & Genesee is also a coffee town with many local shops and coffee purveyors in the region. *Fireside Coffee* roasts its own beans in Swartz Creek and has a small coffee shop on site. It also distributes to local cafes and restaurants, including the *Laundry* in Fenton and *Fully Grounded Café* at the Flint Farmers' Market. The *Coffee Beanery* has been an institution in Genesee County for 50 years and has several locations in the county and throughout the country (and internationally).

Whether you're looking for an event or some outdoor adventure and fun, look no further than Flint & Genesee.

Learn more and book your stay at exploreflintandgenesee.org.

Amazing Pollinators! At Sloan Museum of Discovery in Flint

Amazing Pollinators is a game-based, role-playing adventure that immerses audiences in the colorful and diverse world of pollinator and plant relationships. An interactive exhibit for the whole family, Amazing Pollinators will open at *Sloan Museum of Discovery* in Flint January 16 and run through May 2, 2027.



Great Falls National Historic Park

With a curvy maze atmosphere, each section of the exhibit is themed by environments that need pollinating. Travel through the maze and navigate lush environments in need of pollination like the rainforest, desert, farm or glow-in-the-dark night room. An assortment of short individualized missions allows visitors to see 48 pollinator species interact with more than 175 plants in their respective environments. Little ones can take on a mini-mission in the maze as they become flying pollinators and target flowers. They can also dress up as their favorite pollinator, build a pollinator-friendly garden or toss color-coded pollen bean bags into their correct flower.

The *Pollination Game Parlor* is the place to play classic games with a conservation twist! Try your hand at invasive species shuffleboard, connect 8 pollinator habitats and more. This visually stunning exhibit weaves great stories with urgent messages about pollinators, the critical work they do."Amazing Pollinators will be a fascinating exhibit that sparks curiosity in visitors of all ages," commented Sloan Museum's Executive Director, Todd Slisher. "We take the important work of insect pollinators for granted, but without them, much of what we know in the plant world could not exist. This exhibit will highlight the important work of pollinators in a fun and engaging way," Slisher added.

Amazing Pollinators was created by Minotaur Mazes in collaboration with the Florida Museum of Natural History and the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

Sloan Museum of Discovery is located within the Flint Cultural Center Campus in Flint, Michigan. The world-class, hands-on science and history museum features four primary hands-on learning galleries and a 6,000 square feet special traveling exhibit gallery.With four main gallery spaces including an interactive, child-sized neighborhood, science and discovery hall, history gallery and a collection of vintage and concept cars. Visit sloanlongway.org for more information.





It's Courses With Horses at Three Moons Farm

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

Three Moons Farm is where personal development, mental wellness and joyful play come together using some horse sense. Maureen Moons, the owner and president of *Courses With Horses* says the farm's unique equine-assisted programs are designed to promote well-being through the therapeutic power of horses.

"Horses are highly responsive to changes in their environment," notes Moons. "They notice shifts in energy, attention, movement and emotional state. They do not evaluate a participant based on job title or professional reputation. A horse responds to what is happening in the moment. This creates a form of immediate, unbiased feedback that is difficult to replicate in a traditional classroom."

Horses have played a monumental role in the human evolution and are proving to be effective at partnering with people in experiential development programs. The genuine connection between humans and horses creates learning experiences that can be unmatched.

"In our programs, learning with horses happens 'in the field' — literally says Moons. "Participants reach a level of vulnerability needed for deep personal development."

Whether your visit entails a team building exercise, mindfulness and meditation, a family gathering or just enjoying quality time with farm animals you'll leave with a renewed sense of purpose, wellbeing and resilience.

Courses with Horses workshops are unique. Horses are incredible energy facilitators! Guests collaborate with horses to enhance mental health and foster personal development. Participants build greater awareness of themselves and their colleagues through group-based activities. They improve communication and leadership skills, focus and motivation, further developing emotional intelligence, self-confidence and self-awareness, laying the foundation for greater team cohesion and performance.

Three moons experiential approach ensures an impactful workshop that provides lasting results for your group.

Start your day with fresh air, friendly animals and simple joys on the farm. *Farm Mornings* at Three Moons Farm invite you to slow down, explore and connect with the animals who make their farm such a special place. Designed to be playful, hands-on and relaxed, guests will have time to meet and visit with farm friends, including baby calfs, curious goats, miniature horses, soft baby bunnies and more. Each morning also includes a fun farm-themed craft for the kiddos so they can bring a little piece of the experience home with them. Crafts may change with the season, as do the animals and what is happening around the farm, keeping each visit fresh, fun and memorable. Farm Mornings are a joyful way to experience the magic of the farm.

Immerse yourself in the tranquil presence of horses and embrace the present moment through mindfulness and meditation. Join them in an approximately 1.5 hour Guided Meditation Workshop. Experience the profound connection of soul, heart and brain coherence. Cultivate inner peace, reduce stress and enhance self-awareness. With the help of gentle and intuitive horses, you'll learn how to balance your energy and achieve a deeper state of mindfulness and a harmonious and centered state of being.

In the 90 minute *Mindfulness: Manifesting* session, learn to connect with the majestic animals and explore the art of manifesting your desires. Let their gentle and intuitive horses guide you through this unique experience.

For more information visit www.threemoonsfarm.com



Relax & Live Happy in West Branch Michigan

Find yourself in West Branch. When autumn arrives in West Branch, Michigan, the landscape transforms into a playground of color, adventure and discovery. Nestled among the forests, hills, lakes and rivers of *Ogemaw County*, West Branch is the kind of place where you can slow down, breathe deep and reconnect with the outdoors. From vibrant fall colors to snowy winter trails, every season offers a new reason to explore.



Rifle River Recreation Area

Start your fall adventure on the *Ogemaw Hills Pathway,* where miles of scenic trails wind through Northern Michigan forests. Lace up your boots, grab your bike and experience the brilliant reds, oranges and golds that make autumn in Ogemaw County unforgettable. For even more exploration, head to Rifle River Recreation Area, a sprawling natural destination with miles of trails, lakes, streams and beautiful overlooks.

Fall is also the perfect time for a scenic drive, wildlife watching, geocaching and discovering the area's local treasures. Visit *Ogemaw Nature Park* for a close-up experience with deer and other animals or spend an afternoon exploring the shops, restaurants and historic charm of downtown West Branch.

Then winter arrives—but the adventure doesn't stop! Snow transforms the Ogemaw Hills into a destination for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling. At Rifle River Recreation Area, winter visitors can enjoy cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Snowmobiling is permitted on park roads when conditions provide sufficient snow.

For a classic winter day, take the family to Irons Park for sledding, then warm up with a delicious meal downtown. When you're ready to get back outside, explore the area's winter trails and frozen landscapes. West Branch makes it easy to trade screen time for snow time, whether you're seeking an energetic adventure or a peaceful walk through a quiet winter forest!

And adventure isn't always about going far. Sometimes it's discovering a new favorite shop, sharing a meal with friends, taking a scenic drive or watching the seasons change around you. Find adventure around every corner and maybe discover something about yourself along the way. That's the magic of West Branch: there is room to explore, room to play and room to simply be! *Visitwestbranch.com for more information.*





Cambria Suites Traverse City

Choose Choice Hotels Michigan

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

From the fiery autumn canopy of the Upper Peninsula to the snow-dusted shores of the Great Lakes, Michigan offers a breathtaking backdrop for every season. Whether you're planning a fall color tour, or a winter ski trip, finding the right home base is key to an unforgettable experience.

With Choice Hotels strategically located throughout the Great Lakes State, you'll find the perfect base to explore all Michigan has to offer. A rich portfolio of diverse brands, offer a range of accommodations such as Ascend, Cambria, Comfort Inn, Sleep Inn, Quality Inn, Clarion, Mainstay, Econolodge, Roadway Inn, Suburban or Woodstay Suites which caters to every traveler's wants and needs.

Choice Hotels offers the perfect blend of comfort, value and convenience. After a day spent navigating snowmobile trails or exploring nature or a charming downtown, the *Quality Inn & Suites* brand provides a dependable and comfortable retreat. Recognized for its consistent, clean and well-appointed rooms, this brand is built for travelers who value practicality without sacrificing comfort. It's an ideal choice for families on a road trip, couples on a scenic getaway or business travelers needing a reliable place to rest.

When you're looking for a more elevated experience that still prioritizes affordability, the *Comfort Inn & Suites* brand delivers. This brand focuses on the amenities that make a trip truly relaxing. Unwind in modern, spacious rooms featuring plush bedding, ensuring a restful night's sleep after a day of adventure. Some hotels offer a complementary breakfast, which is a essential start to any day! Be sure to check out locations which offer pet friendly accommodations, perfect for those who travel along with their furry family members.

Cambria Suites offer design-forward accommodations. Indulge yourself with their upscale essentials which includes a state-of-the-art fitness center and spa-inspired bathrooms and premium bedding. *Cambria Suites Traverse City* is located in a charming coastal town which is ideal for both leisure and business travellers, offering both comfort and convenience.

Planning your Michigan journey is effortless with the Choice Hotels® Mobile App. It's your ultimate travel tool, allowing you to search for hotels, book at the best available rates and manage your reservations all from your smartphone. Membership is free and offers immediate benefits. Enjoy exclusive member only rates, earn points on every stay that can be redeemed for free nights and access instant perks that enhance your travel experience. Every stay brings you closer to your next escape.

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Medeval Times

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

The Meadowlands is Fall & Winter's Ultimate Playground

Winter in the New Jersey Meadowlands doesn't mean slowing down. In fact, when the temperatures drop, the region offers an exciting mix of major sporting events, indoor adventures, family attractions, dining and entertainment that makes it an ideal winter destination.

One of the biggest events of the season arrives on Saturday, December 12, when one of college football's greatest traditions comes to MetLife Stadium. The *127th Army–Navy Game* will bring the Army Black Knights and Navy Midshipmen together for another chapter of "America's Game." It marks the rivalry's return to MetLife Stadium for the first time since 2021 and only the second time the game has been played at the stadium.

Few sporting events match the pageantry, tradition and atmosphere of Army–Navy, making this a must-see event for football fans and an unforgettable way to experience the Meadowlands.

When the weather turns cold, some of the region's best adventures move indoors.

At *RPM Raceway* in Jersey City, visitors can get behind the wheel of high-performance electric go-karts and compete on an exciting multi-level indoor track. RPM combines racing with arcade games, virtual-reality experiences and racing simulators, making it a great destination for families, friends, corporate groups or anyone looking to add a little competition to a winter day.

For another adrenaline rush, head to *iFLY* Indoor Skydiving in Paramus. Instead of jumping from an airplane, guests experience the sensation of freefall inside a vertical wind tunnel. First-time flyers can suit up, learn the basics from an instructor and experience the thrill of flight in a controlled indoor environment — no parachute required.

Of course, no winter visit to the Meadowlands would be complete without a stop at *American Dream* in East Rutherford. The massive entertainment and shopping destination makes it possible to pack several completely different experiences into a single day.

Winter sports enthusiasts can ski and snowboard on real snow at *Big SNOW,* North America's first indoor, year-round real-snow ski and snowboard resort. Just steps away, families can trade their winter coats for bathing suits at *DreamWorks Water Park*, where the temperature stays tropical even when it's freezing outside.

The fun continues at *Nickelodeon Universe,* an indoor theme park filled with rides and attractions, while The Rink offers ice skating in the heart of American Dream. Visitors can also explore miniature golf, shopping, dining and countless other entertainment options throughout the complex. Whether you want to ski, swim, skate, ride a roller coaster or simply enjoy dinner and shopping, American Dream offers an entire winter getaway under one roof.


Nickelodean Universe

For an experience that transports visitors to another time, *Medieval Times Dinner & Tournament* in Lyndhurst combines live entertainment with a four-course feast. Inside the castle, guests cheer on knights as they compete in jousting, sword fighting and games of skill, complete with horses, colorful costumes and plenty of medieval pageantry. It's a especially fun winter outing for families and groups — and another reminder that some of the Meadowlands' biggest adventures happen indoors.

For a different kind of competition, spend an evening at Meadowlands Racing & Entertainment. The legendary Meadowlands Racetrack continues to offer live harness racing and dining throughout the colder months, giving visitors another classic Meadowlands experience.

And sports fans have even more reasons to visit. MetLife Stadium remains home to the New York Giants and New York Jets throughout the NFL season, bringing football crowds to East Rutherford well into the winter.

The best part about winter in the Meadowlands is the variety. One weekend can include college football at MetLife Stadium, indoor skiing at American Dream, high-speed racing at RPM, indoor skydiving at iFLY, a medieval feast and tournament and an evening at the racetrack.

Add the region's hotels, restaurants, shopping and close proximity to New York City and the Meadowlands becomes much more than a place to visit for one event.

This winter, bundle up — or head indoors — and discover just how much there is to experience in the New Jersey Meadowlands. Meadowlandslive.com

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WINTER IN THE MEADOWLANDS





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New Jersey

MLCVB received funding through a grant from the N.J Department of State, Division of Travel and Tourism.



BY **RENU SAGGAR**

South Jersey Serenely Segues Into Autumn and Winter

When summer crowds retreat South Jersey's four counties—Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Salem—reveal their true selves. This is a landscape of river towns, pine forests and farmland, best experienced when the air turns crisp and frost tinges the fields.

Burlington County's *Johnson's Corner Farm* in Medford, draws families for apple picking and hayrides, while Gloucester County's *Duffield's Farm Market* in Sewell is famous for its apple cider doughnuts and pumpkin patches. Corn mazes open across the region, and the smell of wood smoke and falling leaves becomes the season's signature.

History enthusiasts should not miss the *Battleship New Jersey,* which is permanently moored at the Camden Waterfront. At nearly 900 feet long and towering 11 stories high, this floating museum is America's most decorated battleship. Visitors can explore its decks through guided tours, view historical exhibits and special events that bring the ship's storied past to life.

The nearby *Adventure Aquarium* promises a delightful time for families. Home to over 15,000 aquatic species, including the largest collection of sharks on the East Coast, the aquarium's exhibits are sure to captivate. Don't miss the *Stingray Beach Club,* where visitors can touch and hand-feed an array of stingrays.

Smithville is a living-history village that feels like stepping into a Currier & Ives print. Colonial-style buildings housing unique shops and eateries surround a picturesque lake In December, the village transforms into a Christmas fantasy with over one million lights, a festive train ride and nightly tree lighting. The scent of wood smoke and mulled cider fills the air, making it a quintessential holiday destination.

A visit to South Jersey wouldn't be complete without a stroll through *Haddonfield,* a picturesque town often likened to the idealized "Main Street USA." Kings Highway, lined with locally owned boutiques and excellent restaurants, is set amid charming colonial-era architecture. Haddonfield is also famous as the childhood home of director Steven Spielberg and features a monument to the *Hadrosaurus*, the first dinosaur discovered in the United States.

Dinosaur buffs should head for the *Jean & Ric Edelman Fossil Park and Museum* in Mantua Township. The museum overlooks a real quarry where researchers have unearthed 66-million-year-old marine fossils and even a full-blown tyrannosaur.

Salem County holds some of the region's most evocative historic sites. *Hancock House,* built in 1734 in Hancocks Bridge, displays patterned brickwork typical of early Delaware Valley architecture. *Finn's Point National Cemetery,* overlooking the Delaware River, is a place of quiet reflection.

Spanning Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester counties *Wharton State Forest* is a different world once the leaves fall. Dressed in a white robe of snow, it takes on a silence that feels almost sacred. Hikers can venture deeper into the Pine Barrens to *Batsto Village's* historic ironworks and mansion,now quiet against bare trees. Keep an eye out for the legendary *Jersey Devil*, said to roam the Pine Barrens for over 250 years.

Shopping here is an antidote to the big-box store. It's about the thrill of the find. Browse the eclectic mix of antique stores, art galleries and specialty boutiques. In *Smithville,* explore the *Village Greene* for everything from old-fashioned candy and holiday ornaments, to handmade crafts. In Haddonfield, discover high-end fashion, unique home goods, and local art.

The colder months also bring a quieter dining scene. In Burlington City, historic High Street offers cozy cafes and taverns housed in colonial-era buildings. Camden County's Haddonfield and Collingswood boast thriving restaurant rows, where farm-to-table menus highlight local root vegetables and winter greens. Gloucester County's *Mullica Hill* retains its small-town charm with antique shops and a general store that feels frozen in time.

For overnight stays, bed-and-breakfasts in Salem and Burlington counties offer fireplaces, antique furnishings and the kind of unhurried hospitality that defines the region.

For more information about planning your fall or winter visit to South Jersey, explore visitsouthjersey.com.

Haddonfield




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The waterfront promenade at Liberty State Park

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

Eight Great Things to Do in Hudson County New Jersey

Nestled just minutes from Manhattan, this dynamic waterfront region offers skyline views, diverse neighborhoods and incredible cuisine—without the sky-high NYC prices. From iconic landmarks to incredible food, here's your ultimate guide to a fun, festive and totally unforgettable visit.

Visit Ellis Island & See Lady Liberty Up Close!

No place represents the American journey quite like *Ellis Island*. Between 1892 and 1954, more than 12 million immigrants entered the United States here, making it one of the most important landmarks in American history. Today, visitors can explore the *Immigration Museum*, hear powerful personal stories and stand inside the historic *Great Hall* where generations of newcomers first stepped into America.

The ferry to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty departs from Liberty State Park in Jersey City, making it one of the easiest and most scenic ways to begin your Hudson County adventure. Statue City Cruises offers the only authorized ferry service to the *Statue of Liberty* and Ellis Island from Liberty State Park in Jersey City. Seeing Lady Liberty up close is a true bucket-list movement and the perfect way to connect with the spirit of America 250. Advance tickets are highly recommended.

Take in the Views from Liberty State Park

Liberty State Park is where everything comes together. Book your ferry tickets & tours in advance and spend an afternoon exploring the historic *Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal*, where millions of immigrants began their American journey. The powerful *Empty Sky 9/11 Memorial* is a peaceful and moving space that honors lives lost while framing one of the most incredible skyline views in the country. This is one of those experiences that stays with you.

Experience Hudson County's Global Food Scene

From incredible Cuban cuisine in Union City to legendary Italian bakeries, Latin American restaurants and buzzy modern dining spots in Jersey City, Hudson County offers a global culinary adventure within just a few miles.

And if you really want to experience it like a local, sign up for one of the county's popular food tours and pizza tours. These guided experiences take visitors through neighborhood hotspots where you can sample everything from authentic empanadas and Cuban sandwiches to handmade pasta and classic New Jersey pizza. So come hungry. Because in Hudson County, history isn't just something you learn — it's somethhing you eat.

The Birthplace of Frank Sinatra

Legendary singer Sinatra was born in Hoboken in 1915 and went on to become one of the most influential entertainers of the 20th century. Visitors can see the commemorative plaque marking his birthplace and explore the nearby waterfront park that bears his name: Frank Sinatra Park.

The park offers incredible views of the Manhattan skyline — a fitting tribute to the city that helped shape his legendary career. Take a self-guided walking tour with sites linked to the legendary New Jersey singer.

Walk the Waterfront in Jersey City

The waterfront in Jersey City, Hoboken and Weehawken offers some of the most breathtaking skyline views in America, making it one of the best places to experience Hudson County.

Stroll along the scenic *Hudson River Walkway,* relax in waterfront parks and take in panoramic views of New York City just across the river.

Explore Hoboken — The Birthplace of Baseball

Sports fans won't want to miss a visit to Hoboken, where the first officially recorded baseball game took place in 1846 at Elysian Fields, where you can see an historic marker at the intersection of 11thStreet and Washington Street.

That game — played between the New York Knickerbockers and the New York Nine — helped shape the rules of modern baseball. Celebrating America 250 here means celebrating one of the country's favorite pastimes.

Visit the Historic Apple Tree House

One of Hudson County's most fascinating Revolutionary War landmarks is the *Apple Tree House* in Jersey City. Dating back to the 1740s, the house gained historical significance during the American Revolutionary War. George Washington is believed to have observed British troop movements fom here. Today, the restored building sits within Apple Tree House Park, where visitors can explore exhibits about Hudson County's Revolutionary War history and enjoy views of the Manhattan skyline.

Visit the Weehawken Dueling Grounds

Perched along the Hudson River cliffs, the Weehawken Dueling Grounds marks the site of the infamous 1804 duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. The memorial features a bronze bust of Hamilton and stunning views of the Manhattan skyline. It's a quick but powerful stop that highlights one of the most dramatic moments in American history—right here in Hudson County.

For more information on hotels, eateries and attractions, visit www.visithudson.org.



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Supported in part by a grant from the New Jersey Department of State, Division of Travel and Tourism

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Biosphere pool at Grand Cascades Lodge

Holiday Magic at New Jersey's Sussex Skylands

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

Winter transforms New Jersey's Sussex Skylands into a wonderland. Just 43 miles from New York City, this secluded corner of the Garden State offers a full season of skiing, snowboarding and holiday cheer. Set amidst mountain splendor with scenic vistas spanning three states, *Crystal Springs Resor*t is the Northeast's premier four-season destination. Comprised of the luxurious *Grand Cascades Lodge* and recreation-rich *Minerals Hotel,* cold weather devotees will find stylish accommodations, first-rate amenities, gourmet meals and abundant activities.

This year, Crystal Springs is redefining the holiday getaway with cozy fireside traditions, seasonal pampering and endless adventure. December is packed with an array of family activities, special events and festive fun. Hands-on holiday traditions include Festive Crafting, The 12 Goats of Christmas, Reindeer Games, gingerbread house baking, mini-tree decorating and winter wagon rides.

Guests at Grand Cascades Lodge can glide across an expansive eco-friendly synthetic ice rink, challenge friends to a curling match or try their hand at axe throwing before relaxing rinkside and enjoying artisanal hot cocoa.

Over at Minerals Hotel, visitors can warm up at *Frosty's Cantina*, sipping signature craft cocktails and warming holiday favorites around cozy fire pits surrounded by picturesque mountains. Swim year-round in tropical indoor pool complexes or heated outdoor pools. In the evening make your reservation at the heated outdoor *Champagne Chalets*. Dining experiences feature chef-curated buffets, multi-course wine-pairing dinners and traditional farm-to-table feasts across the signature restaurants.

The highlight of the season arrives on December 12 with the all-new *Holiday Spectacular* at *The Canyon* in Minerals Hotel. Guests will enjoy high-energy performances by talented vocalists, musicians and comedians. The *Evening Gala*: An all-inclusive holiday experience, features a gourmet buffet and an open bar with seasonal cocktails, craft beer and fine wine. For a unique New Years Eve experience, the *Biosphere Pool* at Grand Cascades Lodge hosts a tropical-inspired party with a champagne toast at midnight. Beyond the holiday programming, Crystal Springs Resort offers access to its Spas of America-awarded day spas featuring seasonal winter treatments, curated tastings in the Wine Spectator Grand Award-winning *Wine Cellar* and fine dining at 4-star restaurant *Latour.*

Guests can take advantage of direct access to skiing, snowboarding and snow tubing at neighboring *Mountain Creek*. Sussex Skylands is a snow lover's playground and Mountain Creek Resort is its centerpiece. The resort spans four mountain peaks with 167 skiable acres, nine lifts and a 1,040-foot vertical drop—the highest in New Jersey. With an extensive snowmaking system and new grooming machines, the resort reliably opens early and maintains quality snow through the season.

The *Appalachian* hotel at Mountain Creek, offers ski-in/ski-out access to *Vernon Peak*, with spacious studios and one-bedroom condos featuring kitchens, fireplaces and balconies overlooking the valley. Guests enjoy a heated outdoor pool and hot tub year-round—perfect for soothing tired muscles while snow falls around you.

The *Hawks Nest Experience* is a luxurious private lounge experience at the *Red Tail Lodge*. It includes meals, snacks, specialty bar service and complimentary amenities, perfect for enhancing your winter adventure. Relax with complimentary amenities like hand warmers and cozy slippers. Secure lockers are available for your gear.

For a dazzling drive-through experience the *Skylands Stadium Christmas Light Show* in Augusta, features over two million lights across a mile-long route, plus a walk-through Christmas village with photos with Santa, carnival rides and s'mores by the fire. Open (Nov. 27 – Jan 3) it's a festive cap to any winter day.

Celebrate the magic of the holidays at *Peters Valley School of Craft.* Get ready to embark on a handmade holiday adventure brimming with creativity and craftsmanship! The gallery will be brimming with new works from incredibly talented artists. From unique jewelry to exquisite home décor. The Handmade Holiday Event runs from November 14 - December 31, 2026.https://petersvalley.org/exhibitions/2026-handmade-holiday-event/

The *German Christmas Market,* held at the Sussex County Fairgrounds in Augusta, is one of New Jersey's top holiday events. The (December 4-6) event includes authentic wooden huts, traditional bratwurst and German food, hand-crafted artisanal gifts, live choirs and festive entertainment for the whole family. https://www.gcmnj.org/

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The Sussex Skylands DMO is supported in part by a grant from New Jersey Department of State, Division of Travel and Tourism.



Mexico Beach, Florida ~ The Unforgettable Coast®

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

Not all beaches are created equal, and Mexico Beach, Florida, is a living proof. Tucked away in Northwest Florida, just 45 minutes east of Panama City Beach, this quiet, sun-soaked community has remained a beloved secret for generations of travelers. With five miles of white sandy beaches, Mexico Beach offers more than just a vacation, it offers a timeless experience. Visit once, and you'll understand why this charming coastal town leaves a lasting impression!

A True Escape From the Everyday

Here, time has a way of slowing down, giving you space to breathe, unwind and reconnect with what matters most. Mexico Beach is refreshingly free of towering high-rises and traffic lights, because there aren't any. Since 1946, our coastal town has preserved its small-town soul, offering a peaceful retreat from the hectic pace of modern life.

As the summer crowds fade and the cooler months arrive, Mexico Beach reveals its authentic character. Fall and winter offer a more intimate experience for those seeking genuine connection with nature, loved ones and themselves.

Fall: Tranquility & Nature's Splendor

Fall ushers in a more peaceful rhythm to Mexico Beach. With summer visitors returning home, the beaches become your private stage for nature's daily masterpiece: sunsets that paint the Gulf in brilliant oranges, deep purples and golds.

Comfortable temperatures make fall perfect for long walks along the beach, unhurried mornings with coffee off your balcony, afternoon fishing from the shore and evening conversations as the waves roll into the night sky.

Natural beauty seems to reach its peak during these months, when the light takes on that golden quality, photographers dream of. Whether capturing sunset photos with family or simply savoring quiet moments together, fall offers countless opportunities to create memories that last long after you return home.

Winter: Peace & Quiet in Paradise

Winters in Mexico Beach is an ideal time for reflection and relaxation. While temperatures may dip in the low 40s, the mild Gulf Coast climate makes it comfortable to enjoy the beach and outdoor activities. As the off-season, winter brings fewer crowds and more opportunities to enjoy the shoreline at your own pace.

Finding the perfect place to stay is simple, with choices that include beachfront resorts, Gulf-view townhomes, spacious RV campgrounds and fully equipped vacation rentals. Many local lodging partners also welcome pets, making it easy to bring the whole family. Wake up enjoying Gulf views at El Governor Beachfront Resort, settle into a fully furnished condo with Pristine Properties or plan a pet-friendly escape with partners such as Driftwood Inn and Forgotten Coast Property Management & Rentals.

Winter is the season for romantic walks along uncrowded shores, families enjoying quality time together and anyone craving the rare gift of true quiet.

Flavors & Finds in Every Season

Mexico Beach's culinary scene is full of flavor and personality, year-round. Enjoy locally caught seafood from the Shell Shack, grab a casual bite at Mango Marley's while catching the game or enjoy a fresh pizza from Point Break Pizza. Start your mornings at Caribbean Coffee & Café, where the legendary cinnamon rolls taste even better when enjoyed alongside locals.

Stroll along sidewalks that stretch the length of town, where charming boutiques and gift shops invite you to explore. Treat yourself to a visit at White Sands Salon & Boutique, find unique mementos and personalized keepsakes at Beach Planet or stop by Mexico Beach Marina & Outfitters for gear before heading to the shore or out on the water.

Your Invitation to Reconnect

Ready to trade your routine for the slower rhythm of waves and salt-kissed air? Fall and winter in Mexico Beach offer something increasingly rare: genuine peace, space to breathe and time to reconnect with what truly matters!

Whether you're sharing breathtaking sunsets, enjoying quiet family time on uncrowded beaches or simply rediscovering the joy of having nowhere urgent to be, the cooler months provide the perfect backdrop for creating memories that will warm you long after you've returned home.

The crowds are minimal. The sunsets are spectacular. The memories are unforgettable.

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Ohio Statehouse in Columbus

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

Ohio's Leadership Trail & Ohio Women's Monument

Long before Ohio became a state, people on this land were governing communities, building alliances, resolving conflicts and making decisions that shaped the future. Across generations, Ohioans have organized movements, challenged injustice, built public institutions, stood together for workers and communities and turned environmental problems into actions.

The Ohio Leadership Trail takes you to the places where those choices were made. Some leaders held offices or commanded armies. Others organized neighbors, challenged laws, gathered people around a cause, produced the evidence that changed minds or simply decided they could no longer accept things as they were. This "drive your own adventure" experience connects you to leadership stories across six themes and to the people, places, decisions and movements that helped move Ohio and the nation forward.

Ohio's leadership story begins long before Ohio. Indigenous nations governed communities, built alliances, negotiated, traded, resisted pressure and maintained cultural systems across this land for generations. These places reveal leadership through diplomacy, collective decision-making, strategy, cultural authority and adaptation during periods of profound change. They also remind us that the story of leadership here did not begin with statehood or westward expansion. It was already here.

Ohio's civic leadership story stretches from the creation of communities and state government to the presidency and national public life. Presidents, elected officials, educators, civic leaders, First Ladies and public institutions all shaped how people understood leadership and responsibility. Their stories reveal that holding office is only the beginning.

Many of Ohio's leadership stories began with people challenging injustice. Abolitionists defied slavery. Black Ohioans built institutions and challenged barriers. Women organized for political voice and opportunity. Lawyers and citizens confronted unjust laws. Faith and conscience inspired people to pursue abolition, peace, reform and different ways of living together.

Across movements and generations, these stories show how people organized to expand freedom, voice, protection, opportunity and power.

Other themes include Labor & Collective Action, Environmental Leadership and Military Leadership.

Leadership rarely fits neatly into one story. Explore online exhibits, educational resources, trip-planning tools and more ways to discover the people, movements, conflicts and decisions behind Ohio's leadership stories.

Ohio Women's Monument

On October 14, a new monument took its place on the South Plaza of the Ohio Statehouse. The *Ohio Women's Monument* is part of Ohio's commemoration of America's 250th birthday — and a lasting tribute to the women whose courage, leadership and determination have helped shape the state and the nation.

Created by artist *Brenda Councill,* the monument weaves history and contemporary sculpture to tell a story spanning nearly two centuries. Its four stone columns represent different periods from 1830 to the present, honoring notable Ohio women through names, stories and words engraved in granite.

Life-size bronze figures emerge among the columns reflecting the boldness, resilience and determination of the women whose stories are represented. The monument begins with Ohio women who raised their voices for equality before the Civil War and carries their story through the suffrage movement and into the generations that followed. Quotes engraved in the columns speak to equality, justice, liberty and the conviction that women deserve the opportunity to participate fully in civic, economic, educational and cultural life.

But this is not simply a monument to the past. Councill's vision reaches beyond the women whose names and words are etched in stone. It honors the women of today who continue to lead, work, create, serve, teach, advocate and open doors—and the women of tomorrow who will carry that work forward.

The Ohio Women's Monument is a place to pause, learn, reflect and be inspired. It will remind us that progress never happens by itself. It has depended on women who found their voices, women who used them and women who refused to stop working toward a better future. And now, their stories will stand in stone and bronze for generations to come.

America 250-Ohio driving trail details can be found along with America 250-Ohio related events and experiences at america250-ohio.org.

Celebrate Ohioans Who Serve

OHIO'S CELEBRATION OF AMERICA'S 250TH ANNIVERSARY CONTINUES IN NOVEMBER WITH EVENTS HONORING LEADERS AND VETERANS. VISIT AMERICA250-OHIO.ORG TO FIND EXPERIENCES CLOSE TO YOU AND AROUND THE STATE.

Honoring Revolutionary War Veterans

Although no major Revolutionary War battles occurred in Ohio, the state contains one of the largest concentrations of the war's veteran burials. Those burial sites are being mapped through the Ohio's **Revolutionary War Veteran Graves Project**. Existing research and crowdsourced fieldwork is helping to document the final resting places of these estimated 7,000 veterans across Ohio.

Follow the Voices That Moved the Nation

Across generations, Ohioans have challenged injustice, led through war and crisis, built public institutions and turned environmental problems into action. The **Ohio Leadership Trail** takes you to places that helped lead the United States. Choose your own adventure with the trail map on America250-Ohio.org/Ohio-Leadership-Trail.

Celebrating Ohio's Women Leaders

Be among the first to see the new **Ohio Women's Monument** on the grounds of the Ohio Statehouse. Designed by acclaimed artist Brenda Councill, the monument honors the historical and ongoing contributions of women who shaped the state and nation.







Join the Ohio & The Revolution webinar on Nov. 12 to learn about the land grants that led veterans to Ohio. See a full calendar of events on America250-Ohio.org.

AMERICA 250 1776 2026 OHIO™

Celebrate the Season in Ohio's Amish Country

This holiday season, trade the hustle and bustle for the peaceful beauty of Ohio's Amish Country. Within an easy two-hour drive from Cleveland or Columbus, Holmes County offers a chance to slow down, reconnect and make memories with the people who mean the most.

The holiday season comes alive with heartwarming traditions throughout the area. In Berlin, experience the magic of the *Live Nativity Parade on Friday*, November 27, featuring camels, donkeys, sheep, shepherds, angels and more as the Christmas story comes to life. On December 4 and 5, travel to Walnut Creek for the Journey to Bethlehem, an immersive experience that brings the story of Christ's birth to life.



Whitmer's General Store in Winesburg

Tree lightings, Christmas open houses and festive community celebrations add to the season's charm. On December 18 and 19, enjoy the *Christmas Tour of Inns and Shops*, where guests can explore beautifully decorated destinations, collect special treats, receive a commemorative cookbook and enter to win a grand prize, while celebrating the joy of the season.

Holiday shopping takes on a special charm there, too! Stroll through beautifully decorated shops and charming villages while searching for handcrafted treasures, one-of-a-kind gifts and locally made creations for everyone on your list. Along the way, warm up with a comforting meal at The Berlin Farmstead, Mrs. Yoder's Kitchen or Boyd & Wurthmann and savor the flavors of Amish Country.

When the holidays pass and winter settles in, Ohio Amish Country becomes the perfect place to rest, renew and escape the everyday rush. Couples can enjoy a peaceful, spa-like retreat at The Inn at Honey Run, while families can embrace a little indoor fun at the Berlin Resort, Berlin Grande and Comfort Inns in Millersburg and Berlin, where indoor pools offer the perfect remedy for cabin fever.

Home to the world's second-largest Amish settlement, Holmes County offers a unique glimpse into time-honored traditions and a lifestyle centered on simplicity and intention. Here, winding backroads, rolling hills, welcoming communities and handcrafted treasures create an atmosphere that encourages you to breathe a little deeper and stay a little longer.

This winter, unplug from the chaos and reconnect with what matters most. Ohio Amish Country is waiting. Plan your holiday or winter getaway at visitamishcountry.com.



Medina County for the Holiday & Winter Season!

The *Candlelight Walk* in downtown Medina has welcomed residents and visitors and is in its 42nd year. This signature event, held November 20-22, 2026, has become a beloved pastime as an official kick off to the holiday season. With choirs and music in the center of the park's gazebo, shopping specials, lighting ceremony, carriage rides, caroling and visits with Santa, this event is a visitors dream and is sure to spice up your holiday cheer. Candlelight Walk is a great way to get away and helps you check off your holiday gift list while enjoying places like *Boyert's Farm* or Castle Noel to pick up gifts and décor for your holiday. Saturday night is *Candlelight Walk's Parade of Lights* and the fireworks welcome you to start your holiday with a bang!



Holiday lights in Medina's Uptown Park

No holiday is complete without a trip to *Castle Noel*. America's Largest Indoor Year-Round Christmas Entertainment Attraction will guide you through halls decorated in Christmases past with holiday movie highlights and whisk you back to your childhood movie favorites. Tickets must be purchased online. New displays are added every year and new this year is the Hideaway Tavern- the perfect spot for a holiday meal with friends or family.

The Medina County Convention & Visitors bureau is the title sponsor of this year's 33rd *Annual Medina Ice Festival* on February 19-21, 2027. Elegant Ice Creations and the City of Medina welcome guests from near and far and sets a magical backdrop to enjoy the beauty of winter, while boasting all the amenities in the City of Medina, including lodging, a vibrant food scene, entertainment and shopping. This 3-day event is sure to be the highlight of your winter and you can join thousands of visitors to experience a great way to get outdoors and enjoy the beauty that Medina is known for.

Medina makes the most of winter with events and places to gather. After the holiday hustle, take time to catch up on your reading, connect with friends, trek outdoors and enjoy a relaxing cup of coffee while you watch the snow fall. Take time to enjoy the serene and quiet landscapes in the *Medina County Park District*. Medina has a lot to offer to ward off the winter blues! For more information go to visitmedinacounty.com.



Light up the Holidays in Miami County Ohio

The holidays have a way of filling the calendar quickly. Shopping lists grow, weekends disappear and the season can feel more rushed than memorable. A trip to Miami County, Ohio, offers a different way to spend a December day—or an entire weekends.

Here, holiday shopping comes with historic downtowns, locally owned businesses and plenty of reasons to linger. Add one of the area's favorite seasonal traditions and you have holiday experiences rather than errands.



Holiday Lights at Lost Creek Reserve

During the day, head to the county's downtown districts, where holiday shopping takes on a whole new meaning.

Downtown Troy surrounds its historic Public Square with independent boutiques and specialty shops filled with clothing, home décor, jewelry and gifts. In *Piqua,* Main Street sets the scene for antique shops, specialty retailers and locally owned businesses filled with unexpected finds.

Downtown Tipp City brings even more personality to the holiday shopping experience. Its streetscape is filled with boutiques, antiques and tempting treats. On the west side of the county, *West Milton, Pleasant Hill* and *Covington* offer opportunities to discover local businesses and unique gifts.

After a fun day of shopping, enjoy festive lights at Holiday Lights at *Lost Creek Reserve* in Troy, presented by the Miami County Park District. The 1.25-mile drive winds past more than 60 illuminated displays, with the historic Knoop Homestead providing a memorable backdrop for thousands of holiday lights.

At $10 per carload and $30 for 15-passenger vans (cash only), Holiday Lights is an easy addition to a family outing or weekend visit. Pair it with dinner, shopping and an overnight stay and one evening turns into a weekend of memories.

Spend the afternoon browsing shops, stop for a locally made treat, enjoy dinner at an independent restaurant, then head to Lost Creek Reserve for an evening beneath the lights.

Stay overnight and there's time the next morning for breakfast and a few more gifts before heading home.

Make room in your holiday plans for Miami County. Come for the shopping and lights, stay for local discoveries and time together—and you may leave with a new tradition.

Plan your holiday visit at HomeGrownGreat.com.



Fulton County Ohio is Your Perfect Getaway

What are you looking for? A slower pace or a new adventure? A taste of tradition or a moment of pure relaxation? Find it in Fulton County!

Bring history to life at *Sauder Village,* Ohio's largest living history museum. Travel through time from 1803 to the 1920s as costumed interpreters bring historic homes, farms, gardens and shops to life. Experience the Prohibition era at the *Broken Barrel Speakeasy* or celebrate the season during an old-fashioned *Christmas on 1920s Main Street.* With special events and activities throughout the year, there's always a reason to return. Visit www.saudervillage.org for more information.



Private Dining in an Igloo in Fulton County

Looking for history with a twist? Put your detective skills to the test at the *Museum of Fulton County* during "Murder at the Museum." Explore *Haunting History* tours, elegant living history teas, the *Artful History Academy, Senior Discovery Days* and much more! The museum offers a unique look at both local and American history through its meticulously designed, colorful exhibits and engaging displays.

Celebrate the magic of the holiday season throughout Fulton County! Children of all ages will marvel at festive *Parades of Lights* held in communities across the county, where parks are transformed with colorful illuminated displays that delight the child in all of us. Gather the kids and grandkids and head to *Christmas at the Cabin* for hands-on activities, a visit with talented elves in the blacksmith shop and breakfast with *Mr. Nutcracker.*

Looking for something a little wilder? Get up close to majestic animals at *Bracy Gold Bison Ranch* and experience the beauty of these incredible creatures.

Sip, savor and discover something new at local wineries, breweries and eateries. Many offer live entertainment, craft events, special menus and surprise pop-up experiences throughout the year. From casual dining to fine cuisine, Fulton County offers something to satisfy every appetite.

Choose from a variety of comfortable and affordable accommodations, including Sauder Heritage Inn, Holiday Inn Express, Tru by Hilton, Days Inn & Suites by Wyndham and Rodeway Inn. Conveniently located near the Ohio Turnpike, Fulton County is the perfect place to relax and recharge. visitfultoncounty.com





The Ntional Museum of the Great Lakes

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

Discover More Than You Ever Imagined in Toledo

Just across the border in northwest Ohio, Toledo offers a destination shaped by the Great Lakes, a rich glass making legacy, a growing riverfront and a creative spirit that continues to surprise visitors. With the Gordie Howe International Bridge now open, reaching this region of the United States is even more convenient.

Toledo offers plenty of reasons to plan a weekend away. Visitors can skate along a winding outdoor ice trail, wander through more than a million holiday lights, catch a *Toledo Walleye* hockey game or spend an evening out on the town enjoying orchestral music from the Toledo Symphony.

Toledo earned its nickname, the *Glass City*, through a glass making industry that helped shape its identity. Today, that legacy lives on in experiences visitors can see and even try for themselves.

At the *Toledo Museum of Art*, the *Glass Pavilion* houses an impressive collection of glass art, while demonstrations offer a closer look at the skill behind each creation. Watching artists transform molten glass into intricate works is a reminder that our industrial heritage has evolved into something distinctly creative. Through January 3, visitors can also enjoy a special exhibition featuring dozens of fan favorite works from TMA's overall collection while the main museum undergoes a reinstallation project.

The Great Lakes connect communities on both sides of the border, but few experiences bring their shared history to life quite like the *National Museum of the Great Lakes*. Located along the *Maumee River*, the museum explores the people, industries and vessels that have shaped life on these freshwater seas.

Interactive exhibits and historic artifacts tell stories of exploration, commerce and the challenges of navigating the lakes. During the warmer months, visitors can board the *Col. James M. Schoonmaker*, a historic freighter and the *Tug Ohio*. It's a tangible way to understand the scale of Great Lakes shipping history and the role these waters continue to play in regional life.

For visitors who want to get outside, Toledo's natural surroundings offer another surprise. At *Oak Openings Preserve Metropark,* sandy trails, oak savannas and distinctive habitats create a landscape that feels unexpected in the Midwest. Closer to the city, *Glass City Metropark* brings people to the Maumee River with open green spaces, waterfront views, dining and a skating ribbon for all seasons. It's part of a larger effort to reconnect residents and visitors with the river and create new reasons to spend time along its banks.

As the holiday season approaches, Toledo's calendar offers plenty of reasons to plan a weekend away. On November 7, *Romance-Con* brings romance literature fans together at the Toledo Library for a celebration of books and authors.

Beginning November 20, the *Toledo Zoo & Aquarium's Lights Before Christmas* transforms the grounds with more than a million lights and festive displays, making it a memorable holiday outing. Follow *The Ribbon* at Glass City Metropark, a unique way to embrace winter with its winding ice-skating trail.

Sports fans can catch a Toledo Walleye hockey game at the *Huntington Center*, while the Toledo Symphony's performance calendar offers opportunities to spend an evening enjoying live orchestral music. Round out the weekend with dinner at a local restaurant, a stop at an independent coffee shop or a visit to one of Toledo's many distinctive cultural attractions.

Toledo's eclectic dining scene will keep you happily fed and fueled along the way. At *Souk Mediterranean Kitchen & Bar,* bold Mediterranean flavors and fresh, seasonal ingredients make for a memorable meal, while *Registry Bistro* pairs an ever-evolving, chef-driven menu with creative cocktails in a stylish setting. For a more casual stop, The *Garden by Poco Piatti* at Glass City Metropark serves Mediterranean-inspired favorites just steps from the riverfront and The Ribbon. And no visit to Toledo would be complete without trying the famous Hungarian hot dog at *Tony Packo's*, a local institution with a history as memorable as its food.

Independent coffee shops offering plenty of places to recharge between adventures. *Brew House Downtown* is a favorite among hotel guests, with cozy seating and a speakeasy that comes to life after hours. Other local favorites include EARTH Coffeehouse & Café, House of Coffee and Maddie & Bella Coffee Roasters, each with its own personality and atmosphere.

For Ontario travelers, Toledo is an opportunity to discover something new without going far from home. The next time a change of scenery is calling, consider Toledo. With a remarkable legacy, a deep connection to the Great Lakes and lots of room to explore, it's only about an hour from the border. visittoledo.org.


MORE THAN YOU EVER IMAGINED
TOLEDO
View of the Glass City River Wall,
The largest mural in the United States,
from J&M Cruise Lines
Plan your trip at
VisitToledo.org



Chestnut Festival in the village of Curral das Freiras

The Island of Eternal Spring

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

Rising dramatically from the Atlantic Ocean, the Portuguese archipelago of Madeira is a destination that defies expectations. From the moment you arrive, you know you are somewhere special. The island's dramatic topography, with its steep, fertile hills plunging into the deep blue sea, is the result of its volcanic origins. Unlike the mainland's Mediterranean landscapes, Madeira is a semi-tropical outpost of green, characterized by black-sand beaches and rugged coastlines. With its lush laurel forests, dramatic cliffs and a climate that truly lives up to its nickname, the "Island of Eternal Spring," Madeira offers a compelling blend of adventure, culture and relaxation for every type of traveler.

For outdoor enthusiasts, Madeira is paradise. The island's most famous feature is its network of levadas—centuries-old irrigation channels that snake through the mountains, providing water from the wetter northwest to the drier southeast. What was once an agricultural necessity is now a hiker's dream, with trails running alongside these channels through verdant valleys, high cliffs and even dark tunnels. For those seeking a truly immersive experience, the UNESCO-listed *Laurissilva Forest* offers a prehistoric atmosphere, with mist rolling through ancient laurel trees and waterfalls thundering down hidden cliffs.

A hike to the peaks is a must for any visitor. The trail between *Pico do Areeiro* and *Pico Ruivo*—Madeira's third and highest peaks, respectively—is legendary. Watch the sunrise from Pico do Areeiro, where you stand high above a sea of clouds as the light hits the mountains. It's an unmissable experience that many describe as life-changing. It's a challenging but rewarding climb that encapsulates the island's wild beauty.

While adventure is a big draw, Madeira also knows how to live well. The island is home to historic *quintas*—traditional aristocratic estates that have been transformed into intimate boutique hotels and private retreats. Surrounded by vineyards, botanical gardens and orchards, these properties often embrace an estate-to-table philosophy, allowing guests to experience the island's bounty in a truly authentic way.

For those who prefer to experience the culture *Funchal*, the island's capital, offers a wealth of attractions. A stroll



Quinta do Lorde

through the *Mercado dos Lavradores* is a sensory feast, the air is thick with the scent of exotic tropical fruits and fresh fish, while the vibrant colors of locally grown produce and flowers make for a perfect photo opportunity.

Zona Velha — the city's oldest district, dates back to the 15th century when Portuguese settlers first arrived on the island. With its cobbled streets and historic buildings, wandering through the Old Town is like taking a step back in time.

The *Funchal Cable Car* transports passengers from the lower section of Funchal, Madeira to the suburb of Monte, not far from the *Monte Palace Tropical Garden*. The lush garden is home to thousands of exotic plants from all over the world, tranquil koi ponds, cascading waterfalls and winding pathway. The ride up takes about 15–18 minutes and offers fantastic views over the city and the coastline along the way.

Madeira's culinary delights are as captivating as its landscapes. The island's cuisine is deeply rooted in the land and sea, with fresh seafood taking center stage. Local fishermen bring in delicacies like the unusual black scabbardfish, tuna, octopus and limpets, which are prepared with traditional flair. A taste of local beef is essential, particularly the famous *Espetada*—beef skewers grilled on a laurel bay stick, giving it an unmistakable, smoky flavor. It's often served with *Bolo do Caco*, the island's staple bread. No trip is complete without trying *poncha,* a traditional, potent cocktail made with local sugar cane rum, honey and lemon.

The crowning glory of Madeira's gastronomic heritage is its namesake, Madeira wine. Unlike other wines, it is intentionally oxidized and heated, resulting in a rich, caramelized flavor that allows it to age for decades. A visit to *Blandy's Wine Lodge* in Funchal, offers a deep dive into this history, where you can learn that this very wine was once used to toast the signing of the U.S. Declaration of Independence. The island's culinary scene is also being re-imagined by a new generation of chefs, who create contemporary dishes that blend local ingredients with modern techniques, offering everything from fine dining with ocean views to private vineyard lunches.

One of Madeira's most appealing features is its weather. With a subtropical climate, the island is a year-round destination. Spring brings a spectacular burst of color with the famous Flower Festival, making the hiking trails even more beautiful. Summer offers the best conditions for watersports and beach days, with warm sea temperatures and long hours of sunshine. This is also the season for the lively *Madeira Wine Festival*. For those looking to escape the northern winter, Madeira is a perfect retreat, the mild winter months are ideal for hiking and the Christmas lights in Funchal are considered some of the most beautiful in Europe.

To truly experience the island's ever-changing beauty, it's best to rent a car. Driving along Madeira's roads is never monotonous, the scenery can change from a sunny coastline to a misty mountain forest in just a few kilometers.

Madeira is more than just a pretty face. It's a destination where rugged volcanic peaks meet the luxury of historic quintas, where the thrill of canyoning is followed by the serenity of a wine tasting. It is an island that invites you to explore, relax and savor every moment. Whether you are an adrenaline junkie, a passionate foodie or a traveler in search of a unique and stunning getaway, Madeira's magic will capture your heart.



Funchal Harbour



Authentic Alaska with Azamara Pursuit

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

Azamara *Pursuit* is a combination of boutique hotel comfort at sea with destination focused itineraries, making it ideal for travelers seeking a refined, immersive cruising experience. Azamara sails to some of the most extra ordinary adventures on earth, places you've always dreamed of!

Pursuit officially joined the Azamara fleet in 2018. After undergoing extensive refurbishments, Pursuit accommodates 704-744 passengers. With a favourable 2:1 passenger-to-crew ratio and ample space for the guests, there are no line-ups or packed elevators. The inclusive nature of Azamara cruises avoids all the additional expenses you find on other ships!

Sailing from Vancouver, Azamara Pursuit's Alaska itinerary includes port calls in Klawock, Sitka, Icy Strait point, Ketchikan and Victoria British Columbia.

Klawock, on the western shore of Prince of Wales Island, offers an authentic, off-the-beaten-path wilderness and Tlingit cultural experience. Icy Strait Point is a re-created village outside the small town of Hoonah, a thriving Tlingit community. Known as the "Salmon Capital of the World," Ketchikan blends vibrant Native culture, lush rainforest scenery, and Alaska's famous totem heritage. Set between forested islands and snow-dusted peaks, Sitka offers a captivating mix of Tlingit culture, Russian history, and pristine wilderness. Located on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, Victoria is known for its mild climate, historic architecture, and beautiful public gardens. Extended stays in ports such as Ketchikan and Victoria, BC, give guests ample time to explore each destination.

The culinary journey is equally considered. In partnership with award-winning chefs, Azamara has curated menus that celebrate the flavors of Alaska. Imagine enjoying a six-course dinner that showcases the day's fresh catch of wild salmon or halibut, paired with fine wines, all while reflecting on a day of incredible scenery. Azamara Pursuit features seven restaurants, cafes and lounges, including *Prime C* and *Aquilina* speciality restaurants. Pick your steak, cooked to perfection, herb-coated rack of lamb or Chilean Bass- all paired with delicious and healthy sides. Located at the aft (back) of the ship on Deck 10, Prime C features a warm, cozy, wood-paneled aesthetic with large windows that offer stunning, sweeping ocean views.

At Acquilina, the Italian restaurant, you'll taste some of the Italy's most authentic dishes made from scratch from traditional recipes with great vegetarian choices as well. Don't miss out on their famous Italian desserts like Sorrento lemon liqueur mousse, hazelnut chocolate soufflé and more.

The main dining room is consistently praised for its top-quality produce and imaginative cuisine and any dietary needs will be accommodated by notifying the ship at least 80 days before you sail!

The culinary team goes above and beyond to host events, from poolside



Prime C

BBQs ,to evening under the stars, to a spectacular *White Night* party, an al fresco feast and dance celebration where the cuisine is elevated, and the atmosphere is pure magic. You will see the Hotel Director Richard Gusmann, along with all his senior officers serving the food and Captain Mikael Palmroos dinning alongside the guests making this event extra special!

Alaska is a destination that demands a different kind of cruise. Instead of acting as a floating resort that happens to visit a few ports, an Azamara ship is a gateway to the places it visits. It's not about waterslides, Vegas-style shows, or racing from port to port. It's about the profound stillness of a glacial fjord, the thunderous crack of calving ice, and the quiet thrill of spotting a humpback whale breaching against a backdrop of snow-capped peaks. For travellers who crave this deeper connection, an Alaska cruise with *Azamara* offers a distinctly immersive and intimate way to explore the *Last Frontier.*

Sailing the legendary *Inside Passage*, offers some of the most breathtaking and sheltered cruising in the world. This route is a haven for wildlife, with frequent sightings of sea lions, bald eagles, and orcas. The calm waters also make for a smooth journey, allowing guests to truly appreciate the ever-present scenery that unfolds around every bend. Inside Passage cruises also enable guests to experience the carefully selected ports, chosen for their character and cultural richness, not just their convenience.

While the primary focus is the destination, Azamara's ships are sophisticated and comfortable retreats. Restore, recharge, and rejuvenate in the *Sanctum Spa,* and stay active with the onboard fitness programs. Beyond the day's excursions, Azamara creates memorable moments that are included in the voyage. A highlight for many is the *AzAmazing Evening*, a unique, complimentary event designed to connect guests with the local culture. In Alaska, this might be a lively celebration featuring Native dance performances, regional storytelling, or the famed Great Alaskan Lumberjack Show, bringing the spirit of the frontier to life under the open sky.

Pursuit offers a wide range of accommodations, from comfortable staterooms, to spacious suites with butler service. For many, a Veranda Stateroom is the sweet spot, allowing guests to step outside and take in the fresh sea air and ever-changing views of the Alaskan coastline from the privacy of their own space.

For travellers who want to go beyond the coast, Azamara offers extensive Cruisetours—multi-day land packages that can be added before or after the cruise. These programs are a seamless way to experience Alaska's vast interior.

Tours range a journey to Denali, a riverboat cruise, and a scenic rail trip, to more extensive land tours that combine the cruise with an exploration of the Canadian Rockies via the iconic *Rocky Mountaineer* train.

The best time to take this journey is from May through August. During these months, wildlife is most active, the days are long, and the weather—with temperatures typically ranging from the mid-50s to mid-60s °F, is ideal for exploration.

An Azamara Alaska cruise is an investment in an experience, not just a holiday. It is designed for the curious traveller, one who values authenticity, connection, and the profound beauty of the natural world over onboard spectacle. It is a journey that promises not just to show you Alaska, but to help you truly experience it.





The Pretonus Twin Towers

Malaysia ~ Asia's Cultural Crossroads

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

Southeast Asia conjures images of bustling Bangkok or the beaches of Bali. Yet, nestled between these famous neighbors is Malaysia, a country that offers a remarkably diverse and often underrated travel experience. It's a place where futuristic skyscrapers cast shadows on colonial-era buildings, where ancient rainforests harbor unique wildlife and where the culinary scene is a delicious reflection of its multicultural soul. Whether you're an adventurer, a foodie or a history buff, Malaysia offers an accessible and captivating journey.

The adventure often begins in *Kuala Lumpur* (KL) , the nation's dazzling capital. The city is a testament to Malaysia's rapid modernization, most famously embodied by the soaring *Petronas Twin Towers*, which once held the title of the world's tallest buildings. You can walk across the connecting Skybridge on the 41st and 42nd floors and head up to the observation deck on the 86th floor for sweeping city views.

Yet, KL's charm lies in its contrasts. You can explore the serene, pink-hued *Putra Mosque*, bargain for souvenirs in the bustling *Petaling Street* market or visit the *Batu Caves*, a magnificent Hindu shrine. To reach the main Temple Cave, you must climb the iconic, brightly painted 272 steps, guarded by a massive 140-foot golden statue of *Lord Murugan*.

Beyond the capital, history comes alive in the UNESCO World Heritage cities of *George Town* and *Melaka*. George Town, on Penang Island, is a captivating mosaic of British colonial mansions, ornate Chinese shophouses and colorful Buddhist temples. It's streets are also an open-air gallery, famous for the vibrant street art that adorns its walls.

Melaka, a two-hour drive from KL, reflects centuries of Portuguese, Dutch and British colonial rule mixed with local Peranakan culture. Visitors love exploring the red-hued Dutch Square, historical ruins like A Famosa fortress and shopping along Jonker Street, a paradise for souvenir hunters and foodies alike.

For eco-tourists and nature lovers, Malaysia is a veritable paradise. Peninsular Malaysia is home to *Taman Negara*, one of the world's oldest tropical rainforests, a haven for trekking and wildlife spotting, including the elusive Malayan tiger. The adventure intensifies in *Malaysian Borneo,* comprising the states of Sabah



Perhentian Islands Beach

and Sarawak. Here, you can conquer *Mount Kinabalu*, the highest peak in Southeast Asia.

For wildlife enthusiasts, Malaysian Borneo is a dream. *Sepilok* allows visitors to see orphaned and rescued orangutans in a protected forest habitat,while a river safari down the nearby *Kinabatangan River* offers chances to spot wild proboscis monkeys, pygmy elephants and rhinoceros hornbills.

For divers, the waters around *Sipadan Island* are considered some of the best in the world.

If relaxation is more your pace, the island of *Langkawi*, with its turquoise waters and 10-million-year-old rainforest, offers the perfect setting for a "reset" stop. Here you can unwind on pristine beaches, take a cable car to the *Langkawi Sky Bridge* for breathtaking views and enjoy the slower pace of island life.

Located off the northeast coast of Peninsular Malaysia, the *Perhentian Islands* feature powdery white sands and crystal-clear turquoise waters. It is widely considered one of the country's best spots for scuba diving, where reef sharks and sea turtles are frequently sighted.

One of the greatest joys of visiting Malaysia is its extraordinary food. The country's multi-ethnic makeup—Malay, Chinese, Indian, and *Peranakan*—has created a unique and incredibly diverse culinary landscape. George Town is widely celebrated as the culinary capital, where the best meals are often found at humble hawker centers. Must-try dishes include the smoky, wok-fried noodles of char *kway teow* and the spicy, sour and aromatic noodle soup known as *laksa*.

Beyond these famous dishes, you can explore the complex flavors of *Peranakan* (Nyonya) cuisine, a blend of Malay, Indian, and Eurasian influences. Be sure to experience Malaysia's rich breakfast culture, which has even been recognized by UNESCO for its cultural significance.

These days, getting there is simple. Major international airports in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Kota Kinabalu make the country easily accessible. A well-developed network of trains, buses, and affordable domestic flights makes getting around simple and cost-effective. The ride-hailing app *Grab* is the go-to for convenient and affordable taxi services in cities. It is advisable to exchange some currency to Malaysian Ringgit (MYR) in advance, as ATM fees can be high.

Malaysia is hot and humid, so lightweight, breathable clothing is essential. However, to show respect at places of worship, it is important to dress modestly, covering your shoulders and knees. Don't forget a universal power adapter, as Malaysia uses the British-style three-pin plug.

Malaysia has two monsoon seasons, so the best time to visit depends on the region. It is a country that can be visited year-round by planning your itinerary around the areas with the best weather. The year 2026 is an especially exciting time to visit, as the country is promoting Visit Malaysia 2026, a national campaign designed to welcome visitors with more coordinated experiences.

Malaysia is more than just a destination; it's a vibrant and captivating experience. It's a place where you can sip an ice-cold drink while bargaining at a market, then ascend a mountain to watch the sunrise. It offers the perfect blend of adventure, culture and relaxation, all at an excellent value. For a trip that leaves you with unforgettable stories, Malaysia is the perfect choice.



Putra Mosque in Putrajaya, Malaysia



Havasu Falls

Free Range Wanderng in Arizona

BY **RENU SAGGAR**

When people think about Arizona, they usually think about the *Grand Canyon* in the north or the *Sonoran Desert,* which occupies the lower third of the state. But between those two geological marvels, lie towering mountains, smoldering volcanoes, green coniferous forests, rolling grasslands and arctic tundra. Dramatic changes in elevation are responsible for an astonishing variety of flora and fauna. Arizona has more distinctive life zones than anywhere else on earth. In fact, you'd have to travel all the way from Vancouver Island to Mexico, to see as many habitats as you could find here in a single day.

One of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World, the Grand Canyon, is the state's undisputed highlight. The South Rim is the most accessible and popular option, offering breathtaking viewpoints and a comprehensive visitor center. Looking over the rim, you feel as if your heart has dropped 5,000 feet to the canyon floor. The dark corridor of the 2 billion year old *Vishnu Shist* or *Inner Gorge,* was formed by the oldest known rock on the planet. For those seeking solitude, the *North Rim* is a quieter, more remote alternative, though it's only open seasonally. To truly appreciate its grandeur, consider a rafting trip down the Colorado River or a hike below the rim.

The Sonoran Desert's Saguaro cactus stand like a sentinels, arms reaching out toward the horizon. Many Arizonans believe these giants possess human traits. One Saguaro is said to have taken revenge on someone using it for target practice, by falling on him and crushing him to death. Saguaros can live up to 200 years and reach 40 feet tall. Weighing up to 6 tons, they can be swayed by the touch of a finger. Keep an eye out for the many unique species of wildlife including the javelina, a 50 lb. rodent that resembles a pig.

The iconic sandstone formations of *Monument Valley*, have been cinematic backdrop for countless Westerns and are best explored via a jeep tour with a Navajo guide. For a more intimate encounter with nature's artistry, the orange-hued, wave-like crevices of *Antelope Canyon* are a must-see, offering a spiritual and visual feast.

Arizona is home to 22 American Indian



Horseshoe Bend Grand Canyon

Tribes, making it a vital destination for Native American history and culture. Explore the cliff dwellings of the *Salado* people at *Tonto National Monument* or the ancient farming community at *Casa Grande National Monument*. The *Hopi Arts Trail* offers a glimpse into Hopi culture with galleries showcasing traditional crafts like the rare "pootsaya" baskets.

Arizona's cities offer a different kind of adventure. Phoenix, the state's cultural hub, boasts an array of theaters, and museums like the *Phoenix Art Museum* and the *Heard Museum*, which displays an impressive collection of Native American artifacts, including baskets, jewelry, pottery and textiles. The *Kachina Doll gallery* features the world's foremost collection carved Hopi Kachina dolls, which depict spirit messengers from the Hopi religion.

The city's *Desert Botanical Garden* displays 15,000 species of desert plants including the mysterious boogum tree, which resembles an immense, upside down carrot. Just forty miles east of Phoenix, the *Superstition Mountains* rise from a desert basin lush with cacti and ocotillo. They were one of Geronimo's last hideouts and the site of the legendary *Lost Dutchman Mine*.

For a taste of the "Wild West," visit *Tombstone,* where you can watch a re-enactment of the legendary gunfight at the O.K. Corral.

The old territorial capital of *Prescott* has the architectural appearance of a small town in New England. The shady streets fan out from the central courthouse square and are framed by gabled Victorian homes with graceful verandahs. Whiskey Row in downtown Prescott boasts many historic buildings, including *The Palace,* Arizona's oldest restaurant and bar. Prescott enjoys a moderate climate thanks to its location high in the *Bradshaw Mountains* in the central part of the state. Hikers will want to make the 2.5 mile climb up nearby *Thumb Butte* in the 1.25 million acre *Prescott National Forest*. From the summit you can take in stunning 100 mile vistas that include the snow capped *Mt. Humphries* and the *Sierra Prieta Rim*.

Flagstaff is an historic mountain town nestled at the base of the *San Franisco Peaks*, in Arizona's high country. Just two and one half hours north of Phoenix, Flagstaff enjoys four distinct seasons and the state's best skiing at the *Arizona Snowbowl*. Visitors can tour the *Lowell Observatory*—the place where Pluto was discovered.

The *Museum Club* on historic *Route 66,* is a Depression era roadhouse as authentic as a Hank William's tune. The cavernous log structure was once owned by a taxidermist, who lined the walls with enough stuffed animals to open a natural history museum.

The *Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument,* fifteen miles north of the city, was the site of a major volcanic eruption about 900 years ago. Visitors cross over immense fields of frozen lava to reach a black volcanic cone that rises 1,000 above the meadow.

South of Flagstaff, Highway 89A winds down a series of switchbacks through the red rock walls of *Oak Creek Canyon*. The 28-mile ride into *Sedona* is considered one of the most scenic drives in America. Many believe Sedona's iconic red rocks harbor unusual concentrations of electrical, magnetic, and vibrational energy that intersect at places known as vortices. Sedona has at least three such power places, including Bell Rock, Boynton Canyon, and Cathedral Rock. In 1987, hundreds of people paid $75 each for a spot on Bell Rock, which they believed was going to lift off to Andromeda.



Saguaros in the Sonoran Desert

What's Happening in Windsor Essex

Mezzo Ristorante & Lounge

Nestled in the heart of Windsor's, Little Italy *Mezzo Ristorante & Lounge* offers an unforgettable culinary experience. They serve a unique fusion of award-winning Northern and Southern Italian cuisine with global flair.

The not-to-be missed dining experience goes far beyond



award-winning cuisine. A cool blend of an eclectic atmosphere, extensive wine lists, speciality cocktails and live entertainment are the ingredients for one of Windsor's most appealing destinations. That's why it was voted Windsor's Top Choice Italian Restaurant for 2026.

At Mezzo, every detail is meticulously arranged, from the expertly crafted menu, to the tables dressed in white linens.

Pastas include Four Cheese Gnocchi and Tagliatelle with tender shrimp, scallops, mussels & calamari, tossed in a vibrant tomato and white wine sauce. A dinner favourite and award winner is Mezzo's pan-seared sesame encrusted sushi grade Ahi tuna with mango chutney.

The lobster penne features layers of black tiger shrimp, red peppers and brandy blush sauce crowned with an 8 ounce lobster tail. Or, savour Mezzo's Beef Tenderloin, pan-seared 'AAA' beef tenderloin in a Cabernet Sauvignon reduction. The Pollo Mezzo features bacon wrapped chicken breast, stuffed with dried cranberries, wild mushrooms, ricotta and onions and goat cheese in a Champagne cream sauce.

From exquisite Italian wines to international varietals, an extensive wine list is curated to complement the food.

If you're considering a Christmas or New Years event, or a romantic Valentine's dinner complete with champagne, add Mezzo to your list. Mezzo's private room can accommodate between 35 and 40 guests, and can be set up to host a variety of functions. It's perfect for meetings, weddings, birthdays, anniversaries and other milestone events.

Planning a party? Mezzo's catering service offers the same great taste at your location. Affordable and delicious it's perfect for any gathering or occasion.

Mezzo also offers most regular menu items for takeout. Their *Gourmet Boxes to Go* consisting of Mezzo's most popular appetizers, have become an enormous success.

Visit them on line at Mezzo.ca for a full menu and upcoming events!

Artisan Grill

Fresh ingredients, artfully prepared, outstanding service, a warm ambience and an extensive wine menu are the hallmarks of your dining experience at Artisan Grill. Located in a heritage building in the heart of Amherstburg's charming and historic downtown, the atmosphere is warm, intimate, and sophisticated, with a modern yet comfortable decor. A carefully crafted menu marries exceptional, contemporary flavors with the rich heritage of its surroundings. Owner and Chef Matthew Johnston focuses on creating dishes from scratch, using high-quality, ingredients.

The menu features a robust selection of options including gluten-free. They range from upscale classics like a 16-ounce bone-in rib eye steak, lobster Thermidor and rack of and lamb. Casual favorites include the *Classic Artisan Burger*: A juicy beef patty topped with crispy bacon and melted cheddar on a toasted bun. Artisan Grill's *Fall Fusion* feature menu features sensational new dishes, as well as some past favourites. Try the P*umpkin Ravioli* — half moons of pumpkin-filled ravioli in warm brown butter, sage and brown sugar Nappe, or the Grilled *Maple Glazed Pork Tomahawk* — accompanied by redskin garlic mashed potatoes and tarragon and brown butter carrot coins. *Tuscan Kale* with roasted beets features creamy goat cheese, dried cranberries and finished with candied walnuts and a honey balsamic vinaigrette. Many items can be modified to



accommodate special requests.

Artisan Grill's packages feature great options for every taste and budget, and make planning your party a breeze! Custom menus are just a conversation away.

A well-curated selection of wines pair nicely with the menu as well as craft cocktails and beer. An international and Canadian wine list, showcases selections from some local, award-winning Essex County wineries.

Whether you are planning a holiday party, family get together, a special date night, or a milestone event, the Artisan Grill delivers top-tier service, historic charm, and unforgettable culinary craftsmanship. Artisan's team is standing by to take your reservation.

Visit them online at artisangrill.ca.



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Al La Mode

Embrace the fall winter season at A La Mode. Whether it's dressing up, or dressing down — a good dress is all you need to bring a touch of celebration to every day of the week. Located in the heart of Amherstburg, A La Mode ladies fashions brings you the top-notch collections from Europe, Canada, USA and much more. What sets *A La Mode Ladies Fashions* apart is their ability to combine the latest fashion trends with timeless pieces that withstand the test of time. You won't find the originality and comfort of their clothes anywhere else! They carry a wide variety of styles, taking you from day casual to evening chic!



Urban by Alembika at A La Mode

New lines for fall include *Urban by Alembika* from Israel, and *Nikky Apparels* a Canadian brand.

Nikky Apparels is an Ontario-based women's clothing label that has been designing since 1992. Founded by a mother-son duo, the brand is built around the philosophy of creating "everywhere" clothing—versatile pieces that transition seamlessly from chic to cozy, designed to wrap women in comfort and style. Their designs are timeless, sustainable and easy to care for, with a mission to speak to a new generation of creatives, while using innovative fabrics from nature.

The brand's identity is rooted in a legacy of female empowerment and family collaboration. Nikky herself was a long time educator before channeling her creative energy into fashion, while her son Danny Bawa serves as the CEO and Style Director. Together, they design all prints in-house, sew every garment and ship from their own warehouse—maintaining complete control over quality and working conditions. This hands-on approach has allowed Nikky Apparels to build a reputation as a market leader in discovering and nurturing talent, blending decades of manufacturing expertise with a fresh, innovative perspective on what modern women want to wear!

Urban by Alembika is the diffusion line of the Israeli fashion house Alembika, based in Tel Aviv While the main Alembika line is known for its vibrant, expressive aesthetic, the *Urban* collection brings a sharper, more architectural edge to the brand's DNA, characterized by bold shapes and striking contrasts . The collection is designed to offer a full range of sizes up to 48 as a legitimate design line rather than a separate plus-size range, maintaining the same creative cuts and attention to fit across every size. The collection is designed for women who want their everyday wardrobe to have a little attitude—relaxed and expressive clothing that balances comfort with directional style.

Ala Mode also carries a great selection of accessories: purses, jewelry, shoes from *Miz Mooz* and *Django And Juliette* plus much more. Join them on Facebook every Monday at 9 a.m. and Thursday at 5 p.m. for their live stream fashion shows featuring fun outfits and ensemble inspirations!

A La Mode is located at 52 Richmond Street in Amherstburg. Visit their website alamodefashions.ca for store hours.



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