

ROAD TRIPS

ISLANDS
EDITION

(yes, islands)

Let's assume you're reading this at work. Stuck in a cubicle the color of kitty litter. If you were to leave—just leave!—and get in your car *rightnow*, you could be soaking up sand, sun and slushy drinks by nightfall. On an *island*. No, not Mackinac—not that we have anything against tooling around in horse-drawn carriages. These four islands, all within driving distance, are a bit more obscure—from the one that serves beer in beach pails to the one that serves up quirky Canadian-isms (and a whole lot of local wine). Trust us, you won't miss the palm trees.

CLIFF HANGER
Dive from the cliffs
at Big Bay State
Park on Wisconsin's
Madeline Island.

PHOTO: CAMERON WITTEG

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THE NOT-SO-LONELY ISLAND

TARP REFORM
Make some new friends at Tom's Burned-Down Cafe.

Sure, you can hike, kayak or tour sea caves, but Madeline Island's star attraction is its Wisconsin-nice locals.

By **Marissa Conrad**

I'm at a divey waterfront bar on an island off the coast of northwoods Wisconsin when a stranger plunks down and introduces himself as August. August is clutching a bottle of Old Style—not his first of the day. He has come to tell me that the big, black dog wandering the patio would like one of my french fries.

The eager mutt, one of many who roam Madeline Island like characters in a *Milo & Otis* movie, gobbles several fries before disappearing; August

moves on to ridiculing a RECALL WALKER sign attached to a nearby dock. (By the time you read this, Wisconsin residents may have voted their governor out of office in a history-making recall election.) For a drunk guy living on a 42-square-mile island with one grocery store, my new friend is surprisingly tuned into state politics.

Soon find out August lives on the mainland, but takes the ferry across Lake Superior often to drink at island haunts. The ride's only 20 minutes, and,

unlike on many small islands, the 302 full-time residents of Madeline seem to welcome visitors. (From Memorial Day to Labor Day, the island's population swells to 1,500.)

"It's more fun over here," says another mainlander, still celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary of several weeks prior, as she shatters a shot glass. This is Friday night, the day before meeting August. So far today, my boyfriend, Jon, his dog, Penny, and I have driven eight hours from Chicago to the port town of Bayfield, taken the **Madeline Island Ferry Line** (*Washington Ave and Front St, 715-747-2051, madferry.com; \$13 round-trip, kids ages 6–11 \$7, cars \$24*) and checked in at the **Inn on Madeline Island** (*641 Main St, 800-822-6315, madisland.com; rooms \$150 and up*), a plush alternative to renting a cabin or camping (info at madelineisland.com). Faint strains of country music and whiffs of a bonfire have led us to **Tom's Burned-Down Cafe** (*234 Middle Rd, 715-747-6100*), an open-air bar with two potbelly stoves burning logs to fight off the mid-May chill.

A local named Bert tells us the bar burned down several times before owner Tom decided not to rebuild any walls, and to serve alcohol out of a tractor trailer backed up to the patio instead. He also says Tom's was voted the second-best beachfront bar in the world, and during peak season hundreds of people line up to get in for live shows. This is before telling us he's proud his 13-year-old can roll a joint, and trying to slip us a large helping of weed. (We decline.) We're later told we shouldn't believe much Bert says. The tractor-trailer part and at least one of the fires, though, are real.

Tom's is part of a tiny main drag that has a few restaurants, one bookstore and a café that serves its iced coffee in clear Solo cups. Grizzled men in paint-stained sweatshirts sit under taped-up flyers sporting photos of Gov. Walker, captioned DOES THIS ASS MAKE MY SIGN LOOK BIG? It seems everyone here loves to talk politics. But mostly, they just love to talk. We're welcomed with shots of a cheap peppermint schnapps called Dr. McGillicuddy's, and we leave with roadies of Jameson and an invite to a 30th birthday party the next night, to be held in a hangar on Madeline's tiny, private airport.

The combination of the whiskey and a California king bed makes for a dreamy night's sleep. The next morning, we take Penny to **Big Bay Town Park** (*2305 Town Park Circle, 715-747-3031, bigbaytownpark.org*), where we walk for a mile along the beach before settling in for a nap on the sand. Penny likes this a lot better than the hiking at nearby **Big Bay State Park** (*2402 Hagen Rd, 715-747-6425, dnr.wi.gov; \$10 per car*), where heavily wooded trails leave her covered in ticks.

Lunch is gut-bomb sandwiches and heavy pours of Santa Margherita sauvignon blanc at the hopping **Beach Club** (*817 Main St, 715-747-3955, madelinebeachclub.com*), where a young woman we met the night before invites us to linger for more drinks, and her boyfriend offers to bring us jars of his mother's homemade jam.

The island's "fancy" restaurant, where it's still perfectly acceptable to wear flip-flops, is called **Cafe Seiche** (*794 Main St, 715-747-2033*), and an early dinner of almond-crusted trout and a vegan plate packed with pesto, brown rice and veggies is our best meal of the weekend. Then we

PHOTO: CAMERON WITTING

BRIDGE OVER UNTROUBLED WATERS The path to the beach at Big Bay Town Park.



Madeline Island, Wisconsin
 Drive time from Chicago 8 hours (455 miles)
 Ferry time from Bayfield, Wisconsin 20 minutes (2.1 miles)

drive to the airport for the party. Dozens of cars are parked haphazardly on the grass, and the hangar is a sea of cheap card tables, homemade desserts and pitchers of sangria. Twentysomethings chat happily with sixtysomethings as a man in the corner strums a guitar.

We meet the island's lone schoolteacher, whose K-5 classroom has just eight students (after fifth grade, kids go to the mainland for school), and reunite with another of our pals from last night, a man with a parrot on his shoulder who has been coming to Madeline since 1960. This year, he's training for Point to La Pointe, a 2.1-mile swim from Bayfield to Madeline on August 4. He turns out to live a block from me in Chicago.

Were the water warmer, we probably would have spent our weekend kayaking, canoeing and taking a motorboat tour of shipwrecks and sea caves—all the typical tourist activities of the island. But this trip was a welcome reminder that people make the place, and I'm going to remember the people of Madeline for years to come. That, and stripping naked in a state park parking lot so my boyfriend could check me for ticks.



SHORE THING A drive down Hwy H on Madeline Island leads to this secluded beach.

PHOTOS: JONATHAN DOLIAS



The smoldering colors of twilight are the main attraction on Michigan's Beaver Island. Text and photographs by **Jason A. Heidemann**

"Ah, you're visiting from the United States!" A friend and I hear versions of this statement on several occasions during our weekend on Beaver Island, a former Mormon kingdom between mainland Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. There is a whiff of truth in these comments. Although the island very much belongs to the Wolverine State, its Irish heritage, lack of chain stores and distance from the mainland give it an island-nation vibe.

Beaver Island is the inhabited crown jewel of the Beaver Island archipelago, a cluster of islands located in the upper reaches of Lake Michigan. Although the place is affectionately referred to as the Emerald Isle, Mormons actually beat the Irish to the punch when they settled the island in 1848 under the leadership of James Strang, who declared himself king, built the King's Highway (still the island's main thoroughfare) and ruled until 1856, when he was shot and killed. Later that year, mobs from Mackinac drove his 2,600 followers off the land. The Irish eventually claimed the island, and their heritage still lingers in the form of the occasional shamrock flag.

We venture to Beaver via car ferry from the pretty port city of Charlevoix, Michigan, a six-hour drive from Chicago. **The Beaver Island Boat Company** (103 Bridge Park Dr, Charlevoix,

231-547-2311, bibco.com; round-trip \$54) offers daily service from mid-May through mid-September and every other day during off-season. On a stunning September morning, we settle in for a 32-mile journey, which takes a hefty 2.5 hours. A faster mode of transport is via **Fresh Air Aviation Inc.** (06918 Old Norwood Rd, Charlevoix, 231-237-9482, freshairaviation.net; round trip \$97), a charter plane that delivers you to and from the island in 15 minutes and offers spectacular aerial views. (Try boating in and flying back as I did; you can leave your car on the ferry and it will be waiting when you land.)

Our boat docks at Paradise Bay on the island's northeast tip, and the first thing we notice is how turquoise the water looks under the late summer sun—it's almost a Bahamian blue. The island is flat and heavily forested, with private residences dotting the coastline. (Noted Chicago theater director Frank Galati and his partner have a home here.) At 55 square miles, the island is approximately the size of San Francisco but has a year-round population of just 700. Aside from a grocery store, museum, a few restaurants, lodging and **Livingstone Studio** (37900 Michigan Ave, livingstonestudio.com), a gallery filled with the work of local artisans, there isn't much. This island is suited to the art of relaxation.

We unpack at the **Oak Woods Condominiums & Rentals** (38085 Beaver Lodge Dr, 231-448-2099, oakwoodscondominiums.com; \$110/night), a simple collection of apartment-style accommodations just a stone's throw from both Lake Michigan and a bike path. A variety of motels, cottages and even a converted convent are available for short-term rental, too.

My favorite island attraction, aside from Beaver's intoxicating isolation, is the sunsets. We witness our first while dining alfresco at **Beaver Island Lodge** (38210 Beaver Lodge Dr, 231-448-2396, beaverislandlodge.com), a charming property that serves the fanciest meal in town just steps from the sand. Wrapped in our hoodies and warmed by the flicker of torches, we enjoy smoky butternut-squash bisque and crispy braised pork belly while watching the blue sky melt into a palette of orange and pink.

There are half a dozen lakes punctuating the island, and the next morning we set off for Lake Geneserath, the largest. Beaver Island is flush with wildlife: wild turkey everywhere, deer, chipmunks, frogs, turtles and numerous winged creatures. While canoeing around the lake, using oars and a boat we borrowed from our lodge, we're delighted to paddle alongside more than one namesake beaver. Afterward, we circumnavigate



SEE THE LIGHT
Visit Gull Harbor's historic lighthouse.



ONE WAY TICKET TO PARADISE A rusty boat in Paradise Bay.



WING MAN Charter planes from Fresh Air Aviation take guests to and from the island.



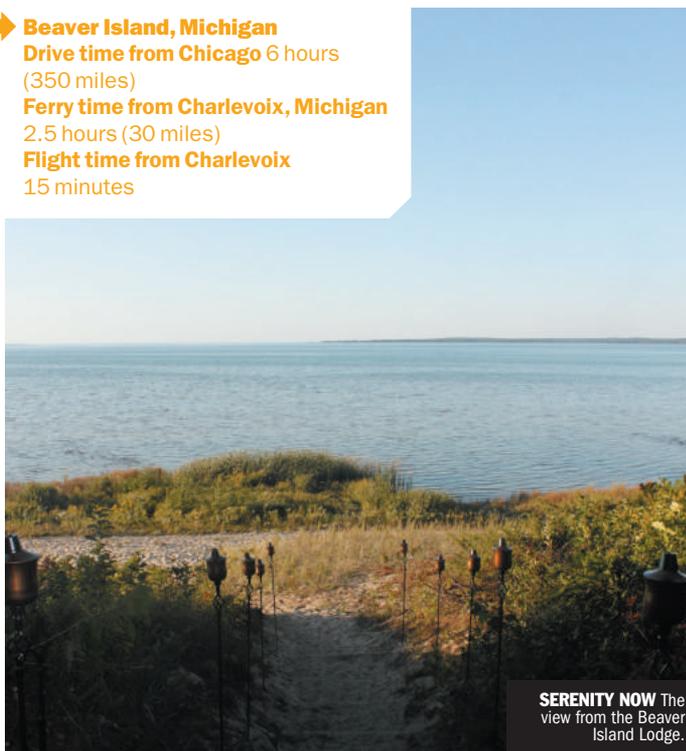
101 PROOF?
Wild turkeys roam Beaver Island.

Beaver Island, Michigan
Drive time from Chicago 6 hours (350 miles)
Ferry time from Charlevoix, Michigan 2.5 hours (30 miles)
Flight time from Charlevoix 15 minutes

the island (unpaved in most parts) via car, stopping at **Nicksau's Point** to climb the historic lighthouse and later stripping down to our undies for a spontaneous dip in Lake Michigan.

It's at dinner that the energy of the island finally clicks. After taking in another eye-popping sunset at Donegal Bay on the northwest shoreline, we grab a meal at the **Stoney Acre Grill** (26420 Carlisle Rd, 231-448-2210, stoneyacregill.com), a restaurant that at 9pm is already sleepy. We strike up a

conversation with our server, Linda, a Chicagoland-based summer season "expat" wearing a T-shirt that reads BORN TO BOODLE. Boodling, Linda insists, has its roots in Gaelic and colloquially means "a whole lot of nothing." We don't know if that's true and don't dare question her, but in practice it refers to the island custom of loading up one's car with a keg and coolers of sandwiches and beach hopping for a weekend. I don't know if I'll ever "boodle" my way around Beaver, but the whole lot of nothing part will lure me back.



SERENITY NOW The view from the Beaver Island Lodge.



WET AND WILD The new cast of *Jersey Shore*, or a scene from *Mist Swim Up Bar* at Put-in-Bay's Commodore Resort?

South Bass's Key West-themed debauchery and Lake Erie heritage combine for a packed weekend getaway.

By **Martina Sheehan**

In the town of Put-in-Bay on South Bass Island, you don't ask why grown men barhop with red plastic buckets on their heads. Or why Christmas is celebrated in July. Or why the Victorian village off Ohio's coast is known as "the Key West of the North." Spend a few hours here and these absurdities start to make sense. The 4-by-1.5-mile island attracts 750,000 visitors a year, most during summer for tropics-themed amusements—think the Commodore Resort's swim-up pool bar, the sandy Mojito Bay tiki tavern and the Flaming Skull pirate-ship canteen at the Grand Islander Hotel.

After a five-hour drive from Chicago and an 18-minute jaunt on **Miller ferry service**

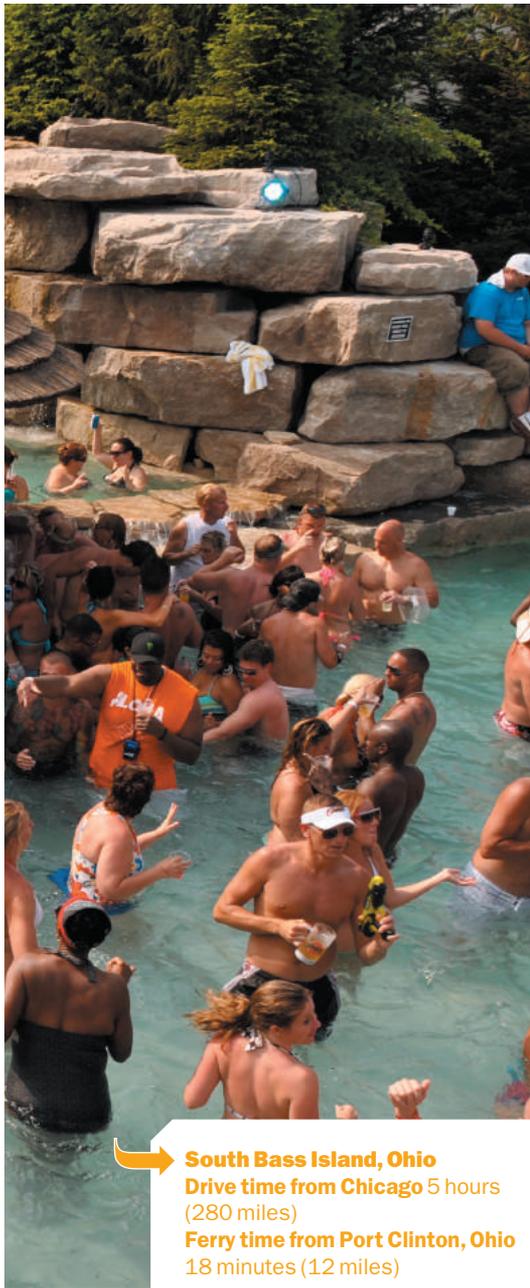
(*departs 5174 E Water St, Port Clinton, OH, 800-500-2421, millerferry.com; \$6.50 one-way ticket, kids ages 6–11 \$1.50, cars \$15*), my friend and I arrive in Put-in-Bay on an unseasonably warm afternoon in late April. We have a car, but we won't need it. Most people—including cops and pizza delivery guys—get around via golf carts, available at **Island Transportation** (2071 Langram Rd, 419-285-4855, *put-in-bay-trans.com; \$11–\$17 hourly, \$60–\$90 per day*).

Our innkeeper at the antique-filled **First Island Son** (560 Langram Rd, 419-285-4448, *firstislandson.com; \$75–\$185/night*), a six-room

Victorian B&B, suggests taking bikes instead, which she offers free to guests. We ride to Delaware Avenue, which marries the charm of Victorian wood-slatted storefronts with the we'll-have-fun-if-it-kills-us determination of Rush and Division Streets. The streetscape of restaurants, T-shirt shops and live-music bars faces leafy DeRivera Park, which abuts the boat-filled harbor. We'll return here tonight to hit the '70s-themed welcome-back-for-the-season party at the 130-year-old **Round House** (*Delaware Ave at Loraine Ave, 419-285-2323*), where beer is guzzled out of red beach pails—hence the "bucketheads."

But not all of the island's 500 permanent residents embrace the beer-fueled debauchery. Quizzing some on their go-to alternatives, we learn that **Goat Soup and Whiskey** (820 *Catawba Ave, 419-285-4628*), housed in an old winery, is the place to go for peace, quiet and outstanding perch tacos. It doesn't open until high season, so we end up at cheap-beer mecca

PHOTO: FLASHFLEDO/JUSTIN WANTS



South Bass Island, Ohio
Drive time from Chicago 5 hours
(280 miles)
Ferry time from Port Clinton, Ohio
18 minutes (12 miles)

Frosty Bar & Family Pizza (252 Delaware Ave, 419-285-4741, frostys.com). Across from Goat is the 124-year-old **Heineman's Winery** (978 County Rd, 419-285-2811), where we belly up for \$2-\$3 samples (stick with the traminette). The tasting room has all the trappings of a dive bar: linoleum floors and plastic cups. But its charms include an expansive garden and a fifth-generation Heineman, Dustin, serving the barrage of tipsy tourists.

Locals also suggest checking out **Perry's Cave** (979 Catawba Ave, 419-285-2283, perryscave.com; \$8, kids ages 6-12 \$4.50) across the street, part of an amusement complex that includes a butterfly house, mini golf and an antique car museum. During the War of 1812's Battle of Lake Erie, Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry brought his men to the cave's underground lake to recuperate.

In 1912, Perry was honored with the **Perry's Victory & International Peace Memorial**



CABIN FEVER Stay in a cabent—that's a cabin-tent hybrid—in South Bass Island State Park.



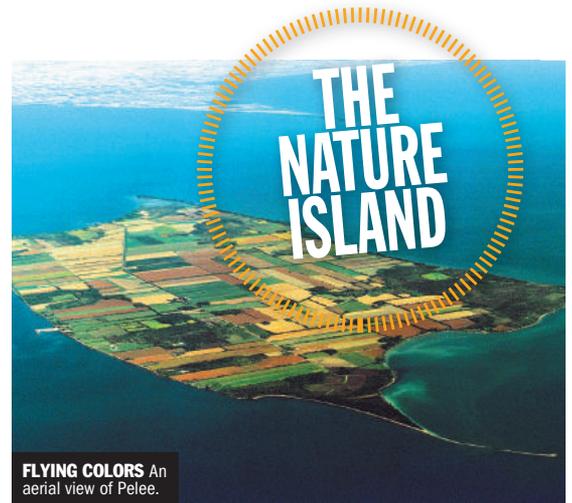
SPREAD YOUR WINGS The Butterfly House at Perry's Cave.

(93 Delaware Ave, 419-285-2184, nps.gov/PEVI), which towers 50 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty. After a lengthy renovation, the observation deck reopens July 20, just after the start of the island's biggest event in a century, the **Battle of Lake Erie Bicentennial Celebration** (battleoflakeerie-bicentennial.com), June 18 through September 2013, which will include a reenactment and tall ships armada.

Still, most of the island's returning party people will mark their calendars for **Christmas in July** (putinbay.com/calendar.htm), July 26-29. The debauched blowout covers the town in over-the-top holiday decorations, while intoxicated Santas stagger the streets.

We get a preview of that famous Put-in-Bay summer party scene Saturday night at the Round House, where locals of every legal drinking age converge in Afro wigs, go-go boots and neon polyester minidresses for buckets of beer, big-hugged reunions and plenty of grooving to the '70s cover band.

For nature lovers, our island insiders recommend **South Bass Island State Park** (866-644-6727, dnr.state.oh.us/parks; free admission), where you can spend the night in a cabent—that's a cabin-tent hybrid—plus view the last ruins of the Hotel Victory, a grand resort that was the nation's largest when it burned down in 1919. With so much history to see, there's hardly time to indulge in the faux tropics bar scene. Well, maybe just a margarita or two.



FLYING COLORS An aerial view of Pelee.

Quirky, quiet and clearly Canadian, Lake Erie's Pelee Island offers forested foot and bike trails. But the biggest adventure may be hitching a ride back.
 By **Martina Sheehan**

Lake Erie's Pelee Island lies just 22 miles off Ohio's coast, but there's never any doubt we're in Canada. The first signs might've been the speed limits posted in kilometers and having to show Border Patrol our passports, but our geographic whereabouts are arguably exacted at the island's foremost social hub, the **Anchor & Wheel Inn's Island Restaurant** (11 West Shore Rd, 519-724-2195, anchorwheelinn.com; double \$95-\$125/night). Over fresh-caught lake perch and the sounds of Bob Marley, the beer-fueled banter of some local twentysomethings quickly hits the one-two punch of Canadianisms.

It starts with an impressive display of survival skills: A woman who was one of 250 residents to winter on the island explains how she got by. "I ate canned food and bow stuff, hunted mostly," she says. Next up is some good old-fashioned American razzing: The group is talking about permits to work in Ohio when one woman, with a mix of surprise and disdain, exclaims, "Your mom's American? I wouldn't tell anyone that."

It's early in the season and the Anchor & Wheel is one of the few spots open. As proprietor Mark Emrich bounces from table to table—he doubles as the inn's waiter, concierge, contractor and more—his laughter rings out, occasionally punctuated by a hysterical snort. Everyone seems to know one another, from the young fishermen docking just for dinner to the families who return annually to the island's dozens of cottages.

The 16.2-square-mile island is far from reaching its peak summer population of about 1,500 when we visit. And despite the nice weather, the weekend has brought even fewer visitors than expected, thanks to the two broken ferries (*departs 103 W Shoreline Dr, Sandusky, OH; 800-661-2220, ontarioferries.com; \$13.75, car \$30*). Both lines—one operating out of Sandusky and one from Leamington,

Road Trips



SPITTING IMAGE Fish Point Nature Reserve sandspit is just hitchhike away



TALL TALE The Pelee Island Lighthouse was built in 1833.

Pelee Island, Ontario, Canada
Drive time from Chicago 5.5 hours (300 miles)
Ferry time from Sandusky, Ohio 2 hours (22 miles)
Flight time from Sandusky 15 minutes



PEDAL PUSHERS The best way to see Pelee is on bike.



ANCHORS AWAY Enjoying fresh perch at the Anchor & Wheel Inn.

Ontario—have been out of service since mid-April (at press time, Ontario Ferries planned to restore service June 8). For Pelee Islanders, venting about sketchy ferry service is a pastime as popular as bad-mouthing the CTA in Chicago—except that islanders' very survival depends on the boats: It's peak planting season for soybeans, the island's largest crop, but the seeds are stranded on the mainland.

Fortunately, my friend and I already have tickets for **Griffing Flying Service** (3115 Cleveland Rd, Sandusky, 419-626-5161, griffingflying.com; \$105 round trip). The eight-seat puddle jumper cruises over the roller coasters of Cedar Point Amusement Park, over beach-trimmed Kelleys Island and the Bass Islands, and within 15 minutes safely delivers six humans and two Labrador retrievers to Pelee. The ferry would have taken almost two hours.

While the vacationing Clevelanders on our flight say most people come to Pelee to do nothing ("People either love that or hate it," one says), we have a busy agenda. Back at the Anchor & Wheel, Emrich makes a few calls about rental bikes. "The guy across the street, Rick Masse, runs the rental," Emrich says, referring to **Comfortech** (1065 Shore Rd W

RR 1, 519-724-2828). "But he's also an accountant, so this is his busy season. He's the island's mayor, too."

Bikeless, we set out on foot for the **Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve** (519-724-2931, pelee.org). On the way, we walk the pretty grounds of the **Pelee Island Winery** (20 E West Rd, 519-724-2469, peleeisland.com; tours \$5), the island's main attraction. Things are quiet now, but come summer, the whole vineyard will be alive with tours, tastings and live bands.

We've been walking awhile along the gravel road, marsh on one side, Lake Erie's wide expanse on the other. The park's dunes and sandspit are ahead, but the sun is sinking. We head back, feet aching, when a white sedan rumbles over the hill. The door is half open and a head of dark curls leans out. "You're up at the Anchor & Wheel?" the kid shouts. The car barely slows. Young Dave, it turns out, is Emrich's right-hand man. The car finally stops and Dave's cheery enthusiasm obliterates our city skepticism; we get in the car. "It's like the '60s around here," he says as he pushes hard on the gas. "Just stick out your thumb and hitch a ride."

Back at the inn, the dining room is bustling. Several bikes—left unlocked—lean against

the deck. This time, we top off our lake perch with glasses of vidal and pinot grigio from Pelee Island Winery, and for dessert, a Nanaimo bar, a Canadian specialty of layered crumb crust, fudgey chocolate and cream. After dinner we head to the fourth floor of the Anchor & Wheel's annex. Blond wood encases the ceiling, giving our room a Scandinavian feel, while brightly colored bedspreads nod to Emrich's love of the tropics. The space is comfortable and less formal than the original Victorian-style rooms in the main house. We sleep well.

In the morning, Emrich drives us out to the trailhead for our final exploration: the **Pelee Island Lighthouse**. A one-mile trek through forest along a creek reveals a towering piece of Lake Erie history dating back to 1833. We take it all in before suddenly realizing we're about three miles from the inn with no cell-phone reception. Our flight back to Sandusky leaves in less than an hour, so we pick up the pace but it's hopeless. Then we hear a humming engine, and I remember Dave's words: "Stick out your thumb." I do and the pickup stops, another islander ready to take on dual roles: friendly local No. 23 and lifesaver No. 2.

Writers' accommodations hosted by the hotels and inns mentioned in these stories. Two ferry trips (Miller ferry service, Beaver Island Boat Company), one plane ride (Fresh Air Aviation) and one meal (Beaver Island Lodge) were also paid for by the respective businesses.