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## WAVE 'HELLO' TO MICHIGAN: WATER, WILDERNESS AND WONDER

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There's a reason why the Great Lakes State is known as "Pure Michigan." From unspoiled natural beauty around every corner and the nation's longest freshwater coastline to the adventure and history found in both its upper and lower peninsulas, come explore what awaits groups in the Mitten.

## THE LOWER PENINSULA

Begin your journey in **Detroit**, a city full of Motown soul, sports, to-die-for cuisine, history and arts attractions galore. Groups could appreciate world class works of art at the Detroit Institute of Arts (recently named Best Museum in the U.S. by *USA Today*); feel the soul at Hitsville U.S.A. and the Motown Museum; see priceless historic artifacts at the Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation in nearby Dearborn; stroll the RiverWalk downtown; visit the Belle Isle Aquarium—the oldest public aquarium in the continental U.S.—and more. Don't leave without trying some Detroit-style pizza, a Coney dog and some delicious Greek food.

Venture just north along Jefferson Ave/Lake Shore Road to **Ford House**, a National Historic Landmark and former family home of Edsel & Eleanor Ford. It's here groups could delve into the area's automotive roots through a guided tour of the family's Cotswold style home, rotating exhibits and more. Don't forget to visit the recently opened Visitor Center, dine at The Continental restaurant and stroll the beautiful grounds and gardens situated along glistening Lake St. Clair.

Travel to the west side of the state to **Grand Rapids**, a vibrant and growing destination located just 45 minutes from Lake Michigan. Recognized as America's Best Beer City, GR offers craft beer enthusiasts a plethora of local brews to imbibe in, from a tour at Brewery Vivant (a refurbished funeral home) to the over 60 stops along the Beer City Ale Trail, groups are sure to be satisfied. Museums and gardens abound here, so don't miss staples like Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum, the Grand Rapids Art Museum and more. Be sure to also try duckpin bowling at Woodrows and fowling at the Fowling Warehouse!

Proceed north and you'll end up in **Ludington**, a harbor town with rich maritime history. **The Mason County Historical Society**, which fosters a deeper understanding of and appreciation for Mason County history, operates many stops in the area that are a must for any history buff. At Historic White Pine Village, groups will encounter a living history tour of a late 19th/early 20th-century pioneer village boasting 30 historic exhibit buildings, while the Mason County Emporium offers a chance to peruse an old-fashioned candy counter. A stop at the Port of Ludington Maritime Museum—home to authentic images and artifacts, and engaging interactive exhibits in a former Coast Guard Station—is also recommended.

Continue on to **Traverse City**, a can't-miss Michigan staple. Because this well-loved destination is situated along the 45th parallel (same as Italy's Piedmont region and Bordeaux, France), wine is the name of the game here, as evidenced by the area's over 40 award-winning wineries. Stay and play at Grand Traverse Resort & Spa, where groups could tee off at one of three first-class golf courses; book one (or several) relaxing spa treatments; fat bike and cross-country ski outdoors in the wintertime; attend the National Cherry Festival celebrating the area's abundant crop in early July and much more.

## THE UPPER PENINSULA

To travel to Michigan's Crown Jewel (**Mackinac Island**), you'll want to hop aboard **Shepler's Mackinac Island Ferry** from ports in either Mackinaw City or St. Ignace. The ferry company, which has been transporting passengers to the island for generations, even offers a narrated route that travels underneath the Mackinac Bridge—the longest suspension bridge in the Western Hemisphere that also connects the state's two peninsulas.

Once on the island, groups will want to purchase some rich Mackinac Island fudge, dine on the patio at The Pink Pony, sip a cocktail on the world's longest porch at the Grand Hotel and admire the beauty of the live insects found inside the Original Mackinac Island Butterfly House. Fun fact: There are no cars allowed on the island, so you'll need to get around by walking, biking or by horse. Groups could take a horse-drawn carriage landmark tour; bike the 8.3-mile perimeter of the island and see Arch Rock; plan a stay during the annual Lilac Festival in June and more. Staying overnight? A popular choice is Mission Point Resort, which recently underwent several renovations this past winter to its soaring

Main Lodge entry space and the Round Island Kitchen (popular for its stunning waterfront view).

Continue north into Michigan's U.P., a true hiker's paradise that's 90% forested and home to over 300 waterfalls. Here, groups could see natural wonders like the crystal clear waters of **Kitch-iti-kipi**, the majesty of **Tahquamenon Falls State Park**, the untamed wilderness of **Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park**, and more. Among this bountiful natural splendor is **Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore**, located on the U.P.'s north coast along Lake Superior. On their visit, groups could appreciate miles of colorful sandstone cliffs that tower 50 to 200 feet above the water, in addition to natural landmarks such as Miner's Castle and Chapel Rock. Go kayaking to see the shoreline from a new perspective and even admire some shipwrecks below, thanks to Lake Superior's supremely crisp and clear water.

Located in close proximity to the Wisconsin state border is **Iron Mountain**, known for being a former mining city once home to an abundance of iron ore. Today, groups could explore this history with a visit to the Iron Mountain Iron Mine, which has operated for 68 years and produced over 21 tons of iron ore. A ride on the mine's underground train takes passengers 2,600 feet through amazing rock formations and large lighted caverns 400 feet below the earth's surface.

Also not to miss during the winter is a true Iron Mountain tradition: The Kiwanis Ski Club's annual FIS Ski Jumping Continental Cup at Pine Mountain Ski Resort, which has been attracting jumpers world over for decades. Crack a cold one and watch at the base or summon the courage (and stamina) to climb the tens of flights of stairs alongside the man-made jump—known as "Giant Pine Mountain" to locals—to watch internationally-ranked skiers and olympians fly through the air. Remember to look up when you hear the announcer say, "Springer Come!"

Of course, before you depart, try a delicious locally made pasty (that should be topped with either ketchup or gravy, depending on who you ask).

*Written by Sarah Suydam, Managing Editor for Groups Today.*

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