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WITH MILES OF SHORELINE, MICHIGAN'S TRAVERSE CITY IS MADE FOR SUMMER

JAY CLARKE Herald Travel Editor

Maybe this is where they invented the "good ol' summertime."

Summer is a glorious time here in Traverse City, the hub of one of the greatest vacation destinations in the Midwest.

Sailboats make pretty patterns on Grand Traverse Bay, cherries and peaches fill bushel baskets in stores and roadside stands, families happily clamber up the giant sand dunes on the lakeshore, and Fudgies browse around the chic shops of Petofskey and Harbor Springs.

Fudgies?

That's what they call tourists here, because they buy so much fudge. This part of Michigan, you see, goes bananas over fudge. Practically every town boasts of at least one fudge shop where you can buy the confection in flavors, sizes, colors and shapes you've never before seen.

When they're not loading up on fudge, visitors are likely to be enjoying the outdoors, for that's what summer is mostly about here. With its miles of shoreline--more than any other state except Alaska--Michigan is a boater's watery Valhalla. There are some 600,000 pleasure boats registered in the state, tops in the nation, and you'll see them flitting on the bays and lakes that make this part of the state a major resort area. If you don't have your own power boat or sailboat, you can rent one.

Sailing is the dominant sport here, whether on the bays, Lake Michigan or one of the 300 inland lakes. Some of these are real beauties. Three of them -- Torch, Glen and Crystal -- have been rated by the National Geographic as among the most beautiful in the world.

Power boaters are found in abundance, too, and come Aug. 24, some 200,000 fans will watch the Northport 200 offshore

power boat race at tiny Northport. Charming lakeside towns pepper the coast here. In Leland, visitors poke around the shops in the restored shanties of Fishtown. They explore the fancy boutiques of Petofskey's Gaslight District, hobnob with the industrial nabobs who keep summer homes in toney Harbor Springs, and admire the homes and boats clustered around Charlevoix's Round Lake.

Landlubbing visitors flock to area golf courses--Michigan has more public courses than any other state. One of the prettiest is the new Bear course, designed by Jack Nicklaus, at the Grand Traverse Resort, the biggest resort hotel complex in the Midwest.

A bit more strenuous--and not your usual thing--is dune climbing. The coastline here has giant sand dunes, sloping up to as high as 480 feet above Lake Michigan. Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore has hiking trails, an automobile scenic trail through forests and windswept dune tops, and breathtaking overlooks.

Out in the countryside, orchards and farms cover the rolling land. Northwestern Lower Michigan is the cherry capital of world, supplying more than a third of the entire world's supply, and for Michiganders, cherries are just about as great an obsession as fudge. The National Cherry Festival, an annual July event in Traverse City, draws 300,000 visitors. But once a year isn't enough for Michigan's cherry lovers; now there's a midwinter Frozen Cherry Festival as well.

Cherries are harvested here mostly in July, but if you're a fruit freak, don't despair: You can buy big, luscious peaches at roadside stands and come autumn, it's apple time, and a freshly picked Michigan apple is a scrumptious treat.

Why this part of Michigan began its love affair with fudge isn't known, but the confection got its start in Mackinac Island, then spread to Lower Michigan, where fudge shops are found in every resort town from Traverse City to Mackinac.

In Leland, Doris Murdich does a land-office business selling 15 varieties of fudge to Fudgies along with peanut and cashew brittle, local honey, maple syrup and other goodies. The favorite fudge?

"Chocolate pecan, probably," said Murdich, whose husband Doug is the great grandson of the Murdich who started the whole fudge bit in Mackinac back in 1887. Other popular fudge varieties are white chocolate and maple, with various nut combinations.

Leland, admittedly a touristy town on the lakeshore, nevertheless exudes considerable charm. Its main attraction is "Fishtown," the old wharf area where shanties dating back to the 1800s have been restored and converted into shops and boutiques. You can buy fresh whitefish here for \$3.95 a pound, a hunk of homemade beef jerky for 60 cents, or dip your own line into the waters below the picturesque dam for rainbow trout, Chinook and coho salmon. "You have to use a lighter line than in the Florida Keys," observed Dr. Bob Feetham, an optometrist from Florida who was trying his luck in the teeming waters.

In this region, too, are several vineyards and wineries, all founded in the past two decades. One of them, Chateau Grand Traverse, won the American Wine Championship in 1984 for its 1982 riesling. All the wineries offer tasting, and while they may not measure up to California standards, it's a pleasant way to spend an hour or two.

Traverse City even has casino gambling, though it's not generally know. It's legal, too, sponsored by the Chippewa and Ottawa Indians on their reservation, which is not subject to state law.

South of Traverse City, one of the country's top music schools offers concerts during the summer. Interlochen, which draws some 3,000 young people to its National Music Camp, sponsors concerts with such stars as Chuck Mangione and The Canadian Brass.

IF YOU GO

Grand Traverse Convention and Visitors Bureau, 900 E. Front St., Suite 100, Traverse City,

Mich. 49684, (616) 947-1120.

Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 387, Traverse City, Mich. 49684, (616) 947-5075.

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, 400 Main St., Frankfort, Mich. 49635, (616) 352-9611.

Illustration:photo: hikers at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Park
(MICHIGAN-CITIES and SITES)

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