

OZAUKEE COUNTY TOURISM

Hidden escapes that transcend time and place

OZAUKEE COUNTY — Ozaukee County isn't just a fantastic place to live — it's also a treasure trove of destinations that transport you to another time or place. From unique locations that evoke the charm of another place altogether, to modern businesses that have preserved a part of our past, our beautiful county is full of surprises and experiences that make you feel like you've traveled far, all without leaving home.

Port Washington

Port Washington has a charm that feels straight out of a quaint New England harbor town. Nestled along the shores of Lake Michigan, Port's picturesque marina and colorful downtown storefronts invite visitors to stroll along the bustling harbor walk, browse unique local shops, or enjoy fresh seafood at waterfront restaurants while taking in views of sailboats bobbing in the marina.

With its rich maritime history and cozy, small-town vibe, Port Washington is the perfect destination for anyone longing for the charm of a seaside escape — right here in Wisconsin.

As you walk the half-mile concrete walkway to the historic Breakwater Light-house in Port Washington, you may feel more like you're on an ocean coastline than in Wisconsin. The sounds of waves and seagulls transport you to an era when the lighthouse stood as a vital guide for ships navigating Lake Michigan's shores. The lighthouse's weathered exterior and panoramic views evoke a sense of maritime history, offering a glimpse into the life of early lake mariners. It's a peaceful yet invigorating journey that connects you to Port Washington's rich nautical past.

Perched atop a bluff with sweeping views of Lake Michigan, the 1860 Light Station in Port Washington is overseen by the Port Washington Historical Society and offers an immersion into the lives of Wisconsin's early mariners. This meticulously restored lighthouse showcases the living quarters of the lightkeepers who worked around the clock to maintain the light.

From Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day, visitors can explore the historic rooms filled with period furnishings, artifacts and tools that illustrate the daily life and dedication of the keepers and their families. The climb to the top of the light tower offers not only stunning panoramic views but also a glimpse into the critical role this station played in guiding ships safely to shore. Volunteers looking for an immersive experience can apply to become a "Resident Lighthouse Keeper" and in exchange for providing tours to visitors, can live for a week in the residents' quarters of the lighthouse. For more information and availability, reach out to the Port Washington Historical Society.

Lion's Den

Lion's Den Gorge Nature Preserve in Grafton offers a breathtaking escape that feels more like the rugged Oregon or Washington coast than the Midwest. Perched high above the shimmering expanse of Lake Michigan, its dramatic bluffs provide panoramic views and a striking display of natural beauty.



Above, Lion's Den Gorge Nature Preserve in the town of Grafton offers breathtaking views from its 90- to 100-foot bluffs. **Right**, the lightkeeper's office is located in the 1860 Light Station in Port Washington.

Visitors can explore miles of trails winding through dense woodlands, tranquil wetlands, and along the towering cliffs, culminating in scenic overlooks that capture Lake Michigan's vastness. With its unique blend of coastal charm and Midwestern serenity, Lion's Den Gorge is a hidden gem that enchants hikers, photographers and nature lovers alike.

Cedarburg

A visit to Cedarburg itself feels like stepping into a living postcard from the 19th century, where history and modern comforts blend seamlessly. The town's charming inns, housed in beautifully restored historic buildings, offer cozy accommodations with all the modern amenities while preserving their vintage charm. Many businesses are located in the artfully restored mills that anchor the town, such as the Shops of Cedar Creek Settlement on the north end, housed in a collection of buildings that date back to the 1860s.

For a truly unique experience, stroll through the picturesque open entryway over Cedar Creek — once home to a working water wheel — to reach Rebellion Brewing. There, you can enjoy locally crafted beers in a setting that perfectly marries Cedarburg's industrial history with its vibrant, modern energy.

Cedar Creek Winery in Cedarburg offers a glimpse into old-world winemaking and a taste of history alongside their exceptional line of award-winning wines. Descending into the wine cellars, with their cool, stone-lined walls and rich aroma of aging barrels, feels like you've been transported to a charming European wine country rather than the heart of Wisconsin. This destination winery provides not only tours, tastings and a great retail shop but also a rich connection to Wisconsin's winemaking heritage.

The Cedarburg History Museum showcases the stories and artifacts that shaped this charming Wisconsin town. Housed in a historic 19th-century building, the museum features changing exhibits on Cedarburg's early industries, local businesses, and everyday life from decades ago. From vintage photographs and tools to a restored general store display, every corner of the museum reveals a piece of Cedarburg's heritage. It's one thing to go back to

the 1800s, but how about going back millions of years, to when dinosaurs walked the earth? At The Gem Shop in Cedarburg, you can hold a piece of that ancient history in your hands. Many of the shop's stunning agates, jaspers and fossils date back tens to hundreds of millions of years, formed through volcanic activity, mineral deposits and the slow passage of time. Some specimens even predate the dinosaurs, offering a rare glimpse into Earth's distant past.

Stepping into the new Barrels on Bridge feels like entering a distillery along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail, but with the charm and community spirit of Cedarburg. Inspired by the desire to preserve a historic property dating back to the 1840s, Barrels on Bridge offers a carefully curated selection of spirits including unique offerings from craft distilleries worldwide, many of which are exclusive to the shop, including collaborations with Kentucky distilleries. Visitors can enjoy free tastings, Meet the Maker events, and distillery-led classes, all designed to celebrate the art of bourbon and whiskey. With plans for a membership-driven Bourbon and Whiskey Club, an event space, art studios, and a Civil War-era bed and breakfast, Barrels on Bridge is more than a store — it's a vibrant hub that blends Cedarburg's historic charm with the spirit of discovery found on the Bourbon Trail.

Get ready to trade snow boots for flip-flops — at least in spirit — because Festivals of Cedarburg's theme Hawaii Five-3-0-1-2 is bringing a taste of Hawaii to the heart of Wisconsin winter! This playful nod to both the iconic TV show and Cedarburg's ZIP code promises a fun escape filled with island vibes. The tropical theme will be represented in some of Winter Festival's favorite activities, from the ice sculpture competition and costumed bed races, to a Saturday night luau with Polynesian Dancers and a catered Hawaiian buffet. It's the perfect way to shake off the winter blues and embrace a little tropical warmth without having to leave the county!

Historical attractions
History comes to life in historical sites all around the county. From the beautifully preserved 19th-century buildings at Pioneer Village in Saukville to the

glimpses into how early settlers lived in places like the Jonathan Clark House and the Trinity-Freistadt Historical Site in Mequon, visitors have the opportunity to learn about pioneer life, participate in immersive events, and sometimes even research into their own histories. In our next article we'll provide a deeper dive into some of these historical sites and how centers like the Cedarburg Cultural Center and the Luxembourg American Cultural Society and Center in Belgium are providing visitors with a delightful journey into Wis-



consin's rich heritage and in some cases, into their own pasts.

Ozaukee County is filled with opportunities to step into the past or feel like you've traveled to a completely different place. From historic lighthouses and museums to beautifully preserved buildings and unique shops, there's no shortage of destinations to spark your sense of wonder and connection to history. Whether you're a longtime resident

or new to the community, take the time to explore these local treasures. You might just discover a new favorite spot, a story from the past that inspires you, or a deeper appreciation for the incredible place we call home.

(The Ozaukee County Tourism Council is a group of businesses and organizations that support and promote tourism in Ozaukee County.)



Barrels on Bridge recently opened in a historic property dating back to the 1840s.

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