

Door County Driving Tour



Explore Wisconsin's Door County

Our 90-mile driving route samples the best of the peninsula, from bustling small towns to white sand beaches.

Water defines the Door Peninsula, a finger of land that juts northward between Green Bay and Lake Michigan. In fact, you're never more than 10 minutes from a view of the lake or the bay when you visit this northeasternmost section of the Badger State.

Door County takes its name from Porte de Morts passage (Death's Door), the treacherous strait at the peninsula's tip that links Green Bay's protected waters with the rough, open waters of Lake Michigan. Locals talk about "lakeside" and "bayside" when they give directions or describe the peninsula.

On the bayside, or northwest shore, you'll discover Door County's most popular towns, bustling on summer weekends. Visitors browse

through art galleries, sample fudge, and explore shops and restaurants. The lakeside, or southeast shore, strikes visitors as far more rugged, showcasing the peninsula's natural beauty, with long stretches of white sand beach and surf-pounded, rocky cliffs. Inland, you'll discover rolling countryside and the county's celebrated cherry orchards. Inland lakes draw canoeists, swimmers and fishing enthusiasts.

This 90-mile route samples the best of this compact area's attractions, including a ferry trip to Rock Island off the peninsula's tip. The route begins and ends in Sturgeon Bay, the unofficial gateway to the peninsula.

Sturgeon Bay

POPULATION: 9,800

Driving across the State-42/57 bridge, you may spot enormous freighters crossing below. Sturgeon Bay's shipyards lie along the canal banks to the north. The city spreads out northeast of the canal.

Downtown **Sturgeon Bay** boasts a large historic district of stores and Victorian-Era homes. Eclectic shops sell everything from children's toys to kitchenware to beautiful hand-blown glass pieces (800/301-6695; sturgeonbay.net). [▶ Drive 17 miles north on State-42 across the peninsula's interior, passing through Carlsville. You can stop at the Door Peninsula Winery there, which gives tours to visitors \(800/551-5049; dcwine.com\).](#)

Egg Harbor

POPULATION: 280

The deep, well-protected waters off **Egg Harbor** make it a favorite anchorage of summer sailors. Family resorts cluster around this vacation town set on a bluff (920/868-3717; eggharbordoorcounty.org).

Students from the nearby **Birch**

Creek Music Performance Center

often perform free concerts in the gazebo at the historic Cupola House. Browse the many Main Street Shops along State-42 (920/868-3763; birchcreek.org).

A couple of miles south along County-G, you'll discover **Murphy County Park**, with a swimming beach and picnic area (920/746-9959; map.co.door.wi.us/parks). [▶ Drive 6 miles north on State-42.](#)

Fish Creek

POPULATION: 250

One of the peninsula's more bustling commercial areas, **Fish Creek** becomes Door County's social and cultural hub each summer with a crowded calendar of music and theater events (800/577-1880; fishcreekinfo.com). The schedule includes performances by the **Peninsula Players**, America's oldest professional summer resident theater. The curtain rises on the troupe's plays in a garden theater every night except Mondays from mid-June to mid-October (920/868-3287; peninsulaplayers.com).

You'll also discover some of the area's best shopping here, including the chic shops at Founder's Square.

At the **White Gull Inn**, another summer spectacle takes place: an authentic Door County fish boil (reservations recommended). Like the many other Door County restaurants that host fish boils, the inn uses a large, open-air fire. Cooks toss potatoes and whitefish steaks into a huge kettle. When the food is nearly done, staffers pour kerosene on the fire, creating a flaming spectacle as the kettle boils over. Then, the feast begins (888/364-9542; whitegullinn.com).

Fish Creek also marks the entrance to **Peninsula State Park**, a 3,700-acre limestone headland that juts into Green Bay. Hiking trails

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crisscross the park, and there's even an 18-hole golf course (920/868-3258; dnr.wi.gov).

► *Drive along the 8-mile Shore Road for a sampling of the park's many beaches, bays and campsites. You can tour the 1868 Eagle Bluff Lighthouse and climb the park's observation tower for views of the half-dozen islands just offshore. The hazy landscape in the distance is Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Drive the Shore Road through the state park to its east exit, rejoining State-42. Head north just over a mile to Ephraim.*

Ephraim

POPULATION: 350

Chances are that visitors who compare Door County to New England's Cape Cod have the village of **Ephraim** (pronounced EEF-rum) in mind. It's easy to understand why: Sailboats bob lazily in the harbor, tidy homes and shops sprout up from the hillside, and twin white steeples stand tall against the blue summer sky. Since the 1850s, an unwritten law has dictated that all buildings be painted white or left as natural wood (920/854-4989; ephraim-doorcounty.com).

You'll find some of the best views of town from the water. Rent a paddle boat to explore Ephraim's gracefully curved waterfront. You also can arrange for a sailing trip around Horseshoe Island at the harbor's mouth.

Back on land, plan to visit the **Anderson Barn Museum** and dock (920/854-9688; ephraim.org). Some of the area's first tourists arrived here by steamer more than 100 years ago. Carriage rides provide a leisurely way to explore the town. **Wilson's Restaurant**, open since 1906, is an Ephraim landmark; cool off with an ice cream cone (920/854-2041; wilsonsiccream.com).

► *Continue 5 miles north on State-42.*

Sister Bay

POPULATION: 990

Sister Bay's most famous residents might well be the goats who munch on the grass roof atop **Al Johnson's Swedish Restaurant** (800/241-9914; aljohnsons.com). The Sister Bay area always attracts shoppers; browse galleries with works of local artists and crafters along State-42 and State-57 (920/854-2812; sisterbaytourism.com).

Those roads lead into the cozy downtown and more shopping. South of town along State-42, test your miniature golf skills at **Pirate's Cove** in a parklike setting (920/854-4929; piratescove.com).

► *Drive about 10 miles north on State-42, passing through Ellison Bay en route to Gills Rock and Northport.*

"Top of the Thumb"

Few visitors can resist a trip to the tip of the peninsula (or "Top of the Thumb," as locals call it). From there, some vacationers travel by ferry to a pair of islands just off of the mainland.

Gills Rock, a working fishing port, grew up at the edge of the peninsula (920/854-5448; doorcountythumb.com). Nearby at **Northport**, you can catch a car ferry to **Washington Island**, home of the nation's largest Icelandic settlement (800/223-2094; wisferry.com). The 4½-mile-long island is a perfect place to experience the quieter side of Door County (920/847-2179; washingtonisland-chamber.com).

Cross Washington Island to reach Jackson Harbor and you can hop a smaller passenger ferry to **Rock Island** (920) 847-2235; dnr.wi.gov). The entire island is a forested state

park, where visitors discover hiking, fishing, picnicking and backpack camping. Visit the Pottawatomi Lighthouse on the northern tip of the island—it was the first one to light Wisconsin's shorelines.

► *Backtrack to Sister Bay on State-42, and drive 3 miles south on State-57. Then, go 6 miles southeast on County-Q. Follow the winding Cana Island Road for 2½ miles, until it ends at the causeway that leads to the lighthouse.*

Cana Island Lighthouse

The trip from Sister Bay to **Cana Island** takes you through some of Door County's most diverse landscapes—from cherry orchards to birch forests to the acres of wetlands along the shores of Mud Lake (920/743-5958; dcmm.org).

When you reach the end of the road, weather conditions and wave heights will determine whether you can explore tiny Cana Island, a county park managed by the Door County Maritime Museum.

Built in 1869, the lighthouse now opens its doors to visitors each year during daytime hours from May 1 to October 31. Climb the lighthouse tower or explore the displays in the lighthouse keepers' quarters to learn the history of this special part of Door County. Due to lower Lake Michigan water levels, the narrow causeway that leads to Cana Island has allowed visitors a dry passage since the mid-1990s.

► *Drive 4 miles southwest on County-Q to State-57 and 1 mile east on Ridge Road.*

The Ridges Sanctuary

Ancient sand-dune ridges gave the 1,600-acre **Ridges Sanctuary** nature preserve its name (920/839-2802; ridgessanctuary.org). The unique topography has produced an outstanding variety of wildflowers,

including 25 kinds of orchids. You can learn about the area on a naturalist-led tour or a self-guided hike. Cap off your visit by relaxing at the preserve's excellent beach.

► *Backtrack to State-57 and drive 8 miles south through the towns of Baileys Harbor and Jacksonport. Just past Jacksonport, turn left on Cave Point Road and drive 3½ miles south to Cave Point County Park.*

Cave Point and Whitefish Dunes

Etched with caves and overhangs from eons of scouring ice and crashing waves, limestone ledges rise 20-30 feet above Lake Michigan in **Cave Point County Park** (920/746-9959; map.co.door.wi.us/parks/). On many days, Lake Michigan's waves crash into the rock with a resonant boom. The park offers picnic tables and grills.

Cave Point is joined to the south by **Whitefish Dunes State Park**, your last stop before making the final leg of the drive back to Sturgeon Bay (920/823-2400; dnr.wi.gov). Whitefish Dunes State Park extends from Lake Michigan inland to the shores of Clark Lake. The rarely crowded park harbors wetlands along a winding creek. Nearby stand the highest sand dunes in Wisconsin. Hike the boardwalk to the top of Old Baldy, the tallest dune in the park. Be sure to stay on marked trails to protect the dunes. Also don't miss the park's 1½ miles of beautiful sand beach, a popular place on hot summer days.

► *From the state park, drive Clark Lake Road 4 miles west to State-57. Then, continue 10 miles south back to Sturgeon Bay to complete your tour.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Door County Visitor Bureau (800/527-3529; doorcounty.com)