



Located about 65 miles from Detroit, the villages and towns surrounding Lake Huron along Michigan's lower peninsulas offer a rural, yet cosmopolitan getaway for the hustle of life.

Michigan's Eastern

Coast

Easy As Sunday Morning By Joseph Blake

One of the great things about a country as geographically diverse as the United States are the unique pockets of beauty everywhere between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

From California to Maine, to South Carolina and South Dakota, the aesthetics are as varied as the culture and people. In the midst of it all is Michigan, a state blessed with a range of beautiful settings that sooth and inspires.

Open, vast, rural and cosmopolitan are all terms that can be used to describe the towns and villages surrounding Lake Huron, where I spent several days tasting, touring, touching and gradually getting hooked on the quiet, slow pace of the area.

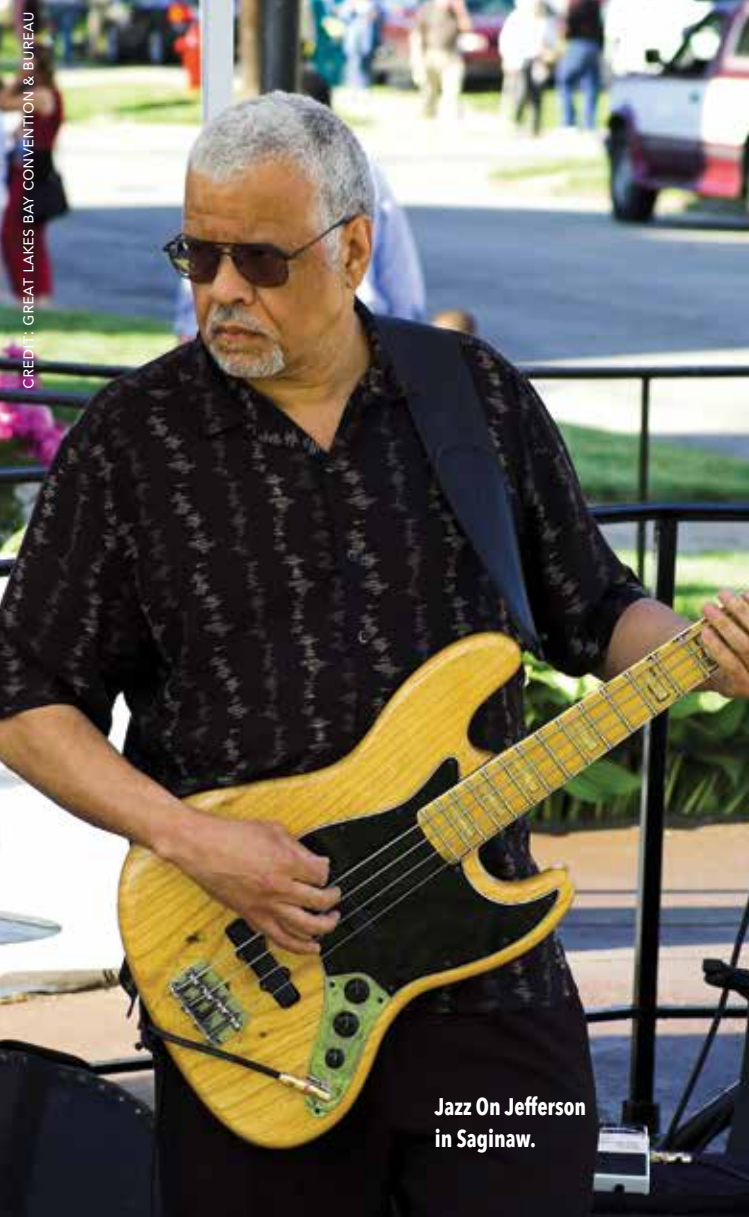
Approximately 65 miles from Detroit and 180 miles from Grand Rapids, the the Great Lakes Bay and Blue Water regions are surrounded by Lake Huron, and comprise the "thumb" of Michigan in the Lower Peninsula.

I kicked off a five-day visit in the town of Bay City, a picturesque place for tourists search for a destination with the serenity that comes from a slower pace and the natural beauty. The restored, historic buildings surround a new, successful City market, an enclosed shopping area that features local produce, fish, meats, crafts and flowers.

It's only been open about a year but the market has already exceeded expectations in regard to the number of shoppers who frequent this charming place. One vendor—Heidi's Darn Good Cookies—still can't keep up with demand and sells out more often than not before the end of the day.

Meandering along the Bay City borders is the Saginaw River and Wenonah Park, which features fantastic views of the river and an opportunity to walk off some of those calories from the goodies at the City Market.

For a more formal meal (and "formal" is used loosely) another Bay City restaurant called Castaway's serves an unexpectedly sumptuous fried walleye and also the kind of food (fries smothered with cheese and topped with bacon, as well as something called a steak Philly dip) that forces you to either sit and admire the view, or stand and admire the view.



Jazz On Jefferson
in Saginaw.

CREDIT: GREAT LAKES BAY CONVENTION & BUREAU

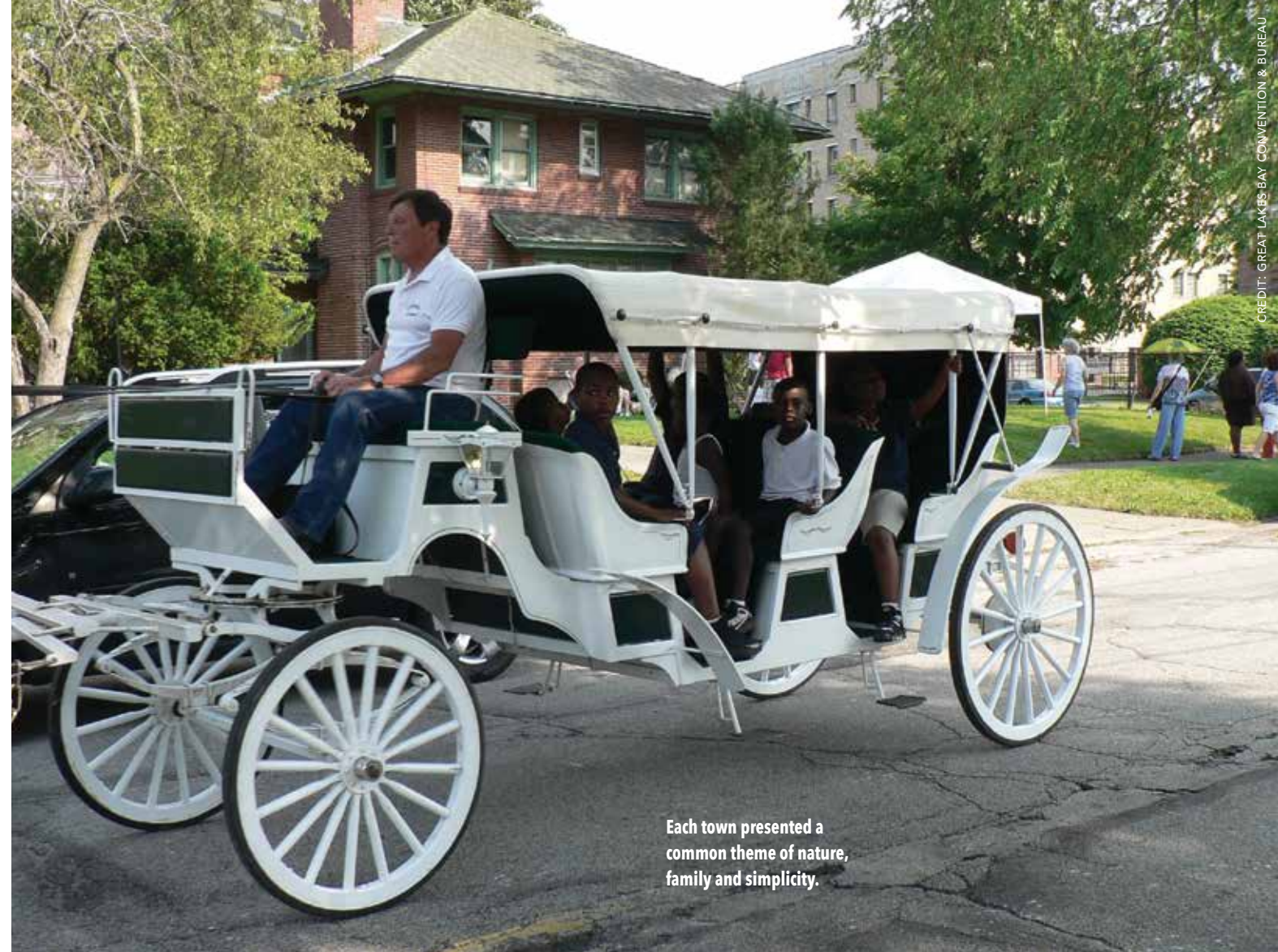
The same is true at Harbor Beach Lighthouse in Harbor Beach, where local volunteers have dedicated their time and sweat to physically refurbishing and raising every penny on their own to restore the 122-year-old lighthouse to its former glory. As the volunteers give tours, their pride is evident. But there is also a deeper, more discernible feeling of history, culture and pride of community that is passed along to every visitor.

And that, perhaps, is arguably the essence of the area — a quiet, no-nonsense region that doesn't pretend to be anything other than what it is — a no-validation-needed area of relaxation and fellowship.

During my visit, the Port Austin Porch Fest was in full swing. Musical bands performed on porches along sun-drenched streets lined with single homes that featured daylilies, poppies and ornamental grasses that waved at the slightest breeze.

In Lexington, I stumbled upon an encampment of reenactors representing a Civil War regiment from Texas. They had erected their tent on an open spot in the middle of the block. It looked a bit out of place among the stately homes and cool breeze that blew in off of Lake Huron, but it was history and though Michigan was pretty solidly Union during the Civil War, even Texas was welcomed here with a patient smile.

As a destination, the eastern coast, or sunrise coast, of Michigan is well worth a visit. It's no more than a two-hour flight from anywhere in the Northeast and a mere hour drive from Detroit. 🌊



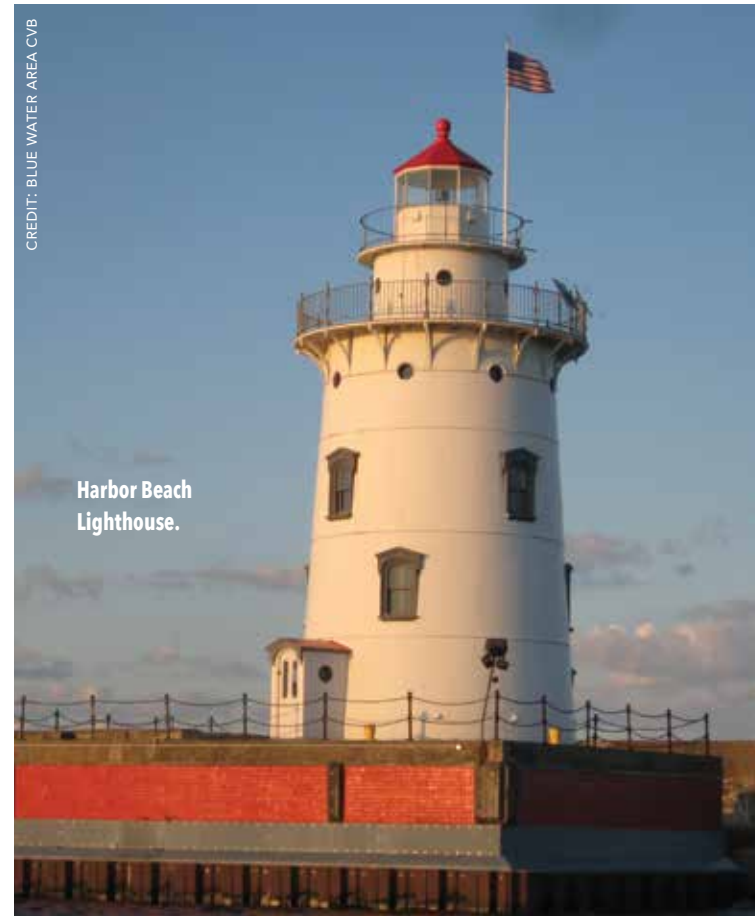
Each town presented a
common theme of nature,
family and simplicity.

CREDIT: GREAT LAKES BAY CONVENTION & BUREAU

Food in the area is as diverse and prolific as the antique stores and specialty shops that line the downtown streets in a way that is both unassuming and inviting. No fast food restaurants, no neon-lit bars, no billboards of any sort advertising anything.

Such lack of pretension could also be found in Port Austin, Lexington and Port Huron, where there is a common theme of simplicity, nature and family, as well as a slowed-down pace that draws you in and makes you realize you will return before you've even left.

Places like the family-owned Bird Creek Farm in Port Austin, where the owner will greet you personally and his wife will stop by in mid meal just to see if you need something, add much to the allure. The farm-to-table establishment is a peaceful, soothing place to eat, with an outside dining area that overlooks a working farm of crops and animals. The pride in the restaurant is evident from father (the owner) to son (the manager). They genuinely seem to enjoy engaging, joking and effortlessly making people feel at home.



Harbor Beach
Lighthouse.

CREDIT: BLUE WATER AREA CVB

If You Go: Do try to explore more than one town and take special note of the many restorations being done—from stately old buildings to prominent lighthouses with a thousand stories to tell.

The following are a few of Pathfinder's favorites:

Grindstone General Store

Serving ice cream in this historic building since 1890, with the largest cone in Michigan.

<http://www.michigan.org/property/grindstone-general-store>

DoubleTree by Hilton—Port Huron

http://www.hilton.com/search/dt/us/mi/port_huron/

Lakeside A&W, Lexington

Not fast food, but Michigan food served at a table or car side. Here, you can still get a root beer float just like they served on "Happy Days."

<http://www.lexingtonmichigan.org/menu-item/w-lakeside-restaurant/>

Castaway's Bay City

Do try the fried walleye.

www.castawaysbaycity.com

City Market, Bay City

Get there early enough to sample one of Heidi's Darn Good Cookies.

www.citymarketbc.com

The Tap Room at Bird Creek Farms

Great atmosphere, wonderful hosts and good food.

www.birdcreekfarms.com

Harbor Beach Lighthouse, Harbor Beach

Simply a must-see. The tour is great and the views are spectacular from atop the lighthouse.

<https://harborbeachlighthouse.org/tours>