

# The Ultimate Milwaukee Outdoor Bucket List

BY LAUREN SIEBEN  
PHOTOS BY DAVID SZYMANSKI

When we say "bucket list," you might think of lofty, extreme goals – climb Mount Everest, skydive from an airplane, book a flight to some far-flung destination. But not every bucket list requires a plane ticket or an epic summit. We've put together a list of can't-miss attractions right in our Wisconsin backyard, each one guaranteed to get you outdoors and take full advantage of your home base in The Good Land.

## Summer

### Cruise Lake Country on a Harley-Davidson or celebrate Harley's 115th anniversary

When the ice melts, Harley-Davidson riders bring their prized bikes out from hibernation, and there's no better way to kick off the dust than with a scenic cruise through Lake Country. Head west in Waukesha County and cruise between more than 140 lakes in towns including Pewaukee, Delafield and Oconomowoc. If you don't own a bike, you can rent from the House of Harley-Davidson in Greenfield. "We're very fortunate to have some beautiful countryside to explore throughout Wisconsin," says Bill Davidson, great-grandson of William A. Davidson and vice president of the Harley-Davidson Museum. "The landscape varies so greatly from one mile to the next, that it's always great to see what's around the next bend."

If you still want in on the action but don't have a license, join in the celebration over Labor Day weekend as Harley-Davidson celebrates its 115th anniversary and hosts a series of events in Milwaukee that cater to bikers and non-bikers alike, including demo rides at all of the area dealers. "No matter what you ride, or even if you haven't started riding yet, we invite everyone to experience the excitement and thrill of motorcycle culture," Davidson says.



Bill Davidson sits on Harley-Davidson's 115th Anniversary Street Glide in front of the replica 1903 original Harley-Davidson shed situated on the grounds of the museum. The museum is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year.





### FEEL LIKE YOU'RE IN FLORIDA AT BARNACLE BUD'S

Tucked between Bay View and the Harbor District is Barnacle Bud's, a can't-miss Milwaukee gem during patio season. The riverfront restaurant has a distinct, beachy vibe that feels more Gulf Coast than Milwaukee River, as boaters anchor alongside the wooden dock to pop in for a plate of oysters. Don't let the remote location fool you – hot summer days draw a crowd, so saddle up to the bar and order a bucket of Coronas while you wait for a table.

### Play volleyball at Bradford Beach

Bradford Beach is the epicenter of summer fun in the city, and on a hot day in July, you'd be forgiven for thinking you were in Florida. The sprawling city beach attracts both amateur and professional volleyball players to its 43 sand volleyball courts on the coast of Lake Michigan. Recreational volleyball leagues run throughout the year, so put together a team and head for the water. For those who would rather watch from the sidelines, beach bums can sip drinks from a waterfront tiki hut or rent a private cabana to kick back in style.



### Rock out at Jazz in the Park and Chill on the Hill

Pack up your folding chairs and your picnic baskets this summer and enjoy two of the city's most beloved outdoor concert series. In 2018, Jazz in the Park celebrates its 27th year of free, outdoor music. Groove to jazz, funk, blues and more every Thursday evening in Cathedral Square Park from May 31 to Aug. 30. In Bay View, Chill on the Hill brings local musicians to the Humboldt Park band shell every Tuesday evening from June through August. Neighborhood restaurants sell their most popular dishes from food trucks, including Vietnamese food from Hue, Italian from Tenuta's and Mexican from Guanajuato.

### Plan an easy escape to nature at Harrington Beach State Park

When there's no time for a trip up north but you're itching to ditch the city and get lost in nature, Harrington Beach State Park in Ozaukee County is a perfect middle ground. Just 10 miles north of Port Washington, the park's placid lakefront is a world away from the city's bustling beaches. Plan a day trip to explore the walking trails, go trout fishing or kayak along the shore, or – for a prolonged getaway – book a campsite. A handful of walk-in sites are set back from the park's group sites to provide a rustic, private retreat.

### Rent a boat and explore Pewaukee Lake

Pewaukee Lake transforms into a warm-weather oasis in the summer and, luckily, you don't need to own a boat (or constantly pester that one friend with a boat) in order to enjoy it. Outfitters including Beachside Boat & Bait and Good Time Rentals rent out pontoon boats for as short as a few hours or as long as the whole day. Grab your inner tubes, your water skis and a dozen of your closest friends for a day of exploring and relaxing on the largest lake in Waukesha County.





## Fall

### Watch Boerner Botanical Gardens light up for China Lights

This fall, Boerner Botanical Gardens in Hales Corners transforms into a spectacular light show for the return of China Lights from Sept. 21 through Oct. 21. For the third year in a row, Boerner hosts the show, which is put together by a team of Chinese artisans to honor the centuries-old tradition of lantern festivals. Walk through the intricate, brightly colored displays or pause to watch the live performances. "This event is unique in that it brings China to us," said Shirley Walczak, director of Boerner Botanical Gardens. "Visitors get to experience a traditional lantern festival, be immersed into the Chinese culture, see entertainment direct from China and experience the Botanical Gardens at night."

### GOLF AT A DESIGNER COURSE

Kohler is a mecca for golfers in Wisconsin, and for good reason. The straits at Whistling Straits is a Pete Dye-designed course that has hosted three PGA tours and will host the Ryder Cup in 2020. The River, another Dye design in Kohler set along the Sheboygan River, has received accolades from *Golf Digest*, *GolfWeek* and *GOLF Magazine*. Head farther south to Saukville and explore The Bog, an Arnold Palmer-designed course with 18 holes set along 297 picturesque acres of the Cedarburg Bog.



### Take a hot air balloon ride

Picture it: You're floating high above the ground, drifting peacefully over the neighborhood as the sun sets or rises. This isn't just the stuff of dreams – WindDancer Balloon Promotions in Waukesha offers on-demand hot air balloon experiences within a 20-mile radius of Waukesha. The husband-wife team takes reservations for early morning or evening flights, offering majestic views that create the perfect backdrop for special occasions, or for ordinary days that could use a little excitement.

### Hike the entire Ice Age Trail

When the first leaves on the trees turn from green to yellow, don't just admire the foliage from your backyard – head outside for a scenic hike along the Ice Age Trail and up-close, unobstructed views of the fall colors. Ready to knock a real challenge off your bucket list? Gear up for the weeks-long journey to become a Thousand-Miler. This title is bestowed upon explorers who cover the entire 1,200-mile Ice Age Trail by foot, from the Wisconsin/Minnesota border up to Door County. The Ice Age Trail Alliance ([iceagetrail.org](http://iceagetrail.org)) offers planning tools and tips for hikers who plan to take on the ultimate challenge.



## Winter

### Cross-country ski at Lapham Peak

After the first snowfall of the season, Lapham Peak, located in the sprawling Kettle Moraine State Forest, takes on a new life for outdoor enthusiasts, as cross-country skiers arrive to traverse an illuminated 2.5-mile loop. Bring your own skis or rent them from Wheel and Sprocket in Delafield, offering on-site winter gear rentals at Lapham Peak – all you need to bring is yourself, your down jacket and a thermos of your favorite warm beverage.

### A fishing charter on Lake Michigan

Whether you're an avid angler or just enjoy the open water, most Wisconsinites have tried fishing, and true Wisconsinites have experimented with ice fishing. Take that popular past-time one step further and explore Lake Michigan through a Reel Sensation fishing charter. While most of Lake Michigan freezes in the winter, the Milwaukee harbor stays fairly open. Pull on extra layers and let your charter captain lead you in a winter excursion for brown trout, which are the fish of choice January through April.

### Run the Samson Stomp at the Milwaukee County Zoo

Every January, runners and walkers congregate at the Milwaukee County Zoo for the Samson Stomp & Romp, a 5K run named for a gorilla who was one of the zoo's most famous residents. The run has been a Milwaukee tradition for nearly 40 years, and it's one of the few January races in the region. "It's usually quite cold at the time of the race, so participants can feel like they've conquered the cold," said Jennifer Diliberti-Shea, public relations coordinator at the Milwaukee County Zoo.



### WARM UP AT A WINTER FESTIVAL

Winter brings two choices for Milwaukeeans: suffer through the season or lean into the cold. This year, embrace the elements and bundle up for an outdoor festival. At Mittenfest, hosted each February by Burnhearts in Bay View, you'll soon forget the cold as you pack in around space heaters and sip steaming hot toddies as local bands perform. For family-focused fun, head to Cedarburg's Winter Festival to watch the ice carving contest or the old-fashioned dog pull. The weekend-long event features live music and a chili cook-off, with plenty of indoor attractions when you need to warm up. In Waukesha, the annual JanBoree is a festival "created to chase the winter blahs." Past JanBorees have featured a snow slide made with PVC pipe and a Friday night opening ceremony, complete with fireworks on the Fox River.





Photo courtesy of Waukesha Jan Boree

## Spring

### Go behind the scenes at Miller Park

Tailgating at Miller Park is nothing short of epic, but when you're ready to go beyond the parking lot, book an MVP tour of the facility and walk through the dugout, luxury suite level, visiting clubhouse, press box and Bob Uecker's broadcast booth. A special "Bernie's Slide Experience" offered to small groups before select home games includes a special tour and up to five rides down Bernie's Slide. "It's perfect for the fan who wants to know what it feels like to be Bernie Brewer when the Milwaukee Brewers slug a home run," said Tyler Barnes, senior vice president of communications and affiliate operations for the Brewers.



### PEDAL OVER THE HOAN BRIDGE AT THE UPAF RIDE FOR THE ARTS

Most of us only traverse the Hoan Bridge from the comfort of our vehicles, but if you've always wondered what it would be like to slow down and take in the overhead views of Lake Michigan, the United Performing Arts Fund's annual Ride for the Arts is your golden ticket. Each spring, bike riders choose from routes between 5 and 70 miles. The longer routes cross the Hoan, and the longest 70-mile course travels all the way north to Port Washington. Reward yourself for your workout at the after-party held at the Summerfest grounds.



## Any Season

### Fly over your home in a plane

Hungry for a taste of the A-list life? Book your own charter flight through West Bend Air – no celebrity status (or pilot's license) needed. The company's fleet of charter aircrafts can seat between three and eight people, with smaller planes designed to cruise around the Midwest and larger aircrafts that can fly from coast to coast. Your ant-sized neighbors will watch in awe as you fly overhead.

### Explore the Urban Ecology Center

The Urban Ecology Center's mission is to connect city dwellers to nature by providing year-round programming for both kids and adults. Members of the Urban Ecology Center can borrow canoes, kayaks, bikes, cross-country skis, sleds, snowshoes and more, and the center's popular summer camps feature themes that appeal to kids with all types of interests, from animals to robots. Members can take advantage of guided adventures and lessons on how to use outdoor gear, or "simply borrow it to make their own adventure," said Jeff McAvoy, director of marketing and communications at the Urban Ecology Center. "All without having to leave the city!"



Photo courtesy of the Urban Ecology Center