



IDYLIC TIMES TWO

The sister cities of Saugatuck and Douglas, Michigan, offer boaters a perfect mix of food, fun and culture.

The online dictionary defines idyllic as “perfect; extremely pleasant.” For a Lake Michigan boater looking for a relaxing destination to spend some time or just weather a stormy afternoon, that describes sister cities Saugatuck and Douglas, Michigan, all the way.

And if you’re a boater interested in art—performing arts, painting and pottery and the culinary arts—this is a must-stop on your cruise agenda.

The two towns are on opposite sides of Lake Kalamazoo, one of Michigan’s sunken river lakes, this one at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River. Both towns offer great marina facilities, but Saugatuck has more restaurants, bed and breakfasts, antique stores and other shops, while Douglas is more residential. A chain ferry, powered by the arm strength of local teenagers, connects the two towns across the Kalamazoo, and public transportation via the Inter-Urban Bus service costs a whole dollar and runs between the two burgs, too. Transient boaters alighting in either place can thoroughly enjoy both.

When approaching Saugatuck and Douglas from the offshore waters of Lake Michigan, the only discernable landmark for miles out is a round, white orb of a microwave relay station, visible just above the treeline. If you’ve got the lat/lon punched in correctly on your GPS, you’ll see the flat spot marking the mouth of the Kalamazoo River, punctuating green, tree-covered high dunes behind a long line of sandy beach. To port of the entrance is one of the few visible beachfront residences along this Art Coast of Michigan—a mansion with a silvery roof.

Once past the piers, an inlet appears to starboard. This is a popular anchorage, but it is quite shallow in spots. About 15 minutes of idle-speed takes you up the channel past residences and forested banks (where deer often appear for a drink) and gets you to Saugatuck on the north side of the channel at the entrance to Lake Kalamazoo.



Good Karma

My wife, Kathy, and I met our friends, Jim and Tracey Ridderbos, at the ramp belonging to Star Ferry in downtown Saugatuck. The fine folks at Hall's Sports Center up the road in Muskegon brought us a big Four Winns Horizon 310 bowrider for our August day of cruising. After paying our \$30 launch fee (it's free at a couple of ramps upstream, both on the Saugatuck and Douglas sides, where we've easily launched 21-footers in the past), we headed directly for the big lake. Putting the hammer down through the chop, we headed out a few miles and noticed a man in a small recreational fishing boat, about four miles from shore, flailing his arms somewhat frantically in the rolling three-foot waves. He needed a tow, and we were happy to give him one, as we really didn't have a schedule to meet. Using the first hour and a half of our day being good samaritans seemed like it would provide good karma for the rest of the day.

The fellow tossed us his anchor line. We tied it to the ski tow and headed slowly back to port. Once past the winding channel between the big lake and Lake



Boaters and other tourists have many opportunities to relax and enjoy the waterfront in Saugatuck and Douglas (opposite). The annual Sidewalk Sale Days in August are a great time to enjoy the ambiance of downtown Saugatuck—and find great deals (top). Three happy revelers enjoy Independence Day (bottom).



You can shop 'til you drop in Saugatuck, and fortunately plenty of great restaurants and watering holes provide perfect places to recuperate (left).

Kalamazoo, we got an education in careful navigation. His dock was a ways upriver from Saugatuck, beyond the Blue Star Highway bridge on the Douglas side. As we didn't have any GPS mapping software, we had to rely on the powerless angler to show us how to follow the fairly tricky channel. Lake Kalamazoo is not a place for casual cruising. The lake is full of shallows that are thankfully muddy (we had to back our big bowrider off a mud flat after I ran her aground—better described as “amuck”—at idle speed). Several times our digital depth gauge read two feet, but we were still able to maneuver to the deeper channels. It's hard to imagine the Kalamazoo River once allowed ships to go all the way upstream to the inland town of Allegan—a distance of more than 25 miles.

Tasty delights

Happy angler back in his slip, it was getting close to lunchtime, so we docked at Sergeant Marina, which cost \$15 for four hours, and walked up to the Coral Gables restaurant for lunch. Food here—we were hungry for burgers and salads—was sumptuous, and the drinks were cold. Service was great, too. I've been to Saugatuck numerous times fishing on my own and a couple of times shopping with Kathy, and we've never experienced a bad meal. The Mermaid Bar and Grille gets a high personal recommendation, with entrées that go well beyond basic bar and grill fare. The Butler is renowned for charbroiled burgers and steaks, and you can't go wrong at Wicks Park Bar and Grille, either. Don't leave town without trying the perch sandwich at Wally's—you won't find a better one anywhere on the planet. All of these and more are in the downtown shopping area of Saugatuck, within easy walking distance from the docks on the Saugatuck side.

To sample some great craft brews, check out the Saugatuck Brewing Company (sbrewing.com) in Douglas, which offers a wide range of beer, ale and stout brewed on site, as well as a range of local wines. These compliment some fine meals available in an Irish pub-type atmosphere. The SBC also hosts a series of classic films throughout the year on its own big screen—you can drink and dine during the films, too.

The microbrewery takes up half of a large, former manufacturing facility, which has the Blue Star Antique Pavilion and its amazing selection of antique and art taking up the other half (see “Brewtiquing” sidebar).

Brewtiquing, Anyone?

BREWTIQUING: *The activity of shopping the antique mall until you need a break, grabbing a bite at the brewery, going back to the mall, then back to the brewery...*

That's the definition provided by David Hulst, owner of the Blue Star Antique Pavilion (2948 Blue Star Memorial Highway; 269-857-6041), housed in the same building as the Saugatuck Brewing Company. The antique mall opened in July 2004 and fast became a destination mall for serious antiquers and casual browsers alike, says Hulst. He noted the Antique Pavilion occupies half of a 50,000-square-foot former manufacturing facility and features more than 175 antique dealers from all over the United States—including Detroit, Chicago, and even Nevada. The dealers have no singular specialty, says Hulst, therefore offering “a little bit of everything for everyone.”

“The founders of (public television's) ‘Antiques Roadshow’ stopped in while filming in Grand Rapids and stated this was the best mall they have seen, and they have seen many,” says Hulst. “The mall has many regular customers, and dealers who go out of their way to shop there, one regular all the way from Canada and another from Georgia, stop as often as they can.”

“Now that the Saugatuck Brewing Company has occupied the other half of the building, a new activity has been born,” says Hulst. “Brewtiquing!” – *D.M.*



PHOTOS BY FELICIA FAIRCHILD

Whether in Saugatuck/Douglas for the afternoon or the whole season, you'll find ample accommodating slips and marinas.



Hungry Village Tours

A new way to sample a community's plate

David Geen started Villas and Vines more than 15 years ago, specializing in food and wine adventures in Italy, France, Spain, Argentina and Ireland. Repeat customers such as The Cooking Cottage (a cooking school from Buck's County, Pennsylvania) were requesting new culinary destinations, so Geen went local and created Hungry Village Tours.

"David's creating a local, agriculture-related micro-business focusing on culinary/cultural tourism in the Saugatuck/Douglas lakeshore community," according to Felicia Fairchild, executive director of the Saugatuck/Douglas Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Geen plans two tours a day: A walking tour that probably will cost less than \$50 per person, exploring Saugatuck and Douglas' culinary secrets behind the storefronts with demonstrations and tastings; and a driving tour of the lakeshore's producers, including farms, orchards, blueberry patches, vintners, brewers, creameries and smokehouses. Geen said the driving tour will cost less than \$100 per person and includes transportation, making it appealing for foodies who arrive by boat. Both tours will convene at the Saugatuck Center for the Arts, acknowledging the center's weekly Greenmarket and its history as a pie factory. Tours are slated to begin in May and run through October.

"I want to make clear that this is not a restaurant sampling kind of thing," Geen explained. He said the tours will offer exceptional "behind the scenes, personal" glimpse of local culture, food, wine, customs and fun.

Special tours can be designed for groups, too. For more information, call 800-593-6350 or visit hungryvillagetours.com. — D.M.

Other places to eat and drink in Douglas that are close to Tower Marine and its transient slips include Back Alley Pizza Joint, the Wild Dog Grille (try the Wasabi Salmon) and Everyday People Café, which has a rather misleading name, as it's only open in the evenings and serves gourmet meals and adult libations.

A great way for boaters to experience the culture of Art Coast cuisine is by hooking up with Hungry Village Tours, which offers a free walking tour of the two towns, as well as a driving tour of the surrounding area (see "Hungry Village" sidebar). You also can provision the boat in either town at several groceries.

Home of the arts

We happened to be in town during sidewalk sale days, which attracted a lot of weekday foot traffic. Here, we perused all manner of paintings and sculptures, clothing and antiques. We look forward to exploring Douglas this boating season.

Other items worth noting include the many bed and breakfasts in the area, offering some respite from life aboard the boat. And Saugatuck's Ship & Shore Motel offers boaters who have smaller craft lacking overnight accommodations the opportunity to dock and walk to their waterfront room. I've stayed here, and it's a nice place.

Felicia Fairchild, executive director of the Saugatuck/Douglas Convention and Visitors Bureau, notes that the town populace is serious about the arts—and attracting people to the area to see them. She explained the community has become well-known for the visual arts, with 36 art galleries in the area. Saugatuck also offers venues for the performing arts, with the Red Barn Theatre and the Red Barn Playhouse, which offers live performances.



The Lost Town of *Singapore*, MI



SINGAPORE, MICHIGAN

Beneath the sands near the mouth of the Kalamazoo River lies the site of Singapore, one of Michigan's most famous ghost towns. Founded in the 1830's by New York land speculators, who hoped it would rival Chicago or Milwaukee as a lake port, Singapore was in fact, until the 1870's, a busy lumbering town. With three mills, two hotels, several general stores, and a renowned "Wild-cat" bank, it outshone its neighbor to the south, "The Flats" as Saugatuck was then called. When the supply of timber was exhausted the mills closed, the once bustling waterfront grew quiet. The people left, most of them settling here in Saugatuck. Gradually, Lake Michigan's shifting sands buried Singapore.

Up until 1875, sailing or steaming into the river from Lake Michigan would put you in downtown Singapore, now one of Michigan's oldest ghost towns. But today, there's barely any evidence it ever existed.

Long buried by shifting sands after being founded and booming in the 1830s as a lumber town, the site is now mostly groomed private land. Singapore only exists in Saugatuck as the name of a yacht club and the Singapore Bank Bookstore.

The bookstore's name recalls an alleged, ongoing scandal in which the Singapore and Allegan banks shared funds to meet federal requirements compelling the institutions to have a certain amount of money. The federal bank examiner would inspect the Allegan Bank, then be taken out to get drunk by the Allegan banker while the money was transported 25 miles down the Kalamazoo River and deposited at the bank in Singapore—before the bank examiner could get there to count it.

According to Wikipedia, the 40-day Blizzard of 1842 might have wiped out Singapore if the ship *Milwaukie* had not wrecked just off shore. The food aboard the ship kept Singapore residents alive.

Here's the creepy thing: The town and surrounding trees were greatly damaged by fire the same night as the Great Chicago Fire, and the fires that wiped out Peshtigo, Wisconsin—all on October 8, 1871. Although the Chicago fire is most well-known, the Peshtigo fire killed 1,300 people, while the fire that spanned from Saugatuck to Holland and up to Manistee, Michigan, swept completely across the state and burned Port Huron and other towns on the Lake Huron coast. What trees the fire spared around Singapore were harvested for lumber to rebuild Chicago and Holland, and without lumber to feed its two mills, Singapore soon became a ghost town, the last resident reportedly leaving in 1875. — D.M.

singaporeyachtclub.com) and Sergeant Marina (269-857-2873; sergeantmarina.com) are next in line, and on the town's waterfront. Each has up to 10 transient slips available. Coral Gables and Sergeant each sell gas and diesel; all three offer pump-out.

On the Douglas side and around to starboard as you enter Lake Kalamazoo is the full-service Tower Marine (269-857-2151; towermarine.com), which has 40 transient slips and a service facility than can handle a full complement of repairs.

Activities abound

For a couple of small towns, there's an amazing amount of things to do beyond what we've already covered. Some activities yet to mention include

the Ravines Golf Course, designed by Arnold Palmer. You can take sailing lessons. Or throw your own pottery at the Express Yourself Art Barn in Douglas. Rent a canoe from Old Allegan Canoe and float down the Kalamazoo from New Richmond, Michigan. Watch puppet shows or go on exciting dune rides. Take a tour of the whole harbor aboard the Star of Saugatuck, an old-fashioned stern wheeler. Visit the Saugatuck/Douglas Historical Museum. There's really just too much to list here, which is why you should go to saugatuck.com and check out the complete online visitors guide, or call the Saugatuck and Douglas Convention & Visitors Bureau, 269-857-1701. Saugatuck/Douglas are cruising destinations you just may add to your itinerary year after year. ♦

Fishing Saugatuck: A Mixed Bag

Fishing, whether from the pier or in boats, is good in Saugatuck/Douglas early in the year and into June. Kings, cohos and steelhead can be found near the pierheads, feeding on alewives spawning in the river. The action moves offshore as the water warms, but by August and September action can be hot for staging king salmon headed for the Kalamazoo River.

Charters I can personally recommend are Best Chance Too (616-292-6098), with captains Dave Engel and Bill Bale, who dock at Big Lake Outfitters downtown. Capt. Matt Shanahan of Matt's Charter Service (616-857-4316) is another captain.

To research additional charters in the area, call Big Lake Outfitters at 269-857-4762. — D.M.

The Saugatuck Center for the Arts is housed in a former factory that had 30-foot ceilings and converted nicely to a 450-seat theater. Here, the Mason Street Warehouse Theatre serves as an incubator for Broadway productions. It also is close to the waterfront.

The community has come into its own as a venue for the cinematic arts, quietly establishing the Waterfront Film Festival as the third most popular film festival in the world, behind Cannes and Sundance. This year, the 13th Annual Waterfront Film Festival takes place June 9-12.

Marinas

Approaching Saugatuck up the Kalamazoo River, the first marina you encounter is Saugatuck Yacht Service (269-506-6361), which offers 10 transient slips, heads, showers and laundry, along with gas, diesel and pump-out services.

Coral Gables Marina (269-857-2162; coralgables-saugatuck.com), Singapore Yacht Club (269-857-2442;



The Saugatuck Chain Ferry provides a handy, unique way to shuttle between Saugatuck and Douglas (top). It's simply not possible to find a bad meal in either town (bottom).

Saugatuck/Douglas

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Lakeside in Saugatuck Village



Inspired by its lakefront setting, this beautifully appointed waterfront duplex has the ambiance and space of a private, country home, surprisingly tucked into the center of the village. Walk to shops, galleries, and restaurants, literally steps away. No hassles with driving to the village, and looking for parking. This location has it all! Ample green lawns & gardens flank the bulkheaded, deepwater dock. Two slips accompany the sale. Each slip 40L X 25W, or along

the outside, 80ft of tie-up. Good water depth. Direct channel access to Lake Michigan. Singapore Yacht Club, and fueling station close by. The southern facing 2000-plus square foot residence enjoys a 27ft private, waterside terrace, with room for gracious entertaining. There are three oversized bedrooms, each with adjoining full baths, and a second floor family, or media room. The living-dining room has beautiful built-in cabinetry, a marble wetbar, 2 large bay

windows, new cypress hardwood flooring, and Pella doors & windows. This home is not to be missed, for those who want quality, elegance, and convenience, on the water. Owner is a licensed Michigan Realtor.

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