



Simple charms still lure visitors to northern Wisconsin

[by Divina Infusino]

By and large, the experience of vacationing in northern Wisconsin in the summer has remained blissfully the same for the past 50 years. Whether a weekend or a month, it is largely a time spent diving into a clear lake from a pier or pontoon boat, wading with a child on a sandy beach, water-skiing, fishing for muskie and walleye pike, biking along the many trails, hiking amid the lush pine and birch forests and listening to loon calls while mesmerized by the star-flooded night sky.

But other aspects have changed over the years. For one thing, northern Wisconsin's forests have matured. The clear cutting that occurred in the early part of the 20th century has now been rectified by 100 years of tree growth. The lush forests of stately pines - on 5.7 million acres of public land - are back. Add to the enhanced natural attractions better roads and an increase in local marketing efforts and vacationers pack up the car or fly into the Rhinelander airport from May to late September in ever-increasing numbers.

But these vacationers are baby boomers, often from the Chicago and northern Illinois area. They want to return to an era of clean air, clean water, no crime and a lifestyle that can lower blood pressures by 30 points, but they do not want to sacrifice 21st century amenities in the process.

So north-central Wisconsin has adapted by retaining the charms of bygone times while adding upscale sophistication.

One of the most visible examples is Minocqua, located amid three lakes in Oneida County about six hours from Chicago. The wooded acreage and pristine, spring-fed lakes are intact. But drive into the town area and amid traditional arts and crafts shops and antique stores crowded with mounted deer heads and taxidermied bears is Ann Marie, a shop that sells pottery from France and Italy and chocolate cream truffles. Nearby is Dan's Minocqua Fudge, with the largest selection of handmade chocolates in the North Woods, and La Baguette, owned

by two French expatriates who bake crusty French bread and fresh croissants and brew frothy cappuccinos.

Restaurants, too, have gone beyond the relish tray and basic meat-and-potato fare for preparations of local fish, European cuisine and extensive wine collections. In nearby Eagle River, the Riverstone centers its gourmet dining around a climate-controlled room containing 300 wines.



Other areas of north-central Wisconsin such as Eagle River and Rhinelander also exhibit the influx of upscale demands, especially in accommodations.

At one time, the fishermen who visited the area baited their lines in what were basically little wooden shelters. The families checked into a resort that consisted of several simple cabins situated around a lake. The heavily bankrolled built or rented a private log home.

Now, high-rise condos are beginning to populate the shorelines of Lake Minocqua and other areas. Those individual cabins around the lake are being sold off as condos. The resorts are now replete with satellite dishes, DVD players and other amenities found in high-end accommodations. And

those big luxurious homes? There are far more of them, many available for weekly and monthly rentals.

The fishing shacks are still there, as are rentals of the classic family resorts with fully equipped kitchens and beaches for children. Plenty of little, locally owned motels still dot the roads.

"The fish are still jumping, the air is still fresh and the lakes still inviting," said Jim Holperin, secretary of Wisconsin Department of Tourism. "But I would say we can accommodate all tastes in northern Wisconsin."

IF YOU GO

For general information visit www.travelwisconsin.com.

Chambers of Commerce can guide you to vacation rentals of varying types, styles and prices, including condos and private homes. Local Chambers of Commerce:

www.eagleriver.org,

www.rhinelanderchamber.com,

www.minocqua.org.

ACCOMMODATIONS

AmericInn of Minocqua, 700 U.S. Highway 51 N., Minocqua, WI 54548, (715) 356-3730. Lodge with modern furnishings in rooms, stone fireplace, indoor pool, sauna. Spas available in some rooms. Includes breakfast.

Whispering Woods Cottages, 8658 W. Squaw Lake Road, Lac du Flambeau, WI 54538, (715) 588-9135, cell: (262) 496-7103. Updated



family cottages with satellite dishes, DVD players and modern kitchens. On peaceful Squaw Lake. Good for children.

Miller Shorewood Vista, 4239 W. Lake George Road, Rhinelander, WI 54501, (715) 362-4818. You can rent a country home that sleeps eight people. Resort offers vacation plans that include three meals a day.

RESTAURANTS

Riverstone Restaurant, 219 N. Railroad St., Eagle River, WI 54521, (715) 479-8467. Received Award of Excellence from Wine Spectator Magazine.

Al Gen Dinner Club, 3428 Faust Lake Road, Rhinelander, WI 54501, (715) 362-2230. Known for its local-fish preparations, including walleye pike.

Dan's Minocqua Fudge, 521 Oneida St., Minocqua, WI 54548, (715) 356-2662.

La Baguette, 700 U.S. Highway 51 N., Minocqua, WI 54548, (715) 358-6953. Authentic French bakery and cafe.

SHOPPING

Ann Marie's Fine Coffee and Tea, 414 Oneida St., Minocqua, WI 54548, (715) 356-1515. Pottery from Europe and other china, coffee and tea accessories.

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