

From the community: Dog Days of Autumn in Door County



Relaxing by the bonfire (with bucket of water for safety!) (Posted by lauraquinnbooks, Community Contributor)

By **Community Contributor lauraquinnbooks**

OCTOBER 11, 2015, 1:09 PM

Think of Door County, Wisconsin, and you probably think of many happy summer vacation memories. Not so very long ago, the verdant island closed up shop after Labor Day. That is definitely not the case, as Door County is bustling throughout the gilded autumn season. Want another surprise? You can enjoy all the splendor on a budget!

My husband and I just returned from a relaxing four-day holiday in Door County with our dog. Our mission was to spend as little as possible, while still enjoying a comfortable/relaxing mini-vacation. The trip also needed to involve our furry companion, Simon. Weighing eighty-nine pounds, he doesn't quite fall under the purse dog category. So, when we say dog-friendly, we mean dogs of all sizes. Be sure to check with businesses before bringing your dog, to learn their policies. Also, check off-season schedules, as they may differ from peak-season hours.

Our drive to Door County is about 250 miles, just under five hours if you're following the speed limit. That is, if you drive directly to Door County, which seems just about impossible. Along the drive, there are shopping outlets, scenic stops, rest areas, and even a military museum. We succumbed to the lure of the Pleasant Prairie Premium Outlets, located right off I94 (11211 120th Avenue, Pleasant Prairie, WI 53158). Many of the stores are dog-friendly, and the outdoor mall provides great opportunity to stretch your legs while perusing bargains. There are fast food restaurants and a gas station here, and the Jelly Belly factory outlet is just down the road. For the rest of our drive, we listen to audio books to entertain us. Simon keeps an eye out for cows and horses, as he has always been fascinated with his bovine and equine cousins.

As many times as I have visited Door County, I still feel like I'm transported to another world when I arrive. Roads curve and dip between heavily forested land, leading you to the collection of distinct towns that make up the county. This is especially true as the leaves begin to display their autumnal hues. As we followed Route 42 north past Sturgeon Bay, the tree tops began to show traces of fall colors. Dabs of reds, golds and oranges appeared a bit more frequently among the dense fields of green leaves as we continued north, hinting at a spectacular spectacle of color in the coming weeks. Check with your hotel personnel on their opinion of the Fall Colors, as the weather plays a huge role in the transition. Door County experts we talked to stated that the peak of Fall Colors will be by the early 3rd week of October. "We expect the peak Fall Colors to be at Baileys Harbor by the 2nd or 3rd week of this October, weather permitting," commented Bailey's Sunset Motel and Cottages owner Penny Geitner.

Door County features a full range of lodging options, from campgrounds, to basic motel rooms to luxurious villas. Visiting after Labor Day generally means paying off-season prices (with the exception of holidays or special events). Each of the communities that make up Door County has its own identity, and each tends to attract loyal visitors. We like to stay in Bailey's Harbor, as it is one of the quieter areas on the island, and perfect for relaxation and creative pursuits. A few years ago, we discovered Bailey's Sunset Motel and Cottages (8404 Highway 57 in Baileys Harbor, Wisconsin 54202), and have stayed there since. There are other dog-friendly properties in the area, but this one combines very reasonable prices with friendly service and beautiful grounds to explore. Our room was in the two-unit building, offering a fire pit (with free firewood!), picnic table and chairs to enjoy the grassy expanse. One of the entrances to the walking trails is located directly across from the room. The trails are a main attraction, especially when walking with your dog (leash required). The fresh scent of pine surrounds you, echoed by the soft crunch of needles beneath your feet. Raspberry bushes offer bursts of fresh berries intertwined with the evergreens. The property also boasts apple trees, grape vines and a pear tree, all delicious snacks as you navigate the paths.

Our lodging choice is very budget-friendly at just \$65 per night (weeknights) and \$75 per night (weekend). This nightly rate includes the \$10 per diem charge for dogs. The rooms are what you would

expect from a classic mom-and-pop operation - few frills, but all exceptionally clean and comfortable. Each room has a full bathroom, extra blankets and pillows, DVD player (with complimentary videos in the office) and flat screen TV, coffee maker, microwave and small refrigerator/freezer. A selection of pastries, orange juice, and hot beverages are offered as a continental breakfast. "Treat each other like you treat your friends" is the motto of owners Dave and Penny Geitner, and they live up to it. Their dog, Bo, is also very attentive, dropping everything (even his favorite ball) to greet customers at the desk. It is tempting to spend much of your vacation exploring and relaxing at the motel itself, but there is so much more to see in Door County.

Our dog could stay in the room alone, as long as he was in a crate. Simon, however, accompanies us wherever we go - easy to do in dog-friendly Door County. Throughout our stay, we visited all the communities and found activities to entertain all of us. Listed below are some highlights that we enjoyed in each town during our stay. These are just the tip of the mountain of activities available, especially if you visit during one of the festivals or special events. True to our budget challenge, all our activities were free or very low-cost...at least until we encountered some of our favorite shops. To balance our retail indiscretions, we packed our cooler with beverages, sandwiches and snacks for picnic lunches. We also took advantage of the microwave and outdoor grill for a few in-room dinners.

Baileys Harbor has two main beaches, Ridges Beach and Anclam Park. Our dog loves to swim, so this is always the first stop after checking in at the motel. Keep in mind that although the water looks Caribbean blue, it is still located in the far north and is usually cool. In the fall, it definitely helps to have fur, but we waded up to our knees and eventually got used to the water's brisk temperature. We like Ridges Beach, as it is less crowded and has picnic tables, restrooms and plenty of parking. Anclam Park is located in the center of town and is much more populated. It has a paved path for walking, and we have often seen kite surfers dancing along the waves. There are a few restaurants and shops here, many that allow dogs.

Carlsville offers tours and tastes of a coffee company, distillery and winery. There are also specialty shops, including a pet boutique. Our time is always spent at Dairy View Country Store, where our dog likes to walk around the farm and look at the goats, geese, and miniature horses (from afar). He also drags us to see Cookie, the giant cow statue, up close. Although dogs are not allowed indoors, there are plenty of outdoor sitting areas and a chance to shop for pumpkins and gourds. Inside, you can visit the café, gift shop and Schopf's Hilltop Dairy tour.

Egg Harbor has many shops, galleries, wineries and restaurants to explore, as well as a beautiful park overlooking the lake. Although not all businesses welcome dogs, there are enough flower-lined paths to occupy a dog and his designated non-shopper. A highlight for us is the delightful Main Street Market, a place where the cashiers say hello to everyone and know the locals' names. Here, we load up on such DC specialties as maple-plank-salmon, an assortment of cheese dips (this trip, a collection of cheddars:

sharp, horseradish, port wine, and tomato-basil), crackers, lunch meat, bread, cherry wine, produce and a carton of ice cream. We have mastered the cart shuffle, where one person shops while the other walks our dog, then swap.

Ellison Bay, Gills Rock, Northport and Rowley's Bay are a cluster of communities at the northern tip of Door County. Beautiful views of the lake abound here, especially from the beach at Northport (another of Simon's favorite swim spots). Northport has a large visitor's center and is also one of our favorite picnic spots. Although not as commercial as other communities, you'll find a few galleries, shops and restaurants. Scenic cruises and ferries to Washington Island leave from Gills Rock, with some dog-friendly services available. From Northport, a ferry transports cars and their occupants (including leashed dogs) to Washington Island via spooky-sounding Death's Door. Not to be missed is a hike around Newport State Park.

Ephraim lies outside one of the two entrances to Peninsula State Park. This 3,776 acre jewel is an adventure not to be missed, whether you decide to hike or just tour via the car. Dogs are allowed in certain areas only, and must be on a leash. The views of the lake are spectacular, and you can drive up to the historic Eagle Bluff Lighthouse. Ephraim also boasts beaches with stunning views, so be sure to park and explore the shoreline. This is also one of the most picturesque spots to watch the sunset. Wilson's Restaurant and Ice Cream Parlor is the red-and-white throwback to yesteryear, and is always filled with hungry patrons. Famous for their ice cream treats, you'll see fit cyclists in full gear slurping down shakes alongside somewhat less fit tourists (placing myself in this category). Also be sure to keep an eye out for the unique stone-faced fire station that looks like it's in a cave.

Fish Creek can get very crowded on the weekends, so we always plan our visit there during the week. The reason for the crowds is that it is chock full of shops, galleries and restaurants. Find a parking spot and take the opportunity to walk around the diverse shopping areas. Many businesses allow dogs, and there are plenty of outdoor benches for those that don't. There are several park areas to balance the concentration of consumerism. Our dog's very favorite Door County dining spot, Not Yet Licked, is located here. The driveway to this ice cream dream is very steep, but there are also plenty of street-level spaces if you prefer to face the hill on foot. The chalet-themed building is topped with stylized dragon beams, set aglow by a string of red lights. Seating is available indoors, but the outdoor area is irresistible. Whether you choose the old-fashioned gliders or the wrought-iron table and chairs, all have a view of the creek that meanders through the property. The gentle babbling of the water is accented by the occasional quacking of ducks floating leisurely by. If you ask Simon, these are all fine amenities, but the order window is the place to be. There, dogs are offered a free puppy cone, a miniature cone with vanilla custard. Simon loves ice cream, and laps it up before it has a chance to melt. Humans can enjoy all sorts of delicious hamburgers, brats, and other hot sandwiches followed by a vast selection of decadent ice cream desserts. Vegetables are grown on-site, and I must admit I was tempted to abscond with some of

the plump tomatoes tantalizing me from the abundant bucket planters (I didn't). Open through October. If you have a Friday or Saturday night free, don't miss the opportunity to experience watching a double feature at a vintage outdoor theater. Open since the 1950's, Sky Way Drive-In Theatre is located at 3475 Highway 42 in Fish Creek, WI. Listen to the movies old-school via the individual speakers that hook onto your window, or tune in the audio via your car's FM radio. The old-fashioned snack bar complete the dose of nostalgia. Open seasonally. Dogs are allowed, but must remain on leash.

Jacksonport has its own dog beach at Whitefish Dunes State Park. Cave Point County Park provides stunning views of waves crashing against rocky cliffs. Many outdoor festivals are held at Lakeside Park, and the Polar Bear Plunge takes place on New Year's Day.

Sister Bay features a fenced-in dog park, if your furry friend needs a romp. Get your camera ready when you visit Al Johnson's Swedish Restaurant, so you can capture goats romping on a grass roof. In addition to shops, restaurants and Piggly Wiggly, Sister Bay also hosts several festivals and farmers markets.

Sturgeon Bay is like a big city compared to Door County's other communities, but it has its share of unique shops, restaurants and wineries as well as parks and waterfront walkways. A dog park provides space for your dog to run off-leash, and a dog specialty store offers treats, toys and even a self-serve wash. If you're in need of a fast-food fix, there are many choices in Sturgeon Bay.

Hopefully, you will never need the following pet services, but they are available if needed. Northern Door Pet Clinic is located in Sister Bay, WI (920-854-4979 or <http://northerndoorpetclinic.com/>). The Door County Humane Society at 3475 County Road PD, Sturgeon Bay, can help with lost or missing pets (920-746-1111).

Throughout all the communities, you'll find a plethora of cherry and apple orchards and country stores. Most of these allow dogs in their outdoor areas, and are a fun place to stop and indulge in freshly picked produce and delicious baked products. During the autumn season, enjoy the harvest decorations and corn mazes as well as seasonal favorites from apple candles to pumpkin pies.

October features many special events throughout Door County, some of which are listed below. Most outdoor events are dog-friendly as long as your dog is on a leash and is well-behaved. However, some events may not allow dogs due to health restrictions or other issues. Please check with event coordinator before bringing your dog.

October Events:

Sister Bay Fall Fest - October 16-18th

Fall Art Crawl - October 24-25th

Jack O' Lantern Days Fish Creek - October 30th-31st

Check <http://www.doorcountynavigator.com/> for special events and general tourism information.

So, pack up your pooch and head to Door County for an autumn adventure! Whether you're on a budget or ready to splurge, whether you want an active journey or a relaxed retreat, you'll find the pawsitively perfect getaway in this Midwestern treasure.

This item was posted by a community contributor. To read more about community contributors, [click here](#).

Copyright © 2016, Lake County News-Sun

This article is related to: [Travel](#)