

Best of Lake Erie

— featuring Chautauqua Lake

Relax with lake breezes and a cocktail or strike a yoga pose as the mighty Niagara Falls rushes before you. Enjoy dinner in an old grain silo in Buffalo or world-class cheesecake on the streets of Detroit. Zipline in Geneva-on-the-Lake or stop by a speakeasy in Erie. Whatever your idea of a good time, you'll find it around Lake Erie.

Best Chautauqua Lake Getaway

Chautauqua Lake offers year-round nourishment for the mind, body and soul, even beyond the gates of the Chautauqua Institution. Along its 41 miles of shoreline, you'll find small villages, each with its own distinctive charm. Listen to moving music in Mayville, fill your belly in Bemus Point, laugh in Jamestown or head south to Celoron, where a new destination hotel is making waves.

At first light, strands of sunshine mingle with swirling mist hovering just above Chautauqua Lake on a crisp morning. The water is calm until a skein of honking geese come in for a landing, skidding across the surface and sending a wave of ripples in front of the resort-like Chautauqua Harbor Hotel in Celoron, New York.

The 135-room hotel opened last year on the grounds of the famed Celoron Park, a popular theme park that opened in 1894 and shuttered in 1962. It's a great spot for a getaway — anytime of the year — and makes an ideal launching spot for exploring the rest of the lake.

But before you head out, make sure to enjoy what the Chautauqua Harbor Hotel has to offer. The Lakehouse Tap & Grille overlooks the expansive lakeside patio, where people lounge next to the saltwater pool or gather at three fire pits, a putting green or the Carousel Bar, which is connected by a short footbridge to Sunset Island, once the location of a popular swing ride at Celoron Park.

"The park may be long gone, but the magic is still here," says concierge Dottie Maitland, who vividly remembers the sights and sounds. "I can still hear the click, click, clack, clack of the roller coaster when I take a walk along the boardwalk to enjoy the view."

You can certainly stay put in Celoron and enjoy the amenities and tranquility, but those who choose to venture out will find all kinds of activities and attractions waiting to be explored.



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Best of Jamestown

Laughter takes center stage in the nearby city of Jamestown, home to the year-old National Comedy Center, a high-tech museum (comedycenter.org) that caters to each person's own brand of humor.

At the entrance of the museum, visitors select their favorite stand-up comics, movies, television and YouTube shows. The resulting comedy profile is stored on a chip-enhanced wristband that creates a personalized experience when waved in front of the interactive exhibits. The center is also a treasure trove of amusing artifacts, ranging from rubber chickens to set props from shows like "Seinfeld," "The Office" and "Saturday Night Live."

Throughout the year, the Comedy Center hosts stand-up comedians at venues throughout the city, including the Tropicana Room, a faithful re-creation of a set from the "I Love Lucy" television show that's housed within the Lucille Ball Desi Arnaz Museum (lucy-desi.com).

When you've worked up an appetite, there are a few stand-out places to eat and drink in the city. At Labyrinth Press (labpressco.com) — locally known as "The Lab" — the food is so good, you won't notice the menu is completely vegetarian. Enjoy the burritos, salads and soups at the downstairs espresso bar or upstairs at the Brazil Craft Beer and Wine Lounge.

Alternatively, head to Forte (fortetherestaurant.com), where one of Jamestown's favorite bartenders, Nick Dean, stirs things up with expertly crafted cocktails with international appeal. Try the Lychee Sake-tini, which combines unfiltered sake with the fruity flavor of Thailand.



Best of Bemus Point

The town of Bemus Point feels frozen in time with its Victorian-era Hotel Lenhart (hotellenhart.com); the Village Casino that still serves up food and nighttime entertainment (bemuspointcasino.com); and Skillmans, a general store turned fashion and home furnishings boutique (skillmansny.com).

Much of the old-time ambiance of the village endures because families have remained generation after generation while newer business owners have committed to keeping longstanding traditions alive.

Bemus Point Inn (bemuspointinn.com), for example, opens at 7 a.m., serving up coffee and legendary gut-busting cinnamon rolls. The super-sized pastries are advertised as "the sweetest buns in town," and they do not disappoint when they arrive dripping with freshly poured white-glaze icing.

The Fish (bemuspointfish.com), meanwhile, is one of the town's newest restaurants, serving up signature cocktails and all-you-can-eat snow crab legs on the lively waterfront deck.

Work off all those calories at nearby Long Point State Park (parks.ny.gov), where you'll find swimming, hiking and mountain biking. Loud Performance Products (loudperformance.com), located near the park, rents all the gear you'll need for a trail ride, including fat bikes for winter recreation.

Best of Chautauqua Institution in the Off Season

More than 100,000 people visit the grounds of Chautauqua Institution (chq.org) to participate in its various summer programs centered around the arts, religion, recreation and education. But there's still plenty to do even after the nine-week season ends in August.

1. HAVE A DRINK ON THE PORCH OF THE ATHENAEUM HOTEL. Open from late April to October each year, the historic Athenaeum Hotel proudly overlooks the lake in all her Victorian glory. Sit in one of the rocking chairs on the lake-facing veranda and sip a classic cocktail from the lobby bar.

2. GET IN A ROUND OF GOLF. Golf has been an integral part of the Chautauqua experience since the first nine holes opened in 1914. The Chautauqua Golf Club now has two four-star, 18-hole courses to challenge even the most experienced golfers.

3. BROWSE FOR BOOKS AND GIFTS AT THE CHAUTAUQUA BOOKSTORE. The bookstore is a hub for staying up to date on the works of fiction, nonfiction, essays and poetry that are selected each season by the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle — one of the nation's longest-running continuous book discussion groups.

4. WARM UP WITH COFFEE AND A LIGHT MEAL AT AFTERWORDS CAFÉ. Located above the Chautauqua Bookstore, the cafe is a chill place to page through a book or get some work done. The coffee comes from Crown Street Roasting Co., located in nearby Jamestown, and pairs perfectly with the fresh pastries. Swing by at lunch time for the café's famous lobster bisque.

5. ENJOY A FARM-TO-TABLE CULINARY GETAWAY. Spend the weekend of Sept. 13-15 at the Athenaeum Hotel to participate in hands-on culinary workshops and eat farm-fresh meals. Make a reservation by calling the Athenaeum Hotel front desk at 716-357-4444.

6. TAKE IN THE WINTER VILLAGE. On select weekends between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve, the Chautauqua Institution comes alive with holiday festivities, including horse-drawn carriage and sleigh rides to holiday concerts and Breakfast with Santa. chq.org/winter



Best of Mayville

While the town is best known for being the gateway to the Chautauqua Institution, it also stands on its own as a getaway destination. You can shop for antiques, handmade art and artisanal food; cruise the lake on a sternwheeler, rent a boat or kayak; and listen to world-class music on a floating stage.

After a year-long hiatus, the newly christened Chautauqua Lake Pops (chautauqualakepops.com), formerly known as the Bemus Bay Pops, has just concluded its first season at a new location behind the Mayville Depot Museum at Lakeside Park. The floating stage hosts world-class musicians, local and regional bands, special events and free movie nights in the summer season.

Lakeside Park is also the home port to the Chautauqua Belle (269bell.com), one of the few operating sternwheelers left in the United States. During the summer season, it steams out into Chautauqua Lake, making a stop at Chautauqua Institution along the way. In the spring and fall, it makes weekend trips from the Chautauqua Harbor Hotel and McCrear Point Park in Jamestown.

If you'd rather get out on the water on your own, Chautauqua Marina (chautauquamarina.com) rents an assortment of watercrafts, including power boats, pontoons, fishing boats, pedal boats, kayaks and canoes. Add water skis or towable tubes to amp up the family fun.

There's even more to explore on the shore, whether seeking out unique gifts or gourmet treats. Get a taste of the town by stocking up on handmade chocolates at Webb's Candies (webbworld.com), which is well known for its goat's milk fudge and other sweets.

Meanwhile, Riko Chandra pours his passion into the art of cheesemaking at Reverie Creamery (reveriecreamery.com), which he opened with partner Jim Howard in 2015. In addition to offering a variety of gourmet items, Reverie produces its own aged hard and soft cheeses, made with milk from Western New York dairy farms. The Gitane on Weck is infused with caraway seeds — an homage to the region's Beef on Weck sandwiches.