

Saugatuck Douglas - Gay and Lesbian Vacations on Michigan's West Coast

Tucked between soaring sand dunes and the glorious Kalamazoo River, the gay friendly cities of Saugatuck-Douglas shower the spoils of resort-life on locals and visitors alike. With its beautiful beaches and eclectic cuisine and nightlife, the area's relaxed atmosphere has fostered gay and lesbian vacations for nearly a century. Whether hosting the club kids or the over 60 crowd, Saugatuck-Douglas proudly offers something for everyone.

A History of GLBT Pride

Once a thriving lumber town, Saugatuck-Douglas became a popular tourist destination in the early 1800s. By 1870, Chicago and St. Louis natives commonly traveled to the Saugatuck-Douglas lakeshore to escape the summer heat, but the area's true turning point came in 1910, when artists from the Chicago Art Institute established the Summer School of Painting on the Ox-Bow Lagoon. Ox-Bow encouraged a gay presence in Saugatuck and Douglas, which flourished as gay friendly small towns. In fact, tourists have warmly nicknamed Saugatuck the "Fire Island of the Midwest" for its GLBT pride.

After forging their reputations as gay-friendly cities, Saugatuck-Douglas emerged as pillars of GLBT pride in the greater Midwest gay community. Many who once called Saugatuck-Douglas a home away from home became full-time investors in the town's success. As they fell deeper in love with their surroundings, the weekend warriors purchased and renovated homes and businesses. What were once abandoned storefronts and dilapidated cottages gradually became quaint bed and breakfast establishments and storefronts. Saugatuck-Douglas now features more than 30 art galleries and a local calendar loaded with music, art and film festivals. Reflecting the area's GLBT pride, 30 percent of Saugatuck-Douglas' impressive restaurants, hotels and shops are gay owned and/or operated.

The Charm of Gay Friendly Small Towns

The [dining circuit](#) in the gay friendly small towns of Saugatuck-Douglas bridges the gap between top-shelf taste and low-brow attitude. American, French, English and Italian delicacies are available in abundance, as are the prerequisite burgers and ice cream demanded by most travelers. Wander dockside for Mermaid Bar and Grille's (269/857-8208) famous salads and pastas, or discover the casual British ambience of Chaps (269/857-2699). A sophisticated, continental flare shines through Blue Moon Bar and Grille's (269/857-8686) small plates and entrees. Reliable home cooking is on the order at Kalico Kitchen (269/857-2678), best known as the morning solace of the after-hours set.

Saugatuck-Douglas' [clothing, gift and antique shops](#) run the gamut from classic to contemporary. Elephant's Trunk (269/857-4755) boasts rare British Colonial antiques and

an art collection born of global exploration. Circa (c.) (269/857-7676) offers antiques, art and accessories spanning the scope of time, and Thomas Greene (269/857-4063) provides the latest in gifts and decorative home accessories. Continue on to Butler Pantry (269/857-4875) for terrific gourmet cookware, specialty foods and household accents.

Unforgettable Gay and Lesbian Vacations

Tourists also enjoy many options when it comes time to rest their weary heads. Saugatuck-Douglas [motels, resorts, cottages, suites and bed & breakfast inns](#) are suited to every taste and budget. The Dunes Resort (269/857-1401) is one of the largest [gay and lesbian vacations resorts](#) in the Midwest, providing comfortable accommodations, a diverse entertainment complex, and one of the most popular [gay bars in Michigan](#). Pines Motorlodge (269/857-5211) brings retro flair to a kitschy cottage atmosphere, and visitors banking on a quiet bed and breakfast setting will find The Kirby House (269/857-2904) an elegant respite. A more rustic retreat is found at Campit (269/543-4335), an outdoor resort for gays, lesbians and friends.

Although business and tourism thrive year-round in Saugatuck-Douglas, gay and lesbian vacations really heat up between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Swimmers and sunbathers soak up the scene on infamous [Oval Beach in Saugatuck](#). MTV once touted O.B. as one of the nation's five best beaches, and Conde Nast Traveler rated it one of the world's 25 best shorelines. Water babies preferring a clothing-optional setting will find the privacy of the surrounding dunes conducive to all things au natural.

The gay friendly cities of Saugatuck-Douglas have plenty of physical, outdoor diversions for the young and restless as well. Canoeing, jet-skiing and horseback riding can be arranged from several locales, and premier hiking awaits at Saugatuck Dunes State Park, Allegan State Park and picturesque Fenn Valley vineyard.

Feeling really motivated? Brave the heart-pounding 282 steps up the Mt. Baldhead sand dune for a stunning bird's eye view of the harbor. Free-wheelers will likely elect to jump a dune-schooner – a converted pick-up truck transporting adventurers to the highest dunes. When travelers tire of the sand in their suit, romantic Lake Michigan is on hand to conjure another stunning sunset each and every night.

GaySaugatuckDouglas (GSD)
PO Box 1132
Saugatuck, MI 49453
(616) 836-2770
info@gaysaugatuckdouglas.com