

By Carolyn DeMarco  
staff writer

Pardon me while I crow a bit. I've just returned from a weekend at the Stratford Festival in Ontario.

How were my seats? I don't want to sound boastful but the seats for "The Merchant of Venice" were so close you could almost smell Shylock's breath and whiff Portia's sweet perfume. That's fourth row center orchestra.

And for the double bill of "Titus Andronicus" and "Comedy of Errors" just a tad back, still orchestra seating of course. So close that the rape and mutilation scene forced the woman next to me to head for the exit.

The accommodations? Glad you asked. How about a room with a sitting room, skylight and loft at the Jester Arms Inn, you know the quaint little inn on Ontario Street with only 13 rooms. That's 13. Count 'em.

Now of course your next question is how far in advance did I make reservations. Six months? Nine? Last season?

Would you believe this Stratford trip was made without any reservations? Not play tickets, not hotel, not dinner. Zip.

Granted the trip was made two days before the traditional May 29 festival opening, but Stratford Festival office personnel, inn operators and Stratford Information booth staffers all agree, a spur-of-the-moment jaunt to Stratford is absolutely possible. Without reservations you can still get a room, play tickets and a meal.

#### HERE'S HOW:

To get to Stratford, Ontario, from Oakland County will take about three hours. Cross into Canada at Sarnia and take 402 east. Wayne County residents will want to go via Detroit/Windsor on 401 and link up to the 402 at London. Exit at Highway 125 north also known as Highway Avenue (exit 189B). Go north 20 miles to Highway 7 and east to Stratford.

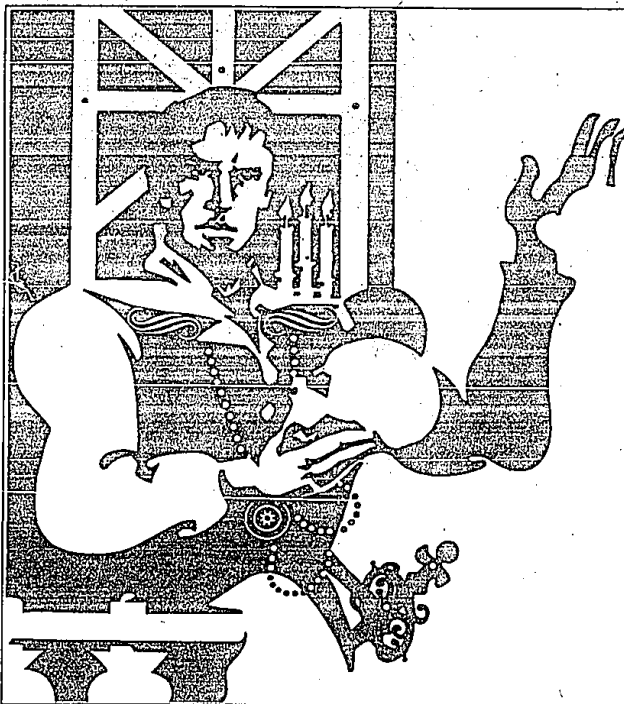
First stop should be the Tourist Information Booth along the Thames River, on the west end of York Street east of Huron Street. The booth is staffed from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. (The theaters are dark on Monday.)

Two full-time staffers paid by the city, a few students and other volunteers dispense information about accommodations availability for hotels, bed and breakfasts and campgrounds in the area.

On Sunday or Monday of each week area hotels call the booth to get an availability count. That checklist is posted on a bulletin board just above a set of stairs showing pictures of the establishments. While booth tenders will not make reservations for you, they'll allow you to use a telephone placed there for just that purpose. Local calls only, please.

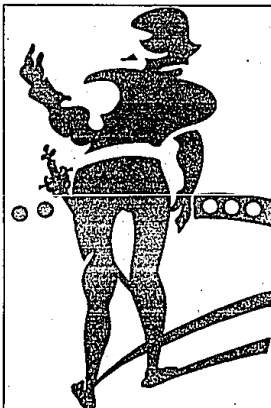
IF YOU strike out on hotels or if you'd just prefer a bed and breakfast arrangement, the booth has a list of 84 to choose from, all inspected and approved for listing.

"As long as they're not sticky we'll get them a room," said staffer Laurie Parker.



# STRATFORD

## How to visit without reservations



You can also get information about area recreation and outdoor activities including surrounding golf courses, attractions, festivals and arts and crafts shows. You'll also find out about area restaurants and their menus, churches, galleries and specialty stores.

Now about the tickets. That's one thing the information booth does not help with.

There are three theaters: the Festival, Avon and Third Stage in decreasing order of prestige and price. The main box office is located at the Festival Theatre on Queen's Park. Reserved tickets are held at the Stratford Festival Box Office until 1 1/2 hours before curtain. The Avon and Third open one hour before curtain and sell tickets for that day's performance only. You can call the main box office from the information booth to find current ticket availability.

IF YOU'RE given the "all sold out" spiel, pay attention here: unclaimed, unpaid for tickets are released for sale one hour prior to curtain. Chances are you'll be able to cash in on a "no show." If you don't score then, wait for the scalpers. Just before curtain they'll appear in front of the theater trying to resell unneeded duets.

Then again if living on the edge, i.e. spontaneous travelling, makes you nervous, you can always follow the tourist industry's most quoted advice, "Call ahead for reservations."

For ticket information and accommodations, call the Stratford Festival Box Office and Accommodations Bureau, Detroit information line, 964-4568.

Of course it won't be as exciting that way.

## A couple tips for the festival

Here's some miscellaneous tips on seeing Stratford:

- If you'd like a one-hour guided walking tour of early Stratford, stop by the Tourist Information Booth on York at 9:30 a.m. Monday through Saturday "on all nice days in July and August" or pick up the map guide for your own tour.

- Another self-guide tour map is provided by the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee, and naturally leads you to architecturally significant buildings.

- Be sure to ask at the booth about the parks surrounding Lake Victoria, "the largest park system per capita in Canada." Paddle boats and canoes can be rented by the hour at the information booth and Stratford Parks and Recreation maintains three tennis courts on a first-come basis.

- Take a quick walk through the Shakespearean Gardens (a brief stroll from the information booth) near the Perth County Courthouse along the Thames. It features flowers and herbs mentioned in Shakespeare, including rue, lavender, dropwort, roses and the like.

- Drive the 15 minutes to the town of Shakespeare and have a real afternoon tea, complete with scones, at Harry Ten Shilling. Within walking distance are several antique shops and a Christmas craft store.

# North by Northeast: The coast is still clear

By Doris Scharfenberg  
special writer

Q: Last year, you did a story that followed Highway 22 around the Leelanau Peninsula in west Michigan. Can you do the same thing with the coast of Lake Huron in east Michigan?

M.S.  
Livonia

When I think of east Michigan, I picture daybreak over Lake Huron. The rising sun transforms the Tawas lighthouse into a gleaming silo and fillers through curtains of marsh grass to reveal the nests of geese. Tawas Point State Park is one of a thousand places along Lake Huron's upper coast where morning can be seen and felt in all its glory.

The "quiet" corner of the state is not all nature walks, beaches and boats, however. As you drive north from Standish to Mackinaw City, you'll find shopping centers, new motels, and every fast food chain known to traveling appetites. You can find golf before breakfast and hot tubs after canoeing if you want them.

Turn off I-75 north of Bay City to slightly poky US 13. Stop at Deer Park near Pinconning to let Junior feed Bambi or ride the safari express. Buy Pinconning cheese. Follow US-23 to Omer, Michigan's smallest city. Rent canoes or tubes to enjoy the forest-lined Rifle River, shallow enough for kids if a canoe dumps, but rippling enough to be fun. In Au Gres, check out an amusement park with roller coaster, miniature golf and kiddie rides.

As US-23 edges closer to the big lake, swatches of blue horizon begin

to flash between clumps of trees. West of the highway lies the Huron National Forest and miles of county roads leading to pine-scented campgrounds, a world of small lakes, trails and tiny hamlets (44 lakes, 36 streams in Isosco county alone).

Tawas City/East Tawas (no one but a native could guess where the border is) curl along a bay formed by the small peninsula of Tawas Point. The warm water fishery of Saginaw Bay makes Perch and Walleye a steady catch and the protection of the Point gives small sailboats a great place to race.

THE NORTHBOUND road rides along a gentle bluff toward Oshtemo. Another set of civic twins astride the legendary AuSable River as it meets Lake Huron. If you have an itch to fish, Capt. Steve Pastaski, one of many charter-boat veterans, guarantees catches from his 37-foot rig. He's talking coho, trout, steelhead, etc. (For information, call 517-735-2301.)

Antiquing is the next biggest sport. Or relaxing (sometimes with a cocktail) on the decks of the AuSable River or Queen for a two-hour paddlewheel boat ride, almost too popular for drop-ins.

Reserve ahead for river visits to Lumberman's Monument and a lot of green serene river (For information, call 517-735-2301.)

On Friday, civilians with reservations can tour Wurtsmith Air Force Base (For information, call 1-800-235-GOAL, the Chamber of Commerce).

A state park sits on the south side of Harrisville, a "Harbor of Refuge" port. The town hosts the BarberShop-Sweet Adeline singing competitions

each year, fills a calendar with fishing derbies, and its bed-and-breakfast big has enlarged to three houses. Meanwhile, the third generation of Yokoms operates the Big Paw Resort, a AAA-four diamond classic.

Slightly north and invisible 'til you're there, the road into Big Paw twists toward nest cottages, each with a fireplace, along Lake Huron. Everyone eats together in a dining room mellow with rustic hominess. One price, family style, for resort guests or those who reserve far in advance (Information: 517-24-6328).

In old lumbering camp days, they used tall tales to fill the entertainment gap. Pop hero Paul Bunyan, a 15 foot-tall lumberjack who could fell trees with one chop, stands with his blue ox, Babe, next to the road near Ossineke.

IN A FOREST just beyond, creatures that would shrink anyone are life-size and authentic. Dinosaur Gardens has a brontosaurus to greet visitors, and more massive beasts down the path. Even if dinos don't grab you, enjoy the magnificent trees.

K mart, Pizza Hut, quaint shops, department stores, the time warp fades as we enter Alpena, a "Warm and Friendly Port . . ." unless your ship sank. The 50 or more sunken ships in nearby waters give Alpena special rank as an underwater preserve. Equipment is available to qualified divers, and the Alpena Hospital is equipped with a decompression chamber in case of accident.

For non-divers (most of us), the Thunder Bay Theater is the only year-round live professional theater in Northern Michigan. Modern or traditional productions are well

done. Another north country treat is the Jesse Besser Museum, modern, fully accredited museum of art, history and science. Planetarium, fossils and noted artists. On Johnson Street, only 300 yards from US-23.

Golf, tennis, festivals. Then drop

into Club 32 for a late snack and live band (Wednesday through Sunday), or Red's Saloon and Eatery for some sing-along piano diversion.

The Presque Isle Lighthouse and museum show the homey side of those isolated lives. Climb the tower,

put Junior in the pillory, take photos.

In Rogers City, "Nautical City," a new travel center next to McDonald's, can load you up with area info. Or ask folks at the Busy Restaurant, next to the Driftwood Motel, where every room's balcony looks at Lake Huron.

From R.C. to Cheboygan, the highway hugs the shore, opening to scenic turnouts and two state parks. Here are the most delightfully empty beaches in the state, where searchers might find Petoskey stones or a treasure for the rock garden.

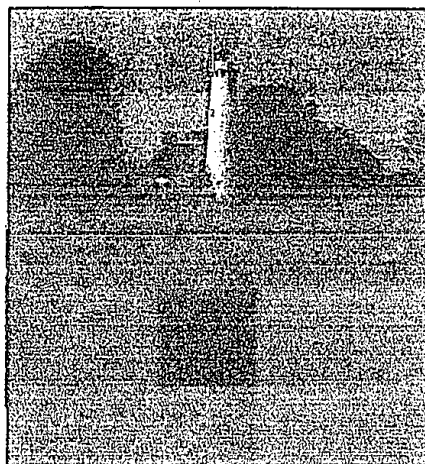
AT THE top of the mitten, Cheboygan County wins for having the most inland lake surface acreage. An inland water passage to Lake Michigan begins here. Going the other way, the town is where you catch the ferry to Bois Blanc Island, a semi-wilderness area.

Hidden in the area woods, you'll find a lot of lodging, dining, and a little night life. Ask the way to Hackmeck Park Inn on Beebe Road, about six miles from the junction of M-27 and 33.

In this rambling building diners look past bright blue tablecloths and an open-hearth grill to lovely woods and river. Great tender whitefish or steak (Information: 616-633-2919).

Back in town, the Boathouse on Pipe Street went from ship shed to elegant waterfront restaurant. Dockage and overnight rooms (Information: 616-627-4310).

Sawing logs can keep you wide-awake if it's the handmade machinery at Old Mill Creek State Historic Park and Interpretive Center. A backwoods industrial complex four miles south of Mackinaw City on US-23.



The sights in the northeastern part of the state are breathtaking.

DORIS SCHARFENBERG