

'The play's the thing,' but not every thing

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For the best selection of seats on busy weekends, we now order in February when the schedule is announced. One year our friends had a last minute change in plans, but the Festival was most accommodating and tickets were conveniently exchanged for another date. With a Detroit phone number (984-4668), orders and changes are quite convenient.

A variety of plays are scheduled each year. This year, in addition to the usual Shakespeare plays ("Hamlet," "Much Ado About Nothing," etc.) we're sure you'll enjoy Thornton Wilder's "Our Town," and Rogers and Hammerstein's "Carousel." We know Stratford will put on Broadway-caliber performances. In fact, some of our warmest theater memories are of Stratford's performances of "Cabaret" and "Guys and Dolls."

reader's report

Lodging is perhaps the next most important consideration in planning your visit. Stratford is famous for its accommodations, all excellent for what they represent. In addition to the bed-and-breakfasts (which the Festival will book for visitors) several good hotels and motels come to mind.

We like the Queen's Inn. It has been completely remodeled in the last three years and is now owned and run by The Elora Mill Inn. It is well located and the rooms are comfortable. It is particularly convenient for its handicap access.

We also have enjoyed the Stone Maiden Inn on Church Street. It's really a charming bed-and-breakfast, and most of the rooms have private baths. (Some have whirlpools and canopied beds.)

You may also want to consider the loft studio rooms at the Jester's Arms over Bentley's Restaurant. Bentley's is a neat place with a lively crowd 'till late at night, so it may be a tad noisy.

The Festival Inn, just outside town, is really very nice and has an indoor pool. You'll have to drive to the theaters though, and that may be a drawback. Similarly, the Westover Park in St. Mary's (15 minutes from the Stratford theaters), is most charming since its refurbishment four years ago. And the dining room is very good.

In addition to the plays, there's much to do in and around Stratford.

We still find the shopping very attractive.

There seem to be more interesting shops each year. Our favorites continue to be VS Galleries and Bradshaw's. VS has a remarkable collection of Canadiana, from native carvings to wood and leather hand-made crafts to interesting art prints. Bradshaw's maintains an excellent collection of fine china and crystal and is always helpful in packaging it and preparing the paperwork to get the tax refunds that make the purchases so attractive. This year, Bradshaw's has added a gourmet kitchen shop and a Crabtree and Evelyn collection.

There are many other good shops for Scotch woolsens and china novelties, and several excellent and unusual bookstores. The Festival shop across from the theater has an excellent selection of Shakespearean stuff

and a range of souvenirs for friends and family.

We also enjoy dining in Stratford. Our favorite for fine dining is Rundle's. But others we've met are equally fond of the Church and the Old Prune. None are inexpensive, but the quality is excellent; and compared to Detroit prices, we think they are excellent. We also enjoy The Keystone Alley and Woolly's, almost as good food, but with less service, they are more modestly priced. Bentley's and the Olde English Parlor are also worth noting. The crowd at Bentley's suggests that it's the favorite of locals.

If you're willing to take a 15-25 minute drive, we're sure you'll enjoy the Waterloo in Hamburg (Waterloo); and the Westover Park in St. Mary's. Oh yes. To assure seating, we suggest reservations. (Bentley's doesn't generally accept reservations.)

Last but not least, we hope you'll find time to take in some of the area's "tourist highlights." In Stratford, we recommend you book a Sunday morning tour behind the Festival theater stage. You'll be amazed at all that goes into great theater. The Stratford gallery is also worth a stop to see famous scenes, performers and costumes from past productions.

A picnic along the lake is delightful on a sunny day. Several local shops prepare excellent baskets to suit your budget. Also, depending on when you Stratford, there may be related events scheduled around the plays.

Outside of town, three side trips come to mind. There are many charming towns within a 30-mile radius.

Gene and Lynne Loren are West Bloomfield residents.

Vacation at home with foreign guests

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"We need all kinds of families," Elizabeth said. "More boys than girls come to the U.S., so we are always looking for homes for boys. That can be difficult because the American students who express interest are often girls."

"We also occasionally place a foreign student with a family that has no children, especially a student who grew up as an only child in an adult environment. Those families look to the children of their friends and relatives for companions."

Elizabeth also stressed that foreign students should be treated as members of the family. "Sometimes we have families that treat them as guests, and after a few weeks the family feels stressed."

"It really doesn't cost money or hard work to host a foreign student for the summer. Add another plate to the table, a few more dirty clothes to the laundry, and the rest takes care of itself."

Each foreign student brings his or her own health and liability insurance and spending money.

If you would like to host one of the 180 French, German and Spanish students, mostly boys, who want to spend four weeks experiencing American life this summer, call Evelyn or Julian Price at (313) 626-6841 or the national office toll-free at (800) 622-3533.

Better hurry up. French students arrive July 10, followed by a second group July 28; Spanish students July 5 and again July 30; German students will be here July 30. They all speak English.

Learn how to tow a trailer properly

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Michigan law requires that safety chains be attached to the hitch in case of malfunction.

Before driving on the highway, however, even experienced drivers should maneuver the trailer at low speeds, preferably in an empty parking lot, remembering that it can take at least twice as long to stop, pass and pull into traffic.

Packing the inside of the car takes equal skill and, again, the

owner's manual should be checked to determine the total weight capacity of your vehicle.

If you have a tall load in the car or are pulling a trailer, Cullen says it is imperative to have outside mirrors on each side of the car to "see the blind spots."

Routine maintenance calls for such things as removing snow tires and checking for tire wear and proper inflation; checking coolant and oil levels; replacing cracked or

frayed hoses and belts; replacing dirty air filters and streaky windshield wipers; adding windshield washer fluid, if necessary, and replacing broken headlights.

Cullen also recommends taking a first aid kit and emergency tools. "For example, in summer remove the snow shovel from your trunk and replace it with pliers, a screwdriver, signal flares and a flashlight," he said.

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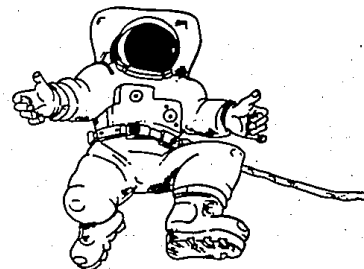
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