

# NORTHERN MICHIGAN'S MAGAZINE Traverse

## ESCAPE TO THE LAKES

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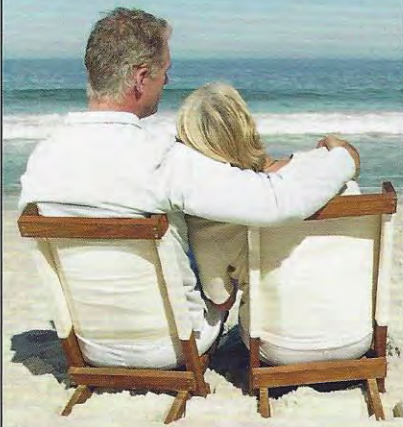
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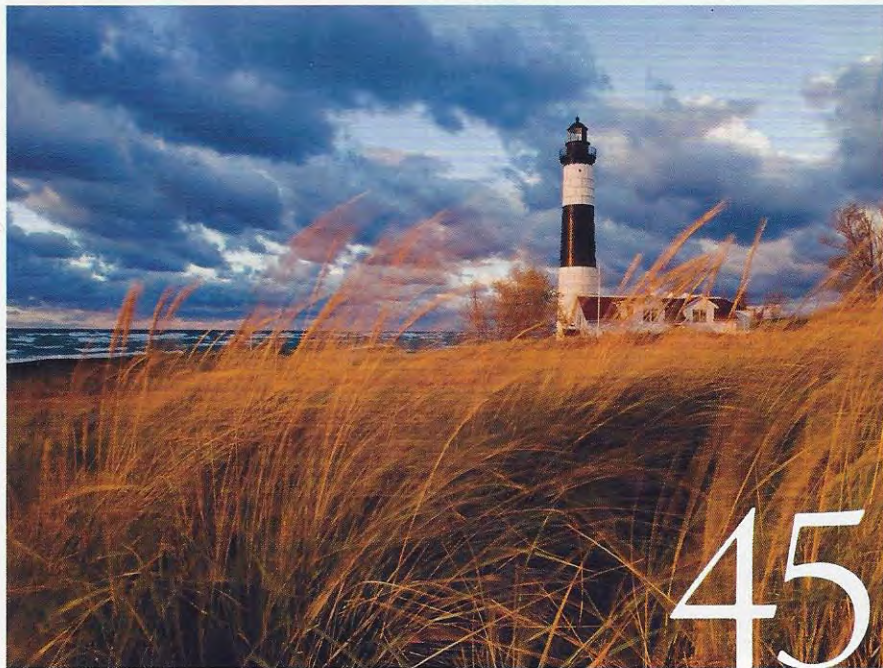
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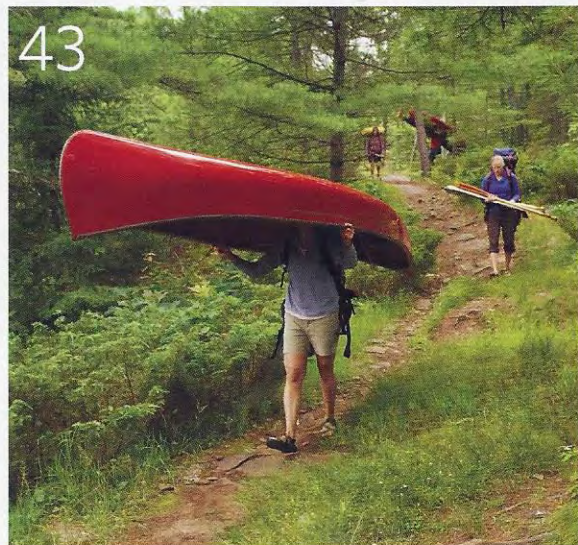


45



127

## departments



43

- 9 Editor's Note**  
Sweet summer evenings.
- 13 Letters**
- 15 Up North**  
Q&A with Breathe Owl Breathe, T.C.'s community gardens, movies alfresco, more.
- 21 August Events**  
So many ways to enjoy high summertime Up North.
- 43 Travel**  
Guided expeditions. Plus: Explore gorgeous Ludington State Park.

- 47 Up in Michigan**  
The Pull.
- 105 Dining**  
Great eats on Mackinac Island. Plus: *The Cottage Cookbook*, a recipe for smoked whitefish pâté, Cuppa Joe's cool new warehouse lounge, our restaurant guide and more.

- 139 Outdoors**  
Great Lakes waves and the science behind swimmer's itch.
- 144 Into the North**  
August Calm.



COVER PHOTO:  
LITTLE PLATTE  
LAKE AT TWIN  
BIRCH RESORT IN  
HONOR, BY TODD  
ZAWISTOWSKI.

# ESCAPE TO THE LAKES

The annual pilgrimage to the shoreside Up North cabin is a rite of passage for many a Michigander. Make this summer's the best one yet.

TEXT BY EMILY BINGHAM    RECIPES BY EMILY BETZ TYRA  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY TODD ZAWISTOWSKI

*Twin Birch Resort  
on Little Platte Lake  
Dock and Boats*



# M

y family's annual Up North summer vacation began the same way each year: in the driveway of our suburban Detroit home where my little brother and I sat buckled into the backseat of our '82 chocolate-and-tan Ford Econoline, squished between duffel bags, pillows, dime-store fishing poles and Hannah, our 110-pound slobbery white beast of a dog. The drive from Detroit to Torch Lake, where we spent two bliss-filled weeks every summer, was exactly four hours long—a sticky eternity to a pair of squirmy, sun-burnt kids in a van with no A/C. We elbowed each other the whole way, whining at regular intervals to ask how much longer until we'd be at "the Torch house."

Straddling a thin parcel of shoreline on Torch Lake's east shore, Torch House was a small cottage where, it seemed, nothing ever changed. The place smelled like an old deck of cards—finger-smudged and musty—with mismatched dishware in the cupboards, an orange shag rug in the living room, macrame curtains on all the windows, a stove on which only two of the four burners heated properly. None of the clocks worked, and nobody ever bothered to fix them.

Because we never knew what time it was—much less what day—our vacations at the cottage were delicious, languorous time-warps. Mornings we lingered over cinnamon toast and picture books at the tall kitchen counter. Afternoons drifted along, hot and hazy, to the drone of cicadas in the cedar trees out back. On sunny days my brother and I swam endlessly, searching for beach glass and snail shells along the water's edge. When storms raged in from the west, we wrestled indoors and played board games with mismatched pieces. We always knew where to find our parents: Mom on the dock in her sunhat, slowly turning the pages of *The Northwoods Reader*; Dad on the stony shoreline, tinkering with our duct-taped-together, single-man sailboat, *Fishhook*.

For lunch, we fared for ourselves—ham-and-cheese roll-ups, cold sweet cherries, Kool-Aid—but supper brought the four of us together, often still dripping from the lake. The meals were fresh and simple: boiled corn and thick-sliced heirloom tomatoes; broiled whitefish and baked potatoes with butter and chives; watermelon wedges, raspberries with milk and sugar, cherry pie from Elzinga's roadside stand. We often ate at the picnic table just off Torch House's back steps, using beach rocks to keep our paper napkins from blowing away.

And then, of course, came the sunset. The daily Torch. I don't know how or when the ritual started, but to this day it lives on: Mom, Dad, Brother and myself gathering at the end of the dock to give a standing ovation to the sun as it sank against the opposite shore. Each night, the show was different, depending on the clouds, wind and waves: sometimes the whole sky shouted with fiery orange and crimson, sometimes it was more mellow, with berry tones of mauve, pink and violet. I remember one quiet stunner when the lake was glass and a cold front had turned the horizon into a sheet of steel wool—the sun was still visible behind those clouds, a perfect white circle in all that gray. Like someone had punched a hole in the wall, allowing light from the next room to shine in. Each evening, we'd wait until the last sliver of sun had disappeared, then we'd all clap and cheer before heading to the beach for a bonfire, where we'd roast marshmallows and tell ghost stories that were really only a little scary.

Why was it that the drive back to Detroit was always so much quicker than the drive Up North? Leaving the lake meant returning to work, a new school year, clocks that actually told time. Things that always arrived faster than we wanted them to. Which is why on our final morning each of us would say goodbye to Torch, thanking it for another lovely vacation. At that age, my brother and I lacked the vocabulary to describe the importance of family-time with no agenda, but we innately knew that the cottage was good for our collective soul. The air smelled better. The water tasted better. And nowhere else but here could we invent and indulge in the strange but beautiful traditions our family has come to associate with our Up North. Sitting at the dinner table in a wet bathing suit. Talking to the lake. Applauding the end of another summer day.





## Morning View on Little Platte Lake



## COTTAGE RENTAL LIST

There's no substitute for the North's lakeside mom-and-pop rental cabins: they're at once private and intimate, with great family-friendly vibes. The *Traverse* staff had a sublime early morning photo shoot for this story at

**Twin Birch Resort's** adorable green cabin (Honor, 231-325-2401, [twinbirchresort.com](http://twinbirchresort.com), \$585 weekly); at right are other picks for rentals Up North. Call for regular and off-season rates.

### **Fisher's Lakeside Cottages**

Maple City, 231-228-6201,  
[fisherscottages.com](http://fisherscottages.com)  
Peak: Up to \$1,150 weekly

### **Paradise Hollow Resort**

Lake Ann, 231-275-3283,  
[paradisehollow.com](http://paradisehollow.com)  
Peak: \$650 to \$950 weekly

### **Island View Cottages**

Traverse City, 231-947-2863,  
[islandv.com](http://islandv.com)  
Peak: \$840 to \$2,250 weekly

### **Pilgrim Village Resort**

Cadillac, 231-775-5412,  
[pilgrimvillagefishing.com](http://pilgrimvillagefishing.com)  
Peak: \$495 to \$700 weekly

### **Parkview Cottages**

Ludington, 231-843-4445,  
[parkviewcottages.com](http://parkviewcottages.com)  
Peak: \$700 to \$1,250 weekly

### **Cedars Resort**

Central Lake, 231-544-8069,  
[cedars-resort.com](http://cedars-resort.com)  
Peak: \$725 to \$750 weekly

### **Legs Inn Cottages**

Cross Village, 231-526-2281,  
[legsinn.com](http://legsinn.com)  
Peak: \$695 weekly, up to  
\$119 nightly

FOR MORE RENTALS GO TO  
**[MYNORTH.COM/COTTAGES](http://MYNORTH.COM/COTTAGES)**.

### **SUMMER LOVE**

**ABOVE:** Cottage vacays call for laid-back meals enjoyed lakeside. No picnic table? Take your dinner right down to the dock, and chow down while your feet dangle in the water.



## Twin Birch Resort Lakefront Green Cottage Kitchen



### CABIN FEVER

Fresh flowers and fruit from the local farmers market make a sunny kitchen even sunnier. **OPPOSITE:** The green cabin at Twin Birch Resort. At the cottage you're free to wake with the sunshine—not an alarm clock.

## Twin Birch Resort Lakefront Green Cottage

### YOUR LAKE ESCAPE CHECKLIST

- Stay up late and gaze skyward on August 12, when the Perseids meteor shower will deliver some 60 meteors an hour.
- Bring a length of clothesline for drip-drying bathing suits and hosting impromptu games of beach-ball volleyball.
- Eat pie for breakfast.
- Keep a wide, shallow pan of water near the front door for quick, de-sanding foot dips prior to entering the cottage. Empty the pan each night and refill in the morning.
- Simmer bratwursts for 20 minutes in a mixture of light beer and sliced onions before tossing them on the grill.
- Pack a jelly jar with a screw-on cap for each child to fill with sand, stones and other lakeshore keepsakes.
- Weight your tablecloth with beach stones.
- Dip strawberries in powdered sugar for dessert.
- Bring a journal to keep a "lake log" of memories, kid doodles, pressed wildflowers, etc.
- Have a watermelon-seed or cherry-pit spitting contest.
- Invite the cottage neighbors over for beers and Euchre.
- Build a bonfire.
- Go fishing at sunrise.
- Set out a bowl of fresh washed local fruit for snacking.
- Skip stones at sunset.
- Skinny dip (after dark).
- Play the watermelon crawl: grease a watermelon with Crisco then try to wrestle it past each other in the lake.
- Look for constellations on clear nights.
- Decorate your table with daisies in a Ball jar.
- Compete for the biggest cannonball splash.
- Nap on your beach towel.
- Craft a sand castle. Don't forget the moat.



Nectarine "Caprese" Skewers





**Twin Birch Resort Boat  
Included with each stay**



## Recipes

Baileys Toasted Marshmallows



## LIGHT, BRIGHT AND BREEZY

Simple, summer-luscious fare is the way to go for meals at the lake. Take a break from the bratwurst and Better Mades with these easy recipes.

### White Wine Citrus Sangria

(PICTURED ON OPENING SPREAD)

- 1 orange
- 1 lime
- 1 lemon
- 5 tablespoons sugar
- 2 bottles Pinot Grigio
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup brandy
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup Cointreau

Thinly slice the citrus and set aside. In a large pitcher, combine the sugar, Pinot Grigio, brandy and Cointreau. Stir thoroughly to mix and dissolve sugar. Add citrus slices to pitcher and stir gently to combine. Refrigerate at least 2 hours and up to 8 to let flavors mingle. Serves 8.

### Grilled Garlic-Lemon Shrimp

The perfect cottage supper: The melamine bowls from the 70's kicking around every cabin cupboard work great for this marinade. The shrimp take only a few minutes on the grill, so you can get back to taking it seriously easy.

- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup olive oil
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup fresh lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup chopped fresh parsley
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- Coarse salt and ground pepper to taste
- Crushed red pepper flakes to taste
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  pounds raw medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
- Skewers, soaked in water for 20 minutes

In a large, nonreactive bowl, stir together the olive oil, lemon juice, parsley, garlic, salt, black pepper and crushed red pepper. Add shrimp, and toss to coat. Marinate in the refrigerator for 30 minutes. Preheat grill for high heat. Thread shrimp onto skewers. Discard marinade. Lightly oil grill grate. Grill shrimp on skewers for 2 to 3 minutes per side, or just until they turn pink and opaque. Serves 4 to 6.


### Nectarine "Caprese" Skewers

Meant to be: Juicy nectarine slices, baby orbs of mozzarella and verdant basil leaves come together on a little skewer of sunshine.

- 6 ripe nectarines
- 1 pound bocconcini (small fresh mozzarella balls) OR regular fresh mozzarella, cut into quarters
- 1 bunch fresh basil

Slice nectarines. Slide one slice nectarine, one bocconcini and one basil leaf each onto small wooden skewers. Serve immediately. Serves 6.

### Baileys Toasted Marshmallows

A grown-up twist on the campfire classic, for when the kids have gone to bed. Pour some Baileys Irish Cream into a bowl. Dunk marshmallows in Baileys before roasting on a stick or metal skewer over the fire. 

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