



GOING GREEN

Wide Open Spaces

An Ecotourist's Guide to the Midwest

BY JOHN IVANKO

Maybe there's something in Wisconsin's water. How else to explain the state serving as home to so many conservation leaders, including Aldo Leopold and John Muir? Gazing out at the spectacular Apostle Islands—a group of 21 islands in Lake Superior at the northernmost coastline of Wisconsin—I began to understand how they captured so many imaginations.

I ventured with my wife and son along the easily accessible trails in the Apostle Island National Lakeshore, followed by some beach combing at Little Sand Bay. While there, we were treated to a magnificent view of two bald eagles perched atop a pine tree and water-sculpted red sandstone sea caves.

Bantam Beauties

What the 22 Apostle Islands lack in size they make up for in stark beauty, steeped in the history and lore of Native Americans and European settlers. The islands claim more lighthouses than any other coastline in the nation and are critical nesting or resting habitat for more than 200 bird species.

We headed to Bayfield, the bustling gateway to the Apostles and the departure point for the island ferries. Reminiscent of coastal New England, but without the steep price tag, Bayfield features an abundance of restaurants, art galleries and fruit orchards. We easily and sustainably ate our way through a tour of the community, with stops at Good Earth and Blue Vista farms and dining at the Wild Rice Restaurant, Old Rittenhouse Inn and Burt & Francie's. Ecotour operators like Dreamcatcher Sailing and Living Adventure let us ply the waters in their 33-foot sailboat and kayaks.

And the Pinehurst Inn at Pikes Creek offered us the ultimate in eco-



luxury in Bayfield. Pinehurst's sumptuous breakfasts made with mostly local ingredients were served by enthusiastic hosts, Nancy and Steve Sandstrom, who are determined to walk their talk in every way. You can stay in their historic main house or a new sustainably designed Garden House, featuring solar-heated showers. Even your carbon emissions from travel are offset by the mindful hosts. For an alternative experience, we also spent a night at the Devine Inn in Washburn, a cozy cottage retreat completely powered by a 2.7-kilowatt solar electric system.

Travel Green Wisconsin

Bayfield and the nearby Washburn community are unique in another way, too. More than 27 apple orchards, accommodations, restaurants, galleries and the Apostle Island National Lakeshore itself are Travel Green Wisconsin certified. As the nation's first green travel certification program, Travel Green Wisconsin recognizes tourism businesses that have made a commitment to reduce their environmental and social impacts.

The Bayfield area jumpstarted the initiative, but as of early 2008 more than 100 destinations were certified throughout the state. Included among them is the Aldo Leopold Visitor Center, a plat-

GREEN LIVING



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Wisconsin's Pinehurst Inn (left) and Minnesota's Angry Trout Café offer green escapes on a Midwest eco-tour.

inum LEED-certified building, and the Madison Visitor and Convention Center, designed by the father of organic architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright.

Green Routes through Minnesota

Neighboring Minnesota showcases green travel, too. The Angry Trout Café on Minnesota's north shore, a family run business, serves fresh foods made from organic and locally grown ingredients. "We incorporate a sustainability perspective into all aspects of our restaurant operation, from the furnishings in the dining room to our cleaning supplies," says co-owner George Wilkes. The café is powered with wind energy offered by the local utility.

Today, more than 100 destinations like Angry Trout Café are part of an innovative approach to travel called Green Routes, launched by Minnesota-based nonprofit, Renewing the Countryside. Pairing the power of the Internet and Google maps with grassroots sustainable tourism development, Green Routes features an easy-to-use Internet interface that guides travelers to one-of-a-kind places to eat, play, shop, sleep and learn.

CONTACT: Bayfield County Tourism and Recreation, www.travelbayfieldcounty.com; Green Routes, www.greenroutes.org; Pinehurst Inn, www.pinehurstinn.com; Travel Green Wisconsin, www.travelgreenwisconsin.com.

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