

July 2001

Big Apple Parent

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Family Travel Funbursts

Finger Lakes Fun

By Brette McWhorter Sember

The Iroquois believed that the Finger Lakes were created when the Great Spirit reached down and placed his hand on the land of central New York state, leaving imprints in the shape of his fingers. Today these glacier formed finger-shaped lakes are home to picturesque towns, rolling countryside, excellent fishing and serene lake life. A tour of the countryside offers the opportunity to swim and fish at town beaches, to stop at wineries, shops and other local industries, as well as time to simply and quietly enjoy the countryside with your family. Information about any of the Finger Lakes areas, accommodations, dining, activities and maps can be obtained from the Finger Lakes Association (www.FingerLakes.org, 800-KIT-4-FUN) which prints a detailed guidebook each year.

Skaneateles (www.skaneateles.com), situated on the lake of the same name, may be the best known town in the area. There is an abundance of shopping to do here, including T.C. Timber Toy Outlet (4407 Jordan Street, open only Saturdays from 10 to 1; www.tctimber.com). East and West Genesee Streets (Route 20 through town) and Jordan Street are home to fabulous little shops the whole family will be enchanted by. One of the best places to eat is Doug's Fish Fry where, it is advertised, 'the locals eat'.

There are two wonderful waterfront parks in the village. Don't miss *Clift Park's* gazebo and long public pier. Mid-Lakes Navigation Company (1-800-545-4318) offers boat cruises which leave from the park, most notably the U.S. Mailboat cruise (one of the only water delivery routes left in the U.S.). The historic Sherwood Inn across from the park (www.thesherwoodinn.com) is the most famous hotel, although many small inns abound in the area.

The City of Auburn, at the tip of Owasco Lake, contains the *Harriet Tubman Home* (180 South Street, www.nyhistory.com/harrietubman) and the *Seward House* (home to William H. Seward, former governor, senator and secretary of state to two presidents; 33 South Street; 315-252-1283).

Don't miss *Seneca Falls* (www.senecafallsonline.com), the birthplace of women's rights, nestled next to stunning Cayuga Lake. The Women's Rights National Historic Park — including the Elizabeth Cady Stanton home, the site of the first women's rights convention and the Declaration of Sentiments, displayed on a stunning 100-foot waterfall — is a national treasure. The town is also home to the National Women's Hall of Fame (www.greatwomen.org).

Cayuga and Seneca Lakes are connected by a canal, part of the Erie Canal system, that makes for a booming houseboat business (Erie Canal Cruise Lines, www.canal-cruises.com). On the western shore of Cayuga Lake lies Misty Meadows Farm

2828 Vineyard Road, Romulus, 607-869-9243), a family farm open to visitors. There are animals to pet, hay rides to take, and a sunflower maze to wander in.

No trip to the Finger Lakes is complete without a visit to *The Windmill* (www.thewindmill.com, open only Saturdays), a farm and craft market located on Route 14A between Penn Yan and Dundee, off the shores of sprawling Keuka Lake. A petting zoo, food stands, baked goods, arts and crafts (many made by local Mennonites and Amish), local produce and outdoor performers make this a stop the whole family will enjoy. The surrounding countryside provides an excellent opportunity to see Mennonite and Amish families going about their daily business and traveling by horse and buggy. Enjoy a homestyle meal at Miller's Essenhaus (315-531-8260), just north of the Windmill on 14A, where you will notice the presence of buggies hitched up outside.

On the southern tip of Seneca Lake waits Watkins Glen (www.watkinsglen.com). The town is famous for the stunning gorge located in *Watkins Glen State Park* (607-535-4511), a wonder made up of waterfalls, hiking trails and the beautiful glacier-formed canyon. At night be sure to catch Timespell, a laser show in the gorge. Lake cruises are available from the town dock (Captain Bill's, 607-535-4541); and Wisson's Honey Stand, where you can watch the bees working, is just north of town on Route 14. The Farm Sanctuary, run by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals; www.farmsanctuary.org) may be worth a visit to see the well-cared-for animals, unless your family will be upset by the graphic information about what exactly the animals were rescued from.

Canandaigua (www.canandaigua.com), the small town on the lake of the same name and the most western Finger Lakes town, has the feel of a resort town. On Thursdays, head to Hanna Junction (Route 21 North) for a smaller scale version of the Windmill, held indoors. Not to be missed is *Sonnenberg Gardens* (www.sonnenberg.org, 716-394-4922), a 50-acre Victorian estate complete with a mansion and incredibly manicured grounds where children can frolic and adults can bask in the beauty.

The relaxed pace and natural beauty of the Finger Lakes will ensure that your family's visit to the region is one you all will enjoy.

Ithaca Is It!

Ithaca, located at the southern tip of Cayuga Lake and home to Cornell University and Ithaca College, is a diverse college town with a relaxed country feel.

There is an assortment of accommodations, from a large number of gracious bed

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and-breakfasts to comfortable hotels and motels. The Bed and Breakfast Reservation Service of Ithaca (607-272-7344) and the Bed and Breakfast Association of Greater Ithaca (800-806-4406, www.bbithaca.com) are resources.



Swimmers at Buttermilk Falls State Park

A favorite activity in Ithaca is strolling *The Commons*, a pedestrian street lined with a variety of shops. Frequent free outdoor concerts, street musicians and performers provide entertainment for those gathered at outdoor tables. The Commons and the surrounding streets offer a wide array of ethnic restaurants.

One street over from the Commons, in an old brick building, is the *Dewitt Mall*
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(215 North Cayuga Street), with more shops and restaurants. Next door is the famous *Moosewood Restaurant* (215 N. Cayuga Street, 607-273-9610), known worldwide for its original vegetarian food and cookbooks.

Collegietown (College Avenue, Eddy Street and Stewart Avenue), located next to Ithaca College, is a fun shopping area filled with hills, twists and turns. The Ithaca Bakery (400 N. Meadow Street) is popular for breakfast as well as for take-out picnic lunches. Enjoy a picnic at one of the many beautiful parks in the Ithaca area, such as *Myers Point Park*, home to a tiny lighthouse (Route 34B to Myers Road to Marina Road in Lansing); *Buttermilk Falls State Park*, where you can swim at the bottom of a magnificent waterfall (Route 13 South); *Tauquahannock Falls State Park*, home to a spectacular 215-foot waterfall (Route 89); and *Robert H. Treman State Park*, dotted with small waterfalls and lake swimming areas (Route 327).

The *Ithaca Farmers Market* runs June through October (Sundays, 10-2, at Steamboat Landing at the end of Third Street; and Tuesdays, 9-1, at Buffalo and Cayuga Streets). The offerings are eclectic and include arts and crafts, and produce as well as prepared foods. Boat rides on the lake are available on Sunday.

The *Sciencenter* (601 First Street, www.sciencenter.org) is a children's museum that will intrigue all family members. Each exhibit is hands-on and designed to intrigue children into exploring science. Exhibits include the inside of a huge camera, computers that track real lightning strikes, a beehive behind glass, an amazing two-story ball machine, a moving water exhibit, a live boa constrictor, and an outdoor area with a working water pump, communication system, lever and pulley system, as well as a bridge building area. The Sciencenter also maintains the 'Carl Sagan Planet' walk, a scale model of the solar system in The Commons.

The *Sapsucker Woods Sanctuary* (159 Sapsucker Woods Road, 607-254-BIRD, www.birds.cornell.edu), offers 4.2 miles of bird watching trails, an observatory overlooking a large pond, a bird feeding garden, and a museum of bird art.

Contact the Tompkins County Convention and Visitor's Bureau (1-800-284-8422, www.visitithaca.com) for more information about family fun in Ithaca. ♦