

TRAVEL

DISPATCHES



DOUG LEMKE, GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Jordan Pond from the South Bubble in Maine's Acadia National Park.

Kid-friendly national parks

The winners of the 10Best Readers' Choice Awards for Best National Park For Kids are in. Nominees in the contest, sponsored by USA TODAY and 10Best.com, were chosen by a panel of experts and voted on by the public.

1. **Acadia National Park**, Maine
2. **Rocky Mountain National Park**, Colorado
3. **Great Smoky Mountains National Park**, North Carolina and Tennessee
4. **Carlsbad Caverns National Park**, New Mexico
5. **Grand Teton National Park**, Wyoming
6. **Zion National Park**, Utah
7. **Yellowstone National Park**, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming
8. **Biscayne National Park**, Florida
9. **Grand Canyon National Park**, Arizona
10. **Mesa Verde National Park**, Colorado

CHIME IN

A new Readers' Choice contest category launched this week. Vote for Best Hotel Spa at 10best.com/awards/travel/.



OMNI HOTELS & RESORTS

Spas such as the one at Omni Scottsdale weigh into guests' satisfaction.

Hotel guests (sort of) happier

Hotel guest satisfaction has gone up for the fourth straight year but may be reaching a plateau, according to the new J.D. Power 2016 North America Hotel Guest Satisfaction Index Study.

Perks such as free Wi-Fi and breakfast and premium bed linens that used to be special are becoming the norm, says Rick Garlick, global travel and hospitality practice lead at J.D. Power.

"As those perks become standard, customers are quick to ask, 'What have you done for me lately?'" he says.

The study, now in its 20th year, measures overall guest satisfaction across eight hotel segments, rated in seven key measures: reservations, check-in/check-out, guest room, food and beverage, hotel services, hotel facilities; and cost and fees. Satisfaction is calculated on a 1,000-point scale.

Overall satisfaction increased by 2 points over last year for an average of 806, a much smaller increase than in recent years.

The brands that ranked the highest in guest satisfaction in their respective segments are:

- LUXURY:** The Ritz-Carlton
UPPER UPSCALE: Omni Hotels and Resorts
UPSCALE: Hilton Garden Inn
UPPER MIDSACLE: Drury Hotels
MIDSACLE: Wingate by Wyndham
ECONOMY/BUDGET: Microtel Inn and Suites by Wyndham
UPPER EXTENDED STAY: Hyatt House
EXTENDED STAY: Home2 Suites by Hilton

The survey is based on responses gathered between June 2015 and May 2016 from more than 63,000 guests in Canada and the USA for stays between May 2015 and May 2016.

Nancy Trejos

Foodie scene is the cherry on top for Traverse City

Ashley Day
USA TODAY

A TRAVERSE CITY, MICH. rhythm of wine splashing, glasses clinking, staff murmuring tasting notes and groups laughing in the distance echoes beneath the high ceilings at Bonobo Winery's wide-open tasting room. Like a host in his own home, co-owner Todd Oosterhouse makes the rounds, asking guests at the bar if they need anything.

Moments later he's giving me the grand tour when we peek in on groups in several breakout areas designed for conversations one wouldn't have at a crowded bar.

"People can hang out and escape the tasting room cattle-call feel," says Oosterhouse, who opened the winery in December 2014 with his brother, Carter. "We just wanted that comfortable feel, whether you walk in in shorts or a tuxedo."

Though it's the nicest tasting room (or combination of rooms) I've ever seen — you may know Carter from cable design shows *Trading Spaces* or *Million Dollar Rooms* — I am at ease in what feels like the set of a photo shoot.

The Oosterhouses are two of many Traverse City natives who returned home in the past decade to find culinary offerings (and interest) and an opportunity to contribute. The Michigan vacation destination is still the Cherry Capital of the state, with an annual festival drawing half a million visitors and downtown's Front Street filled with vendors offering products made with the fruit. But the food and beverage scene has grown far more sophisticated.

"Traverse City has transformed itself so much," Oosterhouse says. "The flavors and the profiles of everyone here have elevated, so it's changed what you can expect."

Many credit celebrity chef Mario Batali with boosting interest in dining here. Batali began visiting the area just one week every summer and now stays from June to Labor Day.

"The chefs involved in the scene celebrate what's here; they're not trying to be anything they're not," Batali says. "Now people are coming for gastronomic tourism."

You can often get recommendations from Batali via Twitter, and it's no secret he's one of the many fans of The Cooks' House, the city's claim to culinary fame.

Quaint despite its stardom, The Cooks' House is in an unassuming white house. Chefs Eric Patterson and Jennifer Blakeslee create an ever-changing seasonal menu sourcing from local farms.

A partially open kitchen offers four chefs' table seats in front of the action. And the intimate dining room set among bookshelves, delicate art and a seamlessly integrated bar feels as if you're being entertained in their home. Five- and seven-course tasting menus offer samplings of the beautifully presented dishes, but ordering a la carte won't take away from the unforgettable experience.

Perhaps the only other eatery quite as committed to local sourcing is Trattoria Stella in The Village at Grand Traverse Commons. Equally popular with locals, the Italian restaurant has changed its menu daily for 12 years and lists the farms and purveyors that provide ingredients.

Track down your favorite finds from dinner at the Sara Hardy Farmers Market on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The waterfront

Wine, beer, food and fruit thrive in this 'magical little bubble' in Michigan



PHOTOS BY ASHLEY DAY, USA TODAY



Grab a salad with arugula, roasted beets, raita sauce and quail egg at The Cooks' House.

gathering draws locals and visitors for fresh produce and flowers, Boss Mouse's famous Smoked Butter cheese and 9 Bean Rows' wait-worthy croissants and pastries. Choose bread from Bay Bread Co., grab raw local honey from Champion Hill Farm and pack your own picnic to enjoy across the street in Clinch Park or out on Old Mission Peninsula.

The scenic half-hour drive to

the Old Mission Lighthouse winds along a trail of 10 wineries. Find flights of three to six samples, plenty of picnic opportunities and local goods at each.

The beer scene is just as compelling for drives outside downtown. Grand Traverse is home to 19 microbreweries and counting, and every local has a favorite or two. For a brewery unlike most, venture to Brewery Terra Firma, which is growing its own ingredients on a 10-acre farm.

Here, I walk past the herb garden to the hop yard, where a smiling guy in a Hawaiian shirt joins me, beer in hand. Vice president Charlie Kinzel nods as I review all of the breweries I've stopped in and my awe that each is travel-worthy and distinct.

"It's a magical little bubble and everyone's doing well," he says. "We're not 'Us, too.' We're who we are, and we're completely different."

At Traverse City Whiskey Co., you can try a flight of four varieties, including bourbon whiskey infused with cherries.

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