

Hocking Hills

Plan a winter trip to Ohio's scenic state park

By HILARY BERNSTEIN
The Medina Gazette

When planning a trip to Hocking Hills, many of the 3 to 4 million yearly visitors never consider traveling in the winter. But the state park is beautiful in every season. And since southeastern Ohio typically is warmer than Medina County, winter is a fine time to visit.

A couple things are missing during a winter trip to Hocking Hills: leaves on most trees and thousands of visitors. During the summer and fall, parking lots are filled to capacity, the park's 27 miles of walking trails are populated and area lodging is booked.

However, in the winter, the parks are fairly empty — visitors can get front row parking as well as the peace and quiet of nature. All trails are open, even though only a handful of hikers may be found. And area cabins offer reduced rates, so the tranquility even comes at a bargain.

Nature's winter beauty depends a lot on the weather. Since southeastern Ohio has experienced a lot of flooding this winter, currently many rushing waterfalls can be found at Old Man's Cave, Ash Cave and Cedar Falls. The waterfalls have frozen in past winters, providing fascinating ice formations.

While flowers, leaves and green grass may be gone for now, the Canadian hemlocks are evergreen and fill the trails of Old Man's Cave and Ash Cave with a hazy tint of green.

Wildlife always is around for observation in Hocking Hills. As one of the state's best locations for birding, the Audubon Winter Bird Count was held earlier this month. Deer also are plentiful in this part of the state — guests should take extra caution when driving the twisty, hilly roads at night to avoid colliding with the animals.

This Friday at 6 p.m., a night hike is planned at Ash Cave, the largest recess cave east of the Mississippi River. On Feb. 12, another naturalist-led hike, the Sweethearts Hike, is planned for 5 to 7 p.m. at Ash Cave.

In case it's a little too chilly to spend a lot of time outdoors, the Hocking Hills region offers many indoor activities:

Washboards galore

In the nearby town of Logan, the last washboard company in America is open for tours. The Columbus Washboard Co. was founded in 1895 — and today, the washboards continue to be made one at a time. While on a tour, visitors can observe washboards being manufactured by the company's four female employees. Each washboard is assembled in 45 seconds. Workers still use original tools including finger joint machines, pressers and box stitchers.

Around 35,000 washboards are produced here each year. Today, 40 percent of washboards are used for laundry, 30 percent are used by musicians and 30 percent are used for crafts. Currently, The Columbus Washboard Co. is sending washboard kits to soldiers in Iraq. Each kit contains a washboard, washtub, soap, clothesline, clothespins and instructions.

Washboards are produced with galvanized steel, stainless steel, tin, brass, glass and chalkboards. The glass washboards last a lifetime, because the ¼-inch thick glass doesn't rust like metal. And all the washboard materials are from Ohio, except for the glass from Tennessee.

Logan arts

Local businessman Bob Delaplane has added many creative touches to downtown Logan. Delaplane opened The Sandstone Restaurant, a fine dining restaurant; The Spotted Owl Cafe, a

restaurant with tasty breakfasts and lunches; and Logan Art Gallery and Art Center. At Logan Art Gallery, visitors can find artwork from local artists, as well as a gift shop filled with homemade items.

The fun part of the Art Center is found at the back of the building. An artist's workshop is set up, and visitors are invited to stay and paint or create pottery. Teresa Speakman gives private pottery lessons for \$12 an hour — all materials are included in the price. For week-end guests, a self-drying clay can be used so the creations can be taken home. Pieces can be fired, too.

If people already know how to throw pottery, use of the potter's wheel is \$5 an hour. Painting classes cost \$30 for two hours. Again, all the materials are included in the price.

The studio can be reserved for private art parties. Also, date night packages offered by local inns include dinner at The Sandstone Restaurant and an hour of pottery.

Picture this

For another kind of art, nature photography workshops are held at The Old Bear's Den. Hocking Hills photographers Eric Hoffman and Don Stephenson take participants to picturesque areas of Hocking Hills and offer instruction. An eight-hour workshop on frozen waterfalls is planned for Feb. 19. Private five-hour workshops also can be scheduled.

Tasteful options

For guests who would rather spend time enjoying food, The Inn at Cedar Falls offers cooking classes with the entertaining Chef Moe Michels. "Kids Cooking with Moe" is planned for Feb. 27, and "Couples Cooking with Moe" is planned for March 4-5. A Winter Wine TasteInn also will be held Jan. 28.

Shop 'til you drop

The Hocking Hills region also has shopping options, although the only big city store is Walmart. The Hocking River Emporium in downtown Logan sells moccasins, cabin games, jewelry, Native American jewelry and clothing.

At the Hocking Hills Market on state Route 33, shoppers can browse the Spring Street Antique Mall, Farmer's Flea Market, Appalachian Art and Craft Market and the Boot Shop Outlet.

For more travel information, call 1-800-HOCKING or visit www.1800hocking.com.

Hills dining

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Visitors to the Hocking Hills region can expect many unique dining options. The area isn't littered with chain restaurants, which brings a tasty change of pace.

Light breakfasts are available at The Spotted Owl Cafe in downtown Logan and Great Expectations Cafe and Bookstore at the Hocking Hills Market. For heavier eaters, Olde Dutch Restaurant in Logan has a breakfast buffet.

The Spotted Owl Cafe also serves lunch food, along with the Trails End Grill in Rockbridge and the Inn at Cedar Falls, located across from Hocking Hills State Park.

For a fun, funky lunch experience and trip down memory lane, go to Etta's Lunchbox Cafe in Starr (at the intersection of state routes 328 and 56). While it's a little drive from Hocking Hills, you'll be glad you went, thanks to the food and atmosphere. The Lunchbox Cafe is filled with about 400

different lunchboxes, including Fat Albert, The Monkees, Donny and Marie, Star Wars, Bee Gees, E.T., Laugh-In, Strawberry Shortcake and Rambo, the last metal lunchbox ever made. Etta's offers delicious sandwiches, pizza, salads and soup.

Local fine dining options give guests a reason to look forward to dinner. For a truly unique experience, visit Glenlaurel in Rockbridge. On weeknights, a five-course dinner costs \$49 and on Fridays and Saturdays, the seven-course meal is \$59.

The Inn at Cedar Falls uses the cooking talents of Chef Moe Michels, a Painesville native. Chef Moe cooks in an open kitchen and converses with guests and diners. Dinner — by reservation only — is served in a homey log cabin.

Other excellent choices include The Sandstone Restaurant in downtown Logan, Great Hall at Ravenwood Castle and Grouse Nest Restaurant. In case you'd rather not go out for dinner, Grouse Nest has a traveling chef who will come to visitors in their cabins.

For more information, call 1-800-HOCKING or visit www.1800hocking.com.

Sleeping options in Hocking Hills

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Hocking Hills State Park in Southeastern Ohio used to be a beautiful place visited mostly by locals, nature lovers and campers. In the past decade, the region has changed. Nature's stunning beauty still is there, but the area's accommodation options have exploded.

Now, visitors can enjoy the natural surroundings while staying in comfortable quarters. Secluded log cabins are very popular and the interiors range from rustic to posh. Most of these cabins include fireplaces and hot tubs. Old Man's Cave Chalets call themselves the "Hot Tub Getaway" and for a good reason — after listening to guest concerns, each hot tub is drained, sanitized and refilled once guests leave. And every day, technicians sanitize each hot tub.

Guests looking for a unique place to stay have many options. An old train caboose has been transformed into a cabin for five at Lazy Lane Cabins, and Salt Creek Retreats offers accommodations with a Mongolian flair — an authentic Mongolian yurt (a wooden hut used by nomads), to be exact. Hopping Turtle provides traditional Sioux tipis for guests. Each tipi measures 26 feet across.

For a rustic cabin experience, The Inn at Cedar Falls offers renovated 19th century log cabins, log cottages and rooms at the Inn. All cabins, cottages and rooms are furnished entirely with antiques, which provide an old-fashioned and refreshingly simple experience. A full breakfast is served to guests, and lunch and dinner is available at the inn's restaurant.

Offering the atmosphere of a Southern plantation, A Georgian Manner is located on the shores of Lake Logan. This bed and breakfast serves a continental breakfast.

For a more medieval time, Ravenwood Castle rents guest rooms along with English-style cottages and a reproduction British gypsy wagon. A full breakfast is served to guests.

If a Scottish style is preferred, Glenlaurel has cottages with secret gardens, crofts, suites and rooms in both the manor house and carriage house. Each cottage is named after a different Scottish clan and decorated accordingly. Guests are served a full breakfast and dinner also is available.

For travelers who look for a typical motel, Logan is home to AmeriHost Inn and Holiday Inn Express. Many campgrounds also are located in the area.

For more lodging information, call 1-800-HOCKING or visit www.1800hocking.com.

Directions

To get to Hocking Hills from Medina County, take Interstate 76 east to Interstate 77 south. Take Interstate 77 south to Interstate 70 west in Cambridge. Take Interstate 70 west to the U.S. route 37 east/Lancaster exit (No. 126). Follow U.S. route 37 to Lancaster. Turn right onto U.S. route 22 for four blocks. Turn left onto U.S. route 33 east. Continue on U.S. 33 to the state Route 664 (Logan/Bremen) exit. Exit at 664. Turn right. The Hocking Hills Welcome Center is located just south of the intersection of state Route 664 and U.S. 33, on the left.

Activities

The Columbus Washboard Co.
1-800-343-7967

www.columbuswashboard.com

Hocking Hills Market

740-332-6300

www.hockinghillsfleamarket.com

Logan Art Gallery and Art Center

740-385-9455

The Old Bear's Den Photography Center

740-380-2039

www.theoldbear.com

Dining

Etta's Lunchbox Café

740-380-0736

Glenlaurel

1-800-809-7378

www.glenlaurel.com

Great Expectations Café & Bookstore

740-380-9177

www.hockinghills.com/greatexpectations

Grouse Nest

740-332-4501

www.ashcave.com

Olde Dutch Restaurant

740-385-1000

www.oldedutch.com

The Inn at Cedar Falls

1-800-653-2557

www.innatcedarfalls.com

The Sandstone

740-385-9479

The Spotted Owl Café

740-385-9479

Lodging

A Georgian Manner

1-800-606-1840

www.georgianmanner.com

Glenlaurel Inn and Wooded Cottages

1-800-809-7378

www.glenlaurel.com

Hopping Turtle Creative Camping and Luxury Retreat

614-989-2345

www.hoppingturtle.com

Old Man's Cave Chalets

1-800-762-9396

www.oldmancavechalets.com

Ravenwood Castle and Medieval Village

1-800-477-1541

www.ravenwoodcastle.com

Salt Creek Retreats

614-397-3422

www.saltcreekretreats.com

The Inn at Cedar Falls

1-800-653-2557

www.innatcedarfalls.com

For more information

Hocking Hills Tourism Association

1-800-HOCKING

www.1800hocking.com