

Revive at
some of the
heartland's
best sandy
spots.

The harbor at
New Buffalo, MI

Harbor Country, Michigan

Be as active or as lazy as you like: This accommodating resort area offers lots to do, and no pressure to do any of it.

Harbor Country is the Midwest's answer to Martha's Vineyard. A string of sleepy beach towns set along Lake Michigan, the area is known for its picturesque sand dunes and slow-paced way of life. Located in southeastern Michigan, a 90-minute drive from Chicago, it offers New Yorkers the opportunity to combine a trip to the Windy City with a relaxing retreat to some of the heartland's best sandy spots.

Though grown-ups may gravitate toward antiquing in the many shops that dot Red Arrow Highway or vegging in a quaint cottage rental, kids deserve a trip to Warren Dunes State Park (\$8 per car, per day; 12032 Red Arrow Hwy, Sawyer, MI; 269-426-4013). As a child,

I climbed the mountainous dunes with my brother and sisters over and over again just for the thrill of racing back down at breakneck speed. The trip down the 240-foot dunes was just as exciting when I returned last summer with my boys, but the "over and over again" part had somehow lost its appeal. Exhausted after our sandy climb, we opted for a more leisurely hike through the adjacent woody trails, then grabbed a quick bite at the park's small sandwich shop and hit the beach.

Charming vacation rental homes are the lodging of choice in Harbor Country. A number of websites (harborcountry.org/availability; bluefishvacations.com; rsvp-rentals.com) feature photos and online

booking. The privately owned homes vary wildly in size and amenities, and most require a weekly rental (\$1,500–\$3,500). But many have room for multiple families, so bringing your sister and her screaming brats along could save you cash. All homes come with fully equipped kitchens, making it easy to eat in after a long day at the beach. Stock up on steaks and house-made sausages at Falatic's Meat Market (12236 Red Arrow Hwy, Sawyer, MI; 269-426-3224, falatics.com) or grab fresh pastries, salads and made-to-order sandwiches at Whistle Stop (15700 Red Arrow Hwy, Union Pier, MI; 269-469-6700).

Though technically not part of Harbor Country, nearby Michigan City, Indiana, offers one of the best lodging options for families, Beachwalk Resort (202 Beachwalk Ln, Michigan City, IN; 800-814-7501, beachwalkresort.com). Colorfully painted cottages and white picket fences give the community—a mix of renters and permanent residents—a real neighborhood feel. But the extras (tennis court, swimming pool, live music, scavenger hunts) are the big selling



Beachwalk
Resort

(TOP) COURTESY WARREN DUNES STATE PARK; (MIDDLE) DOORCOUNTY.COM; (DOOR) COUNTY VISITOR BUREAU; (BOTTOM) MIKE SELFRIDGE