

Don't let the economy ruin your summer vacation. Use these 24 **IOWA ALTERNATIVES** to popular family getaways to save some cash.

Dear Iowa Outdoors Reader,
We've said it all along, and we stand by it still: You don't have to leave the state for a memorable vacation. Especially if your budget is tight, staying in-state gives you the pleasure of knowing your home more deeply. It also means freedom from that sinking queasiness of post-vacation credit-card statements.

In fact, we bet there's an Iowa equivalent for every \$10,000 outfitted uber-adventure featured in rugged outdoorsy supermarket magazines. And you won't have to mortgage the house to get there. Read on, and you'll see what we mean.

Miami Beach, FLORIDA
 If you love the bustle of Diddy-caliber crowds, head to **Gull Point State Park Beach in Okoboji**. Of Okoboji's five swimming beaches, Gull Point is the most happening (712-337-3211).
 "The scene at Okoboji varies from family-oriented and laid-back to Cancun spring break," says Tim Richey, park manager. Fishing, skiing, boating and scuba diving amp up lake recreation, which is supported by golf, shopping, open-air dining and a lively bar scene. Central Iowans can get a similar fix at **Big Creek State Park (515-984-6473)**.



Whitewater Rafting, COLORADO RIVER

When Webster City's Briggs Woods County Park gets three to five inches of rain, Briggs Falls starts running. The one-third mile stretch of stream located in the northeast corner of the park drops about 60 feet total, a fairly short run with a number of eye-bugging ledges that plunge paddlers headlong into cold water (515-832-9570).

"The middle ledge, hands down, is the most fun," says Nate Hoogeveen, DNR river programs coordinator.

A straight-through paddle would probably last five minutes, but when it's running, schedule a half-day there. Use the creekside trail to hike back to the top of the run, kayak on your shoulder, and do it all over again. "It's almost like a toboggan run," says Hoogeveen.

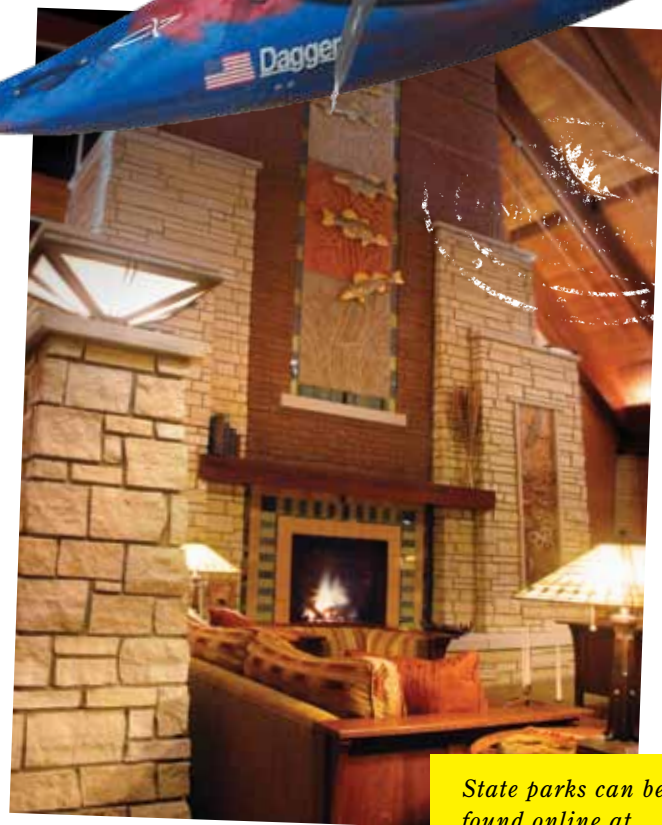
This is a Class III whitewater rapids, and you need appropriate whitewater skills, boats and gear. Hoogeveen recommends getting involved with other paddlers such as the ISU Canoe/Kayak Club (www.stuorg.iastate.edu/isucanoekayak), Central Iowa Paddlers (paddleiowa.org) or the Iowa Whitewater Coalition (iowawhitewater.org).



Old Faithful Lodge, YELLOWSTONE

Okay, you probably should get to Yellowstone once in your life. But after you've seen the geyser, you're good, and the next family vacation is just as easily spent at Honey Creek Resort State Park, Iowa's own icon-in-training.

This southern Iowa recreational playland is designed specifically to help visitors dig into the state's natural wonders, complete with an architecturally impressive lodge. Old Faithful might have a few years on us, but a visit to Honey Creek in its infancy makes you part of our history (1-877-677-3344; honeycreekresort.com).

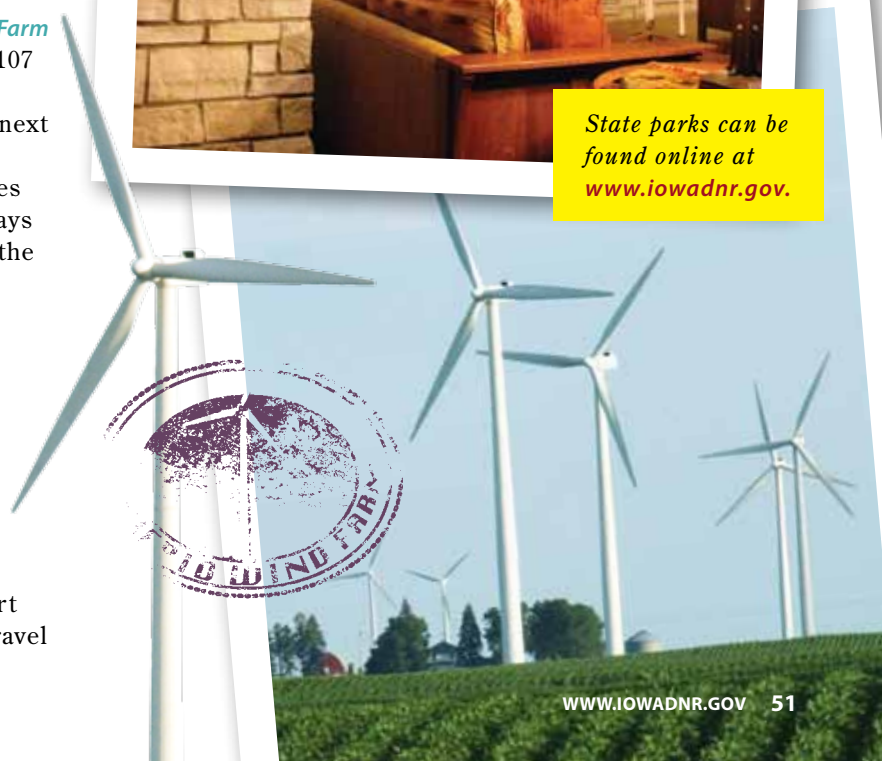


State parks can be found online at www.iowadnr.gov.

Windmill Watching, HOLLAND

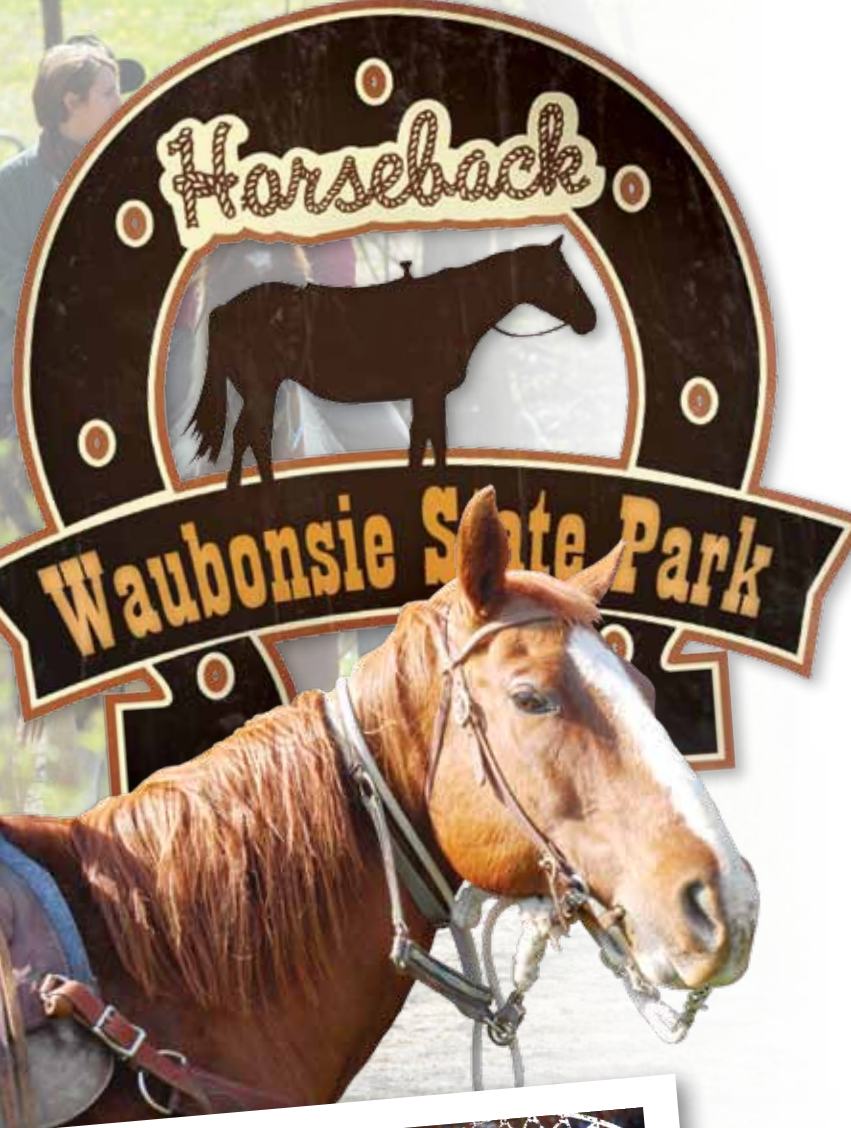
You don't need to a passport to view the Intrepid Wind Farm in Sac and Buena Vista counties, in northwest Iowa. The 107 wind turbines power some 43,000 homes. To get your full-on Dutch fix, visit the Orange City Tulip Festival next spring (712-707-4510; octulipfestival.com).

"I was so stunned by the beauty of the wind turbines that I had to pull off the highway to take a picture," says Holli Hartman of Denver, Colo., who passed through the area on a recent drive to her hometown of Algona. "I thought, 'This must be what it's like in Holland.'" (midamericanenergy.com/wind/html/resource5.asp; orangecityiowa.com).



Rocky Mountain Dude Ranch, COLORADO

The family farm isn't that far out of Iowa's collective consciousness that we find 5 a.m. chores retro or charming. But horses? We miss horses. And that's part of what makes Waubonsie State Park our new favorite travel



destination. It only has eight miles of equestrian trails (compared to *Brushy Creek in Webster County*, which has 50), but this park has so much potential, it'll soon be one of the stars of the parks system. Each of the 32 equestrian campsites has a holding pen or a hitch rail, plus picnic tables and fire rings. But it's the location that makes Waubonsie so great. The switchbacks and lush canyon of its Loess Hills setting make the trail a real heart thumper. If you don't bring your own horses, hire those of local cowboy and trail guide Alan Driever ([402-297-3279](tel:402-297-3279)).

Waubonsie just added 646 acres and several cabins by acquiring an adjacent Girl Scout camp ([712-382-2786](tel:712-382-2786)). Nearby Sugar Clay Winery & Vineyards is good for tasting, with occasional live music on weekends ([712-628-2020](tel:712-628-2020); sugarclaywinery.com).

Yurt camping, MONGOLIA

Your experience in *Cerro Gordo County's McIntosh Woods on the banks of Clear Lake* won't be worthy of an episode of *Bizarre Foods* like a visit to China might be, but that's probably a good thing. The benefits of yurt camping are the same no matter where you rest your head.

Many acres of Clear Lake are undeveloped, particularly on its northwest corner, called *Little Lake*. The peninsula of McIntosh Woods is an ever-changing montage of water levels, wind and cloud movement, perfect for fishing, wading, photography and star gazing.

We'll let park manager Tammy Domooske ([641-829-3847](tel:641-829-3847)) speak for her yurts, which are the favorite feature of many repeat customers. An increasingly popular alternative to camping that's still cheaper than a motel, yurts are a growing trend for families and those who don't like the hassle of tent set-up:

"Through the clear acrylic dome, one can view the night sky, relax on the shores of Clear Lake, and observe many amazing summer sunsets off the deck or from inside the yurt. The shade of oak trees and the lake breezes provide visitors with a cool stay. Visitors are surprised when they step inside the yurt itself, into a sheltered circle that feels warm, open and free. The apex at the top shows shadows of clouds moving past, tree branches swaying in the breeze and birds cruising overhead. Moonbeams blanket you at night, and the rain may tease, but does not gain entry."



Mauna Kea Observatory, HAWAII

Palisades-Dows Observatory, just southeast of Palisades-Kepler State Park, ([319-848-2068](tel:319-848-2068); cedar-astronomers.org) near Cedar Rapids is the obvious go-to here. But we also like to step off the beaten path.

In that vein, *Whiterock Conservancy, a nature preserve in Coon Rapids* with on-site lodging, is likely the darkest sky in Iowa, with less than 10 yard lights to contend with on 4,300 acres of contiguous ground for stargazing and night hiking.

Those brave souls who explore Whiterock at night might encounter fox or coyote, or perhaps a spooked doe and her twin fawns, says Executive Director Tolif



Hunt. They'll be deafened by the chorus of frogs. An assortment of owls call to mark out territory or locate a mate. Salamanders come out for the rare terrestrial stroll.

A night hike under the stars forces us to give up part of our human dominance of the land, says Hunt.

“Being alone in the environment during the night sacrifices one of our most relied upon senses, our eyesight, forcing us to realize that sometimes we are just as fragile as any part of the environment, from baby birds to rare orchids: We humans are vulnerable to the elements, too. Although in Iowa you have little to fear—there are no macro predators left—so walk with a light heart, dear night hiker!” (712-684-2697; whiterockconservancy.org).

Shedd Aquarium, CHICAGO

We can't promise sharks, but sturgeon can get more than 10 feet long, and they look cooler. See them at *The National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium in Dubuque*, which actually scored higher than Shedd in the 2008 TripAdvisor Top 10 Aquariums ranking. Its expansion begins this summer into the former Diamond Jo Casino riverboat. The new Great Rivers Center will tell the story of America's rivers through more great interactive exhibits (563-557-9545; mississippirivermuseum.com).

Leech Lake, MINNESOTA

Hark; the fishermen yearn for the walleye! Unfortunately, a tricked-out trip Up Nort' is gonna cost way more than mounting the trophy it scores you. And when you fish far away, you lose the flexibility of canceling for a better weekend if your destination's fishing report is tepid. So we've scouted one of Iowa's top walleye destinations for you, located at the swank, yet reasonably priced, *Honey Creek Resort State Park*. (1-877-677-3344; honeycreekresort.com).

“Rathbun is the most significant walleye fishery south of I-80 in Iowa,” says Mark Flammang, DNR fisheries management biologist. “Each year, anglers harvest about 5,000 walleyes.”

In fact, 2005 was a record year at Rathbun, with the walleye harvest ranking higher than 75 percent of all walleye lakes in the world. “That's no small task!” adds Flammang, who says walleye range around 15 to 21 inches, with most around two pounds.

His advice for anglers: Don't be afraid to fish shallow. Flammang has pulled decent-sized fish from four feet of water. And ask at the local bait shop about current sweet spots of lake habitat.

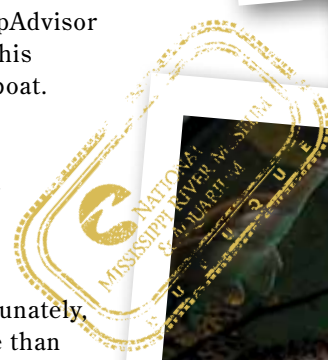
If you're looking for the atypical walleye bite, Rathbun is it. Though late May to early August is most productive elsewhere, the hottest time at Rathbun is right in the middle of summer.

“Most anglers think of walleye as a cool-weather species,” says Flammang. “Rathbun walleye seem to disagree.”

My early work is the result of going around over that very gorgeous territory where I live and not seeing it. I wanted things that looked French. I'd been told that the Midwest was flat and ugly and I believed it.

Later, after I realized the material around me was paintable, and started painting out of my own experience, my work had an emotional quality that was totally lacking before. I had to go to France to appreciate Iowa. That was the best way to get perspective.

-Grant Wood, 1935



HONEY CREEK RESORT
STATE PARK

ON RATHBUN LAKE





Deadwood, SOUTH DAKOTA

Another heavily marketed stop on the tourist circuit, Deadwood is the former site of a seedy subculture of gamblers, prostitutes and miners looking to raise a little hell on the day off.

Rent the HBO series if you want to get the idea, and then spend the last full weekend of September at authentic [Fort Atkinson State Preserve](#) in northeast Iowa, which has hosted an annual rendezvous since 1977.

The event recreates life on the 1840s Iowa frontier with buckskinners, open-air cooking, U.S. Army dragoons, black powder shoots, craftspeople, contests and demonstrations. Originally built in the 1840s to keep the Winnebago on neutral ground and to provide them with protection, Fort Atkinson has a relatively peaceful history. And the demonstrations of everyday frontier life are a lot more realistic than a shoot-out with Wild Bill Hickok (www.iowadnr.gov; 563-425-4161).

Mountain Biking, MOAB, UTAH

Avoid the hype, and head to [Lake Manawa State Park in Council Bluffs](#). The professionally designed technical courses attract mountain bikers from the tri-state area. With 72 camping units and 1,529 acres, it makes a great weekend destination for the biking crowd (712-366-0220).

Coney Island, NEW YORK

If it's a waterside boardwalk with a storied history that attracts you, try [West Lake Okoboji's Arnolds Park](#). What began as a water toboggan slide by a smart developer in the late 1800s has blossomed into a 21-acre lakeside attraction of beaches, rides, shopping and dining, best seen from the upper reaches of a Ferris wheel.

And we're just guessing on this, but we doubt if Coney Island could live up to Arnolds Park's motto of "Good Clean Fun" (712-332-2183; arnoldspark.com).

Lake of the Ozarks, MO/ARK

For an angler's weekend away, sometimes bigger isn't better.

"The reservoirs in Arkansas are huge and it's sometimes difficult to find the good fishing, or even where you are on a map," says Chris Larson, fisheries supervisor for southwest Iowa. "[Twelve Mile and Three Mile lakes in Union County](#), just a mile apart, offer excellent fishing with plenty of fish habitat to explore."

A bit more about [Three Mile Lake](#) (641-782-1755), which built its reputation on being consistent for bluegill, largemouth and smallmouth bass and walleye. Three Mile is the only southwest Iowa lake where muskie lurk, and the lake also supports a growing hybrid striped bass or "wiper" fishery. Year-round, overnighers will find eight camping cabins and a large building available for rent as a lodge, plus a heated fish cleaning area.

[Twelve Mile Lake](#) is undergoing a rebirth after offering



some of the state's best fishing through the 1990s. Three years ago, it was drained to revitalize its fishery. Once the lake refilled, the DNR stocked larger fingerlings than usual to jumpstart the population, improved water quality and added fishing jetties for shore access and fish-attracting structures to get fish closer for shore angling.

"If this year's ice-fishing pressure was any indication, Twelve Mile is back and will resume its place as the top fishery in southwest Iowa for walleyes, largemouth bass and bluegills," says DNR information specialist Mick Klemesrud.

For bass fishing, *West Lake in Osceola* is considered one of the best. Popular on the tournament circuit, it remains difficult for land-bound anglers due to an undeveloped shoreline, save for a casino on the northeast side whose owners just filed for bankruptcy.

Carlsbad Cavern, NEW MEXICO

Rather than driving 18 hours to this baking-hot desert location, head to east-central Iowa's lush *Maquoketa Caves State Park*. Its petite size, small caverns and a gorgeous campground ringed by old-growth trees make it perfect for families. Bring headlamps for the kids, and let them explore on their own. A couple miles away, Bluff Lake Catfish Farm is one of those hole-in-the-wall vacation finds for dinner, where Mom and Dad can snag a cold one while the little ones watch the pond for the daily special ([563-652-5833](tel:563-652-5833)).

Fishing the chalk streams of ENGLAND

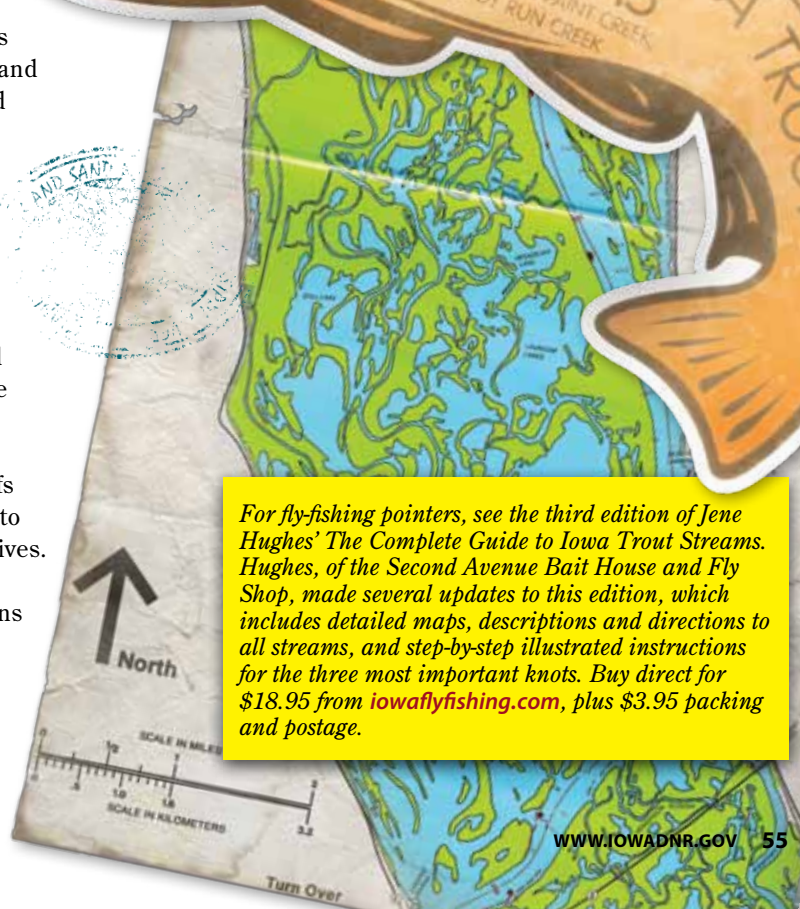
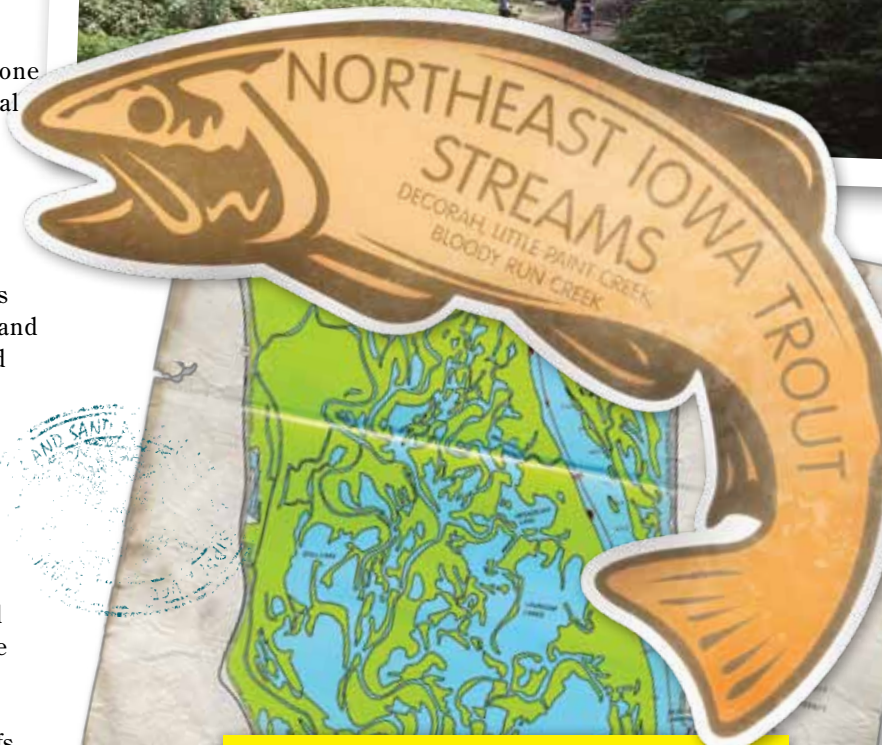
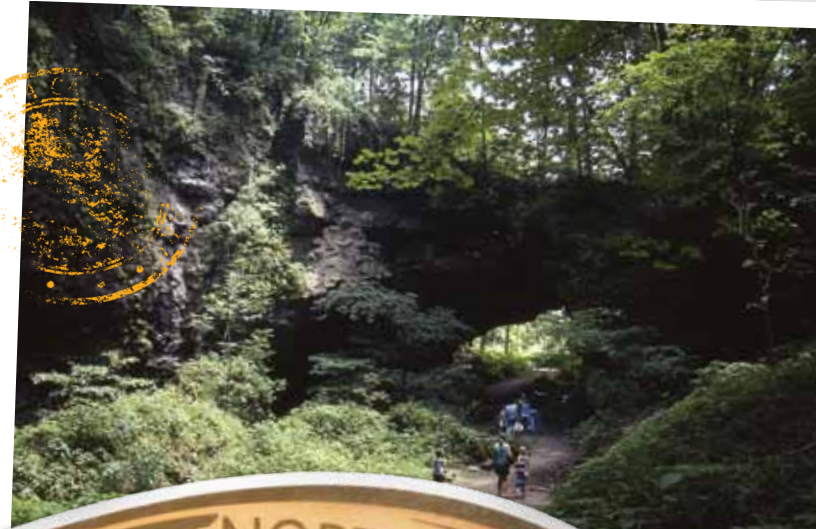
The difference here is money. Big money. The dollar is still fairly weak against the pound, and fishing in England levies a hefty fee on anglers. Save the dollars and head to the trout streams of northeast Iowa. To find 50-plus streams, order the DNR trout map and guide for \$2 (iowanaturestore.com; [866-410-0230](tel:866-410-0230)).

Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, MINNESOTA

An outfitted trip to the Boundary Waters is considered a Midwest wilderness rite of passage, but what is more iconic to the Midwest than the Mississippi River?

Hundreds of islands, sloughs and sand bars make for life-changing paddling near Lansing on Pool 9, where bluffs bristling with trees might shelter anything from warblers to osprey to a peregrine falcon shooting like a missile as it dives. It's a mysterious, primordial feel that you won't find in an upland lake area, tying you to the ancient Woodland Indians who dwelt upon these banks. And the Great River Road travels alongside, so you don't have to portage your boat, either. Your back will thank you later.

Friends of the Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge (friendsofuppermiss.org).



*For fly-fishing pointers, see the third edition of Jene Hughes' *The Complete Guide to Iowa Trout Streams*. Hughes, of the Second Avenue Bait House and Fly Shop, made several updates to this edition, which includes detailed maps, descriptions and directions to all streams, and step-by-step illustrated instructions for the three most important knots. Buy direct for \$18.95 from iowaflyfishing.com, plus \$3.95 packing and postage.*



Bison-watching at Yellowstone National Park, WYOMING

The largest reconstruction of tallgrass prairie ecosystem in the United States, *Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge*, has a herd of bison 56 strong, as well as 18 elk (515-994-3400; tallgrass.org). The Nature Conservancy just started a bison herd, grazing 28 woolly behemoths on the 3,000 acres of *Broken Kettle Grasslands Preserve* north of Sioux City (712-568-2596; nature.org).



Golfing at Pebble Beach, CALIFORNIA

Greens fees at the famous Pebble Beach courses run about \$500. That doesn't even include a cart.

We won't say that *Honey Creek Resort's golf course, The Preserve*, rivals Pebble Beach. But for a few hours' drive, you can play 18 holes with big water views, and overnight just steps away at the lodge. Greens fees run \$30 to \$50, depending on the time of the year.

That includes the cart, friends. (641-724-1400 for tee times. [Http://honeycreekresort.com/](http://honeycreekresort.com/)).

Root River Trail, LANESBORO, MINNESOTA

Popular for trout fishing, biking, tubing and paddling, Lanesboro's idyllic small-town atmosphere has an Iowa mirror, and it's called *Decorah* (563-382-2023; trailsofwinneshiek.org).

The northeast Iowa city is working on a 12-mile *Trout Run Trail* that similarly leads people to scenic trout streams and several campgrounds. Take a tour of Decorah's trout hatchery en route.



Rock Climbing Devils Tower, WYOMING

Just as the Wyoming destination had cultural and spiritual significance to American Indians, so the presence of burial mounds along the deep ravines and river bluffs of *Palisades-Kepler State Park* tell us that it, too, was a favorite among indigenous people.

Palisades-Kepler's cliffs also make it one of Iowa's top rock-climbing areas. Park ranger Jim Hansen and his crew help make the sport safe and accessible—stop by the ranger's office before climbing to check in.

Dave Patton, assistant director of the University of Iowa Recreation Services, says that Palisades holds the majority of Iowa's climbing history. "Royal Robbins climbed here," he says. The poet Carl Sandburg visited regularly in the 1920s and 1930s.

Patton's Touch the Earth Outdoor Rental Center is 3,500 square feet of tents, sleeping bags, kayaks and lots of other great gear needed to create your own adventure. It is part of the Hawkeye Tennis & Recreation Complex located off Prairie Meadow Drive in Iowa City, west of The University of Iowa Hall of Fame, east of the Hawkeye Storage Lots and north of Hawkeye Drive apartments



BUFFALO, HONEY CREEK GOLFING AND ROCK CLIMBING PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH; CEDAR ROCK PHOTOS, HOUSEBOAT DESIGN BY STUDIO Z; FLY FISHING COURTESY DECORAH NEWSPAPERS; YACHT PHOTO COURTESY CLYC

(319-335-9293; www.recserv.uiowa.edu/programs/TTE/index.html). For information on Palisades-Kepler State Park, easily one of Iowa's most breathtaking, call 319-895-6039.

Frank Lloyd Wright House, CHICAGO

Had you known him, you may have called architect Frank Lloyd Wright a control freak. He wanted to dictate not only the style of his home designs, but what went into them, from furniture to fabric. In that spirit, one may say that his house southeast of Independence, owned by Iowa businessman Lowell Walter, is one of his most complete designs. Overlooking the *Wapsipinicon River near Quasqueton (Buchanan County)*, nearly everything in the *Walter Residence* bears Wright's imprint. He designed the furniture and tile, selected carpets, chose draperies and even picked out accessories. Learn more about Cedar Rock on the parks webpage or call (319-934-3572; iowadnr.gov).

COOL FACT: The indoor plants in this summer house need no watering; they're rooted into the bedrock of the limestone cliff upon which it perches.

Lake of the Woods, MINNESOTA/CANADA

Out-of-state licenses, gas money, and a lot of windshield time to get there. Those three good reasons, just off the top of our collective heads, to grab an old pair of tennies, load up the canoe and work your way along the *Wapsipinicon River* for walleye and northern pike. Also, we just like the name, which is Ojibwe for "river abundant in swan-potatoes," another word for wild artichokes, which were once found near its banks. Buy licenses online at iowadnr.gov.

Houseboating Lake Powell, ARIZONA AND UTAH

Overnighters choose houseboating on this Colorado River reservoir on the Arizona-Utah border, characterized by deep sandstone walls, because of tight restrictions on camping in the surrounding Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

Same with overnighters on the *Mississippi River*, where camping is free but not always comfortable, especially on wild and undeveloped shoreline. From a *houseboat*, you can appreciate from a cozy distance this wily basin that supports 25 percent of all fish species in North America, including the paddlefish, which existed during prehistoric times. The river valley itself is the superhighway of migrating waterfowl—40 percent of North America's population, and 60 percent of its bird species. *S&S Houseboat Rentals in Lansing* (800-728-0131; ssboatrentals.com).

Atlantic Ocean Sailing Regatta

Clear Lake hosts sailboat regattas from July through September, (800-285-5338) and *Okoboji* hosts regattas in August. (*Clear Lake Yacht Club* clyciowa.com; *Okoboji Yacht Club* o-y-c.org; 712-337-0121).

