

36 Hours – Wausau, WI

Friday, March 18 – Sunday, March 20, 2005

Well known as a center for insurance and paper – think Wausau Insurance and Wausau Paper – Wausau’s reputation is considerably larger than the community itself. With only 38,000 city residents and an area population of about 85,000, the cultural amenities and natural resources that characterize Wausau are far grander than might be expected based on population alone. Located in north central Wisconsin at the intersection of the state’s major north-south and east-west highways – 51/39 and 29 – and not far from the geological epicenter of the Northwest Hemisphere (see more about that below), Wausau offers visitors a taste of Wisconsin traditions, an opportunity to revel in nature’s beauty, and an array of world-class artworks.

Friday, March 18

5 p.m.

1. Snake Your Way to a Brew

Wind your way toward downtown Wausau via the recently opened Snake Bridge (easy access from County Highway NN or Rib Mountain Drive) that spans Lake Wausau and provides a glimpse of scores of ice-fishing shacks, a winter tradition in the northwoods. Snowmobilers also cruise Lake Wausau as well as take advantage of more than 800 miles of groomed trails that crisscross Marathon County. Once across the bridge, take 17th Avenue to Sherman Avenue, turn left and travel a short distance to Hereford & Hops, Wausau’s award-winning brew pub offering ten specialty beers brewed on site. Sample a seasonal specialty like the Winter Wobbler or a Schwarzbier (2305 Sherman Street, 715-849-3700).

6 p.m.

2. The Depot

If the ubiquitous Wausau Insurance ads are familiar, you’ll want to pay homage to at least one of the depots that inspired the company’s logotype. While the depot at 720 Grant Street sits alongside an active rail line, it no longer accommodates travelers but instead serves as the office for the community’s Head Start program. Nevertheless, the depot’s basic structure remains and it recalls the glory days of active passenger travel by rail which up until the mid-1960s took folks to Wisconsin’s lake region about seventy miles north of Wausau. The Grant Street depot is opposite the Hiawatha Lounge – its building rumored to have been a brothel that also saw its demise with the end of passenger rail travel – home to one of the area’s best Friday night fish fries.

6:15 p.m.

3. Go Fish

Friday night in Wisconsin is all about fish and that means battered and deep-fried perch or cod. At the Hiawatha (713 Grant Street, 715-848-5166), regulars order ‘Half and Half’ – a half order of french fries and a half order of potato salad to accompany their Friday Night Fish Fry. Add your name to the waiting list – usually on the pool table – as soon as you arrive or see Deb, the friendly waitress who delivers excellent service.

8:30 p.m.

4. The Beat Goes On

Consistently voted the best place for live music in central Wisconsin, Scott Street Steak & Pub (124 Scott Street, 715-842-2424) has featured such artists as Buddy Guy, Luther Allison, James Cotton, Coco Montoya, and E.C. Scott. A large selection of microbrews complements the smooth sounds of blues.

Saturday, March 19

9:00 a.m.

5. Over Easy

If you have to wait for a table at The Mint Café in the heart of downtown (422 North 3rd Street, 715-845-5879), pick up a copy of *City Pages* – Wausau’s free arts and entertainment weekly available in an entry-area kiosk – and scan the local news. Check out The Mint’s breakfast specials (oatmeal-pecan pancakes are always a treat if they’re available) or try the Greek Scramble, a hearty serving that includes hash browns and toast.

10:30 a.m.

6. Get Centered

Head west on Highway 29 (see enclosed Marathon County map) to Poniatowski and the Reitbrock Geographical Marker, the exact center of the Northwest Hemisphere. Located halfway between the Equator and the North Pole and half way between Greenwich Meridian and the International Date Line, there are only four places like this in the world . . . two are under water and the other is in China. Wisconsin is lookin’ good! Find the marker in what may be one of the smallest parks you’ll ever visit and take your picture to serve as proof for friends.

Noon

7. Your Aunt Gladys Is Waiting

Book it back to Wausau and the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum (700 North 12th Street, 715-845-7010) where Aunt Gladys awaits. Who is this celebrity? Aunt Gladys is the affectionate name given the mobile glass-blowing studio from Southern Illinois University’s School of Art & Design. Her three-man crew demonstrates techniques and processes related to the exciting world of contemporary glass blowing. No need to worry about the cold . . . demonstrations begin on the hour (noon to 4 p.m.) and last approximately forty-five minutes in a tent warmed by Aunt Gladys’s melting and pot furnaces. A glasswork will be given away at the end of each demonstration cycle.

1:00 p.m.

8. Is It Glass?

Say goodbye to Aunt Gladys and move indoors – the Woodson Art Museum admission is always free of charge – to feast your eyes on *William Morris: Myth, Object, and the Animal*, an exhibition of hundreds of fabulous glassworks. The question you’ll be asking is, “Are they really glass?” William Morris is among the most technically acclaimed and brilliant glass artists at work today. He pushes the physical and chemical possibilities of glass to create life-size black ravens, handsome deer heads, and other objects that suggest themes of mythology, archaeology, and the animal kingdom. The quiet beauty of Morris’s glass sculptures and large-scale, multi-piece installations results from the artist’s use of translucent, sensual surfaces and luminous colors that seem to glow like a life

force from within. Pick up a complimentary Activity Guide – available in the galleries – for ideas on how to look at the artworks and check out Art Park (lower level) for *Myth, Object, and the Animal*-related interactives.

Before leaving the Woodson, saunter through the sculpture garden to enjoy a menagerie of bronzes and, at the south end, take a walk through *Putting Two and Two Together*. This large-scale work by Patrick Dougherty has four towering, twisting, and tilting cones made from 2,500 or so maple and willow saplings weighing about six tons. It's definitely a head turner!

3:00 p.m.

9. On the Square

Locals call it the 400 Block . . . a city-center block bounded by Scott and Jefferson streets and Third and Fourth streets. During the winter, the ice rink is the attraction. Shepherd & Schaller Sporting Goods (324 Scott Street, 715-845-5432) rents skates or you can watch others spin and twirl or wander downtown shopping district highlights, including Uncle Oscar's (316 Scott Street, 715-845-5752), a vintage and new clothing retailer; Janke Book Store (505 Third Street, 715-845-9648), a family-owned store featuring books, cards, art supplies, and superb service; and Evolutions in Design (626 Third Street, 715-849-2586), a historic building filled with fresh flowers, eclectic gifts, home décor objects, and wonderful surprises. Take a hot-chocolate or coffee break at either Jeannie's (529 Third Street, 715-848-0055) or Something's Brewing (412 Third Street, 715-849-8000) or try a cool treat from either Whey Cool (715-843-9797) or Original Rainbow Cone (715-845-7860), both located in the historic Washington Square. If time and energy remain, visit the Center for the Visual Arts gallery and gift shop located on ArtsBlock (427 Fourth Street, 715-842-4545). *CVA Artists Showcase* is on view through March 26 and the Gift Gallery is filled with the extraordinary work of over 190 Midwest artists.

6:30 p.m.

10. So Many Choices . . . Not Enough Time

Consider one of the following for dinner. Back When Café (606 Third Street, 715-848-5668) offers a sophisticated atmosphere and menu to match. Lamb, duck, and seafood are among the specialties, all prepared with fresh herbs. The Wagon Wheel Supper Club (3901 North Sixth Street, 715-675-2263) boasts an award-winning wine list featured in *Wine Spectator* and serves dry-aged, charbroiled steaks. Don't miss the cowhide sofa in the lounge. Carmelo's (3607 North Mountain Drive, Rib Mountain, 715-845-5570) is located at the base of Granite Peak Ski Area at Rib Mountain. Authentic Italian dishes include Spaghetti Carbonara and herb-roasted chicken. All three restaurants offer an assortment of desserts . . . but you might prefer instead to indulge at Kelly's Martini Bar.

9:00 p.m.

11. Bottom's Up

A lively night scene is always on tap at Kelly's Martini Bar and Something's Brewing (412 Third Street, 715-849-8000) and its smoke-free environment is especially nice. Indulge in a specialty martini or a coffee drink and a dessert selection while you enjoy classic rock performed by DanJoe.

Sunday, March 20

8:00 a.m.

12. Hot and Now

Wausau is now home to a Krispy Kreme Donut Shop (1914 Stewart Avenue, 715-843-6514), something that Madison, Wisconsin, doesn't yet have! Check out the sleek design, which enables you to watch the donuts through the cooking and glazing processes. When the red light is on you'll be offered a sample. Pair it up with a coffee.

9:00 a.m.

13. Block by Block

Take a walking or driving tour of the Andrew Warren Historic District, a National Register of Historic Places landmark since 1984. Sixty-two buildings comprise this ten-block area on the northeast edge of downtown Wausau. Among the late 19th and early 20th century homes, you'll see examples of Greek Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne, Classic Revival, and Prairie School architecture. District maps are available at the Marathon County Historical Society (715-842-5750, 410 McIndoe Street) or Friends of Wausau Historic Landmarks (715-848-6143).

10:00 a.m.

14. Oh, What a View

One of the oldest rock formations on earth, Rib Mountain stands proudly in the middle of central Wisconsin. The fourth highest peak in Wisconsin, Rib Mountain offers breathtaking views from the observation tower and/or from the State Park overlooks, a well-maintained network of snowshoeing and hiking trails, and Granite Peak Ski Area. At Granite Peak (715-845-2846), snowboarders and skiers can enjoy seventy-two runs of varied terrain for all abilities.

THE BASICS

Visiting Wausau

Wausau is 175 miles east of Minneapolis/Saint Paul and 140 miles north of Madison. Driving times are approximately three hours and two hours and twenty minutes respectively depending on road conditions. United Express, Midwest Express, and Northwest (Mesaba) serve the Central Wisconsin Airport located eighteen miles from downtown Wausau. These airlines offer regional jet service from their hubs in Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Detroit. Car rentals from Avis, Hertz, and National are available at Central Wisconsin Airport.

The Stewart Inn (521 Grant Street, 715-849-5858) occupies an elegantly restored George W. Maher Prairie-style house and offers five guest rooms with private baths and luxury hotel amenities. The inn is pet friendly and serves a full gourmet breakfast. www.StewartInn.com

Courtyard by Marriott (1000 South 22nd Avenue, 715-849-2124) is among the newer properties with eighty-four rooms. Breakfast is served daily.

Best Western Midway Hotel (2901 Martin Avenue, 715-842-1616) provides convenient shuttle service from Central Wisconsin Airport. The hotel has a full-service restaurant, ninety-seven rooms, and large indoor pool area.

Hampton Inn (615 South 24th Avenue, 715-848-9700) has recently upgraded its amenities, including a full complementary hot breakfast. Eight-nine rooms.

The Lodge at Cedar Creek (805 Creske Avenue, Mosinee, 888-36-LODGE/715-241-6300) boasts a 50,000 square foot indoor tropical water park and 140 suites.

Note for skiers and outdoor enthusiasts

In addition to Granite Peak Ski Area, the Wausau area is home to additional winter recreational activities including the following:

- Sylvan Hill (1329 Sylvan Street, 715-261-1550) offers inner-tubing with a tow rope to pull you back up. Chalet with snack bar, restrooms, lockers, and a fireplace on site.
- Nine Mile Forest (Red Bud Road, 715-693-3001) is one of Wisconsin's top cross-country skiing facilities featuring twenty miles of trails including loops ranging from a half mile to more than nine miles. Spacious chalet offers equipment rental, concessions, restrooms, changing facilities, and lockers. Trails are groomed to accommodate both skaters and diagonal skiers.
- More than 800 miles of groomed snowmobiling trails crisscross Marathon County. Obtain an Official Marathon County Snowmobile Map through www.co.marathon.wi.us.

For more information about the Wausau area, contact the Wausau/Central Wisconsin Convention & Visitors Bureau at 888-WI-VISIT or www.visitwausau.com.

With thanks to the *New York Times*' "Journeys" series for providing the inspiration and the model for "36 Hours – Wausau, Wisconsin."