

Winter Wonderland: Michigan's Upper Peninsula

by Tina Peterson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I've had this happen more times than I can remember: someone finds out I'm from Michigan and holds out their hand facing me so I can point out where in Michigan I am from. This inevitably leads us into a conversation about the Upper Peninsula (the "other" part of Michigan), which is where I live. If you look on a map, the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) is the rabbit-shaped section above the "mitten". We affectionately refer to ourselves as "Yoopers." (U.P.'ers - get it?)

Being a Yooper takes a special kind of person. Our winters last a long time, usually starting in October and finally giving us some reprieve in April. In an area where the snowfall averages over 200 inches a year, you have to either really love winter or at least be able to cope with it. Me? I'm a little bit in the middle. There are days when the always gloomy, overcast skies of winter make me want to run away to somewhere sunny (yes, Walt Disney World usually comes to mind). But then my sons will ask me if I will come outside and help them decorate their snowman and I remember why we live here.

The U.P. is an outdoor lovers dream. There is plenty to do during all four seasons up here. Spring is the ideal time to go waterfall hunting, summer is great for hanging out, or boating on Lake Superior or Lake Michigan, and the fall colors are breathtaking. But winter is when this area really comes alive.

Skiing, both downhill and cross country, are big tourism draws. Many trails and hills are near a ski resort, which offers lodging, food, and other amenities either onsite or nearby. Although I've never partaken in downhill skiing, I love cross country. The sound of the crunching snow under your skis, the cool wind on your face, and the accomplishment of actually finishing a grueling trail are exhilarating. There is also a different type of trail around here, and these are for snowmobiles. People flock to the U.P. for this snowy activity. On any given day in the winter, if you drive down a county road, you're sure to see several snowmobiles zipping along the side of the road. Whatever your fancy, be sure to finish off your outdoor activity with a cup of hot cocoa brimming with mini marshmallows.

Don't leave the kids behind on a trip to the U.P. There are several sledding/tubing hills around. Every local community has its own 'secret' hills, so be sure to ask! If you're looking for something a little more

daring than regular sledding, do not miss the Lucy Hill Naturbahn Luge in Negaunee. This is an actual luge hill where Olympians train. Open most weekends for public use, the area uses the bottom 1/6 of the track for family fun. Equipment and instructions are provided. The fee is \$10/child and \$20/adult. This is North America's only "naturbahn" luge track, so it's a unique experience. (A "Naturbahn" luge is a natural, un-refrigerated hill bordered by boards and snow banks. This is in contrast to the luge tracks you see on the Winter Olympics that are man made, refrigerated tracks.)

Come February, there are sled dog races. The U.P. 200 takes place around where I live and attracts "mushers" from all over. The kids and bundle up, go stand on the sidelines and cheer while the mushers and dogs take off on their race! This is also a good month to go ice fishing. Driving by local lakes, you will see dozens of shanties spread out on the frozen ice. (Anyone see Grumpy Old Men?) The fishermen put up these little shelters, bore a hole in the ice and fish to their hearts content. February is also the month for Michigan Tech's Winter Carnival. If you take a trip to the far north of the Upper Peninsula, you will have the pleasure of viewing the wonderful ice/snow sculptures that are a big centerpiece of this carnival.

If you are not an outdoorsy person, do not fear. The U.P. is the perfect place to curl up by the fire with a good book while the fluffy flakes fall outside. We have many quaint [bed and breakfasts](#), so even if your traveling party goes out for a day of snowy fun, you can stay back and relax. This is also hockey country, and the local universities put on some great home games. Be sure to visit the local restaurants and shops and pick up a [pasty](#), some cudighi (Italian sausage) and some [Trenary toast](#).

If you're looking for a specific area or activity while you are here, don't be afraid to ask. Yoopers are extremely friendly and we want to share our winter wonderland with you!

About The Author: Tina Peterson has lived in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan her entire life, the last 11 having been spent in Gwinn, MI. Her favorite winter activity is building snowmen with her 9 and 11 year old sons. Tina enjoys traveling throughout the country, even flying to Boston and Connecticut for PassPorter meets. Tina is a proud member of the PassPorter message guide team.

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