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PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

While Elkhart and its surrounding counties offer more entertainment and leisure opportunities than the vast stretches of farmland belie, many Hoosiers want to venture farther afield during summer vacation. And this is when living at the "Crossroads of America" pays off. Big cities? Check. Miles of sandy beaches? Check and mark. And don't forget the wooded hills of southern Indiana or the roaring waterfalls of Hocking Hills State Park in Ohio — all just a few hours away.

For those in search of more shopping, dining and entertainment options, there's no place like nearby metropolises: Chicago, Indianapolis or Grand Rapids.

Chicago, Illinois



The Windy City has enough options for a whirlwind weekend or a full weeklong vacation no matter your interests.

Shoppers often head straight for the



Magnificent Mile, an eight-block stretch of stores along North Michigan Avenue; but for those seeking a wider variety of gifts or fashions, several neighborhoods outside downtown offer up their own selection of boutiques.

For a tour of iconic Chicago sites, visit Millennium Park, Navy Pier, Skydeck



Chicago in the Willis Tower (formerly the Sears Tower Skydeck), the Art Institute of Chicago and the Lincoln Park Zoo (free admission). And those travelers who'd rather vacation off the beaten path? The City of Chicago boasts it has more than 200 theaters, more than 7,300 restaurants, 15 miles of beaches, 552 parks and 19 miles of lakefront bicycle paths. It's no wonder the city welcomes more than 50 million visitors each year.

Indianapolis, Indiana



Indiana's capital city, named a "Hottest Destination of 2018" by Condé Nast Traveler, is smaller than Chicago, but the resulting manageability and walkability make it an ideal vacation destination.



Nate Swick, communications coordinator at Visit Indy, said, "Every year, the winner of the Indy 500 has to make 800 left turns before taking the checkered flag. In Indy, there's a surprise around every one of them. From fanatics and families to foodies and art aficionados, Indy is sort of a one stop shop for all people. Highly accessible and just a couple hours south, there are thousands of ways to discover your own surprises." According to Visit Indy, the city is taking its arts and culture "to the next level" in 2018. The Phoenix Theatre, Indiana's only professional contemporary theater, recently opened its doors. The opening was followed closely by a renovation of The Cabaret, a hub of

cocktails and nighttime entertainment.

Both history buffs and foodies can indulge at the Indianapolis City Market, a giant hall of food vendors established in 1866, in the heart of the city. The Children's Museum of Indianapolis is another family-friendly option for a rainy day.

For sports fans, the city offers one of America's favorite pastimes — baseball — at Victory Field, a vintage basketball court at the NCAA Hall of Fame, Lucas Oil Stadium and a plethora of sports bars for those who didn't snag a ticket in time.



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