



This page: The Drive-In in Taylors Falls has been serving up homemade root beer and fast-food treats for five decades. Opposite: Lindstrom Bakery's one-of-a-kind donuts.



No Cabin? No Problem

JUST AN HOUR AWAY FROM THE TWIN CITIES, THE TOWNS OF LINDSTROM, CENTER CITY AND TAYLORS FALLS OFFER A SURPRISING, COMMITMENT-FREE LAKE VACATION.

By Mecca Bos



The tiny Main Street of Lindstrom, Minn., is a welcome respite from the speedy din of Highway 8. It's here that soul-sucking exurbia gives way to boat rentals, liquor stores and gas stations advertising live bait. The blink-and-you'll miss it sister city to Tingsryd, Sweden still boasts a small-town butcher and baker and, while I didn't find a candlestick maker, there are plenty of antiques to be found.

To me Lindstrom's Main Street is like the familiar page out of a storybook—one you've had read to you 346 times—that tells you you're getting to the good part: the Swedish blue and yellow, the Dalecarlian-horse red and the Dairy Queen cone (the ultimate reward for making it almost an hour in the car—an eternity for a little kid).

My grandfather, on a butcher's salary, was able to support four kids and a stay-at-home wife, pay the mortgage on a humble East St. Paul bungalow and purchase a tiny, one-bedroom cabin with no plumbing on North Center Lake near Lindstrom. It's here that those four kids, and the kids of those kids (and now their kids) spend the fondest moments of their lives. The meals? Sunfish and crappies from the lake, sweet corn from the fields, apples from the apple tree. You know, local food. And when the grandparents were in need of a stiff cocktail and a bloody burger, they brought us down to the local dive bar.

Years later, some things are as indelible as a milfoil-filled Minnesota lake (the burger bar is still there). Yet, change is inevitable (the tiny grab-and-go DQ window is now a sparkling, sprawling Brazier). And some things get better (the advent of local wine and buffalo).

If none of your kin has a little shack on the lake, my condolences. But, you can still do Lindstrom, Center City and Taylors Falls and be back in the Cities in time for supper—not that you'll have room.

Before you hit Lindstrom's Main Street, follow the massive signage for **WineHaven**. Whatever your feelings about Minnesota wine (I find it incredibly sweet), this is the perfect time of year to take in the winery's scenic landscape and do a little impromptu tasting. Whether or not you decide to bring home some bottles (the rhubarb wine is right at home on a picnic blanket) it's a charming way to spend an hour. Private tours require advance reservations. 9757 292nd St., Chisago City; 651.257.1017; winehaven.com

Hang a left on Andrews Avenue off of Highway 8 in Center City, then take a quick right up the embankment onto Summit. There ain't much there (just a couple antique shops), but **Al's Center Saloon** is a hidden gem. Al's is just a little old dive bar—the kind where the bartender grills your burger. But what a wonderful burger it is, complete with heavily griddled and caramelized onions. 325 Summit Ave., Center City; 651.257.5757; alscentersaloon.com



Jump back on 8 and head to Taylors Falls' main street, Bench Street. In the summer, this place will be jumpin'. If you've got any room in your gut after Al's (consider hiking the Interstate State Park to burn off some calories) your choices run the gamut. **The Drive-In** is a five-decade-old carhop with homemade root beer, malts, dogs and burgers. If you're planning to make an evening of it, check out **Tangled Up in Blue**, the only fine-dining emporium in the area, with a standard but thoughtful lineup of rich players: carpaccio, crab cakes, lobster claws, filet mignon and more. *The Drive-In*, 572 Bench St., Taylors Falls; 651.465.7831; taylorsfalls.com. *Tangled Up in Blue*, 425 Bench St., Taylors Falls; 651.465.1000; tangledupinbluerestaurantintaylorsfalls.com



Looking for something a little more lowbrow? **Border Bar and Grill** is not the kind of place I'd ordinarily recommend; they've got \$2 "mystery shots" and cherry bombs (maraschino cherries soaked in Everclear) for a quarter. This is a real drinker's bar, and you're not here for the atmosphere. You've been warned. 367 Bench St., Taylors Falls; 651.465.1011

Heading west, hit **Eichten's Market and Café** (look for the giant mouse statue and roaming buffalo) for an on-the-go snack of lemon-pepper buffalo jerky and six-year aged goosda, and enjoy them while wandering through the Fellini-esque **Franconia Sculpture Park**, where you'll repeat this mantra: "WTF?" (In a good way.) *Eichten's*, 16440 Lake Blvd., Center City; 651.257.1566; theichtensbistro.com. *Franconia Sculpture Park*, 29836 St. Croix Trail, Franconia Township; 651.257.6668; franconia.org

Next, park the car in Lindstrom and roam around. Make sure you hit **Deutschland Meats**, where German-born butcher Martin Ziegler twists up traditional handmade bratwursts, blood sausage and even chorizo. (Ziegler also runs *The Glockenspiel* in St. Paul.) Bring some home along with a sackful of pastries from **Lindstrom Bakery**, where the Scandinavian donuts, heavy-crisp on the outside and tender as brioche within, are the real deal. A half-dozen will run you under a five-spot (the place hasn't changed in 30 years). Don't eat 'em yet though, because you'll be stopping at the **DQ** for a cone on the way out of town. A trip to Lindstrom isn't proper without this all-important tradition. *Deutschland Meats*, 12825 Lake Blvd., Lindstrom; 651.257.1128; deutschlandmeats.com; *Lindstrom Bakery*, 12830 Lake Blvd., Lindstrom; 651.257.1374; *Dairy Queen*, 13105 Lake Blvd., Lindstrom; 651.257.2536; dairyqueen.com +