List view
Map view

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Dan Morey's guides

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Chautauqua Lake: A New York Gem

Families
Foodies
History

Chautauqua Lake has been a big part of my life. When I was a kid, we rented summer cottages. I caught perch and bluegill from our dock and walked up the shore to Midway Park. As a teenager, I worked at the Chautauqua Institution, checking peoples' gate passes at the entrance to that paradise of art, culture and recreation. In my twenties, I played golf and partied with friends at the Village Casino. Nowadays, I fish for bass and musky, listen to music at the Institution, and enjoy fantastic food and drink. These are my favorite spots around the lake.

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Bemus Point

Bemus Point is a small village on the east side of Lake Chautauqua, first settled in 1805. A ferry service started in 1811, making it much easier to reach from the western shore. Now there's a bridge as well. There are only around 200 permanent residents here, but you'd never know it in the summer when the village streets are crowded with tourists. They come for the great restaurants, quirky shopping, live music, golf, and fishing and boating. My favorite place on Chautauqua!

See more

SKILLMANS
SINCE 1908

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Skillmans

9 Main St, Bemus Point, NY 14712, USA

When this beloved Bemus Point store opened in 1908 it was called Skillman Bro's General Merchandise. The Skillmans sold everything under the sun and their slogan was "If we don't have it, you don't need it." The store is still owned and operated by the Skillman family (4th generation), but the inventory is less diverse. These days Skillmans is known for preppy, nautical-style clothing, upscale women's wear, and decorative home (and boat) items. They also carry souvenirs, gifts, kids' stuff and gourmet food. Prices tend to be high, but if you hit the end of season sales bargains can be had.

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Midway State Park

4859 New York 430, Bemus Point, NY, United States

I spent many hours and many quarters in this classic Chautauqua Lake amusement park when I was a kid. Most of those quarters ended up in the arcade's Kung Fu Master video game. They don't have Kung Fu Master anymore, but the arcade is still open and full of cool games for today's youngsters. The rides at Midway are mostly geared toward children as well, and the nice picnic areas make it a great family destination. Be sure to check out the historic roller rink!

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L.S. AERO MARINE

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Lawson Center

73 Lakeside Dr, Bemus Point, NY 14712, USA

The Lawson Boat and Engine Company (later L.S. Aero Marine) was the first chandlery on Lake Chautauqua to sell affordable family boats. This historic Bemus Point building (opened in 1918, rebuilt in 1947) is now a museum dedicated Chautauqua's boating heritage. Inside you'll find beautiful antique boats, outboard/inboard motors and vintage photos from the days when huge steamboats plied the lake's waters. There are lots of kids' activities, too, including a racing boat simulator. Don't miss the Boat Shop and its selection of nautical souvenirs.

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Village Casino

1 Lakeside Dr, Bemus Point, NY 14712

The Casino opened in 1930 and played host to the finest bands of the swing era: Goodman, Basie, Ellington, Cab Calloway...they all played the upstairs ballroom. These days, the bands play downstairs and tend to rock rather than swing. I love to eat on the deck here, looking out over the docks: bang bang shrimp tacos, char-grilled salmon, the famous chicken wings-- all good. Inside there are video games for the kids and an ice cream shop. No Chautauqua vacation is complete without a stop at the Casino.

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See-Zurh House

14 Main St, Bemus Point, NY 14712-0633

This is one of the most affordable restaurants in Bemus Point. Their beef-on-weck and fish fry are classics. The dining room doesn't have much ambiance, but you can always sit in the bar if you don't mind a bit of noise. There's a shaded porch (always lively) for drinking, too. Unlike most Bemus eateries, the See-Zurh stays open all year, making it a local favorite. Have had many enjoyable evenings here in the dead of winter.

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Stow Ferry

Stow Ferry, Chautauqua Lake, NY, USA

Before they built the Veterans Memorial Bridge, this ferry was the fastest way to get from one side of Chautauqua Lake to the other. It's been crossing the narrowest part of the lake (Bemus Point to Stow, 968 feet) since 1811. A crossing on the Stow Ferry is steeped in nostalgia and wonderfully scenic, but it can still be practical as well. On busy weekends, when it's hard to find good parking in Bemus Point, we'll park the car in Stow and walk onto the ferry. It drops you right at the Village Casino. The ferry is currently undergoing repairs and might not operate during the 2018 season.

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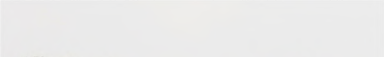

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Hotel Lenhart

20-22 Lakeside Drive, PO Box 449, Bemus Point, NY

Sitting in a rocking chair on the porch of the Lenhart, sipping a cocktail as the sun goes down. This is one of Chautauqua Lake's quintessential experiences. The Hotel Lenhart has been in the same family since it opened in 1880, and not a lot has changed. There are no TVs in the rooms or public areas. The rooms on the upper floors have a sink, but no bathroom (they're in the hall). Rates include a delicious breakfast in the big Victorian dining room. The Lamplighter is my favorite bar in Bemus Point: big band music and a big musky on the wall.

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Ellicottville Brewing on Chautauqua

57 Lakeside Dr, Bemus Point, NY 14712, USA

This brewpub opened in 2016 at the former Surf Club. I miss the Surf Club, but Ellicottville Brewing is a great replacement. They've been making excellent craft beer in the NY ski town of Ellicottville since 1995 and have recently expanded around the state with some very nice brewpubs. You'll pay 15 bucks for a burger and 19 for fish tacos, so it certainly isn't the cheapest place around, but after a couple Stainless Steel IPAs you won't much care.

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COPPOLA'S
PIZZARIA
567-4

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Coppola's Pizzaria

20 Main St, Bemus Point, NY 14712

Though Coppola's is one of the newer restaurants in Bemus Point, its recipes go back three generations, all the way to Collepietro, Italy. This friendly, family-run pizzeria does excellent lasagna, salads, subs, wraps, calzones, and, of course, pizza and wings. There are ten specialty pizzas including a popular deep dish. It can be hard to eat out in Bemus Point without spending a lot of money, but that isn't the case at Coppola's. Prices are cheap enough to feed the whole family. Takeout and delivery are available, and they're open year-round.

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Mayville

The village of Mayville, on the north end of Lake Chautauqua, was first settled in 1804. The current population is around 1,700. Thanks to its great restaurants and proximity to the Chautauqua Institution, Mayville gets very busy during the summer. There's plenty to do in the winter as well. The ice fishing and snowmobiling are fantastic, and the President's Day Weekend Winter Festival always draws a big crowd. An ice castle is built on the shores of the lake if weather permits.

See more

Andriaccio's

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Andriaccios Restaurant

4837 West lake Rd, Mayville, NY 14757

Andriaccio's has been serving up top-notch Italian-American food across from the Chautauqua Institution since 1982. The menu has gotten bigger and bigger over the years and now includes things like salmon ratatouille and an organic spinach Cobb salad. Of course, the mainstays are still available: pasta, pizza (lots of specialty pies), chicken wings, calzones and their famous hot and cold bombers (subs, 8 or 12 inch). Nick's Homemade Super Sausage hot bomber has been on the menu since '82 and is as good (and as popular) as it's ever been.

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Lakeside Park

Mayville, NY 14757, USA

Mayville's Lakeside Park is full of things to do: shuffleboard, tennis, baseball, swimming, picnicking...plus a nice playground for the kids. The tennis courts are lighted, so you can play in the cooler nighttime hours. There's a bathhouse for changing into swimsuits, and numerous picnic tables and grills (plus a pavilion) for cooking out. There's a boat launch here as well, with plenty of parking for trailers. Come February, the President's Day Weekend Winter Festival is held at Lakeside Park with concessions, children's activities and an ice castle. Get a hot chocolate and take a walk on frozen Lake Chautauqua!

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Pearl Gravit Memorial Park

67-89 Valley St, Mayville, NY 14757, USA

This park in Mayville has a baseball diamond with bleachers and a wire backstop as well as acres of fields and trees to explore. There's a little creek too, lined with ferns and tall grass, which attracts wildlife like frogs and birds. Often very quiet, Pearl Gravit Park is a nice place to get away from the summer crowds. You can walk dogs, take exercise, or even have a picnic. Though not a usual tourist stop, I find it very relaxing here.

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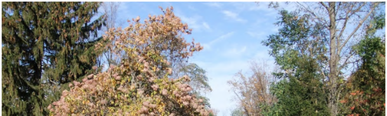

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Chautauqua Cemetery

4949 W Lake Rd, Mayville, NY 14757, USA

This beautiful cemetery along Lake Road outside Mayville is the final resting place of many prominent Chautauquans, including former Institution president Arthur Bestor. There are some really interesting memorial stones. Don't miss the giant Masonic orb in the Gornell plot. The nature here is just as fascinating as the sculpture. There are hydrangea bushes that have reached the size of trees--gorgeous in fall when their colors change to softer autumn tones. The Chautauqua Cemetery is great place for a walk any time of year.

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LAKEVIEW
Hotel & Restaurant
at the Docks
GREAT FOOD · GREAT PRICES
Lunch · Dinner · Salad Bar
Beef on Weck · Wings · Fish Fry
BEEF ON WECK
CHICKEN WINGS
SALAD BAR

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Lakeview Hotel and Restuarant

13 Water Street, Mayville, NY 14757

The Lakeview is right next-door to the Docks restaurant on the Mayville waterfront. Both places are operated by the same folks: the Docks specializes in seafood, while the Lakeview offers more affordable fare like Beef on Weck and pulled pork sandwiches. The Lakeview bar has a pool table and dart board and stays open till 2 a.m. all year round. In summer you can eat on the patio or upstairs deck. There's a boarding house out back that was built in the 1880s for Chautauqua steamship captains. Rooms and apartments are still available for rent. Don't worry, they have been updated since 1880.

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Chautauqua Belle

78 Water St, Mayville, NY 14757, USA

The Chautauqua Belle is one of only five operating steamboats in North America. It was launched in 1976 to celebrate the U.S. Bicentennial. I did the historical cruise, which includes commentary from an expert guide, and really enjoyed it. Snacks, cocktails, beer and soft drinks are available for purchase on board. They also do lunch and dinner cruises and fall foliage trips. The Belle calls at many ports around Chautauqua including the Institution and Midway Park. No better way to cruise the lake than in a real steam-powered paddle-wheeler...just like the old days!

See more

The Watermark

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The Watermark

188 s. erie st., Mayville, NY 14757

This is the place for serious seafood on Lake Chautauqua. From sea bass to halibut to tuna nicoise...fish junkies are in heaven. The Seafood Tower is fantastic: blue crab, shrimp, avocado and tomato, stacked and chilled with Old Bay aioli. They even have soft-shelled crab. Steak and pasta are also available. Prices are on the high side, but worth it for such admirable variety. The Watermark is right on the lake, so you'll want to take advantage of their outdoor seating on nice days. And feel free to arrive by boat: a dock is available.

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Chautauqua Harbor House Restaurant

95 W Lake Rd, Mayville, NY 14757, USA

Most people remember this place as Dick's Harbor House, an old-school diner with a good fish fry. It's under new management now, and they've really spiffed the joint up with a new coat of paint and lots of plants inside. The food is great at lunch and dinner, but the breakfast (especially the omelets) really gets raves. They don't serve alcohol here, so it's mainly popular with families and old folks, but hey, without booze on your bill you'll walk away with a lot more in your wallet.

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Webb's Captain's Table

115 West Lake Road, Mayville, NY 14757

Webb's started in the 1940s when Paul and Nadine Webb purchased The Mooring Bit diner ("Where boating folks stop for Cokes") in Mayville on Lake Chautauqua. Over the years it has expanded to become a year-round hotel with a candy shop (try the sponge candy), mini-golf course, and the family's famous restaurant the Captain's Table. In winter, the dining room is kept warm with a crackling fire. In summer we dine upstairs on the outdoor deck overlooking the lake. I love the Fisherman's Platter, which includes scallops, shrimp, whitefish, stuffed devil's crab and lobster. Summer also brings live music, which is almost always acoustic.

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Jeffery K Skyscanner

Chautauqua Institution

1 Ames Ave, Chautauqua, NY 14722

The Chautauqua Institution is many things: summer resort, cultural/educational center, religious community, historic district... You can play tennis in the morning, attend a lecture in the afternoon, and hit a concert by a popular act like the Avett Brothers in the amphitheater come evening. I enjoy the opera, theater and Chautauqua Symphony. Sometimes we go on Sunday, when there's no gate fee, just to walk around the grounds and admire the Victorian architecture or take a swim at the beach. It's really an endlessly fascinating place.

See more

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Athenaeum Hotel

3 S. Lake Dr, Chautauqua, NY 14722

The shores of Lake Chautauqua used to be home to many grand Victorian hotels. Only two survive: the Lenhart in Bemus Point and the grande dame Athenaeum in the Chautauqua Institution. The Athenaeum opened in 1881 and has remained the region's premiere lodging option. Standard rooms go for $350 per night, and a 3 night stay is currently required. If that sounds too pricey, you can opt for dinner in the hotel's Heirloom Restaurant or just have a drink on the famous veranda.

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Tally Ho Hotel

16 Morris Ave, Chautauqua, NY 14722

No two rooms are quite alike in this quirky historic hotel. You can get anything from a full apartment (up to 6 guests) to a standard room. Most rooms have a balcony and air conditioning. Location is perfect (just off Bestor Plaza in the Chautauqua Institution), but the real highlight is the restaurant. We dine here often before attending performances at the amphitheater, Norton Hall or elsewhere. You can get the buffet or order from the menu; both are great and very affordable. Try to get a table on the veranda.

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St. Elmo Accommodations

1 Pratt Avenue, Chautauqua, NY 14722

This condo complex replaced the old St. Elmo Hotel in 1988. Because of its recent vintage it lacks the historic charm Chautauqua is known for, though the decor is neo-Victorian. It's located in the heart of the Institution on Bestor Plaza. You can easily walk to all the attractions. Studios and one bedroom suites are available, with kitchens. During the season, a minimum one week stay is required. There's an onsite spa, shops and La Familia restaurant, which does great Italian dinners and even has an opera singing chef.

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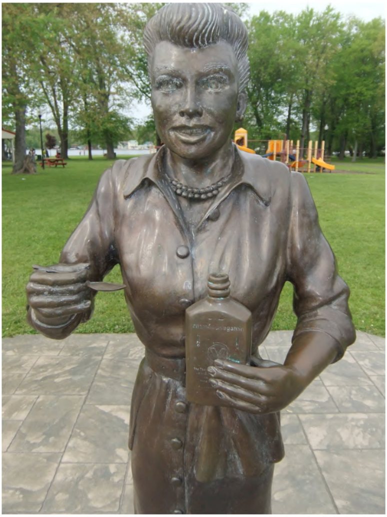

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Lucille Ball Memorial Park

21 Boulevard Ave, Jamestown, NY 14701, USA

Lucille Ball, the great comedic actress, grew up in the village of Celoron on Lake Chautauqua. The park that bears her name is the home port of the Summer Wind cruise ship; it has a boat launch, playground, baseball field and picnic facilities, but is famous for its 2009 statue known as "Scary Lucy." The statue is so bad it went viral in 2015 and travelers from as far away as Japan have been coming to see it ever since. A new, much better, statue of Lucy was unveiled in 2016, but everyone still wants to see Scary Lucy.

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Long Point State Park

4459 NY-430, Bemus Point, NY 14712, United States

Long Point is a beautiful 360-acre state park on Lake Chautauqua. There's a guarded swimming beach, a marina and boat launch, hiking trails, picnic pavilions, playgrounds, lots of spots for fishing (including a pier) and a large bathhouse for changing. In winter you can cross country ski, snowmobile or ice fish. The vehicleuse entry fee is $7 when the beach is open and $6 when it isn't. If you show up after 6 p.m. (or 4 p.m. Monday through Wednesday) entry is free, and you still have plenty of time to walk the dogs or catch some fish.

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Hogan's Hut General Store

3503 Old Bridge Rd, Stow, NY 14785, USA

Hogan's Hut in Stow has long been my favorite store on Chautauqua Lake. You can get everything you need here: gas, beer, ice, propane, fishing tackle, bait, snacks, t-shirts and sweatshirts, any odds and ends you might need at a cottage. They do great food, too. Ice cream and subs and hoagies. I love the capicola and the Tom's Point turkey. And speaking of Tom's Point: the trail head is just behind the store. If you're hiking toward evening, make sure you pick up some mosquito repellent at the Hut.

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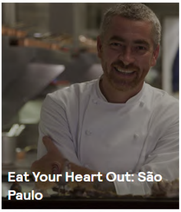

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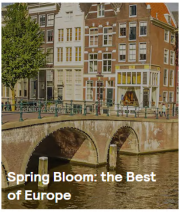

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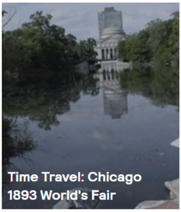

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