



Mission Point Resort

Mackinac Island (pronounced “Macki-naw”) is a hidden gem off the coast of northern Michigan with a bit of a 19th century feel: No automobiles are allowed. “In 1898, cars were taking off, and the city of Mackinac Island decided they were a threat and banned them,” explains Bradley McCallum, general manager of Mission Point Resort, the largest hotel on the island. “That still exists today.”

Getting to the resort takes a few more steps than most hotels require, but it’s not a deterrent to the many faith-based groups that host conferences and retreats here each year. Most come via a 20- to 45-minute ferry ride from one of two ports, one at Mackinaw City and one at St. Ignace. The ports are drivable from several large Midwestern cities: about four hours from Detroit and Grand Rapids, and about six from Chicago. “It’s quite a common drive-in destination,” say McCallum. Once on Mackinac Island, guests come upon a four-block section filled with shops and restaurants, and the 242-room Mission Point Resort is about a 10-minute walk beyond that.

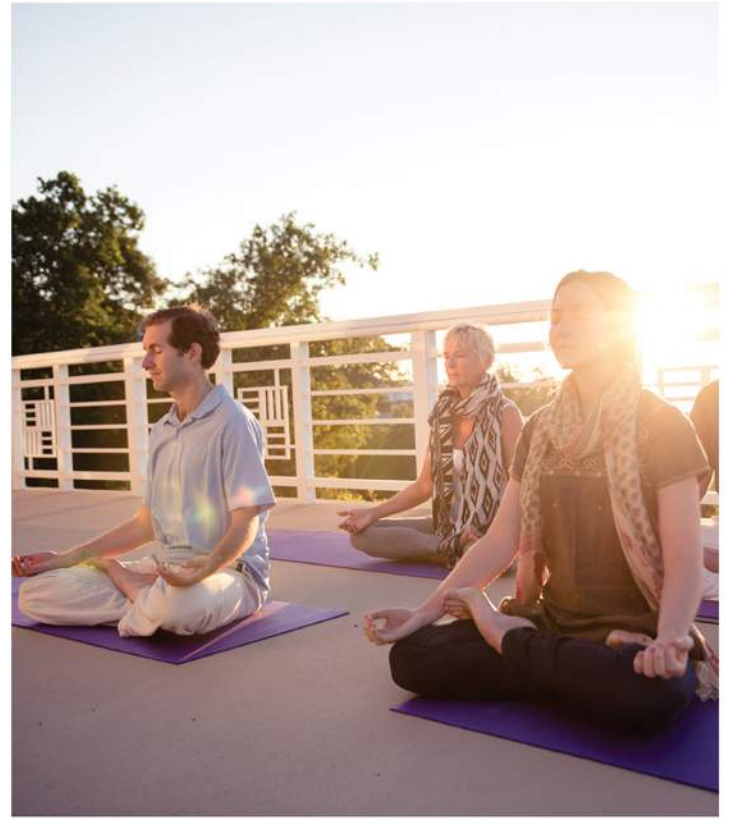
Eighty percent of the island is designated as state park land, so all of the activities and amenities are packed onto the bottom side. Given the heavily wooded areas, meadows and hiking and biking paths, outdoor activities reign here. “It’s really a place unlike anywhere else,” says McCallum.

And it’s no wonder the island draws conservative groups such as Church of God, that can really get away from it all and find safe spaces for personal reflection. “They love coming because of the traditionalism and lack of what they perceive as threats to their beliefs,” says McCallum. Many of the Church of God attendees take part in biking, hiking and worship sessions. The resort also hosts a large Lutheran youth conference every year for 600-700 teens. “It has a nice element of safety and security for that age group,” McCallum notes. The group’s days are usually filled with workshops and speakers in the morning and volunteer activities in the afternoon. Concerts at the on-site theater or sound stage or bonfires on the lawn by the water often take place in the evenings.

Given its location, the island and all of its hotels are seasonal, operating May 1 through Nov. 1 each year. The best months for groups are May through June and September through October, as the summer months are heavy leisure times. —KO

Insider Tip

If you’re hosting a youth event, make sure to ask for Mac the Moose. The resort’s unofficial mascot gets in costume, runs around with the kids and hosts story time by the fire with milk and cookies. “Everyone loves him,” says McCallum.



The Art of Living Retreat Center

Serenity is the focus for many faith-based organizations meeting at The Art of Living Retreat Center. Tucked away in the Blue Ridge Mountains in Boone, North Carolina, the center is designed to be a place of tranquility and seclusion for groups.

Groups of 25 to 3,200 will find dining, accommodations, meeting space, spa and fitness activities on-site. The 17,500-sq.-ft. Main Hall, the center’s largest of three group spaces, has mountain views to remind guests of their immersion in nature. A group of yoga instructors from Lotus Pond Center for Yoga and Health in Tampa stayed at the center for two weeks in March, using each of the spaces for education sessions and training. They were particularly impressed with the Shankara Ayurveda Spa, where treatments are designed to help guests detox based on their body composition, says Dr. Venkat Srinivasan, manager of operations and guest experience.

This holistic center is alcohol- and drug-free, and all of the food served is vegetarian. Many of the greens used in the kitchen come from the on-site garden. “This diet is more supportive of the inner journey—it’s easily digestible,” says Srinivasan. “Our chef creates tasty and nutritious meals, ruining the misconception that vegetarian food isn’t tasty.”

Disconnecting from technology is another encouraged behavior at the center, for groups who desire to. Meeting spaces have audiovisual equipment and sleeping rooms have optional Wi-Fi, but because of the property’s location in the mountain range, cell service can be spotty. The Art of Living staff suggests guests abstain from using their phones while on-site for a more serene experience. —Natalie Dupuis

Insider Tip

Take an afternoon hike to Green Hole. Srinivasan says it’s worth the trek to see the waterfall and spend time relaxing next to the oasis.