

Discover the winning ways of Wisconsin's Walworth County

While there are countless dairymen in Wisconsin, there likely is only one Tevye. Make a date to visit him at the village of Anatevka, where he worries constantly about finding suitable matches for his five daughters.

Travel to Fort Atkinson, tucked into the southeast corner of Wisconsin, to find yourself in 1905 Russia on the eve of revolution. Your passport is The Fireside Dinner Theatre's superb production of "Fiddler on the Roof," a Broadway hit musical that captured nine Tony awards.

First-rate theater is but one reason to travel in and around Walworth County, best known for the popular resort town of Lake Geneva. Explore the county and you'll discover the East Troy Electric Railroad (where you might book space on its dinner train). You'll find sustenance at the nearby Elegant Farmer where specialties are cider-baked ham and apple pie baked in a brown bag — both of which are elegant, indeed.

Maybe you'll opt to spend time hiking or biking the surrounding Kettle Moraine State Forest, making your headquarters at Hamilton House, a bed-and-breakfast in the lively town of Whitewater (home of a campus of the University of Wisconsin). Occupying an 1860s Second Empire mansion, this bed-and-breakfast offers private fireplaces and whirlpools and eight guest rooms themed to



Catch a performance of "Fiddler on the Roof" through May 27.

COURTESY OF FIRESIDE THEATRE

French impressionists.

You'll find plenty to do as you wander this pleasant town, including band concerts and a history museum housed in Whitewater's Victorian Gothic train depot, designed in 1890. Outdoor activities include boating or fishing on four nearby lakes and golf at Spring Creek, a sporty par 3 course. There are bike rentals available as you strike out to explore state forest trails.

Don't miss a stop at The Fuzzy Pig, two miles south of Whitewater. It occupies renovated barns converted into a mall so large that you almost need cell

phones to keep track of your group. It has furniture, stained glass, antiques, bath and body shop, women's clothing boutique — and a whole lot more — as well as a 1950s-style malt shop and a restaurant.

It was in late autumn 1907 that the first interurban train pulled into the village of East Troy, linking it to an interurban electric railway system that would cover 250 miles of Wisconsin. During summer months, long excursion trains came from Milwaukee for the "pleasant scenery" (as described by railway literature) of the lakes and rolling hills of

Walworth County. One-way fares from Milwaukee to East Troy were 65 cents.

Through efforts of dedicated volunteers, you can relive a small part of that journey via a 10-mile round trip aboard a restored trolley of the East Troy Electric Railroad. A variety of operational rolling stock includes a classic arch-window wooden interurban electric trolley car built in 1908 and retired from service 67 years ago (when it was used as a summer cottage along Lake Michigan's shore).

Several times a year dinner trains offer two-hour excursions, four-course dinners and full bar. (They sell out quickly; be sure to book well in advance.) Also popular are Brew Trains, offering Wisconsin's favorite beverage from regional microbreweries. Nine Brew Trains run on Saturdays May through October.

Trips run between the East Troy depot and Mukwonago, home of the Elegant Farmer. Enjoy lunch of slow-roasted pulled pork or a sandwich of hickory-smoked cider ham partnered with creamy Muenster cheese on a Kaiser roll. Baking apple pie in a paper bag produces a cross between pie and cobbler with crunchy top crust and flaky bottom crust, filled with tender Ida Red apples and simmered fruit juices. Pies also combine apples with rhubarb, blueberry, peaches or raspberries.

Other favorites at this sprawling bakery/deli, which incorporates a massive 1930s dairy barn, include homemade soup, charcoal grilled bratwurst and award-winning cheeses from around the state.

Some travelers are wary of dinner theaters, believing, with

If you go



Information: Walworth County Visitors' Bureau (800) 395-8687, www.visitwalworthcounty.com; Fireside Dinner Theatre (800) 477-9505, www.firesidetheatre.com; Wisconsin Department of Tourism (800) 432-8747, www.travelwisconsin.com.

Mileage: Whitewater is about 110 miles northwest of Chicago.

some justification, that they too often get neither right. Not so with the Fireside Dinner Theatre. It may have sprouted in a Wisconsin cornfield, but it produces quality food and entertainment. The restaurant dates back to 1964; the theater opened in 1978.

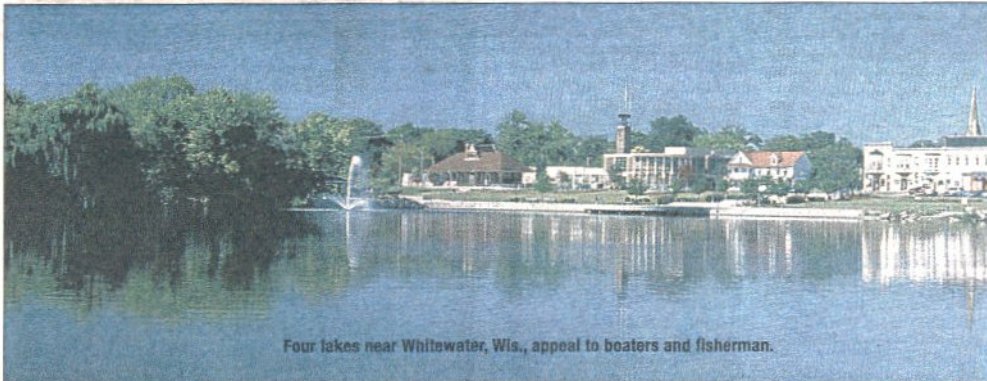
The menu offers the likes of beef Wellington, veal piccata and Chilean sea bass, prepared by a kitchen staff that includes graduates of the prestigious Culinary Institute of America. Broadway-caliber actors are recruited in New York, with sometimes as many as 700 hopefuls auditioning for as few as 20 parts. Costumes, sets, lighting and choreography also are in the hands of seasoned professionals.

Nor is there a revolving door of productions. Usually, a show enjoys a close to two-month run with 10 performances a week.

Fireside sprawls over two acres and has a 652-seat theater, dining for 1,000 at a separate restaurant (no-rattling dishes to disrupt the show), five gift shops, a sunken lounge and an onsite bakery.

However, you'll need to go soon to catch Tevye and his brood. "Fiddler on the Roof" runs through May 27. Then it is Oscar and Felix, that decidedly "Odd Couple," playing May 31 through July 29.

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Four lakes near Whitewater, Wis., appeal to boaters and fishermen.

COURTESY OF WHITEWATER TOURISM COUNCIL