


Step Back in Time on Mackinac Island

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Pronounced *Mackinaw*, Mackinac Island is a pristine island filled with charm and character-filled houses lining each street. Horses' hooves echo as buggies carry ferry loads of visitors from the dock.



View from horse and buggy on Mackinac Island – Photo Melody Wren

An island in Lake Huron, it is in the state of Michigan. In the late 19th century, Mackinac Island became a popular tourist attraction. As it has undergone extensive historical preservation and restoration, the entire island is listed as a National Historic Landmark.

No cars are allowed on the island, so visitors rent bikes, take a horse and buggy, or walk, as the small island is very only eight and a half miles long. There are two historic districts in the town, one school, the Governor's mansion, and the majestic resort of the Grand Hotel.

Built in 1885, the Grand Hotel is synonymous with the island. Anyone who talks about the island mentions the hotel even if they aren't staying there as visitors can have afternoon tea, a drink, a meal or a historic tour.



In front of the Grand Hotel for a historic tour by horse and buggy – Photo Melody Wren

The charms of another period are packaged up in the fashionable resort where families used to assemble for the entire summer. Even now, you'll see several generations of families returning year after year for their holiday at the Hotel.

Chenille bedspreads, floral wallpaper and a cool breeze blowing in the window sets the scene for a restful sleep at the epitome of summer resort on Mackinac. The Grand Hotel is is 'grand' enough to have hosted five U.S. presidents including Trueman, Clinton, Bush, Kennedy and Ford.

Toddlers in sports jackets, straw hats and shorts with sisters in Sunday-best dresses scoot through the corridor behind parents heading for afternoon tea or cocktails on the porch. With the constant clomping of horse's hooves outside, you might catch yourself wondering

if you have gone back in time as guests embrace the theme and not only dress accordingly, but also abandon their cell phones for a while.

The hotel is a spectacle of maximalism in décor, boasting boldly wild colours and large furniture. With the largest covered porch in the world, it boasts one hundred rockers, set to admire the lake and garden views.



Porch rockers on the huge veranda of the Grand Hotel – Photo Melody Wren

There are many different restaurants to choose from at The Grand with many opting for the main dining room, a must-see as diners must wear ties and jackets and women must wear skirts or dresses, all rules that apply to the small folks as well. For a more casual vibe, food

can be ordered on the front porch to take in the country air and views, and there's a Sushi restaurant close to the entrance. Leave space for ice cream or fudge. Allergies and special diets are catered to with gluten-free, lactose-free and vegetarian options at each meal.

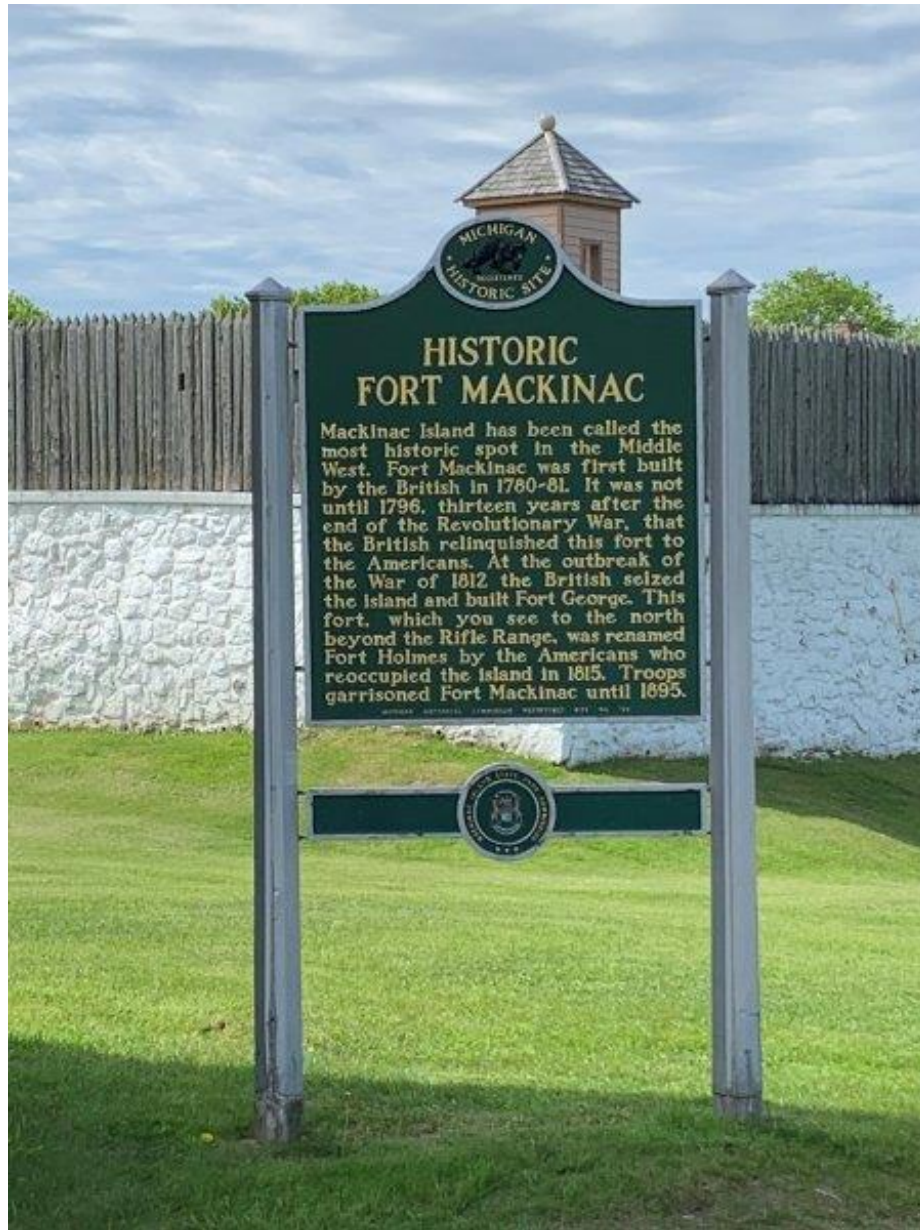
Historian Bob Tagatz gives tours of the hotel daily in which he talks about the evolution of the building with ten different lectures being offered often including information about the décor.

Activities on the island are all about exploring the small island covering 3.8 square miles.

Rent a bike from one of the many bike companies along the main street. There are eighty miles of trails for biking and hiking and an 18-hole golf course on the grounds of the Grand Hotel.

Treat yourself to a horse-and-buggy ride—it's the only place in the country where you can drive yourself. At Jack's Livery stable, a short walk from the Grand Hotel, horses are matched with the renter's experience. Owner Teddy Gough talked us through the route we opted for which took us along the coast and through the residential area of Harrisonville led by a beautiful Percheron. It's a peaceful way to explore the island: \$70 for one hour for two people. Horses are available for riding which can be arranged at the stable as well.

If driving yourself doesn't suit you, opt for a guided historic horse and buggy tour with Mackinac Island Tours. Our guide, Josh Wolford, was very knowledgeable about local history after living on the island for five years.



Fort Mackinac – Photo Melody Wren

Another fascinating way to learn the history of the island is a visit to Fort Mackinac. The Fort was built in 1780 by the British army. Fourteen original buildings and the oldest standing is the hospital. Soldiers dressed in 1880's regalia do demonstrations shooting rifles and a cannon. The soldiers explained their uniforms to the children in the audience saying that their uniform of the 1880s was their version of jeans and t-shirts, told the audience "the soldiers were amongst the worst shots in the world" and "if you can't be the best army in the world, you may as well dress like you are" with the uniforms mirroring those of Prussia with "pickle helmets." (PHOTO). Highly recommend a visit to the Fort as there is so much to see and do for the whole family. In the kid's quarters, they can dress up in historic clothing, learn how to march, and play games. If the weather's pleasant, ask for a table on the outdoor terrace at the tea room overlooking the water.



Fort Mackinac soldiers – Photo Melody Wren

With only 500 residents, the island swells with tourists, as over one million visit annually. In the winter, there are 16-20 horses, but in peak tourist time, there are 600 horses. If you prefer to avoid crowds, Choose your visit so it doesn't line up with school holidays. Anytime you go is a step back in time.

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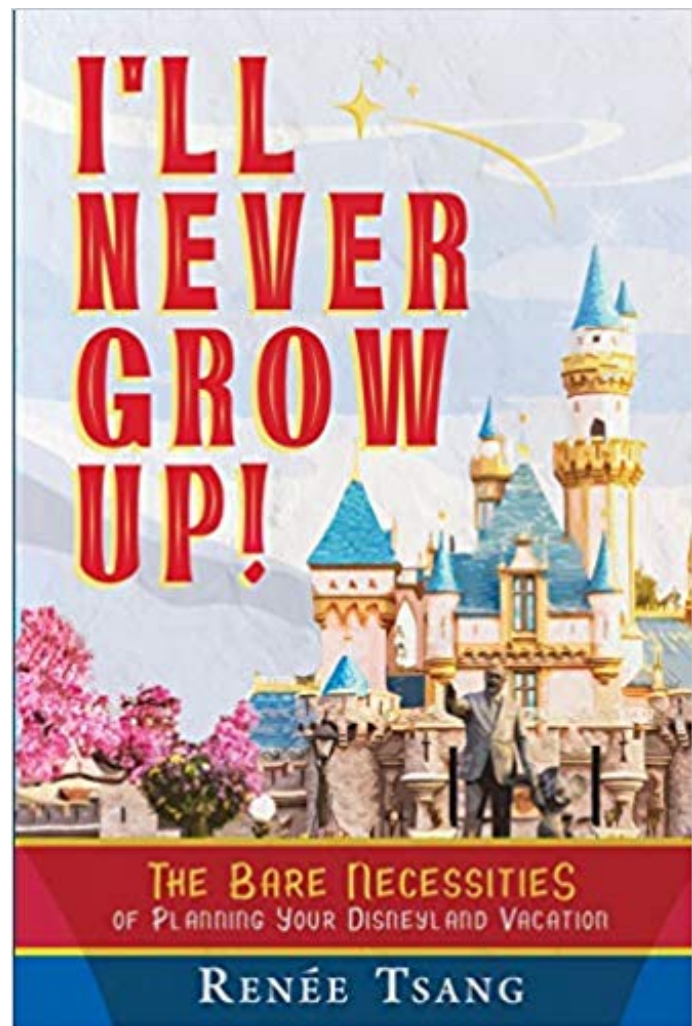
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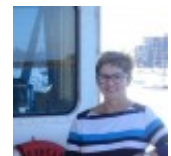
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About The Author

[Melody Wren](#)

Melody is an Ontario based travel writer who believes travel stories are meant to encourage and inspire and considers her age (over 60) a gift in her journeys, bringing wisdom, experience, humour and a major 'if not now, when' attitude to her writing. A formerly nervous traveller, experiential travel



has helped her conquer fears as she snorkelled through the Galapagos islands, glacier trekked in the Northwest Passage, danced around a fire in Africa, learned how to make the perfect tiramisu in Florence, kayaked amongst spawning salmon in Ontario, snow-shoed in Colorado, and sailed in the British Virgin Islands . Her work appears in Canadian Yachting Magazine, Canadian Jewish News, The Toronto Star, Kitchener Waterloo Record, Caribbean Beat Magazine, Cottage Life Magazine, Waypoints Global, Active Over 50, and Inspired Seniors.