Autumn Adventures
Awe-inspiring vistas in the Smokies

Plus
See fall foliage from scenic trains
Harvest fun at farms & festivals
Make plans for a Weston weekend
Mississippi River towns come together for a great getaway.

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY DEBORAH REINHARDT

and Rock Island are in Illinois, while Davenport and Bettendorf are in Iowa. Smaller towns, such as LeClaire, also are in the mix.

The communities are so close that it's easy to visit each one as deftly as the American Pickers fans conquered Antique Archaeology.

Looking for Treasures

Shoppers will love the charming little river town of LeClaire, 15 minutes north of Bettendorf. Stroll Cody Road downtown and stop in any number of shops, Grasshoppers Gifts, Antiques & Wine is housed in a former river pilot home.

My find of the day was Shameless Chocoholic on Jones Street. Among the handmade truffles was a carrot cake bonbon enrobed in white chocolate that contained the flavors of autumn.

Libations Lane is a promotion for Green Tree Brewery, Mississippi River Distilling Co., and Wide River Winery Tasting Room. All within easy walking distance of one another, the businesses offer a free pint glass when a completed punch card is produced. There's also a Wide River tasting room in the Village of East Davenport.

In Davenport, stop in the new studio showroom and tour center for lovely Isabel Bloom sculptures. Bloom was raised in Davenport and studied at the Stone City artist colony that painter Grant Wood organized. Her charming and playful sculptures depict animals, children, and angels. Free one-hour tours at the center are available through reservations to see how the sculptures are made.
THE DRAW OF THE RIVER

Quad Cities' culture is colored by the Mississippi River, which touches the past and present. In LeClaire, visit a simple repository of local history, the Buffalo Bill Museum. William "Buffalo Bill" Cody was born here, so there's a good deal of information about his life as afrontiersman, Army scout, and showman. But part of the museum also has River Pilots' Pier, which interprets the history of area riverboat pilots, including Capt. Philip Sutter, the first licensed to navigate the notorious Rock Island Rapids. Finally, tour the Lone Star steamer attached to the museum.

QUAD CITIES GAMING

Riverboats and gaming have a long history, and the Quad Cities has hosted these boats — now land-based casinos — for more than 25 years. Three casinos are in the area: Isle Casino Hotel in Bettendorf, Jumer's Casino and Hotel in Rock Island, and Rhythm City Casino Resort in Davenport.

Iowa approved riverboat gaming in 1991. Nancy Ballenger, vice president and general manager at Isle Casino Hotel, said their first riverboat began gaming cruises in 1994. In 2004, the state laws changed to allow the boat and expanded buildings to be "over the water." A few years ago, land-based casinos were approved, allowing the casino to expand again. The hotel, Ballenger said, is the largest in Iowa with 509 rooms.

WHERE TO EAT AND SLEEP

The Quad Cities has a large number of quality restaurants, plus locally made wine, beer, spirits, and a James Beard American Classic soda fountain. You'll have no problem eating your way through the weekend.

Take a break from shopping in LeClaire and have lunch at the Blue Iguana Mexican Cantina. Try the roasted veggies quesadillas with the house sangria.

Fans of farm-to-table restaurants will want to try Barley & Rye Bistro in Moline, which serves locally sustainable American cuisine. You can sample from more than 400 bourbons, whiskeys, and ryes at the bar.

Don't leave Moline without visiting Lagomarcino's, an early 20th-century ice cream parlor and confectionery. Homemade ice cream and chocolates are the stars here. The hot fudge sundae comes with a small glass pitcher filled with liquid chocolate with which to dress your ice cream or pour down your throat (for hard-core chocolate lovers). There's another location in Davenport.

Inside the Isle Casino Hotel, Keller's American Grill is a good choice for a fine dinner in a relaxed setting. My short ribs were braised to perfection and served with garlic whipped potatoes. In addition to the satisfactory wine list, there's a good selection of appetizers if you'd rather nosh on something light with cocktails. An inviting couch area with a fireplace was a cozy place to nibble and sip.

Accommodations at the Isle were sleek, spacious, and comfortable. The staff couldn't have been more accommodating. Plus, the hotel is centrally located to explore all of the Quad Cities, so even if you're not big into gaming, the Isle still is a good choice for a hotel.

And the Quad Cities is a perfect choice for a fall weekend escape.

Deborah Reinhardt is managing editor of AAA Midwest Traveler.

BEFORE YOU GO

For more information about the Quad Cities, contact the convention and visitors bureau at (800) 747-7800 or visitquadcities.com.

To visit the Quad Cities, first stop by your nearest AAA service office for maps, reservations, and TourBook® guides. A list of offices to serve you is on page 6. Visit AAA.com/travel for a TripTik® Travel Planner.
Pie fans eat up Quad Cities-style pizza.

With some things — like pizza — it's just best to go the old-school route. Sure, you can find fancy shmancy pizzas wood-fired in brick ovens in the Quad Cities, but for an authentic taste of the locals' spin on the pie, head to Harris Pizza.

Quad Cities-style pizza is a circular pie cut into rectangular strips. The dough has to be hand-tossed with a dust of cornmeal on the bottom. Toppings are usually under a generous amount of melted cheese. And crumbled sausage kissed with fennel is almost always one of the toppings. The red sauce also has a kick from red pepper flakes and/or cayenne, which sets it apart from traditional pizza sauce.

You'll find several places in town that serves Quad Cities-style pizza, but Harris claims to have the original. Leonard and Mary Harris introduced their pizza to the area in the 1960s. Today, the couple's daughter, Kathleen Mosley, and her husband, Greg, run the business. There are Harris Pizza locations in Bettendorf and Davenport in Iowa, as well as Rock Island, Ill.

The Davenport pizzeria's dining room was comfortably sized. It's nothing fancy, but diners have a clean, family-friendly space to enjoy their meal.

When the pizza arrived hot to my table, it was cut into strips, which made it easy to dip into the cup of the signature Gold Rush sauce, a butter and garlic concoction that accompanied the pizza to perfection.

Harris offers 20 specialty pizzas — including their famous taco pizza once enjoyed by singer Elton John — and a German pizza with Canadian bacon, sauerkraut, and mozzarella cheese. Or you can build your own from the list of toppings.

An all-you-can-eat buffet is served Thursday and Friday at lunch and offered for dinner on Wednesday. — Deborah Reinhardt

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**BEFORE YOU GO**

Harris Pizza, (563) 322-2411 or harrispizza.com

Hours: 11 a.m.–8 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday