

Families, Freaks, & Tall Frosty Ones

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In a world of corporate blandness where every strip plaza is the same crap from San Diego to Boston, and we build fake towns like Crocker and Legacy because we let Wal-Mart TM kill off the real-things in places like Kamms, Euclid and Maple Heights, there is Geneva-on-the-Lake. And on this Father's Day, Mansfield Lucas pens an amusing and informative piece about this hidden gem, about an hour east of Cleveland. Happy Fathers Day dads!



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Since gas is like five hundred dollars per gallon, you might want to take a pass on the drives to the Outer Banks, Myrtle Beach and Hilton Head this summer. Unless of course you are an oil future's speculator. Then you can buy Hilton Head. Before you burn in hell. I digress. If you are still driving an SUV and make less than \$200 K a year, driving to Cedar Point might even require a second mortgage. What's one in need of a beach fix to do? I mean, there's gotta be more to life than all sports, all the time, right?

Here at TCF/STO, the writers are heavy balanced toward native east-siders. That's why we use polysyllabic words and we know so much about beer. We just hope west-siders put down their tasteless Lite beers, re-size the text size to "largest", read slowly and sound out the words, and hopefully they can keep up. Awe-c'mon. I'm just playin', Ken from Rocky River. I intended no maliciousness. I digress. Therefore, many of us at the STO morning java at some point probably grew up with summer trips to

Geneva-on-the-Lake, whether it was the state park beach as a kid when we wanted a change up from Headlands, or some adolescent summer cruising on an honest-to-God strip, or some cheap brewskis when we came of age, or maybe more accurately, when we had ID's of age. But have you been there lately?

The place is amazing no matter what your age or family circumstances. To be honest, I'd forgotten how much fun it is. If you have the C-note, I highly recommend dropping it on a room at the [new state lodge](#). It's new, it's huge, it's posh, it's cheaper and less dangerous and embarrassing than a DUI, and it's just far enough from the strip to get some sleep at night but is in easy walking - or stumbling - distance from all the action. Want to stay in one of the vintage

[beach cottages](#)

instead? Flippin' sweet. You do that. But the lodge has indoor and outdoor pools overlooking the cliffs of Lake Erie. Being in the hot tub at sunset (preferably with company) rocks. The grub is good in a dining area that has roundhouse views of the lake, you got a nice little bar, the staff is very cool, and at pretty reasonable weeknight rates staying for the breakfast buffet the morning after to chase the demons from the previous night is a real two-out rally to start the next day. If you want a crunk-free family vacation, it works as well. There's also

[a go-cart, bumper boat, and mini-golf park](#)

within easy walking distance. Or you can also do a straight-edge romantic getaway. Or something. I guess. But chances are if that's your thing you're not reading STO and you're looking up

"Twenty-Seven Dresses"

to rent on Netflix, so why did I even go there?

Looking to go clubbing? Looking for the beautiful people of South Beach? For a place that's mostly beer bonging preppy college kids or

wannabe dorky parrot-head types like Put-in-Bay? Sorry. You're oh-fer three like an Indians' offensive inning. The strip is about bars. I don't mean TGIFridays. I don't mean I'll-rub-my-ass-on-you and call it "clubbing" with crappy generic pounding music. I mean **bars**. They're filled with bikers, middle agers who live there, 30 & 40-somethings who got the kids to the grandparents, and a few 20-somethings who generally aren't obnoxious (excluding the wet t-shirt contests late night at the wilder establishments); not to mention some hard core drunks who may or may not be functioning alcoholics. They're harmless. Hitting the bars in the afternoon and evening before it gets late-late is just plain fun.

Before the bars, however, you can start off with a quiet wine tasting if that's your style. [The Lakehouse Inn Winery](#) is a B&B with this unbelievable patio set up mid-way down the banks to the lake. Table with umbrella? Nice. Or maybe you want to kick back on an Adirondack chair and just gaze and sip? You can even take your vino down the steps and drink it while waves hit your toes. There are lots of high quality flat rocks to spin and skip into the water like when you were a kid, and not a dead sheep head fish in sight. You can smash a bread plate with huge hunks of cheese for a warm up. I personally never touch the grape, but I understand the wine is pretty good. They have a progressive sampler flight if that sounds fun to you.

If you want the louder version, walk about a quarter mile east to the [Old Firehouse Winery](#).

There are huge decks and they also serve a lot of beer, which is nice. It's next door to a

[small waterslide park](#),

which is clutch if you have 'tweens or young teens that can be out of sight on their own a few yards away. It's also where you can learn about

the

[Lake Erie Monster](#)

. They give you this stamp card in any of the participating establishments, and if you hit something like 10 bars and have an adult beverage at each you get the victory t-shirt to prove it. Nice. Anyone can drive through a brew thru and pay money for a shirt. You gotta EARN The Monster, and there's a new model every year.

The rest of the strip is a funky blend of fair-style fast food, old game rooms, open patio bars and old school bars, a huge music club from out of the 70's dazed and confused era, and some souvenir stores. The whole thing puts an awesome 'ack' in tacky. A putting shot at [The High Tide](#) ? \$

2. A Nathan's Hot Dog at Time's Square? (You'll have to ask special for Stadium Mustard

TM

, and ask nicely.) \$ 2.50. A women's Harley t-shirt from a gift shop that says that says on the back,

*"If you can read this, the d*** won't let me drive"*;

? Priceless.

There are a couple places to slow down and get your dining on in a civilized but casual way. [Piero's pasta house](#) is delicious. It offers excellent pasta dinners cooked diner style by a chef served in a manner so unpretentious that

[Billy Carter](#)

would have felt he was too formal. It's really good. But the gem on the strip not to be missed is

[The Sandy Shanty](#)

sea food restaurant. In a place where absolutely nothing costs

over \$ 5 and you can still pick up a cold can of beer for a buck at Yankee's Bar, seeing an opportunity to drop \$ 15 - \$ 20 on a plate for dinner might seem at first to be unreasonable. Wrong. You walk in this place and your eyes are drawn to an old fashioned shooting gallery behind a bar of all things. We asked Patt, the owner-chef, what was up with that. She said when they were remodeling she found a false wall and the gallery was behind the wall. The brightly colored ducks and other things still have chips from where years of BB's had been shot at them. If you ask her nicely, she may even crank it up and show it off. The original gears still work. Made in the U.S.A. You'll get a friendly greeting, personal service, and they carry a micro brew selection for when you are just done with that some-teenth American lager. Slow down and order an Arrogant Bastard Ale. Then you'll really slow down. Everything was amazing, but the lobster dip is the specialty not to be missed and they have better conch fritters than the Keys. The entrees are as good as you'd get in a McCormack and Schick's, except you're still in cargo shorts and flip flops and the service is beyond assumptive. Or instead of cargo shorts and a t-shirt, maybe it's riding leathers if you're one of the many bikers.

And if bikers freak out your sheltered suburban self, you're missing out. Bikers are peaceable cats; if you are no idiot. They are there for the same reason you are: to have fun, get some sun, and relax. Don't diss them and don't diss their bikes and who knows? You may even end up doing some rounds together listening to some road stories. Many are from out-of-town crossing the country. If you are not a biker, leave your

prejudices at the county line. If you want to get your gourd stomped, go ahead, gawk and be a jackass.

If you want to meet some locals, check out The High Tide. It is one of the few places open year-round. It is also one of the few air conditioned taverns for when you are overheated and dragging. It is literally a Ma and Son place and serves some mean wings. Like every place else on the strip, its dirt cheap. You'll meet Ohio's version of beach locals, all sorts who traded in Eastlake, Struthers, and Steubenville for a life of leisure on the lake. They wait out the brutal winds and fickle electrical failures in winter for the three to four months of old Key West that magically re-appear annually. They'll talk easily and treat you like old family friends while you down cold one after cold one. You won't find a fake person, and you won't find a corporate entity that isn't Harley-Davidson or related to a brewery for a blissful mile and half that is just an hour east of C-town but is 50 years away in time.

You get wise. You get real. You get your ass to Geneva-on-the-Lake this summer.