

Hot Summer Nights

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Accent sultry summer evenings with a dash of cool.

When the heat of an Ohio summer becomes oppressive, it's time to seek refuge. Long walks by the lake, cool evenings spent listening to a concert in the park, or even a spin on a carousel can turn a muggy night into a refreshing delight.

Water music

Saturday night at Sandusky's Lyman Harbor outdoor entertainment complex on Lake Erie is full of music. Local and national acts take the stage here, creating a pleasant venue for an evening out. But don't just see a show -- stroll along the pier before having drinks, or plan a late supper or dessert at a bayside cafe.

Visitors to northwest Ohio enjoy staying at Huron's Sawmill Creek resort, with its swimming pools, tennis courts, marinas and access to golf.

Landlubbers may appreciate Ohio's oldest continuously operating summer theater, the Huron Playhouse. Located just two blocks from the lake, the Huron Playhouse's 56th season opener is "Oklahoma!" The season runs throughout July and features five semi-professional productions, including three musicals.

Lyman Harbor, 1615 First St., Sandusky, 419/625-9626, 6-10 p.m. Call for concert ticket prices.

Sawmill Creek Resort, 400 Sawmill, Huron, 800/729-6455. Rates: \$169-\$189.

Huron Playhouse, McCormick School, 325 Ohio St., Huron, 419/433-4744. Tues.-Sun., 8 p.m. Tickets \$11, students and seniors \$10, children under 12 \$7.

Carousel cool

Located about an hour and a half southwest of Cleveland, Mansfield's Carousel District is comprised of three blocks of shops, restaurants and amusements. Restored Victorian buildings, ornate iron fencing and charming courtyards provide a backdrop for the town's spectacular hand-carved wooden carousel, the first wooden carousel built since the 1930s. Be sure to visit on the first Friday of every month for the Shop Hop, a downtown shop-to-shop open house. Wares include antiques, art, flowers, books, home furnishings, gifts and baked goods. Food selections range from fine food and wine to coney dogs and fried pickles.

In nearby Ashland, the new Johnny Appleseed Outdoor Drama welcomes visitors to enjoy the story of the amphitheater's namesake, who journeyed through Ohio in the early 1800s.



Stay over at nearby Spruce Hill Inn & Cottages. With hilltop views of Snow Trails Ski Resort, the cottages offer a cool summer breeze and a great view. End the night counting fireflies and sipping iced tea on the inn's scenic deck.

Carousel District, 75 N. Main St., Mansfield, 419/522-4223. Richland Carrousel: 75 cents per ride, \$2 for three.

Johnny Appleseed Heritage Center, 2179 St. Rte. 603, Ashland, 800/642-0388.

Spruce Hill Inn & Cottages, 3230 O'Possum Run Rd., Mansfield, 419/756-2200. Cottages \$99-\$125; Victorian Manor: \$395-\$495; Rustic Lodge \$295-\$395.

Concerts in the park

Summer evening fun is just a half-hour drive southeast of Columbus in Lancaster. Begin the evening by strolling through the area known as Historic Square 13, a National Register Historic District noted for its fine collection of 19th-century homes. Then take in a Friday evening bandstand concert, held mid-June to mid-August. The concerts feature a different sound every week, putting a homespun spin on everything from big band to Motown classics. Next, cool off in Cork's Bar at Shaw's Restaurant & Inn. The charming tavern, outfitted in dark wood and brass, boasts an extensive selection of wines, cognacs and single-malt scotches, as well as a well-stocked cigar humidor. Settle in for the night in one of two dozen suites and guest rooms before ordering up a late-night, room-service snack.

Lancaster also boasts a vanishing summer night classic, the drive-in movie theater. Open continuously since 1948, the Skyview Cruise-In Theater is one of Ohio's oldest drive-ins and shows first-run, double features nightly. Go retro by snacking on the concession stand's chili cheese fries, shredded chicken sandwiches, orange sherbet push-ups and, of course, buckets of popcorn.

Friday Night Bandstand Concerts, Zane Square at Broad and Main streets, Lancaster, 740/687-6651. Concerts at 7:30 p.m.; free.

Historic Square 13, bounded by Wheeling, Main, Broad and High streets, Lancaster, 800/626-1296.

Shaw's Restaurant & Inn, 123 N. Broad St., Lancaster, 800/654-2477. Rates: \$83-\$198.

Skyview Cruise-In Theater, 2420 E. Main St., Lancaster, 740/653-5517. Feature begins at dusk. Open April-Oct. Admission \$5, free for children 11 and under.

Country evenings

A hot summer night begs for a ride through the back roads of Morrow in Warren County. Stop at the Kirkwood Inn, a restored farmhouse and hotel formerly used as a hitching post and stagecoach stop. Historical figures such as statesman Henry Clay took respite here. Sit under one of the shade trees on a wooden bench and enjoy a cold lemonade before heading out to The Dude Ranch.

Saturday night at the ranch is family night, featuring a choice of a 30-minute trail ride on horseback, paintball in an old western town, or four-wheel driving through the ranch's open fields and woodlands. Children six and under enjoy unlimited pony rides. Finish the night with a hayride, marshmallow roast and a game of horseshoes.

Grill your own steak at Valley Vineyards where the Schuchter family has turned a part of their winery into a weekend backyard barbecue. Folks gather around the grill to sip wine, chat and cook steak over hot coals. The meal includes choice of salad, in-season vegetables and baked potato, plus a bottle of house wine. Save room for the homemade dessert buffet laden with such tantalizing treats as Hershey almond pie and homemade cheesecake.

Kirkwood Inn, 4027 U.S. Rte. 42, Mason, 800/732-4741. Rates: \$59.95-\$165.

The Dude Ranch, 3205 Waynesville Rd., Morrow, 513/421-DUDE. Western Family Night every Sat. night, Apr.-Oct., 4 p.m.- dusk. Admission: \$19.95 per person.

Valley Vineyards, 2276 E. U.S. Rte. 22 & 3 (Montgomery Rd.), Morrow, 513/899-2485. Fri. and Sat. seating every half hour, 5-8:30 p.m.; Sun. (July through Oct.) seating 4-6 p.m. \$45 per couple.

The great outdoors

Begin a trip to the southeastern Ohio city of Zanesville with a trip to Zane's Landing Park, where you can board the Lorena Sternwheeler for a dinner cruise along the Muskingum River. The Lorena is a 59-ton, diesel-powered riverboat that has carried musicians, governors and Miss Americas. Take in the sunset view while relishing the house specialty, slow-cooked baked steak.

After dinner, grab a fishing pole and head to nearby Dillon State Park. Nighttime fishing is permitted along the lakeshore (no beach or dock fishing), where you are likely to reel in some largemouth bass, muskie, bluegill, crappie or catfish. The quiet coves and wooded hills of Ohio's rural hill country are the perfect place to enjoy nature's best after-dark sounds.

Spend the night in neighboring Blue Rock at the McNutt Farm II bed and breakfast, which also offers overnight accommodations for pets and livestock. Since this is also a working farm, let the lowing of the farm's shorthorn and Brown Swiss cattle lull you to sleep.

Lorena Sternwheeler, Zane's Landing Park Dock, 205 N. Fifth St., Zanesville, 800/743-2303. June 9 & 23, July 17 & 31, Aug. 11 & 28, Sept. 8 & 18; 6-8 p.m.; \$30 per person.

Dillon State Park, 5265 Dillon Hills Dr. (off St. Rte. 146), Nashport, 740/453-4377. Open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. No cost except Ohio fishing license. Prices range from \$7 for a one-day resident license to \$15 for a three-day nonresident license.

McNutt Farm II, 6120 Cutler Lake Rd., Blue Rock, 740/674-4555. Call for rates.