

Painted Cliffs by Boat, a Turquoise Spring at Sunset

A 3 Days Pictured Rocks Road Trip

Michigan's Upper Peninsula in three days: a narrated cruise past 15 miles of the mineral-streaked sandstone cliffs at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, a glass-bottom raft ride over the 40-foot-deep, always-45-degree Kitch-iti-kipi spring, the tea-colored plunge of Tahquamenon Falls, and a last morning on Lake Superior's shoreline in Marquette — with real outfitters, real lodges, and 2026 prices for every stop.

DURATION

3 Days

BEST TIME TO GO

June – September

peak season for the Pictured Rocks boat tours and warmest Lake Superior weather; the cruises run mid-May through mid-October, and fall color along the shoreline peaks in late September to early October

FROM

\$540 USD / person

for 2 people, incl. rental car, lodging, and tickets

Day 1

Marquette Landing & the Pictured Rocks

Fly into Marquette, pick up a rental car, and drive an hour west to Munising for an afternoon cruise past the sandstone cliffs of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore.

Rental Car Pickup — Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Sawyer International Airport (MQT)

~50 minutes to Munising · From \$58 USD / day

Major agencies operate out of this small regional airport in Gwinn, about an hour's drive from Munising and the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore visitor center.

Pictured Rocks Cruises — Classic Cruise

~2 hours 40 minutes, narrated, book ahead · \$48 USD / adult

A narrated cruise past 15 miles of the sandstone cliffs that give the national lakeshore its name — Miners Castle, Battleship Row, and Chapel Rock, streaked rust, copper, and turquoise by mineral runoff seeping through the rock.

Coffee & a Browse — Falling Rock Café & Bookstore

~45 minutes · \$8–\$14 USD / person

A Munising fixture combining a coffeehouse and a genuinely good independent bookstore — a low-key stop before or after the boat tour, with strong espresso and fresh baked goods.

Overnight — Comfort Inn & Suites Munising-Lakefront

From \$170–\$210 USD / night, for 2 people

A Lake Superior-facing hotel right in Munising, walking distance to the harbor where the Pictured Rocks cruise boats dock — the most convenient base for Day 1 and an easy start on Day 2.

Day 2

Kitch-iti-kipi & Tahquamenon Falls

A day of two very different kinds of water: a glass-clear spring you raft across on a hand-cranked cable, and a tea-colored waterfall wide enough to be called the 'Little Niagara of Michigan.'

Kitch-iti-kipi, Palms Book State Park

~45 minutes drive from Munising, ~20 minutes self-guided · Free with \$14 USD Recreation Passport (per vehicle, per day)

Michigan's largest freshwater spring — 40 feet deep, a constant 45°F, and so clear that trout swimming near the bottom look close enough to touch. A hand-propelled observation raft glides visitors out over the spring on a cable.

Tahquamenon Falls State Park — Upper Falls

~1.5 hours drive, ~40 minutes self-guided boardwalk · Free with Recreation Passport

At more than 200 feet wide and a 50-foot drop, the Upper Falls is one of the largest waterfalls east of the Mississippi — its amber-brown color comes from tannins leached from the cedar swamps upstream, not pollution.

Dinner — Tahquamenon Falls Brewery & Pub at Camp 33

~1 hour · \$14–\$22 USD / person

One of the only breweries located inside a state park anywhere in the country, a short walk from the Upper Falls parking area — hearty pub food and UP-brewed beer after a day on the water.

Overnight — Tahquamenon Suites Lodging

From \$150–\$190 USD / night, for 2 people

A small suites property in Paradise, a few minutes from both the Upper and Lower Falls, positioned for an early return to Marquette on the last day.

Day 3

Marquette & Departure

A last morning on Lake Superior's shoreline in Marquette before returning the rental car and flying out.

Presque Isle Park & Sugarloaf Mountain

~2 hours drive from Paradise, ~1.5 hours self-guided · Free

A wooded peninsula park with a rocky Lake Superior shoreline, then a short, steep climb up Sugarloaf Mountain for a panoramic view over Marquette and the lake — the classic farewell view of the UP.

Lunch — The Vierling Restaurant & Marquette Harbor Brewery

~1 hour · \$14–\$22 USD / person

A downtown Marquette landmark since 1885 as a building and since the 1980s as a restaurant, with harbor views, a full in-house brewery, and a whitefish sandwich locals argue is the best in town.

Departure — Sawyer International Airport (MQT)

~25 minutes from downtown Marquette · Self-guided

Closes the loop on three days that ran from the painted cliffs of Pictured Rocks to a 40-foot spring to the state's widest waterfall — return the rental car at the terminal and check carriers' recommended arrival times.