

Paddling Sea Caves by Day, a Lighthouse Cruise at Dusk — A 3-Day Apostle Islands Road Trip

The Apostle Islands sit at the tip of Wisconsin's Bayfield Peninsula, a cluster of 21 forested islands in Lake Superior best known for the red sandstone sea caves carved into their mainland and island cliffs. This three-day long weekend runs from a self-drive up the peninsula to a guided sea-cave kayak tour, a narrated lighthouse cruise through the heart of the island group, and a last day riding the car ferry across to Madeline Island for a lake-sand beach few visitors ever reach. A real outfitter, a real 118-year-old inn, and 2026 prices for every stop.

DURATION
3 Days

BEST TIME TO GO
June – September

Lake Superior's sea-cave kayak tours, the Grand Tour cruise, and the Madeline Island ferry all run full summer schedules in this window, with the warmest water and the most reliable weather; the famous winter ice caves are a separate, weather-dependent phenomenon that only forms in some years.

FROM
\$410 USD / person
for 2 people, incl. 2 nights at a historic Bayfield inn, a guided sea-cave kayak tour, Apostle Islands Cruises' Grand Tour, and a round-trip Madeline Island ferry crossing for a car and driver (excl. gas and most meals)

Day 1

Drive to Bayfield

A scenic self-drive up Wisconsin's Bayfield Peninsula to the small harbor town that serves as the gateway to the Apostle Islands.

Self-Drive — Duluth/Twin Cities to Bayfield

~90 mi / ~2 hrs from Duluth, ~250 mi / ~4 hrs from the Twin Cities · self-drive via WI-13

Highway 13 traces the shore of Chequamegon Bay for the last stretch into Bayfield, with pull-offs for lake views and roadside orchard stands once you're on the peninsula.

Inn Check-In — Old Rittenhouse Inn

from \$250 USD/night, for 2 people

A restored 1890s Queen Anne mansion on a bluff above Lake Superior, two blocks from the Bayfield harbor, with antique-furnished rooms and a well-regarded on-site dining room.

Old Rittenhouse Inn · +17157795111 · www.rittenhouseinn.com

Sunset at the Bayfield City Dock

~30 min, self-guided · free

A short walk down from Rittenhouse Avenue to the marina, where the Apostle Islands Cruises fleet docks for the night against a backdrop of Lake Superior and, on clear evenings, Madeline Island.

Dinner — Greunke's Restaurant

~1 hr · ~\$18–28 USD/person

A Bayfield institution since the 1940s, known for Lake Superior whitefish and a weekend fish boil — the kind of first-night dinner nearly every visiting itinerary to this town includes.

Greunke's Restaurant · +17157795480 · www.travelwisconsin.com/listing/greunkes-restaurant/16923/

Day 2

Sea Caves & the Grand Tour

A full day on the water: a guided kayak trip into the mainland sea caves in the morning, then a longer narrated cruise through the islands in the afternoon.

Guided Sea Cave Kayak Tour — South Shore Adventures

~3.5 hrs, guided · from \$80 USD/person

A half-day paddle out of nearby Meyers Beach into the mainland sea caves — arches, chambers, and narrow slots carved into red sandstone cliffs by centuries of Lake Superior wave action, with a guide handling route and safety calls based on the morning's conditions.

South Shore Adventures · +17156003609 · www.southshoreadventures.com

Lunch on Your Own — Bayfield Waterfront

~1 hr · ~\$12–18 USD/person

A handful of casual harborfront spots around the marina make an easy stop between the morning's paddle and the afternoon cruise.

Apostle Islands Cruises — The Grand Tour

~2.5–3 hrs, narrated · \$55 USD/person (incl. city tariff)

A narrated boat tour that threads past Raspberry Island Lighthouse and Devils Island Lighthouse, sailing directly beneath the sea caves, arches, and standing rocks carved into Devils Island's cliffs — the classic, most complete way to see the island group in a single trip.

Apostle Islands Cruises · +18003237619 · www.apostleisland.com

Dinner on Your Own — Downtown Bayfield

~1.5 hrs · ~\$15–25 USD/person

Bayfield's small downtown has a cluster of restaurants and a brewery within walking distance of the inn — an easy, low-key close to a long day on the water.

Day 3

Madeline Island & the Drive Home

A last morning across the water to the only inhabited island in the chain, then the drive back down the peninsula.

Madeline Island Ferry — Bayfield to La Pointe

~25 min crossing · car round trip from \$56 USD

A short car-ferry hop across Lake Superior's La Pointe channel to Madeline Island, the only one of the 21 Apostle Islands with year-round residents and the only one reachable without a private boat or tour.

Madeline Island Ferry Line · +17157472051 · madferry.com

Big Bay State Park Beach

~1.5 hrs, self-guided · \$10 USD vehicle admission

A mile-and-a-half of sand beach backed by a lagoon and a boardwalk through the dunes — Madeline Island's largest and least crowded stretch of Lake Superior shoreline.

Lunch on Your Own — La Pointe

~1 hr · ~\$12–18 USD/person

La Pointe's small village strip has a few lakefront cafes and a general store that's been serving the island since the 19th century, an easy last stop before the return ferry.

Return Ferry & Drive Home

~25 min crossing, then self-drive · varies by destination

The ferry runs continuously through the afternoon in summer, with no reservation needed for the return crossing — from Bayfield, it's the same Highway 13 run back toward Duluth or south to the Twin Cities.

Download the latest version of this itinerary anytime at i-journey.com