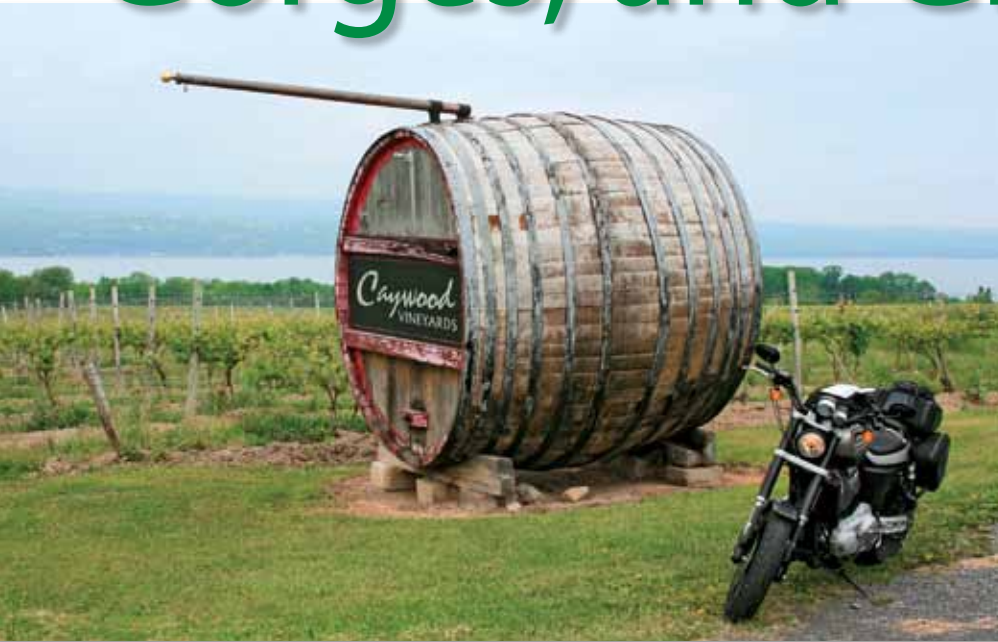


Ithaca New York – Shamrock Tour®

Gorgeous Lakes, Gorges, and Grapes



📍 *Wine is big around the Finger Lakes region – really big.*

👤 *The author, demonstrating the relaxation that's required in this part of the country.*



According to scientists, the story of the Finger Lakes began in the Pleistocene epoch. Glaciers, some more than two-miles thick, crawled southward from what is now Hudson Bay, then retreated, and did it all again, several times. Over the course of their journeys, they gouged, tore, and plowed huge trenches in the earth. And then, it got warm.

Text: Chris Myers

Photography: Chris Myers and James Smeem



🕒 *The quiet surroundings of Ithaca, New York allow for a thorough exorcising of those workday demons.*





As temperatures rose, the ice sheets retreated for good, leaving two-million years' worth of sediment to dam the new valleys left in their wake. Long, slender, deep bodies of water formed. In the surrounding hills, new streams and rivers tumbled freely from high, jagged cliffs, eroding the rock, and creating gorges. This slow, steady interaction of land

U *The curve of lines create memorable riding times.*



and water that has been shaping Central New York for thousands of years is still at work today, creating one of the most unique and geologically stunning areas in the US. But the sense of timelessness here can be seen in so much more than the region's imposing natural beauty. Roads with four lanes are hard to find, weather beaten barns sit like sentinels atop solid stone foundations, and farmers still operate the faded, rusty tractors of their grandfathers. Even before arriving in my host city of Ithaca, at the southern tip of Cayuga Lake, I begin to understand why the roots of American winemaking run so in this area. Great grapes cannot be rushed, and the pace of life here is decidedly slower.

Rolling into Ithaca on a Saturday afternoon, I sense that the energy level is unusually high. Not uncommon in a college town (Ithaca is home to both Cornell University and Ithaca College), but classes aren't normally in session this late in May. Upon my arrival at La Tourelle Resort and Spa, I'm informed that the annual Ithaca Festival is in full swing, just a few miles away in the heart of downtown. The promise of live bands and food vendors is all I need to hear to get me back on the bike.

C *Unique micro-climes create superior vines.*

I park the Harley-Davidson XR1200 among a gaggle of other motorcycles and scooters and head toward the music. All types of folks from older, distinguished couples, to well-dressed young families, to punk rockers, and hippies are here enjoying the carnival-like atmosphere. The Ithaca Commons pedestrian mall is bopping to the beat of a band. Wisps of smoke carry intermingling culinary scents and tug at my impatient stomach. The clock that was showing such a relaxed pace only a few hours ago has taken on a whole new dimension for the evening.

Owasco, Otisco, and Skaneateles

A couple of open windows and a fresh, cool breeze make rising a bit of a chore. Thankfully, a light breakfast at the resort's Simply Red Bistro is just the ticket to get me off and running. I turn northeast and head up East Hill toward the main campus of Cornell University. The tight, swerving streets lined with shops, bars, and restaurants give this section of Ithaca a European feel.

The quiet, relaxing Route 38 and the crisp, country air makes for an easy pace. In the village of Moravia, the morning is slowly coming to life. Well-dressed churchgoers give knowing waves to the guys manning the big, smoky cookers in the parking lot of the fire department. Barbecued chicken lunches will be served later.

Within minutes, the road dissects the gentle slope of emerald pastures tumbling toward the cerulean surface of Owasco Lake. My only companions are a few grazing cows and some distant, flitting birds.

Though an exploration of the historic city of Auburn at the upper end of the lake is tempting, I opt to shoot back down the east side on Route 38A, and then Rockefeller Road, which keeps me even closer to the shoreline. Family farms define the scenery here, and the spring's early crops wave lightly against the brilliance of the nearby water. Soon, my southerly trek deposits me back in Moravia where the firehouse chicken is ready and folks are lining up.

Route 38A turns me back north and toward Skaneateles Lake. In New Hope, I follow signs down a dirt road to the New Hope Mills along Bear Creek. Unfortunately, the antiquated mill is closed on Sunday, so the best I can do is peek in the windows and snap a few photos of the large, overshot waterwheel.

Along the lake's western shore, the scenery changes from rolling pastures to steep slopes covered in deep hardwood forest. Despite often being obscured by trees, the view of the lake's sparkling surface and the sheer cliffs of the opposite shore are spectacular from the winding and narrow Route 101.

With a left on Route 41, I swing a wide U around the southern tip of Skaneateles Lake and head for Otisco Lake. Route 24 winds along the eastern shore before rolling into even more farmland. The recently plowed fields have turned up acres of rocks and dirt, and I wonder about the many Iroquois arrowheads that lie undiscovered there.

With the shadows getting a little longer, I turn back toward Ithaca. My chosen lackadaisical pace is the only thing out here affecting my progress.

➤ *The vertical drop of Taughannock Falls is an impressive 215-feet.*

Purity Ice Cream

700 Cascadilla St,
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 272-1545
www.purityicecream.com

On a Sunday afternoon in 1892, the Platt and Colt Pharmacy in Ithaca began serving vanilla ice cream with cherry syrup and a cherry on top. Since that first day of sticky sweetness, Ithaca holds the oldest verifiable claim to the invention of the ice cream sundae. Platt and Colt are long gone, but Purity Ice



Cream has been manning the scoop since 1936. Purity also indulges the sweet tooth with fresh baked muffins, sticky buns, and brownies.



➤ *Greens and blues split the difference around the Finger Lakes.*





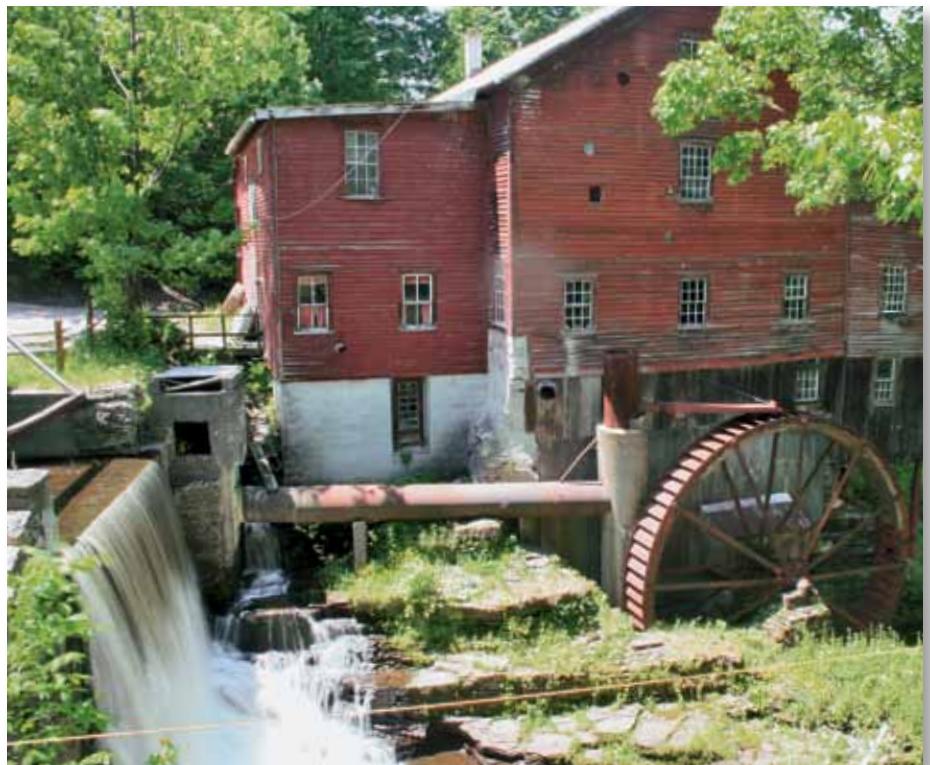
Cayuga

While on yesterday's loop, I was surprised that I didn't see more of the wineries for which these lakes are known. La Tourelle's General Manager, Scott Wiggins, assures me that vineyards will be the least of my worries on today's swing around Cayuga Lake. Though the morning dawn's cloudy, the promise of sunshine is more than enough inspiration. Route 89's lake-side course immediately rewards with awesome waterfront views.

I was told not to miss Taughannock Falls State Park, and that couldn't have been better advice. Here, an easily accessible overlook offers an incredible view of Taughannock Falls, where Falls Creek plummets vertically for 215-feet from atop a sheer stone outcropping. The drop is 33-feet further than Niagara Falls, and one of the highest in the

📍 *Perfect rides on country roads lead to perfect country days.*

📍 *The old ways are on display at New Hope Mills.*



Eastern United States – absolutely worth the short diversion.

With my northward direction reestablished, I begin to understand why this place is known for its wine. Row after row of still immature grapes begin well above the highway and tumble gently toward the glassy lake below. The contrast of green and blue is made all the more striking by a gloriously widening crevasse in the dark clouds. Amazingly, the depth of the lake here (435-foot deep) helps to create its own, unique climate. The summer-warmed water acts as an insulator throughout the winter, protecting the hillside vineyards from early frosts and the brutal winter temperatures, thus maintaining just-right microclimates for the grapes. I spot the sign for Sheldrake Point Vineyards and swing in. Though not a big Riesling fan, I've been advised not to miss out, so I grab a bottle and continue on my journey.

At the far north end of the lake, the depths give way to shallow mud flats – home to the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge. This vast system of lakes and ponds covers 7,068-acres of protected nesting and feeding grounds for more than 200 species of waterfowl and migratory birds. Observation stations accessible from Route 89 provide excellent opportunities for motorcycling bird watchers to enjoy.

My goal of reaching Lake Ontario is looking to be in jeopardy, as the break in the clouds quickly repairs itself. A scattering of Great Lakes raindrops have me retreating toward Ithaca on Routes 266 and 38. Though nearly all of Cayuga Lake's wineries have excellent restaurants, a foot-long white-hot drowned in chili at Pete's Treats, in Union Springs, will trump a Zagat's joint for me most every time.

Ithaca, New York

You don't so much *visit* Ithaca as you *experience* Ithaca. College towns are always great for high energy and an eclectic mixture of people. And with Cornell University and Ithaca College within a good Frisbee toss of the downtown center, it's fair to say that there's almost always something interesting happening in this town. The central shopping district is the Ithaca Commons, a two block pedestrian mall that boasts an incredibly diverse range of shops, art galleries, and eateries. Street performers and musicians can be found practicing their crafts, as students, professorial types, families, and bohemians all stroll the sidewalks together. There is an air of openness and acceptance here that is felt in few other places.

For the terminally hungry, few cities can top Ithaca in its scope of culinary offerings. From the world-renowned vegetarian fare of the Moosewood Café, to European, Asian, and Indian cuisine, just about any taste can be sated here. In fact, the city is proud to boast that it has more restaurants per capita than New York City.

After the sun goes down, the action doesn't stop. Live music from nightclubs, laughter, conversation, and the scents of late dinners and bar snacks ride the breeze off of Cayuga Lake late into the evening.

Wandering the final stretch along the east side of Cayuga Lake, I pass through the small communities of Union Springs and Aurora, both steeped in small town Americana. The stars and stripes hanging from street posts flutter in the breeze as friendly school kids wave and give hearty thumbs-ups to the uber-cool XR1200. A couple call for wheelies, but I responsibly shake

For those looking for more outdoor endeavors, Ithaca and Tompkins County are hard to beat. Hiking and mountain biking are popular here, and with over 100 waterfalls and gorges within ten miles of downtown, it's easy to understand why. If playing on the water is a priority, the city's location at the southern tip of Cayuga Lake, the largest of the Finger Lakes, guarantees that fishing, swimming, and boating are easy activities to come by as well.



While motorcycling may be the primary reason for considering a visit to the Ithaca area, the fun roads are only part of the appeal. Great food, interesting and friendly folks, a unique history, and superb outdoor attractions are even more reasons to add the Tompkins County area to your short list of vacation destinations. The T-shirts and bumper stickers around town state *Ithaca Is Gorges*. No matter how you read it, that statement couldn't be more accurate.

my head from side to side – never mind that I couldn't do a wheelie if I tried.

Back in Ithaca, I'm tempted by one more stop. Coming into town along Route 34, I spot Ithaca Falls. This 100-foot cascade literally pops up with no warning. I park in a small, dirt lot and make my way up the creek bank to the base of the plunge. A group of college



📍 *Steep slopes and verdant forests ring the sparkling waters of Skaneateles Lake.*

kids fling a Frisbee along the rocky bank, and a mother cat-herds her three young charges. Apparently the out-of-towners aren't the only ones drawn to the falls.

Though the clouds have somewhat dampened the sunset view from my balcony, the crisp, dry Riesling, slightly chilled, provides an excellent cap to another fine day.

Seneca and Keuka

The forecasters promise increasingly sunny skies, but I take it with a grain of salt as I head west on Route 79. The long, straight pavement across the gently rolling hills between Seneca and Cayuga Lakes is easy-going until I see my first deer standing roadside. Several others join her over the next few miles, making me thankful for the slower pace so easily adopted here. Routes 131 and the northern reaches of 125 are well represented with wineries. In Geneva, I swing another big U-turn around the upper end of Seneca Lake and dive south on Route 14. Everywhere, vines reach, sprawl, and crawl across miles of trellises that melt into the distant water. Like Cayuga, Seneca Lake is also one of the country's deepest at over 600-feet in places, and it too produces a protective microclimate for the numerous wineries in the area.

Outside of Penn Yan, along Route 54A, the hills dropping into Keuka Lake become steeper, offering beautiful views. At its southern tip, the city of Hammondsport is home to Pleasant Valley Wine Company, the oldest winery in the US, and the proud bearer of the US Bonded Winery No. 1 designation. Operating from eight stone buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Pleasant Valley has been crushing the skins since 1860, and it shows no signs of slowing down.

La Tourelle Resort and Spa

1150 Danby Road,
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 273-2734
www.latourelle.com



A clean, comfortable room is the best antidote to the rigors of a day on the road. And I found that elixir at La Tourelle Resort and Spa. From the moment I arrived, I felt welcome and relaxed. My large, airy room featured an exceptionally comfortable bed and a balcony with a westward view of Buttermilk Falls State Park, which proved exquisite as the pinks and oranges of the setting sun retreated beyond the rolling hills.

For true indulgence, the on-premise August Moon Spa offers a "blending of traditional Eastern therapies with Western knowledge." The soothing music and aromas combine with the masseuse's magic touch to ease away any saddle stress that may be lingering. I walked into August Moon a spa-newbie and practically spilled out on gelatinous legs, amazed at what I'd been missing all these years.

The Simply Red Bistro, just off the lobby, served great fare to get me rolling. To this day, I'm still talking about my Applewood-smoked bacon, roasted tomato, and goat cheese omelet. For heartier evening fare, the John Thomas Steakhouse, just across the lawn, dishes out delicious cuts of aged beef along with numerous seafood and poultry favorites. They also have a stellar wine list, never a bad companion to a great dinner.

The serene setting of La Tourelle Resort and Spa is located just three miles from the center of Ithaca, with plenty of paved parking. And the best part is, they welcome motorcyclists with open arms.

And speaking of not slowing down, this small town is also home to aviation pioneer and early motorcycle speedster, Glenn Curtiss. In 1907, Curtiss designed and built a V-8 powered motorcycle that he rode to a world-record speed of 136.36 mph. Apparently Mister Curtiss never got the *relaxed pace* memo.

Turning northward along Route 54, I can see that the steep hills here aren't very conducive to agriculture, but the panoramas are breathtaking. Back in Penn Yan, the course turns south toward Watkins Glen. Car racing fans will recognize that name – from NASCAR to SCCA, four-wheel speed freaks push their machines to the limit on the 3.45-mile Watkins Glen International race-track. Though speed may be in the air, it's only a few miles before tranquility returns for the ride back to Ithaca.


Inland East

I'm convinced that there's more to Central New York than long skinny lakes. After another fine breakfast at La Tourelle, I head east on Route 79. The tarmac rolls over bounding hills, tumbles through verdant valleys, and spans clear streams. This is farm country, and bovine traffic far outnumbers motor vehicles.

In Bainbridge, I pick up Route 206 and head toward Walton and the Delaware River. This tributary is the main water supply for New York City and signs along the wide Cannonsville Reservoir strongly discourage stopping. Despite the beautiful forested scenery, I keep the wheels turning, noting that somewhere along the way, the trail lost its soft edges and has turned into twisties. The ride continues this way across Routes 27, 35, and especially 220. By the time I stop for a breather at McDonough General Store in McDonough, my laid-back attitude has been supplanted with



a maniacal grin. As I sip my orange crème soda, I remind myself to heed the shopkeeper's warning that the New York Troopers keep their eyes on these roads. For the remainder of my ride back to Ithaca, I revert once again to a leisurely pace.

The sense of calm here is as warmly intoxicating as a nice bottle of Seneca Lake Pinot Noir. It's with reluctance that I pack for my morning departure. Rarely have I been made to feel so at home as I have at La Tourelle Resort and Spa. And Ithaca too has imprinted my mind with lasting memories of towering waterfalls, steep gorges, and the pleasant sparkle of sunlight waltzing across the azure dance floor of Cayuga Lake. There's no reason to rush anything here. The lakes have been around for millions of years; the rocks weren't worn smooth in a day, and the wine will be ready when it's ready. On second thought, there is one thing worth putting on the fast track – a return trip for another bottle of Reisling. 

To view more photos and post your comments, visit www.roadrunner.travel

📌 An orange crème soda with a splash of the past are easy finds in McDonough.

📌 We'll cross that bridge when we get to it. There's definitely no rush here.



Ithaca Shamrock Tour®

FACTS AND INFORMATION

Total Mileage

Approximately 697 miles.

In General

Wine making regions are known for scenic beauty and New York's Finger Lakes region is no exception. Anchored by deep, glacial bodies of water that spawn excellent growing conditions for many varieties of grapes, the pace of life moves a little slower here. This is a place to kick back and then savor the fruits of the land, once the riding day ends.

How to Get There

The Finger Lakes are located in Central New York, south of Interstate 90, between Syracuse and Rochester.

Along with easy access from I-90 (the New York State Thruway), travelers can easily reach the tour area from Interstates 86, 390, and 81.

Food & Lodging

Central New York has long been a summer playground for out-of-town guests. Hotels, motels, inns, and B&Bs dot the shores of each lake. Whether the search is for swanky digs or something more economical, it's easy to find. The high season can be hectic though, so check availability in advance. Finding a good restaurant is the least of your concerns here. The pairing of fine wine and great food is a given, and local farms are treasure troves of fresh ingredients from fruits and vegetables, to meats and cheeses.

good shape. Once off the beaten path, potholes and pesky gravel patches can be an issue, so beware when the curves tighten up.

Books & Maps

- *The Finger Lakes Book: Great Destinations* by Katharine Delavan Dyson, Countryman ISBN 9781581570458, \$18.95
- *Waterfalls and Gorges of the Finger Lakes* by Derek Doeffinger, McBooks Press ISBN 9780935526240 \$29.95
- AAA State Series Map New York

Addresses & Phone Numbers

- Ithaca/Tompkins County CVB (800) 284-8422
www.visitithaca.com
- Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance (800) 530-7488
www.fingerlakes.org
- Glenn H. Curtiss Museum (607) 569-2160
www.glennhcurtissmuseum.org
- Finger Lakes Wine Country (800) 813-2958
www.fingerlakeswinecountry.com

Roads & Biking

The scenery is nothing short of phenomenal. Crystalline blue lakes shimmer against forests of green hardwoods, vineyards, and pastures. And though Central New York does see its share of winter weather, the main roads are in surprisingly



Motorcycle & Gear

2009 Harley-Davidson XR1200
 Helmet: HJC IS-Max
 Jacket: Olympia Moto Sports GT Air Transition
 Pants: Olympia Moto Sports Ranger 2
 Boots: Sidi Doha
 Gloves: Held Air
 Luggage: Harley-Davidson Genuine Motor Accessories