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## **For the cost-conscious traveler, the Brainerd Lakes Area is home to a multitude of free activities**

BRAINERD, Minn. – Cost-conscious travelers understand that vacation expenses go well behind travel, lodging and meals. Once you're at your destination, the charges can really start piling up.

It's easy to drop a bundle of cash when you start paying for guided tours, admission fees, rental fees and all the extras that go with them. But the Brainerd Lakes Area can be an exception to that rule. There are many attractions here that come with a cost, but you don't have to look far to find activities that are not only free but are also fun for all ages and can easily eat up an entire day.

“One of the great things about the Brainerd Lakes Area is that we have so many amenities that take advantage of the natural features of this area,” Tourism Director Gretchen Ennis said. “You can easily vacation here for a week and not spend a dime on entertainment, but yet you'll have a lot of fun and see some incredible scenery. If you enjoy the outdoors, you can leave your wallet in your room and still have a full and active vacation here.”

The focus in the Brainerd Lakes Area, of course, is the lakes. With 465 crystal-clear, hard-bottom lakes within a 30-mile radius, not to mention the Mississippi River and several other smaller rivers and streams, you're never far from a water source that offers a full day of fun, whether you enjoy fishing, swimming, river tubing, snorkeling, canoeing, kayaking or just enjoying a nice quiet float on an air mattress. Nearly all lakes and rivers have boat accesses, and many have clean public beaches.

For active travelers, the Brainerd Lakes Area has hundreds of miles of trails, some of which are paved for biking and inline skating while others are strictly for hiking and walking. A growing number of trails are hilly and rugged for mountain biking. Regardless, the trails system here is excellent for combining exercise, site-seeing, enjoying nature, and, of course, fun.

The Paul Bunyan Trail, the Cuyuna Lakes State Trail and the Paul Bunyan National Scenic Byway are three of the most popular paved trails. They all weave through the area's northwoods and around lakes, making for a very scenic ride.

In addition to bike trails, the area has many walking trails through natural areas that give users a chance to see wildlife, native plants and natural features that are unique to this area. Pillsbury State Forest is the oldest state forest in the state and features 27 miles of trails, two camping areas (one can accommodate horses) and several lakes, including one that holds trout. The Northland Arboretum is a 500-acre facility on the edge of Brainerd that has 12 miles of hiking trails, environmental education classes, outdoor events, garden areas and a visitor center. The Paul Bunyan Nature Learning Center is a 65-acre preserve with three miles of walking trails through a variety of native habitats. Guided tours and educational classes are available. The Crow Wing State Park, Uppgaard Wildlife Management Area and Cuyuna Country State Recreational Area are three more examples places that have hiking trails and other natural activities available.

For those who enjoy history and art, the Brainerd Lakes Area has a number of museums, history centers and art galleries, including Paul Bunyan Land at This Old Farm Pioneer Village, Crow Wing County Historical Society Museum, Northern Trackers Railroad Club, the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and Trading Post, and the Franklin Art Center.

Summer in the Brainerd Lakes Area also means the calendar is full of events and festivals. Here is a sampling:

Below are some of the Brainerd Lakes Area's spring events and activities:

- **Turtle Races**, 2 p.m. every Wednesday through Aug. 19 in downtown Nisswa – As much fun to watch as it is for the kids who are racing.
- **Nisswa-Stamman Scandinavian Festival**, June 12-13, Pioneer Village in Nisswa – Features 150 folk musicians performing on three stages, traditional Scandinavian dance and food, children's activities tent and much more.
- **Fourth of July Celebrations**, July 3-5, area cities – Area communities celebrate the Fourth of July like few others can, with free music, fireworks displays, parades, art festivals, games and much more.
- **Bean Hole Days**, July 14-15, Pequot Lakes – Burying of the Beans ceremony is Tuesday, followed by the raising and serving of the famous beans Wednesday at noon. Free beans.
- **Annual Majestic Pines Art Festival**, July 17-18, Nisswa – More than 100 artists participating in a juried art festival. Live music and food.
- **22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Whitefish Chain Antique and Classic Boat Show**, July 25, Crosslake – A spectacular boat parade with more than 50 restored classic and antique boats.
- **Chokecherry Festival**, August 15, Pequot Lakes & Breezy Point – A full day of activities, including a Chokecherry Culinary Contest (chokecherry recipes only), Pit Spitting Contest, Back Seat Driver Contest, Partner Carry Contest, street dance and more.

Groups or families can find that the Brainerd Lakes Chamber is an excellent resource for planning a family vacation, group tour or area adventure. Contact the Chamber first at 1-800-450-2838 or [www.explorebrainerdlakes.com](http://www.explorebrainerdlakes.com). The new 2009 Visitors Guide is now available as well. A comprehensive list of activities and events is available by visiting the Brainerd Lakes Chamber Web site. Lodging and golf specials and packages are available on the property's or golf course's individual Web site; some are featured on the chamber's Web site as well.

**Note: Contact PR Coordinator Geoff Gorvin at 218-821-9513 or 218-829-2838 for more information or photos.**