Welcome to Monroe County

Don't Miss...

- Cranberry Country
- Elroy-Sparta & La Crosse River State Trails
- Monroe County Museum
- Wisconsin Cranberry Discovery Center
- Wegner Grotto
- The Amish
- Fort McCoy
- World's Largest Bicycle
- Tomah Historical Museum
- Deke Slayton Memorial Space & Bike Museum
- Little Falls Railroad & Doll Museum

Monroe County offers visitors a variety of contrasts in each of the four seasons.

Historic bike trails with cavernous tunnels, an Amish community, thousands of acres of cranberries, Fort McCoy, numerous museums, and great hunting and fishing opportunities lure visitors from across the nation to Monroe County.

Visit the Monroe County Museum and the Tomah Historical Museum to check out our rich history. We boast seven museums where you can explore dolls, railroads, cranberries, Fort McCoy, Astronaut Deke Slayton, space, bicycles, and so much more.

The people in our communities work hard for a living and enjoy the quality of life that our area provides for a good family "country style" of life. It's not only the beauty of our land, but the people that make the place.

KENDALL

Nestled in the rolling hills is the community of Kendall, incorporated as a village in 1894, growing from a railroad community to a farming community.

The official headquarters of the Elroy-Sparta State Bike Trail is the restored Kendall Depot, which offers specific information about the trail, a museum featuring the history of the railroad, bike shuttle services and destinations to stop at during your bike ride. www.elroyspartabiketrail.com

The Kendall area invites you to their special events during the year. The community's biggest celebration is Kendall Fest on Labor Day weekend, which includes music, food, crafts, kids games, a mud run, community breakfast, community reunion, tractor pull and a big parade. The Colors of Kendall is held the 2nd Saturday in October, showcasing local artisans and producers.

The Kendall area has an active arts community. The **Colors of Kendall**, held the second Saturday in October, features the **Autumn Ridge Art Tour** and local producers.

The towns along the trail welcome bicyclists with open arms. They offer food, refreshments, and plenty of places to stop and rest.

WILTON

Wilton is a small, picturesque farming community located at the headwaters of the Kickapoo River and at the middle of the Elroy-Sparta Bike Trail. Gentle rolling hills lend the area a charm all its own.

Wilton Wood Turtle Days is a celebration held annually on the first weekend in August. It features a 5K run, fantastic fireworks show, softball tournament, volleyball tournament, arts and crafts display, parade, water fights, and fun for the whole family.

The Wilton Lions Club members serve up a tasty pancake breakfast each Sunday morning in the summertime in the Wilton Village Park Campground, located only five blocks from the bike trail. Tunnel Trail Campground lies next to the bike path and offers visitors a swimming pool, bike rentals, mini golf, and a repair shop.

Wilton offers visitors several restaurants, a small hotel, and several bed and breakfast establishments.

NORWALK

The Village of Norwalk welcomes visitors with open arms, offering several restaurants and the Elroy-Sparta State Bike Trail winds through a beautiful community park, which offers relaxation and camping.

The Norwalk Lions Club hosts their annual NTPA Region 3 Tractor Pull the 2nd full weekend in August. A local truck & tractor pull is held on Sunday. Come and enjoy the Friday fish fry, Saturday steak fry and Sunday charcoal chicken.

In October each year, Norwalk hosts the Rails to Trails Marathon. Known for its steady and challenging uphill stretches that await runners along the first few miles of the course, the Rails to Trails Marathon, Half Marathon, 5K & 1-Mile Fun Run takes runners and walkers on a tour of the Elroy Sparta State Trail that winds through this corner of southwestern Wisconsin.Run this Boston Qualifier Marathon on the historic Rails to Trails. Experience a unique race in beautiful scenery.

FORT MCCOY

Located in the heart of the upper Midwest, Fort McCoy is the only U.S. Army installation in Wisconsin.

The installation, which was established in 1909, is named after Major General Robert Bruce McCoy. The son of a Civil War captain, McCoy was a prominent local resident who served as a lawyer, district attorney, county judge, and mayor of neighboring Sparta, while also serving 31 years in the Wisconsin National Guard.

The installation offers year-round recreational opportunities at Pine View Campground and Whitetail Ridge Ski Area. Both areas are open to the public. Pine View features picnic and playground areas (one handicapped accessible), a campground with a camp store, lodging units, a recreational-equipment checkout center, miniature golf, hiking trails, and a beach. Winter enthusiasts can enjoy downhill and cross-country skiing, snow tubing, and snowboarding at Whitetail Ridge. The Whitetail Ridge Chalet provides an indoor respite. In addition to providing a break from the cold, the family area of the facility serves a variety of food and beverages and has large windows allowing views of the activities outdoors. Tactics Paintball and Laser Tag are also located at Whitetail Ridge.

Hunting and fishing opportunities are offered to military (active and retired) and their dependents, government employees, and the general public. Appropriate Fort McCoy permits and State of Wisconsin licenses are required. More information can be found on the Fort McCoy public website: *mccoy.army.mil/Visitors/FishHuntInfo.asp.*

Tours of Fort McCoy's award-winning Commemorative Area are available to the public, free of charge. The Commemorative Area consists of the History Center, five World War II-era buildings (open seasonally April through October), the Equipment Park, and Veterans Plaza. Tours of the area can be arranged for groups of 15 or more Monday through Friday by appointment.

To schedule a tour, contact the Public Affairs Office at 608.388.2407 or send an email to usarmy.mccoy.imcom-central.list.pao-admin@mail.mil.

Guided, narrated bus tours of the installation are also available for groups that arrive by bus. These tours can be paired with a Commemorative Area visit for a complete experience.

A self-guided driving tour is also available daily from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. for individuals or smaller groups. A self-guided driving tour brochure can be picked up at the Main Gate or by contacting the Public Affairs Office.

Each year, Fort McCoy typically hosts its Open House the third Saturday in May, Armed Forces Day. This is an excellent time to visit—no appointment required! All Commemorative Area buildings are open and many special activities are scheduled.

Visit *mccoy.army.mil* to learn more about Fort McCoy and its rich history.

OAKDALE

Tall bluffs rise abruptly from the flat plains surrounding Oakdale, gateway to Wisconsin's Driftless Area. Mill Bluff State Park offers opportunities to picnic, swim, and camp.

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Elroy-Sparta Bike Trail

Oakdale has a new pedestrian path from County PP (by Granger's Campground) that goes to County NN (by the elementary school). It is open year-round.

CATARACT

Nestled in the countryside just outside of Cataract is the Wegner Grotto. Paul and Matilda Wegner developed this grassroots art environment of glass and pottery shards in concrete in the late 1920s to early 1930s. A chapel, known locally as the glass church, animals, a peace star, peace garden, and replicas of their 50th anniversary cake, and of the Bremen, the ship they came to America on, are part of the many structures you'll see.

The Little Falls Railroad and Doll Museum is located just two miles east of Cataract on Hwy II. Hundreds of dolls from the 1800s to the present-day Barbies are displayed throughout the museum.

The railroad museum features three operating layouts, including a garden railroad, and for children there is an outdoor train ride. A large library of photos, books, videos, and railroad art retell the story of railroad history.

The Cataract Sportsman's Club holds its annual field days the weekend after Labor Day. The event features many activities for the entire family: clay shooting, archery and shooting sports contests, softball tournament, games, music, and great food.

CASHTON

The Village of Cashton is set atop some of the most scenic hills in southwestern Wisconsin, and the surrounding townships are home to the largest Amish community in Wisconsin. Cashton marked the spot of an old Native American trail that led westward to the Mississippi River, serving as a trading post and rest stop for stagecoaches heading north to Sparta and other cities. Almost entirely surrounded by the beautiful coulees of the Driftless region, Cashton is located just off of I-90 and within 30 minutes of Sparta, Viroqua, and La Crosse. Highways 27 and 33 provide easy access to the Cashton area.

The annual Cashton Fall Festival is the pride and joy event for the community each year in September. Events take place not only in the Cashton Ball Park, but at the high school and in the historic Cashton Community Hall. The weekend of fun culminates with a gigantic parade and charcoal chicken. Be careful of slow-moving horse-drawn wagons as you drive through Amish country along Highway 33. The Amish post signs advertising their wares: quilts, furniture, rugs, and baked items. The Amish do not sell on Sundays. A cheese factory, Amish tour service, several restaurants, organic farms, and many local artists' wares can be found throughout the region.

Saint Mary's Church, located at the highest point of St. Mary's Ridge just northeast of Cashton, was built more than 100 years ago. Follow Highway 33 east from Cashton to the Village of Ontario, Kickapoo River, and Wildcat Mountain State Park situated in the unglaciated area of Wisconsin known as Coulee Country. High bluffs and long, narrow valleys make this a spectacular scenic area.

LEON

Leon is a small community located 5.2 miles south of Sparta along Highway 27.

In 2002 *USA Today* published an article stating Leon had an "alligator problem." It was not true, but the fun loving residents of Leon decided to celebrate with a fun festival called "**Gatorfest**," held the third weekend in August. It includes a laundry basket softball tournament and a stand-still parade (where the people walk by the entries that are standing still).

Leon boasts a beautiful community center which is available for rent all year long, a nearby campground, a tavern, and several businesses.

SPARTA

Sparta was well known for the healing powers of its magnetic mineral waters.

Sparta, the "Bicycling Capital of America," is home to the world's largest bicycle, a 30-foot-tall high wheeler bike with Ben Bikin' riding on the structure, erected in 1997. The world's largest bicycle was built by the FAST Corporation in Sparta.

Sparta is host to the northern end of the famous 32-mile **Elroy-Sparta State Bike Trail** and the eastern end of the 21.5-mile **La Crosse River State Bike Trail**. Each of these trails hooks up with additional state bike trails, offering the bicycle enthusiast more than 100 miles of biking pleasure. Make sure during your visit to the downtown area look for the beautiful bicycling murals.

The Elroy-Sparta Trail boasts three cavernous tunnels and more than 30 trestles for the bike enthusiast to enjoy. Area businesses offer bike rentals, shuttle services to all trails, and sales and repair.

A bridge erected in 2002 gives bicyclists, pedestrians, and snowmobilers a safe and scenic connection between the Elroy-Sparta and La Crosse River Trails.

Sparta is the county seat and home to the Deke Slayton Memorial Space and Bicycle Museum. The museum features permanent and changing exhibits that educate the public on the history and evolution of bicycling; explores Monroe County's rich aviation history; and examines the life and career of Monroe County's Donald "Deke" Slayton, one of America's first astronauts.

In June, Sparta celebrates "**Butterfest**," a three-day event dedicated to the rich dairy industry in the area. The Butterfest agenda includes a carnival, flea market, golf and softball tournaments, a milking contest, quilt show, poker run, lots of live family

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The Monroe County Local History Room Museum and Library includes a research room which houses the county newspapers up to 1990, all state and federal census information, as well as a cemetery card file on county gravestones. Photographs, maps, and many published books on Monroe County are available for research.

The History Room is also Monroe County's History Museum. Exhibits include pioneer history through modern times, illustrating farming, industry, and life in a typical home in past years.

For more information visit *bikesparta.com*

TOMAH

Tomah is a growing community since 1883 and the crossroads for west central Wisconsin. The State's Interstate system (I-90/94) divides at Tomah.

Whether it's a family vacation, reunion, business meeting, or if you just need to get away, Tomah's your place. There's something for every season: biking, hiking, fishing, boating, camping, golfing, snowmobiling, skiing, or shopping for unique Amish and cranberry items and antiques.

The City of Tomah has 10 lodging properties offering over 635 rooms. Our lodging properties offer hot tub suites, indoor swimming pools, and an indoor aquatic center—all conveniently located by more than 20 area dining establishments.

Enjoy meals from a simple cup of soup to steaks and seafood. Enjoy ethnic foods, such as Chinese or Mexican, meals with a European flair, or a great pizza. Numerous fast food options are available if you're on the go. Or savor a meal created with locally grown cranberries.

Looking to get back to nature? The Tomah area offers eight campgrounds. Whether you enjoy staying in an RV or prefer your tent, our area campgrounds offer all the amenities you need for a great camping trip.

Looking to do a little hiking or bird watching during your trip? The Tomah Recreational Trail is located throughout Tomah, passing through many beautiful parks. It begins at Winnebago Park on Lake Tomah, winding north around the lake to the Lemonweir River. Follow the river northeast to Memorial Park, just off Superior Avenue. Once you hit North Glendale Avenue you head south along the east side of Tomah. The four-mile trail ends at Buckley Park, home to the Tomah Aquatic Center. The trail can be used for walking, biking, blading, or anything else.

Be sure to visit Mill Bluff State Park, just to the east of Tomah; Wildcat Mountain State Park, located to the southwest of Tomah; or the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, also located east of the Tomah area.

Learn more about the Amish families who reside in our county or how cranberries grow by taking a self-guided driving tour. The Amish Country Tour will take you past several Amish family farms. Watch for little signs at the end of their driveways offering goods for sale, such as quilts or rocking chairs. The Cranberry Country Tour will take you past several area cranberry marshes. Harvest season is normally the first three weeks in October. Both tours are a great way to see our fall foliage colors too!

Tomah offers great events, such as the Budweiser Dairyland Super National Truck & Tractor Pull, held annually in June and the Monroe County Fair held in July. Downtown Thursday Nights featuring live music right on the street in our downtown area. Fun for the entire family. May – October, shop our downtown Farmers Market and kicking off the holiday season, our popular nighttime Holiday Parade. For more information on the Tomah area or community events call the Tomah Visitors Bureau at 800.948.6624 or visit *tomahwisconsin.com*.

WARRENS

Warrens, located in the northeast corner of Monroe County, has the largest concentration of cranberry marshes in the area. More than 3,700 acres of bright red berries are harvested every year. Manufacturing companies in the area make the equipment for the cranberry industry. Sphagnum moss is the area's other atypical export. The moss is commonly used for keeping plants and nursery stock alive. Wisconsin is the only state that produces sphagnum moss commercially.

McMullen County Park has wonderful camping opportunities. The 71-site park, located on 600 forested acres, offers secluded campsites, electrical and water hookups, restrooms, and showers. A 50-acre fishing lake is part of the park. A three-quarter-mile hiking trail goes around the bluff and wetlands area. Turkeys, hawks, Canada geese, osprey, and deer can be found

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in the park habitat.

The **Warrens Cranberry Festival** is held in late September each year and brings more than 100,000 visitors to the area. Highlights of the event include more than 1300 booths, featuring arts and crafts, a farmers market, antiques/flea market, and plenty of good food and cranberry products.

Cranberry marsh tours, recipe contests, music, and plenty of great food bring people back year after year for a great festival experience.

The Wisconsin Cranberry Discovery Center is dedicated to the Wisconsin cranberry industry, providing a historic and contemporary look at all aspects of the industry. Browse the unique gift shop, which features cranberry products and cranberry glassware. The bakery and ice cream parlor atmosphere offer plenty of opportunities to try some delicious cranberry products.

Wetherby Cranberry Marsh in Warrens offers cranberry marsh tours for individuals, and small and large groups. The first Saturday in October they host harvest tours in the morning. Fresh cranberries are available for sale at Wetherby's, one of the only independent growers in the area.

Ride the historic bike trails, step back in time with the Amish, tour Fort McCoy, visit our museums, and browse our unique specialty shops. Come hunt, fish, bike, hike, ski, and snowmobile with us.

Monroe County attractions welcome group motor coach tours. For assistance in setting up tours and itineraries, call the Sparta Chamber of Commerce at 608-269-4123 or info@bikesparta.com or Tomah Chamber & Visitors Center at 608-372-2166 or info@tomahwisconsin.com.

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