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Gaylord, Michigan IS All OUTDOORS!

**Northern Michigan's Premier Hiking & Biking Destination -
Home to Fresh Air, Unparalleled Scenery, Variable Terrains
and Convenient Trail Access**



GAYLORD, MICHIGAN – Located in the exact center of northern Michigan on the rustic and undulating 45th parallel, Gaylord is undeniably recognized as a premier cycling and hiking destination. The area abounds with pathways for outdoor enthusiasts of every skill and age level. The trail scene here is diverse, from single tracks at Aspen Park, the Pigeon River Country State Forest, Shingle Mill Pathway, Pine Barron Pathway and High Country Pathway to the crown jewel of trails – the **North Central State Trail**.

The ultimate up north biking journey received an upgrade with the addition of the trailhead situated right in Gaylord's downtown district. Opened in fall 2021, the Gaylord Gateway Trailhead offers eager cyclists ample parking, restrooms, a selection of repair tools, area information and access to our Alpine Village's diverse and booming culinary, shopping and nightlife scene.

Popular for connecting outdoor enthusiasts to 62 miles of northerly delight stretching all the way to the Mackinac Bridge, the North Central State Trail has even more to offer now. Another 11 recently developed miles extend to the south, an extension of the Iron Belle Trail.



[North Central State Trail](#)

This former railroad line that was refurbished and improved with a crushed limestone surface is a haven for bikers, runners and walkers of all ages. Running from Gaylord all the way to Mackinaw City, the view along this 62-mile northern stretch showcases some of the prettiest landscapes in the north. Farms, forest and open fields share the scene with sparkling lakes, rivers and marshes buzzing with wildlife. Whether you're a family out for an afternoon ride, a novice seeking something energizing but not too over-the-top or an experienced rider seeking adventure, this trail delivers. Routes from one town to the next and back are great short rides – most are 20 miles or less. Do just one hamlet-to-hamlet jaunt or combine several for a longer

excursion. Keep in mind that the trail is primarily downhill between Gaylord and Indian River, with a net elevation loss of a very gradual 777 feet.



The recently completed Iron Belle Trail extends the North Central State Trail an additional 11 miles south to the quaint village of Waters. This scenic segment passes through downtown Gaylord and traverses along expansive Otsego Lake. Cyclists will find plentiful parking at the new downtown trailhead or Otsego Lake Township Hall and can look forward to a variety of local restaurants and convenience stores along this lovely ride. Give yourself a break and take a quick dip in Otsego Lake at the trailside State Park or Wah Wah Soo public access site.

SINGLE TRACKS FOR HIKING & BIKING

[Pine Baron Pathway](#)

If a short family outing is what you're looking for, the Pine Baron Pathway, situated in the Mackinaw State Forest, is only six miles from the heart of Gaylord. This system of gently rolling to flat terrain has four short loops which average two miles each. The total outside loop is only 6.25 miles, so it makes a nice hike with the kids. There are several benches along the way for resting, as well as some clearings perfect for a trailside picnic. All the trails are clearly marked

and easy to follow through peaceful pine forests and mixed hardwoods. Wildlife abounds, so keep your eyes open for the natural inhabitants of the Pine Baron Pathway. In addition, this trail is friendly to our equestrian friends.



[High Country Pathway](#)

Feeling ambitious? Ready for some real wilderness adventures? Pack your gear and head north to Vanderbilt, then take Sturgeon Valley Road east to the High Country Pathway. High Country is a 70+ mile loop that meanders east through Pigeon River Country, Thunder Bay State Forest and Black Lake State Forest. With rustic camping available at several points along the way, an ambitious hiker can cover the trail in 7-10 days. The terrain is varied, taking in scenic vistas, challenging hills, stream crossings and thick growth.

This extensive and rustic trail was recognized as having “Epic” status by the International Mountain Bike Association in 2023. This list of impressive trails is created each year by IMBA through a public nomination process and showcases trails that provide a true backcountry experience. There are only 53 trails in the world recognized by IMBA as “Epic,” 42 are in the United States and the High Country Pathway is the only one in the state of Michigan.

Shingle Mill Pathway

If you would like just a taste of the High Country experience, check out the Shingle Mill Pathway. This popular trail system begins at the Pigeon Bridge Campground, just off Sturgeon Valley Road, 11 miles east of Vanderbilt. The shortest of the five-segment pathway is 3/4 mile and the longest stretches for 12 miles. Trail difficulty increases with the length of each trail, with some steep terrain along the 6-, 10- and 12-mile stretches.



Aspen Park

Paved and unpaved trails for walking, biking and in-line skating are well suited for family adventures close to downtown Gaylord. As an added bonus, the paved segments are solar-lit until 11:00 p.m. year-round. While you're exploring, don't forget to stop by the boundary shared with our City Elk Park to view the elk, sika and fallow deer herds. Just past the elk park, you will encounter the entrance to Gaylord's state-of-the-art disc golf course.

If mountain biking is more to your liking, then you'll be impressed by the series of undulating trails developed in cooperation with the Northern Mid-Michigan Chapter of Michigan Mountain Biking Association (NMBA).

If the paved trails at Aspen Park don't quench your thirst for road biking, consider one of the following recommended routes:

PAVED RIDING

If you have not done any road biking in Gaylord, you are in for a pleasant surprise! With the highest elevation of any city in the Lower Peninsula, over 90 inland lakes and the headwaters of 5 major rivers, you will delight in the scenery. The gently (and sometimes not so gently!) rolling terrain offers some of the best vistas and challenging pavement riding in Michigan.



Northeast Route

This route is a part of the former Starker Mann Biathlon and includes great scenery! It covers rolling farmland dotted with a variety of trees, crosses the Sturgeon River, has a few challenging climbs and the potential to see lots of wildlife. Park at the soccer fields off North Ohio Street and head north on Morgan Road. The road winds around to the right and crosses Old 27 North. Cross Old 27 North onto Whitmarsh Road and head due east. This is a nice flat area, and the farther east you go, the better your chance is of seeing elk and deer. Bear right on Winnie Hill Road and you will pass the Smith Golf Course and begin a long climb through the woods. This road will eventually wind around and turn into Marquardt Road, where you will pass

Treetops North. Enjoy a long descent and some gorgeous farm country with gentle streams. Stay on Marquardt Road and after a long climb, take a big turn and the road becomes Wilkinson Road. Going right past the main entrance of Treetops, stay on Wilkinson Road until it takes you to M-32 and back into town. This is a hilly, challenging 26-mile route with plenty of scenery.

Lake Route

Riding around Otsego Lake is always fun! You can park at either the Otsego Lake State Park or Otsego Lake County Park. This very enjoyable circular route winds around the largest lake in the county and is scenic and hilly in places with ample views of the water. You will have plenty of chances to stop on this route, which is about 18 miles long. If starting at the State Park, head south on Old 27 to Mancelona Road. You will then turn on West Otsego Lake Drive, heading



north on a fairly new paved road with nice wide shoulders. It is a bit hilly on this side, where you will also pass Beaver Creek Resort. Follow the large curve, which brings you to Old 27 South. From here, a right turn takes you back to your starting point. Riders will also appreciate the option of taking the Iron Belle Trail extension running along the east side of Otsego Lake.

Southeast Route

If you are looking for an extensive, scenic and relaxing ride with an opportunity to stop for a meal or beverage, then take this route! Bordering the Pigeon River State Forest, wildlife abounds on our southeast route. Starting in town, head east on M-32 then take a slight left onto Wilkinson Road. After passing Treetops Resort, you will come to a large curve. Stay right on the curve to remain on Wilkinson Road, which rolls up and down through gorgeous farmland. Stay on Wilkinson until it eventually takes a hard left turn and brings you to the Sparr Road intersection. Turn right on lovely Sparr Road and go for a long distance. At the intersection with Meridian Line Road, turn right. This is a beautiful, but lengthy, uphill climb. Turn right on Heatherston Road to visit the peaceful community of Johannesburg. Consider stopping at The

Old Depot Restaurant or Paul's Pub to refuel. When finished, turn onto M-32 and head south for a short distance. At the large curve, turn right onto Finnegan Road, which eventually intersects at Turtle Lake Road. Stay right on Turtle Lake Road. When you reach the corner of McCoy and M-32, turn left on McCoy Road to head west. Your journey on the wide paved shoulder will take you past Dixon Lake, a picturesque lake with a great public access site. Stay on McCoy Road to the Krys Road intersection, then turn right and follow to M-32. A left on M-32 will return you to downtown Gaylord. It is approximately a 40–45-mile route with plenty of scenery and gorgeous farmland.