

## Visit Ohio's north coast...they'll leave the light on for you

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The Marblehead Lighthouse is one of the scenic lakeside landmarks found at the 100-acre Marblehead Lighthouse State Park. Although lighthouses can be found in many countries, they have reached a cult-like status here in the U.S.

American lighthouses have been pictured on postcards, travel brochures, T-shirts, family room wallpaper, U.S. postage stamps and their iconic shape has made its way into many graphic designs.

Lighthouses are usually thought of as a New England attraction, but there are lighthouses in other states, too, including the ones that border the Great Lakes. In fact, there are more inland lighthouses along the shores of the Great Lakes than most countries have along their entire ocean coast line.

Ohio, which contains part of Lake Erie, is the home of a number of interesting lighthouses, keeper's homes, and maritime museums, which you can find by following the 293-mile Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail that stretches from Conneaut in the northeast to Toledo in the northwest. This is not too surprising when you consider that Erie is the oldest, the shallowest, the most treacherous and the most unpredictable of the Great Lakes.

The best-known (or at least the most photographed) of the Ohio lighthouses is Marblehead Lighthouse, formerly known as the Sandusky Bay Light. Located in Marblehead Lighthouse State Park at the mouth of the Sandusky Bay entrance to Lake Erie, it was named after the village of Marblehead, which provided the 65-foot-high tower's limestone building blocks.

The tower, which opened in 1822, is the oldest continuously operating lighthouse on the Great Lakes.

During the summer, the tower is a popular tourist attraction, with hundreds of visitors browsing through the exhibits of lighthouse history in the Keeper's House, taking guided tours, climbing up the tower's spiral staircase, taking pictures from the tower balcony and picnicking on the grounds.

It's a lovely area and it has served as an attractive backdrop for weddings, vow renewals, proposals and other special events over the years, although no reservations can be made for such use and the grounds are always open to the public.

Visitors who want to make a day of it can also enjoy nearby East Harbor State Park, which offers a number of activities and amenities including camping, swimming, boating, disk golfing and fishing.

In addition, lighthouse fans can also hop a boat over to South Bass Island (home of Put-In-Bay) to visit the South Bass Island Lighthouse, which includes two-and-a-half stories of living space and an attached 60-foot tower.

This lighthouse is owned by The Ohio State University, which conducts summer tours of the tower for a fee. The living space is sometimes used to house visiting OSU speakers and dignitaries and is not open to the public. There is a small air-conditioned space upstairs that can be rented for meetings and various events, with light refreshments or catered meals.

OSU also owns Gibraltar Island, the 6.5 acre island off the north side of South Bass Island. Located on Gibraltar is OSU's Franz Theodore Stone Laboratory, the nation's oldest freshwater biological field station. Tours of the island and facilities are offered in the summer for a fee.

The northeastern shore of Ohio has its share of lighthouses, too, but most are not open to the public and can only be seen from a distance. However, the Fairport Harbor Village Lighthouse and Marine Museum, in Fairport Harbor, is worth a visit.

The 60-foot-high sandstone and brick tower was built in 1871 at the mouth of the Grand River and has a spiral staircase that takes visitors right to the top. Visitors can also visit the adjacent museum (once the light keeper's house) to learn more about lighthouses and Ohio history from the museum's collection of navigational instruments, lighthouse lenses, ship models, Native American relics and salt-mining and iron ore displays.