



The 2014 tower of the Edgewater hotel adjoins a lakefront plaza and second hotel tower dating from the 1940s.



Graze chef Tory Miller's award-winning bibimbap appears as a burrito on the brunch menu.



KATHERINE RODEGHIER/PHOTOS FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE
The National Mustard Museum in suburban Madison, Wis., has mustard-theme displays, a tasting bar and a gift shop.

Need a quick, no-fuss getaway?

Just a 3-hour drive from Chicago, Wisconsin's capital city is an ideal weekend destination — even in winter

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Chicago Tribune

MADISON, Wis. — Itching for an easy weekend escape mixing some urban adventures with a luxury hotel stay and memorable meals? Look northwest to Madison, Wis., a three-hour drive from Chicago, this winter.

This state capital, home of the University of Wisconsin at Madison, has experienced a downtown revival. Millennials employed in the tech world moved in along with baby boomers who've flown empty nests in smaller towns to be closer to the capital's cultural offerings.

Consider a winter getaway that spans both generations by touching on Greater Madtown's old favorites along with some new experiences.

Friday

Check into the Edgewater. Dane County's only four-diamond hotel blends old and new. Its 1948 tower, designed in the Art Moderne style, got a face-lift in 2014 when the Edgewater's modern hotel tower went up next door.

Although it lies just a few blocks from the Capitol at the heart of downtown Madison, its perch on Lake Mendota makes it feel more like a resort than a big-city hotel. A spa and lakefront plaza with an ice skating rink and skate rentals in winter add to its appeal.

It's a 15-minute walk to Tornado Steak House, where you can sip an Old-Fashioned, Wisconsin's signature drink, often made with brandy instead of bourbon. Knotty pine walls, white tablecloths and a relish dish are in keeping with the warm and cozy 1950s supper club vibe.

Longtime patrons insist favorite dishes never change, said owner Henry Doane. They typically start with coquilles Saint-Jacques (scallops in a creamy wine sauce), dig into bone-in tenderloin and finish off with pineapple upside-down cake.

An after-10 p.m. menu draws the college crowd, as does the downstairs Corral Room.

"It's amazing to see the resurgence of people downtown," said Doane, adding that "the 1990s were dead."

Saturday

After a light breakfast in the Cafe or a full meal in the Statehouse at the Edgewater, walk down to the domed building that commands attention all around downtown Madison: the Wisconsin State Capitol.

Pick up a brochure at the information desk to explore on your own, or take a free guided tour. The massive granite building is the state's third Capitol, built between 1906 and 1917 and sporting an interior adorned with 43 varieties of stone from around the world. From the base of the rotunda, crane your neck for a look at the inside of the dome decorated with glass mosaics. Check out the Governor's Conference Room, styled after a council

chamber in the Doge's Palace in Venice, Italy, and look for a copy of Philadelphia's Liberty Bell — minus its crack. A statue of a badger, the state animal, gets some love from visitors who rub its nose for good luck.

The Capitol lies on an isthmus, a strip of land between two bodies of water. You've seen Lake Mendota outside your hotel. Continue walking away from the Capitol toward Lake Monona, where soul singer Otis Redding perished in a plane crash during a December snowstorm in 1967.

If that thought — or the weather — chills your bones, step inside the Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center, making a grand sweep along the lakeshore. Wisconsin native Frank Lloyd Wright presented his design for the center to local officials in 1938. It was rejected. In 1997, after eight design revisions by Wright and the firm he founded to carry on his work after his death, it finally opened. Today it's credited with helping spark downtown Madison's renaissance.

Take note of the center's curvy walls, ceilings and circular forms, hallmarks of Wright's architectural style. A gift shop on the terrace sells items based on Wright's designs. Downstairs, the multimedia exhibit "Beyond the Drawing Board" tells the story behind his controversial plan for the center. Two more displays focus on photography: "The Wright Picture," a collection of photos by Wright's primary photographer, and "Madison — An American Capital City," comprising 18 photos of city landmarks.

Hungry yet? Drive south to suburban Fitchburg and Quivey's Grove, a 5-acre site with two restaurants known for from-scratch cooking and baking. Both buildings date from 1855 and are on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Stone House, an Italianate fieldstone mansion with 18-inch-thick walls and 13-foot ceilings, has a series of small dining spaces open for dinner only. A tunnel connects it to the estate's former stable, now the Stable Grill with hand-hewn beams and a few tables made from wagon wheels. Dishes on the lunch menu play on local names: Monona meatloaf and a Fitchburger in 1/3- and 1/2-pound sizes.

In suburban Middleton, a temple to the "king of condiments" awaits. The National Mustard Museum contains nearly 6,000 bottles, tubes and jars of prepared mustards from all 50 states and more than 80 countries.

Founder and curator Barry Levenson started collecting mustards in 1986 and opened his museum after leaving his job as Wisconsin's assistant attorney general.

"It was my midlife crisis," he said. "Some men in their 40s buy a red sports car; I opened a mustard museum."

Downstairs, the free museum displays rack after rack of mustards, along with antique mustard pots, advertisements and other memorabilia. Upstairs, a tasting



Wisconsin's Capitol building was completed in 1917 and dominates the skyline in downtown Madison.



Mosaics and stonework add color to the ceiling of the rotunda inside the Wisconsin State Capitol.



The Unitarian Meeting House in Madison was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and is open for tours. Other Wright works are near the capital.

bar has free samples, along with chutneys, salsas, sauces and preserves. The gift shop stocks wacky mustard-themed items, as well as 300 to 400 mustards.

Try not to fill up on mustard and spoil your dinner downtown at Heritage Tavern, opened in 2013 by 30-something chef Dan Fox, a three-time James Beard Award semifinalist. Fox went to high school in Algonquin, graduated from Chicago's Kendall College culinary school and worked at top Chicago restaurants, including Everest, as well as restaurants in Austria and France.

In Madison he follows the farm-to-table concept literally by

using meat and produce from his own farm a short distance from downtown.

"We actually get into the field and farm ourselves," he said.

His menus change with the seasons, naturally, but look for gussied-up deviled eggs and tempura bacon-wrapped cheese curds among his small plates. Large plates might include Great Lakes whitefish and heritage pork schnitzel and knackwurst.

Sunday

Locally sourced ingredients also are the hallmark at Graze, a gastropub helmed by chef Tory

Miller, who bested Bobby Flay on the Food Network's "Iron Chef Showdown" challenge by cooking, among other things, bison bibimbap.

Go for brunch, and choose a seat at one of the expansive windows overlooking the Capitol, an impressive sight even when snow blankets the surrounding square. Miller's bibimbap takes the form of a burrito on the brunch menu, joining other entrees like corned beef and kimchi hash, quiche and eggs Benedict.

For some people, Sunday means church. Visitors are welcome at the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Unitarian Meeting House, either for services at 9 or 11 a.m. or for a guided tour at 10:15 a.m.

Wright completed the building in 1951, calling it "a little country church" because of its proximity back then to farm fields. City residences have since surrounded it. A pitched roof resembling a ship's prow accentuates the dramatic exterior. Inside you'll find typical Wright touches, such as clerestory windows, a low entryway, triangular shapes and a curvy ceiling.

Not ready to head home yet? You can always venture beyond Madison to see more of the famed architect's Wisconsin work on the state's Frank Lloyd Wright Trail.

Katherine Rodeghier is a freelance writer.