

# THE TIMES

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JOHN J. WATKINS, THE TIMES

The Cypress Log Cabin has been transformed into a rental by a new company, In the Dunes, which is now doing rentals inside Indiana Dunes National Park.

## TOURISM DEMAND

### Rental firm hopes to capitalize on the dunes

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Northwest Indiana has long been a getaway as the more-than-century-old South Shore Line tourism posters promising sunny beaches and outdoor adventures “just around the bend” can attest.

The elevation of the Indiana

Dunes National Lakeshore to the Indiana Dunes National Park has further driven up visitation along the South Shore of Lake Michigan. The new resort-style SoLa project aims to give Michigan City a more New Buffalo-like flair, bringing in both vacationers and second homes.

A developer hopes to capitalize on the growing tourism demand.

The NWI Development Group has launched The Wanderlux Collection, an umbrella of three different vacation brands in Northwest Indiana. It's renting out more

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# Rentals

From AI:

than 140 vacation rental homes in Northwest Indiana and neighboring Southwest Michigan under the IN the Dunes, South Shore Vacation Homes and Beachwalk Vacation Rentals brands.

IN the Dunes offers lodging inside the Indiana Dunes National Park, initially at the Cypress Log Cabin in the Century of Progress Homes District in Beverly Shores. Beachwalk Vacation Rentals rents out houses in the Beachwalk Resort just off the Lake Michigan shore in Michigan City. The company just added South Shore Vacation Homes as it expanded its portfolio to include houses for rent across the South Shore in Northwest Indiana.

"As we continued to grow, we saw the need to better define and group our diverse properties, reflecting the unique character of each home and the specific experience it offers," Vice President of Hospitality Erin Harrell said. "The Wanderlux Collection represents our vision to clearly articulate and deliver an unmatched, desti-

nation-specific experience for every traveler who stays with us."

The parent company, NWI Development Group, has done major development projects around Northwest Indiana, including The Banc redevelopment of the former Bank Calumet headquarters in downtown Hammond and the Barrelhouse The Venue at Zorn Brewing in Michigan City. NWI Development Group President and CEO Rob Harte had previously done hospitality developments around the world, including in Monaco.

The Wanderlux Collection both markets and manages vacation homes across the Region. It advertises vacation homes and takes reservations, using dynamic pricing to charge more during busy periods in the summer.

It helps the homeowners generate a side income and handles the day-to-day operations, including housekeeping, maintenance and 24/7 customer support.

"Our team recognized the need for a highly professional, dedicated, hospitality-focused approach to vacation rental management," Harte said.

NWI Development Group originally offered 40 managed properties at the Beachwalk Resort in 2015 after buying the resort out of bankruptcy. It has 212 resort homes ranging from three bedrooms to seven or eight bedrooms. Some of the 2,000-square-foot to 4,000-square-foot homes are right across the street from the beach at Stop 7 in Michigan City. Some are as far as seven blocks or about a half mile away or about a 10-minute walk.

Many of the Beachwalk residents also use golf carts to get around, including to drive to the beach. Many residents have summer or second homes there that they like to rent out for the rest of the year.

"It was an opportunity," Harte said. "There was an evolution in hospitality with sites like Vrbo. Effectively, every house can be a hotel. Vacation rentals are one of the fastest-growing areas in hospitality."

The company has grown over time to more than 140 properties under three different brands. It rents across Northwest Indiana, including on Pine Lake in LaPorte. It's especially targeting people from within driving distance looking to visit the Lake Michigan

beaches and the Indiana Dunes National Park.

It does not manage any properties in communities where vacation rentals are not allowed like Long Beach and Beverly Shores.

"This evolution allows us to better serve property owners in distinct markets—whether in Michigan City's renowned Beachwalk Resort, the iconic properties within Indiana Dunes National Park or the emerging vacation rental destinations in Northwest Indiana and Southwest Michigan's Harbor Country," Harte said. "A professional hospitality-driven management company not only provides peace of mind to individual property owners but also strengthens our communities by enhancing the promotion of the incredible experiences available throughout Lake Michigan's south shore."

He runs the company with his business partner and wife Sharon Harte.

"The vacation industry is looked at as a mom-and-pop kind of industry, but we have extensive experience in management and a deep passion for hospitality," he said.

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