




## Day Trip: Valparaiso, Ind., offers a 'valley of paradise'

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 By **Phyllis Rose | Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette**

VALPARAISO, Ind. — When friends Marty and Bonnie Biemer, of Louisville, Ky., asked us to meet them in Valparaiso for dinner, we had an excuse to spend the day exploring the “valley of paradise” — which is what Valparaiso means in Spanish.

Appropriately, our day in paradise started in a garden: Taltree Arboretum & Gardens, 450 W. 100 North, a 300-acre preserve with gardens, ponds, woodlands and a railway garden.

Arriving at Taltree, we headed right to the Railway Garden, accessed through a 1920s-era depot. From our first glimpse, all we could say was, “This is amazing.” For Best-Ever Friend Dave, a railway nut, it was paradise.

Imagine a model train layout covering an acre with trains coming and going everywhere across 30 bridges and through all kinds of topography with about 500 varieties of plants.

Vignettes throughout the layout take visitors through 200 years of the steam era of railroading. A mining town, a coal town, a limestone quarry, and a re-creation of Lincoln’s funeral train as it stopped in Richmond, Ind., are among the layout’s historical vignettes. Plants such as dwarf conifers, bonsai and club moss add reality to the scenes.

A Taltree employee, Bob Sheets, talked to us about the Railway Garden, which just opened in June. This 1-acre segment is the first of three phases planned for the garden.

He and Dave discussed the challenges of maintaining model trains because they run all day long. Then, Sheets took us into the depot’s basement to see the workshop where engines filled the workbench waiting for repair.

Wanting to see more of Taltree, we left the Railway Garden to hike the 1.5-mile Bluebird Trail around the edge of a prairie grassland and along a savanna wetland. It was so miserably hot, we didn’t hike the whole trail. We enjoyed watching the butterflies flitting along the path and a heron standing in the pond



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From this “Window on the Wetland Pergola” along the Bluebird Trail, visitors can sit and watch wildlife in the wetlands.

### IF YOU GO

#### **Valparaiso, Ind.**

is 115 miles, about a two-hour drive, from Kalamazoo. Note:

waiting to snag a fish.

From there, we drove into downtown Valparaiso to the Porter County Museum of History, 153 Franklin St., located in the former sheriff's residence and the jail. Kevin Pazour, executive director, welcomed us, told us about an upcoming mask exhibit and invited us to wander upstairs and down through local history. What's fun about local history museums is finding out about local people, even some who've become famous.

Here it was that Beulah Bondi, an Emmy-award winning actress from Valparaiso, made her first stage appearance at Valparaiso's Memorial Opera House when she was 7.

We also learned about Broncho John Sullivan, who was once part of the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show, and then had his own wild west show. Many of his belongings and memorabilia are displayed at the museum.

With time to spare before meeting the Biemers, we drove to Samuelson's Garden Center, 295 N. State Road 2, and to the Illiana Garden Railway Society. It's much smaller than the one at Taltree, but it's still fun watching the trains, including Thomas, the famous tank engine, rattling around on the rails.

Watching the trains pass one another, I asked Dave, "Remember those story problems in math where you had to figure out if one train left the station going a certain speed and a second train left later going faster, when would the second train pass the first?"

All we remembered was that we hated those story problems, but we realized they might help us figure out when the trains would pass each other on the garden railway.

Back in Valparaiso, we were early for our dinner reservation, but stormy weather threatened so we went to the restaurant anyway. Fortunately, Restaurante don Quijote, 119 E. Lincolnway, wasn't busy and the waiter graciously seated us and kept our water glasses full until the Biemers arrived.

This restaurant just added to our day in paradise. The food and service were excellent. We all had something different and everything was top-notch: appetizers of empanada and calamari; entrees of rainbow trout, swordfish, skewered pork and marinated pork loin; desserts of flan, lime pie, blueberry bread pudding and cinnamon apple cake with ice cream.

As we chatted

over the crumbs of our desserts, chef Elena Jambrina stopped by our table and said she'd heard we'd didn't like her desserts. Of course, she was kidding. Elena is from Spain and the restaurant sponsors tours to Spain every other year,

Valparaiso is on central time.

**Directions to Taltree:** Go west on I-94, crossing into Indiana. Take Exit 22A/U.S. 20/Melton Road. Turn left onto IN-149; right onto IN-130; left onto County Road 475 West; right on U.S. 30 West; left onto North County Road 500 West; left onto West 100 North.

**From Taltree to the museum:** Go east on West 100 North. Turn left onto North County Road 250 W; right on U.S. 30 East; left onto South Washington Street; right onto East Monroe Street; left onto South Franklin Street.

**To the restaurant:** From South Franklin Street, turn right onto East Indiana Avenue; left onto South Michigan Avenue; left onto East Lincolnway.

**To Samuelson's Garden Center:** Go east on East Lincolnway to IN-2.

**For more information:**

- Taltree Arboretum & Gardens  
219-462-0025

**website**

- Porter County Museum of History  
219-465-3595

**website**

- Restaurant don Quijote  
219-462-7976

**website**

- Samuelson's Garden Center  
219-462-2708

so we  
exchanged  
stories about  
our  
experiences in  
Spain.

Sadly, our day  
in the "valley  
of paradise"  
had to come  
to an end.

But we're  
dreaming of a  
day when we  
can return.



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Detailed vignettes such as this one help depict 200 years of steam railroading history.

Email **Phyllis Rose**.

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