Exploring the Champlain Islands by Car or Bike: What to See and Do

The Champlain Islands, scattered across Lake Champlain between Vermont and New York, offer a rare mix of quiet roads, lake views, and small-town character. Whether you travel by car or by bike, the pace changes. A car lets you cover more ground in a day, while a bike forces you to slow down and notice the landscape. Either way, a bit of planning helps you make the most of the trip. This guide covers the key points to check before you set out, so you can enjoy the ride and the stops along the way.

Map Your Route First

The islands are connected by bridges and causeways, so you are never far from the water. The main route follows US-2, which runs from the mainland near Burlington up through South Hero and North Hero, then across to the New York side. For a car trip, the full loop takes about half a day with stops. For a bike, plan for a full day or break it into two shorter rides. Check ferry schedules if you want to include the smaller islands such as Isle La Motte or Valcour Island. Some ferries run only in summer and on limited hours.

Check the Weather and Wind

Lake Champlain creates its own microclimate. A calm morning can turn into a windy afternoon, especially on the open causeways. For cyclists, a strong headwind can make a short ride feel long. Check the forecast for wind direction as well as temperature. Pack a windproof layer even on a warm day. Car travelers have an easier time, but fog can roll in quickly, so leave early if you want clear views.

Plan for Food and Water Stops

Services are spread out. South Hero has a few stores and seasonal farm stands, but don't count on finding a sit-down restaurant on every island. Bring snacks and plenty of water, especially if you are biking. A reusable bottle and a small cooler work well. Several lakeside farms sell fresh produce and cider in season, and a handful of vineyards offer tastings. These make good mid-ride breaks, but check their hours online before you go.

View the location on Google Maps

Know the Road Conditions

US-2 is paved and well maintained, but some of the side roads are gravel or dirt. A road bike with narrow tires may struggle on the loose surface. A hybrid or mountain bike gives you more flexibility. For car travel, gravel roads are fine but can be dusty in dry weather. Watch for farm vehicles and slow-moving tractors, especially in late summer and fall. Shoulder space is narrow in places, so cyclists should ride single file and use a rearview mirror.



Pack the Right Gear

For a car trip, bring binoculars for birdwatching, a camera for the lake views, and a picnic blanket. For a bike trip, a repair kit is essential. The islands have few bike shops, so a flat tire can end your ride if you are not prepared. Carry a spare tube, tire levers, a mini pump, and a

multi-tool. A bike lock is useful if you plan to stop at a vineyard or nature preserve. Sunscreen and insect repellent are worth packing for either mode of travel.

Include a Nature Preserve or Two

The islands hold several nature preserves with trails and shoreline access. The Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge is just north of the islands and offers a boardwalk through marshes. On South Hero itself, the Rockledge Trail is a short, easy path along the lake. These stops give you a reason to get out of the car or off the bike and stretch your legs. They also offer some of the best spots to see waterfowl and migrating birds.

Make Time for a Nine-Hole Course

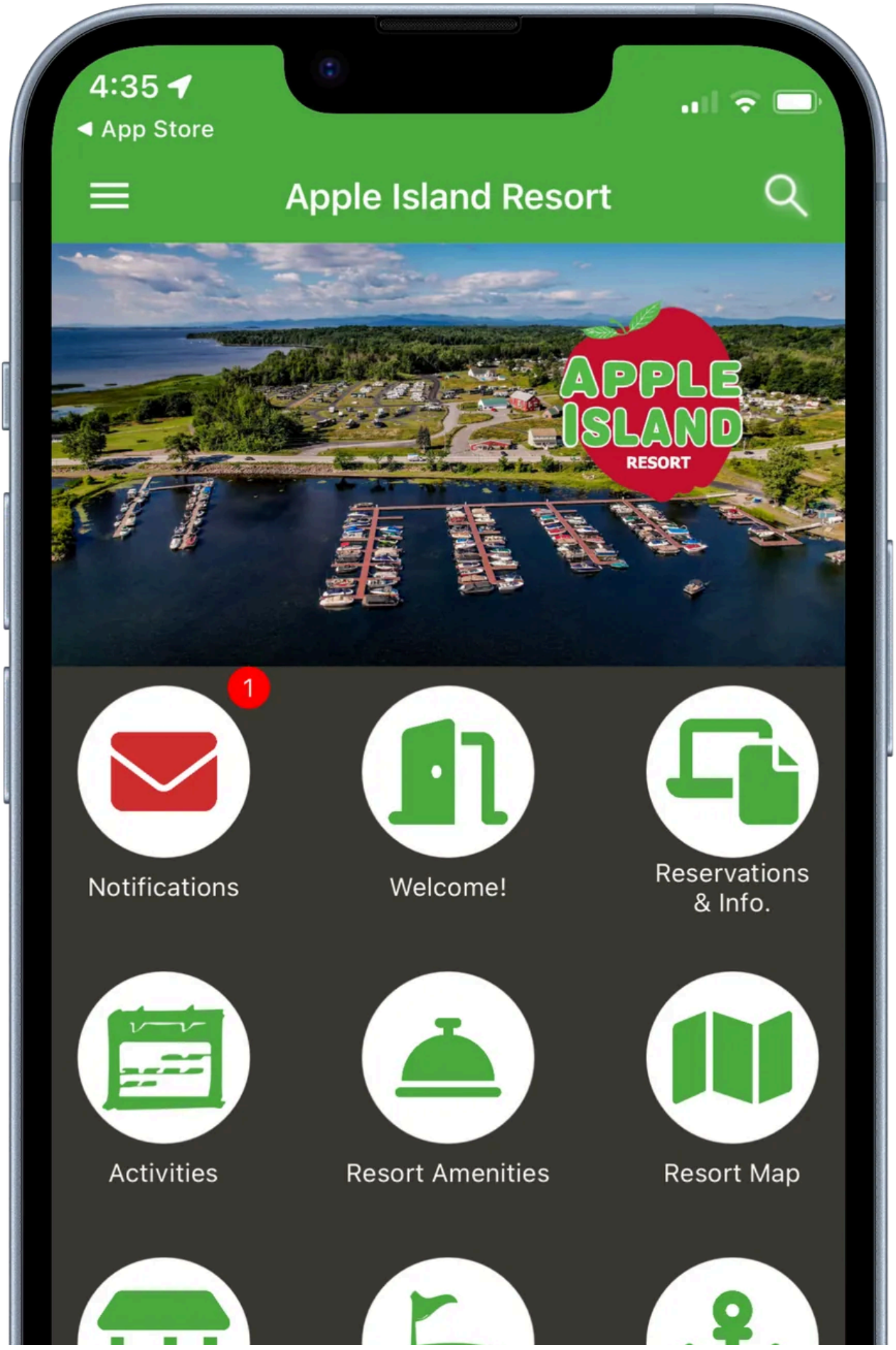
If you enjoy golf, the Champlain Islands have a relaxed nine hole course that fits nicely into a day of exploring. The course is set on the shores of Lake Champlain at a seasonal lakeside RV resort. Its layout is compact enough that you can play a round without committing half a day. You can bring your own golf clubs or rent them on site. The course is open from late spring through early fall, weather permitting. Check whether you need a tee time or if walk-ups are welcome. The setting alone, with lake breezes and views of the Adirondacks, makes it a pleasant stop even for a casual golfer.

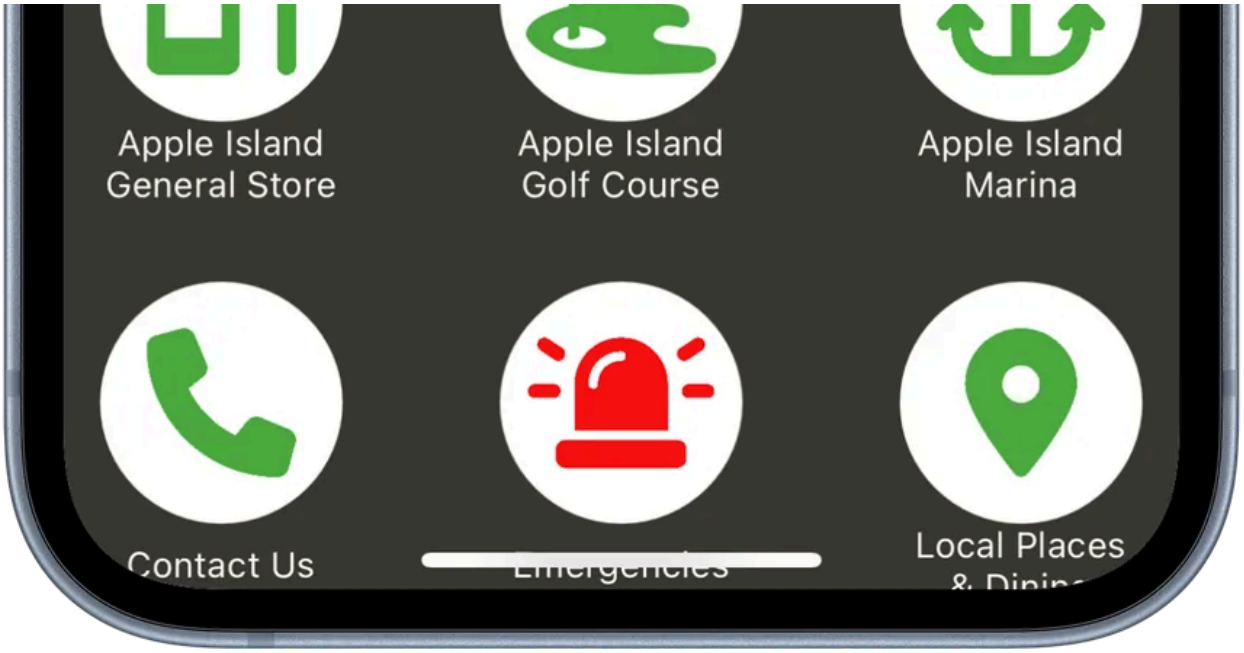
Consider a Stay at a Lakeside Farm

For a longer visit, a few properties offer overnight accommodations. One option is The Mott House, a farmhouse rental on the same property as the golf course. It gives you a base to explore the islands without rushing. Another is the RV resort itself, which offers full-hookup sites for those traveling with a camper. Cottage-style accommodations are also available. Apple Island Resort, the seasonal lakeside RV resort in South Hero, provides marina access, boating, a heated pool, a hot tub, and a general store. Staying overnight lets you enjoy a sunset over the lake and an early morning ride before the roads get busy.

Plan a Scenic Drive or Bike Route

A popular scenic drive starts in South Hero, crosses the Swanton Bridge into North Hero, then follows the shoreline toward the Canadian border. For a shorter loop, take US-2 east to the Alburg Passage and back. Cyclists often prefer the quieter side roads, such as Harbor Road or the roads along the eastern shore of North Hero. These have less traffic and better views. A good bike route map is available from the local visitor center in Burlington or online from the Vermont tourism site. Download it before you go, as cell service can be spotty in the northern islands.


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Apple Island Resort
APPLE ISLAND RESORT
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Notifications
Welcome!
Reservations & Info.
Activities
Resort Amenities
Resort Map



Visit a Vineyard or Farm Stand

The islands have a small but growing wine scene. Vineyards here grow cold-hardy grape varieties and offer tastings in rustic settings. A stop at a vineyard adds a cultural layer to your trip. Farm stands sell everything from maple syrup to fresh vegetables. Many are self-serve honor systems. Carry cash, as card readers are rare at remote stands. These stops are spaced a few miles apart, so they work well as rest points on a bike ride or as photo opportunities on a car trip.

Watch for Wildlife

Lake Champlain is home to a variety of wildlife. You might spot bald eagles, osprey, great blue herons, and the occasional otter or beaver. Drive and ride with your eyes on the road, but pull over safely when you see a good viewing spot. Early morning and late afternoon are the best times for wildlife. Keep a respectful distance and never feed the animals.

Know Your Limits

The Champlain Islands are not a challenging destination, but they do require some self-sufficiency. Services are limited, and help can be far away if you break down or get injured. For cyclists, that means carrying tools and knowing how to use them. For drivers, it means having a spare tire and knowing the nearest gas station. The nearest full-service town is St. Albans or Burlington, both about 30 minutes away by car. Plan your fuel and food stops accordingly.

Apple Island Resort is also on Facebook.

Allow for Spontaneity

The best part of island travel is the unexpected. A roadside farm stand, a hidden beach, or a friendly chat with a local can become the highlight of your trip. Leave some slack in your schedule. If you see a sign for a lake access point or a short trail, take it. The islands reward curiosity.



Enjoy the Journey

Whether you drive or pedal, the Champlain Islands offer a peaceful escape from the everyday. The combination of lake views, farm country, and small towns creates a landscape that invites you to slow down. With a bit of preparation, your trip will be smooth, safe, and memorable.

Apple Island Resort is located at 71 US-2, South Hero, VT 05486, USA, and can be reached at +1 802-372-3800.