

Lake.com Releases 2026 Fall Foliage Map for 100 Popular North American Lake Destinations

Fall color sweeps across the continent for more than two months, with the greatest concentration of lake destinations peaking in October

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Lake.com, the travel platform dedicated exclusively to stays and experiences by the water, today released its [2026 Fall Foliage Map](#), showing when fall color is expected to peak at the 100 most

popular lake destinations within driving distance of major metropolitan areas across the United States and Canada. The guide also estimates how long peak color may last at each destination, helping travelers better time their fall lake getaways.



Beautiful Bartlett, New Hampshire in the fall

“

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*David Ciccarelli, CEO of
Lake.com*

Key Highlights

Season length: Fall color moves across North America's lake country for 9.5 weeks, from Sept. 18 through Nov. 22.
Busiest weeks: 43 of the 100 destinations are at peak during the week of Oct. 5, and 43 during the week of Oct. 12.

Median window: The peak-color window is 12 days per destination.

Drive-to access: 46 of the 100 lake destinations are located within a two-hour drive of a metropolitan area of more than one million people.

The Lake.com 2026 Fall Foliage Map uses regional forecasts, government foliage trackers, historical guidance, climate data, and satellite imagery to estimate each destination's peak-color

window, when roughly 70 to 100 percent of the surrounding landscape will be in fall color.

“Few experiences capture the feeling of fall quite like seeing an entire landscape blanketed in red, orange and gold,” said David Ciccarelli, founder and CEO of Lake.com. “At a lake, you have the added beauty of those colors reflected across the water. It’s a spectacular but fleeting part of the year, which makes being there at the right time all the more important.”

The release of the map comes just ahead of the turning of the season, as shorter days and cooler temperatures begin to trigger the chemical changes in leaves that produce fall colors.

The First Peak Color of 2026: The Season Opens Sept. 18 in the Rocky Mountains

The earliest destinations in the ranking share the same drivers: high elevation, northern latitude, and aspen or larch stands that begin to change colors weeks before the eastern maple belt.

Lake Louise (Alberta) opens the season on Sept. 18, with a 12-day peak-color window running through Sept. 29. In Larch Valley above Moraine Lake, the larch trees are expected to turn brilliant shades of gold against the majestic backdrop of the Canadian Rockies.

Flathead Lake and Glacier National Park (Montana) also enter their peak-color window on Sept. 18, with aspen and cottonwood along Going-to-the-Sun Road holding color for 13 days.

Lake Estes and Rocky Mountain National Park (Colorado) are the most accessible of the early-season destinations, reachable from Denver in about 90 minutes. The peak-color window in this area opens Sept. 18 and runs through Sept. 30.



Fall foliage on display



Lake.com logo, lakeside vacation rental platform

“The question we hear more than any other is simply, ‘When should I go?’ Most people assume fall color happens one weekend in October, so they plan a getaway for that weekend and may end up feeling like they missed it,” said Ciccarelli. “Our analysis shows the color change is more like a wave. Too late in the Adirondacks, for example, is right on time for the Ozarks.”

The Best Saturdays to Catch Peak Fall Foliage

For travelers planning a weekend getaway, the Lake.com 2026 Fall Foliage Map identifies the first Saturday within each lake destination’s expected peak-color window.

Saturday, Oct. 3 covers Lake Placid and the Adirondacks, Muskoka, the Laurentians around Mont-Tremblant, Québec City, and [New Hampshire’s White Mountains](#).

Saturday, Oct. 10 is the busiest Saturday of the season, covering Lake Winnepesaukee, Lake Champlain, Sebago Lake, Lake George, Door County, Traverse City, Gatineau Park and Deep Creek Lake.

Saturday, Oct. 17 sees the colors shift into the Finger Lakes, the Pocono Mountains, Lake Geneva, the Delaware Water Gap and the mountains of North Carolina.

Saturday, Oct. 24 covers the Great Smoky Mountains, the Lower Hudson Valley, Lake of the Ozarks, Lake Cumberland, and Lake Norman.

Saturday, Oct. 31 reflects peak color at Kentucky Lake, Lake Barkley, [Broken Bow Lake](#), Lake Lanier, as well as Lake Ouachita and Hot Springs.

The Last Color of 2026: Southern Lakes Carry the Season into November

Travelers who miss the October crest still have options, with peak color continuing across southern lake destinations into November. Nearly all of these lakes sit within a three-hour drive of a large metropolitan area.

Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley (Kentucky and Tennessee), both within a two-hour drive of Nashville, reach peak color from Oct. 25 through Nov. 5.

Broken Bow Lake (Oklahoma) and Lake Lanier (Georgia) are expected to remain at peak through Nov. 8.

Lake Ouachita and Hot Springs (Arkansas) are the latest-peaking destinations, with peak color running from Nov. 9 through Nov. 22.

Other notable findings:

The Great Smoky Mountains hold the longest peak window in the study at 15 days, because color descends through elevation bands from the ridgelines to the valley floors rather than arriving everywhere at once.

Gatineau Park (Québec) stands out in the study's combined index for its color quality, timing, and accessibility. Located just 30 minutes from Ottawa, fall color at Gatineau Park peaks from Oct. 7 through Oct. 18.

Canadian Thanksgiving (Oct. 12) falls inside the busiest time of the season in both Ontario and Québec.

Methodology

The Lake.com 2026 Fall Foliage Map analyzes 100 popular lake destinations within driving distance of major metropolitan areas, including 77 in the United States and 23 in Canada. Lake destinations were selected based on being located within 60 miles of a major metro area. Peak-color windows were developed using official 2026 regional forecasts where available, live government foliage trackers, and historical guidance from the USDA Forest Service and National Park Service. The analysis also incorporates land-surface phenology, 1991–2020 climate normals and elevation data from the USA National Phenology Network, NOAA, Environment and Climate Change Canada and the USGS.

Peak dates are intended as planning windows rather than guarantees. Wind, rain, drought and early or late frost can shift or shorten peak-color windows.

To read the full report, visit <https://www.lake.com/company/reports/fall-foliage-map/>

About Lake.com

Lake.com was founded by a husband-and-wife team with a shared passion for helping families experience the beauty of God's creation. Today, the platform features more than 75,000 vacation homes across North America and Europe, with a focus on transparent pricing, no guest fees, and family- and pet-friendly stays. By combining trusted destination guidance with a purpose-built marketplace, Lake.com is building the next generation of travel for those drawn to the water. For more information, visit www.lake.com.

Media Contact
Andrea Oliveira
media@lake.com

Andrea Oliveira
Lake.com
+1 226-794-5744

[email us here](#)

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