

Lake.com's 2026 Fall Foliage Dupes Report: Quieter Lakes Next Door to North America's Most Crowded Fall Destinations

Every deciduous destination in Lake.com's Top 100 has a lake alternative with similar fall color served by the same metro; 51 within 1 hour of the crowded town.

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Lake.com, the travel platform dedicated exclusively to stays and experiences by the water, today released The Fall Foliage Dupes, a companion to its 2026 Fall Foliage

Map. The report pairs each of the 100 most popular lake destinations within driving distance of major metropolitan areas across the United States and Canada with a quieter lake alternative served by the same metro, then compares the two on fall color, drive time, crowding, and nightly rate.



Fall Foliage Dupes from Lake.com

“

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*David Ciccarelli, CEO of
Lake.com*

Key Highlights

Same color, same week: All 90 destinations in the Top 100 with a deciduous canopy have an alternative rated in the same or a closely comparable canopy type, peaking inside the same window. Seventy of the pairs share the same dominant tree cover.

Within an hour: 51 of the 100 alternatives are within an hour's drive of the crowded town they stand in for, and 79 are within 90 minutes. The median detour is 12 minutes.

Closer than the crowd: 31 alternatives are closer to the feeder metro than the famous town is. Bryson City is about 40 minutes closer to Atlanta than Gatlinburg; Lake James is about 35

minutes closer to Charlotte than Asheville.

The price gap, pair by pair: Where comparable market rates were available, the lake was cheaper in four of five pairs: 34 percent at Fontana Lake against Gatlinburg, 28 percent at Tupper Lake against Lake Placid and 26 percent at Tamworth against North Conway. The exception is Lake James, where rates run 69 percent above Asheville because 70 percent of its rentals are three-bedroom-plus homes.

The Foliage Dupes builds on the Lake.com 2026 Fall Foliage Map, which assigned a 2026 peak-color window to each of the 100 destinations. For each, Lake.com identified the town where traffic, permits, and bookings concentrate at peak color, then selected a lake alternative from the same feeder metro, inside the same peak window and, wherever one exists, under the same dominant canopy. Crowd and cost were compared using active short-term rental listing counts, trailing 12-month market rates from AirDNA and AirROI, National Park Service visitation, and one-way drive-time estimates.

“Most people think of fall color as belonging to a handful of famous towns, and they plan around those towns,” said David Ciccarelli, founder and CEO of Lake.com. “The trees don’t stop at the edge of town. In nearly every case there is a lake twenty or forty minutes away, under the same canopy, peaking the same week, with a fraction of the cars and at a discounted rate.”

Same Park, Quieter Side: Gatlinburg and Fontana Lake

Great Smoky Mountains National Park recorded 11.5 million recreation visits in 2025, the most of any national park in the United States. Gatlinburg, the Tennessee gateway, has 7,032 active short-term rental listings at a market average of \$347 per night.

On the park’s quieter southern boundary, Bryson City, North Carolina, sits on Fontana Lake with 1,483 listings at an average of \$230 a night, 34 percent less. The two share the same peak window, Oct. 18 through Nov. 1, and the same best Saturday, Oct. 24, and Bryson City is about 40 minutes closer to Atlanta. Color descends from Newfound Gap toward Fontana Dam on the same schedule it descends toward the Parkway.

The Marquee Pairs

Five of the most congested fall towns in North America have a lake alternative with a comparable market rate on record, and the pattern holds in four of the five.

Lake Placid □ Tupper Lake ([New York](#)). Thirty minutes west of Main Street, under the same Adirondack sugar and red maple, with 33 active listings to Lake Placid’s 410 and a market rate of \$315 against \$439, 28 percent less. Peak color runs Sept. 27 through Oct. 8; best Saturday, Oct. 3.

North Conway □ Tamworth ([New Hampshire](#)). Twenty-five minutes south of the Kancamagus Highway, on the Chocorua Lake basin, with 19 listings to North Conway's 237 and a rate of \$291 against \$394, 26 percent less. Tamworth is also 20 minutes closer to Boston. Peak color runs Sept. 28 through Oct. 9.

Bar Harbor □ Rangeley ([Maine](#)). Not a next-door swap at three and a half hours apart, but 48 minutes closer to Boston, with a maple and birch canopy that outcolors Acadia's spruce mix and no summit vehicle reservation to secure. The rate gap is narrow, \$401 against \$439, 9 percent. Peak color runs Oct. 6 through Oct. 16.

Stowe □ Lake Willoughby (Vermont). Stowe sits outside the Lake.com Top 100 but is one of New England's best-known fall destinations, so the analysis includes it as a supplementary pair. Westmore, on Lake Willoughby in the Northeast Kingdom, is about an hour northeast, with 49 listings to Stowe's 901 and a rate of \$297 against \$564, 47 percent less. Peak color runs Oct. 1 through Oct. 12.

"We expected these lesser-known lakes to be cheaper across the board, and mostly they are," said Ciccarelli. "But a lake town full of four-bedroom houses will post a higher average rate than a resort town full of one-bedroom condos, even when the like-for-like house costs less."

Where a Reservation Is the Crowd

Fifteen of the 100 congested towns are gateways to a park or viewpoint that now rations access at peak color through timed entry, a vehicle reservation, or a mandatory shuttle. A further 13 are defined by a named scenic road that closes or backs up on peak weekends. Each has a lake within reach that requires none of it.

Rocky Mountain National Park (Colorado): timed-entry permits through mid-October on both sides of Trail Ridge Road. Grand Lake's alternative, Granby on Lake Granby, is 20 minutes outside the west gate under the same aspen belt; Estes Park's is Red Feather Lakes, an hour and 40 minutes north.

Glacier National Park (Montana): vehicle reservations on Going-to-the-Sun Road. Bigfork, on Flathead Lake, is 55 minutes south with western larch and aspen along the Swan Valley.

Zion National Park (Utah): a shuttle-only canyon. Navajo Lake on the Markagunt Plateau, 80 minutes away, carries aspen that turns earlier and brighter than Zion's canyon floor.

Named roads: the Kancamagus Highway (North Conway □ Tamworth, 25 minutes), the Blue Ridge Parkway at Blowing Rock (Boone □ Watauga Lake, one hour), Sleeping Bear's M-22 (Traverse City □ Crystal Lake at Frankfort, 48 minutes) and the Delaware Water Gap (□ Swartswood Lake, 30 minutes).

Canada: The Dupes Around Thanksgiving Weekend

Twenty-three of the 100 destinations are Canadian, and Canadian Thanksgiving, Oct. 12, falls inside the busiest fortnight of the season in both Ontario and Québec. The alternatives cluster within an hour of the towns that fill up.

Mont-Tremblant □ Saint-Donat (Lac Archambault), 55 minutes, same Laurentian sugar-maple canopy, peak Sept. 28 through Oct. 9.

Muskoka □ Magnetawan (Ahmic Lake and Lake Cecebe), about an hour north of Bracebridge on the same Canadian Shield canopy, peak Sept. 29 through Oct. 10.

Huntsville □ Barry's Bay (Algonquin Provincial Park), take Algonquin's Highway 60 corridor, 85 minutes on the King's Highway.

Collingwood and Blue Mountain □ Lake Eugenia and the Beaver Valley, 35 minutes, peak Oct. 3 through Oct. 14, best Saturday is Oct. 10.

Baie-Saint-Paul □ Lac Nairne, 35 minutes, beneath the Hautes-Gorges, peak Oct. 5 through Oct. 15; and Québec City □ Lac Saint-Joseph, 35 minutes, peak

Sept. 29 through Oct. 9.

Gatineau Park □ Lac Simon, 80 minutes, for weekends when the Fall Rhapsody parkways close to cars and run shuttle-only.

Other notable findings:

Several alternatives outcolor the original. Rangeley's hardwoods against Acadia's spruce; Lake Burton in Rabun County against Lake Lanier, 70 minutes north of Atlanta's default lake weekend; Lake Jocassee's Blue Ridge escarpment against Lake Hartwell; and the Kaibab Plateau aspen at Jacob Lake against the Grand Canyon's South Rim.

The Ozarks stack up too. Shell Knob, on the west end of Table Rock Lake, is 48 minutes from the Branson Strip; Truman Lake at Warsaw is 55 minutes from Lake of the Ozarks and 48 minutes closer to Kansas City.

Ten coastal and desert destinations in the Top 100, from Myrtle Beach to Scottsdale, have little deciduous canopy on either side of the pair and are flagged in the study rather than presented as fall-color alternatives.

Methodology

The Foliage Dupes takes the 100 lake destinations of the Lake.com 2026 Fall Foliage Map, 77 in the United States and 23 in Canada, in the order their color peaks. For each destination, Lake.com identified a primary town, the place where bookings, traffic, and permits concentrate at peak color, and classified its congestion signal as a timed-entry or reservation system, a mandatory shuttle, a named scenic road that closes or backs up, a dated festival, or a nationally known destination with a seasonal rate premium. The alternative is a lake town reached from the same feeder metropolitan area of more than one million residents, inside the same peak-color window and, where one exists, under the same dominant canopy type, chosen in order of preference from the same park or watershed, the same state or province, then the same metro.

Nightly rates are trailing 12-month market average daily rates from AirDNA, AirROI, and Rabbu public market pages, accessed Sept. 2, 2026, compared only within the same source. Crowding is measured by active short-term rental listing counts from the same pages and by calendar-year 2025 recreation visits published by the National Park Service in March 2026. Drive times are one-way estimates from the metro center and between the two towns. Canopy match is an editorial rating of dominant tree cover, pending a satellite land-cover extraction.

The comparison has limits. Market rates are annual averages, not October rates, and are not adjusted for the size of the home, which is why a lakefront market can post a higher average than a resort town with smaller units; comparable rates were available for five pairs and are quoted only for those. Listing counts measure rental supply, not visitors. Drive times are estimates and will vary with traffic. Peak-color windows are planning windows, not guarantees, and wind, rain, drought, or frost can shift or shorten them.

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

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