



When fall color peaks at North America's 100 most popular lakes

A destination-by-destination calendar of the week color peaks
and how many days the window lasts

FALL FOLIAGE MAP · 2026

IN BRIEF

Peak color is a nine-week wave, not a single weekend

**9.5
weeks**

from the first peak on
Sept 18 to the last on
Nov 22

**43 +
43**

destinations at peak in
the weeks of Oct 5 and
Oct 12

**12
days**

median length of a
destination's peak
window

**46 of
100**

destinations within a
two-hour drive of a
metro above one million

WHAT THE STUDY MEASURED

Four evidence layers, in order of precedence

01

Official 2026 forecasts

Dated regional predictions where a government has published them

02

Live foliage trackers

Park- and state-level color reports updated weekly in season

03

Historical peak guidance

Forest Service, Park Service and destination records

04

Satellite and climate baselines

Phenology, 1991–2020 climate normals, elevation

PEAK DEFINED

The period when roughly 70 to 100 percent of the landscape is expected to be in fall color

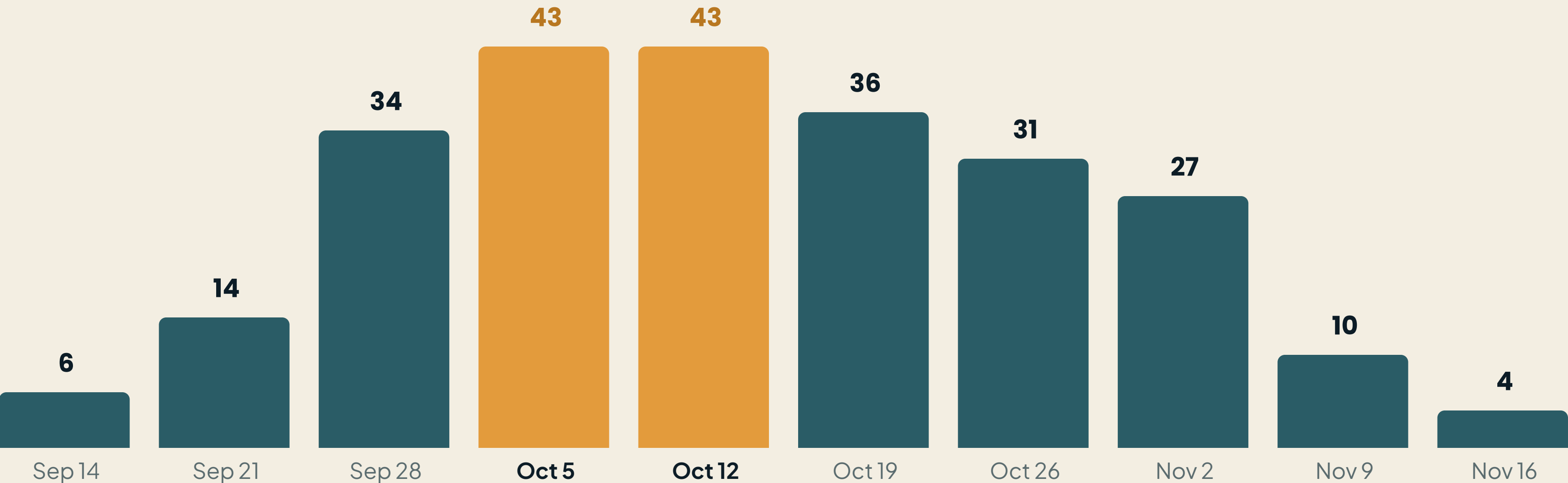
CONFIDENCE RULE

Destinations are flagged High, Medium or Low by evidence tier rather than presented as equal

THE SEASON, WEEK BY WEEK

The season builds for three weeks, crests for two, and is gone by Halloween in the north

Destinations at peak, by week of 2026



Six destinations are at peak in the opening week and four in the final week. Between them, 43 peak at once, twice.

THE BUSIEST WEEKEND OF THE YEAR

Saturday, October 10

43

destinations at peak that
week

8

of the top 10 index markets among
them

Lake Winnepesaukee, Lake Champlain, Sebago Lake, Lake George, Door County, Traverse City, Gatineau Park and Deep Creek Lake all sit inside their peak window on the same Saturday.



THE ONE WEEKEND TO CIRCLE

Four Saturdays carry most of the season

Sat Oct 3

Lake Placid / Adirondacks

Muskoka

Mont-Tremblant

Québec City

White Mountains

Haliburton Highlands

Sat Oct 10

Lake Winnepesaukee

Lake Champlain

Sebago Lake

Lake George

Door County

Traverse City

Gatineau Park

Deep Creek Lake

Sat Oct 17

Finger Lakes

Pocono Mountains

Lake Geneva

Delaware Water Gap

North Carolina Mountains

Niagara-on-the-Lake

Holland / Grand Haven

Eastern Townships

Sat Oct 24 & 31

Lower Hudson Valley

Great Smoky Mountains

Lake of the Ozarks

Lake Cumberland

Kentucky Lake

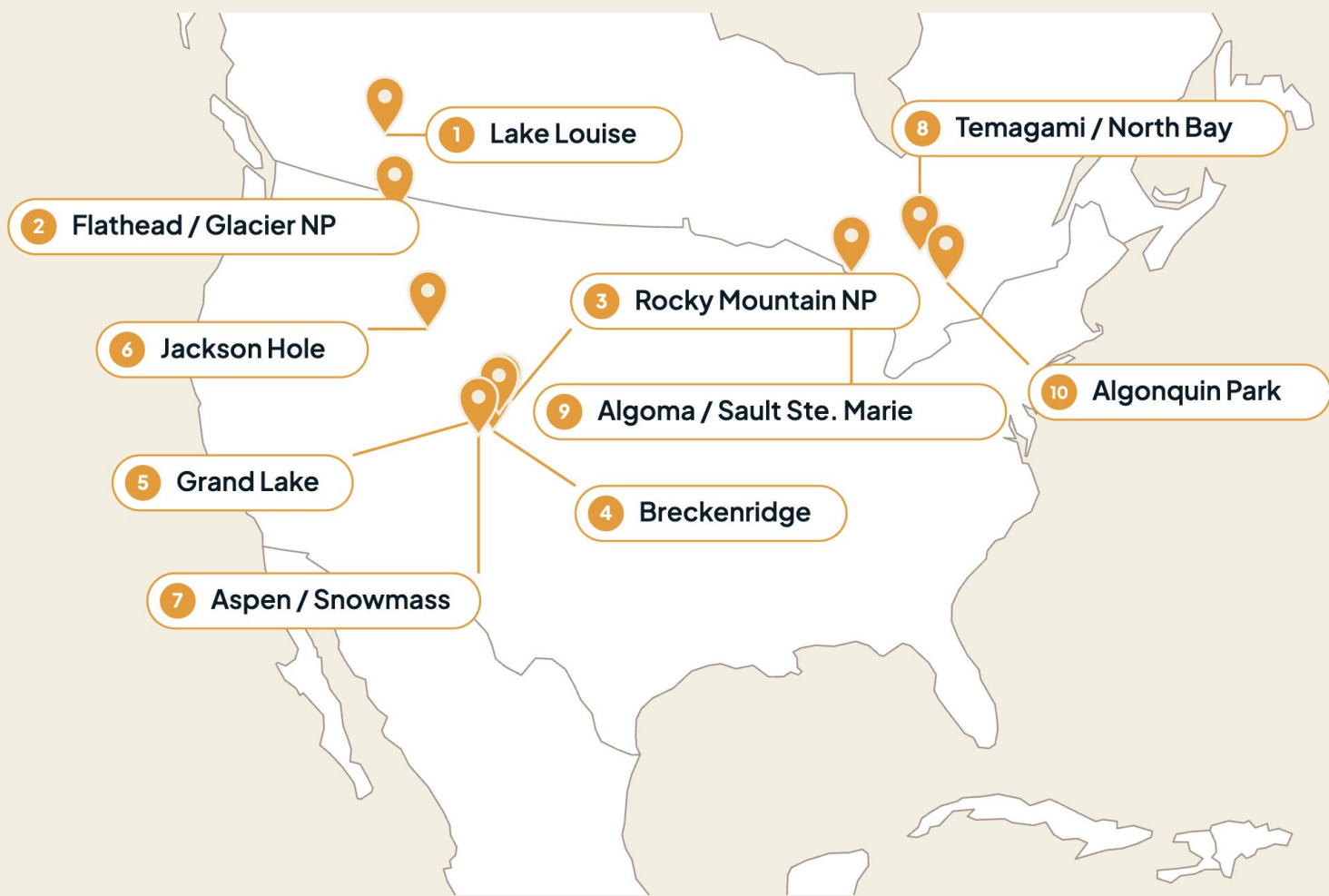
Lake Norman

Broken Bow

Lake Lanier

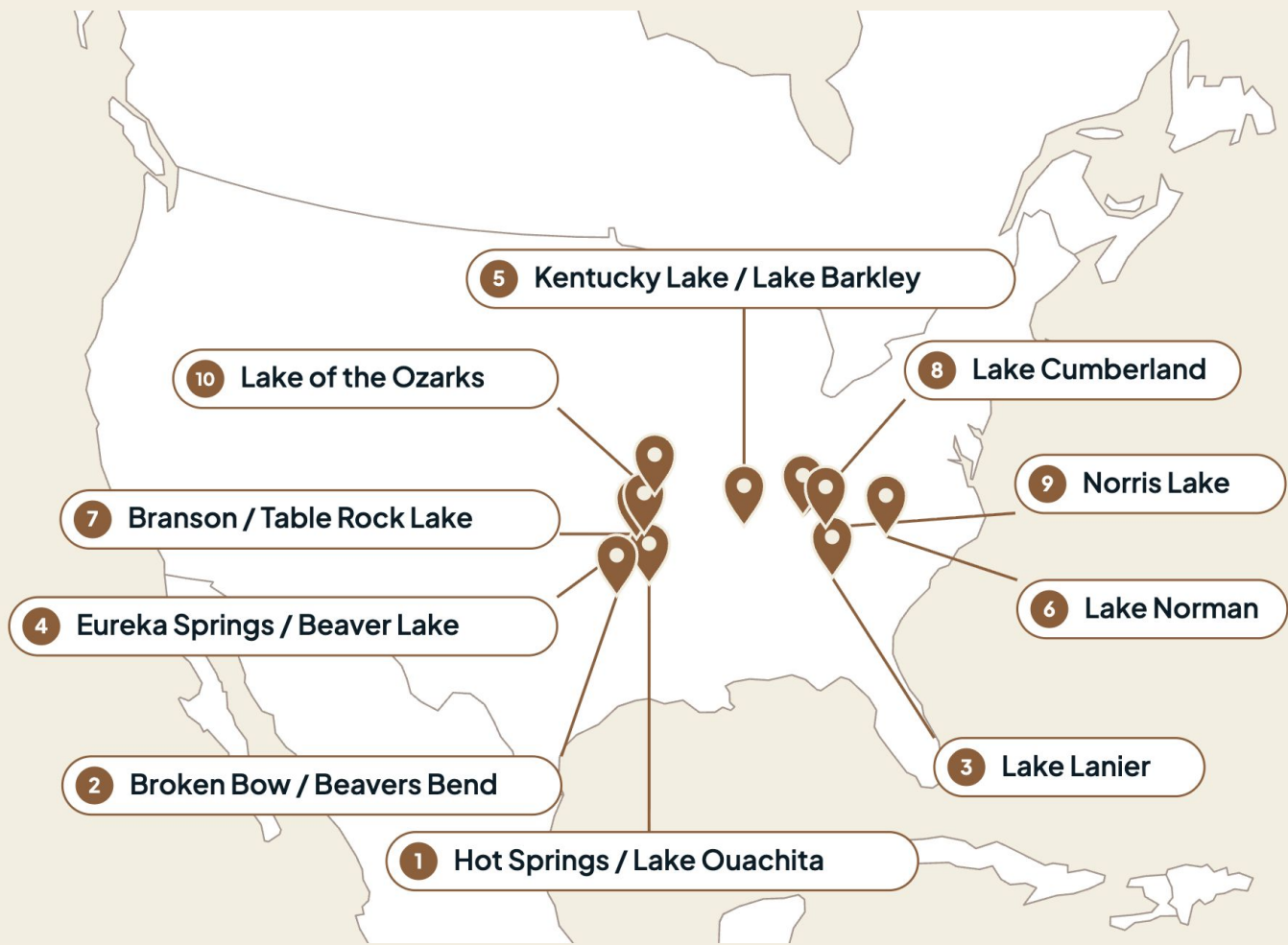
Best Saturday is the first Saturday falling at least two days into a destination's peak window.

The season opens Sept 18 in the Rockies, where elevation beats latitude



#	DESTINATION	PEAK WINDOW	NEAREST METRO
1	Lake Louise, AB	Sep 18 – Sep 29	Calgary, 2.1 h
2	Flathead / Glacier NP, MT	Sep 18 – Sep 30	Calgary, 4.5 h
3	Rocky Mountain NP, CO	Sep 18 – Sep 30	Denver, 1.5 h
4	Breckenridge, CO	Sep 20 – Oct 1	Denver, 1.6 h
5	Grand Lake, CO	Sep 20 – Oct 1	Denver, 1.9 h
6	Jackson Hole, WY	Sep 20 – Oct 2	Salt Lake City, 4.7 h
7	Aspen / Snowmass, CO	Sep 22 – Oct 3	Denver, 3.6 h
8	Temagami / North Bay, ON	Sep 22 – Oct 3	Toronto, 4.0 h
9	Sault Ste. Marie, ON	Sep 22 – Oct 4	Detroit, 5.5 h
10	Algonquin Park, ON	Sep 24 – Oct 5	Toronto, 3.0 h

Seven weeks after Lake Louise, the wave is still moving through the Ozarks and the piedmont

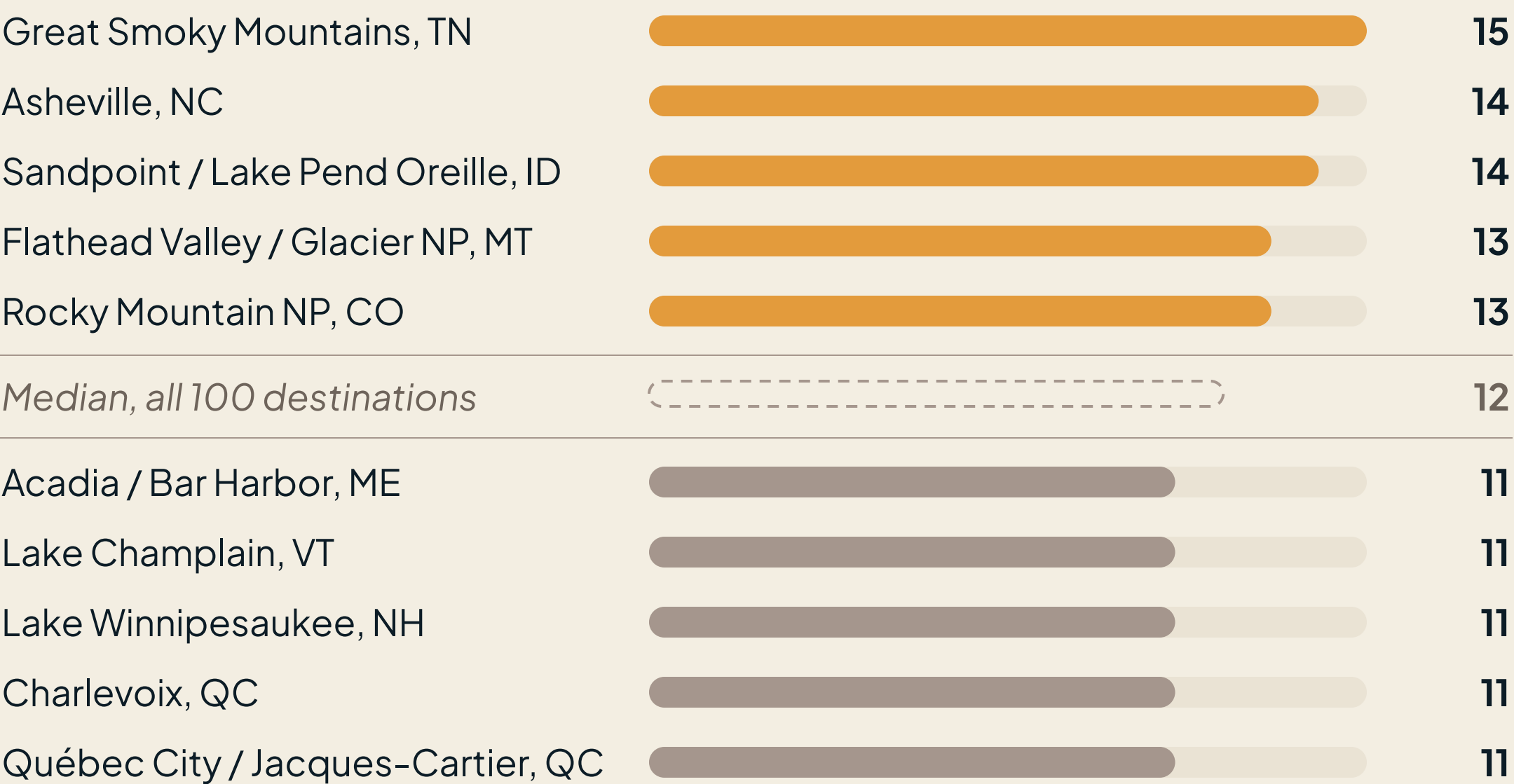


Every destination on this list is a drive, not a flight, from a southern or midwestern metro.

#	DESTINATION	PEAK WINDOW	NEAREST METRO
1	Lake Ouachita, AR	Oct 29 – Nov 9	Memphis, 3.3 h
2	Broken Bow, OK	Oct 28 – Nov 8	Dallas, 3.2 h
3	Lake Lanier, GA	Oct 28 – Nov 8	Atlanta, 1.0 h
4	Beaver Lake, AR	Oct 27 – Nov 7	Tulsa, 2.2 h
5	Kentucky Lake, KY–TN	Oct 25 – Nov 5	Nashville, 2.0 h
6	Lake Norman, NC	Oct 25 – Nov 5	Charlotte, 0.6 h
7	Table Rock Lake, MO	Oct 24 – Nov 4	Kansas City, 3.3 h
8	Lake Cumberland, KY	Oct 24 – Nov 4	Louisville, 2.3 h
9	Norris Lake, TN	Oct 24 – Nov 4	Nashville, 3.0 h
10	Lake of the Ozarks, MO	Oct 22 – Nov 2	Kansas City, 2.7 h

WINDOW LENGTH

Elevation buys you time: the Smokies hold color for 15 days, Acadia for 11



Days at peak, 2026

The Smokies span 15 days because color descends through elevation bands from ridgeline to valley floor rather than arriving everywhere at once.

The short windows are lakes in flat terrain and single-species canopy, where one storm can end the display.

Ontario and Québec are the only markets with an official 2026 forecast behind them

THE EVIDENCE

Tourisme Québec published dated regional predictions on Aug 19, 2026. Ontario Parks reports color change park by park through the season.

Twenty-three of the 100 destinations are Canadian; nine carry the study's only High confidence rating.

Oct 12

Canadian Thanksgiving falls inside the busiest fortnight of the season in both provinces.

DESTINATION	PEAK WINDOW	BEST SATURDAY
Algonquin Park, ON	Sep 24 – Oct 5	Sat Sep 26
Haliburton Highlands, ON	Sep 28 – Oct 9	Sat Oct 3
Québec City / Jacques-Cartier, QC	Sep 29 – Oct 9	Sat Oct 3
Muskoka, ON	Sep 29 – Oct 10	Sat Oct 3
Charlevoix, QC	Oct 5 – Oct 15	Sat Oct 10
Mauricie, QC	Oct 5 – Oct 15	Sat Oct 10
Kawartha Lakes, ON	Oct 5 – Oct 16	Sat Oct 10
Gatineau Park / Outaouais, QC	Oct 7 – Oct 18	Sat Oct 10
Prince Edward County, ON	Oct 10 – Oct 21	Sat Oct 17
Eastern Townships / Sutton-Orford, QC	Oct 12 – Oct 22	Sat Oct 17

FIRST IN THE FALL FOLIAGE INDEX

Gatineau Park, Québec

Oct 7–18 30 min

peak window

from downtown Ottawa

Exceptional maple canopy, a drive-up overlook at Champlain Lookout, an official provincial forecast, and the shortest metro drive of any top-ten destination.



ACCESS

Forty-six of the hundred are a Friday evening departure

46

destinations within two hours of a metro
above one million

METRO	NEAREST PEAK DESTINATION	DRIVE	PEAK WINDOW
Ottawa	Gatineau Park, QC	0.5 h	Oct 7 – Oct 18
Charlotte	Lake Norman, NC	0.6 h	Oct 25 – Nov 5
Grand Rapids	Holland / Grand Haven, MI	0.6 h	Oct 12 – Oct 22
Atlanta	Lake Lanier, GA	1.0 h	Oct 28 – Nov 8
Rochester	Finger Lakes, NY	1.0 h	Oct 10 – Oct 21
New York City	Lower Hudson Valley, NY	1.2 h	Oct 18 – Oct 28
Montréal	Eastern Townships, QC	1.4 h	Oct 12 – Oct 22
Chicago	Lake Geneva, WI	1.5 h	Oct 12 – Oct 22
Denver	Rocky Mountain NP, CO	1.5 h	Sep 18 – Sep 30
Toronto	Kawartha Lakes, ON	1.6 h	Oct 5 – Oct 16
Boston	Lake Winnepesaukee, NH	1.9 h	Oct 3 – Oct 13
Nashville	Kentucky Lake, KY-TN	2.0 h	Oct 25 – Nov 5

GEOGRAPHY OF THE WAVE

Color moves south and downhill: five regions, five different months to travel

REGION	DESTINATIONS		TYPICAL PEAK
Rockies & Northern Interior		12	Mid-to-late September
Ontario, Québec & Northern New England		26	Late September to mid-October
Great Lakes & Upper Midwest		14	Early to mid-October
Mid-Atlantic & Southern Appalachians		18	Mid-to-late October
Ozarks, Piedmont & Southern Lakes		20	Late October to early November

Ten coastal and desert destinations sit outside the deciduous pattern and are flagged separately.

Three things the dates alone will not tell you

Elevation, not latitude

Aspen peaks the same week as northern Ontario, 1,300 miles further south. Height above sea level moves the date more than distance north.

Two weeks of change, days of brilliance

Official guidance in New York and Vermont describes a roughly two-week color cycle in any one place, with maximum brilliance much shorter. The window is when to travel; the peak inside it is luck.

Weather ends it, not the calendar

A single storm of heavy wind and rain can strip a canopy days early. Québec's own forecast carries that caveat.

“Most people treat fall color as one weekend in October, book late, and end up feeling like they missed it. What the data shows is a wave that moves across the continent for more than two months. If you are too late for the Adirondacks, you are right on time for the Ozarks.”

“A date on a map is a starting point, not a promise. Use it to pick the week and book the house, then check a live tracker the week before you leave.”

DAVID CICCARELLI · CEO, LAKE.COM



TAKEAWAYS

Three practical reads for anyone using the calendar

01 **Pick the week, not the weekend**

A destination's window is 12 days on median. Any Saturday inside it is a good bet; the first one is the safest.

02 **If you missed it, drive south**

The gap between the earliest and latest peak in the study is nine and a half weeks. There is almost always a lake at peak somewhere within a three-hour drive.

03 **The calendar is a plan, not a forecast**

Windows are built from official forecasts, live trackers and long-run climate records, and are refreshed weekly through the season.

METHODOLOGY AND NOTES FOR EDITORS

How the 100 windows were built

METHODOLOGY

The study assigns a 2026 peak fall color window to each of the 100 most popular lake destinations on Lake.com: 77 in the United States and 23 in Canada.

Peak is the period when roughly 70 to 100 percent of the surrounding landscape is expected to be in fall color, the definition used by Bonjour Québec.

Windows draw on four layers in order of precedence: official 2026 regional forecasts; live trackers from Ontario Parks and the Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and New York foliage reports; historical guidance from the USDA Forest Service, National Park Service and destination organizations; and satellite and climate baselines (USA National Phenology Network, NOAA and ECCC 1991–2020 normals, USGS 3DEP elevation).

Window length is the inclusive number of days from the start to the end of the expected peak; the median is 12 days. Best Saturday is the first Saturday at least two days into a window. Drive times are one-way estimates from the nearest metro above one million residents, using U.S. Census Vintage 2025 and Statistics Canada CMA data.

Each destination carries a foliage quality rating and an evidence confidence tier. Ten coastal and desert destinations with limited deciduous canopy are flagged rather than presented as peers of the maple and aspen markets.

Peak dates are planning windows, not day-level forecasts. Wind, rain, drought and an early or late frost can shift a window by up to a week or shorten it.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Credit with link
Any use of this story requires a linked mention of Lake.com.

Assets available on request
The interactive fall foliage map with a week-by-week slider, the wave chart, regional cuts by state and province, and the full 100-row calendar as a downloadable table.

Spokesperson
David Ciccarelli, founder and CEO, available for interview.

Refresh cadence
The calendar is rebuilt each August and updated against live trackers weekly from mid-September.



Read the full report

lake.com/company/reports/fall-foliage-map

DATA SOURCES

USA National Phenology Network, NOAA
NCEI and ECCC 1991–2020 climate normals,
USDA Forest Service, National Park Service,
Ontario Parks, Bonjour Québec, and state
foliage programs

ATTRIBUTION

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