



The quieter lakes next door to North America's most crowded fall towns

THE FOLIAGE DUPES · 2026

100 congested destinations paired with a lake alternative from the same metro — same color, shorter line, and a price gap that depends on what you count

IN BRIEF

Every crowded fall town has a lake dupe — and it is usually closer and cheaper than you think

90 of 90

deciduous destinations with an alternative in the same or a close canopy type

51

alternatives within an hour of the crowded town (79 within 90 minutes)

31

alternatives that are closer to the metro than the famous town

5 of 6

pairs where the lake was cheaper per night, where comparable rates exist

Ten coastal and desert destinations in the Top 100 are flagged and excluded from the color comparison.
Source: Lake.com Foliage Dupes 2026; AirDNA, AirROI, Rabbu (Sept. 2, 2026); NPS CY2025.



WHAT THE STUDY MEASURED

Four questions asked of every pair



Color

Is the alternative under the same dominant canopy, peaking in the same window? Editorial rating: Same, Close or Weaker.



Drive

Same feeder metro above one million. Minutes from the crowded town, minutes from the metro, and who is closer to the city.



Crowd

Active short-term rental listings, national park visits, and the congestion signal: timed entry, shuttle, gridlock, festival or marquee premium.



Cost

Trailing-twelve-month market rate, same source on both sides, quoted pair by pair.

PAIR DEFINED

A lake town reached from the same metro, inside the same peak window and, where one exists, under the same canopy, with meaningfully fewer listings or visitors.

THE MARQUEE TEN

Ten towns everyone names, ten lakes almost nobody does

● Crowded town ● Lake dupe

#	Crowded town	Lake dupe	Apart	Metro	Peak window
1	Gatlinburg, TN	Bryson City / Fontana Lake, NC	1 h 25	Atlanta	Oct 18 – Nov 1
2	Asheville, NC	Lake James (Nebo), NC	55 min	Charlotte	Oct 15 – 28
3	Bar Harbor, ME	Rangeley, ME	3 h 35	Boston	Oct 6 – 16
4	Lake Placid, NY	Tupper Lake, NY	35 min	Montréal	Sept 27 – Oct 8
5	North Conway, NH	Tamworth / Chocorua Lake, NH	25 min	Boston	Sept 28 – Oct 9
6	Estes Park, CO	Red Feather Lakes, CO	1 h 40	Denver	Sept 18 – 30
7	Lake George, NY	Schroon Lake, NY	30 min	New York City	Oct 5 – 16
8	Boone / Blowing Rock, NC	Watauga Lake, TN	1 h 00	Charlotte	Oct 12 – 24
9	Muskoka (Bracebridge), ON	Magnetawan, ON	1 h 05	Toronto	Sept 29 – Oct 10
10	Stowe, VT	Lake Willoughby (Westmore), VT	1 h 05	Boston	Oct 1 – 12

Five of the ten are within an hour of each other; eight within ninety minutes.

Source: Lake.com Foliage Duples 2026; AirDNA, AirROI, Rabbu (Sept. 2, 2026); NPS CY2025.

SAME PARK, QUIETER SIDE

Gatlinburg and Fontana Lake share a national park and a peak week — not a price

Gatlinburg, TN

\$347 a night

7,032 active listings

3 h 30 from Atlanta

Parkway strip gridlock; Newfound Gap and Cades Cove backups

Bryson City / Fontana Lake, NC

\$230 a night · -34%

1,483 active listings

2 h 50 from Atlanta

Deep Creek, Road to Nowhere, Fontana Dam

11.5M

PARK VISITS

Great Smoky Mountains NP, CY2025

Oct 24

BEST SATURDAY

Same date, both towns

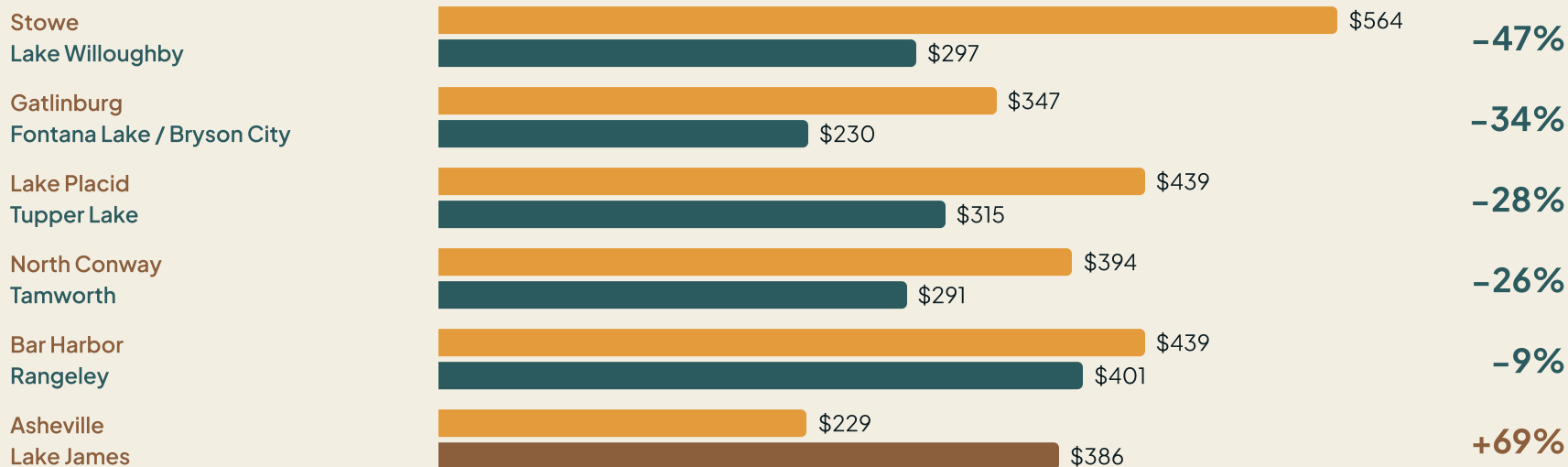
USD per night; AirDNA trailing-twelve-month market average, both towns, not October rate, not adjusted for home size.

Source: Lake.com Foliage Dupes 2026; AirDNA, AirROI, Rabbu (Sept. 2, 2026); NPS CY2025.



THE PRICE GAP

Where the lake is cheaper — and the one pair where it isn't



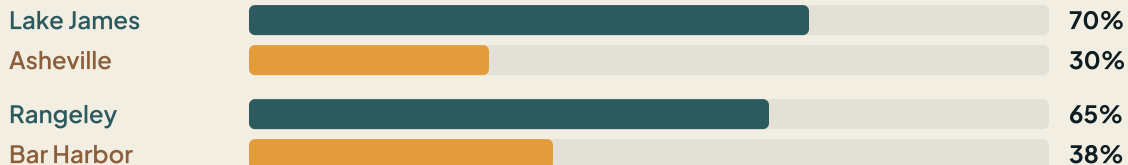
USD per night; trailing-twelve-month market average, not October rate, not adjusted for home size.

Source: Lake.com Foliage Dupes 2026; AirDNA, AirROI, Rabbu (Sept. 2, 2026); NPS CY2025.

THE INVERSION

Lake James costs more than Asheville because its houses are bigger, not because the lake is pricier

Share of listings with 3+ bedrooms



A market average mixes one-bedroom condos with four-bedroom lake houses. Where the dupe skews to whole-family homes, its average rises even when the like-for-like house costs less — which is why pairs are quoted individually.

Share of active listings with three or more bedrooms. Rates: trailing-twelve-month market average, not October rate, not adjusted for home size.

Source: Lake.com Foliage Dupes 2026; AirDNA, AirROI, Rabbu (Sept. 2, 2026); NPS CY2025.



THE CROWD

The famous town has 5x to 21x the rental supply of its lake dupe



Active short-term rental listings, same source each pair. Supply is a proxy for the number of neighbors on the water, not a visitor count.

Source: Lake.com Foliage Dupes 2026; AirDNA, AirROI, Rabbu (Sept. 2, 2026); NPS CY2025.

THE DRIVE

Thirty-one dupes are closer to the metro than the town everyone drives past them to reach

Metro	Crowded town (h)	Lake dupe (h)	Min
Atlanta	Gatlinburg 3.5	Bryson City 2.8	-40
Charlotte	Asheville 2.1	Lake James 1.5	-35
Boston	Bar Harbor 4.6	Rangeley 3.8	-48
Boston	North Conway 2.5	Tamworth 2.2	-20
Kansas City	Lake of the Ozarks 2.7	Truman Lake 1.9	-48
Milwaukee	Door County 2.5	Elkhart Lake 1.0	-90
Denver	Grand Lake 1.9	Granby 1.7	-12
New York City	Delaware Water Gap 1.5	Swartswood Lake 1.3	-12

12 min

MEDIAN DETOUR

across all 100 pairs, crowded town to lake dupe

Source: Lake.com Foliage Dupes 2026, Sept. 2, 2026; NPS Visitor Use Statistics CY2025.





THE GATEKEEPERS

Fifteen towns ration the view with a permit or a shuttle — their dupes don't

10 Timed entry

Rocky Mountain NP → Red Feather Lakes, Granby

Glacier → Flathead Lake

Acadia → Rangeley

Arches → Monticello

Yosemite → Shaver Lake

Olympic → Lake Quinault

La Mauricie → Lac Sacacomie

Bruce Peninsula → Southampton

Joshua Tree → Idyllwild

5 Mandatory shuttle

Moraine Lake → Kananaskis

Maroon Bells → Marble / Beaver Lake

Zion → Navajo Lake, 80 min

Mackinac Island → Burt Lake

Gatineau Park Fall Rhapsody → Lac Simon, 80 min

13 Named-road gridlock

Kancamagus → Tamworth, 25 min

Blue Ridge Parkway → Watauga Lake, 1 h

Algonquin Hwy 60 → Barry's Bay, 85 min

Sleeping Bear M-22 → Crystal Lake, 48 min

Delaware Water Gap → Swartswood Lake, 30 min

plus eight more

Congestion signal as classified for each primary town; minutes are one-way drive estimates to the dupe.

THE NORTHEAST

Four of the six sourced pairs sit within a three-hour arc of Boston and Montréal



Pair · peak window	Best Sat
Lake Placid → Tupper Lake Sept 27 – Oct 8	Oct 3
North Conway → Tamworth Sept 28 – Oct 9	Oct 3
Stowe → Lake Willoughby Oct 1 – 12	Oct 3
Lake George → Schroon Lake Oct 5 – 16	Oct 10
Bar Harbor → Rangeley Oct 6 – 16	Oct 10

Best Saturday: the first Saturday at least two days into the window, carried from the 2026 Fall Foliage Map.

Source: Lake.com Foliage Dupes 2026; AirDNA, AirROI, Rabbu (Sept. 2, 2026); NPS CY2025.

FALL FOLIAGE IN CANADA

Thanksgiving weekend, Oct. 12: the dupes sit within an hour of the towns that fill up

Crowded town	Lake dupe	Min	Peak window	Best Sat
Mont-Tremblant, QC	Saint-Donat / Lac Archambault	55	Sept 28 – Oct 9	Oct 3
Québec City, QC	Lac Saint-Joseph	35	Sept 29 – Oct 9	Oct 3
Muskoka (Bracebridge), ON	Magnetawan / Ahmic Lake	65	Sept 29 – Oct 10	Oct 3
Haliburton, ON	Bancroft / Baptiste Lake	65	Sept 28 – Oct 9	Oct 3
Collingwood / Blue Mtn, ON	Lake Eugenia	35	Oct 3 – 14	Oct 10
Baie-Saint-Paul, QC	Lac Nairne	35	Oct 5 – 15	Oct 10
Kawartha (Bobcaygeon), ON	Chandos Lake	55	Oct 5 – 16	Oct 10
Gatineau Park, QC	Lac Simon	80	Oct 7 – 18	Oct 10

Minutes apart: one-way drive estimate, crowded town to lake dupe.

Source: Lake.com Foliage Dupes 2026; AirDNA, AirROI, Rabbu (Sept. 2, 2026); NPS CY2025.



23

Canadian destinations in the Top 100

Oct 12

Canadian Thanksgiving, inside the busiest fortnight in both provinces

Algonquin's Hwy 60 gridlock has an east-gate answer at Barry's Bay, 85 min.



GEOGRAPHY OF THE PAIRS

One hundred pairs, five regions, one rule: the lake is in the same peak week as the town



70

pairs share the same dominant
tree cover

22

pairs rated close

8

rated weaker — all coastal or
desert markets

Region counts carried from Story 01; canopy match is an editorial rating, pending NLCD extraction.

BEYOND THE PAIRS

Three things the pairing alone will not tell you



Some dupes outcolor the original

Rangeley's hardwoods against Acadia's spruce; Lake Burton against Lake Lanier; Lake Jocassee against Hartwell; Jacob Lake aspen against the South Rim.



Same window, same weather risk

A dupe peaks with its town and loses its leaves with it. One storm ends both. Pick the week, book the house, then read the tracker.



Supply is not silence

Fewer listings means fewer neighbors on the water, not an empty trail. The lake is the quieter base, not a guarantee of solitude at the overlook.

“

Most people think of fall color as belonging to a handful of famous towns, and they plan around those towns. The trees don't stop at the town line. 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.

We expected the lakes to be cheaper across the board, and mostly they are. 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. That is why we have published the numbers pair by pair rather than as one headline percentage.

David Ciccarelli

Founder and CEO, Lake.com





TAKEAWAYS

Three practical reads for anyone using the pairs

01

Book the lake, day-trip the town

The dupe is the base; the famous overlook is a 25 to 85-minute morning drive on most pairs. Go early, leave before the lots fill.

02

Compare like with like

Ask for the rate on a three-bedroom home in both towns, not the market average. Where the lake is mostly whole houses, the average misleads.

03

Same week, same window

The Fall Foliage Map's best Saturday for the town is the best Saturday for its lake too. Refresh against the state or park tracker in the final week.

How the 100 pairs were built

METHODOLOGY

Universe	The 100 destinations of the Lake.com 2026 Fall Foliage Map (77 U.S., 23 Canada), in peak order. Stowe, VT carried as supplementary.
Primary town	Where bookings, traffic and permits concentrate at peak; congestion signal classified by type.
Alternative	Same feeder metro (>1M), same peak window, same dominant canopy where one exists.
Rates	Trailing-twelve-month ADR from AirDNA, AirROI and Rabbu public pages, Sept. 2, 2026; compared within one source. Quoted for six pairs.
Crowd	Active listings (same pages); NPS CY2025 recreation visits for park gateways.
Drive	One-way estimates, metro center and town-to-town.
Canopy	Editorial rating, pending NLCD 2021 shoreline-buffer extraction.

LIMITS

Annual, not October, rates
Not adjusted for home size
Listings are not visitors
Drive times are estimates
Ten coastal and desert pairs flagged
Peak windows are planning windows, not guarantees

Read the full report

lake.com/company/reports/foilage-dupes

DATA SOURCES

Lake.com 2026 Fall Foliage Map; AirDNA, AirROI and Rabbu public market data (Sept. 2, 2026); NPS Visitor Use Statistics CY2025; USDA Forest Service and NPS viewpoint guidance.

ATTRIBUTION

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

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interview.

ASSETS ON REQUEST

The 100-pair table as a sheet

Paired-bar price chart

Listings-ratio chart

Pair map with regional cuts

Per-metro “closer than the crowd” tables for local desks



A scenic view of a lake at sunset. In the foreground, five red Adirondack chairs are arranged on a grassy shore, facing the water. The lake is calm, reflecting the warm orange and pink hues of the sky. A line of trees with autumn foliage borders the far shore, and a small island with more trees is visible on the right. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds.

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