



KWEENAW

EXPLORING FALL IN LAC LA BELLE - 24 HOUR GUIDE

Author: Amanda Makela on September 19, 2023

There's an undeniable force within the Keweenaw that seeks to harmonize with those who travel to this Peninsula, a calm undercurrent that beckons you to move at a different pace. This rhythm is set by the wind through ancient trees. The lapping of water on singing sands. Stoic mountains. History's quiet gaze from beachside lighthouses. Clouds streaming over autumn leaves and warm, quiet welcomes from tucked away establishments. We are talking about a place of intention, of travel and adventure meant to be savored. We are talking about Lac La Belle.

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Begin your sojourn to the beautiful lake by taking a less-conspicuous route. While the beauty of US-41 in the late summer and early fall isn't anything to diminish, the route that travels east from Lake Linden to Gay and then north along the Gay-Lac La Belle Road could be considered one of the most underrated seasonal drives. Traveling through expansive Keweenaw farmland, past the towering sentinel that is the Gay Stack, out to the road following the eastern Lake Superior shoreline offers incredible autumnal views.

Everyone lauds the turns of M-26 between Eagle Harbor and Copper Harbor, but gentler twists and turns can be found along the Gay-Lac La Belle Road that will appeal to those looking for idyllic road-tripping. Along this route you'll find plenty of roadside turn offs and beaches like Brunette Park.

BETE GRIS WETLANDS PRESERVE

Travelling north on the Gay-Lac La Belle Road, you'll happen first upon the south entrance to The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Bete Gris Wetlands Preserve. This area began its preservation of the Bete Gris area in 2004, and it encompasses 62-acres of land and 4,000 feet of beach area. At this south entry point, you are treated to an easy and accessible walk to Bete Gris Bay. Visitors can access the TNC preserve by walking along the beach through the Houghton Keweenaw Conservation District's Bete Grise Preserve.. The path opens to the classic Lake Superior rocky shores, and depending on weather and water conditions may be a little less stable, so mind your footing.

As autumn's brush paints the Keweenaw, viewers are treated to a broad palette of Keweenaw colors across this vista. These waters make for excellent kayaking or paddle boarding near the shoreline.

HAVEN FALLS

Haven is a little slice of heaven, if you don't mind me saying. This Keweenaw waterfall offers accessible viewing for any mobility. Whether from the car, or right up to its gracefully flowing falls, Haven Falls is a gorgeous stop to check off of your Keweenaw bucket list.

Here you'll find a large pavilion great for picnicking, benches for quiet enjoyment of the falls, and rustic roadside amenities. During the fall, the trees that cling to the cliffside of Haven Falls burn bright with autumn color, making a bright and beautiful backdrop for photos and treasured memories.

BEAR BELLY PIT STOP

While there are many places along this route for snacking, we highly recommend that you save your lunching for the Bear Belly. This local establishment is tucked away on the shores of Lac La Belle herself. Gas is available at the antique pumps outside, and inside you'll find a cozy shop filled with all manner of desirables. From cheeky one-of-a-kind shirts and merch, to beverages and snacks, and best of all - homecooked to-go food!

The owners of the Bear Belly curate a rotating menu of hearty, warm home cooked dishes packed to order, pasties, soups, and delicious desserts. No matter if you're taking the food back to your boat anchored in their docks, or sitting at one of their many outdoor tables, you'll find the sustenance you need that both warms your body and soul. If the fall views of the lake and Mount Bohemia during lunch have inspired you the Bear Belly does offer seasonal boat rentals for another way to enjoy the waters.

BETE GRIS BEACH AND THE MENDOTA LIGHTHOUSE

We hope you packed your cooler at the Bear Belly because it's time to head to Bete Gris's Singing Sands. This beach has a beautiful lore that enriches your time soaking in the beachside glory of Lake Superior.

Some find that when you scrub your hands in the sand or step across, the sands make a unique pitch. Legend has this is a long ago echo of the mournful cries of a Native American woman yearning for her love lost to Lake Superior. Whether supernatural or scientific, this phenomenon is one of the unique charms of this beach. Warm fall days are a glory to behold, views stretching to the horizons, and you can easily while the day away here. Bring your bathing suit, a paddle board, or a good book and enjoy this lovely beach.

Right down from this beach is the Mendota Lighthouse. You're welcome to park under the pines and gaze upon the historic lighthouse from across the Mendota Shipping Channel. This channel is placid and clear, a perfect spot to paddle a kayak.

Across the way, the lighthouse stands smartly amongst the trees. Constructed in the late 1800s, this lighthouse still holds a priceless Fresnel light in its tower. While the lighthouse is private, it's a sight to behold from the beach or the water.

HIKE CLIFF VIEW TRAIL

While Mount Bohemia is a popular downhill destination during the winter, during the summer and fall it offers 12 miles of hiking trails. One special trail, not mapped, but offered in person is the widely popular Cliff View Trail. Marked by blue cones, the Cliff View Trail offers an easy to moderate 1.5 to 2 hour hike partially up the mountain and rewards hikers with one of the best views in the Keweenaw.

HEAD TO THE NORTH POLE

There's no better way to end the day than to treat yourself to a restorative soak and steam! Hike back down the mountain to the Nordic Spa and North Pole Bar. Open all year round, the Nordic Spa and Bar offer wood-fired pizza, adult libations, and a deeply relaxing spa experience.

Slip into your bathing suit and relax in the enormous outdoor hot tub and float in the pool right under the gaze of Mount Bohemia. Fall colors brighten the mountainsides, and add ambiance to your steamy escape. While your pizza cooks, take a steam or a dry sauna and plunge into the icy cold bath. Wake your senses and invigorate your body in the glorious Keweenaw outdoors, and then toast with a lovely cocktail with friends. A perfect end to a perfect day.

Author

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A Keweenaw filmmaker and the owner of 2nd Sandbar Productions, Amanda Makela directs her skills and time to local community development and telling the stories that run deep in Michigan's farthest north. You'll find Amanda and her crew swimming at Misery Bay or diving deep in the local food scene!

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