



KEWEENAW

YOUR LAKE SUPERIOR CIRCLE TOUR GUIDE TO THE KEWEENAW

Author: Kayleigh White on June 15, 2023

The Lake Superior Circle Tour is an incredible 1,300-mile self-guided route that takes you on a scenic journey around the world's largest freshwater lake. The world-class tour offers the road trip of a lifetime. We promise that the Keweenaw Peninsula is one part of the Circle Tour that you will not want to miss! In this guide we'll share why you'll want to spend an extra day (or two) before getting your stamp and motoring to the next check-in!

WHERE IS THE KEWEENAW PENINSULA?

The Keweenaw Peninsula is the northernmost part of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and projects into the freshwaters of Lake Superior. For those of you putting your hands together to create the shape of Michigan, the Keweenaw is the "thumb" of the Upper Peninsula and is a geographically prominent part of the U.P.

WHY STOP IN THE KEWEENAW?

When looking at the map, the Keweenaw may seem a little "out of the way," but we promise you it is worth the extra time to explore. The Keweenaw offers over 125 miles of Lake Superior shoreline and historic scenic drives that take you to some of the best lookout points around the entire lake. As you venture into the Keweenaw, you will notice unique geological and topographic features different from other areas around the lake. Roadside waterfalls, scenic drives that tunnel through towering trees, rugged cliffs, and rich history make the Keweenaw a special place to spend some time. Not convinced? Follow along for our Keweenaw Peninsula route designed specifically for Lake Superior Circle Tour visitors.

ENTERING THE KEWEENAW PENINSULA

For those of you headed clockwise around the lake, you will enter the Keweenaw via US-41. Make sure to stop at Canyon Falls Roadside Park, about nine miles South of L'Anse on your way! Often referred to as the "Grand Canyon of the UP," Canyon Falls is one of the easiest falls to visit along the Circle Tour. Then enjoy scenic Lake Superior views as you pass through the communities of L'Anse and Baraga and around Keweenaw Bay, entering the Keweenaw Peninsula region.

Visitors traveling counter-clockwise around the circle will enter the Keweenaw via M-26. Consider stopping at Twin Lakes State Park or Wyandotte Falls on your way! Regardless of which way you come, both highways will funnel into the charming small town of Houghton, Michigan.

HOUGHTON

Houghton is the "big city" of the Keweenaw. Home to Michigan Technological University and buzzing with energy, Houghton is a great place to pick up essentials and grab a bite to eat. The downtown area has many local shops and award-winning restaurants to choose from.

After grabbing a bite to eat, make sure to check out the scenic Waterfront Trail that runs along the southern shore of the Portage Canal. The most prominent landmark along the trail is the Portage Lake Lift Bridge. This unique lift bridge was officially dedicated as a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Civil Engineers in the summer of 2022 and is considered the official "Gateway to the Keweenaw." It serves as the only connection between the Keweenaw Peninsula and mainland.

Another point of interest in the Houghton area is the A.E. Seaman Mineral Museum at Michigan Tech. This is the official Mineral Museum of Michigan and the unofficial Mineral Museum of the Great Lakes Region. It is home to the world's best collection of Michigan minerals and a fantastic selection of specimens from around the Great Lakes. New this year, the A.E. Seaman Mineral Museum introduced a "Yooperlite" exhibit where you can learn about the mineral properties of sodalite that make these mystical rocks glow under UV light. Make this a destination on your Circle Tour to learn more about the geology of Lake Superior, Michigan, and the Great Lakes Region.

HANCOCK TO CALUMET

After spending some time in Houghton, it's time to cross the iconic lift bridge and pass through the town of Hancock. The downtown area features many historic buildings, great restaurants, arts and cultural activities, and green spaces. Stop by Milly's for a mouthwatering Detroit-style pizza or sip on a refreshing Patio Pail while soaking up sunshine at Gino's Restaurant.

Learn more about the unique cultural heritage of the area by exploring the Finnish American Heritage Center. During the peak of the copper mining boom in the Keweenaw, many Finnish immigrants came to the area searching for work. Today the region is home to generations of Finnish-Americans that take pride in their cultural heritage. The Finnish American Heritage Center is a place near and dear to the hearts of many locals and provides an opportunity for individuals to learn more about the Finnish culture and Finnish-American history. The Heritage Center also keeps traditions alive through special events such as Heikinpäivä and Juhannus/Midsummer.

For those who enjoy arts and culture, the Copper Country Community Arts Center is another great stop. The arts center features three galleries, including the Artists Market Sales Gallery, a Youth Gallery, and the Kerredge Gallery. The art featured in these galleries is created by local and regional artists and is in great part inspired by the natural beauty of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The Arts Center also offers a variety of classes and programs that will inspire you to create during your time in the area.

Hancock is also home to the Orpheum Theater, a restored vaudeville theatre that now showcases a variety of musical performances. Make sure to check our events calendar to see if there are any shows scheduled during your time in the Keweenaw!

When you're ready to continue your adventure north, we recommend taking the M-203 to Calumet. This scenic route hugs the Keweenaw Waterway and features some great stops along the way.

F.J. McLain State Park is about 10 miles from downtown Hancock on M-203. This beautiful state park is located at the point where the Keweenaw Waterway opens into Lake Superior. It offers hiking trails through towering pines, over 2-miles of Lake Superior shoreline, and the best views of the Keweenaw Waterway Upper Entrance Light. Built in 1950, this historic light is still an important structure used by ships entering the canal.

Another destination along the M-203 is Calumet Waterworks Park. This Lake Superior park offers green space, a playground, horseshoe pits, pavilions and grills for picnics, as well as a nice beach for rock-picking. Just across the street from the park is the Gardner's Creek Trailhead. These trails offer a gentle hike through a maple-dominated forest. Not only do the maple trees offer shade, but they also offer protection from any winds coming off Lake Superior. It's the perfect place to stretch your legs!

CALUMET

Calumet Waterworks Park is just five miles from the historic streets of downtown Calumet. Once a bustling metropolis that was home to tens of thousands of immigrant mine workers and their families, this small town embraces its historic character. We encourage you to walk the streets of Calumet and imagine the buzzing energy that filled the streets during community events during the peak of the copper mining boom. Or visit during the annual CopperDog 150 dog sled race or Pasty Fest to feel the energy of the community today.

Dive into the history of the region by exploring the Keweenaw National Historic Park (KNHP). While the KNHP includes several heritage sites scattered throughout the peninsula, the Park Headquarters and Visitors Center and a handful of heritage sites are located in the Calumet area. The Park Headquarters offers an incredible multi-level museum that is free to visitors, and the Calumet Theatre and Laurium Manor Inn are nearby Heritage Sites that are certainly worth a visit.

The Calumet Theatre is a breathtaking turn-of-the-century opera house that features built-in acoustics, beautiful paintings above the stage, and stunning architectural details. Today, the theatre continues to offer a quality entertainment experience and hosts talented musicians and performers on a regular basis. If you happen to attend an event at this historic venue, tradition beckons a visit to the neighboring 1890's Saloon, Shute's, during intermission or after the show.

The Laurium Manor Inn is a jaw-dropping mansion built in 1908 for Thomas Hoatson, the owner of Calumet & Arizona Mining Company, and his family. No expense was spared in the building of this 45-room mansion. At the time, it was the largest mansion in the Western Upper Peninsula and was the most opulent of all of them. The mansion now serves as a bed and breakfast and offers tours every day between 12PM and 3PM during the summer months.

Pro Tip: Don't forget to stop by our Visit Keweenaw Welcome Center to grab your official Lake Superior Passport Stamp. But don't let your passport stamp be the end of your Keweenaw Circle Tour. Some of the most scenic Keweenaw destinations are yet to come!

CALUMET TO EAGLE HARBOR

Continue North on US-41 through several old mining communities until you see something that looks like a large thermometer on the right side of the highway. What is this large thermometer? It's the iconic Keweenaw snow gauge! This life-sized snow gauge shows what a record-breaking amount of snow looks like. The current record was set during the winter of 1978-79 when the Keweenaw saw 390.4 inches of snow.

Enjoy views of Cliff Ridge and Keweenaw forests as you continue your drive to Eagle River Michigan. Make sure to stop at Eagle River Falls (both upper and lower) before following the river down to Eagle River Beach. This beach is the perfect spot to take in a Lake Superior sunset or enjoy a picnic lunch. It is also home to the Fitzgerald's Restaurant, which serves mouth-watering hardwood smoked barbeque and craft whiskey with incredible waterfront views.

About four miles past Eagle River on M-26, is a small roadside waterfall called Jacob's Falls. Grab a baked good at the neighboring Jampot and take in the views of this easy-to-access waterfall. From this point, the drive to Eagle Harbor is spectacular and often referred to as Sand Dune Drive because of the sand dunes in Great Sand Bay and Cat Harbor area. The varied beaches in this area are perfect for rockhounds and swimmers alike.

If you're ready for a hike, we recommend exploring the Redwyn Dunes Nature Sanctuary. This Michigan Nature Association Trail is about one 1-mile long and takes you through stable sand dunes covered with Red Oak and Pine. The scenic trail weaves around dune ponds that are often inhabited by migrating waterfowl.

Stopping at the Eagle Harbor Lighthouse is a must for any Lake Superior Circle Tour traveler. The first light in this location was a wooden structure built in 1851 and supported a fourth-order Fresnel lens illuminated by an oil lamp. This structure soon deteriorated and was replaced by the current red-brick structure in 1871. The Fresnel light was eventually replaced by a beacon-aviation style light that now reaches some 20 miles offshore. Today, the Eagle Harbor Lighthouse operates as a museum complex that is open to the public from mid-June to early October. Visitors traveling during the off-season can still explore the lighthouse grounds but will not be able to enter the buildings.

EAGLE HARBOR TO COPPER HARBOR

M-26 continues from Eagle Harbor all the way to Copper Harbor, following the increasingly rugged shoreline the entire way. About 9 miles west of Copper Harbor, you will have the option to continue the shoreline drive along M-26 or take Brockway Mountain Drive into Copper Harbor. While we can say both options are gorgeous and worth exploring, no Lake Superior circle Tour is complete without a detour up Brockway Mountain Drive. The top of Brockway Mountain offers panoramic views of Lake Superior, Keweenaw forest, inland lakes, and the charming small town of Copper Harbor. Once you've taken in the views of Copper Harbor, it's time to continue your drive into town.

Copper Harbor is a treat – a quaint, peaceful town that offers unlimited outdoor recreation. If you are ready for an adventure, head to the Keweenaw Adventure Company for a guided sea kayak tour or a guided mountain bike excursion. If you want to relax, book a reservation at the Harbor Haus. Here you can enjoy fine dining while taking in the views of the Queen IV as she makes her return trip to the harbor from Isle Royale around 6:30PM

If you love lighthouses, a trip to Copper Harbor Lighthouse is a must! This lighthouse is only accessible by boat, but Noah's Ark Charters makes it easy to visit! This boat tour will take you on a scenic cruise through the harbor before docking at Hays Point. Your captain will unlock the lighthouse and old light keepers house so that you can view the historic exhibits set up inside. Originally, the light was constructed as a singular tower and a lightkeeper lived in a small house nearby to maintain the light. The first tower was later replaced by the current lighthouse in 1849 using stones from the original structure as the foundation for the new one. Not only is the lighthouse remarkable, but the views of Brockway Mountain from Hays Point are really hard to beat!

While history can easily be felt through the rugged and natural landscape of the Copper Harbor area, it can also be experienced at the historic Keweenaw Mountain Lodge or Fort Wilkins State Park. The Keweenaw Mountain Lodge is a WPA-era wilderness resort with history dating back to 1934. Not only does the lodge offer cozy cabin stays, but the property also features many outdoor recreation opportunities. From hiking and biking trails to golf, disc golf, and dark skies – the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge has something for everyone. During 2021, the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge went through the process of establishing the Keweenaw Dark Sky Park, and in June of 2022, the International Dark Sky Association officially designated the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge and surrounding areas as an International Dark Sky Park. Stop by the Lodge for maps and information that will help you as you chase the northern lights and stargaze.

Fort Wilkins, now a Michigan State Park, was built in 1844 and was intended to keep law and order during the Keweenaw copper rush. The fort is now set up as a museum and tells the story of life on the northern frontier during the mid-1800's. During the summer, it also offers a living history program that allows family to experience what life was like at the fort for soldiers and their families.

COPPER HARBOR TO GAY

From Copper Harbor, we recommend taking US-41 through the "Tunnel of Trees" and then following signs toward Lac La Belle. Spend some time enjoying the soft "singing" sands of Bete Grise and be sure to stop by Mount Bohemia for a bite to eat and sauna at their Nordic Spa before hopping back in the car to continue your Keweenaw Circle Tour cruise.

After relaxing in Lac La Belle, take Gay-Lac La Belle Road to follow the shoreline along the east side of the peninsula. We love this scenic drive because it takes you along roads less-travelled and offers a unique perspective on the varying of the region. Some of our favorite things to see along this road are Haven Falls Roadside Park, Brunette Park, and Tobacco Creek Park. As you traverse this side of the peninsula, you will notice the shoreline is much different. This side of the peninsula offers more sandy beaches, with red and white Jacobsville bedrock stretching into Lake Superior. The soft sands, smooth bedrock, and shallow waters extending into the lake make this side of the Keweenaw ideal for swimming on warm summer days.

Just past Tobacco River Park, you will enter the historic small town of Gay. Make sure to stop at the iconic Gay Bar for a drink and one of their famous footlong hotdogs. While visiting the small town of Gay, check out the Gay Stamp Sands and the site of the Mohawk Stamp Mill. Today the stamp mill is nothing more than ruins but it offers insight into the history of this seemingly remote town. Please respect this historic site by leaving what you find and practicing responsible recreation.

THE LAST LEG OF OUR KEWEENAW CIRCLE TOUR JOURNEY

From Gay, take Lake-Linden-Gay Road, following signs towards Lake Linden. Lake Linden is another historic mining town lined with red sandstone buildings and historic churches. Explore the Houghton County Historical Museum and grab a bite to eat at Lindell's Chocolate Shoppe or the Loading Zone II.

Just south of Lake Linden is the small village of Hubbell – home to the lovely Hungarian Falls. Enjoy a short hike back to Dover Creek and explore at least three scenic drops as water flows through the steep gorge created by the Keweenaw Fault.

When you continue south back to Houghton, you will see several historic landmarks, including the Tamarack Stamp Mill, Quincy Stamp Mill, and Quincy Dredge Number Two. The drive will take you along the Portage Canal as you return to the Portage Lake Lift Bridge that spans between Houghton and Hancock. As you return to the Portage Lake Lift Bridge, we hope that you that your mind is full of wonderful memories made during your time in the Keweenaw. Enjoy the rest of your Lake Superior Circle Tour, but don't forget to circle back around to the Keweenaw the next time you need to reconnect with mother nature or enjoy a little rest and relaxation.

Author

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Kayleigh is a U.P. native with a passion for the outdoors. Some of her favorite outdoor hobbies are rock collecting on the shores of Lake Superior, springtime foraging, and hiking. She is also passionate about flow arts and can be found recording technical double hula-hooping videos throughout the scenic Keweenaw Peninsula.

Please Recycle!