

A Long Weekend Traveler's Guide to New Hampshire's Lakes Region

Whether you want to bike the fabled Kancamagus Highway, poke around a twee little town, or simply dangle your feet over a dock, this area is a slice of Americana as tempting as apple pie.

By [Jonathan Soroff](#). 6/30/2026, 9:51 a.m.

From day trips to weekend getaways, our biweekly Traveler newsletter shows you the best of New England and beyond.



Lake love: standup paddleboarding on Winnepesaukee. / Photo courtesy of New Hampshire Division of Travel & Tourism

The Lakes Region of New Hampshire is bigger than you might think: It starts roughly in Concord and extends north through the White Mountain National Forest, encompassing such sylvan bodies of water as [Squam Lake](#), [Lake Sunapee](#), and the big kahuna, [Lake Winnepesaukee](#). A year-round playground with numerous ski mountains in winter and spectacular fall foliage, it delights in the summer with hiking, rock climbing, ziplining, bike paths, spelunking, and scenery as refreshing as a cold glass of lemonade.

<https://www.bostonmagazine.com/travel/2026/06/30/new-hampshire-lakes-vacation/>



Putting the pedal to the metal on a Scenic RailRiders adventure. / Photo via New Hampshire Division of Travel & Tourism

PLAY

There are virtually infinite ways to enjoy the lakes of central New Hampshire. Beyond the better-known bodies of water are more than 250 others, not to mention the mountains and valleys surrounding them. Since 1872, [Mount Washington Cruises](#) has been operating scenic cruises on Winnepesaukee, our favorite being the two-hour trip aboard the M/V Sophie C, the oldest floating post office in America, which visits a variety of islands to deliver letters and packages. On land, the [Winnepesaukee Railway](#) in Meredith delivers on its promise of gorgeous views, while [Scenic RailRiders](#) out of Concord offers a two-hour man-powered adventure via two- or four- person “bikes.” The [Squam Lakes Natural Science Center](#) boasts extensive nature trails and live animal exhibits, while some of the ski mountains have upped their off-season game, including [Gunstock](#), where you can zipline and ride the mountain coaster. The [Polar Caves](#) in Rumney offer a wealth of exploration opportunities, and in inclement weather, [Funspot](#) in Laconia claims to be “the largest arcade in the world,” with 600-plus games. Regardless of how you spend your time, you’re in no danger of being bored.



Summer at Gunstock means ziplining. / Photo via Gunstock Mountain Resort

EAT

On Lake Sunapee, [Fenton's Landing](#) more than lives up to its slogan of “Breakfast, Lunch, Tacos, Brunch,” while everyone in Tilton ties their boat up at [Dox on Winnisquam](#) to enjoy American classics, Italian specialties, and a mouthwatering variety of mac 'n' cheese. In Laconia, the [Junction Restaurant + Provisions](#) offers superior pizzas, burgers, and comfort food in a sleek contemporary setting. For more-formal dining, Van Horn Estate overlooks Squam Lake and offers two dining options in a mansion that dates to 1907. In the [Van Horn Dining Room](#), guests can enjoy a candlelit dinner with white-linen service and a wood-burning fireplace, choosing from main courses like lobster-and-truffle pappardelle and pan-roasted duck breast, accompanied by a bottle from the award-winning cellar. The [Isaac Bistro & Pub](#) boasts a relaxed yet elegant atmosphere with outdoor patio dining and shared plates like fried-chickpea panisse, as well as heartier fare such as bourbon-honey steak tips. Wherever you decide to eat, save room for dessert. The area is home to countless ice cream shops, and [Kellerhaus](#) in Laconia has been handcrafting superb Bavarian-style chocolates since 1906.



Kicking back at Dox on Winnisquam. / Photo via New Hampshire Division of Travel & Tourism

SHOP

You could spend a lifetime scouring New Hampshire's antiques shops and general stores, but you'll need at least a day to explore the [Laconia Antique Center](#), which has more than 150 independent dealers. For bargain hunters, Tilton has the [Tanger Outlets](#), while you can find apparel for both humans and pets, along with books, jewelry, and home décor, at the [Marketplace at Mill Falls](#) in Meredith. Fine-art hounds will want to hit [Lakes Region Art Association Gallery](#) in Tilton, as well as the [BayView Artisan Gallery](#) and [Jeremy Noyes Gallery](#) in Meredith. Major bonus: Shopping in New Hampshire is tax-free.



The lobby at the Lake Estate on Winnisquam. / Photo by The Lake Estate on Winnisquam

STAY

New Hampshire has any number of charming places to stay, from mom-and-pop B&Bs to elegant inns, but the state's first five-star resort opened just last fall. The [Lake Estate on Winnisquam](#), located on 36 gorgeously landscaped acres in Tilton, is like a billionaire's lakeside retreat. The spectacular interiors were designed by renowned decorator Manuel de Santaren, and the hotel offers every amenity—from swimming pools, watersports, and indoor and outdoor dining to a cinema, hiking trails, and fire pits to make s'mores. However, its expansive spa is a real standout. Offering signature treatments that utilize local ingredients in a serene setting, it's reason enough to visit.

GETTING THERE

One of the most appealing things about the Lakes Region is its accessibility, a mere hour-and-a-half drive from Boston on I-93 (depending on traffic).