

TRAVEL Reporter

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THE NEW FALL COLOUR IS BLUE

When the fall colours start to turn, there's no better place to witness Mother Nature's impressive performance than the Explorers' Edge region of Ontario

With Algonquin Park, the Almaguin Highlands, Muskoka and Parry Sound within its borders, Explorers' Edge is home to some of this country's most stunning natural landscapes. And, in autumn, they kick the whole fall colour thing up a notch.

Here you'll find that the beautiful reds, oranges and yellows that already mesmerize you are twice as breathtaking to

behold because they are reflected in thousands of sparkling blue lakes and rivers. All across Explorers' Edge the favourite fall colour is blue.

And when you plan your fall getaway here—just two hours north of the GTA—you'll discover endless ways to experience the incredibly rich blues of fall.

Explore the lakes (including Georgian Bay) and rivers by canoe, kayak or stand-up paddle board. Learn how to use a paddle at one of many

helpful outfitters in the region. Hike or bike around the blue waters, exploring thousands of kilometres of trails and rolling, winding roads. Mix green with blue, and choose from over 30 courses when you hit the links in Canada's best golf destination.

Visit an artist or see dozens in action during an organized studio tour. Wet your whistle when you trek the culinary trail and visit award-winning craft breweries (and one winery). Take a cruise for a splendid view of the colours reflected in the

region's renowned waterways. Or hit the spa, grab a comfy robe and find a lakeside patio chair, and do nothing but take it all in.

With summer now past, you'll find more availability, off-peak rates and—maybe best of all—no bugs.

Across Algonquin Park, the Almaguin Highlands, Muskoka and Parry Sound, you'll discover more fall colour and more ways to experience autumn's incredible performance. Visit Explorers' Edge this season for red, yellow, orange—and for blue, too.

visit
EXPLORERSEGE.CA/FALLBLUE
to plan your getaway!

 TRAVEL REPORTER	
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THE (SERIOUSLY) GREAT OUTDOORS

From paddling to biking, the stunning natural landscape of Explorers' Edge is best enjoyed in fall

"I'm not sure why more people don't paddle in the fall," says Peter deMos, owner of Muskoka Outfitters on the picturesque Muskoka River. "Fall is my favourite time of year. The bugs are gone, the colours are amazing—and what better way to see them than by paddling down a river or hitting a trail on a bike? You'll see so much more than you would from a car."

When it comes to getting out on the water for a paddle, deMos says autumn in Explorers' Edge has some of the best lake

conditions of the year.

"In the spring, the water takes a while to warm up from being frozen, so it's always cold," he observes. "If you head out in the fall, the water is warm and the air is cool. We still do rentals right up until Thanksgiving and continue to paddle well into late November."

Gord Baker, who manages the Algonquin Outfitters location at Oxtongue Lake near the iconic park, recommends that beginners opt for a day trip to get their "lake legs."

"A day trip is a good way to start for people who don't have a lot of paddling experience," says Baker, who blogs about his

own paddling adventures on the Algonquin Outfitters site. "And accessibility is easy—we have a variety of locations where you can just drive up and park your car, rent a canoe and go for a paddle."

Once you're comfortable on the water, he recommends an overnight camping or portaging trip, and that paddlers hit all the places that are normally booked all summer.

Back on land, Muskoka Outfitters also does a thriving business with its mountain, road and touring bike rentals. DeMos says the cool air and lack of bugs is a huge plus for cyclists hitting the trails this time of year, and the reduced traffic means road riders enjoy a safer tour. Off-road, mountain bikers have access to top trails at Buckwallop Cycling Centre (one of the top biking destinations in Ontario, with plenty of trails for experts or beginners), Porcupine Ridge near Bracebridge, the Torrance Barrens and the Bracebridge Resource Management Centre.

THE GREAT MUSKOKA PADDLING EXPERIENCE

The third annual Great Muskoka Paddling Experience takes place October 12 this year, running on the Muskoka River from Bracebridge Bay and continuing downstream. It features 10 km and 18 km courses, as well as a 2.5 km fun paddle where families and paddling newbies can head upstream from Annie Williams Park to Bracebridge Falls and back again. Get out on the water for some fall fun!

THE DEEPEST BLUE

URBAN DWELLERS SOMETIMES FORGET THAT STARS EVEN EXIST. But look up at the sky on a clear fall evening when you're standing almost anywhere in Explorers' Edge and you'll instantly recall the words to that classic children's song—"Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky"—and the kid in you will marvel at it all.

Algonquin Park and Loring-Restoule are hot spots for viewing, and check out Canada's very first Dark Sky Conservation Preserve at the Torrance Barrens. And don't miss the Muskoka Family Star Party at the Gravenhurst KOA and the Barrens on October 4 and 5. It features a guided talk by expert Terence Dickinson with telescopes provided.



GOLF THE EDGE

Explorers' Edge is a golfer's haven with more than 30 courses ready to welcome both the beginner and veteran. Recognized as one of Canada's best golf destinations, Muskoka alone plays host to six of the top 100 courses in Canada (according to *Score Golf*) and eight of the top 50 courses in Ontario (as voted by Ontario golf professionals in *Canadian Golfer Magazine*).

"With a variety of courses ranging in difficulty, landscapes and elevations, it's easy to see why so many of Canada's top golf courses are located in the region," says Jerry Feltis, General Manager of Rocky Crest Golf Resort in Mactier. "And with a range of accommodations—from housekeeping cottages to luxury resorts—Muskoka offers some of the country's best stay-and-play packages as well."

Add to the mix off-peak rates, more tee time availability, a great selection of value-added courses and a generally more relaxed season, and you've got the makings of some of the best golf you'll ever play.

"My favourite time to golf in Muskoka and Parry Sound is the fall," adds Feltis. "The traditional colours reflected off so many lakes just take already-great golf to a whole new level."

For more information on courses, packages, tee times and what makes the Explorers' Edge region Canada's best golf destination, visit GolfMuskoka.com

And, to play what is perhaps the most stunning 18th hole in the land, be sure to visit The Ridge at Manitou beside Lake Manitouwabing in beautiful Parry Sound.



THE LURE OF BLUE WATER

With fish schooling in the shallows of bays and rivers, fall is prime fishing season in Explorers' Edge

As every serious angler knows, fall is one of the best times to be on the water. That's when the elements conspire to create ideal fishing conditions: wide blue skies, warm days, cool nights, no bugs and, most importantly, no crowds.

But it's also when the fish decide to cooperate. As the water begins to cool from the bottom up, fish start to school in the shallower areas of bays and rivers, where they find temperatures a little more to their liking.

"The fish typically become more grouped and centrally located," advises Al Wylie, who has operated the Commanda Lake Resort in the heart of Loring-Restoule for 17 years. "Rather than spreading out through the lakes... they go to river mouths and hang out in the weed beds and the bays that are their favourite feeding areas. They're easier to locate when they do, and that gives you a better chance of getting them."

That's music to the ears of any fisherman looking for some autumn action. Wylie says the fish also do what he calls a fall pre-spawn run in the swollen rivers, searching for more plentiful sources of food. "Some of the trout, pike and walleye like to travel to those areas for feeding," he notes, and that makes them easier to land in the narrower waterways.

The Explorers' Edge region, in general, is a prime destination for anglers—and with good reason. Besides those three species, Commanda Lake also offers

small and large mouth bass, black crappie, perch and other pan fish year-round. Loring-Restoule is also a great spot for muskie.

The Almaguin Highlands also has been ranked as one of the top 10 places in Canada to fish, with species like large and small mouth bass, and northern pike. The topography of the area is broken by a series of lakes, and that offers literally hundreds of miles of shoreline and plenty of prime spots to lay down a line. If you're looking for insight into what's biting here, you'll do no better than talking to Ken Turner of Woodland Echoes Resort Cottages, who's been involved in efforts to restock beautiful Ahmic Lake and knows it inside out.

To the south, Muskoka offers similar diversity, with local species like bass, pike, walleye and lake trout plentiful. And fishing is good all year long—just ask the folks at Reelpro Guide Services. And an outing on the beautiful waters of Georgian Bay in the fall with guides from Parry Sound Fishing Charter will likely hook you a pike, bass or trout.

Wylie says fall conditions are also ideal for canoeists and kayakers, who would rather just take in the incredible scenery than try for the fish.

"It's a nice time of year," he observes. "You have the colours, the great fishing and no crowds. Plus you have warm days and cool evenings—it's perfect for sleeping and camping."



The View from Above

Want to see just how impressive the fall colours really—really—are in the Explorers' Edge? Then your best bet is to start climbing.

There's a famous vantage point at the top of the Scenic Lookout Tower, located off Highway 35 just north of the historic village of Dorset. Head up to an observation deck perched an incredible 142 metres (465 feet) above beautiful Lake of Bays, and enjoy the impressive vastness of autumn's splendour.

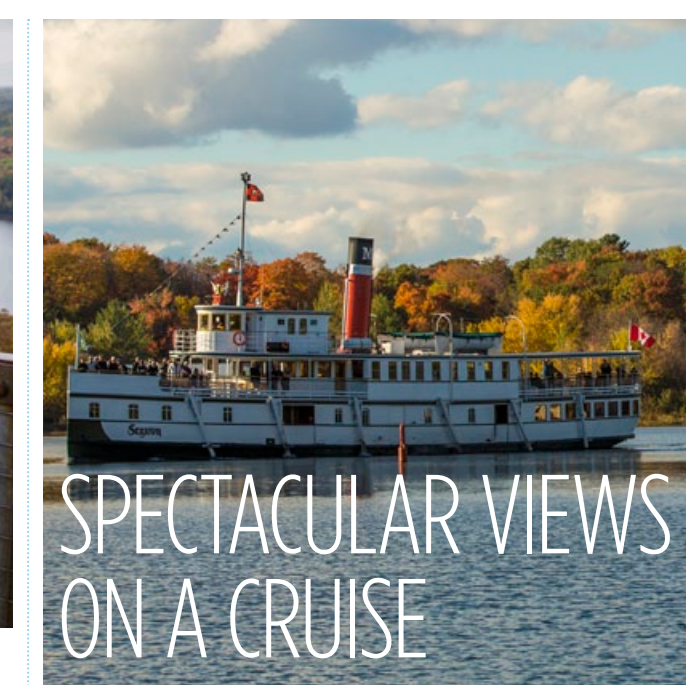
Spectacular viewing can also be found at the West Parry Sound District Museum Fire Tower, located on Museum Hill. Visitors

can climb 131 steps to a deck that overlooks the wide expanse of Georgian Bay (locals call it "the sixth Great Lake") and the Parry Sound harbour from 30 metres (96 feet) above.

Rock cliff lookouts are everywhere for your viewing pleasure, with perhaps the most striking found atop the Huckleberry Rock trail in Milford Bay, Muskoka. High Rock Lookout also provides a stunning view of Bernard Lake in the Almaguin Highlands—the largest freshwater lake in North America without an island (try to spot one).

But if you really want to see just how talented an artist Mother Nature is, then a flight with Georgian Bay Airways will provide a view that's impossible to beat. With air tours leaving from the Parry Sound harbour until October, the view of the bay's 30,000 islands (and all the colourful trees growing on them) will leave you speechless.

Take off from the sparkling blue waters of Georgian Bay, fly up into the powder blue skies above, and look down at the brilliant reds, oranges and yellows beneath, in an uninterrupted view of Ontario's finest scenery.



SPECTACULAR VIEWS ON A CRUISE

SOME SAY MUSKOKA WAS BUILT ON THE BROAD PLANKS OF WOODEN BOATS. Generations ago, when roads were scarce or dodgy, it was steamships that transported everything from mail to groceries to tourists heading to an idyllic resort. Visitors this autumn can share what those earlier travelers experienced and, as an added bonus, see the brilliant foliage along the way. This fall, take a cruise and enjoy the spectacular views.

The Muskoka Steamship and Historical Society runs the restored Royal Mail Ship Segwun and newer Wenonah II on three of Muskoka's most renowned lakes: Muskoka, Rosseau and Joseph. Harboured at the Gravenhurst Wharf, these majestic boats offer fall cruises that are on a lot of bucket lists.

Sunset Cruises out of Port Carling offers more intimate excursions on Lakes Joseph, Rosseau and Muskoka on the restored Peerless II and Idyllwood—the latter being a faithful restoration of an elegant 40-foot 1920s-era private yacht.

The SS Bigwin was recently restored after being hauled up from the bottom of Lake of Bays. She's proudly sailing again out of the village of Dorset. The more modern Island Queen Cruise in Parry Sound heads out for two and three-hour sightseeing cruises through the rugged 30,000 islands of Georgian Bay. If you prefer, you can also rent a classic wooden boat and take the wheel yourself. Visit MuskokaLaunchLivery.com and check boat builder Stan Hunter's stunning collection of Duke Playmates.

Brewer Gary McMullen



There has been an explosion of local craft breweries in the Explorers' Edge region over the last few years, led by Muskoka Brewery, the Lake of Bays Brewing Company, The Sawdust City Brewing Co., and Highlander Brew Co.

"Craft beer, in general, is growing on such a fast scale," notes Jed Corbeil, co-owner of the Griffin Gastro Pub in Bracebridge, who nightly pours his customers a number of fine craft brews. "We went from a dozen breweries or so in Ontario

ten years ago to almost 50 now. It's one of the fastest-growing industries in the province." Here in Explorers' Edge, the award-winning breweries are leading the pack. With innovative packaging and intricate flavours, they produce their year-round standards as well as seasonal specialties.

Take a tour of Muskoka Brewery in Bracebridge this fall,

sample their popular Harvest Ale and stock up for colder months with their fuller Winter Beard brew. Head over to the Lake of Bays Brewing Company in Baysville to sample their Ten Point IPA on the outdoor patio, and take home some Old North Mocha Porter.

"Ask any craft brewery what their mantra is," says Corbeil, "and every single one of them

will say 'quality.' They make their beer with a lot of heart. For them it's creating art."

Also putting heart and soul into their harvest is the Muskoka Lakes Winery in Bala. This award-winning establishment produces a range of wines only from fruits indigenous to the Muskoka region, primarily cranberries and blueberries.

The results are a delightful surprise, ranging from sweet to dry, from reds to rosés and a commendable selection of dessert wines. This fall, take a tour, try a sample (on another great patio), and hike the trails of the neighbouring Johnston's Cranberry Marsh. There's never a dull moment at this picturesque spot—be sure to visit them during the annual Bala Cranberry Festival on October 18, 19 and 20.



ESA PALTANEN, THE GENERAL MANAGER OF THE HISTORIC SHERWOOD INN, A LUXURIOUS RETREAT AT THE EDGE LAKE JOSEPH IN MUSKOKA, IS ALSO A BURLY EX-HOCKEY PLAYER WHO EXPLAINS WHY HE RECOMMENDS A SPA GETAWAY TO EXPLORERS' EDGE IN FALL.

What's the key to getting out of the city and really unwinding?

Come for a two or three-night getaway, and come more than once a year. Your first night you can just relax, then wake up the next morning and sit on the dock, and listen to the loons—there is nothing more peaceful than that.

So it's all about finding your pace?

Definitely. Come here, walk the grounds and take in nature. Have a beer, go to the spa, have dinner, go to bed. And then wake up the next morning and do it all again. You have the option to do nothing but sit by the lake and read a book with a glass of wine, or you can go golfing or rent a boat. You can go on a nature hike. There are all kinds of things to do—you can be as busy or as tranquil as you want.

And the spa can help things along?

Certainly! Book a massage the night you get here, then come back the next day and have a pedicure. I'm a 51-year-old, big, ex-hockey player and I had a one-hour deluxe pedicure the other day that was the coolest thing! You can take it to the extreme, or you can just have a little time-up.

Does Sherwood Inn have a specialty?

I would say it's our culinary offering. Our chef is Everett Bell, a young guy from Manitoulin Island. He grew up on a farm so we have vegetable and herb gardens and we buy produce locally. The freshness of the products we get is unparalleled—we can source local fish from Georgian Bay and cranberries from a farm 10 minutes down the road. Dining is really best experience for us, and that's part of the pampering.

What's the best time to visit?

Mid-week getaways are the best—fewer people and less traffic. Sunday through Thursday is excellent. And the fall is possibly the loveliest season of all.



HAIL THE COUNTRY HARVEST!

From fall fairs to autumn festivals, seasonal gatherings celebrate all things rural

Maybe it's deeply seeded in our DNA, but even if we live in a city, there's something about fall that compels us to celebrate the season. As leaves start to turn, when fireplaces start to crackle and sweater weather arrives, thoughts turn to the autumn harvest and the bounty it provides.

In Explorers' Edge, this nostalgic inking most likely translates to time spent taking in one of many fall fairs throughout the region, including the one in Huntsville on the weekend of September 20 to 22. The whole family will enjoy the country charm of competitions for best livestock, fruits and vegetables, flowers and crafts. Rides are plentiful too, as is the entertainment, and cotton candy is considered a staple.

Want to really get down to earth? Dig your hands into the dirt and pick your own seasonal vegetables at a local establishment, like Brooklands Farm in

Milford Bay, where the fall fare includes bright orange pumpkins, decorative gourds and winter squash.

And find out why thousands annually flock to the "Cranberry Capital of Ontario" to experience the Bala Cranberry Festival (October 18 to 20 this year). Here's a unique Ontario event that celebrates the annual harvest of ruby berries from two marshes, including Johnston's Cranberry Marsh, which offers daily tours. Browse the farm's "Cranberry Emporium" to discover just how many delectable goodies can be made from the indigenous fruit, including preserves, sweets, candles and soap. Sample award-winning wines at the neighbouring Muskoka Lakes Winery, or wander picturesque Bala for more vendors, entertainment and great eats.

Get a taste for country living this fall. Visit ExplorersEdge.ca for more delightful autumn events.



"...the best I can do does not do the place much justice in the way of beauty."

Tom Thomson

What captivated Tom Thomson and Canada's iconic Group of Seven about the natural landscape from Georgian Bay to Algonquin Park continues to inspire painters, photographers and crafts people in the Explorers' Edge region today.

Hundreds of artists create incredible works year-round in their studios, many of which are surrounded by picturesque woods or nestled by a lake.

Art galleries abound, including the Algonquin Art Centre (in the park), the Chapel Gallery in Bracebridge (curated by the renowned Muskoka Arts & Crafts organization), Muskoka Place Gallery in Port Carling, Windows to the North Gallery in Magnetawan, the Huntsville Art Society's Art Space and The Sun Dog Gallery in Loring-Restoule.

A totally unique fall drive includes traveling to see various installations of the Group of Seven Outdoor Gallery, a collection of more than 90 murals celebrating the works of these important artists. Murals are located throughout the "art trail," which extends from Huntsville to Algonquin Park to Lake of Bays, tying the works back to the places that inspired their creators. (There's even one hanging at the outdoor patio at Lake of Bays Brewing Co. in Baysville, so you can enjoy a craft brew while you contemplate genius.)

And fall in the region is the time to meet artists in their happy places. Plan to attend the 35th Annual Muskoka Autumn Studio Tour (September 28/29 and October 4/5) to see the creative process in action—and to inquire of these talented folks just what about the landscape in the Explorers' Edge inspires them most.

TRAILS, TALES & ALES

Northern Edge Algonquin offers a Canadian Tourism Commission Signature Experience called **Trails, Tales and Ales**—a guided three-day historical culinary adventure by bike and canoe that teaches visitors about the fascinating history of the region and the artists it has inspired. And when the trekking is done, it's all about food (created by award-winning chef Gregor) and locally brewed Highlander Ale. After that, it's saunas and a swim under a night sky full of stars. Best of all, the adventure runs year-round.

Chef David Friesen



From Field to Fork

Chef David Friesen has learned to embrace the flexibility. In fact, he prefers it.

Friesen has owned the picturesque Riverwalk Restaurant in Muskoka for more than 13 years, and given his reliance on locally-sourced ingredients for his sumptuous fare, his menu is a constantly evolving thing.

"We have a wonderful farming community up here," he says. "There are a lot of smaller farms that do most of the growing in the region, whether it's agriculture or livestock. But the farmers play to Mother Nature, so you never know what's going to happen or what produce you'll get."

A member of Savour Muskoka, Friesen says fall culinary creations are all about root vegetables: tomatoes, squash, kale, spinach, arugula, corn, celery, turnips and carrots, as well as fruits such as apples.

"I like to go back into comfort foods," he says of autumn's dishes. "It's pot pies, pumpkin bread pudding, mulled wine and apple ciders. It's all about the warm and fuzzies."

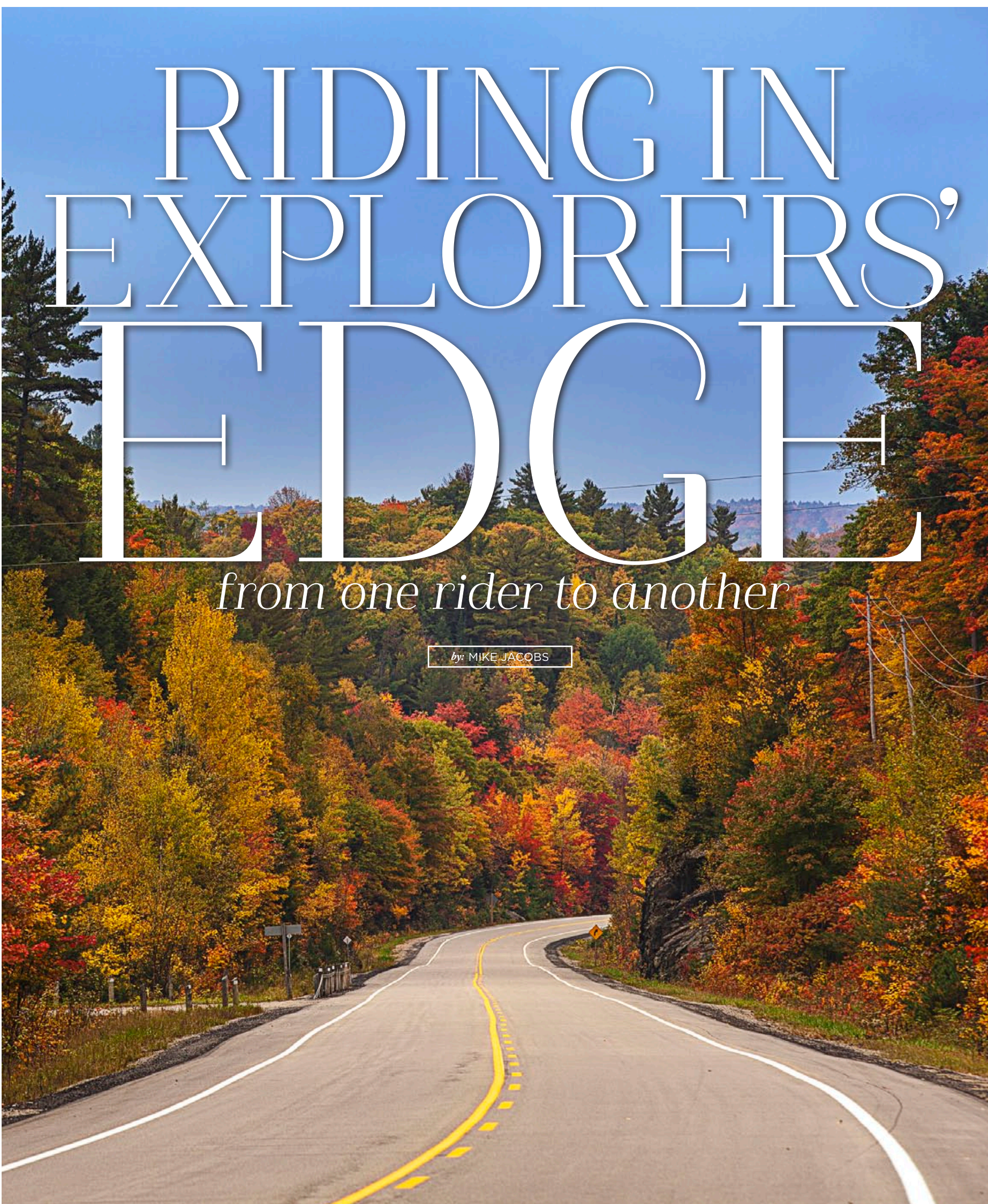
Hundreds of chefs will be serving hearty fare across Explorers' Edge this fall. Enjoy exceptional, warm and tasty dining throughout Algonquin Park, the Almaguin Highlands, Muskoka and Parry Sound all season.



IF YOU WANT TO GET TECHNICAL ABOUT WHAT REGION HAS THE MOST COLOURS, EXPLORERS' EDGE ALSO BOASTS OF ANOTHER HUE ON ITS AUTUMN PALETTE.

"Everyone's familiar with the traditional colours," observes Jackie Leung, owner of Fern Glen Inn B&B in the Almaguin Highlands, just 20 minutes north of Muskoka. "Maple and birch trees peak earliest—and then it's time for the tamarack. They turn yellow first, and then a deep gold and orange. So, later in the season we get these shimmering golden tamaracks. I call it the 'Golden Encore' because it's like a second act in the fall colour performance."

Tamarack forests get thicker as you travel further north in Explorers' Edge, making the Golden Encore even more impressive as the finishing flourish on the brilliant fall canvas.



RIDING IN EXPLORERS' EDGE

from one rider to another

by MIKE JACOBS

Pristine forests. Lakes, rivers and cliffs. Winding back roads that range from tame cruisers to technical twisties. That's what riding in the Explorers' Edge region of Ontario is all about.

visit EXPLORERSEGE.CA/FALLBLUE to plan your getaway!



Whether you've ridden here before or not, Explorers' Edge has something incredible to show you—especially in fall. Imagine a place where your ride includes more popular cottage country stops, as well as solitary stretches through untouched forests surrounding winding back roads that go on for miles. In Explorers' Edge, you can have it all.

Here your rides will take you through four vastly different sub-regions, which are what set Explorers' Edge apart from all other destinations in the province.

Starting in the south, Muskoka is an internationally-renowned vacation hotspot, with all the modern comforts you could possibly want. You'll love the wharf in Gravenhurst, the arcade in Bala and dining in Rosseau. And for cruising, you

can't miss Southwood Road, Muskoka Beach Road and County Road 26, as well as the mind-bending Highway 632. (Just keep your speeds down until you know what you're dealing with.)

Parry Sound is home to some of the best freshwater coasts in the world—make sure to take in Georgian Bay and catch sight of the dozens of boats launching from the town of Parry Sound, then explore epic motorways like the 520.

The Almaguin Highlands bring riders into some untouched Canadian wilderness. Highway 522 and the Screaming Heads art installation in Burk's Falls are essential highlights, as is a stop in the charming town of Magnetawan. The Almaguin Highlands Visitor Information Centre off Exit 244 on Highway 11 is a great staging point for riders

arriving from all over the province.

And finally, majestic Algonquin Park contains only one highway—but this piece of twisty asphalt winds through Ontario's oldest and most beloved provincial park, taking riders to some of the best roadside stops in the region, such as Lake of Two Rivers beach.

We've recommended two routes to try when you're traveling in Explorers' Edge this fall. Both are designed with optimal on-road experience in mind. Scenery, road quality and aesthetic value take the front seat here, and anything straight and flat has been ruled out for optimal entertainment.

If you'd like to customize your fall ride, don't forget to visit ExplorersEdge.ca for helpful planning around where to stay, what to eat and what to see and do.

THE BEST ROUTES

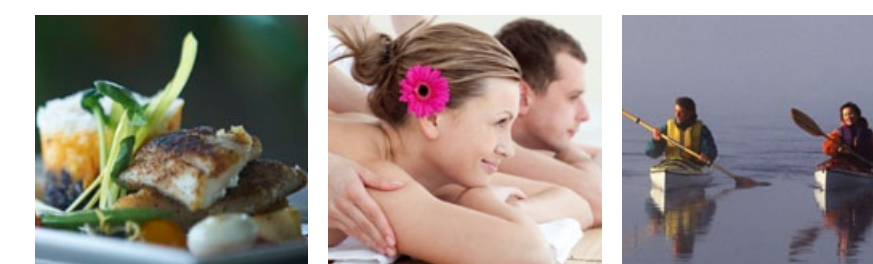
HERE ARE TWO RECOMMENDED ROUTES TO TRY WHEN YOU'RE TRAVELING THIS FALL IN EXPLORERS' EDGE, WITH YOUR ON-ROAD RIDING EXPERIENCE CONSIDERED THE TOP PRIORITY.



The Short Loop is ideal for a weekend trip, at just over 650 kms (400 miles) from start to finish. It can be done in a day, but if you want to take advantage of all of the scenic opportunities, we recommend staying at least one night. And if you're travelling from the US or from a great distance, you should make a weekend out of it. The short loop gives you a taste of each of the regions within Explorers' Edge, without taking on the major extra mileage that Algonquin Park adds. It also focuses on packing in more of the area's top roads.



The Long Loop is built for high-mileage touring. Ringing in at just under 1,000 kms (620 miles), this route takes riders on a slightly different combination of roads, and adds a cruise through Algonquin Park to discover the wilds of the northern reaches of Explorers' Edge.



Fall in Love with Muskoka Here

Sip, savour, explore and enjoy everything you love about Muskoka all in one place. From Fall getaway packages with great ways to see the colours to food & wine weekends and golf specials, you'll find your perfect autumn escape here.

Fall Colour Getaway from \$229*/night for two includes accommodation, 3-course Savour Muskoka Fall dinner and discounts on boat tours, horseback riding, spa services and canoe & kayak rentals. *Some conditions apply; see details online.

Make your Fall escape plans now at: 1-888-976-2024 deerhurstresort.com/fall-getaways