

Ely, Minnesota: Top Areas for Scenic Fall Color

Every autumn, nature plays a symphony in northeast Minnesota. When Ely nights turn cool in September, the landscape tunes up like a musical encore at the end of a richly satisfying concert. In one last burst of glory, a breathtaking composition of color erupts, and every tree plays a part.



Luminous gold-and-yellow high notes appear in the paper birches and aspens. Maples harmonize in bright red and orange, and ash trees hum along in sepia undertones. All of this plays out against a backdrop of mottled greens provided by balsam fir, spruce, and red and white pine. On the sandy cliffs, even blueberry bushes get into the act, brightening as nights grow colder. Tamaracks play the crescendo as they turn saffron gold before dropping their needles. These are the most common players in this grand, summer-encore performance. And here are some of the best places to soak up the glorious show:

New Tomahawk Road

From Babbitt, take Highway 70 east to New Tomahawk Road. An area populated with aspen, birch, balsam fir and red pine, the New Tomahawk Road offers an incredible scenic view of the Northwoods. With Mother Nature's vibrant display of reds, yellows, and oranges, contrasted with the dramatic greens of the red pines, there is no better way to experience the spirit of the season. This is a lightly traveled road, so keep the camera handy as you are sure to find some wildlife on the move.



Dry Falls (hike only)

Along this 1.7-mile section of the Bass Lake Trail just six miles north of Ely, hikers who traverse a fairly rugged ridge are rewarded with a beautiful view of the Northwoods all aglow. Along the way, scenic overlooks, waterfalls and a constantly changing terrain make the trip abundantly worthwhile.



Bass Lake Trail (hike only)

Wear sturdy shoes and bring a camera; the geology is fascinating and the views are stunning, especially when the water is surrounded by a harlequin forest. Hikers draw close enough to the shoreline to see and photograph colors reflected in the clear, still waters of Bass Lake.

Ed Shave Lake

A drive up the Echo Trail north of Ely will take you along the southern edge of 90-acre Ed Shave Lake, where granite cliffs, water scenes and an autumn forest of pine and hardwoods always brings ooohs and ahhs. This small lake is easy to canoe, too, and the autumn-color view from the water is even better than a drive-by.

Ojibway Lake

About 14 miles northeast of Ely, Ojibway Lake has an outline so notched and snagged it creates a "water, water everywhere" effect. County roads will get you close enough to appreciate the waterscape in full, fall-color riot—and a picnic area on the north side of Ojibway offers a spot to relax and enjoy lunch along with the view.



Glacier Pond

Two Glacier Ponds (conveniently named "1" and "2") are located along the way to Ojibway Lake, just off the Fernberg Trail. A forest road (557) will take you right past both ponds, but you might want to get out of your vehicle and walk part of the way. If you've been in the autumn forest, you know that smell of pine needles and crisp, fall leaves. It's easy to identify and strangely impossible to recall, but a walk along a Glacier Pond will jog your memory.

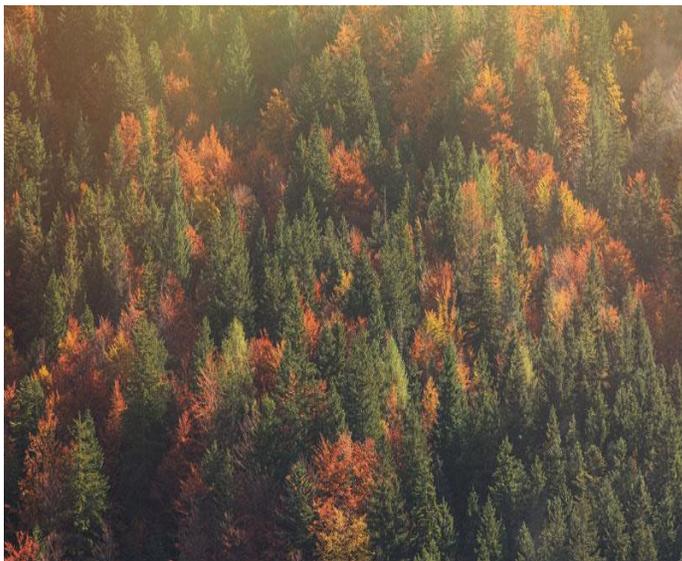
Fernberg Road

There are many roads in the Ely area that offer visitors a scenic wilderness experience, but one of the prettiest drives is along the Fernberg Road. This stretch of about 20 miles runs through the Superior National Forest to the literal "end of the road" at Lake One, an entry point of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. The variety of aspen, birch, maple, ash, spruce and pine seemingly hug the road to create

a corridor filled with a symphony of color. Don't forget to stop at the Fernberg Road Scenic Overlook for a fantastic view of marshy wetland area in all of its autumn glory.

Burntside Lake

In fact, any lake in the Ely area has the potential for breathtaking autumn color-views from the water level. Burntside just happens to be a bit dramatic; its granite shorelines, islands large-and- small, and steep, tree covered sides offer sweeping views that tower over a boat or canoe. The view is stunning whether standing on the shore or gliding through the water—you won't be able to look away.



Autumn Aerial Tours

For a truly memorable Northwoods experience, soar above the fall color show for a stunning view of the autumn scenery. Enjoy a bird's eye view of blue lakes and rivers surrounded by a vibrant palate of reds, yellows, oranges and greens. You will see a distinctly wilder appearance in the landscape as you fly over remote areas not accessible by car.

South Kawishiwi River

This sparkling river runs southwest from the edge of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness down to Birch Lake, about 10 miles out of Ely. A bridge near the U.S. Forest Service campground is a popular spot to take fall-color photographs, and a small, gravel access road leads down to the river for a closer view and a different angle. The nearby South Kawishiwi River Pavilion is a historic log building built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933. It accommodates 30 or 40 people for special events in a dramatic, fall-color background.

The Autumn Resort Experience

The fall colors near Ely are a visual gift and an artist's delight. With a morning cup of coffee in hand, fall-color seekers staying at their favorite resort need only look out the window to feel the connection that calls them to walk down to the shoreline to listen to the birds sing and the winds rustling the leaves as they gaze upon Mother Nature's glorious fall display.

If you know the northwoods around Ely at all, you appreciate the endless diversity of sights and sounds, flora and fauna, and indoor and outdoor adventures that make it a unique vacationland. But if you haven't experienced it in the fall, it's time to make a plan. The autumn symphony awaits.

