

NORTHEAST KINGDOM TOUR

Nicknamed the Northeast Kingdom (NEK) by Governor George D. Aiken in 1949, the three most northeastern counties- Caledonia, Orleans, and Essex- comprise the least populated region of Vermont. Named by the National Geographic Society in 2006 as the most desirable place to visit in the United States, the “Kingdom” covers 2000 square miles of rugged forest, glacial lakes, and scenic rivers. The countryside is dotted with dairy farms, tiny villages, and an abundance of moose, bear, beavers, fish, and deer.

Our tour begins by entering the Lamoille River Valley at Cambridge where we visit the Boyden Valley Winery. Steeped in the culture and agricultural heritage of Vermont’s Green Mountains, this is an award-winning winery in the tradition of European-style wines with a Vermont twist. Next, we visit the Poland Bridge, a Burr Truss covered bridge built in 1887.

In Johnson we visit the Johnson Woolen Mills, founded in 1842, and one of the last vestiges of a time when Vermont was the sheep and wool capital of the world. The company store offers a very wide variety of both old and new woolen clothing styles, and accessories with a 20% discount to tour participants. Continuing on up the Lamoille Valley towards the east, we’ll stop past Wolcott at the last covered wooden railroad bridge in the western hemisphere, the “Fisher Bridge.” Part of the St Johnsbury and Lamoille County Railroad – the “covered bridge” line – the bridge was constructed at the turn of the last century and is a heavy lattice design. The route is now being converted into a rail trail.

St. Johnsbury, the gateway to the NEK, was the home of the Fairbanks Scale Company. Founded in 1830, the company became the world’s supplier of platform scales, invented by Thaddeus Fairbanks. The family lavished much of their fortune on public facilities in the town including the Athenaeum, which houses a rare and robust collection of the Hudson River School of landscape paintings including Bierstadt’s “Domes of Yosemite” and the Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium. Built in 1890, the Romanesque structure is the finest example of a Victorian natural history museum in the United States and includes a world-class collection of mounted animals. Also in “St. J” we’ll visit Maple Grove Farms Factory and Maple Museum. Started in 1915, Maple Groves is the largest packer and manufacturer of maple products in the United States. The company store offers many maple products, as well as maple syrup.

Heading north we’ll pass by Lake Willoughby, Vermont’s deepest and most beautiful lake. Formed by glacial action, the lake has excellent fishing and a landscape reminiscent of Lake Lucerne in Switzerland. Dinner the first night will be served dockside on Lake Memphremagog, a picturesque 27-mile long glacial lake spanning the Canadian border. Planning is underway for either a tour boat ride and/or open-air band concert for the evening entertainment.

On the second day, breakfast will be served dockside on Lake Memphremagog. The tour will spend the morning visiting two large Tree Farms in Orleans County, including Vermont’s 2009 Tree Farmer of the Year. We’ll see maple and boreal forests and learn about some of Vermont’s invasives. In Newport we’ll visit the veneer mill of Columbia Forest Products, and lunch at the Big Falls on the Missisquoi River. The tour’s last stop will be a tram ride to the top of Jay Peak! At 3438 feet, Jay is the highest mountain in the NEK, affords views of three states and Quebec, is the northernmost peak along Vermont’s Long Trail, and receives the most snow annually in the eastern United States with over 400 inches of natural snow. The Ski Resort is one of Vermont’s best and is rapidly expanding into a four-season resort. The bus will be returning to both the hotel and the airport between 5 and 6 PM the end of the second day. Please note that, unfortunately, many of the sites on this tour are not handicapped accessible. Participants should be able to walk unassisted for two (2) miles each day on moderate trails and walks.