



Compass

By David Webb

Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta

Central Alberta's colourful diamond in the rough.



Alberta Beach, a scruffy little hamlet on the shores of Lac Ste. Anne, is a colourful place to be sure. Just spend an afternoon sipping a Corona at the lakeside Jungle's Bar & Grill, and you'll see all types of folk crawl out of the woodwork.

"If I see my mom," mumbles an inebriated 30-something from the table next to me, "I'm totally getting a ride home with her." It's half-past noon, and the locals are celebrating Canada Day in style.

The waitress answers my request for a menu in robotic fashion.

"We don't have menus; we have cheeseburgers, chicken fingers or BLTs," she drones. I nod my head, place my order and try to figure out how this place that seems a world away could be only 60 kilometres from downtown Edmonton.

The 55-square km Lac Ste. Anne is a popular cottage retreat for Edmontonians—although far less so than mainstays like Pigeon and Sylvan lakes. On this weekend in particular, Alberta Beach, the main summer village on the lake, feels like a hidden gem. The tiny public beach is not half full and traffic is non-existent. A few other tourists like myself wander the streets, unmistakable

thanks to their fanny packs and triple-decker ice cream cones. We stop in at shops like the Hey Loft, a knickknack store with surprisingly reasonable prices, and some of the cutesy, family-run coffee or sandwich shops.

A short walk from Jungle's to the public beach (a small patch of grass and lake-sand less than 100 metres long) reveals why cottagers might wish to keep this area from becoming the next Sylvan Lake. Lac Ste. Anne is an oasis in the northern forest—a clear-water, picturesque prairie lake ringed with private cottages. A couple of wakeboarders and pleasure boaters make their rounds on the water in front of me, and in the distant corner a boat sits at anchor—perhaps with a lazy angler aboard. Near the long, rickety wooden pier, an elderly gentleman plies the waters in an honest-to-God Amphicar; one of the few remaining examples of this 1960s-era, German-built amphibious vehicle. However, for a large lake less than an hour's drive from Alberta's capital city, this place is practically a ghost town.

Lac Ste. Anne has a holy history. Originally dubbed Wakamne by the local Nakota Sioux,

The Water's Edge development offers the full Lac Ste. Anne experience at a reasonable price.

IF YOU GO

Alberta Beach is located 60 km west of Edmonton. Take Highway 16 west, then turn north on Highway 43. Gunn (population 1,120) is the largest town in the area, located about 10 km north of Alberta Beach at the intersection of Highway 43 and Highway 33. The Water's Edge is located between the two towns. For more information on the development, visit www.watersedgestates.ca.



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The pier at Alberta Beach seems to stretch for miles into the welcoming, shallow water.

meaning "God's Lake," European settlers renamed it "Devil's Lake," perhaps due to a heinous misinterpretation of Wakamne, or because of how dangerous it could become in bad weather. It was the missionary Father Thibault who set up shop and bestowed the lake with its current name in 1842. Although the famous Father Lacombe moved that mission to the present-day city of St. Albert, Alberta, Lac Ste. Anne still has a holy following—thousands of people pilgrimage there each year, claiming physical and spiritual healing from its warm, shallow waters.

Holy water aside, there are many reasons the cottager might want to take a look at this lake and its surrounding areas. In Alberta Beach, lakeside living can be had for around \$200,000. Lakefront cottages are a bit more than homes in the 762-person town, but still below the provincial average of about \$700,000.

However, just a quick jaunt north of Alberta Beach, along the road that encircles the lake and passes by the summer villages of Val Quentin, Sunset Point, Yellowstone, Ross Haven and West Cove (where real estate is similarly priced but less

tanks. This complex takes the worry out of those issues. All of the green-spaces are maintained for you, as are the roads, clubhouse, boat-launch . . . and the provincially approved water treatment and low-pressure septic system."

But for those who might worry this planned development is an abomination of nature, Arndt assures that nothing could be further from the truth.

"This property owns the riparian rights, which allowed the development of the half-mile of lake-front," Arndt says. "But the development actually enhances the environment." Only native species were used, including natural grasses and bulrushes. Fish habitat was enhanced as well. Arndt had an environmental assessment done to ensure any modification would be done in an environmentally sensitive manner. On the lots, rather than a fenced off subdivision, the craftsman-style cottages (which have a "cabiny feel," according to Arndt) are separated by a combination of 20–24 different species of native trees and shrubs.

"We are rebuilding the natural setting," assures Arndt. And it is quite a setting. Unique to an Alberta lake, The Water's Edge property is sloped, offering four view benches that allow for breathtaking vistas that stretch for 20 km or more, across the lake and into the horizon. "Our lots celebrate the lake," adds Arndt. "We're not just a developer out to make a buck, we're building a legacy."

Whether you choose hassle-free living at The Water's Edge, or pick up a rustic sub-\$200,000 bungalow in Alberta Beach, Lac Ste. Anne's holy waters will soothe your spirit all the same. And if all that holy water and serenity starts to get to you, a quick trip to Jungle's Bar & Grill provides the perfect complement. ☺

Real Estate Listings at a Glance

Lakeview
3 beds
1.5 baths
\$234,000

Lakeside
4 beds
1.5 baths
\$232,000

Lakefront
adjacent w/lake access
2 beds
1.5 baths
\$249,000

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