

Barbara Kay: Oceans are great. Sucks to be a lake

[National Post](#) - Thursday July 5th, 2012

Ocean or lake?

Ocean or lake?

For ten months a year, we opinion writers are racked by inner debate over the hard news of the world: Should Israel bomb Iran? Can the European Union survive? Will Pakistan implode? Is that Higgs Boson thingy going to change our lives, or is God just messing with scientists' brains?

But in July our brains suddenly turn to mush. The habit of being racked by conflicting arguments continues, of course — we are who we are — but suddenly the focus of our thoughts shifts from the sublime to the ridiculous, and we start wondering about what TomKat's divorce will mean for the world of Scientology, and where is the best place to vacation in the world.

I have in my hand the latest issue of Yankee, "New England's magazine." That's because I am in Maine, where we go every year at this time for a few weeks. Yankee is the kind of magazine you want to read when your brain is mushy, featuring articles like "The best blueberry prize in New England" and "Celebrating July 4th in style." For this issue, Yankee looked at and rated 25 beaches in New England, including famous ones like Nantucket, Provincetown and Kennebunkport, home to the Bush family.

And guess whose beach came first? Mine! Ogunquit Beach. We've been coming down to this beach for almost 50 years. We brought our children here from infancy, and now they are bringing their children here every year. For the Toronto branch, it's a long trek.

Montrealers may suffer the tortures of the damned in their politics, and they do, but no city in Canada can rival Montreal for its great compensatory advantage: proximity to so many great vacation options. Montreal is not only surrounded by mountains high and low, and lakes large and small, all within two hours drive of the city, but it is within a half-day's drive of Boston and New York. And the ocean.

We lead privileged lives. We have a mountain retreat on a small lake with easy access to excellent skiing just an hour door to door from our city home, so that's where we spend most of our getaway time. But we're close enough to the incredible beaches of Maine to make even a weekend trip worthwhile. Endless political tension at home seems a small price to pay for that benefit.

Here are the reasons I like ocean vacations better than lake vacation.

- Lakes are beautiful – or not – but oceans are always awesome;
- Oceanside roads are flat and amenable to bike riding for miles, with gorgeous scenery to look at, while mountain lakes are surrounded by hilly terrain it isn't often fun or even scenic to bike on;
- When you walk into the ocean, you have firm sand under your feet, and it feels good; lake bottoms are mostly made up of dark, squishy stuff that gives you the creeps;
- You can walk for miles alongside an ocean. But even public lake beaches aren't very long, and besides, you have to drive to them;
- There are no bugs at the ocean because there is no foliage; also no snakes, bears or other scary critters.
- Children can do stuff on ocean beaches they can't do at the lake. They can run and run and run because the expanse of sand is so vast. There are tide pools big enough for a kid to swim in, clear and warm and clean. You can set up a

baseball diamond on the hard-packed sand. You can fly a kite because the wind is so steady. In my experience, children are happier at the ocean than at the lake, and so are parents;

- Ocean beaches are backed up by towns that in New England at least are loaded with charm and good places to eat. You can eat lobster fresh from the traps. There are charming mountain towns too, but one's cottage isn't usually in them.
- Fresh air smells nice in the mountains, but it isn't a patch on the smell of the ocean. No contest.
- Tides! Lakes are always the same. But the beach is never quite the same. Every tide changes it subtly. One plans one's day by the tides. The connection is timeless and emotionally powerful.

Most interesting between the two is how we relate to others. At the lake, your cottage is separate from others. You don't feel comfortable sharing space with strangers. But at the ocean, you can be amongst thousands of other people, and your cottage can be a foot away from another in a long row of ocean-facing dwellings, but you don't care. Lakefront is personal, and one has to protect it, but oceanfront is impersonal. It's nobody's and everybody's. All care drops away. It's how life should be on vacation. Ocean trumps lake.

National Post