



The Crown Jewel of Oakland

Lake Merritt is the epicenter of Oakland. Affectionately referred to as the city’s “crown jewel,” the Lake is to Oakland what Central Park is to New York, and the National Mall is to Washington DC. It is Oakland’s aesthetic and spiritual heart—a place where residents from all corners of the city come together. Walk around the lake on a warm weekend afternoon and you will “get” what this city is all about.

The Lake was originally a tidal lagoon. In 1868, Mayor Samuel Merritt had a dam built at one end, separating the lagoon from the Oakland Estuary and San Francisco Bay. Two years later, the lake was designated the first official wildlife refuge in the United States. In the 1890s and early 1900s, the wetlands were dredged and the lake took its current form. Inspired by the City Beautiful movement, Oakland leaders created Lakeside Park on the northern Adams Point side of the lake, and created a perimeter greenway along the shoreline. Ornate homes and apartment buildings were built along Lakeshore Avenue on the east side and Lakeside Drive on the west.

The lake itself covers 140 acres, and is 8 to 10 feet deep in most places. During the last few decades, Oakland residents have invested hundreds of millions of dollars to clean the lake, restore its landscaping, and create a more welcoming environment for pedestrians. The 3.2-mile perimeter trail around the lake has never been more popular. It offers panoramic vistas of the city and the hills, great people watching, and plenty of places to soak up the sun and learn about local flora and fauna. In the evening, the historic “Necklace of Lights” illuminates the edges of the lake, creating a sophisticated urban streetscape.

While the major draw at Lake Merritt is the shoreline promenade, Lakeside Park offers experiences for persons of all ages. It includes a vintage theme park called Children’s Fairyland, a boathouse (now under renovation), a botanical garden, and the Rotary Nature Center and bird-watching area. The park also includes a scenic pergola, an fountain, a historic bandstand, an earthen maze, and numerous lawns and seating areas. Bellevue Drive is the main road through the park, with access from Grand Avenue.

The perimeter of the lake includes some of Oakland’s best known attractions, along with some hidden gems. The northwest end of the lake abuts Uptown Oakland. The iconic Kaiser Center, a 28-story tower known for its massive curved façade, is a hallmark of mid-century design. The building’s five-story parking garage features one of the largest rooftop gardens in the country. Its 3.5 acres of lawns, ponds, and pathways are open to the public and a great place for a brown bag lunch or morning coffee. Adjacent to the Kaiser Center is the Cathedral of Christ the Light, Oakland’s ultra-modern Roman Catholic Cathedral. Step inside and prepare to be inspired.

Further south on Lakeside Drive, a number of prominent buildings face the lake. These



include several local historic landmark apartment towers, the Scottish Rite Temple, the Alameda County Courthouse, and the Camron-Stanford House, built in 1876. At the “south” end of the lake, the historic Henry J. Kaiser Convention Center, built in 1914, is a beaux arts masterpiece. The renowned Oakland Museum is just adjacent.

But most of all, come to the Lake to walk. Depending on your pace, it takes about an hour to do the loop, and it will be the best hour you spend in Oakland (outside the conference, of course).

How to get to Lake Merritt:

- On foot or bicycle: Head east along 14th Street. It is an easy 10 minute walk to the “base” of the Lake from the Marriott. If you choose to jog or run, the perimeter trail is almost entirely paved and level for your pleasure.

Lake Merritt skyline



Pergola and Colonnade



Cathedral of Christ the Light



Camron-Stanford House



Lake Chalet



bird sanctuary



Guide by Don Bradley and Barry Miller

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