

Travel

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By Natalie B. Compton

Thanks to its size, the United States is one of the best places in the world to appreciate fall foliage. New England tends to get most of the attention during the season, but there are far more places to see autumnal splendor.

To pinpoint some highlights, we talked to travel experts about their favorite destinations for fall trips. Beyond their specific places to visit, they all had a word of warning for travelers.

“For anyone thinking about traveling these days: Book early because space continues to be limited,” said Erina Pindar, managing director at the luxury travel agency SmartFlyer. “Plan ahead.”

While Pindar’s advice has been pertinent for travel year-round, Richard Engle, travel adviser with Global Travel Collection’s BookHuman.Travel, said fall may be particularly tricky.

“Earlier in the year, people were pretty convinced they were not going to be able to go abroad, so many people have made reservations for fall trips already,” Engle said. “For many places, you could be too late.”

Once you (quickly) decide where to go, you will want to refer to the 2021 fall foliage tracker to determine when to visit. For the uninitiated, the map can help travelers estimate when parts of the U.S. will reach its peak-fall colors. It’s not a perfect science, but it has the potential for giving you a better shot at seeing autumn’s finest. Here’s where to start your trip brainstorming.

Virginia
For a multicolor fall experience, Engle sends travelers to Virginia to see “the beautiful scenery of the Appalachians.” Other highlights are the Shenandoah Valley, ●Grayson Highlands State Park and the Priest Wilderness, a 5,726-acre hiker’s paradise in southwestern Virginia. The state is particularly appealing to active travelers, “because there are all kinds of hiking trails, cycling trails in those areas,” Engle said. “The horseback riding is really fun.”

The Virginia tourism board put together

its own fall foliage report based on the 2021 fall foliage map that you can refer to when planning your visit.

Vermont
Out of all the traditional places in New England to leaf peep, Maya George, founder of Our Black Passports and a luxury travel adviser for Tzell Travel Group, is the biggest fan of Vermont. She recommended staying in Stowe, where there seems to be something for every kind of traveler.

“There are a lot of activities to do in Vermont,” she said, listing ideas such as hiking, craft-beer tasting, zip-lining, skiing, backpacking, mountain biking, dining and hot-air-balloon riding.

On the luxury front, Pindar points travelers to Twin Farms, a farmhouse turned adults-only, all-inclusive resort and spa located 90 minutes from Burlington in Barnard.

“There it’s pretty epic in terms of fall foliage,” she said of the property, which was previously owned by Nobel Prize-winning author Sinclair Lewis.

Colorado
Another Engle favorite is his home state, Colorado, where fall transforms the state into a gilded dream.

“In Aspen and Telluride, we have amazing golden colors when the aspens turn,” he said. “Since there’s so many of them, you can have whole mountains full of gold.”

For the active set, Engle also recommended visiting Steamboat Springs.

New York
New York state offers the best of both worlds for fall travelers. On the one hand, you have one of the most vibrant cities in the world. And on the other, there are plentiful options for rural retreats upstate. George says New York City is her first choice, always, for fall trips. A New York native, George sends people to the city’s parks, including Central Park (obviously) in Manhattan and Prospect Park in Brooklyn, as well as the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

Pindar recommended driving north to Kingston to stay at Hutton Brickyards, a boutique hotel on 73 acres located near Storm King Art Center in New Windsor



PHOTO: THE WASHINGTON POST

Fall colors on Virginia’s Skyline Drive

(where you need tickets for a timed reservation).

Illinois
For another trip that combines the best of city living and more rural adventures, Engle points fall travelers to Illinois. He suggested anchoring your trip in Chicago where “there are all the same beautiful trees and beautiful colors in there, but then you have the whole city thing, too,” he said.

Additionally, Chicago will have more accommodation availability than the charming bed-and-breakfasts or resorts in more popular leaf-peeping destinations nearby. “You can take day trips in a car into Wisconsin and it’s a whole new world, or into Michigan and it’s a whole new world,” Engle said. “And you can still come back to the city and sleep.”

Maine
George sends families and campers to Maine for its parks, nature reserves, coastal roads and lakes. She recommended starting a trip in a city like Portland or Bath, then driving farther north to explore the state’s outdoor wonders.

Some highlights include the 66-acre Meryspring Nature Center in Camden, Acadia National Park (you can buy your entrance pass digitally ahead of your visit) and Maine Public Lands for camping and

hiking.
North Carolina
Pindar grew up in North Carolina, and she is a fan of recommending clients to the state for fall vacations.

“It’s the easy ability to find hiking trails, it’s got cute mountain towns,” she said. “It’s really accessible.”

One of her top picks for the area is the Old Edwards Inn and Spa in the southwestern plateau of North Carolina’s Blue Ridge Mountains. Pindar said guests will enjoy the town of Highlands, as well as its proximity to Asheville.

“It’s just so beautiful in the fall,” she said of the region. “It’s a classic.”

Tennessee
Tennessee is a popular fall trip choice for Engle and Pindar. In fact, Pindar said the luxury hotel and resort Blackberry Farm in Walland is “easily one of the most requested properties for our team.”

However, Engle noted, “most of the best places are sold out already for the fall,” including Blackberry.

But it’s not one particular resort that makes Tennessee so special in the fall; it’s the grandeur of the Great Smoky Mountains. Travelers can hunt for other accommodations in the region, from vacation rental homes, cabins and glamping tents.

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