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Enjoy the freedom of the open road along the fabled Route 66, and see nature in all its glory

# FALLING FOR AMERICA

Take a 'leaf-peeping' road trip on Route 66 to see the US in all its autumnal glory

WORDS *Jo Caird*

As the days grow shorter and temperatures start to cool, nature lovers head off on road trips across the US to witness the unforgettable spectacle of trees turning from green to autumnal yellow, red, orange and even purple. Known as 'leaf peeping', these seasonal sightseeing journeys first became famous in New England, in the north-east of the US, but the tradition has since also taken root further afield.

The Great Lakes region offers dramatic panoramas, as brightly coloured woodland stands out against agricultural landscapes, and blazing trees line thousands of kilometres of shorelines and waterways. Chicago and Detroit's lakeside locations mean you don't even really need to set foot outside the city to experience these vistas, with the parks on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago and Belle Isle in Detroit both putting on awesome autumn displays. 🍁

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Venture off road  
to explore parks,  
waterfalls and  
forests



## TRAVEL TIPS CHICAGO



### Stay

**Hotel Lincoln** boasts a thrilling heritage – past guests include Al Capone and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright David Mamet – and it's set in one of Chicago's greenest neighbourhoods. Ask for a room overlooking Lincoln Park and Lake Michigan for the best views.

*1816 North Clark Street.*

### Eat

**Classy French cuisine, spectacular views and flawless service are all part of the draw at Everest, but it's the restaurant's location on the 40th floor of the Chicago Stock Exchange that makes it a must-visit.**

*440 South LaSalle Street.*

### Drink

**Windy City coffee institution Intelligentsia is the perfect place to refuel after a stroll through Millennium Park, Chicago's public art and landscape design hotspot.**

*53 East Randolph Street.*



But it's out beyond the city limits, in rural Illinois and Michigan, that Mother Nature really shows what she's made of. America's most famous road, Route 66, stretches for nearly 4,000km from the Midwest out to the Pacific coast, and it all begins in Chicago. Driving this heritage route southwest through northern Illinois is a great way of combining leaf peeping with roadside attractions, museums and restaurants.

As October advances you'll see sugar maples turning vibrant orange and red, while walnut leaves blaze yellow and white ashes take on a deep purple hue. These colours are present in the leaves all year round, but it's only when levels of the bright green pigment chlorophyll begin to fall as the climate changes that all the other colours become visible.

Autumn festivals celebrating the turning leaves and the harvest are commonplace all over the Midwest. The 20km of walking trails at Starved Rock State Park, a 90-minute drive from Chicago, are open all year, but free guided tours of the best leaf-peeping

spots in the area take place over the Fall Colors Weekend (18-19 October). You might even spot bald eagles in the wild, too.

The Klehm Arboretum and Botanical Garden in Rockford, Illinois, is home to more than 300 species of trees, many of which are non-native, making it one of the richest leaf-peeping experiences in the state. This historic park, less than two hours from Chicago, is particularly worth heading out to on 5 October, when it plays host to Autumn at the Arboretum, a day of family fun including scarecrow making and horse-drawn wagon rides.

There are plenty of autumn colour opportunities for travellers based in Detroit, too. Michigan has one of the largest state parks and state forest systems in the US, as well as more than 11,000 inland lakes, meaning that you don't have to drive far before you come across a patch of beautiful wilderness. The leaves start to change in September in the north of the state, while October is the best time to take to the road if you're staying closer to Detroit. ➔



The Fallsburg Covered Bridge is one of only three traditional wooden bridges in Michigan that is still open to traffic



## TRAVEL TIPS DETROIT



### Stay

Experience a slice of history at **The Inn on Ferry Street**, a luxury hotel converted from four Victorian homes and two carriage houses. Each of the 40 rooms and suites is different, with many boasting period features such as fireplaces.

*84 East Ferry Street.*

### Eat

The mechanics may have been replaced by chefs and waiting staff, but **Vinsetta Garage** still offers a unique **Motor City** dining experience. The eatery's décor retains the industrial feel of the former car repair shop and offers the hearty kind of food eaten by auto industry workers back in Detroit's heyday, from deep fried cheese curds to classic burgers.

*27799 Woodward Avenue.*

### Drink

Marvel at the architectural gem and Detroit icon that is the **Fisher Building** (pictured), then stop for a refresher at **Stella Good Coffee** in the foyer, which has the building's original 1928 marble floor.

*3011 West Grand Boulevard.*

From the Motor City, follow the shore of the huge Lake St Clair to Algonac State Park, where the oak savannas put on a multi-coloured display of green, red, yellow and orange, or head north-west to the Holly Recreation Area – more than 32km<sup>2</sup> of rolling woodland, lakes and open fields. Culturally minded travellers should continue from Holly to Grand Rapids, where the annual ArtPrize competition takes over downtown, and will this year be held from 24 September to 12 October.

On the outskirts of Grand Rapids, picturesque Fallsburg County Park holds an arts festival of its own on 20-21 September, featuring a craft and fine arts market, food stalls, live music and a children's activity area, plus evening entertainment. The area is famous for the wooden Fallsburg

Covered Bridge. Listed on the US National Register of Historic Places, it is one of only three such traditional bridges in Michigan that are open to traffic. The area is also home to Fallsburg Historic Village, whose school and house museums tell the story of local life in the 19th century.

When it comes to planning your own leaf peeping day trip, it's worth remembering that the best times for taking photographs are early in the morning and late in the day, when the sun is sitting low on the horizon. Cloudy days set off the colours beautifully too, so there's really no need to wait for the sun to come out before setting off on your woodland adventure.

Weekends can be busy in the most popular spots, so consider a weekday excursion for a more peaceful trip. And most importantly, be ready to take the road less travelled – there's nothing more thrilling than turning a corner and seeing a magnificent vista open up before you... and having it all to yourself. 👑

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