

## Traveler

### Striking fall color tours take shape in many ways.

Andrea Zani

With the arrival of autumn, Wisconsin is bursting with more brilliant colors than a Matisse palette. From the aspens and maples of the northwest to the oaks and other hardwoods of the Driftless Area and the southeast, the state is covered in trees that don radiant coats each fall.

October is a peak time for viewing this technicolor show and there are many ways to do so. Hiking a state park is an easy one. Pick a park, any park, and there are bound to be vibrant vistas everywhere. The same goes for state properties such as trails and recreation areas and Wisconsin's 14 state forests, where dazzling colors light up the landscape at this time of year.

To make the most of autumn's glory, take a page from that old 1980s film "Planes, Trains & Automobiles." The oddball comedy with Steve Martin and John Candy fea-

tured all modes of transportation; this fall it's possible to pick any — or all — of those to take in what the season has to offer.

#### Bird's-eye view

It's not exactly an airplane, but the vantage point provided by the **Comet Sky Ride** at Wausau's Rib Mountain State Park can serve as a close substitute.

The Comet is actually the regular ski lift at Granite Peak Ski Area, located within the park at 3605 N. Mountain Road. It carries riders to the top of Rib Mountain, where they can step off and enjoy the

fall color scenes before hopping back on for the slow and easy ride back to base.

Rides are offered on weekends through Oct. 15, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., \$11 (free for ages 3-5). Check [skigranitepeak.com](http://skigranitepeak.com) or call 715-845-2846.

Also worth noting: Rib Mountain, like several state

parks, has an observation tower that provides excellent views of the area's fall color terrain. The Rib Mountain tower rises 60 feet high on the park's Gray Trail. Check [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search "Rib Mountain."

Those with no fear of heights might consider one of many scenic **airplane tours** or **hot-air balloon rides** to behold fall's glory from on high, and a growing number of **zip-line experiences** will take adventurers right to the radiant treetops. There are fall color **boat tours** too, for visitors so inclined.

The Department of Tourism has information on all of these options. Check the website at [travelwisconsin.com](http://travelwisconsin.com) and search "fall colors" for dozens of ideas, or call 800-432-8747.

**Leaf-peeper locomotives**  
There are several rail options for fall color lovers. Here are a few notables.

Near Spooner, in the northwest, the **Wisconsin Great Northern Railroad**, N6639 Dilly Lake Road in Trego, offers a variety of train rides throughout autumn, including short sightseeing tours, dining



Rib Mountain



Mid-Continent Railway

MID-CONTINENT RAILWAY



DNR FILES

Color Weekend of rides in the Sauk County countryside, Oct. 6-8. Regular 55-minute rides are available with coach and first-class options, and there also is a Saturday night dinner train. Coach fare is \$20 for adults, \$18 for seniors, \$15 for students and \$10 for children 3-12 (add \$2 for caboose seating). First-class fare is \$42; ages 2 and under are free. The dinner train is \$77 or \$87 per person, depending on beverage choice. Check [midcontinent.org](http://midcontinent.org) or call 800-930-1385.

The **East Troy Electric Railroad** operates on a 7½-mile stretch of railway in southeast Wisconsin, with fall service continuing on weekends through Nov. 5. Trains depart each Saturday and Sunday from the East Troy Depot, 2002 Church St., and riders also may board in Mukwonago at the Elegant Farmer bakery, 1545 Main St., or Indian Head Park. Fares are \$12.50 for ages 15-64, \$10.50 for 65-plus, \$8 for 3-14, and free for 2 and under. Evening dinner trains and family-friendly pizza trains also are available, with reservations required. Check [easttroyrr.org](http://easttroyrr.org) or call 262-642-3263.

The Great Pumpkin Train comes to the **National Railroad Museum**, 2285 S.

Broadway in Green Bay, on Oct. 14 and 21, with live entertainment, family activities and a vintage train ride. The museum also offers its regular rides on weekends through October. Cost, including museum admission and 25-minute ride, is \$12 for adults, \$11 for seniors, \$9.50 for 2-12 and free for under 2. Check [nationalrrmuseum.org](http://nationalrrmuseum.org) or call 920-437-7623.

In Wisconsin Dells, the **Riverside & Great Northern Railway**, N115 County Road N, is a fun option, especially for younger children. The 15-inch-gauge steam train winds along a 3-mile route through wooded areas near the Wisconsin River, and a Pumpkin Train on Saturdays and Sundays in October has free “pumpplings” for ages 12 and under. Rides are \$12 for adults, \$9 for seniors, \$8 for 4-12 and free for 3 and under. Check [dellstrain.com](http://dellstrain.com) or call 608-254-6367.

As a side note for those planning an outing with smaller children, the Dells train is only a couple of miles from Rocky Arbor State Park, which has the perfect hiking trail for young visitors, a 1-mile nature trail that’s full of color in fall. Check [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov)

and search “Rocky Arbor.”

### Hit the road

Finally, the automobile is likely the most popular choice for those in search of fall colors. When seeking out those vivid shades of red, yellow, orange, ocher, burgundy and more, there’s no better choice than Wisconsin’s **Rustic Roads**.

The state has 119 so-designated roads winding through 59 counties and totaling 722 miles. The Department of Transportation provides signage marking Rustic Roads in a program that began more than 40 years ago to highlight the state’s scenic countryside.

According to the DOT, every Rustic Road has “outstanding natural features along its borders such as rugged terrain, native vegetation, native wildlife or include open areas with agricultural vistas.” All roads are at least 2 miles long with a maximum speed of 45 mph. Roads may be gravel, dirt or paved surface and all are “lightly traveled local access roads, serving the adjacent property owners and those wishing to travel by auto, bicycle or hiking for purposes of recreational enjoyment.”

For details on Rustic Roads, including a list of sites with maps and descriptions, check [wisconsin.gov/rusticroads](http://wisconsin.gov/rusticroads).

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trains and even overnight stays. Prices vary by trip. Check [spoonertrainride.com](http://spoonertrainride.com) or call 715-635-3200.

**Mid-Continent Railway**, E8948 Museum Road in North Freedom, has an Autumn



Rustic Roads

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### PEAK PERFORMANCE

To maximize your fall color viewing experience, check out the Department of Tourism’s Fall Color Report — [travelwisconsin.com/fall-color-report](http://travelwisconsin.com/fall-color-report). The report is updated weekly throughout fall and provides estimated peak color times for each region of the state, along with information on area events, attractions and dining and lodging options.