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10 Best Towns To Visit In California During The Fall

Feeling festive? These 10 California towns are perfect for apple picking, wine touring, leaf peeping, and every fun Fall activity in between.

BY NICOLE HANSEN PUBLISHED 1 DAY AGO



Lighthouse Walton Santa Cruz in California

California is one of the most popular destinations in the US any time of the year. Whether visitors are hoping for a beach getaway or are planning a trip to one of [California's most eco-friendly tourism destinations](#), there is plenty to love about the Golden State.

Fall is a particularly beautiful time of year to visit California, as many towns are preparing seasonal festivals beginning the annual harvest. With u-pick Orchards across the state and California's famous mild weather at its best, there are nearly endless things to do around the state.

Of all the places to go and things to do in California this Fall, these ten towns are the best of every, providing you with everything that makes this season great.

Note

Fall is a great time to travel to California, not only because of the beautiful scenery and unique activities, but the great deals on accommodations. As the peak travel season ends, many hotels offer deals to entice travelers. Each destination listed includes a top-rated hotel conveniently located near the fun, giving travelers an advantage as they start planning their Fall California vacation.

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10 San Luis Obispo



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Mountain Bikers follow a trail in San Luis Obispo, CA

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Another California fall destination that benefits from the harvest season, San Luis Obispo is a lively coastal town that is popular with more than just human visitors during the Fall. Starting in October, the annual monarch butterfly migration makes its way to San Luis Obispo, filling the foliage with a totally different variety of colors.

San Luis Obispo is also a great Fall destination for those interested in a less crowded alternative to the Napa Valley wine harvest, as San Luis Obispo is the home base for several of its own wineries. With the fresh grapes being picked and processed, Fall is the perfect time to enjoy vineyard tours and wine tastings at these open-to-the-public locations.

About San Luis Obispo in Fall

- **Best Places for Fall Foliage in San Luis Obispo:** See Canyon Road, Vineyards, Adelaida Road, Highway 46 West, Highway 58
- **Things to Do in San Luis Obispo in the Fall:** Hiking, Wine Tours, [SLO Creek Farms](#), [Cambria Scarecrow Festival](#), [Atascadero Fall Festival](#), [Central Coast Railroad Festival](#), [Octoberfest at Madonna](#)
- **Accommodation:** [Apple Farm](#)
- **Address:** [2015 Monterey Street, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401](#)
- **Amenities:** Outdoor pool, Free Wi-Fi, Free parking, Free airport shuttle

9 Santa Cruz



Photo by [Sean D'Auria](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Photo by



Natural Bridges State Beach, Santa Cruz, California

There is no bad time of year to enjoy Santa Cruz, home of some of [the most beautiful beaches in California](#). Despite its prominence as a summer beach destination, Santa Cruz is also one of the best towns to visit in California during the Fall.

There are two state parks right around Santa Cruz that are ideal for enjoying the fall foliage and cooling Fall breeze along the ocean. Both Nuevo State Park and Natural Bridges State Park are a must for hikers and casual sightseers alike hoping to get a little more time outside before the weather fully shifts.

Of course, it wouldn't be fall in California without some of the more classic activities, like Apple Picking at the local Orchards and Fall festivals like the free [Festival of Monsters](#) in October.

About Santa Cruz in the Fall

- **Best Places for Fall Foliage in Santa Cruz:** Nuevo State Park, Natural Bridges State Park, [UC Santa Cruz Arboretum & Botanic Garden](#), Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park
- **Things to Do in Santa Cruz in the Fall:** Hiking, Fall Festivals, Apple Picking, Visit a Pumpkin Patch
- **Accommodation:** [Rio Vista Suites](#)
- **Address:** [611 Third Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060](#)
- **Amenities:** Adults only, Free Wi-Fi, Air-conditioned, V

8 Napa Valley

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Napa Valley, California

Fall is the season of the harvest, and farms of every kind are enjoying the bounty. [Napa Valley, the wine country of California, is one of the best places to visit in California in the Fall](#) as it enjoys this time of plenty.

Not only is Napa beautiful during the Fall, enjoying the brightness of the Fall colors, but the air is filled with the smell of grapes being pressed and barreled. Harvest festivals are around every corner, and even the Wine Train that runs through Napa Valley has a seasonal festive twist, with Harry Potter-themed rides throughout Fall.

About Napa Valley in the Fall

- **Best Places for Fall Foliage in Napa:** Rutherford Hill Winery, Chateau, Chateau Montelena Winery, Nimbus Arts, Harvest Inn, Far Niente Winery
- **Things to Do in Napa in the Fall:** Wine Train, [Active Wine Adventures](#), [Napa Valley Gondola](#), [Balloons Above The Valley](#)
- **Accommodation:** [Archer Hotel Napa](#)
- **Address:** [1230 First Street, Napa, CA 94559](#)

Amenities: Spa and wellness center, Bar/Lounge, Restaurant, Free Wi-Fi

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7 Oak Glen



Via: Photo by [Bonnie Kittle](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Various Pumpkins in a field with shadows at sunset with crops growing in the background

Pumpkins may be the unofficial symbol of Fall, but in California, apples are the true center of the harvest season. For some of the best apple picking in the state, a trip to Oak Glen, California, is a must.

With a number of unique varieties of apples growing in and around Oak Glen, most of the town's orchards remain open from September through October. While out exploring the farms, visitors can also enjoy petting zoos, locally baked goods, and classic fall colors, making Oak Glen one of the best Fall destinations in California.

About Oak Glen in the Fall

Best Places for Fall Foliage in Oak Glen: Oak Glen Conservancy hike, Mill Creek Preserve, Oak Glen Preserve Trail, Castle Rock Trail

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- **Things to Do in Oak Glen in the Fall:** Apple Picking, Fall Festivals, Oak Glen Preserve, Riley's Farm, Oak Tree Mountain
- **Accommodation:** [Holiday Inn Express & Suites Beaumont - Oak Valley](#)
- **Address:** [1864 Oak Valley Village Circle, Beaumont, CA 92223](#)
- **Amenities:** Outdoor pool, Spa and wellness center, Free Wi-Fi, Business center

6 Lake Tahoe



Photo by [Roland Schumann](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Changing Fall Colors frame a road to Lake Tahoe, CA

Lake Tahoe is another popular California destination better known for its summer fun. The dense evergreen forest hides a variety of [beautiful towns one and around Lake Tahoe](#), each with its own unique approach to the Fall season. South Lake Tahoe, perhaps the most prominent destination on Lake Tahoe's shore, is particularly fun during the Fall.

The weather around the lake is still plenty warm enough for swimming during the day, and even overnight temperatures hold enough to make camping possible. What really makes South

Lake Tahoe one of the best places to visit in California in the Fall is the unusual seasonal **Freakers Ball** and **South Lake Tahoe's free Multicultural Celebration**.

About Lake Tahoe in the Fall

- **Best Places for Fall Foliage around Lake Tahoe:** Zephyr Cove, Sand Harbor, Highway 89
- **Things to Do around Lake Tahoe In Fall:** Freakers Ball, Multicultural Celebration, Hiking, Swimming, Camping, Scenic Drives, Halloween Celebration at the Heavenly Village
- **Accommodation:** Tahoe Seasons Resort By Diamond Resorts
- **Address:** 3901 Saddle Road, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150
- **Amenities:** Outdoor pool, Fitness center, Bar/Lounge, Free Wi-Fi, Business center

5 Nevada City



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A historic storefront in Nevada City, CA

Nevada City, which, despite its name, is located firmly within California's boundaries, is often overlooked as just another stop on the way to Lake Tahoe. Those who take a little more time to look around will quickly realize, however, that Nevada City is one of the best towns to visit in California.

Nevada City is a great California destination for those looking for a less-touristy town that still has plenty to do, and this is particularly true in the Fall. The higher elevation of this mountain town means that the vibrant fall colors come later than many other stretches of the country, with reds and oranges arriving later in October and November. Walking tours of Nevada City and the Grass Valley area are a great way to enjoy these exceptional landscapes after a majority of the state's fall season has come and gone.

About Nevada City in the Fall

- **Best Places for Fall Foliage in Nevada City:** Yuba-Donner Scenic Byway, Historic Downtown District, Victorian California Fall Colors Tour
- **Things to Do in Nevada City in Fall:** Walking Tours, Drive the Yuba-Donner Scenic Byway, Bierwagen's Farm, Victorian California Fall Colors Tour, Grass Valley BrewFest
- **Accommodation:** National Exchange Hotel
- **Address:** 211 Broad Street, Nevada City, CA 95959
- **Amenities:** Restaurant, Bar/Lounge, Free Wi-Fi, Free parking

4 Palm Springs

Palm Springs in California on Unsplash





Palm Springs in California

As the winds begin to change, finding a great Fall destination in the US can be challenging. Fortunately for California travelers, Palm Springs is ready with daytime temperatures in the high 70s to mid 80s well into Fall. These warm temperatures make it easy to explore the wide variety of seasonal activities going on in this popular California town.

In fact, Palm Springs is generally more enjoyable in the Fall, as its outdoor activities are more pleasant without the extreme heat. The crowds that often inundate the town also thin out in the Fall, making it the perfect time to stroll through downtown, jump on a hiking trail, or drive over to nearby Joshua Tree National Park.

About Palm Springs in the Fall

- **Best Places for Fall Foliage in Palm Springs:** [Palm Springs Aerial Tramway](#), Stoddard Peak, Coachella Valley Preserve
- **Things to Do in Palm Springs in the Fall:** Palm Canyon Drive, Joshua Tree National Park, Indian Canyons, [VillageFest](#), Downtown Palm Springs
- **Accommodation:** [Les Cactus](#)
- **Address:** [555 South Warm Sands Drive, Palm Springs, CA 92264](#)
- **Amenities:** Adults only, Outdoor pool, Free parking, Free Wi-Fi

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These 10 Attractions In Palm Springs Are Worth Booking The Flight

3 Mammoth Lakes



Mammoth Lakes, California

The only thing better than beautiful Fall colors is beautiful Fall colors reflecting off the water. At Mammoth Lakes, the bright colors of the trees that appear between late September and mid-October are made even more exceptional by Mammoth Creek and the namesake Mammoth Lakes.

Generally considered the off-season for Mammoth Lakes, Fall is a great time for those looking for a more budget-friendly California destination. Even as temperatures cool, September and October are a great time to enjoy hiking, biking, or picnicking in and among the Mammoth Lakes fall foliage.

About Mammoth Lakes in the Fall

Best Places for Fall Foliage in Mammoth Lakes: Rock Creek, Mammoth Lakes

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Swampy Creek, Sherwin Creek, June Lake Loop

- **Things to Do in Mammoth Lakes in the Fall:** Hiking, Biking, Camping, Picnicking, Devils Postpile National Monument, Rainbow Falls,
- **Accommodation:** [The Mammoth Creek Inn](#)
- **Address:** [663 Old Mammoth Road, Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546](#)
- **Amenities:** Fitness center, Tea/coffee maker, Free parking

2 Chico



Image by [David Mark](#) from [Pixabay](#)

A highway surrounded by forest in the fall

Known as the “City of Trees,” it's hard to imagine a better place to enjoy the changing colors of Fall in California than Chico. Chico is an excellent fall destination in California where travelers can simply wander the streets and local college campus to enjoy the beauty of the season.

As travelers explore, they are also likely to come across seasonal events that add to the appeal. [Link copied to clipboard](#) extend through mid-October in Chico, and special festivals like Johnny Appleseed Days, Chico Art & Wine Walk, and Chico Concours d'Elegance round out a perfect escape in this college town.

About Chico in the Fall

- **Best Places for Fall Foliage in Chico:** Esplanade, Chico State Campus, The Midway, Bidwell Park, Chico Seed Orchard
- **Things to Do in Chico in Fall:** Free Concerts, Johnny Appleseed Days, [Chico Art & Wine Walk](#), [Chico Concours d'Elegance](#), Treat Street, Chico Harvest Sidewalk Sale
- **Accommodation:** [Oxford Suites Chico](#)
- **Address:** [2035 Business Lane, Chico, CA 95928](#)
- **Amenities:** Outdoor pool, Spa and wellness center, Free Wi-Fi, Free parking

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Fall Semester Is In: The 10 Most Beautiful College Campuses In The U.S.

1 Placerville





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Apples in a bag from apple picking

California is famous for its vibrant beach cities and summer destinations, but during the fall, the Central Valley in Northern California gets its time to shine. Placerville, nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas, hosts one of the grandest harvest festivals in the country.

Apple Hill, which runs from Labor Day through October, brings together over 30 farms throughout Placerville for apple and berry picking, fall activities, baked goods, and local vendors.

Visitors from across California flock to Placerville to pick their own apples, enjoy hot Apple cider donuts, wander through local vendor shops, and grab an oven-ready blackberry pie against the backdrop of some of the best fall foliage in California. With such a large area to cover, Placerville is the must-visit fall destination that will keep travelers coming back year after year.

About Apple Hill in Placerville

- **Entrance Address:** 2952 Carson Rd #1, Placerville, CA 95667
- **Entrance Fee:** FREE
- **Popular Stops on Apple Hill:** High Hill Ranch, Abel's Apple Acres, Rainbow Orchards, Harris Family Farms
- **Things to Do at Apple Hill:** Apple Picking, Shop Local Vendors, Berry Picking, Enjoy Local Apple-Themed Food
- **Accommodation:** Glenmorey Country House
- **Address:** 801 Morey Drive, Placerville, CA 95667
- **Amenities:** Game room, Free Wi-Fi, Private bathroom, Air-conditioned

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On weekends especially, the parking at Apple Hill can quickly back up. Arrive early to find a spot in the main parking lot, or be prepared to find street parking in permitted areas.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicole Hansen

(101 Articles Published)

Nicole is a former teacher and lover of culture. She has a passion for language and history and loves a deep dive into a region before her adventures. She brings that passion to each article and brings her subjects to life.

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Here's What Science Is Saying About Peak Fall Foliage In 2023

Why do leaves change color in fall, and where can travelers see autumn colors at their peak?

BY QUINTER AUMA PUBLISHED AUG 18, 2023



A park bench under a tree during fall in Shirley, MA

SUMMARY

- Leaves change color in autumn due to the process of photosynthesis being slowed down by shorter days and less sunlight, causing the natural green color to fade.
- The vibrant yellows and oranges of fall foliage come from color pigments that are already in the leaves, but are covered by chlorophyll during the summer. Red leaves are caused by another pigment called anthocyanins.

■ **The best time to see fall foliage in the U.S. is from mid-September through**
Link copied to clipboard **the peak times being in the second and third week of October.**
Timing and intensity of color change vary based on factors like tree species,
location, and weather.

Nothing shouts autumn like the leaves transitioning from green, to brilliant oranges, browns, and reds – and people adore being outdoors during the season. At this time, travelers are always ready to spend the season engaging in various fun activities, such as visiting apple orchards, enjoying hay rides, pumpkin picking, and of course, leaf-peeping.

At some point, almost everyone has wondered what makes these leaves change colors in autumn. People love the seasonal change, but the magical wonder has wowed scientists and regular travelers, alike. So, why do these leaves turn into beautiful colors? When and where can tourists expect to experience this unique transformation? Here is what science is saying about peak fall foliage in 2023.

RELATED:

Best Places To See Fall Foliage In The World

Why Do Leaves Change Color In Fall?



New England fall foliage along the Scenic Mohawk Trail winding highway in Massachusetts, USA

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New England fall foliage along the Scenic Mohawk Trail winding highway in Massachusetts, USA

As much as travelers love to enjoy seeing the wonderful leaf transformation in the autumn, they may want to understand what causes the change.

- **What is the process of leaves changing color called?** It's photosynthesis!

Chlorophyll is the element that gives leaves their natural green color, and since it depends on the sun's rays to begin the photosynthesis process, lack of enough sunlight means the leaves will start fading.

In autumn, days are typically shorter, which reduces the amount of sunlight hitting leaves. This, in turn, slows down the process of photosynthesis, thereby fading the leaves' color.

So, where do the vibrant yellows and oranges come from? These color pigments are always there in the leaves, but stay covered in the summer (when temperatures are enough to keep chlorophyll active).

Note

As for red leaves, the color transformation is caused by the production of another pigment called anthocyanins.

When Is The Best Time To See Fall Foliage?

Well, when to see the incredible color transformation depends on where one wants to do leaf peeping, and fortunately, there are plenty of [fall foliage map spots to know about](#). Leaves start changing colors from mid-September to early November, with the second and third week of October being the peak times.

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Plenty of factors play a role in the color change, including tree species, location, and weather. This is why some leaves transform way before others do.

Species like sourwood, mostly located in the Southern US, change their colors in the late summer ([according to the U.S. Forest Service](#)). At this time, many of the tree species are still green.

On the other hand, species like Oaks undergo color transformation later in the season, when other trees are already displaying their brilliant colors.



Fall foliage colors in Franconia Notch State Park, White Mountain National Forest, New Hampshire, USA

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Fall foliage colors in Franconia Notch State Park, White Mountain National Forest, New Hampshire, USA

That being said, the colder mountainous areas in the U.S., like the western Rockies and the Eastern Adirondacks experience the first color change in autumn, usually in September, while much of the South experiences its peak foliage in early November.

When to see the fall foliage in the U.S.: From mid-September through November, October is the peak fall foliage month (from the 2nd week)

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Where To See Fall Foliage In 2023

New England is full of some of the best destinations in the U.S. to visit in the fall and comes with incredible experiences during the season. This is all thanks to its cool weather, apple orchards, and of course the main attraction, the colorful fall foliage.

Visiting the region in autumn is fun, but figuring out when and what to expect is definitely a challenge. Vacationers may not find the autumn colors at their peak if they visit the region too soon.

Those who plan a trip too late in the season may also miss the colors at their most spectacular. To find fall foliage at its peak in New England, travelers should plan a trip to the first week of October.

- **The best time to go leaf peeping in New England:** the first week of October

Note

While New England's fall foliage peaks in the first week of October, the color transformation doesn't happen all at once in the whole place. It begins in the North side then spreads into the South and West, and then goes to New York and beyond.

RELATED:

Which New England State Should You Travel To For Leaf Peeping This Fall?

Where To See Fall Foliage In New England This Autumn



Fall Foliage colors at Beaver Pond along the Kancamagus Highway in New Hampshire, New England, USA

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Fall Foliage colors at Beaver Pond along the Kancamagus Highway in New Hampshire, New England, USA

Stowe, Vermont is one of the best places to see fall foliage in New England, and has a nickname, "Fall's Color Capital."

There are plenty of fun activities to enjoy in one of the most beautiful towns in Vermont, including taking scenic drives, biking, zip lining, and hiking – all offering incredible leaf-peeping opportunities.

Montgomery, "The Covered Bridge Capital of Vermont," is another top spot not to miss in New England for autumn views. There are plenty of covered bridges in this place and are surrounded by fall colors.

For a scenic drive, take a ride along Kancamagus Highway, which take vacationers through the iconic White Mountain National Forest, one of the bucket list-worthy natural wonders in the USA.

Fall In Blue Ridge Mountains: What To Expect



Vibrant fall foliage in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia

Photo by [Isaac Wendland on Unsplash](#)

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Vibrant fall foliage in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia

The Blue Ridge Mountains are among the awesome things to do in North Carolina, and boast some of the most beautiful towns in America. The range spans North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and North Georgia, and guarantees some of the most unforgettable experiences.

The Blue Ridge Mountains boast the most colorful and longest autumns in the U.S., thanks to the various elevations. The highest points in the Blue Ridge experience the first fall foliage peak, that is, in October. The lower points then follow in early November.

When And Where To See Fall Foliage In The Blue Ridge Mountains In 2023

Areas at the highest elevations, including the Rough Ridge and the Graveyard Fields, may start seeing fall foliage between September 25 and October 2. These areas experience peak fall foliage between October 2-9.

Lower elevations (5,000 feet – 4,000 feet) have their peak fall foliage between the 9th and 16th of October. This usually includes many areas in the Great Smoky Mountains National

Park home to some of the most beautiful hikes in the U.S. and much of the Blue Ridge

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Tourists planning to explore elevations between 3,000 and 4,000 feet, including Pisgah National Forest and Cataloochee Valley, should visit between October 16 and 23.

Elevations between 2,000 feet and 3,000 feet, which include some of the most beautiful cities in North Carolina; Asheville, NC, and Bryson are best visited between October 23 and 30 for their autumn colors.

Fall in lower elevations peaks in early November (Between October 30 and November 6).

- **When to visit the Blue Ridge Mountains for autumn colors:** from late September through early November, with the peak times being in October
- **Best places to see fall foliage in the Blue Ridge Mountains:** Blue Ridge Parkway, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Pisgah National Forest, and Cataloochee Valley

RELATED:

Fall Foliage & More: 10 Things To Do In The Smoky Mountains This Autumn

Other Places To See Fall Foliage In The U.S. In 2023



An aerial view of Kitch-Iti-Kipi, in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

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An aerial view of Kitch-Iti-Kipi, in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Apart from New England and the Blue Ridge Mountains, there are plenty of places to take in breathtaking autumn views. These destinations host some of the best fall festivals in the U.S. Here are the best spots to consider:

- **Upper Peninsula, Michigan:** Mid-September-Mid-October
- **The Catskills, New York:** Mid-September through the end of October
- **The Ozarks, Arkansas:** Late October to early November

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Quinter Auma

(709 Articles Published)

Quinter Auma is a travel writer based in Kenya. She has written travel articles on destinations across Africa and beyond. Her writing is inspired by her passion to travel to new destinations and inspire others to get out of their comfort zones and explore th...