

Grab your camera and see Michigan's fall color

Take a drive along the state's coastline, hike a tranquil forest or pedal a mountain bike amid towering hardwoods to see spectacular fall color around the state next month.

Leaves are showing their gold, red and yellow hues now through mid-October in the northern half of the mitten. Look for peak color changes in mid-to-lower Michigan now through Halloween.

AAA Michigan has mapped out several routes. Here are suggested drives in the lower peninsula:

MACKINAW

The drive from Mackinaw City south along the west coast of Northern Michigan is a scenic tour of quaint villages and towns. The journey starts on Central Avenue, driving west out of Mackinaw City to Wilderness Park Drive. Turn left and go approximately seven miles southwest to Cecil Bay Road, turn left again and follow to Gill Road. At Gill Road you will turn right, although if you turn left, you will stumble upon "Just a Plain Farm", a scenic 100-acre farm that produces a variety of vegetables and offers hayrides, picnics, parties and a picnic.

Back on Gill Road, head west to Island View Road that follows along the Lake Michigan shoreline to Cross Village. Stop at Legs

Inn in Cross Village for a unique dining experience. This is the best place in Northern Michigan for Polish food. Eat in the outdoor garden on a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan or in the one-of-a-kind dining room. Follow M-119 south through "The Tunnel of Trees," a 20-mile drive of winding road through the trees with unforgettable bluff views of Lake Michigan.

M-119 follows the coastline through Good Hart and into Harbor Springs. The city of Harbor Springs offers two public beaches. The Zorn Park Beach is a block from downtown on Bay Street and Zoll Street Beach is a favorite for kayakers, wind surfers and sailors. Heading out of town toward Petoskey, traveling on M-119, enjoy the dunes and Petoskey Stone hunting (it's Michigan's official stone) at Petoskey State Park.

In Petoskey you will find boats, playgrounds, a Historical Society in the old railroad depot, waterfalls, picnic tables, fishing, beautiful views and quiet, restful multi-hued shade trees. Return to Mackinaw City on U.S. 31 north.

SLEEPING BEAR DUNES

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and its Pierce Stocking Drive combine a relaxing drive with a strenuous but rewarding climb to maximize the

FALL COLOR FACTS

Michigan's 18.6 million acres of forest contain nearly 150 species of trees. Hardwoods, such as aspen, maple, birch, sumac and oak, display some of the most beautiful colors, especially when combined with an evergreen forest.

Weather conditions in early September determine the season's color. Sunny days and cool nights create the most brilliant show. Short days cause leaves to stop producing chlorophyll and lose their green color.

Look for peak color in the northern lower peninsula now through mid-October; in mid-Michigan from early to mid-October and in southern Michigan from mid- to late October.

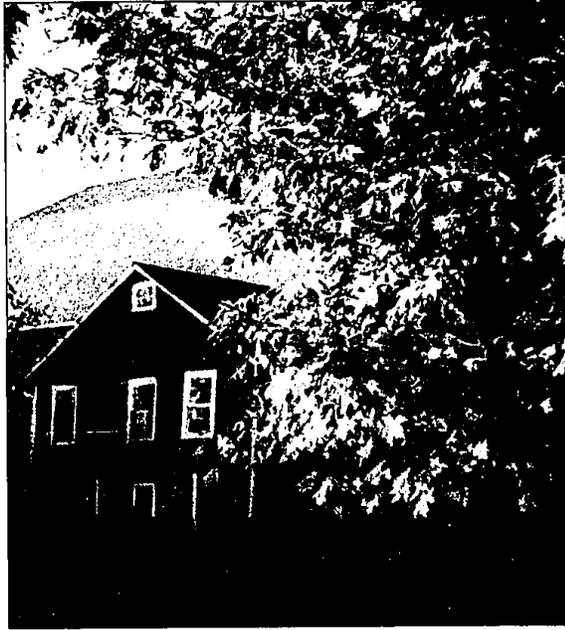
fall color experience in north-west Michigan. From Traverse City, take State Route 72 west to State Route 109, turning north to the National Lakeshore.

After weaving through the woods and dunes along the seven-mile-long Pierce Stocking Drive, stretch your legs and climb the Sleeping Bear Dune—climb on Route 109 (north) and earn a spectacular view of Lake Michigan and Big and Little Glen Lakes atop the crest of this massive sand dune.

CADILLAC

Cadillac may be renowned for its snowmobiling, but its fall colors are just as brilliant.

The White Pines Trail, the longest rail-trail State Park corridor in Michigan, stretches 92 miles from Comstock Park to Cadillac. The trail is surfaced with gravel and asphalt in some areas, and picnic, camping, lodging and eating facilities are available at intervals along the route.



Old barns and brilliant foliage make excellent photo subjects against a blue sky.

PHOTOS COURTESY AAA MICHIGAN

Take an afternoon bike ride to enjoy the colors, or make your trip a little longer and do some camping along the way.

GRAYLING

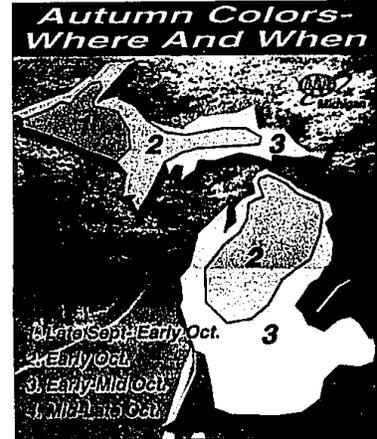
The contrasting evergreen and hardwood forests of Northeast Michigan are spectacular in autumn, and this year's fall foliage promises to be a brilliant show. Nature enthusiasts will enjoy a leisurely drive down back roads, cycling through Hartwick Pines State Park or taking in the riverside colors while canoeing down the world famous AuSable

and Manistee Rivers. Local canoe liveries are open, and the weather is still warm enough for a pleasant afternoon on the water.

Another beautiful viewing site is at Lake Margrethe, west of Grayling. Take M-72 west, to McIntyre's Landing Road and follow the state campground signs. There is a picnic area, boat launch and rustic state campground. Take M-93 to Hartwick Pines State Park. After touring the park, continue north until M-93 ends at County Road 612. Follow CR-612 west into Frederic.

MICHIGAN'S SUNRISE SIDE

Fall colors trim the banks of the Au Sable River on the sunrise side of Michigan. Along the southern bank, the River Road National Forest Scenic Byway offers dramatic overlooks along the 22-mile route. Watch eagles soar over the wooded river valley between Tawas City and Oscoda, following U.S. 23 north along the Lake Huron shore, and take River Road west to Largo Springs where crystal clear natural spring water bubbles to the surface.



AAA Michigan map shows when and where to see fall color changes.

FALL FESTIVALS

■ Red Flannel Festival - Everyone sees (and wears) red at Cedar Spring's celebration of the union suit on Saturday, Oct. 5. A lumberjack supper and garden-tractor pull are part of the festivities. (616) 696-2662

■ Great Lakes Lighthouse Festival - Tour two of America's most illustrious luminaries, the Old and New Presque Isle lighthouses during Alpena's 7th annual lighthouse festival, Thursday-Sunday, Oct. 10-13. Beacon bulls will have the chance to witness these historic wonders from land, air, or lake, walk through their keepers' quarters, and delve into Michigan's stormy maritime history through more than 150 festival exhibits. (989) 595-6722

■ Apple Festival - Charlevoix's 23rd Annual Apple Festival, Friday-Sunday, Oct. 11-13. Apple-lovers munch more than 30 varieties, while strolling the farm market and arts-and-crafts booths or enjoying a horse-drawn carriage ride. (231) 547-2101 For more fall festivals, weekly-updated foliage reports and fall-color tour routes, visit the State of Michigan's official travel Web site, michigan.org, or call toll-free (888) 78-9great.

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