

Eleven Stunning Fall Drives in Virginia for 2011

-Fall foliage combines with legendary scenic drives for the ultimate road trip-

(Richmond, Va.) Fall is one of the favorite times of the year for loved ones to take a road trip in Virginia to enjoy 15 million acres of stunning fall foliage and each other's company. As autumn spreads a beautiful blanket of foliage throughout the Commonwealth the natural beauty inspires a sense of love and connection.

This year the Virginia Tourism Corporation has pulled together a list of 11 scenic fall drives, where visitors can take a leisurely trip through quaint small towns, vineyards, roadside markets and historic sites around nearly every bend in the road. Each trip idea includes distance and drive time from end to end. Here are 11 great scenic drives that offer beautiful fall foliage and the best of fall in Virginia, with more ideas found on www.Virginia.org/fall:

Celebrate an Anniversary on Skyline Drive:

Skyline Drive, one of America's legendary roadways, is the main artery of Shenandoah National Park, which celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2011. Just the drive itself is worth the journey but there is so much more to enjoy. Special programs range from nature walks to cooking demonstrations and camping programs for novices. For a special treat, go on a guided tour of Rapidan Camp, the private retreat of President Herbert Hoover. The Junior Ranger program is a must for young ones. At dusk, herds of deer come out to graze in meadows and along roadsides. The eastern black bear can be seen along with a large variety of songbirds and raptors. Stay overnight at Skyland Lodge or Big Meadows Lodge and enjoy outstanding cuisine along with cozy rooms nestled in pastoral settings.

Drive time: Recommended three hours

Distance: 105 miles

Foliage and History on the Colonial National Historical Parkway:

One of the best routes for fall leaf peeping is the 24-mile Colonial National Historical Parkway, a National Scenic Byway, connecting historic Jamestown and Yorktown and passing through (actually under) Colonial Williamsburg. Devoid of billboards and other advertisements and with easements keeping much development hidden, the Parkway is a peaceful and beautiful meander.

Colonial Williamsburg is gorgeous in the fall and is one of America's best family destinations. Historic Yorktown has a vibrant waterfront and historic homes. Jamestown's attractions detail the history of the earliest permanent English settlement in the New World along with the Virginia Indians who lived here long before.

Drive time: 45 minutes

Distance: 24 miles

A Crooked Road to Fall Splendor:

The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail winds through the mountains and valleys of Southwest Virginia, where the music is as rich as the brilliant fall leaves. Today's country music traces its beginnings to this region which is still a hotbed of bluegrass and Old Time music. Much of this route travels through the higher mountains of Southwest Virginia, making it a beautiful drive for fall colors

Live music venues, museums and cultural centers lie along the trail. Top bluegrass acts perform at the Carter Family Fold, the Floyd Country Store and the Rex Theater in Galax. Johnny Cash played his last concerts at the Carter Family Fold and at the Floyd Country Store there's as much music going on outside as inside.

The new jewel of the Crooked Road is *Heartwood: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Gateway*. The sparkling new facility in Abingdon features music and crafts by area juried artisans and locally-sourced food and wine.

Drive time: Six hours, 30 minutes

Distance: 300 miles

An American Favorite for Generations – The Blue Ridge Parkway:

The Blue Ridge Parkway is the most visited unit of United States National Parks for a reason. Breathtaking vistas and natural splendor have made this peaceful meander, now in its 76th year, a fall foliage destination for generations of families. Well-maintained hiking trails and good overnight accommodations, shops, restaurants and even wineries are nearly everywhere along the way.

Learn about the life of early mountain settlers and watch living history demonstrations at Humpback Rocks Visitor Center. Visit Mabry Mill, the most photographed site on the Parkway. Join a nature hike led by friendly park rangers. Enjoy a romantic dinner at Chateau Morrisette Winery. Watch luthiers crafting fiddles and mandolins at the Blue Ridge Music Center.

The cities of Galax and Waynesboro make good start/end points. Each has quality lodging and dining options.

Drive time: Six hours, 20 minutes

Distance: 215 miles

Across the Bay to the Eastern Shore:

Virginia's Eastern Shore is known for coastal serenity. For those taking the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, getting there is half the fun, as the bridge traverses 17 miles over and through the bay. The fall colors found on the shore are enhanced by the small towns, wineries and birding found on the Shore. Route 13 runs the length of the 70-mile portion of Virginia's Eastern shore, but the real treasures are found in the roads that lead off of Route 13 and to the Atlantic Ocean or the Chesapeake Bay. At the northern tip take Route 175 to Chincoteague, famed for oysters and wild ponies. Heading south visit the town of Onancock, with quaint B&Bs, inns and restaurants featuring local seafood and produce. Off Route 184 visitors will find the town of Cape Charles, with a wonderful beach, hotels, B&Bs and Bay Creek resort, home to golf, lodging and excellent dining.

Drive time: Just over two hours

Distance: Approximately 75 miles

Through the Pass from Lexington to Hot Springs:

Lexington is one of America's most historic and charming small towns and is at the eastern end of one of Virginia's best fall drives. Going northwest out of town take Rt. 39, a scenic Virginia Byway that follows the Maury River. At Goshen Pass the river swirls through a boulder-strewn gorge where the western mountains roll out into the Shenandoah Valley. Good

swimming, barefoot wading, and fishing can be enjoyed amidst curtains of gorgeous hardwood foliage where sharp-eyed visitors may spot bald eagles, hawks and other wildlife.

Continue westward to the village of Hot Springs and go south on Highway 220 to The Homestead, one of Virginia's premier four-seasons resorts. Thomas Jefferson "took the waters" there and loved it. Activities there today include golf, tennis, horseback riding, canoeing, carriage rides, hayrides and even falconry.

Drive time: One hour, 10 minutes

Distance: 46 miles

A Grass-Roots Culinary Tour of Northern Virginia:

Loudoun County is famed for scenic roads and outstanding wine and cuisine. So set a course for dining and sipping delights on this scenic and tasty route.

Start in historic Leesburg and head south on Highway 15 and then west on Highway 50 towards Middleburg. Make a stop at Chrysalis Vineyards with a pleasing tasting room housed in a lovely setting. Continue on to the town of Middleburg, capital of Virginia's horse country. Spend an hour shopping along the beautiful village streets and then head to Market Salamander to assemble a gourmet picnic lunch for later.

Retrace steps eastward a short distance and head north on Rt. 748 and then northwest on Rt. 734. Stop at the historic and fun Philomont General Store for a treat or two and then continue on to Great Country Farms near Bluemont. At Bluemont go east on Rt. 7 to Purcellville and then north on Rt. 287. It's close to lunchtime so choose a local winery at which to spread out the picnic. Spend the rest of the trip enjoying fine dining from Leesburg eateries.

Drive time: Two hours

Distance: 67 miles

Take the Road Less Traveled Through the Shenandoah Valley:

Interstate 81 runs the length of the Shenandoah Valley and in the fall might be one of the most beautiful highways in the country. But for those wishing a more leisurely pace while leaf peeping, get out of the fast lane and onto a secondary road.

Highway 11 parallels I-81 between and takes drivers through the hearts of small towns with antique shops, historic sites, restaurants and inns. Farther off the beaten path lie treasures such as the Dayton Farmers Market, Luray Caverns and the Andre Viette Nursery. At Front Royal look for canoeing rentals for an unforgettable fall float down the picturesque Shenandoah River.

The superb cities of Winchester and Staunton make perfect bookends for a Highway 11 trip – and each has its own historic hotel: the George Washington in Winchester and the Stonewall Jackson in Staunton. Both have been lovingly restored to their original beauty and have all the modern amenities.

Drive time: Two hours, 15 minutes

Distance: 92 miles

Enjoy a Drive on the Nelson Scenic Loop:

Traversing 50 beautiful miles along the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Loop includes four Scenic Byways west of Charlottesville. Take a hike and have a picnic at Crabtree Falls, the highest vertical cascading waterfalls east of the Mississippi and a photographer's dream in the fall

season. Fish for mountain trout in a stocked pond at Montebello. Stay overnight in a creekside cabin with plenty of room for everyone.

Wineries and breweries can be found along the route. Enjoy the fall splendor at nearby Wintergreen Resort, with golf, spa treatments, hiking trails and excellent lodging and dining.

Drive time: One hour, 30 minutes

Distance: 50 miles

A Visit with Presidents in the Virginia Piedmont:

The region often called Virginia's piedmont puts on its best attire in the fall. Three United States presidents chose to make their homes in the area near Charlottesville, giving proof that the region was as charming then as it is now.

Start the journey in the morning at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, where fall is one of the best times to visit this American classic. After saying goodbye to Mr. Jefferson drive east on Rt. 53 to Jefferson Vineyards for a tour and tasting. There at the crossroads take Rt. 732 and then Rt. 729 northwest to Highway 250. Drive on Highway 250 west a short distance to Rt. 22 north.

This historic trace is bordered by gorgeous historic farms. Go straight on Rt. 231 and stop in for a tasting at Keswick Vineyards, located on the grounds of fabulous Keswick Hall, one of Virginia's most elegant inns. Proceed ahead on Rt. 231 to the quaint town of Gordonsville for some boutique shopping or visit the Exchange Hotel Civil War Museum.

Continue north on Rt. 231 to the town of Orange for lunch at Elmwood at Sparks, an informal bistro with a welcoming atmosphere and delicious meals. Orange is a good place for shopping and a stroll before heading west on Constitution Highway (Rt. 20). A few miles out of town is Montpelier, home of President James and Dolley Madison. The home has recently been restored to its original appearance and the tours are well worth the stop.

Take plenty of time at Montpelier and stroll the expansive grounds and Landmark Forest to work up a good appetite for dinner at nearby Barboursville Vineyard's Palladio restaurant before returning to Charlottesville on Rt. 20.

Distance: 55 miles

Drive time: One hour, 15 minutes

Follow the James River to Walton's Mountain:

Rt. 6 follows the trace of a historic route that roughly follows the meandering course of the James River west of Richmond. Because it traverses a mostly rural area it is an excellent road for later fall leaf-peepers. Along the way are historic churches, courthouses and homes and plenty of good places to stop and have a bite to eat and enjoy the cooler fall weather.

From Richmond take Rt. 6 westward through Goochland and George's Tavern. At Fork Union drive through the pastoral grounds of Fork Union Military Academy, one of the top military prep schools in the East. Continue on to Scottsville located at a sharp bend in the James. Scottsville is a good place to get out and do a little canoeing or tubing as several companies in town supply the needed craft and shuttle service.

Grab a bite of lunch at a café in town and then continue on to County Road 800 and drive to the community of Schuyler, home of the Walton's Mountain Museum. Schuyler was the boyhood home of Earl Hamner, creator of the classic television series "The Waltons." The grade school Hamner attended is now well appointed as a museum that focuses on The Waltons and Hamner's boyhood. It is a classic piece of Americana and a must-see for any fan of the show.

Drive Time: One hour, 30 minutes

Distance: 68 miles

Love is at the heart of every Virginia vacation. Visit www.Virginia.org/fall for more trip ideas and to book lodging. Or call 1-800-VISITVA for a free, Virginia is for Lovers travel guide and road map.