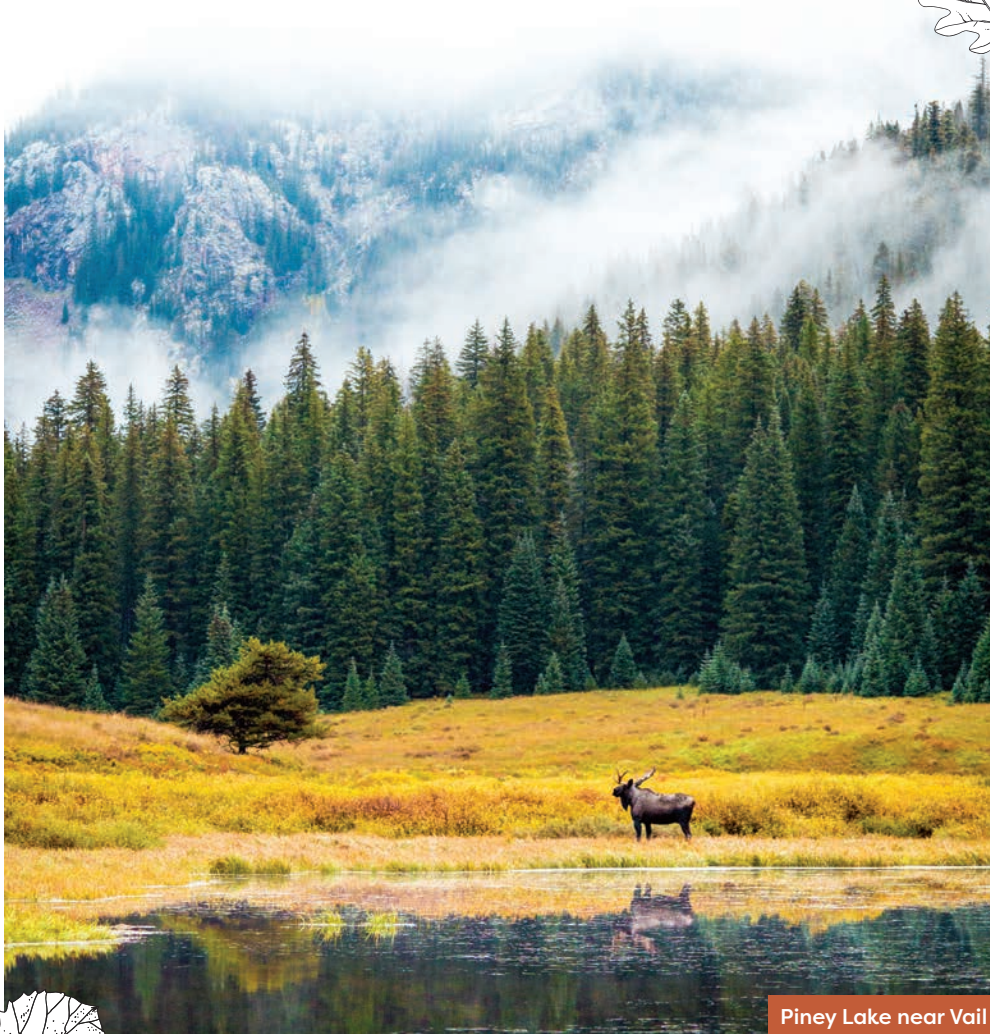


Where to Take a Fall Drive

Hitting the road to see brilliant changing leaves is a Colorado right of passage. Set against a backdrop of blue sky and dramatic colors, these routes will take you along stunning byways and lesser-known routes.

The Million Dollar Highway near Silverton



Piney Lake near Vail

Despite its name, St. Mary's Alice is more a perennial snowfield than a glacier. You will see, however, the changing fall colors of dense willows and Rocky Mountain bristlecone pines. This winding alpine drive is convenient and easy to find, ending with the option of a short, moderately difficult hike. If you decide to attempt the 1.5-mile hike to the "glacier" and lake, there is a fee to park. It might not sound long, but it is an uphill climb at elevations reaching 11,000 feet. The reward for your hard work: stellar alpine views and the rare right to say you've hiked a perennial snowfield.

Fort Collins to the Top of Cameron Pass

Distance: 68 miles one way

Head northwest from **Fort Collins** along US Hwy. 287 to pick up CO-14 west. Follow this route, also known as the **Cache la Poudre-North Park Scenic Byway**, through Cache la Poudre River Canyon to the top of Cameron Pass.

This byway traces the textured history of the area, following a route that was used by settlers to connect the northern plains of Colorado with the Green River settlement in Utah. As you travel up the winding road, take time to pull over and watch the awesome force of the Cache la Poudre River's rapids. The canyon features golden cottonwoods whose leaves in September and October look like they've been covered in turmeric. Top out at Cameron Pass to soak in views stretching down into the bowl-shaped basin of North Park, where coyotes trot on the grassland and elk bugle into the chilly autumn air.

September is the ideal time to witness a gilded aspen spectacle, but you have to time it right. The color lasts only about a week in most places, and it's difficult to predict when exactly the leaves will turn in any given location. The best strategy is to select travel dates in advance, but not destinations. Then, go wherever the color is.

Top of the Rockies Scenic Byway

Distance: 82 miles one way

Start at **Copper Mountain** and go south on CO-91 to **Leadville**. Continue on US Hwy. 24, then west on CO-82, traveling over Independence Pass and ending in **Aspen**.

Bookended by two ski resorts, this sky-high trip crosses the Continental Divide and passes by Colorado's two tallest peaks — Mount Elbert and Mount Massive — old mining camps and high-country lakes. At

the Independence Ghost Town Site between **Twin Lakes** and Aspen, Independence Pass twists around stunning groves of aspen to the former gold-rush tent city.

Fall River Road to St. Mary's Alice Glacier

Distance: 9 miles one way

From **Denver**, take I-70 west to exit 238 (Fall River Road). Follow Fall River Road north for 9 miles to the St. Mary's Alice trailhead. Although not restricted to 4WD vehicles, the road is very steep and winding.



Colorado National Monument near Grand Junction

Care for Colorado

Find 9 principles that you can use to protect our special places as you travel around the state at COLORADO.com/LNT.



FALL BIKE RIDES

Yearning to get out of the car? Hop on two wheels to get up close and personal with the season's color spectacle while filling up your lungs with crisp Colorado air.

▶ Jump on the gondola to the top of Vail Mountain and witness fall spreading its yellow fingers across the landscape. A summer and fall hotspot for mountain biking, Vail's singletrack trails weave, intersect and zip-zag down the mountain just like ski runs in the winter.

▶ Just west of Crested Butte, two biking and hiking trails (Kebler Wagon Trail #606 and Dyke Trail #838) lead to magnificent scenery in addition to Kebler Pass on CO-12, where the radiant yellow and red leaves create a textured denseness unlike anywhere in the state.

▶ The northern section of the Peak to Peak Scenic Byway near Rocky Mountain National Park and the town of Estes Park provides a gorgeous encore of vibrant fall foliage.

▶ With access to Routt National Forest, Steamboat Springs offers mountain-biking trails that go deep into pristine public land and give you that one-with-nature experience among aspens, scrub oaks and mines.



Conifer to South Park over Kenosha Pass

Distance: 54 miles one way

Start in Conifer, 15 miles southwest of Denver. Travel along US Hwy. 285, traversing Kenosha Pass. End in Fairplay, the largest town in the South Park valley.

TV fans recognize the name South Park from the eponymous animated series, but only the most-dedicated fans know that the show is actually based on the writers' experiences growing up in Conifer, not South Park. This drive connects both of these areas via high-altitude Kenosha Pass, which is wide and well maintained, with easily navigated turns. It is one of the best drives in Colorado to view autumn's leaves — vibrant reds and glowing yellows of the aspen woodlands are a striking contrast to the ponderosa pines and Douglas firs around Conifer. The pass eventually spills out into the high grassland basin of South Park, where unobstructed views of the Mosquito Range peaks appear in the west.

West Elk Loop Scenic Byway

Distance: 205 miles round-trip

Start in **Carbondale**, heading south toward the towns of **Paonia** and **Hotchkiss**. Skirt the North Rim of Black Canyon of the Gunnison before looping through **Gunnison** and **Crested Butte**. End back in **Carbondale**.

Located near Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, this byway winds around the West Elk Mountains and two mountain towns famous for their biking cultures: Gunnison and Crested Butte. Touching three national forests (Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison), the drive crosses diverse landscapes of meadows, rivers, canyons and enormous aspen stands lit up in gold and orange. Pull over at McClure Pass between Carbondale and Paonia to snap photos of the high-mountain corridor.

Rim Rock Drive through Colorado National Monument

Distance: 23 miles one way

From **Grand Junction**, go west on **Monument Road**, following signs through the city to reach the monument's east entrance and **Rim Rock Drive**.

Colorado's Grand Valley feels like cowboy country. As you drive along Rim Rock Drive in Colorado National Monument, you'll wish you were trotting along atop your horse, tipping back your Stetson as you peer out at the sunset-colored plateaus, canyons and arches. The drive is a well-maintained paved road traversing the monument. You'll want to get out of the car to enjoy the crisp fall air and to snap photos of the red-and-purple-streaked, water-sculpted cliff walls, whimsically arranged rock formations and sky-high mesas.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT; CATY EDWARDS; BIKING THE SAN JUAN SKYWAY NEAR TELLURIDE; JEFF CRICCO; CRYSTAL MILL NEAR MARBLE; TONY LITSCHESKI; BIKING NEAR STEAMBOAT SPRINGS; STEAMBOAT SPRINGS CHAMBER RESORT; KEBLER PASS; GLENN RANDALL





La Veta Pass near Walsenburg



San Juan Skyway near Telluride

San Juan Skyway

Distance: 236 miles round-trip

Begin and end your journey in **Durango**, making a loop that includes the classic Colorado mountain towns of **Telluride**, **Ouray** and **Silverton**.

This breathtaking circuit through the San Juan Mountains of southwest Colorado dips into the 5-million-acre San Juan and Uncompahgre national forests, offering visitors an amazing array of jaw-dropping cliffs, dramatic scenery and autumn appearances of amber, bronze and gold, as well as a 70-mile stretch between Ouray and Silverton known simply as the Million Dollar Highway. The Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad offers rides that coincide with optimal fall foliage.

La Veta Pass

Distance: 48 miles one way

From **Walsenburg**, take US Hwy. 160 west, climbing toward the top of La Veta Pass. Continue on the same route and end in **Fort Garland**.

Peaking at an altitude of more than 9,400 feet, La Veta Pass in southern Colorado (west of the town of **La Veta**) is one of the most scenic drives in the state during the fall season. Gold aspen trees mixed with dark green pines line the pass, while the magnificent Spanish Peaks and Sangre de Cristo Mountains tower over the foliage of the San Luis Valley. The Rio Grande Scenic Railroad (May to October) passes through mountain meadows, canyons and colorful foothills otherwise inaccessible by cars.

Weminuche Wilderness near Silverton



Highway of Legends Scenic and Historic Byway

Distance: 82 miles one way

Head west from **Trinidad** on CO-12, curving northeast as you approach **La Veta**, and complete your trip in **Walsenburg**.

This route arcs around two of Colorado's burliest mountains, West and East Spanish Peak, where gold-seeking conquistadors, as well as Comanche, Pueblo and Tarahumara Indians once traveled. Along the way, the highway passes beneath ancient volcanic walls that rise over tracts of pine, scrub oak and aspen. Nearly the entire byway begs to be photographed.

WANT MORE? COLORADO.COM/10PLACESFALLCOLOR

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM: WEMINUICHE WILDERNESS NEAR SILVERTON, KENNAN HARVEY; LA VETA PASS, CATHY EDWARDS; SAN JUAN SKYWAY NEAR TELLURIDE, JASON LEWANDOWSKI.