

5 Places to Bask in Spectacular Foliage This Fall

It was a summer of heat, droughts and deluges. Experts say that stress could make autumn colors especially vivid. Here's where you can savor them before they're gone.

[Heat domes](#), [droughts](#), [smoky skies](#), [tropical deluges](#): After a record-breaking summer of extreme weather events, dare we dream of crisp nights, cozy sweaters and the colors of fall?

"This summer really was a chaotic mix of record wettest and record driest, and fall colors will reflect that," said Austin Rempel, director of forest restoration at [American Forests](#), a nonprofit forestry organization. The Northeast and parts of the northern Rockies and Southern California had extremely wet summers, while the Southwest had one of its driest on record, he said.

That stress can make trees lose their leaves earlier, but it can also make the leaf color "really pop," said Tara L. Bal, a forestry professor at Michigan Tech. When leaves and trees are stressed, she explained, "the bright reds and oranges and yellows actually are stronger."

Just how vivid those leaves are depends on the right combination of cool and dry fall weather starting in mid-September, when colors start to change in the West and Northeast, and through late October, when they are at their prime in the Midwest and the Southeast.

NEW MEXICO
Cibola National Forest and Grasslands



A 2.7-mile tramway whisks visitors to the summit of 10,378-foot Sandia Peak, northeast of Albuquerque. Aspen trees and Gambel oaks in the surrounding national forest usually peak starting in late September, but a drought this year might prolong the vivid colors by a few weeks. Credit...Jay Blackwood

The 1.9-million-acre [Cibola National Forest and Grasslands](#) includes four “sky islands,” where the golden [aspen trees](#) usually steal the show starting in late September. This year, though, they’ll have competition with the Oct. 14 [annular solar eclipse](#), which will be visible over the Sandia Mountains, near Albuquerque.

Typically, peak fall foliage at Cibola lasts through mid-October, said Kerry Jones, a local meteorologist for the U.S. Forest Service. But a drought this summer might delay the peak by a few weeks, giving visitors a little more time to catch the oranges of [Gambel oak](#), yellows of [New Mexico locust](#) and those gleaming aspens.

The 2.7-mile [Sandia Peak Aerial Tramway](#), at the northeastern edge of Albuquerque, whisks visitors up rocky cliffs and past mountain peaks sprinkled with reds and yellows, crossing craggy [Domingo Baca Canyon](#) on its way to the 10,378-foot summit (adults, \$33).

The Sandia Mountains are sacred to many Indigenous groups in the area. Get a taste of the Native history with a visit to the [Sandia Man Cave](#), where researchers have found artifacts and animal remains thought to date as far back as 23,000 B.C. The hike, which leads across a valley overlooking a forest, then along the ledge of limestone cliffs and up a spiral staircase to the cave’s entrance, is about a mile round-trip from the parking lot.

Excerpted from *New York Times*, Oct. 7, 2023, Section C, Page 8