

AFAR

The Sweetest U.S. Small Towns to Visit This Fall

From Alaska to Vermont, these lesser-known destinations are perfect in autumn.

The air is getting crisper, the leaves are starting to turn, and teenagers everywhere are lining up for pumpkin spice lattes. While a scenic road trip is always a good idea, one of our favorite ways to revel in the glories of autumn is to set up camp in a town with a big festival calendar, cute B&Bs, mom-and-pop shops galore, and extraordinary access to the great outdoors.

What follows are suggestions for seven such small U.S. towns, with added bonuses like whiskey saloons, rescue lions, and Viking cookery. Happy autumn equinox!

Beaufort, North Carolina



This sleepy little pearl on the southern Outer Banks is home to just 4,199 people. It's the third-oldest town in North Carolina, nestled on the Crystal Coast halfway between Virginia Beach and Myrtle Beach. This fall, mark your

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calendar for the **Beaufort Brewin**' craft beer shindig (September 28-29), an **oyster roast** and bonfire (November 4), and a community-wide "jumble sale" at the **Beaufort Historic Site** (November 17). The weekly **Olde Beaufort Farmers' Market**, set up in front of the Carteret County Courthouse, runs through November 17; swing by on a Saturday morning for a fair-trade caffeine fix from **Green Truck Coffee** and a roasted pear-and-ginger scone from **The Accidental Bakery**.

With energy for the day, you can explore artifacts salvaged from the shipwrecked *Queen Anne's Revenge* at the **North Carolina Maritime Museums**, wander the crumbling tombstones in Beaufort's **oldest cemetery**, or go seashell hunting at the 2,315-acre **Rachel Carson Coastal Estuarine Reserve**, separated from downtown Beaufort by Taylor's Creek. There are two hiking trails within the reserve, but the 1.1-mile Outer Loop trail can only be walked at low tide; follow the markers from Town Marsh and look for piping plover, herons, and egrets.

To explore farther afield, the **Island Express Ferry Service** drops passengers off at the uninhabited **Shackleford Banks**, the southernmost barrier island in **Cape Lookout National Seashore**. It's known for its **wild horses** (more than 100 at last count). The **Cape Lookout Light Station**, with its unique black-and-white diamond-print exterior, is another popular stop, and the 207-step lighthouse is open for climbing through the third week in September. Planning to spend time island hopping? Book a deluxe suite at the **Pecan Tree Inn**, a peaceful B&B kitted out with two-person Jacuzzi tubs and Egyptian cotton towels. It's just half a block from the boardwalk and yacht harbor.