

12 Fun and Unusual Fall Festivals and Events

These unique seasonal events are worth planning a trip around.



Embrace bright colors and seasonal festivities.

By [Kyle McCarthy](#) Sept. 30, 2016

Fall is a great time to plan a [fun and frugal getaway](#), with plenty of festive and affordable seasonal events taking place across the globe. From checking out a surfboard art festival in California to admiring vintage cars in Telluride, Colorado, these quirky annual traditions are sure to pique your interest. Here's a look at standout seasonal events that celebrate fitness, food and fall fun.

Telluride Festival of Cars and Colors

Telluride, Colorado

[Telluride](#) features one of Colorado's flashiest foliage displays. From Sept. 30 to Oct. 2, the Telluride Festival of Cars and Colors brings a variety of vintage cars and exotic vehicles to the golf course and downtown. When you're not checking out the cars, you can take in groves of shimmering gold aspen on display along the historic San Juan Skyway. What's more, you can score tickets to a special appearance by Neil Young and Promise of the Real. Young, as well as designer Ralph Lauren, are among the many celebrity residents of this legendary mountain town.

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The Sonoma County Harvest Fair

Sonoma, California

Now in its 42nd year, the [Sonoma](#) County Harvest Fair celebrates California's bounty. More than 150 wineries featuring 500 varietals and a competition among professional chefs guarantee food and wine lovers will be pleased. Plus, tickets only cost \$55 and you can win \$1500 by excelling at the World Championship Grape Stomp, a three-day team competition to produce the most juice.

Pirate Fest

Tybee Island, Georgia

Buccaneers can sail into Tybee Island from Oct. 6 to 9 for Pirate Fest. Bring an eye patch or bandana for the "I Walked the Plank Pirate Pub Crawl," plus join a Victory Parade, dance to The Brigands, explore Little Matey's Cove or shop in the Thieves Market. Admission costs \$15 for a Saturday pass and \$25 for a weekend pass; children 11 and under can join the fun for free.

North American Wife Carrying Championship

Sunday River, Maine

The 17th annual North American Wife Carrying Championship on Oct. 8 pits couples against each other on a 278-yard, obstacle-filled track as part of the Fall Festival in Sunday River, Maine. Aside from the quirky contest, you can take part in the New England Cornhole Championship on Oct. 11 or the pumpkin pie eating contest, or just kick back in the wine tasting tent.

Greet Reindeer

Champaign, Illinois

Visitors to the Champaign County countryside will find farm-to-table dining, organic farmers markets, wineries and even reindeer. Open through December, the Hardy Reindeer Ranch hosts a herd of Alaska reindeer and features tours (\$4 per person) and photo ops. Mingle with 10 reindeer in their pen; then, head out to the 10-acre corn maze or pumpkin patch. More reindeer arrive in November, which is also the best time to admire the 5,000 trees scattered across the farm.

Elephant Retreat

French Lick, Indiana

Indiana's turn-of-the-century mineral springs resort town of French Lick has unusual events year-round. If you're an animal lover, go on an Elephant Retreat, available regularly in October. Pamper three female circus elephants who retired to Wilstem Ranch during a two-hour Spa Experience. If that's not your speed, the Indiana Wanna Go Fast ½ Mile Runway Shootout Oct. 15 to 16 welcomes 135 cars daily to race each other on the French Lick Airport runway. This lovely region is famous for historic luxury hotels, including French Lick Springs and West Baden Springs, which offer nightly rates for less than \$150 in fall.

Morro Bay Surfboard Art Festival

Morro Bay, California

From Oct. 15 to Dec. 3, surf up the California coast to the Morro Bay Surfboard Art Festival. At this time of year, handpainted surfboards are displayed in the hip shops and cafes around town. Proceeds from sales benefit community groups working to beautify this beach town.

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Galveston Island Oktoberfest

Galveston, Texas

Fans from Texas and beyond spend Oct. 21 to 22 at the Galveston Island Oktoberfest. With plenty of German food and beer, the family-friendly festival has kids' activities galore, a rodeo and live folk dancing. Plus, Galveston is a popular cruise port and beach getaway year-round, and attendees can win an island-themed golf cart in the Oktoberfest raffle.

New Ulm Oktoberfest

New Ulm, Minnesota

Another way to celebrate Germany's heritage is at the annual New Ulm Oktoberfest Minnesota, which takes place in several venues over the first two weekends in October. The event kicks off with a Germanic American Day Parade on Oct. 8 and ends with a bang at Schell's Brewery, which has produced more than 100 varieties of German craft beer since its founding in 1860.

American Royal World Series of Barbecue

Kansas City, Missouri

Before Halloween, the American Royal World Series of Barbecue brings more than 500 chefs, pitmasters, grillers and sauce makers from eight countries to the [Kansas City Speedway](#) from Oct. 26 to 30. Consider it dessert for the three-month-long American Royal, an autumn event celebrating Missouri agriculture with rodeos, museum exhibits, equine and livestock shows, veterinary and scholarship programs since 1899.

The Bahamas National Trust Wine and Art Festival

Nassau, Bahamas

On Oct. 29, Nassau overflows with seasonal wines and the works of top Bahamian artists at the Bahamas National Trust Wine and Art Festival. Book the Fall All-Inclusive Deal at the Atlantis Paradise Island Resort through Dec. 16; nightly rates start at \$299 per adult, and reduced rates are available for teenagers, tweens and toddlers and include all meals and beverages at more than 24 dining spots and access to Aquaventure Water Park, open-air marine habitats and aquariums.

Or... Trade a Festival for a Tea Party Tradition

Boston

Are you tired of harvest [festivals](#)? The Boston Tea Party, celebrated each year on Dec. 16, attracts reenactors commemorating the night 243 years ago when revolutionaries dumped 220 pounds of tea into Boston Harbor to protest taxation. Join them onboard the replica ship to throw bales of authentic East India Company tea overboard. The Boston Tea Party Ship & Museum features several lodging specials starting from \$274 per night for a harbor-facing family room and event tickets, as well as a list of local High Teas and mixologists working on tea-infused cocktails.

Kyle McCarthy is the author of a dozen Frommer guidebooks, contributor to many publications, and is co-founder and editor of [Family Travel Forum](#), the online community trusted by family vacation planners since 1996. Please use her Q&A [@familytravel4um](#) on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) or [Pinterest](#) and connect on [LinkedIn](#).

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