

Southern Living®

SEPTEMBER 2021

Let's Get Baking 38

Fall Recipes
Your Friends
and Family
Will Love

Carrot
Spice
Cake
P. 65

NY999

Perfect
Pear
Desserts

Game-
Changing
Party Dips

ADVENTURES IN
TRAVEL AND CULTURE

The South

LONG WEEKEND

Falling for Virginia

Hit the road for Instagram-worthy
autumn foliage in three mountain towns

BY GRACE HAYNES

Set the Scene
Steeple shines against
blazing backdrops in Hot
Springs, home of The Omni
Homestead Resort.



Worth the Drive

(From top) Take in views of the countryside, cruising from one mountain town to the next. Have dinner at the Waterwheel Restaurant, just 5 miles from The Homestead.

AS CRISP AUTUMN air starts settling in on late-September afternoons, leaf peepers begin hitting Virginia's stretch of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Cloudless skies set an ethereal backdrop for clusters of crimson, burnt orange, and golden leaves lining the curvy two-lane highway, a bright runway for the smoky blue mountains peeking over the horizon. Carloads of tourists embark on the scenic drive every fall to take in Virginia's striking foliage. This year, escape the crowds, and pull

off the parkway to explore a few mountain towns with their own front-row seats to the seasonal show: Hot Springs, with the historic Omni Homestead Resort surrounded by the Allegheny Mountains; Lexington, a charming college town in the Shenandoah Valley; and Roanoke, a buzzy city for both foodies and outdoor enthusiasts in the eponymous valley. These three destinations are easy drives (less than 65 miles apart) from each other too. Pick your own pace for a journey through the commonwealth—spending a long weekend in one spot or planning a road trip to make stops in all three places.



Historic Home Base

(From top) The sweeping Omni Homestead Resort offers accommodations with two centuries' worth of stories. Dine at the on-site Jefferson's Restaurant & Bar for regional farm-to-table fare. Falling Spring Falls is one of the largest cascades in Virginia.



A HIDDEN ESCAPE

Hot Springs

Make Hot Springs your destination for a relaxing long-weekend retreat. This tiny town, tucked away in the Allegheny Mountains, is home to the 255-year-old **Omni Homestead Resort**—the oldest in the country (it even predates the United States). It was founded in 1766, a decade before the Declaration of Independence was signed. Capt. Thomas Bullitt opened what started as a rustic lodge to accommodate the travelers who had heard of the area's hot springs (the mineral waters were declared to have therapeutic powers). Twenty-three U.S. Presidents have stayed at the hotel since its opening (many of their portraits line the walls of the Lobby Bar). It is said that this region's remarkable autumn leaves impressed

George Washington during his first visit here. Drive along the winding roads leading to The Homestead, and you will immediately understand why.

Mountains ablaze in orange and yellow surround this sprawling redbrick resort, which actress Elizabeth Taylor once called the "Versailles of America." This historic stay is steeped in Southern hospitality. Visit the lobby each day around 3 p.m. to enjoy the Southern Social Hour, when guests can snack on sweet breads and sip tea as a pianist plays ragtime tunes on a Steinway. History buffs will enjoy the daily tour with bellman John Tingle, who takes guests back in time to The Homestead's beginning, telling tales about the resort's historical evolution and leading groups through such preserved spaces as an opulent 1920s ballroom.

Spend the rest of your time outdoors admiring waterfalls throughout Bath County. Sign up for a spot on a Homestead-led hike on the **Cascades Trail**. A naturalist will guide you on a scenic walk that passes a series of waterfalls hidden in the Allegheny Mountains. Or set out on your own to explore the area. Head south on U.S. 220, and drive about 12 miles until you reach **Falling Spring Falls**. This 80-foot beauty is one of the most photographed sights in the state. Pack a picnic, and pick a spot at the overlook to take it all in.

