



# An Amtrak Ride Through the U.S.'s Best Fall Foliage

*Maximize leaf peeping by taking Amtrak across the country.*

BY ALI WUNDERMAN

New England is famous for its vivid yellows and oranges and reds in the fall, with leaves that change color once they sense winter is coming—usually peaking around mid-October. To maximize the season and its natural beauty, I hopped on Amtrak and headed east to view as many of America’s shifting hues as possible. This year the region boasts another unique characteristic: some of the strictest COVID-19 restrictions in the country. Depending on where you’re traveling from, each state in New England requires visitors to fill out a form either providing proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken within a certain period of time prior to arrival, or a signed agreement to quarantine for 14 days once in state.

Because my trip was about maximizing fall foliage viewing while staying as safe as

possible, I booked a [private roomette](#) on the [Lake Shore Limited](#), a direct 21-hour line from Chicago to Boston. Illinois is considered a high-risk state by officials in Massachusetts. So before leaving I got an expedited nasal swab within the required 72-hour window and had negative test results to show upon arrival.

With that out of the way, I was ready to settle in and stare out the window for hours on end. The train in Chicago departs after dark, so when I awoke near Erie, Pennsylvania, it was to a palette of unbelievable autumn colors: bursts of orange and red peeking between declining green leaves. As the train pulled in to Buffalo, New York, and onward through Rochester and Schenectady and eventually Boston itself, russet leaves reflected in languid creeks and duckweed-dappled lakes grew only more striking. I was in awe of the autumn ivy that stretched itself over abandoned stone structures, which came into view as the train straddled New York and Massachusetts.

I didn't arrive in Boston until after dark, so I booked a room in the city before continuing my train journey. I recommend the [Four Seasons One Dalton](#), a new luxury high-rise less than a 10-minute walk from Boston's Back Bay station. For those completing the Lake Shore Limited line all the way to Boston's South Station (one stop beyond Back Bay), [The Envoy Hotel](#) in the trendy Seaport district is a great overnight option, and just a five-minute walk away.

There are several fall foliage-heavy Amtrak routes to continue on from Boston: [The Downeaster](#), from Boston's North Station, offers a leisurely 3.5-hour journey through a handful of carnelian colonial towns terminating in Brunswick, Maine. It was a short enough journey to take there and back to Boston in a day (thereby skirting the need for the COVID-19 travel form), but for those looking to extend their trip beyond foliage, the poutine at [Duckfat](#) in Portland is worth a detour.

The final day of my three-day journey into the maroon-rich regions of America put me on the [Acela train](#), a seven-hour trip starting from Boston's South Station and ending in Washington, D.C. From my window, I saw the crimsons, cinnabars, and golds of Providence, Rhode Island, New Haven, Connecticut, Baltimore, and Philadelphia before finally landing in our nation's capital, where no COVID-19 test or travel form is required.

While the stops along my journey had their own policies, Amtrak's COVID-19 safety procedures are consistent no matter where in the country you might be. [Masks](#) are only allowed to be removed during the ride by those in private rooms or roomettes with

their doors closed, otherwise masks must be worn at all times elsewhere in the train and inside all Amtrak stations. Of final note is the awareness that Amtrak's schedules are subject to change due to reduced ridership, so be sure to check the timing. Amtrak's policy currently states that all change fees for reservations made by December 31 and all cancellation fees through October 31 are waived.

Growing up in California, I never understood why transplants from the Northeast lamented the lack of autumn—some of San Francisco's leaves turned yellow and fell off, after all. But as I stepped off the train in D.C., I finally understood what it was that tugged at their heartstrings: The annual show of vibrant colors and immersive relationship to nature is nearly impossible to recreate in any other region. And with a little planning, it's still feasible to enjoy the foliage even during the pandemic.