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12 best mountain towns in the US to see fall foliage

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Skip the road trip and hop on one of five fall foliage train rides around the US

From multi-day family travel adventures to simple weekend getaways, here are some of the best fall train rides in the country. *USA TODAY*

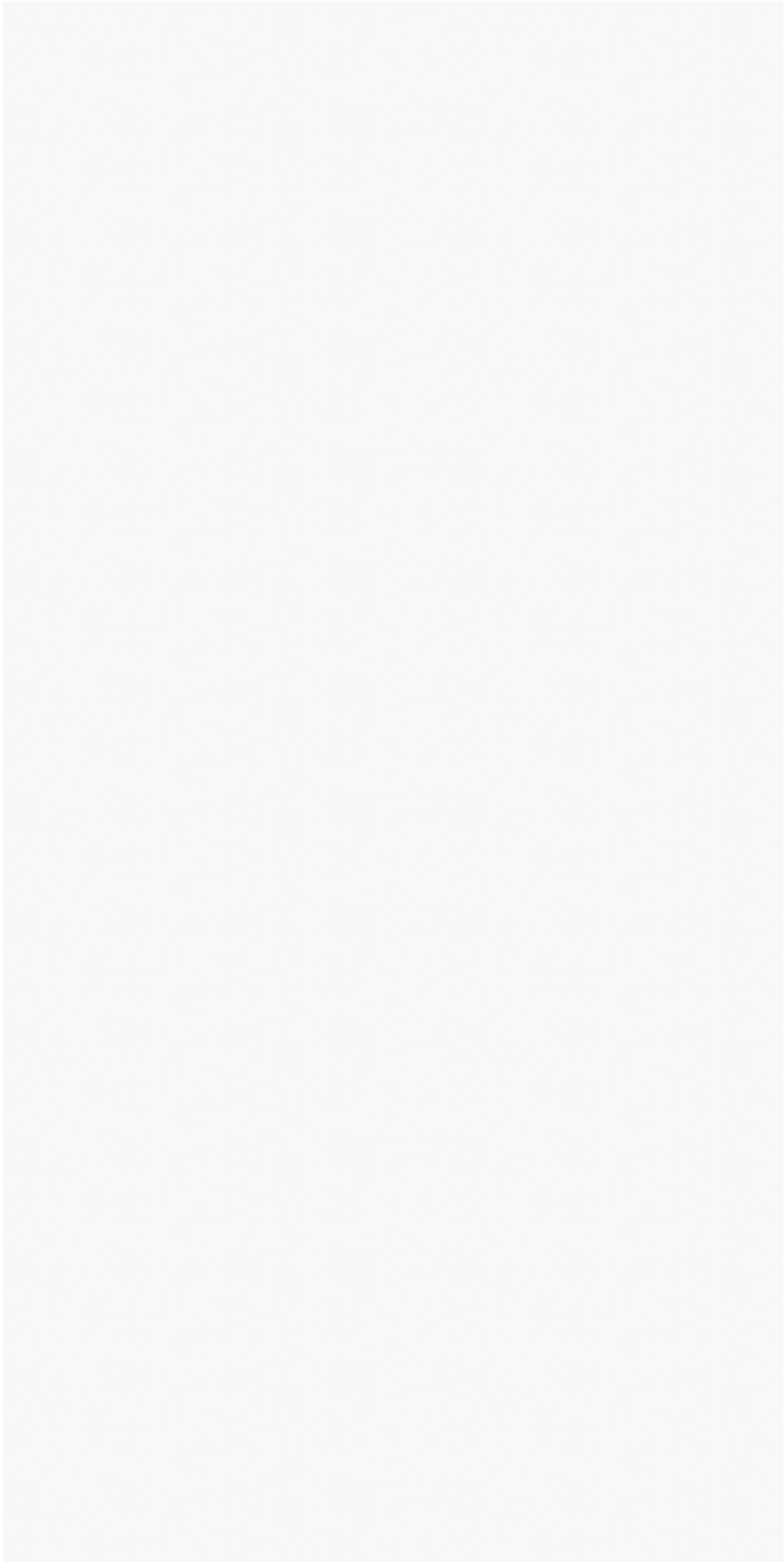
Fall hits differently in the mountains. Cool temperatures and colorful leaves are a springboard for hiking, kayaking, and biking, while the fresh air builds an appetite for autumn treats, from plump donuts to fresh-pressed cider. With apple picking, corn mazes, and [Halloween vibes](#) tossed in for good measure, the best mountain towns in the U.S. feel especially welcoming in the fall months.

If you're in the mood for [fall vacation ideas](#) where the vibrant palette of crimson, gold, and pumpkin-colored leaves takes center stage, then pack your sweater and get ready for some high-altitude leaf-peeping. The hotels are cozy and the trees are ablaze with foliage at America's most scenic mountain towns in the fall.

SCENIC TRAILS: [10 best fall foliage train rides in the U.S.](#)

1. Bethel, New York

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The Catskills



Catskills, Sullivan County, New York *Courtesy Of Sullivan Catskills Visitors Association*

Situated just two hours from [New York City](#) and boasting a wide variety of deciduous trees packing a big autumn color punch, The Catskills have long been a popular [New York vacation destination](#) for outdoorsy urbanites. And the town of Bethel, one of the area's historic hamlets, is a cozy-cute starting point for clean lakes, mountain trails, and leaf peeping galore.

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PLAY ALL DAY: [8 New England fall getaways that will charm the kids \(and parents, too\)](#)

Visit on Sundays in the fall for the annual [Harvest Festival](#) featuring a farmers' market, live music, circus performers, and even a tortoise sanctuary. Stay at [Kenoza Hall](#), a lakeside property a few miles from Bethel where you can [rent a chic bungalow](#) and enjoy the heated saltwater pool (open until mid-October), family yoga, and complimentary canoes.

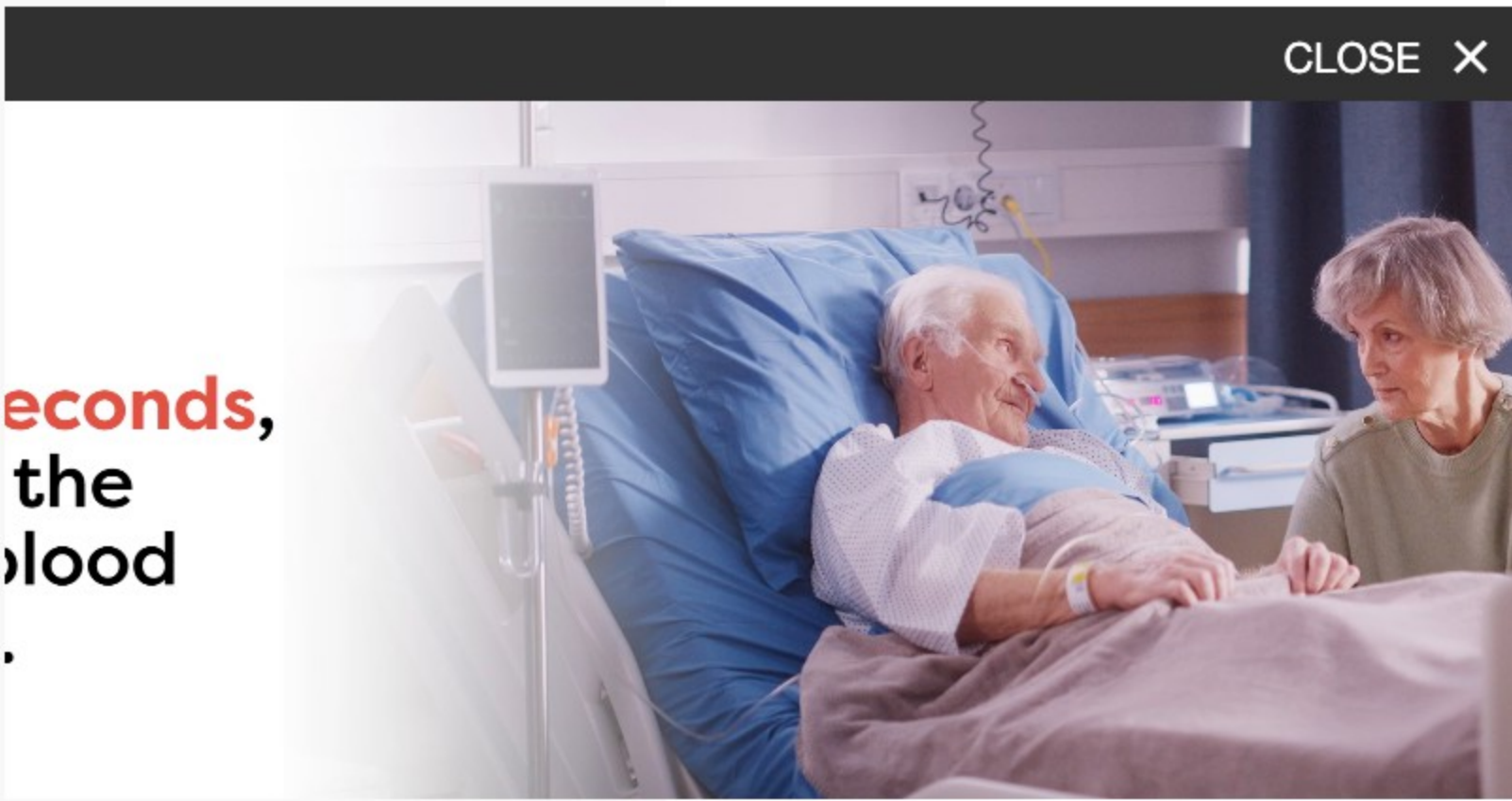
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2. Park City, Utah

Wasatch Mountains

Leaf-peeping season in the Wasatch Mountains presents a golden wonderland of aspens with a smattering of reddish scrub oak and red-orange maples. At the center of it all is [Park City](#), a year-round destination that's a paradise for cyclists in the fall. Mountain bikers can pedal 40 miles of trails at [Round Valley Trail System](#),

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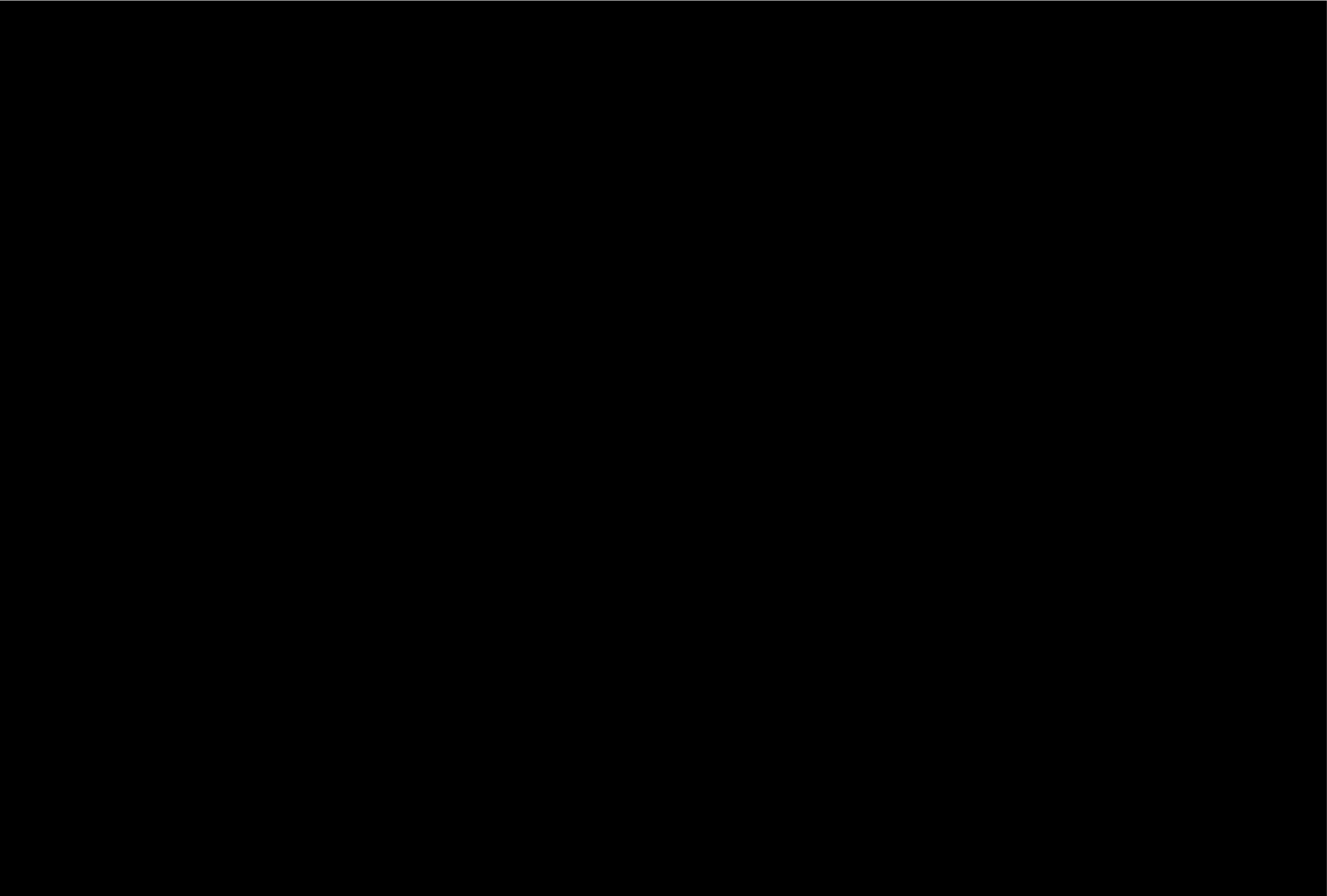
including paths shaded by a canopy of tall pines.

PERFECT CONDITIONS: [13 best national parks for families to visit in the fall](#)

For more leisurely fall foliage sightseeing, lace up your hiking boots and walk the 1.6-mile [McPolin Farm Nature Trail](#), an interpretive loop designed to introduce visitors to native plants and wildlife. Stay at the posh [St. Regis Deer Valley](#) for an array of activities ranging from guided hikes to cookie decorating to splashing in the year-round pool.

3. Skytop, Pennsylvania

The Poconos



Waterfall at Skytop, Poconos. [Skytop Resort](#)

Ringed by Alpine scenery that's especially brilliant in the fall, Skytop is a bucolic spot to enjoy autumn colors in the Pocono Mountains. Just a few miles north is [Promised Land State Park](#) and its hiking trails, two lakes, and wildlife observation station for spotting eagles. An abundance of rich green pines offset the fiery red and orange hues.

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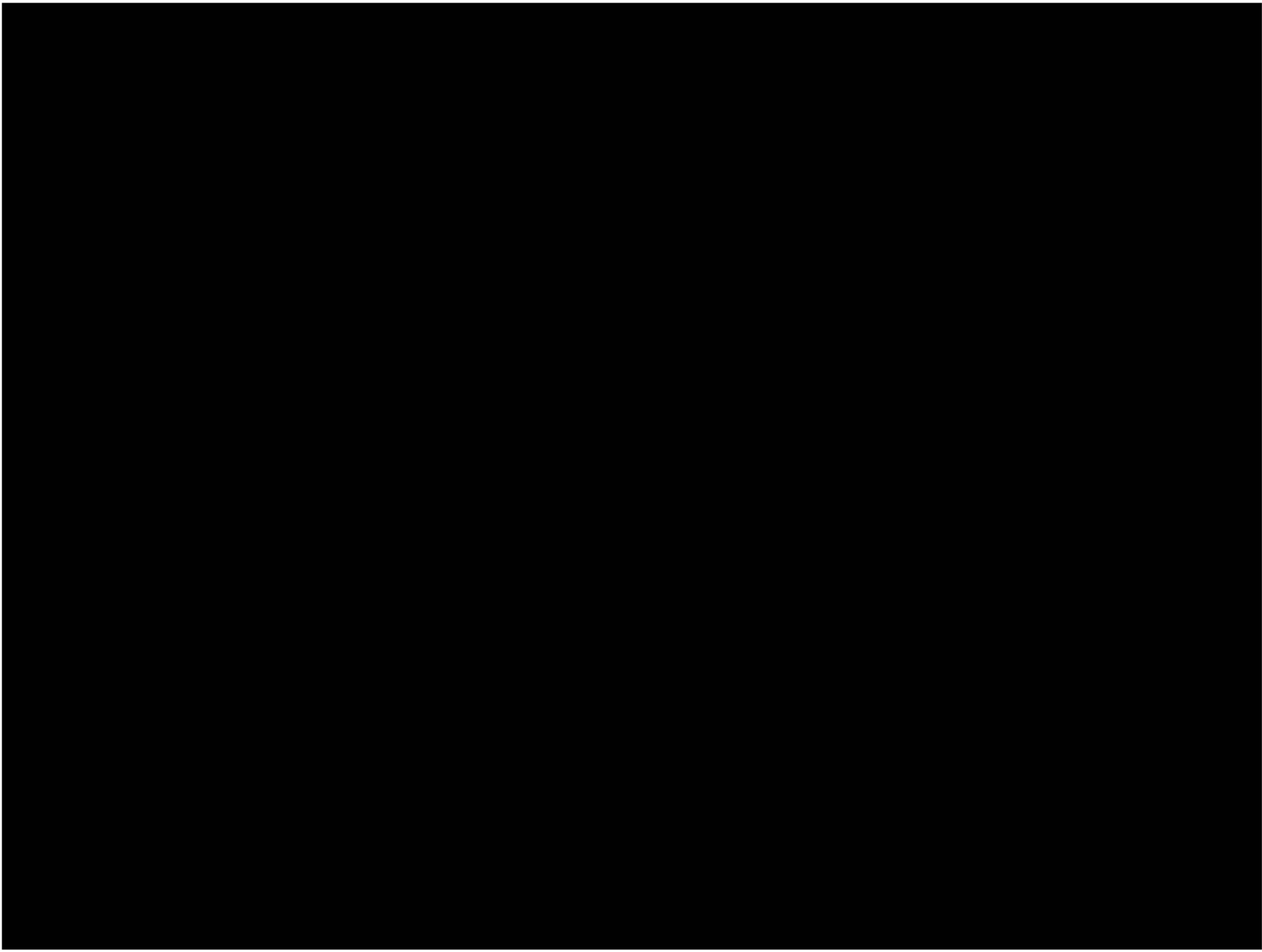
Stay at the spectacular [Skytop Lodge](#) nestled among 5,500 acres of woods with waterfalls and wildlife. Nonstop activities and stellar service make this kid-friendly resort one of the most popular in the entire country, while the option to include a meal plan makes it easy to budget your stay, similar to other [all-inclusive resorts](#) in the U.S.

4. Schroon Lake, New York

The Adirondacks

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Adirondacks-Schroon Lake *Regional Office Of Sustainable Tourism*

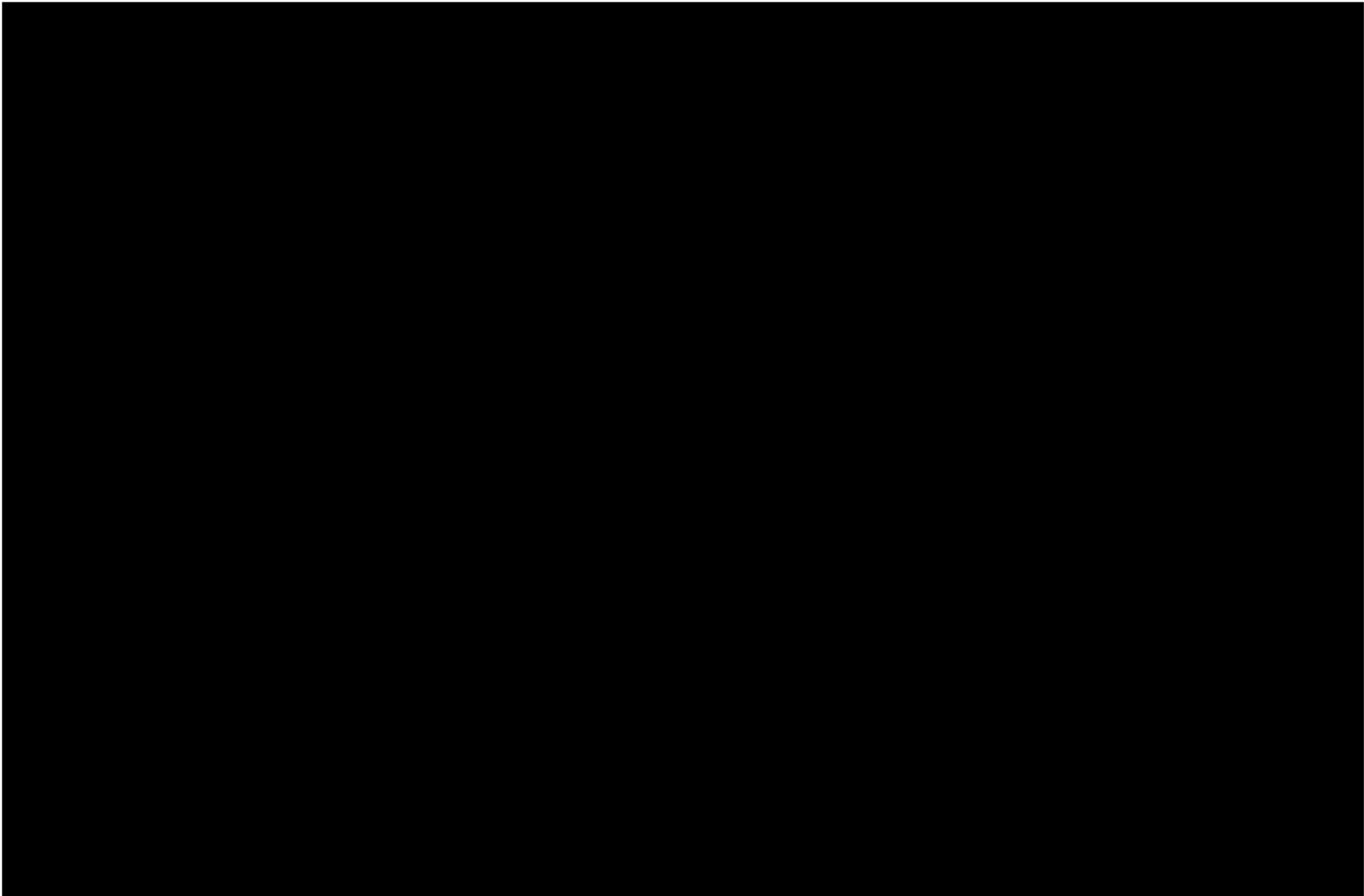
In the late 19th century, wealthy industrialists built extravagant lakeside retreats in the Adirondack Mountains. Today, you can immerse in beauty that borders on poetic just as those tycoons once did at [Schroon Lake](#), a tiny hamlet at the northern tip of its namesake lake.

REGIONAL REWARDS: [10 best family resorts in the northeast](#)

With a plentitude of rambling paths adorned with a crunchy carpet of fallen leaves, expect solitude on the hiking trails. After dusk, the dark sky provides ideal conditions for celestial observations. And the lake itself begs to be explored by boat. Autumn crowds are thin and often the silence is broken only by the call of the loon. Base yourself at [The Lodge at Schroon Lake](#) for a lakefront setting that's truly gorgeous when autumn leaves are reflected in the clear water.

5. West Dover, Vermont

Green Mountains



Hermitage Inn in West Dover, Vermont. *Hermitage Inn*

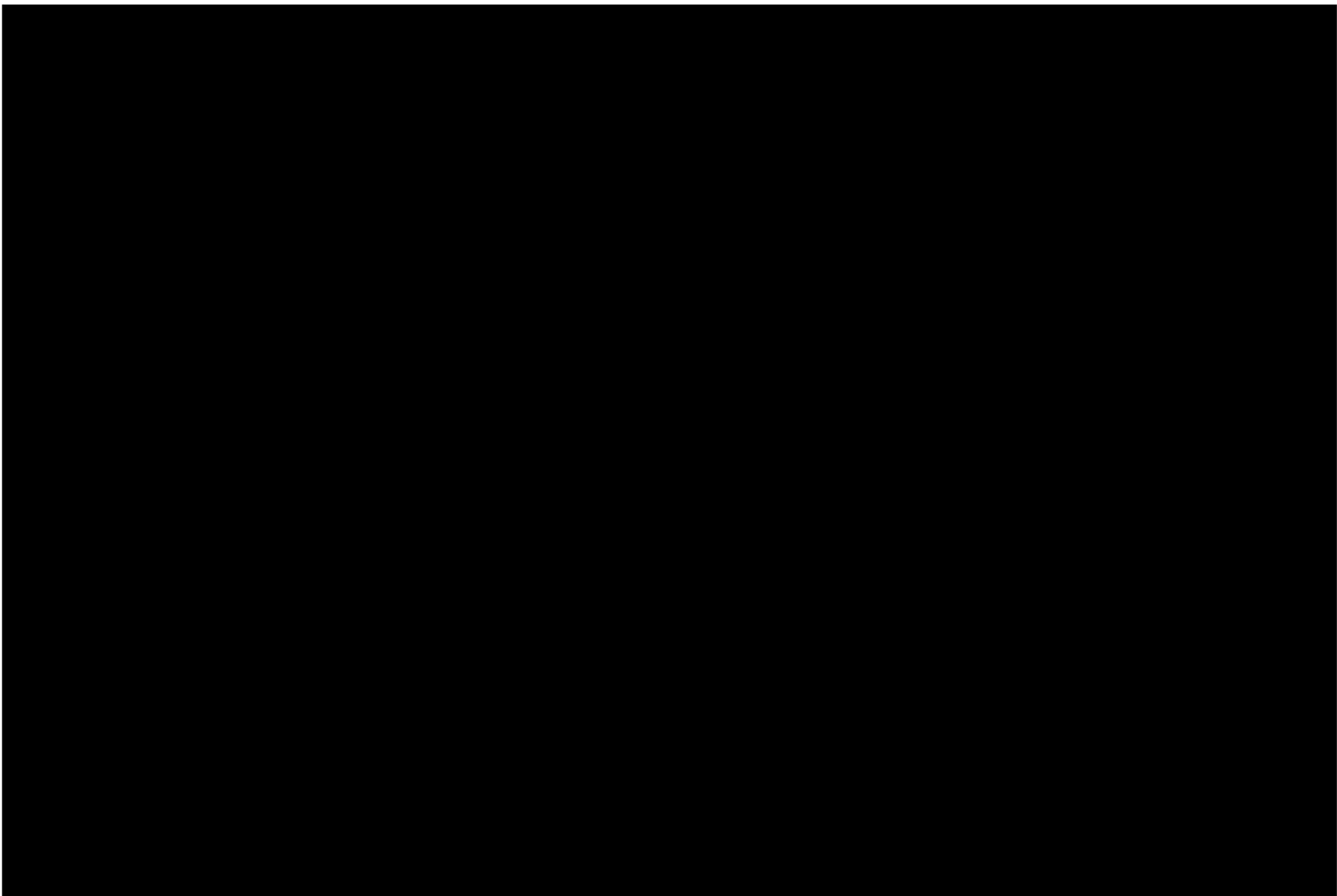
With a windfall of colorful foliage, fall is breathtaking across Vermont. But in West Dover, the locals are especially committed to maintaining the region's rural roots, and the result is a pastoral landscape punctuated by covered bridges and brilliant bursts of color. To experience the foliage from on high, ride the [Bluebird Express](#) to the summit of ski resort Mount Snow for a panoramic look at Mount Monadnock and the Somerset Reservoir.

FALL FUN: [10 best New England towns for fall family getaways](#)

Or, take to the Valley Trail on foot or bike — a section of the pedestrian and cyclist pathway is paved in West Dover, making it easy enough even for little cyclists who still use training wheels. Top it off with a romp in Dover Town Park's playground. Stay at the elegant and inviting Hermitage Inn, where kayaking, archery, and fly fishing will keep kids busy, while the pocket-sized spa provides parental pampering.

6. Aspen, Colorado

Rocky Mountains



Fall foliage at the Maroon Bells in Aspen, Colorado. *Chris Council And Emily Chaplin*

It may be best known as an upscale winter ski destination, but foliage season is a beautiful and less expensive time to visit Aspen. The town's ubiquitous aspen trees present a sweep of yellow leaves against a bluebird sky. Hiking the peaks of Maroon Bells is a local favorite.

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And if you're looking for weatherproof fun, the [Aspen Art Museum](#) has family programming and free admission. At the end of the day, soak in a cerebral vibe at [Aspen Meadows Resort](#), a hotel that's also home to the Aspen Institute, a prestigious think-tank.

7. Williamstown, Massachusetts

The Berkshires

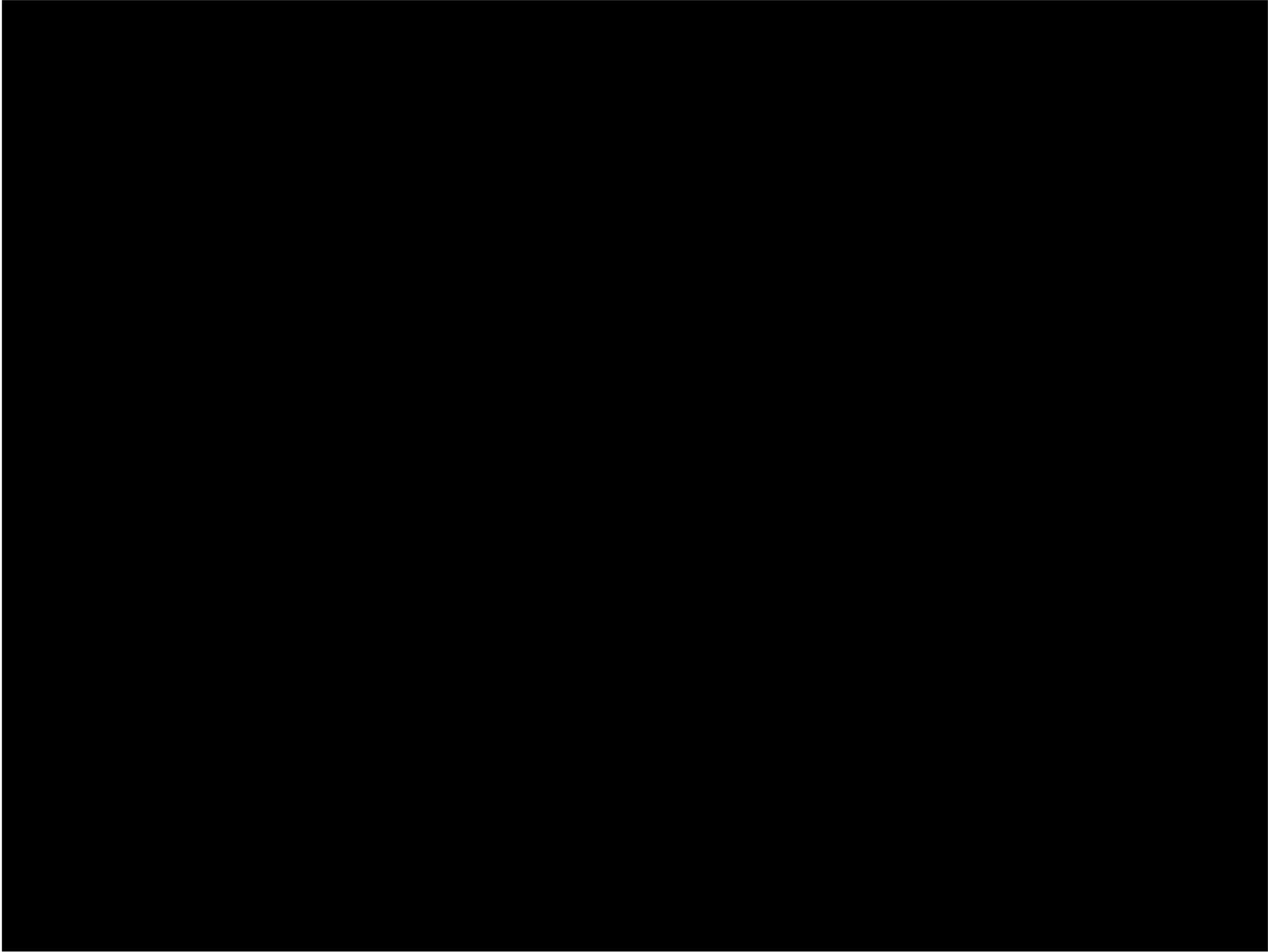
Sprinkled throughout with a patchwork of quaint New England villages, the Berkshire Mountains present painterly scenes with a cornucopia of oak and maple trees tinged scarlet and marmalade. Collegiate Williamstown is home to the [Clark Art Institute](#), where a world-class collection of Impressionist art is surrounded by walking trails and a herd of pastured cows.

FROST IS IN THE AIR: [10 New England winter getaways for families who don't like to ski](#)

For easy fall hikes with a big visual payoff, [Mountain Meadow Preserve](#) is laced with four miles of forest, field, and wetland trails. Top off your visit at [The Williams Inn](#), built with accents of native Berkshire stone and timber and located right in town.

8. Yosemite National Park, California

Sierra Nevada



Yosemite in the fall. [Rush Creek Lodge And James C.](#)

In the heart of the Sierra Nevada range, [Yosemite National Park](#) protects a vast wilderness. Many of the trees are evergreen, but there are enough deciduous varieties (including maples, black oaks, and dogwoods) to thread vibrant notes of red and bronze through a sea of forest green.

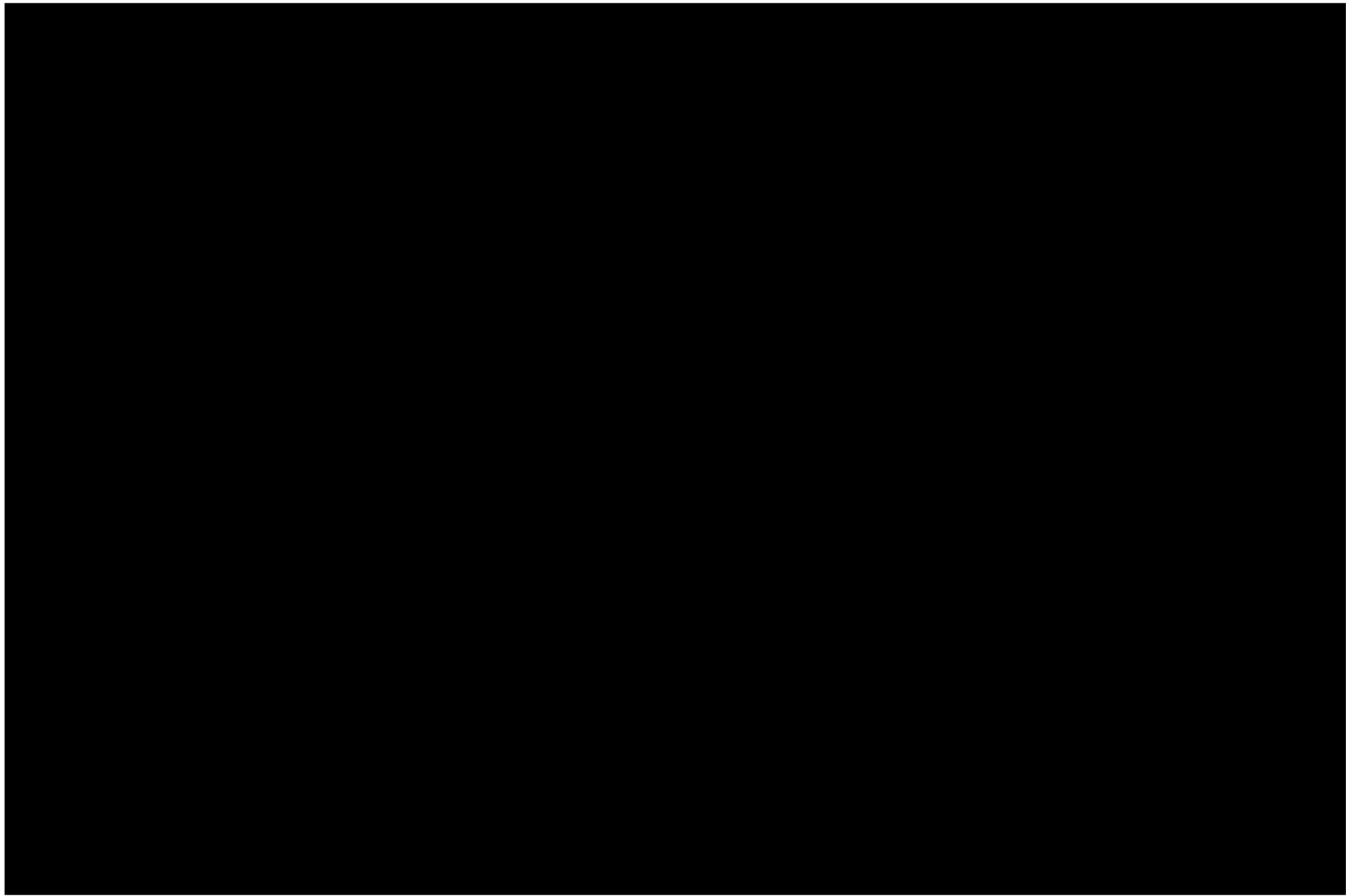
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The park is much quieter after Labor Day, making a hike to [Carlon Falls](#) and other scenic areas within the park a peaceful proposition. With an outdoor swimming pool and fun family game room, [Rush Creek Lodge](#) is located just outside of the park and makes a great base for exploring the national park in fall ([read our full review here](#)).

9. Spearfish, South Dakota

Black Hills



Black Hills, Spearfish Canyon, South Dakota *Travel South Dakota*

In autumn, a hodgepodge of yellow birch and aspen leaves are sprinkled with crimson vines against a landscape of limestone cliffs and foamy waterfalls along the 19-mile [Spearfish Canyon Scenic Byway](#) in the Black Hills. Mountain goats and deer roam freely here, and it's just a 75-minute drive to Mount Rushmore National Memorial, where you'll be wowed by the stone faces of Presidents Lincoln, Washington, Jefferson, and Theodore Roosevelt. Commune with nature and fall colors at [Spearfish Canyon Lodge](#).

10. Gorham, New Hampshire

White Mountains



The Glen House in White Mountains, New Hampshire. *The Glen House*

Perched in the shadow of New Hampshire's towering [Presidential Range](#), Gotham boasts a wide mix of tree species that give great color as the leaves change in the fall. The carriage roads of Gorham's [Great Glen Trails Outdoor Center](#) are bordered with fluffy ferns and crunchy leaves in a rainbow of autumnal hues, a paradise for bikers and hikers.

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Adjacent to the outdoor center, [The Glen House](#) offers sweeping alpine vistas from its modern guest rooms. Frosty weather tends to arrive early in this mountain

town, though, so pack a warm jacket alongside your hiking boots.

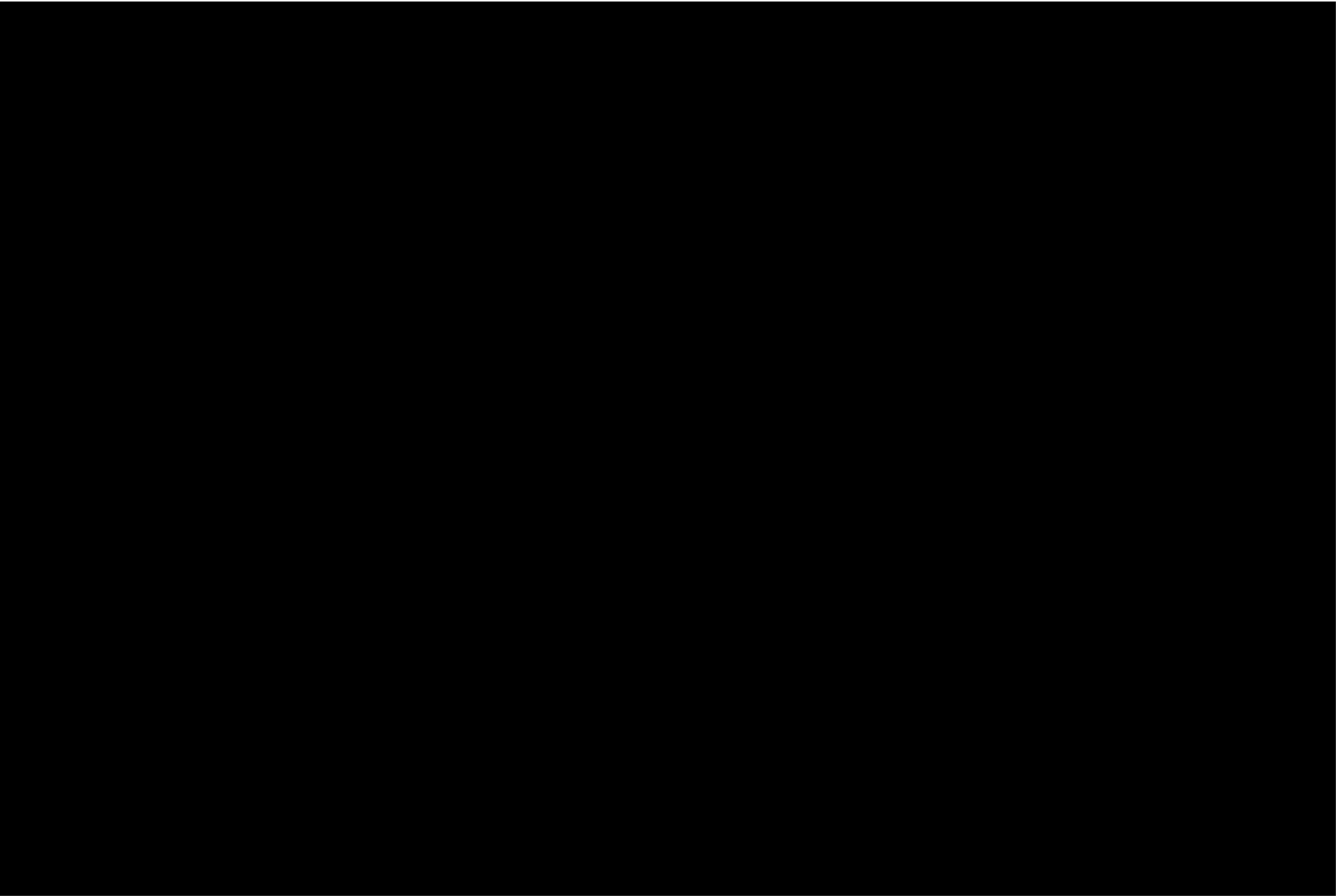
11. Hocking Hills, Ohio

Appalachian Mountains

For kaleidoscopic color in the Midwest, head to [Hocking Hills](#). Dotted with waterfalls, hemlock-shaded gorges, and natural rock bridges, [Hocking Hills State Park](#) is a prime leaf-peeping location and a fine spot for getting out in nature on foot or kayak. The skies are largely undisturbed by light pollution and autumn’s early nightfall makes for fine stargazing at a bedtime-friendly hour, too. Elevate your experience and sleep in a treehouse at [Among the Trees](#) for an extra close look at the fall colors.

12. Beech Mountain, North Carolina

Blue Ridge Mountains



Beech Mountain [Beech Mountain Tourism](#)

For small-town charm and scenic fall drives off the Blue Ridge Parkway, [Beech Mountain](#) hits all the right notes as the highest town in the eastern U.S. Take the chair lift up Beech Mountain and glimpse fall color in five states on a clear day. Hike the [Emerald Outback](#) and enjoy a myriad of scenic overlooks.

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OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES: [How to spend a fall weekend in Asheville, NC \(with or without the kids\)](#)

Oz lovers will want to follow the yellow brick road and join fans of "The Wizard of Oz" for the annual [Autumn at Oz](#) festival; held over three weekends in September, it’s a magical immersion in all things Oz-related. Stay in spacious apartment-style accommodations at [4 Seasons at Beech](#), conveniently located near hiking trails, cycling routes, and two lakes.

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