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TOURISM NUMBERS UP AS FAYETTE ENJOYS FALL ACTIVITIES

Uniontown, PA - It's leaf-peeping season, and Fayette County is one of the best places to take in the vibrant colors as summer transitions into autumn. Locations throughout the Laurel Highlands consistently make lists of the best fall foliage spots, and that's just a hint of the fun things Fayette County fall has in store for visitors and locals alike.

Gov. Josh Shapiro built \$112 million into the state budget for the creation of the Office of Outdoor Recreation, aimed at improving and developing state parks and forests and, in turn, spurring Pennsylvania's economic growth. In September, Shapiro announced the investment with a visit to Fayette County, speaking at Yough River Park in Connellsville, which draws both hometown residents and travelers with its many outdoor offerings, including camping and biking on the Yough River Trail.

The trail is part of the Great Allegheny Passage, a 150-mile hiking and biking trail that stretches from Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Md., carving its way straight through the heart of the Laurel Highlands and bringing with it a great deal of tourism.

And people aren't just passing through. They're staying.

"For July and August this year, Fayette County saw a 5.2% increase in occupancy over 2022," GO Laurel Highlands Executive Director Ann Nemanic reported. "The average daily room rate was \$225. All of that, I think, really provides a good base for us to go into the fall season."

Nemanic said the GAP seems particularly popular in autumn.

"Riders love the Great Allegheny Passage in the fall," she said. "Typically, there's at least one overnight stay in Fayette County."

Nemanic said those merely passing through spend an average of \$90 for a day trip, while overnight guests spend around \$496.

And more than just a pleasant place to hike or cycle, the Laurel Highlands offers plenty of fun fall activities, Nemanic said, including Ohiopyle's annual Buckwheat Festival. The festival, which is just across the line in Somerset County, just celebrated its 75th anniversary Oct. 13-15.

While the small town attracts its share of visitors daily due to its famous falls and hiking, biking and rafting opportunities, Nemanic said the buckwheat festival was set to give it even more of a boost.

"The fact that it (was) the 75th just kind of gives a little bit more publicity to those three days," Nemanic said.

She added the festival was held during what is typically “peak leaf week,” when fall foliage is at its best, so a great many visitors were expected.

Nemanic said Halloween is another big draw in Fayette County, with myriad pumpkin patches, haunted houses and spooky happenings on the horizon.

“Haunted everything is certainly something that folks love to do,” she said, whether those “folks” are couples, families or solo visitors.

For movie buffs who enjoy a spooky thrill, Buffalo Bill’s House in the village of Layton, near Perryopolis, is a destination not to be missed. The house in which much of the iconic movie “Silence of the Lambs” was filmed has been renovated to resemble the movie set as closely as possible and is open for both guided tours and overnights. Stays are booked year-round, but the final tours of the 2023 season are set for Oct. 27-29.

Fans of history and architecture can now enjoy a bit of both at another well-known Fayette County House. Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater, located in Mill Run, is collaborating with Westmoreland Museum of American Art for a special exhibit open through Dec. 31.

“They’re going to have special exhibits in the Speyer Gallery,” Nemanic said. “They’re going to have Fallingwater projects that were never built, but they were designed and prepared for Fallingwater’s estate. It’s something that’s going to be very unique and very cool for visitors to experience.”

Nemanic said rounding out the fall season is the opening of the Grand Lodge at Nemacolin, a luxury accommodation on the property of the Farmington resort.

Indoors or out, budget or luxury, Fayette County looks like the place to be this fall.

For more information:

- Yough River Park: <https://gaptrail.org/amenities/yough-river-park/>
- Ohiopyle:
<https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks/FindAPark/OhiopyleStatePark/Pages/default.aspx>
- Buffalo Bill’s House: <https://buffalobillshouse.com>
- Fallingwater: <https://fallingwater.org/>

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