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October 2007 Issue

Living Color

BY JENNY PAVLASEK

By boat, buggy or basket, this month is all about the leaves. Here, we offer five ways to pass a fabulous fall day.

Flying Colors

Checking out the leaves from hundreds of feet above ground might sound dangerous, but if you're a thrill seeker, stick with skydiving. "Balloons travel at about six knots per hour (less than 7 miles per hour)," explains Laurie Givin, owner of Gentle Breeze Hot Air Balloon Company in Lebanon. Guaranteed to disappoint adrenaline junkies, but an indescribable feeling for those seeking views of nature's annual art show. "It's like you're standing still and the world is moving below you," Givin says.

Advertisement Trips are concentrated in southwestern Ohio, but can be customized. "We ask our customers what they want to see," says Mike Gliatti, who owns Bella Balloons, also in Lebanon. Both companies offer sunrise or sunset flights, since that's when the winds are the most stable. Gliatti says a typical ride sails over varied landscapes, and might include the oak-and maple-lined ridges and hillsides of nearby Caesar Creek State Park, as well as the corn mazes of local farms. You're also likely to spot whitetail deer, red fox, coyotes and red tail hawks, he says.

The flights last an hour or more, flying low along the tree line or 500 to 700 feet above it, although most passengers are smitten by the birds-eye view. "We'll take our passengers leaf picking," says Givin. "People are used to being in an enclosed capsule when they fly. This lets them reach out and touch nature in way they probably haven't before."

Like a Horse and Carriage

Amish Country gets its share of coverage on our pages, but we particularly like it in the fall, since it's on a short list of places where you can still find stretches of land uninterrupted by power lines and cell phone towers. Driving here, you'll be overwhelmed by russets, reds, amber and gold before you put your car in park. But leave it to the champions of the simple life to show us a better way to experience their hills.

In Holmes County, two Amish-owned businesses — Shrock's Amish Farm & Village in Berlin and Yoder's Amish Home in



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Millersburg — let visitors feel the pull of real horse power with a peaceful ride in a traditional Amish buggy. The trips are short —15-minute tours around the respective farms — and navigated by an Amish driver. But taking in the kaleidoscope of colors to the soothing sound of the horse's clippity clop make these outings a contender for the most charming 15 minutes of fall ever.

If you'd like to extend your trip, Shrock's offers 30-minute wagon rides that run "out through the field, past the animals and into the woods," says JoAnn Hershberger, whose family owns the popular destination. Hershberger notes

that even though they bought the property nearly 20 years ago, she hasn't tired of devoting a Saturday to taking buggy and wagon rides on the farm with her five grandchildren. "I love the woods here — it's all dirt paths and no traffic other than the wagon — just the sound and smell of the leaves in the fall."

As for the wireless hillsides, they're best seen on a backroads tour with Happy Trails of Holmes County, a non-Amish carriage ride company that offers 30- and 60-minute (or longer, with notice) trips through the rolling hillsides. If the weather is on your side, request the vis-à-vis carriage, which is pulled by a Bertrand draft horse and has an open top. "We'll take people out to watch the sunset, and that's usually when they decide they want to retire here," laughs Happy Trails owner Stan Gilbert.

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