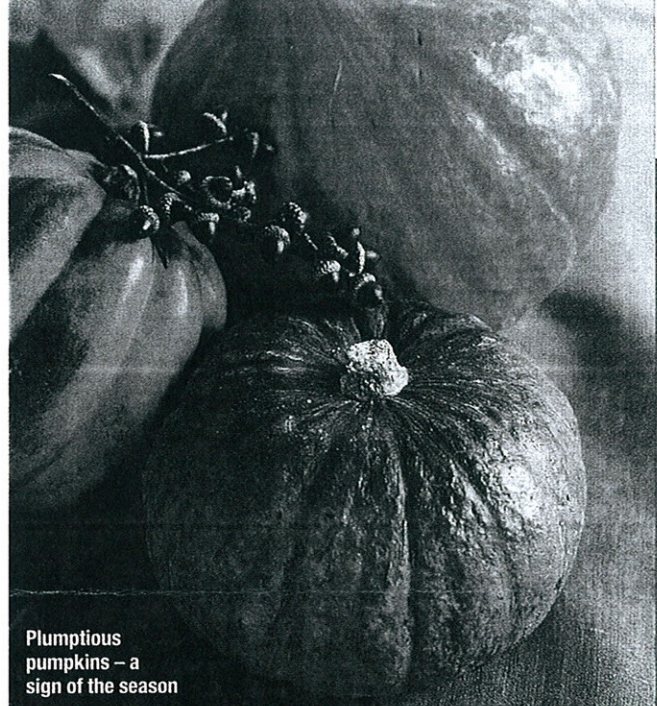


GREAT ESCAPES

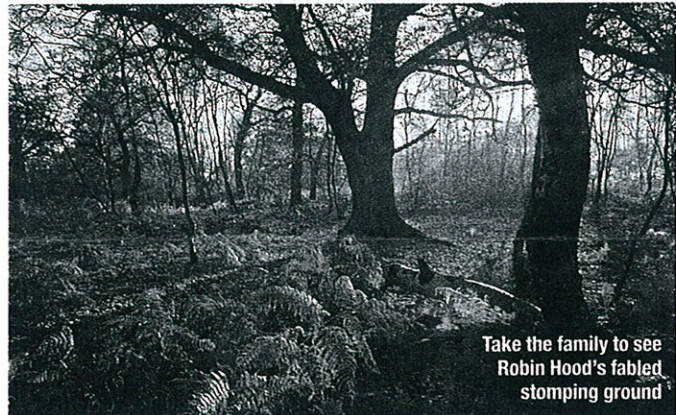


Plumptious pumpkins – a sign of the season

Pumpkins on parade

Big, fat, orange pumpkins are synonymous with autumn, whether for consumption or for carving into Hallowe'en jack-o'-lanterns. At Spalding in Lincolnshire, Europe's biggest grower, David Bowman, produces some two million a year and organises the annual Pumpkin Parade (8 October), together with live music, children's fancy dress, a fun fair and market stalls.

DAVID WICKERS ALSO RECOMMENDS www.pumpkinparade.co.uk website for advice on how to grow your own.



Take the family to see Robin Hood's fabled stomping ground

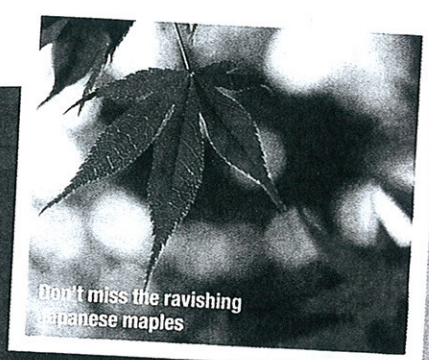
If you have kids in tow

Who was Robin Hood? At the last count, there were 12 candidates, not counting Russell Crowe, and there's even some doubt if his native woodland was Sherwood Forest (01623 823202; www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk). But why ruin a good story? Sherwood Forest today may not be quite the arboreal spread it was when Robin and his Merry Men were (or were not) at large, but you can still see the 800-year-old, 30-foot diameter Major Oak where they supposedly gathered: just follow one of the several walks from the Country Park visitor centre.

DAVID WICKERS ALSO RECOMMENDS the Woodland Trust (01476 581135; www.woodland-trust.org.uk), which manages more than 1,000 woodlands, each a fiery feast of autumnal colours.

Chromatic Cotswolds

Among the 18,000 trees at Westonbirt (01666 880220; www.forestry.gov.uk/westonbirt), the 600-acre National Arboretum near Tetbury, is Britain's largest collection of Japanese maples, which is a number-one magnet for leaf peepers. Anyone looking for a perfect Fall weekend in the area should also see the bonfire of colours at the nearby Batsford Arboretum (01386 701441; www.batsarb.co.uk), known as the 'Cotswold Secret Garden'. DAVID WICKERS ALSO RECOMMENDS checking for offers on the Cotswolds Inns and Hotels website, www.cotswold-inns-hotels.co.uk.

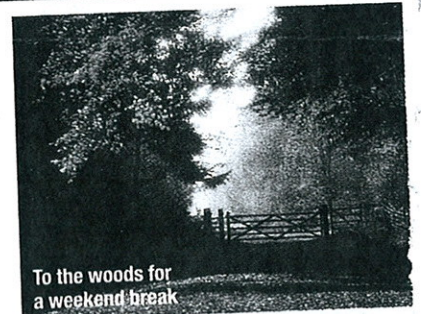


Don't miss the ravishing Japanese maples

The Big Apple

No, not New York City but rural Herefordshire, the traditional home of cider, whose presses are the biggest squeezers in the world. Follow the official Cider Route (www.ciderroute.co.uk), which links several of the county's producers, many open to visitors. The apple harvest will be in full swing in October, with the season coming to fruition at the Flavours of Herefordshire Food Festival being held on 24 and 25 October (www.visitherefordshire.co.uk).

DAVID WICKERS ALSO RECOMMENDS a night or two at Broome Farmhouse, near Ross on Wye (www.broomefarmhouse.co.uk), a homely, three-bedroom B&B with a restaurant and grand views over 45 acres of orchards. Prices from £25pp.



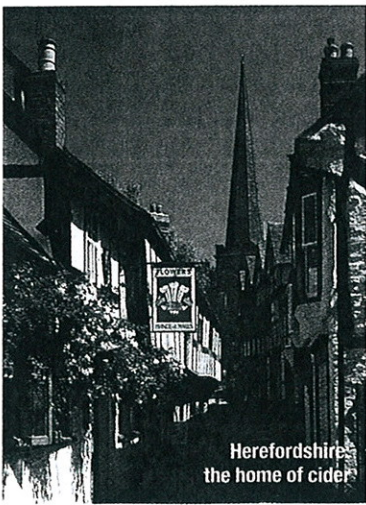
To the woods for a weekend break

Forest hideaways

The luxury timber cabins belonging to Forest Holidays (0845 130 8223; www.forest-holidays.co.uk) put you in the heart of the British Fall. In September, its new Forest of Dean site opens, with 76 brand new, contemporarily designed cabins joining those in Cornwall, Scotland and Yorkshire. Activities include guided walks with a Forest Ranger and bike hire, plus canoeing, abseiling, fishing, climbing and guided mountain biking. Prices start from £302 for a four-night midweek stay in a cabin sleeping four (they sleep from two to eight), or £329 for a three-night weekend break.

DAVID WICKERS ALSO RECOMMENDS Kielder Forest (www.visitnortheastengland.com) in Northumberland, not just for its trees but as a great location for gazing up at the clearest and least light-polluted skies in the country.

[CONTINUED OVER PAGE]



Herefordshire the home of cider