

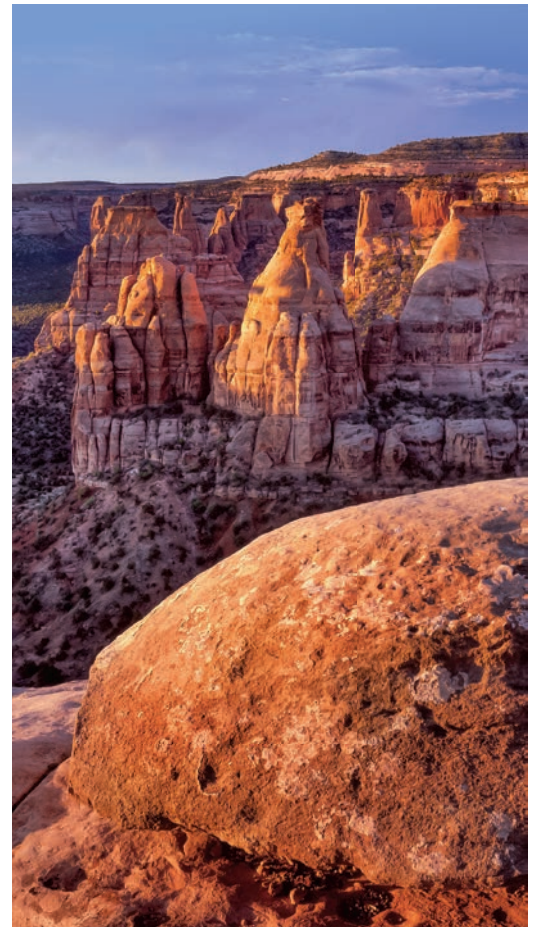
Rocky Mountain Magic



*Lake Helene in Rocky Mountain
National Park (Grant Ordelheide)*



Wander the state that's inspired artists, writers and a national anthem on this mesmerizing road trip.



Katherine Lee Bates wrote the lyrics to *America the Beautiful* standing atop Pikes Peak in Colorado. “O beautiful, for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain. For purple mountain majesties, above the fruited plain.”

The song that has become an American anthem was meant to sum up the country as a whole, but from the top of Pikes Peak, Bates knew what anyone who visits Colorado quickly realizes; here you'll find some of the finest that the U.S. has to offer.

This road trip covers the best of the best as you visit all four of Colorado's national parks and countless incredible sights in between. See the spacious skies of Denver before driving north towards Lyons on the doorstep to Rocky Mountain National Park, passing amber colored fields along the way.

The park is home to spectacular peaks that are the embodiment of purple mountain majesties. Catch sight of them on Trail Ridge Road before heading west through Grand Lake towards Black Canyon of the Gunnison where you'll discover a fruited plain on the road between Hotchkiss and Paonia, dotted with vineyards producing Colorado wine. Along the way, stop for a world class mountain bike ride in Fruita at the doorstep to Colorado National Monument.

Make your way south to Mesa Verde and then east to Great Sand Dunes, seeing the tallest dune in North America. Take in the stunning views of Pikes Peak on the drive back. As you circle the state, you'll experience what so many have come to love about Colorado. From peaceful deserts to crashing waterfalls, from tiny hamlets to college towns and from sand to snow that clings to the highest peaks even in the summer, you'll discover a feeling that can only be described as magic.

PHOTOS: Mountain biking in Fruita (Grant Ordelt), Colorado National Monument (Getty Images)



A Denver Local's Perfect Day in the Mile High City

By Mikaela Ruland

As more and more people discover how great Colorado is, my childhood friends and I joke that we're unicorns, having been born and raised in the Denver area. As a travel writer, I have lots of opinions on the best things to see, do and eat around the world, but there's nowhere I can make recommendations for with quite as much authority as Denver.

My perfect day in Denver starts with a sunrise yoga session or workout at **Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre**. Technically, this world renowned music venue is in the town of Morrison but it's owned by Denver Arts and Venues and has some of the best views of the city, especially at sunrise. There are ticketed classes on various days throughout the year, casual group workouts you can find on Eventbrite or the amphitheater is open most days to yoga, stair-climb or hike the area trails on your own.

Then, I'll head to **Blue Sparrow**, one of my favorite coffee shops for a latte and a croissant from Black Box Bakery. You'll be covered in crumbs as soon as you shatter the flaky exterior with the first bite, but the pastry's strawberry or green chile cheddar filling is so worth it. The location on Blake Street has a perfect patio for a warm summer morning. After enjoying my



coffee, I'll stroll around the neighborhood, ducking into the alleys. **The River North Arts District**, known as RiNo, is a haven for street artists, every square inch of wall covered in gorgeous murals. The art is frequently changing, which makes it a fun place to visit again and again. You'll also find funky local boutiques to explore.

When it's time for lunch, I'll grab a Louie sandwich from **Lou's Italian Specialties** and take it to **Confluence Park** for a picnic. This classic Italian style combo of salami, capicola, ham, provolone and the works is executed perfectly here and only tastes better under Colorado's 300-plus days of sun. I hope you packed the SPF.

After lunch I'll stroll across the Highland Bridge to get to the Highlands neighborhood, where waiting in line is half the fun at the giant, silver milk can that serves Denver's best ice cream. If it's on the **Little Man** menu, I can't not order Salted Oreo, a perfect combo of sweet and savory.

Denver alone has more than 150 craft breweries so an afternoon beer is a must. **Denver Beer Co.** is a classic with a nice patio and is a short walk from Little Man.

If there's still time left before dinner, I'll go over to **Meow Wolf, Convergence Station**. This immersive art experience



is wild and will take you several hours to really absorb. It's the kind of place I wish I could see for the first time again.

Calories don't count in a perfect day scenario, so I'm obviously already thinking about dinner. If I'm celebrating, I'll book a spot at **Temaki Den's** bar. The hand-roll sushi joint is tucked inside an old wooden warehouse turned collective marketplace called The Source. Owned by Denver's most lauded sushi restaurateurs, every single bite served is perfection. For a more casual evening, I'll head back to RiNo and order the house sourdough and a bowl of handmade pasta at **Dio Mio**. The regularly changing menu at this counter service spot is always incredible.

If I ordered an affogato at Dio Mio and still have energy after my sunrise start, I'll meet friends at **Ace Eat & Serve**, a ping-pong bar that has an inventive cocktail menu. Be sure to book play time in advance.

PHOTOS: Denver skyline (Getty Images), Coffee and croissants at Blue Sparrow (Mikaela Ruland), Red Rocks Amphitheatre (David Fulmer/Flickr)



WeeCasa Tiny House Resort
(Courtesy of Town of Lyons)

Linger in Lyons

From boutique lodging to delicious dining, this small town is the perfect basecamp to explore Rocky Mountain National Park.

By Kristen Arendt and Tori Peglar

Looking for a spot to kick back and escape the crowds? Don't miss the chance to slow down and stay in Lyons, Colorado. This hip and historic town tucked in the foothills has lots to see and do while still being just 40 minutes from Rocky Mountain National Park's Fall River Entrance.

It's easy to quickly get on board with the small town vibe. As Kim Mitchell, director of community programs and relations for Town of Lyons puts it, the town has the feel of a friendly neighborhood front porch—it's the kind of place that invites you to put up your feet, relax and stay awhile.

Plan an overnight stay at A-Lodge, located right along Main Street. This mid-century modern spot offers a mix of room options no matter who you're traveling with. Even if you aren't spending the night, stop by The Rock Garden on the lodge's east side for a drink in the evening. This lively outdoor patio hosts a bevy of local food trucks and all sorts of fun events—on any given night you can enjoy live music, watch an adventure film screening or gather with the locals to catch the game on TV over drinks.

Another great spot to basecamp is WeeCasa Tiny House Resort. Located along the beautiful St. Vrain River just a stone's throw from downtown, you can enjoy downtime playing bocce, volleyball and corn hole, or relax around a firepit before tucking into your very own tiny home.

During the day, take a stroll along Main Street to peruse the local boutiques and art galleries. Red Canyon Art is a great place to shop for unique and locally crafted gifts. Looking for a tasty treat? Solace sells everything from artisan chocolates and locally made hot sauce to colorful macarons. Don't miss Lyons Classic Pinball—this landmark has been around for 17 years, offering the chance to play 37 pinball games from vintage 1960s machines to contemporary ones, plus six classic video games.

Moxie Mercantile on High Street is the go-to spot for coffee, pastries, breakfast and lunch. This baking company sells breads and pastries made with house-milled, organic, heirloom grains and is also known for its great coffee. Pick up

a sandwich for your day in the park and shop for local wares. A block over, the St. Vrain Market sells fresh vegetables, baguettes, jams and other grocery items as well as a selection of gourmet cheeses, house-made sausage and fresh baked pies if you want to pick up something to-go for a picnic in Rocky Mountain.

For a more sit down affair, Marigold serves delicious and inventive food in a cozy, bistro style setting. Though the brick cooked chicken served with salsa verde is an always popular option, if you see seafood on the ever changing menu, rest assured that Chef Theo Adley has engineered a delicious dish you'll want to try. From sea urchins to skate wing, these seasonal offerings are decidedly unique. The restaurant is popular so it's a good idea to make reservations.

If you're in the mood for tasty tapas and a mouth watering drink menu, hit up Farra. The newest addition to the Lyons dining scene, owner Antonio Rodriguez says he's designed the menu and space to offer a blend of cultures—from Madrid to Miami—all centered on the love of food, family and having fun.

Finish out the evening in the tasting room at Spirit Hound Distillers where you can enjoy cocktails and tasting flights at the newly renovated covered patio and indoor bar.

Learn more at LyonsColorado.com.

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Grand Adventures

Discover a Western, modern experience you won't want to miss at the doorstep to Rocky Mountain National Park.

By Tori Peglar

From Grand Lake, a waterfront village that sits at Rocky Mountain National Park's West Entrance just 90 minutes from Denver, to Winter Park, a lively ski town that turns on the heat in summer, you'll discover hidden waterfalls, fantastic biking, water sports, live music and horseback riding.

After exploring Grand Lake (see below), head to Winter Park Resort, 40 minutes away, where you can ride Colorado's longest alpine slide at the base area. You'll also find incredible mountain biking and other base area activities like miniature golf, a rock climbing wall and gondola rides.

Beyond the resort, hike or bike one of the valley's 600 miles of trails. For a mellow, relatively flat bike ride, head to the Fraser River Trail that stretches from Fraser to Winter Park Resort. For experienced hikers, the 8.8-mile, roundtrip hike up 12,804-foot Byers Peak near Fraser is outstanding.

See granite peaks, aspen forests and wildflower-filled meadows by horseback with Sombrero Stables in Rocky Mountain National Park. Outside the park, trail ride or take a wagon ride with Snow Mountain Stables. In Kremmling, you can even experience a taste of the Old West on a cattle drive with Rusty Spurr Ranch.

Kremmling is also the spot for fantastic rafting down the Colorado River with one of the guiding companies based in town. Or, rent your own raft in Rancho del Rio, a tiny spot 35 minutes west of Kremmling.

For a gorgeous scenic drive, take the Colorado River Headwaters Scenic Byway that starts in Grand Lake and ends in State Bridge. This route brings you along the river to Kremmling where you'll begin your drive along a dirt road through beautiful red rock country dotted with piñon pine and juniper trees.

Learn more at VisitGrandCounty.com.

Magical Grand Lake

By Mikaela Ruland

At the western gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park sits a town that feels a bit like a snowglobe—a perfect moment carved in time. It's a great spot to basecamp for your adventure to the national park. While the park is a big draw, Grand Lake itself offers tons to do from outdoor recreation to live theater and shopping. Spend some time strolling the town's historic boardwalk, popping in shops and grabbing breakfast at Sagebrush BBQ & Grill. From downtown, it's just two blocks to the picturesque shores of Grand Lake. You can rent boats from one of two marinas right in town whether you want to paddle under your own power, or take a motorized boat out farther. Despite sitting at more than 8,300 feet in elevation, Grand Lake in the summer often feels like a day at the beach. One Love Rum Kitchen keeps that vibe going, offering Caribbean inspired sandwiches, salads and cocktails for a fun lunch or dinner option. After your meal don't miss Miyachi's Snack Bar, a Grand Lake staple for inventive ice cream flavors like lemongrass basil.

When you're ready to get out of the sun, check out the events calendar at the Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre downtown. Starting in 1966, the theater brings Broadway hits to the Colorado mountains. At the end of the day check into the historic Western Riviera, right in the heart of town offering easy, walkable access to shops, restaurants and the lake. It's one of the only properties in town that faces the water.

Learn more at GoGrandLake.com

The Wild Heart of Colorado

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Cool Colorado

Explore this underrated national monument near Fruita.

By Georgia Menetre

Rim Rock Drive is one of the prettiest roads in Colorado. The scenic drive takes travelers 23 miles along the perimeter of Colorado National Monument. The road travels to the Saddlehorn Visitor Center, 14 hiking trails and dozens of lookouts. The whole drive takes about 45 minutes to an hour, without stopping.

There are only two entrances to the monument, both via Rim Rock Drive. The West Entrance is off of Highway 340 in Fruita, four miles from the visitor center. The East Entrance is off of Monument Road in Grand Junction.

The expansive views from the road include red, Mars-like rock formations, green juniper trees, panoramic views of the

surrounding Grand Junction/Fruita area and three tunnels that split through the rock.

Be sure to check out the road at night to stargaze; mark your favorite lookout during the day so you can come back and experience the desert under the moon's glow. For a breathtaking view of both sunrise and sunset, check out the Grand View Overlook, where Ute Canyon and Monument Canyon flow together. If you're looking to spend a night under the desert stars, a spot in the Saddlehorn Campground or in the monument's backcountry is the way to go. Book in advance on Recreation.gov.

If you're entering from the West Entrance, check out the Monument-Wedding

Canyons hike. This 5-mile loop starts at the Lower Monument Canyon Trailhead.

If you take the left fork, you'll head first into Monument Canyon; go right, and you'll start the undeveloped, more rugged Wedding Canyon Loop. Once you make it to the far end, you'll walk by Independence Monument, which towers over the trail. The trail can be extended for a longer hike into Monument Canyon if you're looking for a bigger adventure.

From the East Entrance, don't miss the 3-mile roundtrip Serpents Trail. One of the crookedest roads in the state, it has 16 steep switchbacks. The trail was built in the 1900s and was part of the main road until 1950.

Hit the Trail

By Mikaela Ruland

The charming city of Fruita is the place to headquarter your trip to Colorado National Monument. An outdoor adventurer's paradise, it's still held on to its small town feel. And, best yet, its vibrant downtown is just minutes from the monument.

Fruita is famous for its world class mountain biking with endless miles of single-track trails. Beginners and experts alike should head to one of the town's bike shops, Colorado Backcountry Biker or Over the Edge Sports, for local advice and rentals. Before your adventure, fuel up at Bestslope Coffee Company. If you're new to mountain biking, head to Rustler's Loop at the Kokopelli Trailhead. It has a nice mix of terrain but will allow you to stay in control. The views into McInnis Canyon National Conservation Area from the rim are breathtaking.

Don't miss the Mike the Headless Chicken Festival in June where more than 20,000 people gather to celebrate a very lucky chicken. Destined for the dinner table, a vital artery was missed when Mike was beheaded in 1945. He lived for 18 months without a head and became the star of a traveling road show. The festival in his honor includes a Peep eating contest, a 5K, live music, a car show and other festivities.

There's no better way to end the day than at Hot Tomato Pizza. A mecca for locals, tourists and mountain bikers alike, enjoy a slice and a cold Colorado craft beer on the patio.

Learn more at GoFruita.com.

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Vineyards (Courtesy of Visit Delta County)

Best Slope

Explore the uncrowded side of Colorado in small towns like Delta, Cedaredge and Paonia at the doorstep of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

By Mikaela Ruland

Colorado's Western Slope, which is the side of the state west of the Rocky Mountains, is home to incredible outdoor recreation, locally produced wines and fascinating history. The best part? In towns like Delta, Cedaredge and Paonia, you'll find all of this with no crowds.

"Delta County is an outdoor recreation enthusiast's dream come true," says Darnell Place-Wise, Delta County tourism coordinator. "With six communities to choose from, there is something for everyone, from wine and farm-to-table experience lovers, to hikers, fishermen, water adventurers, bikers and hunters."

For hikers and bikers, there are trails galore. Check out Crag Crest National Recreation Trail just up Highway 65 from Cedaredge. Hike the full 10-mile loop, or wander as far as you like before turning around. Located on Grand Mesa, which is home to more than 100 lakes, you'll hike along a narrow ridge with jaw-dropping views of the surrounding areas and enjoy aspen forests, which go from beautiful to truly stunning in the fall. Mountain bikers love the Jumbo Mountain Trail System just outside of Paonia.

Home to the Gunnison River, there are endless opportunities to get on the water. Book a guided tour with Western Slope SUP in Hotchkiss and paddleboard Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area or whitewater raft the North Fork of the Gunnison River. For a unique experience, join a full moon paddle during the summer at Sweitzer Lake or Crawford state parks.

When you're ready to relax, check out the West Elks Wine Trail in Hotchkiss and

Paonia to sample from 10 wineries. Only have time for one stop? Alfred Eames Cellars won Best in Show for their Carmena varietal in the 2023 Colorado Governor's Cup. Call ahead to book a tasting.

In Delta, don't miss Fort Uncompahgre on the Old Spanish National Historic Trail. You'll step back in time to the 1820s where you'll learn about the fur trading center that once occupied these grounds. Check for a calendar of special events where docents in period attire share the history of the area. Call (970) 874-8349 to schedule a tour.

While seeing a movie might not have been on your vacation radar, trust us. Delta has two incredibly unique theaters: the historic Egyptian Theater that opened in 1928, and the Tru Vu Drive In Theatre, one of eight remaining drive-in cinemas in Colorado, which is open April through September.

Learn more at VisitDeltaCounty.com.



OUTDOOR PLAYGROUND

No matter your passion, you can find it here in Delta County. From great wine, ciders and beer, to fantastic Gold Medal water fishing and scenic hiking suited for every level; you will find what you are looking for, and more.

Make a plan to visit, and start your next outdoor adventure, in Delta County!



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YOUR OUTDOOR ADVENTURE Starts Here



Stay at the Bross

This historic bed and breakfast offers a chance to escape among mountains, vineyards and orchards.

By Mikaela Ruland

If you're ready for a relaxing getaway in Paonia—whether you're here to sample the Western Slope's wines and orchard bounty, or to get out and enjoy amazing outdoor recreation at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park—check-in to the Bross Hotel Bed & Breakfast. The charming, three-story, red brick building was built in 1906 and has been a lodging property its entire life. Remodeled to include modern amenities, while still keeping its historic bones, it's the perfect place to stay.

As soon as you walk into the lobby, you'll realize this isn't your grandmother's bed and breakfast. Instead of lace doilies and cabbage roses, the building is allowed to speak for itself—think exposed brick, warm wood and contemporary art. Take the

historic staircase up to the second and third floors and find your guest room named after a fruit that's grown in Paonia. Each of the 10 rooms has its own unique charm, with full, queen or king size beds, but all include a private bathroom, 5G Wi-Fi and comfortable bedding. The rooms are well soundproofed, so you'll still feel like you have plenty of privacy while getting all the benefits of staying in a bed and breakfast, the primary of course being breakfast itself.

Each morning offers an inventive and tasty spin on breakfast, and whether you spend two nights or a week, you'll enjoy something a little different every day. Everything is made from scratch and uses local ingredients when possible to create a delicious spread. During the summer months, you'll find local fruit incorporated into breakfast, ranging

from apricots early in the year to peaches and cherries mid-summer, and apples and pears in the fall. The hotel is less than two blocks from Paonia's Main Street, so it's easy to walk to shops and restaurants, and attend events like Paonia Cherry Days in July.

Proprietors Mike and Suzanne's recommendations for a perfect day in Paonia? A stop at Western Culture Farmstead and Creamery is a must for amazing local goat cheese. Then, head to Mesa Winds Farm & Winery. One of the highest elevation wineries in the northern hemisphere, this special spot is also an organic farm and orchard. Book a table at the restaurant to enjoy farm-to-table fare.

Book your stay mid-March through mid-November at BrossHotel.com.



Visit Colorado's idyllic North Fork Valley and unwind in this historic, turn-of-the-century inn! Your launching off point for exploring Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, the West Elks Wilderness, Grand Mesa, and Colorado's award-winning wine country.

Located in Paonia, midway between Aspen and Telluride, with restaurants, breweries, shops, and galleries all within walking distance.

BROSSHOTEL.COM





Inside Black Canyon

Visitors who want to experience the inside of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park can drive East Portal Road to the river below where the canyon widens. But what if you want to experience the bottom of the narrow band of canyon visible from the rim?

Exploring the inner park is a rugged experience that requires skill and preparation. For those determined to hike down to the bottom, it's an unforgettable journey.

All visitors to the wilderness portion of the park are required to have a wilderness permit. These permits are available for the busy May through October season on [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) and are limited in number by route. In the off-season, permits can be obtained day-of at the visitor center. Primitive campsites, some with outhouses, wait at the bottom of the canyon. All routes include a steep descent of at least 1,800 feet. Hikers may encounter aid chains, loose rock and poison ivy on their journey. Human waste must be packed out and there is no potable water, so drinking water must be carried in or filtered.

The reward? A solitude-filled experience at the bottom of the canyon.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park (Getty Images)



Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde National Park
(Grant Ordelheide)

Experience Living History

There's more to the southwestern corner of Colorado than just the national park.

By Mikaela Ruland

Mesa Verde National Park's cliff dwellings might get all the attention, but southwestern Colorado is full of archaeological sites. Spend a few days in the towns of Cortez, Dolores and Mancos to see other historical sites, like Canyons of the Ancients and Hovenweep national monuments.

Most visitors check out Canyons of the Ancients Visitor Center and Museum near Dolores and don't venture out to explore the 176,000-acre monument, which contains the highest known archaeological site density in the U.S. Spend the day

mountain biking or hiking Sand Canyon Trail in the monument, a difficult, 12-mile roundtrip ride that will take you past tons of ancient dwellings built into the sandstone walls. Phil's World is another favorite of Colorado mountain bikers, with a variety of world-class trails for all levels of riding. As an added treat, you'll rarely find the area busy.

Indigenous history and culture isn't limited to the past in this part of Colorado. Visit the Cortez Cultural Center to learn about the Ute Mountain Ute, Pueblo and Navajo through art installations, interpretive exhibits and dances. At Montezuma Heritage Museum, learn more about the region's history from pioneers to Hispanic influences to the Ute Mountain Ute.

Mesa Verde, Hovenweep and Canyons of the Ancients are all International Dark Sky Parks, with some of the darkest skies in the country. Seeing the Milky Way arching over ancient buildings is a special way to experience this corner of the Southwest. For the darkest skies, visit in the winter and spring months, around a new moon.

After a long evening of stargazing, check-in to the Mesa Verde Motel in Mancos. This boutique spot was saved from demolition and turned into a fun, hip spot just seven miles from the park entrance. Every room has its own theme (#13 is Twilight Zone) and there's a morning coffee bar and evening cocktail bar that's fun for a visit even if you aren't staying the night.

Southwestern Colorado is also home to a burgeoning craft beverage culture. Lush vineyards and orchards dot this part of the state, making it home to wine and hard cider producers. Try both at Fenceline Cider, tucked next to the Mancos River.

When you're ready for dinner, Cortez has a surprisingly vibrant dining scene for a small town. You'll find everything from creative locally focused restaurants like The Boathouse in Mancos, a farm-to-table eatery with a Spanish inspired menu (make a reservation), to Burger Boy Drive In, a retro spot in Cortez complete with car hops.

Learn more at MesaVerdeCountry.com.

Colorful Creede

By Tori Peglar

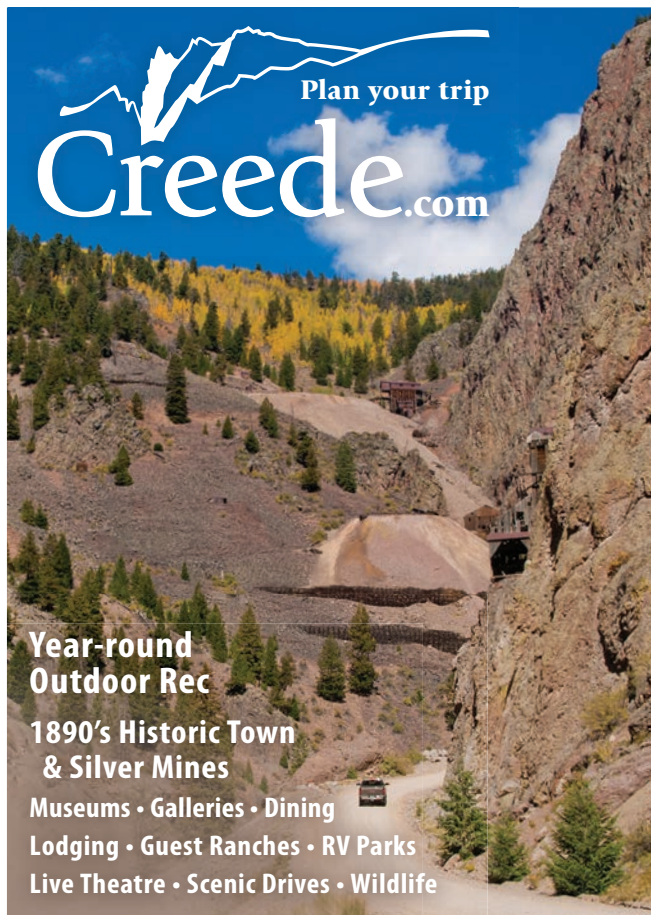
Nestled in one of the most striking mountain settings you'll ever see and dotted with art galleries, boutiques and cafes, Creede is one of Colorado's hidden gems. In 1890, silver was discovered in the area, and it fueled a boom that gave rise to Creede's beautiful buildings and vibrant community that still exist today. Its many events, like the Taste of Creede Arts Festival, Donkey Dash Pack Burro Race and the Creede Chocolate Festival, attest to the celebratory nature of its 800 year round residents.

One of its most outstanding spots is the Creede Repertory Theatre. Founded in 1966, it's a nationally recognized theater

that serves 20,000 patrons each summer. With a rotating schedule, you can see five different plays in one week. Buy tickets in advance before they sell out. Outside the theater, stroll uphill to the Underground Mining Museum for a tour of a replica mine blasted out of the solid rock cliffs.

To get a view of the town, do the Up and Over hike that leads you 0.75 miles and 800 feet above town to the pinnacles that lean into Main Street. From there you can hike down the backside through pine trees, taking a right at both forks, to stroll back downtown in less than a mile.

Learn more at Creede.com.



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Silver Lining

In a state known for its abundant wild places, South Fork holds its own.

By Mikaela Ruland and Tori Peglar

Don't let this tiny town tucked into the folds of the mountains fool you. South Fork, Colorado's small population enthusiastically invites visitors to explore the surrounding 2 million acres of national forest, offering limitless recreational activities. From hiking to skiing to off-roading, you'll find that locals and visitors alike just want to get out into nature.

Head to the Weminuche Wilderness, just two miles from town. It's one of the wildest places in Colorado. In 1979 the state's last grizzly was killed here, 27 years after the creatures were thought to be gone. The Continental Divide Trail also runs through town, giving easy access to the gorgeous San Juan Mountains.

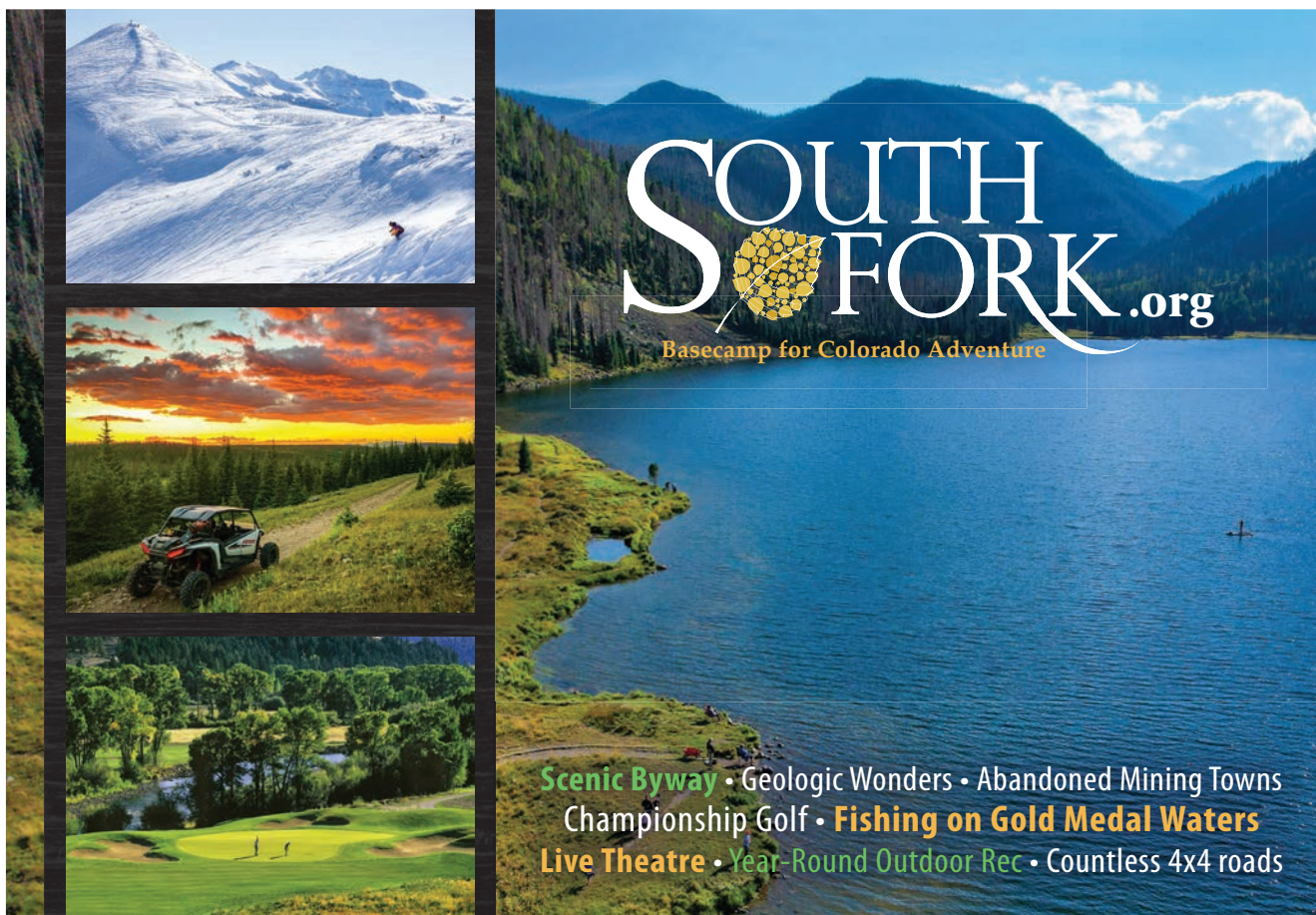
If you prefer to travel on wheels, bring your off-road vehicle, ATV or bike. The South Fork area offers hundreds of miles of trails designated for motorized traffic. These routes will take you to mountain peaks and amazing vistas of the San Luis Valley, to creek bottoms and dense forest growth. Mountain bikers should check out Middle Frisco Creek. The lower 4 miles are beginner friendly while the upper 7 miles are more moderate.

Closer to town, you'll find a fisherman's paradise. South Fork boasts the longest stretch of Gold Medal trophy trout fishing waters in the entire state. Nearly 20 miles of the Rio Grande receive this designation, and can be publicly accessed from town. For an incredible view of the river, book

a rail biking excursion with Revolution Rail Co. On your guided tour, you'll pedal a two or four-seat bike designed to move along railroad tracks. Book a two-hour pedal along the Rio Grande or opt for a Pedals to Paddles package where you pedal up-river five miles before returning by raft.

If you're craving a peaceful scenic drive, hop on the Silver Thread Scenic & Historic Byway from South Fork and follow it 117 miles as it weaves through the mountains. Stop at beautiful North Clear Creek Falls for an accessible photo op, or stretch your legs to reach South Clear Creek Falls on a short, family friendly hike. The drive is spectacular in the autumn.

Learn more at SouthFork.org.





More to Explore

While Colorado's national parks might steal the spotlight, its 43 state parks shouldn't be overlooked. Often less crowded and just as beautiful, here are four of our favorite picks.

By Mikaela Ruland



Cheyenne Mountain State Park

This beautiful park seven miles west of Colorado Springs is home to the Dixon Trail, which provides 23 miles of easy-to-moderate terrain that's perfect for hiking and mountain biking. Meander through prairie grasslands and into the foothills to get a taste of the diverse terrain of Colorado's Front Range.

All Colorado state parks offer ranger-led nature talks, so be sure to check the park's website for the most up-to-date schedule to learn more about the area you're visiting.



Steamboat Lake State Park

This alpine park 29 miles north of Steamboat Springs has so much to offer year round, but winter might just be the best time to visit. A magical wonderland awaits. Rent a snowmobile in Steamboat Springs, or join a snowmobile tour and safely explore miles of trails patrolled by park rangers. Or, if you'd rather get out on your own two feet, strap on snowshoes or cross-country skis and head out on trails closed to snowmobiles for a peaceful experience. You can even cross the frozen lake. Visiting in the summer? Hiking, camping and water sports abound.



Rifle Falls and Rifle Gap State Parks

Find an unexpected oasis located on the western side of the state just 13 miles off Interstate 70 in Rifle. It's the perfect place to bring your family. Playing in the rainbows of mist from Rifle Falls' 70-foot triple waterfall offers a respite from the summer heat as do shady riverside campsites. Rifle Gap has 90 campsites with lakeside views.

Even for a day trip, make sure to bring a flashlight to explore the caves along Rifle Falls' Coyote Trail, one of which has a 90-foot room.



Ridgway State Park

Discover what might just be some of the best views in Colorado at this park. It's located 17 miles south of Montrose at the junction to the picturesque towns of Ouray and Telluride. Rent a SUP or canoe to explore the reservoir but beware, you may be too distracted by the stunning views of the San Juans' jagged peaks to do much paddling.

Below the dam, along the Uncompahgre River, you'll find excellent fishing with larger than normal trout because of the warm water from the dam's generator.

Get more information about Colorado's state parks at CPW.state.co.us.

PHOTOS: Steamboat Lake State Park, Cheyenne Mountain State Park, Rifle Falls State Park, Ridgway State Park (Courtesy of Colorado Parks & Wildlife)

Jackson Lake State Park

Light Show, Colorado Style



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cpw.state.co.us or 1-800-244-5613