

Tips for Colorado Visitors

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(Revised 7/21)

Things to Do

In Denver—

- Denver Zoo.
 - Adults: \$20, Children (3-11): \$14.
- Downtown Aquarium.
 - Adults: \$21, Children (3-11): \$15.
- Denver Art Museum.
 - Adults: \$13, Children (18 & under): Free.
- Denver Museum of Nature & Science.
 - Adults: \$20, Children (3-18): \$15.
- Denver Botanic Gardens (York Street).
 - Adults: \$15, Children (3-15): \$11.
- Wings over the Rockies Air and Space Museum.
 - Adults: \$17, Children (4-16): \$10.
- Denver Mint.
 - Free. Tickets are for same-day tours only. Tickets distributed at 7am on a first come, first served basis and are limited to five per person.
- 16th Street Mall.
 - Touristy; lots of shops and food. Visit during daylight hours only
- REI Flagship Store.
- Bike Rentals (Cherry Creek Trail and/or South Platte Trail).
- Hammond's Candies Factory Tour.
 - Free. Reservations required.
- Colorado Rockies (MLB), Denver Nuggets (NBA), Colorado Avalanche (NHL), Denver Broncos (NFL), Colorado Rapids (MLS).

Beyond Denver—

- Garden of the Gods (Colorado Springs).
 - Free. Easy hiking trails, including some that are paved and handicap accessible.
 - Good place for horseback riding.
- Pikes Peak Highway (Colorado Springs).
 - You can drive to Pikes Peak's summit, which has a gift shop with food. Adult: \$15, Children (6-15): \$5, Carload (up to 5 people): \$50. The average trip takes 2-3 hours.
- Pikes Peak Cog Railway (Colorado Springs).
 - This train takes you to Pikes Peak's summit. It recently reopened (Summer 2021) so it's very popular; be sure to book your tickets well in advance. Adult: \$58+, Children (3-12): \$48+.
- United States Olympic Training Center (Colorado Springs).
 - Adults: \$15, Children (5-12): \$11.
- United States Olympic & Paralympic Museum (Colorado Springs).
 - Opened in July 2020. Adults: \$25, Children (3-12): \$15.
- Red Rocks Park and Amphitheater (Morrison).
 - Free admission when the venue is not hosting events. Easy hiking and great views. Horseback riding is available seasonally in nearby Bear Creek Lake Park. Be sure watch the events calendar for movie nights during the summer months—cheap and fun!
- Mines Museum of Earth Science (Golden).
 - Free. Sounds boring but is surprisingly interesting. Museum includes a moon rock from Apollo 17.

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Things to Do (cont'd)

- Mt. Evans Road (near Idaho Springs).
 - Colorado has two 14,000' peaks with paved roads to the summit—Pikes Peak and Mt. Evans. In my opinion, the drive up Mt. Evans Road is better than Pikes Peak Highway. Evans is closer to Denver and cheaper—\$17 per vehicle. If you have a National Parks Pass, it is only \$2. Reservations are required; book on www.recreation.gov. Pause at Summit Lake for the views; look for mountain goats.
- Chautauqua Park (Boulder).
 - Free. Excellent selection of hiking trails of varying difficulty.
- Pearl Street (Boulder).
 - Lots of interesting shops and people-watching.
- Celestial Seasonings Factory Tour (Boulder).
 - Free. No reservation required. Includes unlimited samples of teas. *Temporarily closed.*
- Oxotic Supercar Driving Experience (Golden).
 - You can rent a Lamborghini, McLaren, Ferrari, Porsche, Mercedes AMG, Aston Martin, etc. and drive it up a canyon. I've done this a couple of times, and it is worth every penny.

Outdoor Activities

- Whitewater rafting.
 - Check out Echo Canyon River Expeditions, which has good trips for all experience levels. Echo Canyon has operations throughout the state. The Royal Gorge trip is excellent (\$95 for a half day, \$159 for a full day). In Steamboat Springs, call Bucking Rainbow Outfitters (\$50-55 for an easy, half day on the Yampa River).
- Fishing.
 - Check out Blue Quill Angler in Evergreen for guided trips or introductory lessons.
- Snowmobiling.
 - Check out Good Times Adventures in Breckenridge (\$125/two hours, \$65/passenger).
- Dog sledding.
 - Check out Snow Buddy Dog Sled Tours, which operates near Steamboat Springs (Adults: \$190, Children: \$120).
- Jeep rentals.
 - Check out Ouray Mountain Adventures (\$190-215/day).
 - Jeeps are also available from rental car companies at the Denver Airport.
- Jet ski and boat rentals.
 - Cherry Creek State Park or Chatfield State Park.
- Canoeing, kayaking, and SUP.
 - Check out Evergreen Lake, which is about 45 minutes from Denver. It offers rentals, including canoes, kayaks, and standup paddle boards.
- Federal lands.
 - Rocky Mountain National Park (reservation required).
 - Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.
 - Great Sand Dunes National Park.
 - Mesa Verde National Park.
 - Colorado National Monument.
 - Dinosaur National Monument.
 - Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.
 - This is an easy drive near Denver and a good place to see bison.

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Outdoor Activities (cont'd)

- State parks.
 - Near Denver, check out Golden Gate Canyon State Park and Staunton State Park. There are moose in both parks, though the moose tend to be rather elusive. Both parks have campsites that can be reserved online (reserveamerica.com). Be sure to have a plan for storing your food if you camp; you'll be in bear country. Also note that there's minimal (if any) cell service in the parks.
 - The state parks in Colorado are amazing and see far fewer tourists than the national parks. Consider exploring some of the state parks in lieu of RMNP, especially during the summer.

Hiking & Backpacking

Near Denver—

- Mt. Falcon Park.
 - Free. Busy on weekends, but a great spot on weekdays. There are two parking lots—one on the west (higher) side of the park and one on the east (lower) side of the park. If you want easier hiking, park in the west lot.
- South Valley Park.
 - Free. Very easy trails, good for dogs and families.
- Deer Creek Canyon Park.
 - Free. Gets muddy easily, so visit only during dry weather.
- Red Rocks Park.
 - Free. Check to ensure there are no events scheduled before you visit.
- Lair o' the Bear Park.
 - Free. Another good hike for a family. Trail follows Bear Creek and passes a castle.
- North Table Mountain.
 - Free. Good hiking once you get to the top of the mesa. There's not much shade, so consider this hike on a cloudy day. Don't wear headphones; listen for rattlesnakes.
- Devil's Head Fire Lookout.
 - Free. This day hike is definitely a favorite. It is an easy hike and popular with Scout groups and families. There is a staircase at the summit, which leads to terrific 360-degree views of the Front Range. On a clear day, you can easily spot Denver, the airport, and Pikes Peak from the top. Note: rough dirt road to TH.
- Elk Meadow Park.
 - Free. The 10-mile/2300' hike of Bergen Peak is a nice workout and a good trial run before attempting larger hikes (e.g., 14ers). Trail is well-marked and well-made.
- Roxborough State Park.
 - Unique rock formations. Some hikes have a decent amount of elevation gain—check out Carpenter Peak if you want some uphill hiking.
- Golden Gate Canyon State Park.
 - Good for snowshoeing close to Denver during the snowy parts of the years.
- Staunton State Park.
 - Some of the best hiking near Denver – and *just* far enough away to avoid big weekend crowds. Elk Falls is certainly a highlight; Bear Grylls filmed an episode in the area.
- Chief Mountain.
 - This hike is short, doesn't involve too much vertical gain, and you get pass through the timberline to have an unobstructed 360° view from the summit. 3.1 miles roundtrip with ~1000' of gain. I highly recommend this hike.

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Hiking & Backpacking (cont'd)

Beyond Denver—

- Emerald Lake from Bear Lake TH in RMNP (3.6 miles roundtrip).
 - This is one of my favorite hikes in Colorado, but it has the potential to be very crowded. If hiking during summer, arrive early (by 6am on Saturday/Sunday)—otherwise, take the free shuttle. You will see three lakes on the hike: Nymph Lake, Dream Lake, and Emerald Lake. Bear Lake is also very close to the parking lot. This is a great snowshoe trip during the winter.
- The Loch from Glacier Gorge TH in RMNP (5.8 miles roundtrip).
 - Longer than the Emerald Lake hike but usually less crowded. You have the option of continuing up to Sky Pond (which makes this a ~9-mile roundtrip). This is an excellent hike.
- The Manitou Incline.
 - Beginning at the base of Pikes Peak, the Incline is a short trail (0.89 miles) that ascends about 2000'. It is essentially a mile-long, steep staircase. Free reservation required. When you get to the top, use Barr Trail to descend back to the trailhead. The Manitou Incline is a strenuous hike.
- State Forest State Park.
 - Arguably the best area of Colorado for spotting moose. This state park is spectacular and on par with RMNP in terms of scenery.
- Chicago Basin.
 - One of the best backpacking areas in Colorado. Most hikers use the Durango-Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad to access the trail that leads up into the basin.
- Indian Peaks Wilderness.
 - The hike up to Crater Lake, which lies at the base of Lone Eagle Peak, is spectacular. Reserve a permit online if you intend to overnight.

Interesting Local Places to Eat

In Denver—

- Habit Doughnut Dispensary. \$
- Snooze. \$
- Urban Egg. \$
- Denver Biscuit Company. \$
- Park Burger. \$
- Lucile's Creole Cafe. \$
- Steuben's. \$\$
- D Bar. \$\$
- Sushi Den. \$\$\$
- El Five. \$\$\$
- Sunday Brunch at Ellyngton's at the Brown Palace. \$\$\$\$
- Beckon. \$\$\$\$

Beyond Denver—

- The Donut Haus (Estes Park). \$
- Goldmine Cupcakes (Golden). \$
- Backcountry Pizza (Nederland). \$
- GQue BBQ (Lone Tree). \$
- Beau Jo's Pizza (Idaho Springs and Steamboat). \$\$

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Interesting Local Places to Eat (cont'd)

- The Secret Stash (Crested Butte). \$\$
- Brown Dog Pizza (Telluride). \$\$
- Buffalo Rose (Golden). \$\$
- Sierra Restaurant (Lone Tree). \$\$
- Chianti (Greenwood Village). \$\$
- The Bistro at Marshdale (Evergreen). \$\$\$
- The Fort (Morrison). \$\$\$
- Sunday Brunch at the Broadmoor's Lake Terrace Dining Room (Colorado Springs). \$\$\$\$
- Matshuisa (Aspen, Vail, and Cherry Creek). \$\$\$\$

Places to Stay

In the mountains during the **winter**—

- For a good family-friendly ski area, consider Breckenridge or Winter Park.
- For a budget-friendly ski area, consider Loveland Ski Area. It is also one of the closest ski areas to Denver.
- For upscale ski areas, consider Vail, Aspen, or Telluride.
- If you want to avoid skiers, crowds, and I-70 traffic during the winter, consider spending time in Estes Park. Estes is on the eastern edge of Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP), which is a great place to visit during the winter. You can rent snowshoes cheaply in Estes Park for hiking around in the snow. Backcountry and cross-country skiing are also popular in RMNP.

In the mountains during the **summer**—

- Consider towns such as Silverthorne, Grand Lake, and Buena Vista.
- Staying in some of the ski areas can be cheap during the summer months, and you can find good deals on cabin rental (VRBO, Airbnb, etc.).
- Avoid Estes Park unless you are willing to battle crowds and congested streets. RMNP becomes very busy on weekends during the summer. If you want to visit RMNP during the summer, I suggest driving Trail Ridge Road, which is generally open from Memorial Day through early October.
- To escape the crush of tourists on the Front Range, consider visiting the southwestern part of Colorado. Montrose and Durango are relatively large cities with plenty of amenities (Montrose even has a Target!). My favorite part of Colorado is the triangle formed by Telluride, Ouray, and Silverton. All three of those towns are awesome. Telluride hosts several big festivals, so be careful when booking a trip there. Check out the Durango-Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad—it's bucket list-worthy!

In Denver—

- If you are looking to do a lot of stuff downtown, then staying downtown probably makes the most sense. Alternatively, if you are trying to save some money, you could also find a hotel that is near an RTD Light Rail stop. The RTD is a great way to get around Denver. There is also an RTD train that goes out to the Denver Airport (the A-Line). You can use the RTD mobile app for purchasing tickets ahead of time.
- If you want to stay in Metro Denver while still having the easiest access to skiing and hiking, staying on the west side of town is smart. Golden and Morrison are in/near the foothills.
- If you are visiting for a concert at Red Rocks, consider staying in Morrison or—more affordably—Lakewood. You can usually find good deals on Airbnb.