

Northwest Colorado

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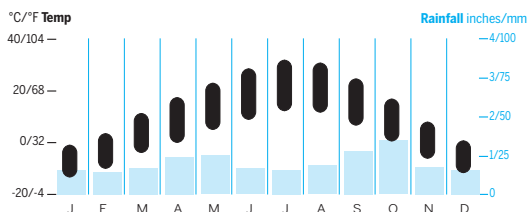
Why Go?

Wild, wind-blown, picturesque solitude, and evidence of the distant past – dinosaur tracks, petroglyphs and ancient geological scars – await visitors down long and lonely stretches of road.

Leaving the I-70 corridor and heading north, you enter a corner of Colorado littered with clues to the region's ancient, mysterious past. Dinosaur National Monument straddles the rugged border with Utah. It's a long haul to get here but well worth it for history and archaeology; it's not only home to the most impressive dinosaur site in the state, but hiking trails allow you to walk in the footsteps of the region's ancients – literally. Within a few dusty square miles, a Camarasaurus skull grins mischievously, frozen in the rock of the Douglass Quarry and the figures of 'Big Foot' and 'Three Kings,' scratched into the rock by ancient Pueblo ancestors, beckon us with inscrutable messages from the past.

When to Go?

Dinosaur



May–August
Canyon camping and mountain biking plus wineries, fruit stands and rodeos.

September & October
Cottonwoods turn gold, tourists roll through and temperatures drop.

November–April
Winter is a blustery affair, but there's plenty of action down the slopes.

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS

POP 10,115 / ELEV 6695FT

Forget about the posturing snow bunnies in Aspen and Vail. 'Steamboat,' as it's frequently truncated, is Colorado's down-to-earth ski town, a place where hitting the slopes isn't an attitude-packed dog-and-pony show.

The town itself, situated in the shadow of Mt Werner, might be less of a rancher's hub than a resort destination, but locals still regard flashy developments and instant-rise condos with disdain – before tipping their hat, hopping into their pick-up and rumbling away. Despite the sprawling Steamboat Village, built to service skiers, the core of the town retains some of its original low-rise charm and the natural setting is lovely. Summer is almost as popular as winter, with hiking, backpacking, white-water rafting, mountain biking and a host of other outdoor activities.

Steamboat Springs consists of two major areas: the relatively regular grid of central Old Town which straddles US 40, and the newer warren of winding streets at Steamboat Village, centered around the Mt Werner ski area southeast of town. Only the former of these is worth wandering around by foot. US 40 is known as Lincoln Ave through Old Town.

Sights

Tread of Pioneers Museum

MUSEUM

(☎970-879-2214; 800 Oak St; adult/child/senior \$5/1/4; ☀11am-5pm Tue-Thu; 🚶) A favorite among the area's community history museums, these restored Victorian homes host an even-handed display about the history of the Native Americans in the area and a fascinating collection on the evolution of skiing. Visitors can also take guided tours and there are regular kids activities.



Activities

Mineral Springs

Most of Steamboat's numerous springs are warm rather than hot, and some have been damaged by highway construction. Probably the nicest spring is 3 miles from Old Town at Strawberry Park. It's open until midnight and you can actually bathe in it. Most of the other spas are in the area around 13th St on both sides of the river; look for the map and brochure *A Walking Tour of the Springs of Steamboat* for more information.

Mountain Biking

The *Steamboat Trails Map* shows mountain-bike routes around town, in Stagecoach (p231) and Pearl Lake State Parks (p232) and in the Mt Zirkel Wilderness. It's available at the visitors information center. Steamboat Mountain Resort promotes biking on Mt Werner, allows bikes on the Silver Bullet Gondola and rents them at the Thunderhead lift.

Orange Peel Bikes

BIKE RENTAL

(☎970-879-2957; www.orangepeelbikes.com; 1136 Yampa St; bike rentals per day \$30; ☀10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat; 🚲) In a funky old building at the end of Yampa, this is perfectly situated for renting a bike to ride the trails criss-crossing Howelsen Hill. A staff of serious riders and mechanics can offer tons of information about local trails. Coolest bike shop in town, hands down.

Snow Sports

The stats of the Steamboat Ski Area speak volumes to the town's claim as 'Ski Town, USA' – 165 trails, 3668ft vertical and nearly 3000 acres. There are runs at every level, a snowshoe area in the middle and race areas near the base. The area is particularly renowned for tree skiing, and the removal of saplings and fallen trees from the glades allows high-level intermediate skiers to weave through trees without the typical hazards of tree skiing. Serious skiers will also dig a number of mogul runs on the hill, and although these runs are a virtual factory of Olympic skiers and snowboarders, you don't have to be world-class to enjoy them. Compared with its foils in the Central Mountains, the sunny north-facing slopes are generally less aggressive. Wide, well-groomed runs are ideal cruising for intermediate skiers who might be a little rusty, making this hill among Colorado's best all-rounders.

The other hill in town, the Howelsen Hill Ski Area (p226), is among the country's oldest ski areas in continuous use and on the Colorado State Register of Historic Places. It's a relatively modest hill – only 14 runs and four lifts – even if there's some winter appeal for snowboarders and ski history buffs. There's an indoor ice-skating facility too, the Howelsen Ice Arena (p228), which operates from October until April.

Steamboat Mountain Resort

SNOW SPORTS

(Steamboat Mountain Resort; ☎ticket office 970-871-5252; www.steamboat.com; lift ticket adult/child \$94/59; ☀ticket office 8am-5pm) Known