



# Southeast Colorado & the San Luis Valley

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## Best Places to Eat

- Marigold (p309)
- Adam's Mountain Cafe (p309)
- San Luis Valley Brewing Co (p329)
- Calville's (p329)
- Jim & Michelle's Farm Table (p338)

## Best Places to Stay

- Broadmoor (p309)
- Cliff House at Pikes Peak (p308)
- Zapata Falls Campground (p326)
- Elk Creek Campground (p331)
- Tarabino Inn (p321)

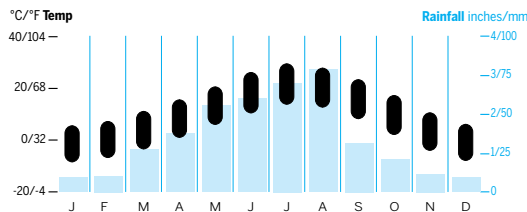
## Why Go?

Colorado's arid southeast is a place of high desert landscapes backed by craggy peaks and flat-topped mesas, where silvery sage and scraggly juniper trees begin to replace the aspen and pine forests of the central mountains. Dotted with signature landmarks – Pikes Peak, the Great Sand Dunes, the Royal Gorge – southern Colorado interweaves dramatic vistas with hardscrabble history to great effect.

In this stripped-down setting, the bones of the earth are particularly evident: fossilized dinosaur footprints, massive petrified sequoias and the volcanic vestiges of the Spanish Peaks serve as a stark reminder of a geological timescale in which human life is no more than the blink of an eye. But a fascinating human element lingers here, too: come discover a time when the Southwest belonged to Mexico and played host to the Santa Fe Trail, which brought together the intersecting lives of Native Americans, Mexican pioneers, French trappers, Pikes Peak-or-bust miners and the covered wagon trains of hope-filled American homesteaders.

## When to Go

### Colorado Springs



**May–Jun** Explore the Sand Dunes before the heat of summer.

**Jun–Aug** Climb 14ers, bike the back roads and enjoy summer music festivals.

**Sep–Oct** Golden aspens light up Pikes Peak and the Sangres.

## Southeast Colorado & the San Luis Valley Highlights

1 Marvel at the sight of North America's highest dunes at **Great Sand Dunes National Park** (p324).

2 Ascend **Pikes Peak** (p304) or gaze at its lofty heights from the magical **Garden of the Gods** (p306).

3 Drive the twists and turns of **Phantom Canyon** (p313) on the way to Cripple Creek.

4 Follow a herd of bighorn sheep through the Sangre de Cristo mountains on the **Comanche-Venable Loop Trail** (p335).

5 Hike past the ancient volcanic walls erupting from the earth on the **Spanish Peaks Wilderness** (p318).

6 Ride the wild Arkansas River through the precipitous **Royal Gorge** (p314).

7 Find solitude in the desert landscapes of **Penitente Canyon** (p332).

8 Chug up a high mountain pass on the **Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad** (p334).

9 Relax in the natural hot springs at **Valley View** (p336).

10 Explore old trading posts and dinosaur footprints along the **Santa Fe Trail** (p317).

