

Understand Colorado

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What happened to the swing state? Colorado goes progressive, legalizing marijuana and transforming public transportation.

HISTORY342

From Wild West frontier to outdoor haven and ski central: Colorado has a whole lot of history.

WAY OF LIFE347

'Rugged individualism' may be a cliché, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's inaccurate.

THE ARTS350

Art doesn't figure in many people's concept of Colorado – let's see if we can change that.

COLORADO CUISINE.....353

Steak and Rocky Mountain oysters? Sure. But there's plenty more on the menu.

WILDLIFE & THE LAND 357

If you're coming here, you're probably heading outdoors. Here's a taste of what's waiting for you.

Colorado Today

From double-diamond runs to stiff espressos, Colorado is about vigor. Universities and high-tech show the state's industrious side, though even workaholics might call in sick when snow starts falling. It's no wonder that the sunny state attracts so many East Coast-ers and Californians. Latinos also have answered the call to shore up a huge hospitality industry. And while much of the state is considered conservative, there is common ground in everyone's mad love for the outdoors and an inspiring and friendly can-do ethos.

Best in Print

On the Road (Jack Kerouac) The Denver doldrums and the origins of road-tripper culture.

House of Rain (Craig Childs) Tracks the Anasazi in the Southwest.

Plainsong (Kent Haruf) Examines a Colorado farming community.

Best on Film

Butch Cassidy & the Sundance Kid (1969) The seminal cliff-jumping scene was shot on the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad.

True Grit (1969) Set in Arkansas but filmed in the San Juan Mountains.

The Shining (1980) Inspired by the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park.

Dear Eleanor (2014) Leonardo DiCaprio produced this Sundance flick, which was filmed on the Front Range.

Etiquette

Do dress like a Tour de France competitor on casual training rides about town.

Don't try to keep up with active locals. They're already acclimatised.

Do drink lots of water, or the high altitude and the high-gravity beers will do you in.

Don't compare anything to California. Sore spot.

The Grass Is Greener

Colorado voted to legalize the recreational use of marijuana in November 2012, and became the first jurisdiction in the world (alongside Washington state) to do so. Attitudes toward ganja had been lightening up around the country for some time, but this trailblazing act failed to take into account one detail: marijuana is still illegal on a national level.

But the times they are a changin', and US attorney general Eric Holder recently decided not to block the law. This approach may be the wave of the future, though it isn't as hands off as it appears. The feds seem to be betting that taxing and tightly regulating legal pot growing will be more efficient in the long run than chasing and prosecuting growers and small-time dealers. It's also argued that creating a legal system will help keep it out of the hands of kids.

That's not to say that a future conservative administration would be so lenient. But the coming years will prove an interesting social experiment, so many years after John Denver's homage to the Rocky Mountain high.

The Young & the Restless

Once a mining, ranching and farming stronghold, today's Colorado is a young state getting younger, with 24% of the 5.2 million residents under the age of 18.

Most live in and around Denver. Development in Denver suburbs on what was farmland fueled real estate and technology booms. Some of those jobs were lost in tech busts in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but the area weathered the storm. Growth not only sparked suburban sprawl but also urban gentrification.

Denver's once blighted LoDo neighborhood is a poster child for urban revitalization, with hip residential lofts and dozens of bars and restaurants. Young college