

Southwestern Colorado

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Why Go?

The West at its most rugged, this is a landscape of twisting canyons and ancient ruins, with burly peaks and gusty high desert plateaus. Centuries of boom, bust and boom – from silver to real estate and resorts – tell part of the story. There’s also the lingering mystery of its earliest inhabitants, whose relics have been found at the abandoned cliff dwellings in Mesa Verde National Park.

Southwestern Colorado can be a heady place to play. Some of the finest powder skiing in the world melts to reveal winding singletrack and hiking trails in summer. A sense of remove keeps the Old West alive in wooden plank saloons and aboard the chugging Durango railroad.

With all that fresh mountain air, local attitudes – from the ranch hand to the real estate agent – are undoubtedly relaxed. Dally a bit under these ultra-blue skies and you’ll know why.

Best Places to Stay

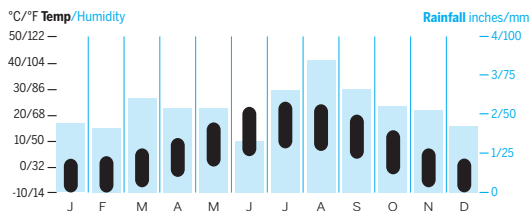
- » Willowtail Springs (p364)
- » Kelly Place (p371)
- » Wiesbaden (p379)
- » Jersey Jim Lookout Tower (p364)
- » Ruby of Crested Butte (p384)

Best Places to Eat

- » Kennebec Café (p362)
- » New Sheridan Chop House (p375)
- » Secret Stash (p385)
- » East by Southwest (p362)
- » Absolute Baking & Cafe (p364)

When to Go

Silverton



Jun–Aug

Prime time for cycling and hiking the legendary San Juans.

Sep–Nov

Cool days in the high desert and fewer crowds in Mesa Verde.

Dec–Apr

Powder hounds hit the famed slopes of Telluride.

Southwestern Colorado Planning

Summer at high altitude can be chilly – bring warm clothing and sturdy boots. At lower altitudes, the drier desert climate means mild shoulder seasons ideal for camping and mountain biking, while mountain towns like Ouray and Telluride are still buried in snow. In late summer, afternoon mountain thunderstorms are typical, so keep your outings early. Be sure to use caution anywhere above the tree line, and always have plenty of water on hand, since the high-and-dry climate makes it very easy to get dehydrated.

DON'T MISS

In **Mesa Verde National Park**, ranger-led backcountry hikes offer an exclusive peek at America's most mystifying spot. If you're looking to set hearts racing, **San Juan** four-wheeling offers off-path adrenaline with steep cliff drops, hairpin turns and rugged Rockies views.

Powder hounds can grab great late-season deals in the ski town Shangri-la of **Crested Butte**, and foodies can nosh their way through the locavore towns of **Durango**, **Mancos** and **Telluride**.

Tips for Drivers

- » US 160, from Durango to Cortez and past Mesa Verde National Park, is the main east–west vein through the region.
- » Further north, the fast and convenient US 50 also crosses the state from east to west, linking Montrose with Pueblo, on the north–south I-25 route, a major thoroughfare.
- » In winter conditions, chains or snow tires are required on mountain passes.
- » For road conditions, call ☎303-639-1111 (recorded message) or visit www.cotrip.org.

TIME ZONE

Colorado runs on Mountain Time (seven hours behind GMT) and observes daylight saving time.

Fast Facts

- » Colorado population: 5 million
- » Area: 104,247 sq miles
- » Sales tax: 2.9% state sales tax, plus individual city taxes up to 6%
- » Durango to Mesa Verde National Park: 66 miles, one hour
- » Telluride to Ouray: 50 miles, one hour
- » Durango to Denver: 340 miles, five hours
- » Pagosa Springs to Santa Fe: 155 miles, two hours

Powered Up

Thanks to Nikola Tesla, Telluride was the first American city to boast electricity – a key development for the mining that continues today, with the town nesting on the country's biggest uranium belt.

Resources

- » Colorado Tourism (☎800-265-6723; www.colorado.com)
- » Edible (www.ediblecommunities.com/sanjuanmountains) Local food and farmers markets.
- » 14ers (www.14ers.com) Resource for hikers climbing the Rockies' highest summits.