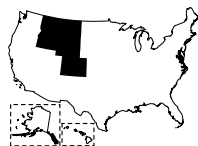


Rocky Mountains



One hundred years ago a vacation in the Rocky Mountains was the doctor's first-choice tonic for curing everything from tuberculosis to fatigue and mental illness. Perhaps today's practitioners should take a lesson from their predecessors and start writing prescriptions to 'Go West' for dealing with stress.

The states in this region are such amazing natural healers it only takes a few blissful days road-tripping around them before your worries are lost in a babbling brook; your stress swept away in a cloudless blue sky. For how can one stay depressed in a place where the sun is always shining? Where the snowcapped peaks, wildflower meadows and misty ponderosa forests are so beautiful, they inspire artists to paint masterpieces and songwriters to pen classic tunes?

Everything about the Rockies – from the bears to the beers to the fried bull's testicles – feels big, larger than life. Nature-lovers will dig big national parks like Yellowstone, Grand Teton, Rocky Mountain and Glacier, where America's 'Big Five' (grizzly, moose, buffalo, mountain lion and wolf) still roam. Adrenaline junkies get their fix off a supersized big-thrill menu – heli-skiing steep powder chutes in Telluride's backcountry, paddling the Middle Fork's wild rapids, spending a week camping under the stars 100 miles from anywhere.

Wherever you go, you're in for a hell of a good trip. Climb a mountain, ski a glacier, get buzzed on local brews and savor your first chewy bite of seasoned bull balls. It doesn't take long; you'll slip right into that sweet, pine-scented nirvana they call the Rocky Mountain high.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Scouting for geysers and grizzlies in **Yellowstone National Park** (p793), one of America's greatest natural treasures
- Shredding powder with rock stars in **Sun Valley** (p812), the Rocky Mountains' least pretentious wealthy winter playground
- Rafting wild white water and camping under the stars on a week-long **Middle Fork of the Salmon** (p815) rafting adventure
- Slurping down happy-hour margaritas at a sidewalk café in neo-hippie, utopian **Boulder** (p770), a college town where growing up doesn't seem mandatory
- Discovering **Silverton** (p786), a true Wild West town with unpaved streets and stupendous 4WDing
- Hiking past frozen blue lakes and snowfields in **Glacier National Park** (p808) while you still can – at the moment the park's glaciers are losing the global warming battle



HOT TOPIC: DENVER'S MOMENT IN HISTORY

Serving as the stage for the history-making 2008 Democratic National Convention, Denver is proud of the role she played in electing America's first African American president. On a surprisingly sweltering August 28, 2008, at the city's famous INVECO Field at Mile High football stadium, history was made when Barack Obama became the first African American to accept his party's nomination to run for President. He accepted the nomination in front of a cheering, celebrity-heavy crowd of 70,000+ after a day of star-studded build up. Coincidentally, the event took place exactly 45 years after Martin Luther King Jr made his own history belting out 'I Have a Dream' on the National Mall in Washington, DC; even though the convention was planned long before an African American man had swept the Democratic primaries.

HISTORY

Before the late 18th century when French trappers and Spaniards stepped in, the Rocky Mountain area was a land of many tribes, including the Nez Percé, the Shoshone, the Crow, the Lakota and the Ute.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark claimed their enduring fame after the USA bought almost all of present-day Montana, Wyoming and eastern Colorado in the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. The two explorers set out to survey the land, covering 8000 miles in three years. Their success urged on other adventurers, and soon the migration was in motion. Wagon trains voyaged to the mountainous lands right into the 20th century, only temporarily slowed by the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad across southern Wyoming in the late 1860s.

To accommodate settlers, the USA purged the western frontier of the Spanish, British and, in a truly shameful era, most of the Native American population. The government signed endless treaties to defuse Native American objections to increasing settlement, but always reneged and shunted tribes onto smaller reservations. Gold-miners' incursions into Native American territory in Montana and the building of US Army forts along the Bozeman Trail ignited a series of wars with the Lakota, Cheyenne, Arapaho and others.

Gold and silver mania preceded Colorado's entry to statehood in 1876. Statehood soon followed for Montana (1889), Wyoming (1890) and Idaho (1890). Along with miners, white farmers and ranchers were the people with power in the late 19th century.

Mining, grazing and timber played major roles in the area's economic development, sparking the growth of cities and towns to provide financial and industrial support. They also subjected the region to boom-and-bust

cycles by unsustainable use of resources and left a legacy of environmental disruption.

After the economy boomed post-WWII, the national parks started attracting vacationers. Tourism is now a leading industry in all four states, with the military placing a close second – there is a major presence in Colorado especially.

LOCAL CULTURE

The Rocky Mountain states are the kind of places where red-blooded, pistol-toting libertarians can sit down and have a few pints with stoned-out trustafarians, and no one gets hurt. The clientele in Montana and Wyoming's Wild West saloons is a mix of leathery old cowboys and New Agers – heavy on the crystal pendants and karmic evolutionary talks. Coloradans are split on whether they vote red or blue, but nearly all believe the government shouldn't tell them what to do. Residents proved this in 2000, when voters legalized marijuana to treat certain chronic medical conditions, and did so not just with a law, but with a constitutional amendment. In 2009 Colorado remained the only state in the nation to have a marijuana law written directly into its constitution.

In trendy après-ski boozing holes you'll still find plenty of rich kids decked out in Burton's latest snow gear, toting Chanel and Vuitton on their gym-toned shoulders, sipping microbrews and swapping ski stories, but even the wealthiest Rocky Mountain towns, like Aspen, Vail, Jackson and Ketchum took a big hit when the financial system collapsed at the end of 2008. Only Boulder seems to have escaped the economic crisis unscathed. While boarded-up buildings and 'for sale' signs are prominent realities in nearly every other Rocky Mountain town these days, in Boulder the bubble has yet to burst. Restaurants remain packed on