

# The Best of Denver, Boulder & Colorado Springs

The old and the new, the rustic and the sophisticated, the urban and the rural—you'll find all these elements practically side by side in and immediately adjacent to the cities of Denver, Boulder, and Colorado Springs.

Founded in the mid-19th century by both East Coast gold-seekers and European and Asian immigrants in search of a better life, these cities on the Front Range of the majestic Rocky Mountains weren't as wild as Colorado's mountain towns (such as Telluride and Creede), but they did have their day. According to historian Thomas Noel, in 1890 Denver had more saloons per capita than Kansas City, St. Louis, New Orleans, or Philadelphia. But these Colorado cities soon became home to a more sophisticated westerner—the mine owner instead of the prospector, the business owner rather than the gambler.

Today, these thoroughly modern cities have virtually all the amenities you'd expect to find in New York or Los Angeles: opera, theater, contemporary dance, art, excellent restaurants, and sophisticated hotels and convention centers. You'll also find historic Victorian mansions, working steam trains, and old gold mines. You can go horseback riding, hiking, skiing, or shopping; do the Texas two-step to a live country band; or spend hours browsing through a huge four-story bookstore, a gigantic model-train shop, or the world's largest hardware store. You might also join the locals at what many of them enjoy most: being outdoors under the warm Colorado sun—so don't forget your hiking boots, mountain bike, skis, sunscreen, and sunglasses.

Although Denver is certainly a city, bustling and growing, it's still comfortable and fairly easy to explore. Boulder and Colorado Springs call themselves cities, but I like to think of them more as big Western towns, where the buildings aren't very tall and there's lots of open space. In all three places, the residents are friendly, relaxed, and casual.

In this book, I thoroughly explore Denver, Boulder, and Colorado Springs. But I also look at some of the nearby attractions where the locals spend their weekends, including the state's most-visited natural wonder, Rocky Mountain National Park.

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## 1 FROMMER'S FAVORITE DENVER, BOULDER & COLORADO SPRINGS EXPERIENCES

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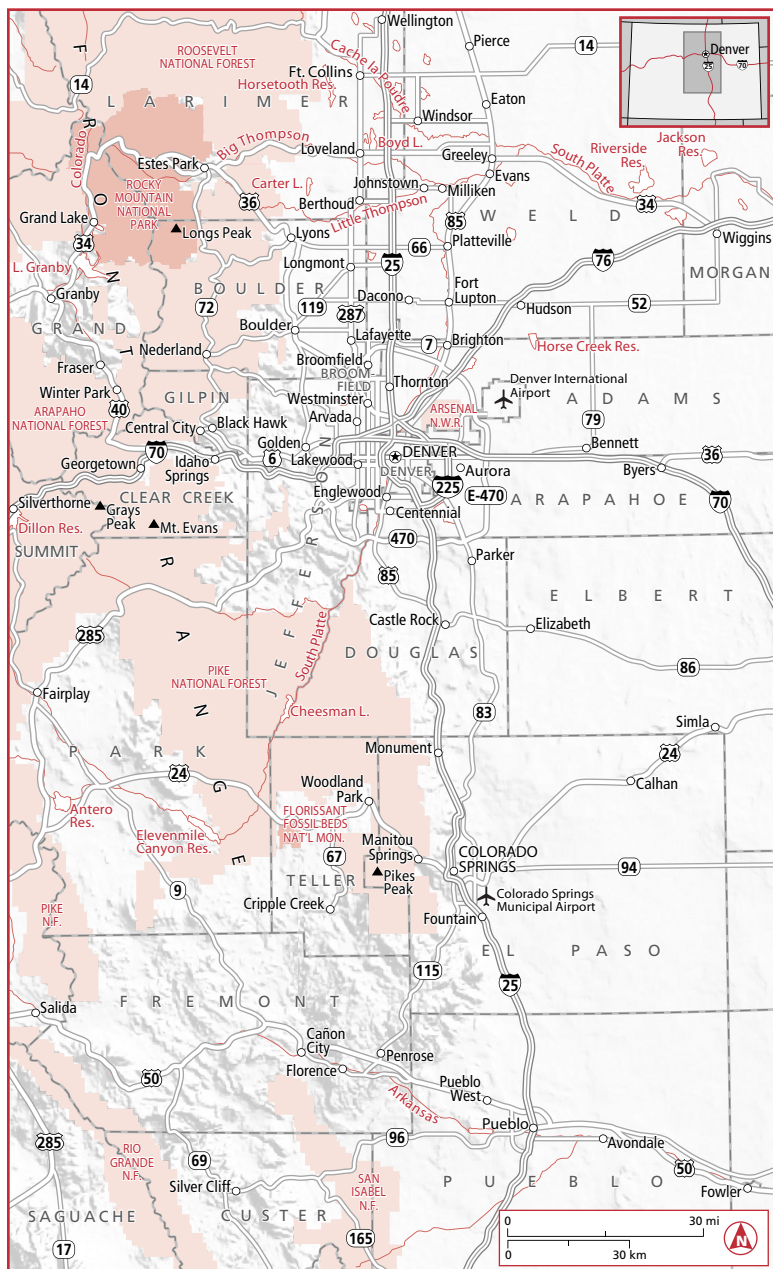
- **Hitting Lower Downtown and Larimer Square (Denver):** Once neglected and even a bit dangerous, Lower Downtown (LoDo) and Larimer Square are now well-preserved historic gems, heavy with redbricks and activity of all kinds. LoDo is where you'll find Coors Field (home of baseball's Colorado Rockies), plus galleries, nightspots, restaurants, and Mayor John Hickenlooper's

long-standing microbrewery, the Wynkoop Brewing Company, right across from Union Station. Larimer Square is abuzz with commercial activity and has more good restaurants than any other block in Denver. See p. 84.

- **Visiting the Denver Art Museum (Denver):** With a striking new expansion doubling its size, the Denver Art Museum now has one of the country's top collections of Western art, ranging from 19th century to contemporary, as well as an excellent American Indian collection. The expansion features a jagged, avant-garde design by renowned architect Daniel Libeskind. See p. 79.
- **Shopping for Duds at Rockmount Ranch Wear (Denver):** The inventors of the Western snap shirt have gone into the retail business after sticking strictly to manufacturing and wholesale since 1946. Their downtown store is a three-generation family operation, and browsing the racks is something of an education on the history of Western wear. Rock stars regularly stop by while in Denver; Bob Dylan wears Rockmount's dusters onstage. See p. 104.
- **People-Watching on Pearl Street Mall (Boulder):** This 4-block-long tree-lined pedestrian mall marks Boulder's downtown core and its center for dining, shopping, strolling, and loafing in the sun. It's also the best spot in Colorado for observing your fellow humans. Here you'll see students, local businesspeople, and tourists as they watch the musicians, mimes, jugglers, and other street entertainers who hold court on the landscaped mall day and night, year-round. See p. 139.
- **Touring Celestial Seasonings (Boulder):** The nation's leading producer of herbal teas offers a tour that excites the senses as it takes you behind the scenes into the world of tea. The company, which began in a Boulder garage in the 1970s, now produces more than 50

varieties of tea from more than 75 different herbs and spices, imported from 35 countries. Guided tours move from a consumer taste test in the lobby to marketing displays, and finally into the production plant, where the overpowering "Mint Room" is a highlight. See p. 142.

- **Watching the Colorado Shakespeare Festival (Boulder):** Among the top Shakespearean festivals in the United States, this 2-month event offers more than a dozen performances of each of four of the Bard's plays each summer. Actors, directors, designers, and everyone associated with the productions are fully schooled Shakespearean professionals. During the festival, company members conduct 1-hour backstage tours before each show. See p. 154.
- **Hiking the Mills Lake Trail (Rocky Mountain National Park):** Although it's packed at first, this moderately rated trail usually becomes much less crowded after you've logged a few miles. At trail's end (elevation 10,000 ft.), towering peaks surround a gorgeous mountain lake. The lake is an excellent spot for photographing dramatic Longs Peak, especially in late afternoon or early evening, and it's the perfect place for a picnic. See chapter 7.
- **Taking in Garden of the Gods (Colorado Springs):** There's nothing like sunrise at Garden of the Gods, with its fantastic and sometimes fanciful red-sandstone formations sculpted by wind and water over hundreds of thousands of years. Although you can see a great deal from the marked view points, it's worth spending some time and energy to get away from the crowds on one of the park's many trails, to listen to the wind, and to imagine the gods cavorting among the formations. See p. 191.
- **Riding Pikes Peak Cog Railway (Colorado Springs):** Perhaps no view in Colorado equals the 360-degree



panorama from the summit of Pikes Peak. For those who enjoy rail travel, spectacular scenery, and the thrill of mountain climbing without all the work, this is the trip to take. The 9-mile route, with grades of up to 25%, takes

75 minutes to reach the top of 14,110-foot Pikes Peak. The journey is exciting from the start, but passengers really begin to ooh and aah when the track leaves the forest, creeping above timberline at about 11,500 feet. See p. 191.

## 2 BEST HOTEL BETS

- **Best Historic Hotels:** From its spacious, well-appointed lobby to the richly polished wood of its elegant Victorian and almost whimsical Art Deco rooms, the **Brown Palace Hotel**, 321 17th St., Denver (☎ 800/321-2599 or 303/297-3111), has an air of sophistication, refinement, and class. The Brown has operated continuously since August 1892. See p. 59.

A handsome downtown establishment, the **Hotel Boulderado**, 2115 13th St., Boulder (☎ 800/433-4344 or 303/442-4344), has been skillfully renovated and restored. It retains its original Otis elevator, lovely leaded-glass ceiling, and spectacular cherrywood staircase, which caused quite a stir when the hotel opened in 1909. See p. 130.

Designed by New York City architects in the Italian Renaissance style, **The Broadmoor**, Lake Circle, at Lake Avenue, Colorado Springs (☎ 800/634-7711 or 719/634-7711), opened in 1918. Colorado's most elegant and best-preserved hotel of the era, it's filled with objets d'art from around the world, including Oriental art from the Ming and Tsin dynasties and a huge carved wooden bar from an 1800s British pub. See p. 177.

- **Best for Business Travelers:** Rooms at **Hyatt Regency Denver**, 650 15th St., Denver (☎ 800/233-1234 or 303/436-1234), are the biggest in downtown Denver and feature ergonomic workstations; the location, next to the Colorado

Convention Center, is convenient to the light rail. See p. 62.

- **Best for a Romantic Getaway:** Ideal for overnighting theatergoers—it's across the street from the Denver Center for the Performing Arts—the **Hotel Teatro**, 1100 14th St., Denver (☎ 303/228-1100), is furnished with plenty of goods from the costume and props departments, and the luxurious feel helps make it the most romantic of all of the downtown properties. See p. 62.

**The Two Sisters Inn**, 10 Otoe Place, Manitou Springs, outside Colorado Springs (☎ 800/2SISINN or 719/685-9684), offers a cozy honeymoon cottage complete with fresh flowers, a big feather bed, a gas log fireplace, and lots of privacy. What more could you ask for? See p. 182.

- **Best Hotel Lobbies for Pretending You're Rich:** The lobby of the **Brown Palace Hotel** (Denver; see address and telephone above) features walls of Mexican onyx and a floor of white marble. The elaborate cast-iron grillwork surrounding the six tiers of balconies draws your eye to the stained-glass ceiling. Luncheon and afternoon tea are served in the lobby nearly every day.

When it opened in 1918, the first guests at **The Broadmoor** (Colorado Springs; see address and telephone above) were millionaire John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and his party. When surrounded by priceless 17th-century art, it's easy to imagine yourself mingling with the wealthy, reading the financial

news, and sipping a cognac by the hotel's elegant marble staircase.

- **Best Moderately Priced Hotels:** The colorful **Boulder Outlook**, 800 28th St. (☎ 800/542-0304 or 303/443-3322), is fun, fresh, and definitively Boulder, with such unique perks as two bouldering rocks (one is 11 ft. high, the other 4 ft.) and a fenced, 4,000-square-foot dog run. Best of all, the rates are typically cheaper than those of its chain counterparts. See p. 131.

Also in Boulder, the **Colorado Chautauqua**, 900 Baseline Rd. (☎ 303/442-3282), isn't exactly a hotel, but its lodge rooms and cottages are midpriced, and it's a National Historic Landmark to boot. See p. 132.

- **Best Inexpensive Lodging:** An apartment-turned-hostel near City Park, the **Innkeeper of the Rockies**, 1717 Race St., Denver (☎ 303/861-7777), offers inexpensive bunks and private rooms a mile east of downtown. See p. 67.

**The Foot of the Mountain Motel**, 200 Arapahoe Ave., at the mouth of Boulder Canyon, Boulder (☎ 866/773-5489 or 303/442-5688), is a nicely preserved relic with cozy rooms and easy access to the outdoors. See p. 132.

Spread across numerous buildings near the University of Colorado campus, Boulder International Hostel, 1107 12th St. (☎ 888/442-0522 or 303/442-0522), is well kept, reputable, and perfect for those traveling on a budget. See p. 132.

- **Best Service:** Dedicated to providing guests with the best possible service, the **Brown Palace Hotel** (Denver; see address and telephone above) succeeds extremely well, and without pretension. Among other things, it offers 24-hour room service, concierge, and in-room massage.

Taking good care of its guests is a point of pride for **The Broadmoor** (Colorado Springs; see address and

telephone above): It offers 24-hour room service, a concierge, in-room massage, valet laundry, a shuttle bus between buildings, and a multitude of recreational activities, as well as almost anything else you might ask for.

- **Best Bed-and-Breakfast:** A great location, striking art, and modern convenience make **The Bradley**, 2020 16th St., Boulder (☎ 800/858-5811 or 303/545-5200), one of my very favorite B&Bs on the Front Range. See p. 130.

At **Old Town GuestHouse**, 115 S. 26th St., Colorado Springs (☎ 888/375-4210 or 719/632-9194), each room is delightfully decorated around a theme, ranging from Saharan to Victorian. This B&B also has just enough in the way of modern convenience. See p. 181.

- **Best Views:** The gorgeous **St Julien**, 900 Walnut St., Boulder (☎ 877/303-0900 or 720/406-9696), is the nearest hotel to Boulder's even more gorgeous foothills. Rooms don't come cheap, but the views rival those from the windows of Colorado's ritziest mountain resorts. See p. 127.

The **JW Marriott**, 150 Clayton Lane, Denver (☎ 800/327-0064 or 303/316-2700), the standout hotel in the tony Cherry Creek shopping district, looks out over the Denver Country Club and the creek itself. See p. 66.

- **Best for Families:** Two swimming pools, water slides, and a fabulous summer kids' program at **The Broadmoor** (Colorado Springs; see address and telephone above) will help keep youngsters busy while parents enjoy the golf courses, spa, and seemingly countless other facilities.

At the **Hotel Monaco**, 1717 Champa St., Denver (☎ 800/397-5380 or 303/296-1717), kids get a kick out of the colorful decor, the complimentary goldfish, and the "Director of Pet Relations," a Jack Russell terrier named Lily Sopris. See p. 62.

### 3 BEST DINING BETS

- **Best Spots for a Romantic Dinner:** **Rioja**, 1431 Larimer Sq., Denver (☎ 303/820-2282), is a quiet, slick, and dimly lit vehicle for chef-owner Jennifer Jasinski's inspired dishes. See p. 72.

**Frasca**, 2328 Pearl St., Boulder (☎ 303/442-6966), has impeccable service and peerless cuisine, drawn exclusively from the culinary traditions of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, a subalpine region in northeastern Italy. See p. 132.

The Broadmoor's snazzy **Summit** (Colorado Springs; see address and telephone number above for The Broadmoor) is at once slick and romantic, with contemporary metalwork and a glassed-in, rotating turret behind the bar. The visual spectacle is aesthetically matched by the fare, which is innovative and adventurous. See p. 185.

- **Best Spots for a Celebration:** Owned by retired Denver Broncos quarterback John Elway, **Elway's**, 2500 E. 1st Ave., Denver (☎ 303/399-5353), is a model of "New West" design, with a menu that melds swank and comfortable. The crowd is lively, and you might bump into Elway himself. See p. 75.

Colorado Springs locals splurge on a night out at the **Cliff House Dining Room**, Cliff House Inn, 306 Cañon Ave., Manitou Springs (☎ 719/785-2415). It offers an elegant Victorian atmosphere, superlative service, and innovative variations on old favorites, such as smoked bacon-scented petite prime-rib roast, with vegetables and potato purée. See p. 184.

- **Best Decor:** Occupying the same premises as when it opened in 1893, the **Buckhorn Exchange**, 1000 Osage St., Denver (☎ 303/534-9505), still has a magnificent 19th-century hand-carved

oak bar in the upstairs Victorian parlor and saloon. The downstairs features an amazing collection of taxidermy, a menagerie that includes everything from leopard to buffalo. See p. 68.

In a converted Victorian, the Tibetan/Nepalese **Sherpa's**, 825 Walnut St., Boulder (☎ 303/440-7151), has no shortage of Himalayan relics, photos, and art to look at, especially in the cozy bar that doubles as a library. See p. 137.

- **Best Values:** The all-you-can-eat buffet at **Govinda's Spiritual Food**, 1400 N. Cherry St., Denver (☎ 303/333-5461), has one of the city's best salad bars, plus great soups, fresh-baked bread, and an array of meatless main dishes.

You'll get fine food at reasonable prices in a casual atmosphere at the **Corner Bar** in the Hotel Boulderado, 2115 13th St., Boulder (☎ 303/442-4560). See p. 137.

It's amazing to find a restaurant that prepares so many different dishes well—candy, ice cream, Southwestern, Greek, basic American—and for such low prices. Perhaps that's why Colorado Springs residents have been coming to **Michelle's**, 122 N. Tejon St. (☎ 719/633-5089), since it opened in 1952.

- **Best for Kids:** More a theme park than a restaurant, **Casa Bonita**, in the JCRC Shopping Center, 6715 W. Colfax Ave., Lakewood, west of Denver (☎ 303/232-5115), has practically nonstop action, with divers plummeting into a pool beside a 30-foot waterfall, puppet shows, a video arcade, and a fun house. Yes, there's food, too: tacos and other standard Mexican fare, country-fried steak, and fried chicken, served cafeteria-style. See p. 78.

There's something about trains that brings out the kid in all of us. **Giuseppe's**



Old Depot Restaurant, 10 S. Sierra Madre St., Colorado Springs (☎ 719/635-3111), has one parked outside the door and plenty more rolling by just outside the large windows. See p. 187.

- **Best Burgers & Beer:** Smack-dab on the pedestrian-only 16th Street Mall, **Paramount Cafe**, 519 16th St., Denver (☎ 303/893-2000), offers juicy burgers matched only by the people-watching patio. See p. 75.
- **Best People-Watching:** With outdoor seating just 2 blocks from home plate of Coors Field in downtown Denver, **Wynkoop Brewing Company**, 1634 18th St. (☎ 303/297-2700), is the place to sit and watch the world stroll by. See p. 74.

Sitting inside or outside, you'll get a great view of the Pearl Street Mall at **14th Street Bar & Grill**, 1400 Pearl St., Boulder (☎ 303/444-5854). You'll see all kinds of people passing by—students and families, old and young, and even street entertainers, from musicians to mimes. See p. 135.

- **Best View:** Perched on the side of a mountain above Boulder, with a wall of windows framing the city below and plains beyond, **Flagstaff House Restaurant**, 1138 Flagstaff Rd. (☎ 303/442-4640), offers extraordinary views, especially as the sun sets or the city gradually disappears in a swirling snowstorm. See p. 133.

Large picture windows at **Charles Court**, in The Broadmoor, Lake Circle, Colorado Springs (☎ 719/634-7711), give diners a splendid vista out over The Broadmoor's lake. See p. 184.

- **Best Wine List:** With more than 2,000 well-chosen selections, **Flagstaff House Restaurant** (Boulder; see address and telephone above) wins this category without question. See p. 133.

The rotating wine turret holds about 400 of the 1,400 bottles on hand at the **Summit** (Colorado Springs; see address

and telephone above for The Broadmoor). See p. 185.

**The Palace Arms**, at the Brown Palace Hotel (Denver; see address and telephone above), has one of the city's most widely respected and award-winning wine lists. See p. 69.

- **Best Desserts:** Homemade desserts at **The Kitchen**, 1039 Pearl St., Boulder (☎ 303/544-5973), include house-made ice cream, sticky toffee pudding, and other delectable treats.

With all the fine restaurants that seem to specialize in desserts, the **Craftwood Inn**, 404 El Paso Blvd., Colorado Springs (☎ 719/685-9000), stands out, particularly for the way it combines raspberries and chocolate. See p. 184.

While its taste in wine is also terrific, the desserts at Table 6, 609 Corona St., Denver (☎ 303/831-8800), are equally praiseworthy, especially the Nutella beignets and margarita nachos. See p. 77.

- **Best Fast Food:** At **Illegal Pete's**, 1447 Pearl St., Boulder (☎ 303/440-3955), you'll get a choice of unique burritos that are both mouthwatering and massive, as well as salads, chile, fish, chicken, and vegetarian tacos. See p. 137.
- **Best Natural Foods:** The Mile High City's vegetarians flock to **Water-Course**, 837 E. 17th Ave., Denver (☎ 303/832-7313), for such specialties as meatless tamales and banana-bread French toast. See p. 78.

At the terrific new **Black Cat**, 1964 13th St., Boulder (☎ 303/444-5500), owner-chef Erik Skokan uses ingredients from his own half-acre farm in Boulder. See p. 133.

Fresh and healthy are the key words at **Adam's Mountain Cafe**, 110 Cañon Ave., Manitou Springs, outside Colorado Springs (☎ 719/685-1430), which serves interesting dishes with a decidedly Mediterranean flair. See p. 189.

- **Best Sushi:** Ask any Denver resident: The **Sushi Den**, 1487 S. Pearl St.

(☎ 303/777-0826), is the place to go for sushi. Located in south Denver in the charming Old South Pearl Street retail district, the Sushi Den is one of two locations worldwide—the other is in Fukuoka, Japan. See p. 77.

- **Best Italian Cuisine:** Traditional and innovative Italian flavors blissfully meet at **Panzano**, in Hotel Monaco, 909 17th St., Denver (☎ 303/296-3525). Try the restaurant's specialty, *buridda*, a Genovese seafood stew with mussels, calamari, and shrimp in a savory lobster broth. See p. 72.
- **Best Seafood: McCormick's Fish House & Bar**, in the Oxford Hotel, 1659 Wazee St., Denver (☎ 303/825-1107), flies in fresh seafood daily. Choices often include salmon from Alaska, mussels from Maine and Florida, and yellowfin tuna from Hawaii. See p. 73.
- **Best Vietnamese Cuisine:** The original Vietnamese restaurant in Denver, **T-Wa Inn**, 555 S. Federal Blvd., Denver (☎ 303/922-2378), is the place to come for genuine Vietnamese cooking. The perfectly cooked and spiced entrees include several vegetarian plates, incredible shrimp and pork loin, and a number of spicy Thai dishes to boot. See p. 78.
- **Best American Cuisine:** The specifics change daily at **Flagstaff House Restaurant** (Boulder; see address and telephone above), but Rocky Mountain game highlights many of the dishes, each individually and creatively prepared with the freshest ingredients.

It certainly isn't cheap, but the creative and exquisitely prepared American cuisine served at Charles Court (Colorado Springs; see address and telephone above) is tough to beat.

- **Best Continental Cuisine:** Bone-in filet mignon with an imaginative wild mushroom and blue-cheese bread pudding at **Walter's Bistro**, 136 E. Cheyenne Mountain Ave., Colorado Springs (☎ 719/630-0201), is just one highlight of this chic eatery at the foot of Cheyenne Mountain. See p. 185.
- **Best Mexican Cuisine: Amanda's Fonda**, 3625 W. Colorado Ave., Colorado Springs (☎ 719/227-1975), is the handiwork of a family that has owned Mexican restaurants for five generations. Clearly they've honed the art of making remarkable chile in that time: Both the chile Colorado and the green chile are excellent. See p. 189.  
Everything at **Jack-N-Grill**, 2524 N. Federal Blvd., Denver (☎ 303/964-9544), has chile in it, roasted by the Martinez family on-site. Both the green and red chile are top-notch, as are the Mexican dishes and the fresh homemade salsa. See p. 78.
- **Best Regional Cuisine:** For carefully prepared Colorado game and other Western cuisine (such as venison, pheasant, and trout), visit the **Craftwood Inn** (Colorado Springs; see address and telephone above).