

Weekend Trips from Denver

Leah Still,



The Rocky Mountains -- Denver's backyard. (Photo: rocky mountains image by Earl Robbins from Fotolia.com)

Denver's location on the eastern edge of the Colorado Rocky Mountains gives you many options for weekend trips. Heading west on Interstate 70 is a good place to start--you'll hit several major ski and summer resorts and quaint towns before hitting the Utah border.

Geography



Not all weekend trips from Denver must involve climbing up or skiing down the Rocky Mountains. The region is varied: You can hike to the top of one of the 14ers (Colorado's 50+ peaks of at least 14,000 feet), but you can also sail on Lake Dillon or cross-country ski near Frisco. The Arkansas and Colorado rivers flow through the mountains -- for whitewater rafting on the Arkansas River, check out Buffalo Joe's in Buena Vista. If you'd rather relax in hot water than be sprayed with cold, head to the Glenwood Hot Springs, about an hour west of Vail on I-70. Or visit one of Colorado's four national parks: Black Canyon of the Gunnison, Great Sand Dunes, Mesa Verde and Rocky Mountain.

Seasons



Come winter, Denver locals compete with thousands of visitors for space on I-70 to go skiing. Be prepared for a slow trip if you head west on I-70 on a weekend from Thanksgiving to Easter, especially if it is snowing -- mountain passes like Vail Pass between Copper Mountain and Vail will close during treacherous weather. The easiest resorts to get to are along or just off I-70 before Vail Pass: Winter Park, Keystone, Breckenridge and Copper Mountain.

You won't find many spring flowers in the mountains until the snow stops falling around late April, but you will find spring skiing. If you put off a ski weekend because of the cold, go in March or early April when it's warmer and sunnier.

A summer weekend is more relaxing -- there's no rushing to be at the front of the lift line to get value out of a nearly-\$100 (as of 2010) lift ticket. Most of the big ski resorts offer an array of summer activities, like biking and disc golf.

In the fall, drive along Highway 24 to admire the Aspen trees in their golden glory. Fall is the calm before the storm -- the snow has not yet fallen and the tourists are still at home.

Historical destinations



Discover some Colorado history in Durango, settled when gold was discovered in 1860. Downtown Durango is reminiscent of a wild west settlement, and one of the town's most popular historic attractions is the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, which is still in operation.

If you're looking for history that predates saloons and gold-diggers, Mesa Verde National Park has Pueblo Native Americans cliff dwellings.

Accommodation



Accommodation near Denver is as varied as the terrain. The Stanley Hotel in Estes Park is famous for being the inspiration for Stephen King's "The Shining." It is elegant and gracious, and uses its hook as being haunted to attract tourists for its ghost tours.

Vail is no stranger to luxury hotels, and The Arrabelle at Vail Square doesn't disappoint. The Swiss-like chateau opened during the 2007-08 ski season. The hotel promises impeccable service, including sweets delivered before bedtime.

Avoid breaking the bank by pitching a tent in Rocky Mountain National Park and rising to fresh mountain air.

Necessities

Always pack for cold weather. Even in the summer, temperatures can be in the 30s at night. Bring layers for spring, summer and fall trips. In the winter, with the possibility of traffic or road-closures, pack an emergency kit: blankets, extra gloves, socks and hats, water bottles, a flashlight and snacks.

About the Author

Leah Still has written about travel, fashion and home design since 2003. Her work has appeared in various print and online publications, including "SKI" magazine, Southernaccents.com and Gusto.com. She has a journalism degree from the University of Missouri and broadens her education with both domestic and international travel.

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