Natural hot springs, high peaks and national park sites dominate this 1,296-mile tour through Colorado.
Few road trips take you past spectacular 14,000-foot peaks, soothing hot springs and fantastic historic towns like this Colorado loop. Start in Denver to sample the city's thriving art and food scene. Next stops are Lyons, Estes Park and then Rocky Mountain National Park where wildlife and incredible hikes await. From there head west to the charming town of Grand Lake, which sits at the park's West Entrance, before heading to Hot Sulphur Springs to soak in the town's hot springs and on to Winter Park for fun activities at the Winter Park Resort base area.

Continue west to the awe-inspiring red-rock landscapes of Colorado National Monument in Grand Junction. From there, travel south to the majestic Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. Farther south, you'll discover ancient history in Mesa Verde National Park and authentic towns like Durango, Pagosa Springs, South Fork and Alamosa along the way to Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. When you return to the Denver area, you'll find affordable lodging, lively restaurants, the Wild Animal Sanctuary and a unique High Plains experience.

PHOTOS: Black Canyon of the Gunnison (Topher Yanagihara), Horseback riding in Rocky Mountain National Park (Grant Ordelheide)

MyColoradoParks.com • 61
**BEST OF COLORADO**

**DENVER TO LYONS, COLO.**

44 miles, 56 minutes

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**GREAT GETAWAY**

Looking for a small historic town near Rocky Mountain National Park but far from crowds? Head to Lyons, a charming 2,000-resident artsy town with great cuisine.

*By Tori Peglar*

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1. **WEECASA TINY HOUSE RESORT**
   - **WHY GO:** Sleep at this tiny house resort along the St. Vrain River and a stone’s throw from downtown Lyons. Enjoy downtime playing bocce, volleyball and corn hole.
   - **TIP:** High-end and hip houses accommodate a variety of guests. Stay in The Rusty Aspen for two or The Solaire, a modern abode for four. The Empty Nester fits six.

2. **OSKAR BLUES**
   - **WHY GO:** Opened in 1997, this casual, family-friendly local brewery with food and live music became one of the first in the nation to can its craft brews in 2002.
   - **TIP:** Order Dale’s Pale Ale for a refreshing drink with citrus floral hops. It was the brewery’s first craft-canned mountain pale ale.

3. **MOJO TAQUERIA**
   - **WHY GO:** A short walk east of historic downtown, this Mexican restaurant is a favorite of locals and travelers alike. It features creative, savory salsas, tacos and burritos in a vibrant setting.
   - **TIP:** Start with the chips and homemade salsa trio as you dine on Mojo’s outdoor patio. Don’t miss the braised short-rib taco.

4. **LYONS CLASSIC PINBALL**
   - **WHY GO:** This Lyons landmark in the heart of downtown has been around for 15 years, offering people the chance to play 35 pinball games from vintage 1960s machines to contemporary ones, plus six classic video games.
   - **TIP:** Tournaments are held every third Thursday at 7:30 p.m. with a $5 entry fee.

5. **BELLA LA CREMA**
   - **WHY GO:** Head to the beautiful Bella La Crema, a butter bar that makes flavorful sweet and savory butters. References to artists appear on its menu and walls, making it a unique and delicious stop. Get breakfast, lunch and dinner here, as well as sample gourmet butters. Call ahead for daily hours.
   - **TIP:** Several doors down is St. Vrain Market offering delicious baked goods, baguettes and sandwiches to go, so you can hit the road to Rocky Mountain National Park and picnic in the park. The market is a small locally-owned grocery with a great selection of cheeses, housemade sausage and fresh-baked pies.

6. **LAVERN JOHNSON PARK**
   - **WHY GO:** Lyons has a big recreational river scene from tubing and kayaking the Whitewater Park to fly fishing, and you can do them all from here. Buy flies or order a hand-crafted custom bamboo fly rod from South Creek Ltd. in Lyons. Be sure to reserve one of 15 RV or tent sites in the park.
   - **TIP:** Plan to be in Lyons for one of its amazing internationally recognized music festivals held at the Planet Bluegrass Ranch along the banks of the St. Vrain River and bordered by red sandstone cliffs. Get tickets for RockyGrass, which takes place July 24-26, 2020, or Rocky Mountain Folks Festival, Aug. 7-9, 2020.

7. **ART GALLERIES**
   - **WHY GO:** Lyons is a magnet for artists. Don’t miss ArtPharm, a gallery of art studios founded by Sonny Smith, Red Canyon Art and Western Stars Gallery & Studio on Main Street.
   - **TIP:** If you’re crafty, head to Lyons Quilting, one of Colorado’s largest quilt shops with more than 6,500 bolts of fabric and 2,000 batiks for sale.

Learn more at LyonsColorado.com.
Stop. Play. Stay.

Hiking. Zip Lining. Kayaking. Mountain Biking. Fishing. Golfing. Shopping. Dining. Museum Going. There's no telling where your adventure will begin in Grand County. And with so much to do, it never has to end. From Colorado's largest natural lake to the sights of Rocky Mountain National Park, the end of one adventure is just the beginning of another.

Don't Just Explore Colorado. Go Grand.

GRAND COUNTY
VisitGrandCounty.com

GRANBY • GRAND LAKE
HOT SULPHUR SPRINGS
KREMMLING
WINTER PARK/FRASER

AFTER ONE VISIT, YOU’LL NEED A
NEW BUCKET LIST
Choose between the YMCA of the Rockies Estes Park Center on the park's east side or Snow Mountain Ranch on the west side for great activities and lodging options.

1. **GET ACTIVE**
   - **WHY GO:** The Boone Family Mountain Center at the Estes Park location houses all adventure activities, including an indoor climbing wall and bouldering wall.
   - **TIP:** At Snow Mountain Ranch, hike the 2-mile round-trip Waterfall Trail, which after undergoing construction, is wider than before and enables you to reach the top of the waterfall.

2. **FLY THROUGH THE AIR**
   - **WHY GO:** At Snow Mountain Ranch, tube down a long white slide. Guests staying at the ranch can reserve their time slot one week in advance online. Visiting for the day? Reserve your spot the day of in the Programs Building. Call the morning of your visit to check on open times at 970-887-2152, ext. 4135.
   - **FOR KIDS:** At Snow Mountain Ranch, younger kids can swing on a mini-zipline unassisted at Spruce Saddle Adventure Zone. Kids ages 8 and up should head to Forest Zip Line where you climb a 35-foot ladder to ride a 600-foot-long zip line.

3. **GO TO THE CRAFT STUDIO**
   - **WHY GO:** Whether you are a Pinterest fanatic who is constantly creating or have not picked up a paintbrush since high school art class, you’ll lose track of time making leather, jewelry and wood pieces, painting ceramics and making sand designs at the craft studio.
   - **TIP:** Crafts always take longer than you think, so avoid going at the end of the day just before the studio closes.

4. **SADDLE UP**
   - **WHY GO:** From the Estes Park location, you can go on a trail ride right into Rocky Mountain National Park.
   - **TIP:** Don’t want to ride? Take a wagon ride at the Estes Park location.

5. **STAY AWHILE**
   - **WHY GO:** Both YMCA locations have lodges and cabins for overnight stays.
   - **TIP:** Spend the night and get a Stay Pass wristband, giving you free access to most activities.
It’s the sound of a railroad whistle echoing in the distance. It’s the feeling of awe at discovering an ancient civilization built into cliff walls. It’s hiking to 14,000 feet and finding more than a view.

It’s more adventure at every turn!

Get inspired at durango.org | #VisitDurango
Nestled next to the west side of Rocky Mountain National Park, you’ll find extraordinary things to do in towns like Grand Lake, Kremmling and Winter Park.

By Tori Peglar

Leaning up against Rocky Mountain National Park’s west side are some of Colorado’s best-kept secrets. From Grand Lake, a charming lakeside village, to Winter Park Resort, you’ll find unparalleled outdoor opportunities. It’s authentic Colorado at its best.

Just outside the national park, you’ll find Grand Lake’s bustling little downtown with its charming historic boardwalk. Founded in 1881, the village still embraces its original rustic architectural style, although it’s much more than a small mountain outpost. More than 60 shops, restaurants and galleries line the downtown area, captivating visitors with their charm. Stroll two minutes from downtown to explore Colorado’s largest natural lake. Then rent kayaks or pedal boats from one of the two marinas and paddle along the shoreline or simply enjoy the views from the town beach.

In the evening, head to the Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre where Hollywood actors David Hasselhoff and David Arquette worked as young thespians. Offering three shows every summer, professional actors take the stage and perform popular Broadway musicals like Les Misérables. Buy your tickets early as the word is out about this gem. Completed in 2011, the jewel-box theater seats 300 people.

Farther south, you’ll find a number of the valley’s 600 miles of trails. A great family friendly stroll or bike ride is the Fraser River Trail that stretches from Fraser to Winter Park Resort. The 8.8-mile round-trip hike up 12,804-foot Byers Peak near Fraser is outstanding for experienced hikers. If you’d rather explore by horseback, head to Rusty Spurr Ranch in Kremmling for trail rides and cattle drives — both great activities to catch fall colors in September.

Then trade trails for activities when you experience the state’s first summer tubing hill at the YMCA’s Snow Mountain Ranch. There’s also roller skating and an arts-and-crafts room on site. Twenty-five minutes down the road, you’ll find incredible mountain biking and Colorado’s longest alpine slide at the base area of Winter Park Resort. You can buy an activity pass here that enables you to go on the alpine slide, play mini-golf and more.

But don’t leave without getting wet. Water lovers will enjoy the 21 mineral pools at Hot Sulphur Springs Resort & Spa in the heart of the oldest town in Grand County — Hot Sulphur Springs. And there are few things that beat the scenery and sense of adventure you’ll experience when you raft the Colorado River near Kremmling.

Learn more at VisitGrandCounty.com.

Desert Solitaire

After leaving Winter Park, head west on Interstate 70 toward Colorado National Monument in Grand Junction. Formed in 1911, this hidden gem offers a gorgeous 23-mile scenic cruise on Rim Rock Drive.

The striking road snakes along the upper level of a collection of canyons, passing 19 signed viewpoints and 14 hiking trails. You’ll get fantastic views of the valley and monument’s beautiful rock formations. Don’t miss the Saddlehorn Visitor Center, which has two 12-minute movies, Spirit of Colorado National Monument and The Geologic History of Colorado National Monument.

Learn more at nps.gov/colm.
Here’s how to make El Moro Tavern’s roasted marrow bones appetizer.

**SERVES 2**

**INGREDIENTS:**
- 4 marrow bones
- 2 cups parsley leaves, minced
- ¼ cup capers
- 4 oz. shallots, minced
- 2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp. anchovy paste
- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- Salt & pepper to taste
- Sliced baguette, grilled, for serving

**DIRECTIONS:**

Preheat oven to 425-degrees.

Add parsley, capers, shallots, lemon juice and anchovy paste to a blender. Blend on medium speed, slowly adding olive oil. Refrigerate.

Sprinkle marrow bones with coarse kosher salt and pepper. Bake for 11-13 minutes and then cool for 2 minutes. Spread parsley sauce on a plate. Place the marrow bones on top of the sauce and enjoy with a baguette.

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**COMMUNITY FIRST**

The great outdoors, creative food and passion for the community meet in Durango, Colo.

*By Mikaela Ruland*

When you spend time in Durango, the first thing you’ll notice is its deeply rooted sense of community. Whether you’re mountain biking a world-class trail, rafting the beautiful Animas River, skiing at Purgatory or eating at one of the town’s 200-plus eateries, you’ll meet with passionate and inspirational locals focused on the good of the community.

Durango has attracted bright and creative chefs from all over the country. Take El Moro Tavern’s chef Sean Clark. He created the first ever food and beer pairing for the James Beard House. Or Beau and Jenna Black, the creators behind The Bookcase and Barber, the two-chair barber shop with a back-wall-bookcase that opens up into a hidden speakeasy when the secret password is mentioned.

“The culinary scene in Durango has never been better,” says El Moro’s general manager David Woodruff. “Every dish here tells a story.”

Don’t be surprised when you get swept into the community on your first day in town. From the collective excitement when the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad’s steam engine starts billowing to fundraising events like the Rochester Hotel’s Secret Garden Summer Concert Series, you’ll feel part of the community instantly.

After riding the train to Silverton or spending the day hiking, biking or rafting, you’ll understand why so many people flock to Durango. Take a piece of this charming town home with you and make one of El Moro Tavern’s specialties in your own kitchen.

Find El Moro Tavern at 945 Main Ave. and learn more about Durango at Durango.org.

PHOTOS: Scenic drive, Train, Horse-drawn wagon on West Durangal, Marrow bones dish (Sean Moriarty) MyColoradoParks.com
When settlers stumbled on the Great Pagosa Hot Springs more than 150 years ago, they saw distinct human footprints in the earth surrounding it. As it turned out, local Native Americans had been soaking in the hot waters for years.

You only need to dip a toe in the soothing waters at The Springs Resort & Spa to understand why people, Oprah Winfrey among them, continue to return to this town's legendary hot springs. With 24 pools at temperatures ranging from 83-114 degrees, it's easy to move from one pool to the next to find the perfect one. There are also 5 adult-only pools. If your muscles are tight from hiking or from just sitting for hours in the car, head to the Pahtoga Spa where you can get a deep-tissue massage, a river stone massage, a hand or foot massage or even a facial.

Afterwards, spend the night at one of the resort's 79 gorgeously appointed rooms and enjoy complimentary robes and 24-hour access to the soaking pools. Heated by the geothermal water and built to meet high environmental standards, the 29-room lodge was Colorado's first LEED gold-certified luxury hotel.

Learn more about The Springs Resort & Spa at PagosaHotSprings.com.
Frequent May through October, you'll be hard-pressed to find a weekend without an event going on in beautiful Salida, nestled under Colorado's Collegiate Peaks. Head to Riverside Park to take in one of the many festivals like the Brewer's Rendezvous on July 11, 2020, to sample Colorado craft beer, or the Salida Wine Fest on Sept. 12, 2020. Grab lunch to go at Sweetie's Sandwich Shop and eat it in the park overlooking the Arkansas River where you can watch kayakers practicing their moves in the current.

Perhaps one of Salida's best features is its proximity to beautiful wilderness. For a challenging day hike, the area is home to a dozen 14,000 peaks known by locals as "14ers." Sections of the Colorado Trail and Continental Divide Trail also pass through the county. Head to Salida Mountain Sports for gear and local knowledge on the best hikes in the area.

Or, hit the water for the day with one of the many rafting companies that call Salida home. Difficulty of the trips vary by season and area, so there's always something for every skill level.

For a unique trip, head to Browns Canyon National Monument with River Runners to float through one of Colorado's newest national monuments.

End the day with an amazing whiskey, gin or vodka cocktail at local Woods High Mountain Distillery.

Learn more at SalidaChamber.org.

From weekly festivals to unparalleled outdoor recreation, Salida is a mountain town that offers it all.

By Mikaela Ruland
**A GEM ON THE EASTERN PLAINS**

In Brighton, you’ll find bald eagles, a nationally recognized barbeque competition and a brewery housed in a refurbished Tibetan temple. It’s a stop worth making.

*By Mikaela Ruland*

Start your stay in Brighton with a locally famous cinnamon roll from Main Street Café, 161 N Main St.

Get ready to enjoy Colorado’s 300-plus days of sunshine as you head to Barr Lake State Park. A bird watcher’s paradise, Barr Lake has been home to a pair of nesting bald eagles since 1986. If you want to learn more about the birds native to Colorado, stop by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies’ banding station at the park August through October. You can watch as researchers catch, measure and band bird species like golden orioles and black-capped chickadees.

The lake is also home to numerous recreation opportunities. Rent a stand-up paddleboard or kayak and explore the lake by paddle or walk or bike the 8.8-mile path around the water.

On your way back to town, stop in at Lulu’s Farm, 13201 E 144 Ave, for fresh produce, local honey and fresh salsa and special events like the Lulu’s Brew & Que Fest in April or the Brighton Chile Fest in September.

End your day in Brighton at Big Choice Brewing, 21 S 1 Ave. Once home to a Tibetan temple, the building now serves craft brews and artisan pizzas. In December, try the Chill Out Peppermint Stout, which is served with a crushed candy cane rim and a peppermint patty. If you visit in the summer, order the 10,000 Summers Saison, a Belgian Farmhouse Ale made with local honey.


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**FAMILY FUN**

If you’ve never walked among 1,600 free-flying butterflies, stop by the Butterfly Pavilion in Westminster just 20 minutes from Denver. You’ll be surrounded by tropical plants with air as humid as Brazil.

Then head to Adventure Golf & Raceway to tee off on one of three adventure-themed miniature golf courses.

Beyond, check out the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, a hip movie theater featuring the latest releases and classics served up with beer, cocktails, burgers, pizza and more.

Consider cooling down on a scorching Colorado day by heading to the Ice Centre at The Promenade. You’ll find three ice rinks and a pro shop.

Afterwards, enjoy dinner at some great hot spots, including Ted’s Montana Grill, 5280 Burger Bar known for its creative burgers and GQue BBQ serving hickory-smoked barbecue in a modern industrial-designed space. Kokopelli Beer Company offers great ambience and food. With 17 hotels, including boutique ones, this is an affordable place to stay so close to Denver.

Learn more at WestminsterChamber.Biz.
When Pat Craig was 19, he visited a friend who worked as a zoo groundskeeper in North Carolina. His friend showed him the back of the zoo where tigers and lions sat in small cages far away from the crowds. They were “surplus” animals, meaning the zoo had no place to put them.

Craig looked at the animals and was shocked by the scene. He didn’t think he would even put a dog in the cages where the lions and tigers lived. He climbed into his blue Chevy pickup truck, leaving the zoo behind in his rearview mirror as he returned home to Boulder, Colo.

But the animals had curled up in the forefront of his thoughts and there they lingered. “Every day, I kept thinking about them as I went back to school [at University of Colorado Boulder],” he says. “I thought, ‘How many people think like I do and are not doing anything about it?’ ”

Today, he runs The Wild Animal Sanctuary in Keenesburg, Colo., the world’s largest and oldest non-profit sanctuary dedicated exclusively to rescuing large carnivores that have been abused, abandoned or illegally kept. For 37 years, a big part of his work has been educating people, including visitors and government officials, about the captive wildlife crisis in which an estimated 30,000 exotic animals live in people’s garages, sheds and roadside shows, often horribly mistreated. But the sanctuary itself would not exist without Craig’s army of dedicated volunteers and critical donations, much of it from visitors.

You can see the sanctuary’s 450-plus animals living in large natural habitats folded into 720 acres of rolling golden plains framed by the Rockies in the distance. But you won’t view them from the ground. Instead, you’ll walk on a 1.5-mile elevated walkway, the longest footbridge in the world.

Standing 30 feet above the ground, the walkway spans tiger habitat, wolf habitat, grizzly bear habitat and beyond. It allows you to view the animals without them seeing you, a key to reducing animal stress and improving the visitor-viewing experience.

“When I first started, I was just taking care of the animals and they knew me,” Craig recalls. “But when friends and others stopped by, I noticed the animals perceived them as a threat at the edge of their territory. They kept their eyes on people.”

Craig had an epiphany when he was working on the rooftops of his farm. Worried the sounds from his power tools would scare the animals, he realized quickly the animals were not bothered by things above them. Ten feet outside the fence is a threat, but 10 feet above is not, he says.

The walkway starts at a football field-sized visitor center that offers seating areas, food, cold drinks and ice cream. While there and on the walkway, you’ll learn about the animals, some of which were rescued from circuses in Bolivia, Mexico and Uruguay, a zoo in Nebraska and a truck stop in Texas.

Craig’s pioneering work has set a gold standard for protecting captive animals here and abroad. “Singularly, Pat is devoted to the animals,” says Kent Drotar, the sanctuary ambassador. “He literally is here seven days a week 12 hours a day. At the end of the day, if he has to make a hard decision, it’s always about the animals.”

Read the entire article at MyColoradoParks.com. If you visit the sanctuary, please be aware that pets are prohibited.
Stop by Fort Morgan, Brush and Pawnee National Grassland to stretch your legs and experience a different side of Colorado.

By Tori Peglar

On your way to or from Colorado from the Midwest, take a break from the road to stretch your legs at Pawnee National Grassland. Known for its Pawnee Buttes, two iconic hill-like features that rise 250 feet from the prairie floor, the grasslands offer the opportunity to see wildlife like coyotes, prairie dogs, and more than 300 species of birds.

You can get to Pawnee Buttes via the Pawnee Pioneer Trails Byway, which is 128 miles and takes about three hours. It’s a gorgeous way to experience the prairie, as well as historic farming towns like Fort Morgan and Brush that make up Morgan County. Woven together by strong agricultural threads, this area is known for its sugar beet and dairy farms and is home to one of the state’s last sugar beet factories.

“Morgan County is very friendly — it’s that old-style welcome to the neighborhood,” says Emily Goggins, tourism director of Morgan County. “It’s a great place to see scenic views that are different from Colorado’s Western Slope and there is a lot of history here.”

In Fort Morgan, drive over Rainbow Bridge that straddles the South Platte River and was the nation’s longest archway bridge when it debuted in 1923. From there, stop at Fort Morgan Museum, which showcases Native American artifacts and has a Glenn Miller exhibit. A popular big band leader, Miller attended high school in town. Grab a bite to eat at The Mav Kitchen and Tap House with more than 16 beers on tap and good food.

Then head to Brush to see its historic movie theater and to learn about the pioneer days at Brush Museum and Cultural Center. Stop by El Jacal for great Mexican food. From there drive to Jackson Lake State Park for warm-water swimming, sandy beaches and camping.

Learn more at MorganCountyTourism.com.
While Colorado’s national parks might steal the spotlight, its 41 state parks shouldn't be overlooked. These beautiful public lands are often less crowded and just as beautiful. Here are four of our favorite picks.

By Mikaela Ruland

RIDGEWAY STATE PARK

Ridgeway State Park might just offer some of the best views in Colorado. It’s located 17 miles south of Montrose at the junction to the picturesque towns of Ouray and Telluride. Rent a SUP or canoe to explore the reservoir but beware: you may be too distracted by the stunning views of the San Juan's jagged peaks to do much paddling. Below the dam, along the Uncompahgre River, you’ll find excellent fishing with the trout larger than normal because of the warm water from the dam’s generator.

STEAMBOAT LAKE STATE PARK

This alpine park 29 miles north of Steamboat Springs has so much to offer year-round, but winter might just be the best time to visit. A winter wonderland awaits. Rent a snowmobile in Steamboat Springs, or join a snowmobile tour and safely explore miles of trails patrolled by park rangers. Or, if you’d rather get out on your own two feet, strap on snowshoes or cross-country skis and head out on trails closed to snowmobiles for a peaceful experience. You can even cross the frozen lake. Visiting in the summer? Hiking, camping and water sports abound.

CHEYENNE MOUNTAIN STATE PARK

This beautiful park 7 miles west of Colorado Springs just added new sections to the Dixon Trail, which provides 23 miles of easy-to-moderate terrain that’s perfect for hiking and mountain biking. Meander through prairie grasslands and into the foothills to get a taste of the diverse terrain of Colorado’s Front Range. All Colorado state parks offer ranger-led nature talks, so be sure to check the park’s website for the most up-to-date schedule to learn more about the area you’re visiting.

RIFLE FALLS STATE PARK

This unexpected oasis located on the western side of the state just 13 miles off Interstate 70 in Rifle, Colo., is the perfect place to bring your family. Playing in the rainbows of mist from its 70-foot triple waterfall offers a respite from the summer heat as do shady campsites along the river. Even for a day trip, make sure to bring a flashlight to explore the caves along the Coyote Trail, one of which has a 90-foot room.

Get more information about Colorado’s state parks at cpw.state.co.us.

MyColoradoParks.com
Our common ground

Colorado is home to 41 state parks, 39,000 miles of trails and more than 23 million acres of public lands to explore. We’re all the caretakers.

Plan your adventure, book a state park campsite and buy your fishing license.

cpw.state.co.us/Discover  1-800-244-5613
The Largest Carnivore Sanctuary In The World, Designed And Built Like No Other In Existence

Help Save Some Of The Most Majestic Creatures On Earth!
YMCA of the Rockies
in Estes Park is surrounded by Rocky Mountain National Park. Spectacular views and affordable lodging create the ideal basecamp for your RMNP adventure! Plus, our activities for the whole family – including rock climbing, guided hiking and fishing – means no boredom allowed!

Visit YMCARockies.org and start planning today!