

Colorado

By Tom Kirvan

THE CENTENNIAL STATE IS FILLED WITH NATURAL WONDERS

Colorado, a land of dramatic landscapes and boundless adventure, offers a unique blend of urban sophistication and rugged wilderness. Known as the “Centennial State” because it joined the Union on its 100th anniversary in 1876, Colorado is a destination where the spirit of the Old West meets the vibrancy of modern life. With its diverse population, rich history, and thriving economy, the state attracts millions of visitors each year, who are eager to experience its natural wonders and cultural landmarks.

Home to more than 5.8 million residents, Colorado boasts a diverse population that reflects its history as a crossroads of cultures. Indigenous peoples, including the Ute, Arapaho, and Cheyenne tribes, originally called this land home, and their influence is still evident today. The state also has a significant Hispanic population, rooted in the Spanish and Mexican settlers who arrived centuries ago.

Geographically, Colorado is a marvel. The state’s varied landscapes include the majestic Rocky Mountains, sprawling high plains, vibrant deserts, and verdant river valleys. The Continental Divide runs through Colorado, shaping its rivers and ecosystems. With 58 peaks topping 14,000 feet, including the iconic Mount Elbert, the state is a paradise for outdoor enthusiasts.

Colorado’s capital and most populous city, Denver, is a thriving metropolis perched at 5,280 feet above sea level – hence its nickname, the Mile High City. Denver serves as the state’s cultural and economic hub, offering a mix of modern amenities and historic charm. Visitors can explore Union Station, the Denver Art Museum, and the vibrant RiNo (River North) Art District. Denver’s craft beer scene is world-renowned, making it a must-visit destination for beer lovers.

Colorado’s history is as rich as its landscapes. Indigenous peoples thrived here for thousands of years before Spanish explorers arrived in the 16th century. The region became part of the United States through the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and gained prominence during the Pike’s Peak Gold Rush of the mid-1800s, which brought waves of settlers seeking fortune.

The state’s mining legacy is evident in towns like Leadville and Cripple Creek, where remnants of the boom-and-bust cycles of the Old West remain. In the 20th century, Colorado emerged as a hub for innovation, particularly in aerospace and energy.

Today, Colorado boasts a dynamic economy that blends traditional industries with cutting-edge sectors. Agriculture remains



Fast Facts

Capital: Denver

Population: 5.8 million

Highest Point: Mt. Elbert (14,438 feet)

Of Note: The Four Corners – where Colorado’s southwest corner borders Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah – is the only place in America where the corners of four states meet.

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vital, with crops like corn, wheat, and cattle dominating the high plains. The state is also a leader in renewable energy, particularly wind and solar power. Denver and Boulder have become hotspots for tech startups, while tourism remains a cornerstone of the economy, generating billions of dollars annually.

Colorado's outdoor recreation industry is particularly robust, fueled by its world-class ski resorts, hiking trails, and national parks. The craft beer and cannabis industries also contribute significantly to the state's economy.

Top 5 Must-See Tourist Destinations

While Denver offers plenty to explore, Colorado's allure extends far beyond its capital. Here are five must-see destinations that capture the state's essence:

- **Rocky Mountain National Park:** One of America's most beloved national parks, Rocky Mountain National Park showcases the grandeur of the Rockies with its alpine lakes, dense forests, and dramatic peaks. Trail Ridge Road, the highest continuous paved road in the U.S., offers breathtaking views and wildlife sightings, including elk and bighorn sheep. Hikers can explore trails like Bear Lake and Emerald Lake, while winter visitors can enjoy snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.
- **Garden of the Gods:** Located in Colorado Springs, Garden of the Gods is a geological wonderland of towering red rock formations. Designated as a National Natural Landmark, the park is a haven for photographers, climbers, and nature enthusiasts. The Visitor and Nature Center provides insight into the park's history and geology, while trails like the Perkins Central Garden Trail offer easy access to its stunning landscapes.
- **Mesa Verde National Park:** A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Mesa Verde National Park is a testament to the ingenuity of the Ancestral Puebloans who built intricate cliff dwellings here more than 700 years ago. The park features more than 600 preserved structures, including the famous Cliff Palace. Guided tours offer a glimpse into the lives of the people who once thrived in this arid landscape.

- **Aspen and Maroon Bells:** Known for its upscale charm, Aspen is a premier destination for skiing, shopping, and dining. However, its crown jewel are the nearby Maroon Bells, often described as the most photographed peaks in North America. Surrounded by aspen groves and pristine lakes, the area offers incredible hiking trails in summer and vibrant foliage in the fall.
- **Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve:** In southern Colorado lies the surreal landscape of Great Sand Dunes National Park, home to the tallest sand dunes in North America. Visitors can hike, sandboard, or sled down the dunes, with the towering Sangre de Cristo Mountains as a dramatic backdrop. The nearby Medano Creek provides a refreshing respite during the warmer months.