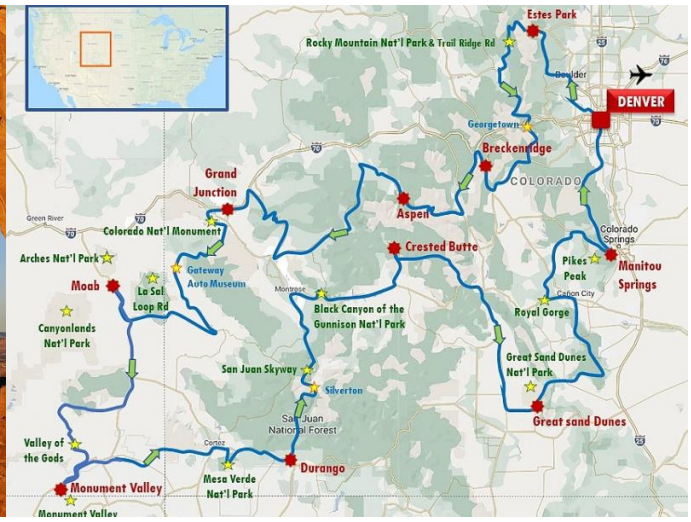
USA West

Tour : car

18 days • 17 nights • 3400 km

Wonders of Colorado & Utah





Starting from **Denver**, enjoy the mountain passes and small mining towns of the **Rockies**. After **Rocky Mountain National Park**, head for **Breckenridge**, **Aspen**, and the **Colorado National Monument**. From green landscapes to the red, ochre and brown sandstone hues typical of the **parks of Utah**: **Arches**, **Canyonlands** and **Monument Valley**, among others. Return to the southern Rockies via **Mesa Verde**, **Durango**, the **Million Dollar Hwy**, then **Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park**, the sand dunes of **Great Sand Dunes National Park**, and the 156 bends of **Pikes Peak**, at over 4,000 m altitude!



Day 1

Arrival in Denver in the afternoon or evening.

Pick up your car at Denver airport and drive to the hotel (approx. 45 min).

Check-in at your hotel.

Overnight in Denver.



Day 2

Free day in Denver. The 'Mile High City' sits at 1,609 m (5,280 ft) above sea level, at the foot of the Rockies.

Capital of the state of Colorado, Denver sprang up during the gold rush in the 19th century. It's one of our favorite cities for its laid-back vibe, its incredible surroundings of course, and its open-minded spirit.

While the historic LoDo district is full of charm with its Victorian houses, brick façades and museums (and its pedestrian street, 16th St.), don't miss the trendy RiNo neighborhood, with its murals and hip addresses. Or head south of Colfax Ave. to the leafy area around the equally green

Cheesman Park.

Go a bit further south to Cherry Creek (this is where Denver was born...). Beyond shopping, it's also the most upscale area of the city. Denver is also famous for its many microbreweries (like all of Colorado). Baseball fans shouldn't miss catching a game at Coors Field —a must.

Overnight in Denver.



Day 3

Drive to Golden, just a few miles from Denver. This friendly little town is home to a fascinating railroad museum, run by volunteers (as is often the case in the USA).

Before joining the 'Peak to Peak Scenic Byway'—a great warm-up before the ridge roads the next day—take a break in the small university town of Boulder, known for its organic farmers market ('organic'), and whose little downtown is really charming.

The Peak to Peak winds up through hairpins before reaching Estes Park, the gateway to the superb Rocky Mountain National Park, home to stunning landscapes and abundant wildlife: moose, bears, bighorn sheep...

In Estes Park, sit on the terrace of the famous Stanley Hotel, which inspired Stephen King when writing his gripping 'The Shining'. The hotel is beautiful, and you can even stay there for an additional fee.

Overnight in Estes Park.



Day 4

Buy the annual America the Beautiful pass at the entrance of Rocky Mountain National Park. It will give you access to all parks and sites managed by the National Park Service (NPS) during your trip. Your day begins on Trail Ridge Road, one of the most beautiful mountain roads in the USA. There’s some traffic, so no speeding—the Rangers are watching!

The road climbs to 3,700 m across beautiful tundra, then descends to Grand Lake, a charming little town by the lake of the same name.

Continue to Georgetown in the valley. This adorable former mining town reached its peak during the gold rush.

Head to Frisco and then Breckenridge, a rather upscale ski resort. Lively in every season, its main shopping street is very pleasant. Check-in at

your hotel.

Overnight in Breckenridge (or nearby).



Day 5

A short stage—time to enjoy Breckenridge or Aspen. Shortly after Breckenridge, Frisco is a lively little town, especially its Main Street. Head south. Look to the east: the peaks still bear scars from mining (still ongoing).

Silver mines made the region wealthy. In Leadville, you can visit the National Mining Hall of Fame & Museum. You can stroll around Matchless Mine, or enjoy the turquoise waters of… Turquoise Lake.

After the Twin Lakes, you take the beautiful road up to Independence Pass at 3,700 m altitude. Just after, the ghost town of Independence is a small ghost town with only a few remains.

Arrival in Aspen, another upscale Colorado ski resort. Check-in downtown or in Snowmass Village, 20 minutes away at the foot of the slopes. In summer, you can even watch rodeos.

Overnight in Aspen or Snowmass Village.



Day 6

Head to Redstone, on the banks of the Crystal River. This adorable little village is where you'll taste the best cinnamon rolls of the trip.

After McClure Pass (2,671 m), you drive alongside Paonia Reservoir.

Possible stop in Delta before taking the Grand Mesa Scenic Byway. Grand Mesa's mountain area hides countless lakes among the forest. There are one or two great lodges for a lunch or coffee break… In summer, mosquitoes can be quite persistent…

After Mesa, the road descends and winds through red-and-ochre canyons typical of nearby Utah.

Arrival in Grand Junction, on the Colorado River, after taking the scenic back roads through vineyards (you can taste local wines in the evening at a restaurant in Grand Junction).

Overnight in Grand Junction.



Day 7

Drive to Colorado National Monument, discovered by following the superb Rim Rock Drive that runs through it.

Head to Gateway. This tiny hamlet in the middle of nowhere used to host one of the most incredible car museums we've ever seen.

Alas, the wealthy owner sold the collection and the museum is closed. That said, the site still features a beautiful adobe resort with a very good restaurant and a poolside bar!

Follow the Dolores River through a magnificent Western setting, including the Hanging Flume viewpoint with an outstanding view over a river meander.

Enter Utah via (or along) the La Sal Mountains before reaching Moab.

Overnight in Moab (or, 30 minutes away, in a beautiful resort on the Colorado River / supplement applies).



Day 8

A free day in Moab does not mean taking it easy.

You are surrounded by two of America's most beautiful national parks! First: Arches. With nearly 2,000 natural arches in glowing red sandstone, it is the largest concentration of sandstone arches in the world. Delicate Arch is the ultimate symbol.

Then: Canyonlands. The park is divided into three sectors, but it is Island in the Sky that will take up your time: the absolutely exceptional views over the White Rim feel like a glimpse into the creation of the universe, with the La Sal peaks in the background, and the Colorado and Green River below.

If you want a small dose of adrenaline, we can arrange a guided half-day 4x4 trip on the Shafer Trail. Or you may prefer a relaxed family-level rafting trip on the Colorado…

Overnight in Moab (or, 30 minutes away, in a beautiful resort on the Colorado River / supplement applies).

Day 9

See program of day 8.



You can also choose to stroll around Moab, with its shops, restaurants and bars. Or rent an ATV for a guided excursion in the paradise surrounding the town...

Overnight in Moab (or 30 minutes away, in a beautiful resort on the banks of the Colorado River / Supplement applies).



Day 10

About 100 km south of Moab, you can detour to the Needles district of Canyonlands National Park to admire the famous “needles”, giant rock spires that seem to mark the boundary of another world.

At Natural Bridges National Monument, you will see three superb natural bridges. Unlike arches, these were shaped by water.

Arrival at Moki Dugway, one of the best views in the American West, overlooking the mesas of the Valley of the Gods!

Down below, a short stop at Goosenecks State Park offers a viewpoint over three meanders of the San Juan River. A little taste of Horseshoe Bend in Page… or, closer to home, Bouillon’s “Tombeau du Géant”.

Arrival in Monument Valley on Navajo land.

Overnight in Mexican Hat.

Optional: overnight at The View hotel, on the Monument Valley site facing the mesas (supplement applies).



Day 11

Spend the morning visiting Monument Valley, a sacred place for the Navajo people.

In your own vehicle (if you have an SUV—best avoided with low clearance), or seated in a pick-up guided by a Navajo, you will explore Valley Drive among the iconic mesas.

If a sense of “déjà vu” strikes, that’s normal: Stagecoach, Once Upon a Time in the West, Easy Rider, Thelma & Louise, Forrest Gump… countless films have immortalized Monument Valley!

Head east and return to the state of Colorado. Whether you visit today or tomorrow, Mesa Verde National Park is a unique place, with the finest Ancestral Puebloan (Anasazi) cliff dwellings spread over two sectors (reservations required for most visits).

Arrival in Durango. Overnight in Durango (or in Mesa Verde National Park, depending on choice and/or availability).



Day 12

If you stay inside Mesa Verde National Park, note that only five of these precariously perched cliff dwellings, set in rock alcoves, can be visited: Cliff Palace, Balcony House, Spruce Tree House, Long House, and Step House. Most require a ranger-guided tour and reservations.

We really like Durango, with its lively Main Street and some great local spots…

It is also the departure point for the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, a historic steam train line climbing 26 miles into the heart of the San Juan Mountains, offering breathtaking scenery, with Cascade Canyon as the grand finale.

Silverton, at the end of the line, is a typical little town that peaked during the gold rush. You can do the journey entirely by train (approx. 5h30) or partially, with the return by coach—or of course by road.

Overnight in Durango (or in Mesa Verde National Park, depending on choice and/or availability).



Day 13

Leave Durango via the San Juan Skyway and Molas Pass (3,322 m). Between Silverton and Ouray, two former mining towns with intact charm, the road is known as the Million Dollar Highway.

Red Mountain Pass is the high point at 3,375 m. Notice the red and orange hues of the summit, caused by oxidation linked to intensive mining—vestiges are still visible from the road.

After the town of Ridgway, head to Montrose and the impressive Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

The great views from the rim and the road descending to the Gunnison River are two musts (entry included with the annual pass).

Arrival in Crested Butte, another charming small town with colorful houses.

Overnight in Crested Butte.



Day 14

The road winding along the Taylor River to the large man-made Taylor Park Reservoir is a little gem (closed in winter). You will likely come across a few fly fishermen casting in the middle of a shallow ford…

Reach the friendly small town of Salida, on the banks of the Arkansas River.

The second part of the route is more direct and heads due south. You leave the peaks of Pike and Isabel National Forest, then Cottonwood Peak (4,142 m) and its high neighbors on your left, and drive toward the striking Great Sand Dunes National Park.

This unique park, at the foot of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, contains the highest sand dunes in North America. Higher up, you may spot bighorn sheep, but also lynx, the occasional black bear, and deer.

Overnight in Alamosa or at the Great Sand Dunes Lodge (subject to availability).



Day 15

The stage is a bit longer, but getting up early is a must anyway if you want to enjoy a walk in the dunes of Great Sand Dunes National Park, some of which rise over 200 m!

Then head toward Cañon City, where you can grab a coffee before reaching the Royal Gorge Bridge nearby.

This impressive bridge spans the Arkansas River Gorge. Thrill seekers can try the zip line between the two rims, or cross by gondola (unfortunately, it’s not cheap).

The route to Manitou Springs follows a very scenic road, High Park Road. You may already glimpse Pikes Peak and surrounding summits, but you’ll have the opportunity to go up the next day.

Overnight in Manitou Springs (or Colorado Springs, subject to availability).



Day 16

Manitou Springs is an adorable little town tucked into a narrow valley. Facing it, Pikes Peak—famous for its races, where the best cover the 20 km course in under 10 minutes—rises like a true monster. You'll reach the summit at 4,302 m (14,115 ft) after 156 turns. There's traffic, and in any

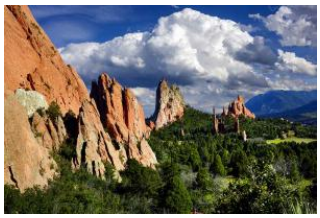
case the speed limit is 30 mph! Entrance fee required.

You can also go up (and back down) aboard the Broadmoor Manitou & Pikes Peak Cog Railway, a small rack railway offering splendid views as well (pricey).

If you still feel like driving, continue to Cripple Creek and Victor along the 'Gold Belt'.

The first town is mainly known for its casinos and restaurants, but you can also go 1,000 feet underground to see gold veins (entrance fee). Near Victor—almost a 'ghost town'—you'll find a gigantic open-pit mine.

Overnight in Manitou Springs (or Colorado Springs, depending on availability).



Day 17

The drive to Denver is fairly short and could be done in about 2 hours on the interstate... But of course we've planned a much nicer route for those who aren't in a rush to head back.

Make the small detour to the Garden of the Gods, a site featuring magnificent red sandstone fins (free entrance), before heading north on scenic back roads.

South of Denver, you can also swing by Red Rocks Park, home to a natural amphitheater carved into red sandstone, with views over the Denver skyline.

The world's biggest artists have performed here—like the Beatles, U2 or Sting. The dedicated Hall of Fame can be visited!

Return to Denver and check in at your hotel (paid parking).

Overnight in Denver.



Day 18

Depending on your flight schedule, stroll around Downtown Denver—for example near the Denver Art Museum—or admire the splendid lobby of the Brown Palace hotel...

Drive to Denver airport, return your rental car and fly back to Europe (arrival the next day).

Stay extension or itinerary change: contact us

Accommodation