

Ultimate Guide to
**Mesa Verde
Country**





The Region

The region where Mesa Verde National Park sits is rich in history, outdoor recreation, and culture, and has a diverse set of gastronomical cuisines. While you might be able to visit Mesa Verde National Park in a day, it's worth spending a week exploring all that this area has to offer!

Southwest Colorado is part of what locals call the “Four Corners”- a relatively small area of the west where Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado meet. In late 1800/early 1900 this area was referred to as the “dark corner” as outlaws hopped regularly between the states avoiding lawmen. Today, travel between the four states is still common — many people live in one state and work in another. The States also share history and cultural elements: for example New Mexico green chile is as popular in southwest Colorado as it is in Utah or Arizona.

Throughout this guide, this area will be referred to as the Four Corners, Mesa Verde Country, and Southwest Colorado. While towns and attractions in other counties and states are highlighted, this guide highlights visitors looking to stay and play in Montezuma County.

Why Visit

Nestled in the heart of southwest Colorado lies Montezuma County, a hidden gem waiting to be explored. Over 76% of the area is public land, offering endless opportunities for outdoor adventure regardless of the season. From the exhilaration of skiing and snowboarding in the winter to the tranquility of hiking, mountain biking, and rafting in the warmer months, there's something for everyone in Mesa Verde Country.

It's not just the natural beauty that draws visitors; Montezuma County boasts a rich cultural history and numerous archaeological sites. Mesa Verde National Park stands as a testament to the ancient civilizations that once thrived in this region, and its designation as an International Dark Sky Park highlights the pristine night skies of rural Colorado. This area remains relatively untouched by mass tourism, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the local culture and truly connect with the community - past and present.



Towns

Montezuma County, Colorado

Cortez, the county seat, can be a little rough around the edges, but just like any diamond in the rough this town is truly a hidden gem of Colorado. With lots of shopping and dining and conventional hotels, Cortez has easy access to all of Mesa Verde Country's adventures.

Dolores is an outdoor adventurer's dream! Dolores is an adorable town in the shadow of a canyon and next to McPhee Reservoir. The town is easily walkable and has several great restaurants.

Mancos is the oldest town in Montezuma Country. With a picturesque downtown, Mancos boasts art galleries, fine dining, and lots of creative events throughout the summer.

Colorado

Durango has the train and rafting. Stroll downtown for shops & dining. El Moro is great for brunch.

Telluride is a former mining town, now catering to a more expensive taste. Ride the free gondola!

Silverton is a quaint mining town, with lots of outdoor activities! Little Bear coffee is local.

Ouray is also a quaint mining town, but boasts several breweries and hot springs! Visit Weisbaden.





Archaeology

With more than 8,300 recorded sites alone in Canyons of the Ancients National Monument, the Four Corners region boasts some of the highest concentration of archaeological sites in the world. Here are the must-do's:

The main archeological attraction of the area, just under 500,000 people visit **Mesa Verde National Park** every year. Park rangers offer guided hikes into the sites from May - October for as little as \$8. These are *highly* recommended for those capable to climb stairs and traverse tight spaces. If you are interested in doing more hiking: Petroglyph Point trail is a moderate 2.5-mile loop that showcases the beauty of the area.

Many people don't know that part of Mesa Verde is actually owned and maintained by the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. To visit this portion of the park with a Ute guide, book a tour with the **Ute Mountain Tribal Park**. These tours are immersive and cultural, a definite "to do" for culturally-minded visitor.

With 174,000 acres of protected land, **Canyons of the Ancients National Monument** has the highest known density of archeological sites in the United States. There are multiple access points to the Monument, but the best hiking sites are:

- [Sand Canyon & Rock Creek Trails](#)
- [Lowry Pueblo](#)

Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance leads tours in Canyons of the Ancients National Monument.

Visit <https://swcocanyons.org/tours/> for more information.

Archaeology Continued

Located on the border of Colorado and Utah, is **Hovenweep National Monument**, once home to over 2,500 people. The Square Town Loop trail is a great way to see multiple sites and sweeping canyon vistas.

Inside the City of Cortez, is a 120-acre nature preserve known as **Hawkins Preserve**. With several miles of intertwining trails - and a paved, accessible trail - everyone can enjoy Hawkins Preserve. Hawkins Pueblo, the main archeological site in the preserve, is not to be missed. You can enjoy the preserve on your own, or book a tour with a local guide from [Cortez Tours](#).

Aztec Ruins National Monument, located just across the border in New Mexico, is another Puebloan settlement not to be missed. Watching sunset or sunrise here, especially during ranger-led programs, is highly recommended.

Also in New Mexico is **Chaco Canyon National Historical Park**. With its intricate network of Great Houses and kivas, Chaco Canyon offers visitors a glimpse into the sophisticated culture and engineering prowess of the ancestral Puebloans.



Tours & Excursions

Guided tours offer visitors to Southwest Colorado a curated, personal experience of local history & culture. If you are looking for a more in-depth exploration of the area, be sure to check out these guides:

Cortez Tours offers walking tours that teach guests about the history and culture of the area. The most popular tours are the sunrise tours at Hawkins Preserve and the ghost tours in downtown Cortez. Prices range from \$20 - \$30.

Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance takes tours on curated trips through Canyons of the Ancient National Monument. Tours usually require bookings of at least 4 people.

Wild West Excursions offers guests the true Western experience with farm and ranch tours and guided fishing and mountain hikes. Prices start at \$99 per guest.

Ghost Walk Durango also offers a ghost tour in Mancos, Colorado. Prices range from \$20 - \$24 per guest.

Mesa Verde Stables is a long-time outfitter offering horseback tours and rides. Rides start at \$75 per person with a 2-person minimum booking.

Four Corners Guides offers longer, 2+ day, guided bike-packing trips into Ute Mountain Tribal Park.



Museums

Museums help visitors piece together the history and timeline of the area. Museums can also help make sense of the unique cultures of an area. Be sure to visit these:

Canyons of the Ancients Visitor Center & Museum

Museum is one of the best museums in the area. Many people lament not making this museum their *first* stop on their tour of archeological sites in the southwest. With the help of the Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance, the museum also plans many events throughout the year that offer a unique perspective on history and culture.

- \$7 admission

Located just off Main Street in Cortez is the **Montezuma Heritage Museum**, a small but incredibly well-curated museum on the history of Montezuma County. The museum comprehensively highlights the pioneer history of the area.

- \$5 admission, additional donation suggested

As you drive through Dolores you will see a train engine on a small length of track. This is actually the **Galloping Goose Historical Society**.

The museum showcases the history of the Rio Grande Southern Railroad, which used to run through the area. If you are lucky, the museum host might start up the engine and take your for a ride!

- Free admission, donation suggested





Arts & Culture

The cultural heritage of Montezuma County and the Four Corners region is diverse with roots from the Puebloan societies over 1,000 years ago. Now the area has several designated Creative Districts, multiple festivals and events that support the arts and many local artisans and craftsmen. If you are interested in the creative industries, check out these important galleries and organizations:

The **Cortez Cultural Center** is a museum-turned art gallery. With monthly rotating exhibits from local artists, the Center is housed in a *beautiful* historic building and has a small gift shop and museum. The Cultural Center also hosts Native American dances Tuesday - Saturday night, June through August.

The **Zu Gallery** is an art gallery, wine bar, and general community gathering space. All of the artwork in the gallery is done by local artists.

Turquoise Raven Art Gallery is another art gallery on Main Street in Cortez. The gallery features local artists from around the Four Corners region.

Notah Dineh Trading Company and Museum is one of the oldest trading posts in the area. Notah Dineh has been family-run since 1961, and specializes in handmade Native American art.

Merriweather Home + Market is a unique shop filled with products from local artisan. Over 80% of her shop is from local women-made artisans.

Events

Summer has the highest concentration of events and festivals, but Montezuma County has things going on all year. Check out these signature events:

Ute Mountain Mesa Verde Birding Festival, Cortez, week in mid-May

Dolores River Fest, Dolores, Saturday in early June

Burro Fest, Mancos, Saturday in mid June

Cortez Celtic Fair, Cortez, Saturday in mid-June

Third Thursdays, Cortez, monthly June - September

First Fridays, Cortez, monthly May - October

Escalante Days, Dolores, Saturday in early August

Fourth of July, Cortez & Ute Mountain Casino, July 3rd & 4th



Outdoor Recreation

With nearly 1 million acres of public land, Montezuma County is a mecca for outdoor enthusiasts. Here are some places to get outside and enjoy nature!

Mountain Biking

- [Guide to easy mountain biking](#)
- [Phil's World](#), Cortez
- [Boggy Draw](#), Dolores
- [Hawkins Preserve](#), Cortez
- [Carpenter & Geer Natural Area](#), Cortez
- [Sand Canyon & Rock Creek Trails](#), Cortez

Hiking

- [Geyser Spring Trail](#), Dolores
- [Sand Canyon & Rock Creek Trails](#), Cortez
- [Navajo Lake Trail](#), Telluride
- [Hope Lake Trail](#), Telluride

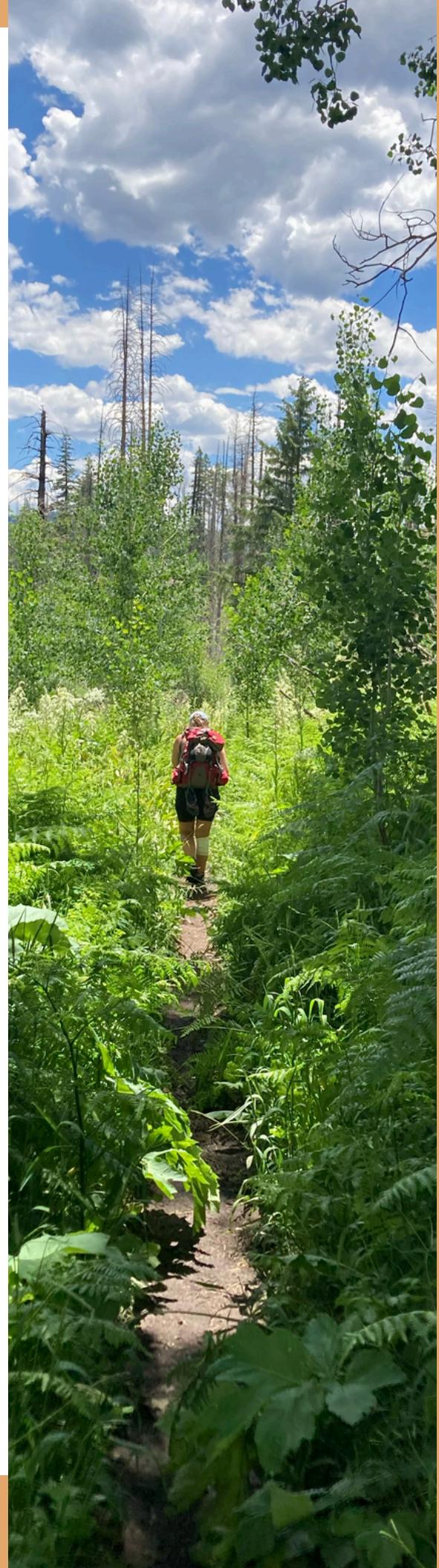
Cross-Country Skiing

- [Trout Lake Railroad Grade](#), Telluride
- [Morefield Campground](#), Mesa Verde NP
- [Chicken Creek](#), Mancos

Downhill Skiing & Snowboarding

- [Purgatory Resort](#), Durango
- [Hesperus Ski Area](#), Hesperus
- [Telluride Ski Resort](#), Telluride*

Locals like to say Cortez is in the middle of everywhere! You can get to the mountains just as easily as you can the desert! It's the perfect place to base a southwest adventure!



Stay

If you are looking for places to stay in Montezuma County, check out these highly recommended hotels and rentals:

Mesa Verde Motel, Mancos (\$140-\$165 per night) - locally owned by two friends, this boutique hotel caters to travelers looking for a little fun! The M Bar is located on the premises, which is a great local coffee shop in the morning and a whiskey bar in the evening.

Retro Inn, Cortez (\$90-\$140 per night) - this 1960's themed motel has easy access to Cortez and great indoor and outdoor spaces to relax after a long day of adventuring.

Far View Lodge, Mesa Verde National Park (\$150 - \$250 per night) - stay inside the national park and wake up to breathtaking views of the area. The Lodge also features the award-winning Metate Dining Room.

Sage Canyon Cliff House, Cortez (\$300+ per night, 2 night minimum) - this beautiful Airbnb is built into the side of a cliff. Nestled in McElmo Canyon, this is a truly unique and secluded experience.



Dining

Mesa Cafe, Cortez - locally owned coffee and breakfast shop, great place to relax and read the news or grab breakfast to go!

Kelly's Kitchen, Dolores - breakfast and taco restaurant in a building listed on the National Registry of Historic Places.

Moon Dog Cafe, Mancos - excellent baked goods and breakfast.

Thai Cortez, Cortez - authentic Thai cuisine run by Cortez locals.

Min-Tea, Cortez - new restaurant featuring bubble tea, Vietnamese cuisine.

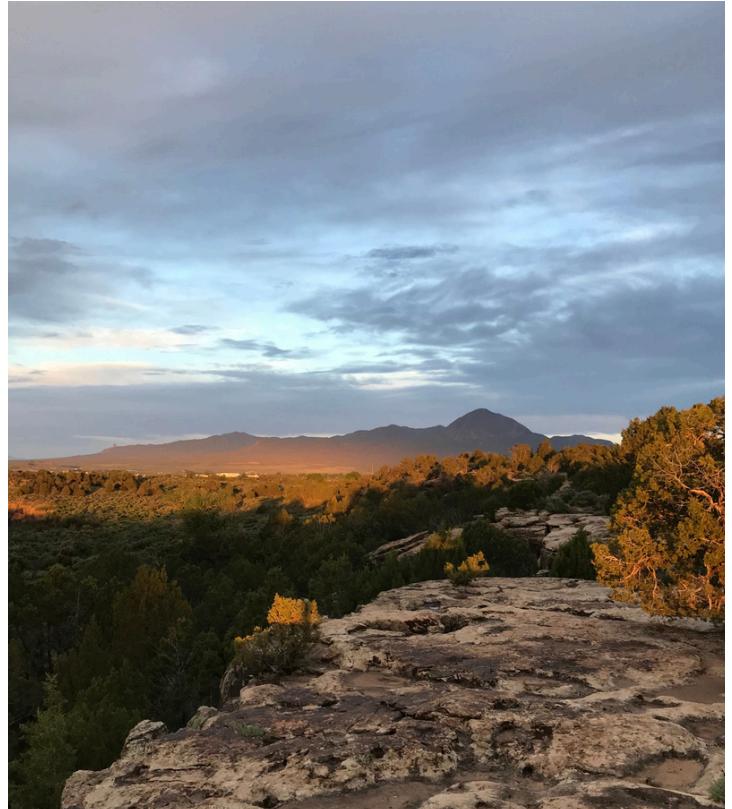
Loungin Lizard, Cortez - southwest American fusion in a historic building.

Stonefish Sushi, Cortez - delicious (and fresh!) sushi restaurant.

Pueblo Seed & Food Company, Cortez - heritage grain store featuring artisan breads, grains, cereals, and soups.

Farm Bistro, Cortez - farm-to-table restaurant featuring local products.

Once Upon a Sandwich, Cortez - whimsical fantasy-themed restaurant. Great for kids!



Beer, Wine, & Cider

Colorado loves our local craft beverages, and Montezuma County is no exception! Check out these watering holes to enjoy locally cultivated spirits:

Dolores River Brewery, Dolores - excellent brewery featuring an open patio, live music, and wood-fired pizza. Try their German-style beers.

Main Street Brewery & Restaurant, Cortez - great spot for lunch & a brew. Check out the unique murals on the wall above the bar.

Wildedge Brewing Collective, Cortez - local community gathering place, features live music on weekends. Try their sour and seasonal beers.

DuWest Wines, Cortez - the newest winery in the region. Book a private tasting at the winery, or request a vineyard and lavender farm tour.

Sutcliffe Vineyards, Cortez - the most picturesque winery around. Try their signature blends made from grapes grown on the property.

Yellow Car Country Wines, Cortez - exciting selection of meads and fruit wines. Try their wine slushies.

Fenceline Cider, Mancos - a quaint cider named for the apple trees that sprout along fencelines where birds sit and spit or poop out apple seeds.





THANK YOU!

Interested in visiting southwest Colorado? Book a tour with Cortez Tours at www.corteztours.com or by calling 970 - 516 - 7646.

BOOK A TOUR!