



2021
VISITOR GUIDE

A Celestial

ENCOUNTER



Colorado Stargazing: Experience the Night connects several Colorado locations known for their dark skies and incredible stargazing opportunities. It also highlights dark sky events and encourages the conservation and preservation of all of Colorado's natural and cultural resources.

Among the following locations, visitors will find International Dark-Sky Association Designated Communities, areas just starting the designation process, and everything in between. Regardless, all of these communities are unified by their high elevation and low humidity, allowing for some of the best stargazing in the world.



Lake City

@TRAVISHODGESPHOTOGRAPHY



MICHAEL UNDERWOOD

Lake City is the sole town in Hinsdale County, the most remote county in the lower 48. Made up of 96% public lands, it's an ideal location for watching the night sky and for leaving civilization behind.

In addition to amazing stargazing opportunities, Lake City and surrounding Hinsdale County offer seemingly endless miles of trails, 21 public campgrounds, five fourteeners, three National Forests, one BLM district, four wilderness areas, and two wilderness study areas.

Popular outdoor activities take full advantage of this open space and include hiking, biking, ATViing, Jeeping, boating, and more. In the winter, outdoor

recreationists ice climb, snowmobile, cross-country ski, and snowshoe along miles of groomed trails. Lake City even has its own ski hill offering the best-priced ticket in all of Colorado.

History speaks loudly in Lake City, where famous cannibal, Alfred Packer, is rumored to have murdered his traveling companions. Lake City is also mining country, and many of the area's historic mines are still standing and available for viewing.

Regardless of what visitors choose to fill their days—climbing, ghost towns, fishing, history—Lake City offers something for everyone and a remote, yet enthralling experience unlike anything else.

LAKECITY.COM

SEE THE STARS

Best Viewing Spots

windy point observation site

Windy Point Observation Site is a picturesque viewing area located along Hwy 149 that also serves as an ideal spot for stargazing. Take Highway 149 south of Lake City for eight miles.

wupperman campground

Less than five miles from downtown is Wupperman Campground at Lake San Cristobal, Colorado's second-largest natural lake. To get there, head south on CO 149, turn right onto CR 30, and then turn left onto CR 33.

slumgullion center

The Slumgullion Center is an International Dark-Sky Designated Park and is conveniently located three miles south of Lake City.

Certification Status

In 2020, Lake City's Slumgullion Center was designated an International Dark-Sky Association Park, adding to the growing list of Colorado's IDA Places.



Four-wheel the Alpine Loop. Plan on a minimum of eight hours and add time for stops in Silverton and Duray or for short hikes and photographs along the way.

Climb a Fourteener. Handies Peak is very doable with Uncompahgre, Wetterhorn, Redcloud, and Sunshine for those with more experience.

Walk the streets of the Lake City National Historic District and learn about the historic homes, buildings, and events described on standing plaques throughout town. Be sure to visit the Hinsdale County Museum and see displays featuring Hinsdale County pioneer, mining, and ranching history and the history of Lake City.

Snowmobile, snowshoe, and cross-country ski enthusiasts should check out the more than 100 miles of groomed trails between Lake City and Creede.

Spend a day fishing either on your own or with a guide. Favorite day trips include fishing at Thompson Lake and Larson Lakes, in the Deer Lakes area, along the Cebolla River, and at Continental and Rio Grande Reservoirs. When Lake San Cristobal freezes over, ice fishing makes for great day-long fun.



Creede

TERRY TADDEUCCI



MICHAEL UNDERWOOD



Discover Creede, a small town tucked into the San Juan Mountains and surrounded by 900 square miles of gorgeous western wilderness, 95% of which is public land.

This historic mining town is unique in that it sits in a former volcanic caldera where it is surrounded by sheer cliffs, limiting the town's physical growth, and thus, light pollution. This lends to the small-town feel and the stupendous dark skies visitors love and come back for again and again.

Creede serves as a jumping-off point to some of Colorado's most popular backcountry regions, including the Weminuche and La Garita Wilderness Areas and the San Juan and Rio Grande National Forests.

Popular outdoor activities in Creede include fishing, rafting, ATVing, and mountain biking in the summer and cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, and ice-skating in the winter.

History seeps into visitors as they stroll through downtown Creede, where intact 1890s storefronts are an invitation to shop, dine, and stay at local lodgings. Dig deeper into Creede's silver mining history at the Creede Historical Museum and the fascinating and unique Underground Mining Museum.

For some summer entertainment, check out a production by the Creede Repertory Theater, or to view some of nature's incredible power, head to North Clear Creek Falls, located along the Silver Thread Scenic Byway.



SEE THE STARS

Best Viewing Spots

pool table road

Pool Table Road is a scenic, long dirt road to the Wheeler Geologic Area, Colorado's first National Monument. From Creede, head east on E 7th Street toward La Garita Street for 269 ft. Turn right at the 1st cross street onto CO-149 South and continue to follow CO-149 S for 7.3 miles. Turn left onto Pool Table Road, FR600.

the bachelor loop historic tour

The Bachelor Loop Historic Tour is a 17-mile drive through a historic mining district above Creede. The tour takes you across mine locations from the 1890s and abandoned ghost towns that once rivaled Creede in size.

love lake

Love Lake is a small, majestic lake surrounded by mountain scenery. From Creede, travel 7 miles west on State highway 149. Turn left and travel southwest on Forest Road 523 for 10 miles and you will come right to the Love Lake parking lot.



Certification Status

Mineral County is currently working with the International Dark-Sky Association in pursuit of certification.



Discover a one-story, wood-framed depot built in 1891 and 1892 and other treasures from Creede's unique past at the Creede Historical Museum.

Learn about Creede's rich mining history at the Underground Mining Museum, which includes many displays, including real mining equipment.

Creede Repertory Theatre is a professional theatre company located at 9,000 feet in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado. Its award-winning company produces big city quality productions in this spectacular location from May through September.

Colorado's Silver Thread Scenic Byway weaves through one remarkable story after another—some historical, others more nature-based. Along the way, you'll pass through two historic districts and tracts of land so remote, you'll feel as though you're trekking through the wilds of the 1800s.

At Wheeler Geologic Area, visitors find many trails, some nearby peaks over 13,000 feet, and expansive views. Wheeler is accessible by a 7-mile hike or a grueling 14-mile four-wheel-drive road. Your efforts are rewarded by views of a remarkable geologic formation of moderately coarse volcanic tuff eroded into many different shapes.

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

PATRICK MYERS

The Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve in southern Colorado was recognized as a National Park in 2004, features North America's tallest dunes, and is one of the state's most visited attractions.

Each spring, Medano Creek runs at its peak flow, making it a terrific time to splash, wade, and float in the cool, snow-melt waters. Along the creek, a sandy beach is ideal for parking chairs, an umbrella, and a cooler and spending the day.

Beyond the creek are 30 square miles of steep and shifting sand dunes to explore. With no designated trails in most of the park, visitors are free to hike where they want or slide down the dunes on sand sleds and boards.

N P S . G O V

At the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, the fun doesn't stop when the sun goes down. This amazing feat of nature comes alive under the moon and the stars, which shine bright thanks to a combination of dry air, little light pollution, and high elevation.

Night at the Great Sand Dunes can include exploring dunes under a bright full moon, viewing thousands of stars on a clear moonless night, listening for owls along the foothills, or observing migrating amphibians on a wet night.

Alamosa, just 35 miles southwest of the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, serves as a great launching point for a visit to the dunes and all other great San Luis Valley attractions.



PATRICK MYERS



SEE THE STARS

Best Viewing Spot

Hike out to the main dune field, lay down, and look up for unobstructed views of the stars.

Certification Status

The Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve was designated an International Dark-Sky Association Park in 2019.



Hike and explore the various landscapes and terrains that give this place meaning and its namesake.

Photograph the various ecosystems and layers that make this place unique and otherworldly.

Drop by the visitor center to join a ranger program, view the exhibits, and watch the park film.

Camp at the Pinon Flats Campground and hike out to the dunes after dinner.

When Medano Creek is flowing, pack a picnic and wade in the creek while enjoying a slower pace of life.





Crestone

PETER ISMERT



MICHAEL UNDERWOOD

A SPIRITUAL MECCA

Nestled in the shadows of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at 7,500 feet, Crestone has emerged in the last few decades as a spiritual mecca for world religions. Although it has only 150 residents, Crestone is home to more than two dozen ashrams, monasteries, temples, retreat centers, stupas, labyrinths, and other sacred landmarks.

Crestone didn't begin as a spiritual mecca. From the 1870s through the 1930s, it was a mining town and then a center for ranching. But its identity underwent a dramatic change in 1977 when a Canadian businessman and United Nations diplomat and his wife purchased a large tract of land in the area and gave away much of it to religious groups that agreed to establish centers there.

Crestone also boasts miles of trails, the rustic North Crestone Creek Forest Service campground, and two

fourteeners—Crestone Needle and Crestone Peak—both of which are considered the toughest and most dangerous fourteeners to climb in Colorado. The wilderness in the surrounding mountains is home to bear, elk, and mountain lions, while the Baca National Wildlife Refuge in the valley protects nearly 100,000 acres of wetlands and grasslands.

A strong strain of quirkiness runs through Crestone. While people have to get a permit to build, they don't have to follow many regulations on how things get constructed. As a result, the buildings here are a glorious hodgepodge of architectural styles. Solar and other forms of alternative energy are popular, and the community has attracted many artists, healers, and spiritual seekers.



SEE

THE

STARS

Best Viewing Spots

ufo watchtower

Head to the nearby UFO watchtower, which is dedicated to the observation of UFOs and all things unexplained from the stars.

hot springs

Soak in the warm waters of Valley View or Joyful Journey hot springs and get a view of the night sky like never before.

orient mine

Hike two miles to the Orient Mine from the Orient Mine Trust Welcome Center for incredible stargazing opportunities and a bat outflight as the Orient Mine is home to nearly 250,000 migratory bats.

Certification Status

In 2021, the International Dark-Sky Association designated the Town of Crestone an International Dark-Sky Community, making it the 31st designated International Dark-Sky Community worldwide and the fourth in Colorado.



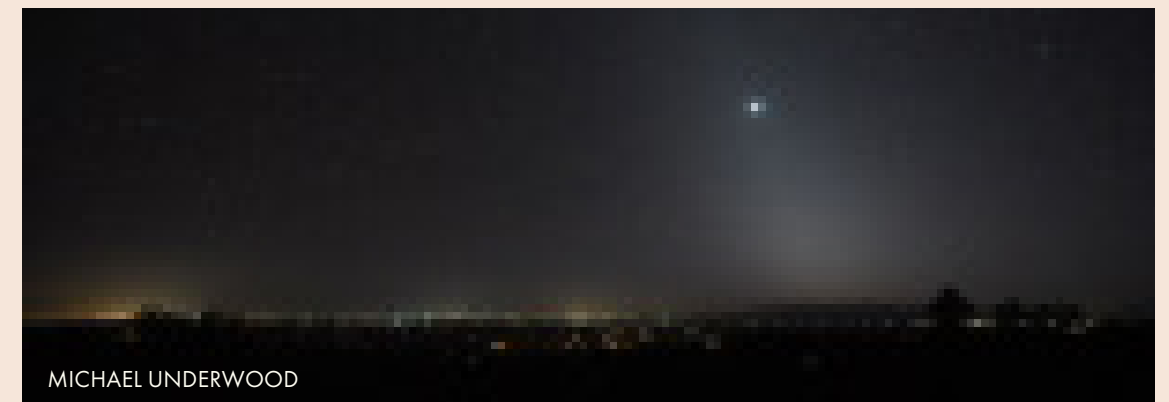
Do some soul searching and experience the surprising international spiritual mecca of Crestone. Over 15 spiritual centers, from a Catholic hermitage to ashrams to Buddhist monasteries, give visitors an amazing array of spiritual centers to visit.

Hike along the miles of trails that start at the edge of town and head straight up into the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness. Each canyon, creek, and mountain is an adventure.

Pick up a historic walking tour map at the Crestone Historical Museum. After checking out the museum's exhibits on old-time ranching, mining, schooling, and home life, amble through the tree-lined streets of downtown.

Soak in local hot springs—Joyful Journey and Valley View—and enjoy geothermal-fed healing waters. Relax your mind and body with nourishing minerals while basking in the majestic beauty of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

Tour the Baca National Wildlife Refuge and enjoy its amazing educational wildlife displays, phenomenal bird watching, wildlife viewing, and guided tours.



MICHAEL UNDERWOOD

La Veta

La Veta is a rural town in southern Colorado known for its community of artists and ranchers. It sits at the base of the Spanish Peaks and at the opening of the Cucharas River Valley, making for 360 degrees of breathtaking scenery.

Extraordinary geological formations called dikes dot La Veta and its surrounding communities. These large, vertical granite formations combined with the area's incredible dark skies make La Veta an unparalleled location for budding and professional photographers.

La Veta has numerous walking and biking trails close to town that showcase its beautiful scenery. Popular trails include La Veta Loop Trail, The Daire Reservoir Trail, and the Hogback Nature Trail at Lathrop State

Park, Colorado's first state park. Galleries featuring local, national, and international artists fill La Veta's quaint Main Street. Visitors are also encouraged to explore classes offered at the La Veta School for the Arts, where well-known instructors teach a wide range of mediums.

The Highway of Legends National Scenic Byway, which runs through La Veta, was selected by The Lonely Planet as one of Colorado's best scenic byways. It is home to unique geological, cultural, and historic features and includes legends from the Native Americans, the Spanish Conquistadors, and the pioneers, miners, trappers, and ranchers who explored and then settled this region.

SPANISH PEAKS COUNTRY



MICHAEL UNDERWOOD

SEE THE STARS

Best Viewing Spots

southern colorado astrological park

Just one mile west of La Veta is the Southern Colorado Astronomical Park, a crossroads of ancient and modern astronomy, including a stone calendar and two observatory structures.

uptop historic district on the top of la veta pass

Uptop, a historic district on La Veta Pass, hosts cross-country skiers, hikers, dance and music festivals, and stargazers.



Certification Status

La Veta does not yet hold an International Dark-Sky Association Certification but is part of the Sangre de Cristo Dark Sky Reserve currently being reviewed for designation.



Visit La Veta's many art galleries, which feature local, national, and international artists.

Get a dose of local history at the Francisco Fort Museum, housed in the town's original trading post.

Check out some live music at La Veta Mercantile and Deerprint Wine & Bistro.

Find peace and solitude at the Wahatoya Lakes State Wildlife Area, where you can take an easy hike around the lake or simply relax and enjoy the scenery.

See a performance at the Francisco Center for the Performing Arts.

Westcliffe & Silver Cliff

SCOTT DANOF



Westcliffe and Silver Cliff in the Wet Mt. Valley make up Colorado's first designated International Dark-Sky Community and the highest elevation of those sites in the world.

The Wet Mountain Valley lays between the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range to the west and the Wet Mountain Range to the east, making for dramatic views in every direction.

Undisturbed ranchland reminiscent of Colorado's earliest days stretches across the valley, making Westcliffe and Silver Cliff truly representative of Colorado as it once was—a land not yet filled by homes and businesses but left open for ranching and nature to thrive.

Custer County ranching continues with active grazing, hay, and calving operations. The community celebrates

its ranching heritage at several annual events, and conservation easements help maintain the county's open space and beauty.

Stargazing in Westcliffe and Silver Cliff would not be complete without a visit to the Smokey Jack Observatory on the southwest corner of Bluff Park. Constructed in 2015, this observatory boasts a retractable roof and a 14-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope with computer-guided pointing and tracking to view our majestic night sky.

The Smokey Jack Observatory is maintained by local organization Dark Skies of the Wet Mountain Valley, which also hosts free public star parties throughout the year.



SEE THE STARS

Best Viewing Spots

smokey jack observatory

Smokey Jack Observatory in Bluff Park.

deweese reservoir

Watch the stars reflect off a still lake on the east side of DeWeese Reservoir.

dude ranches

Any of the area's dude ranches: Bear Basin Ranch, Music Meadows Ranch, and A Painted View Ranch.

rosita

Visit the historic town of Rosita, where it's even darker than in Westcliffe and Silver Cliff and where there are many vacation rentals with views across the valley with the Milky Way overhead.



Certification Status

The International Dark-Sky Association awarded the towns of Westcliffe and Silver Cliff an International Dark-Sky Community Designation in 2015. The designation honors Dark Skies of the Wet Mountain Valley's dedication to reducing light pollution and follows a detailed application process.

Westcliffe and Silver Cliff comprise the first dark sky community in Colorado and the ninth—and highest—such community the world.



Visit All Aboard Westcliffe and The Silver Cliff Museum to learn about the area's history.

Head to Alvarado Campground, hop on the Venable Trailhead, and hike the famous Rainbow Trail.

Drive the Frontier Pathways Scenic Byway to Bishop Castle, a stone, steel, and iron fortress built singlehandedly by Jim Bishop. Bishop Castle is free and open to the public during daylight hours. Just a few miles south of the castle, you'll find Lake Isabel along the CO 165 portion of Frontier Pathways Scenic Byway. This popular camping destination not only offers an afternoon filled with beautiful scenery but also excellent fishing, paddling, hiking, biking, and trails for ATVs.

Peruse the many art galleries that dot downtown Westcliffe.

If you're a nature lover and are up for a ride on more backroads, consider detouring on your return trip to Mission: Wolf, a peaceful sanctuary for captive wolves and wolf-dog crosses.

Cuchara

SCOT MANGOLD



SCOT MANGOLD



Cuchara is a charming, mountain village tucked on the eastern slopes of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in the heart of the Cucharas River Valley.

Surrounded by the San Isabel National Forest with all its lakes, mountains, and wilderness, this village is a favorite respite for Colorado hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts. At the heart of Cuchara is a quaint downtown area with colorful shops, lodging, and restaurants.

Cuchara offers wonderful views of dramatic West Spanish Peak, one of two geological towers once used as guideposts for traveling American Indians and pioneers.

South of town along Colorado 12 and part of the Highway of Legends National Scenic Byway are gorgeous views topping out at 9,995-foot Cucharas Pass. Nearby are abundant opportunities for hiking, fishing, OHVing, and camping, especially at Cordova Pass, Cuchara Recreation Area, and Bear and Blue Lakes.

Non-motorized recreationists enjoy the trails offered at Cuchara Mountain Park, an abandoned ski resort that is now an environmentally sensitive facility offering year-round opportunities for recreation, education, entertainment, and special events.



SEE THE STARS

Best Viewing Spots

cuchara mountain park

It was once a ski resort. But now these 47 acres are an environmentally sensitive facility that offer year-round opportunities for recreation.

bear lake campground

Located in the beautiful San Isabel National Forest at an elevation of 10,480 ft., Bear Lake Campground provides aspen and spruce forests ideal for camping and views of the Culebra Mountain Range.

blue lake campground

Campground with a beautiful little lake ideal for stargazing.

Certification Status

Cuchara does not yet hold an International Dark-Sky Association Certification but is part of the Sangre de Cristo Dark Sky Reserve currently being reviewed for designation.



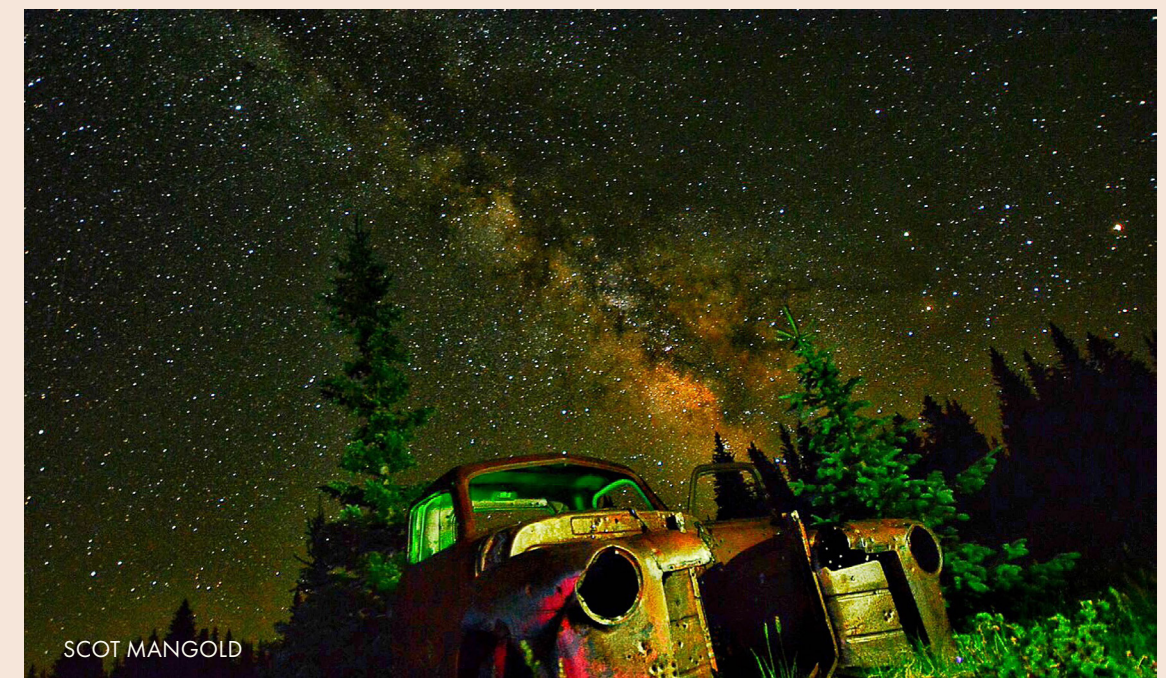
Hike, backcountry ski, or snowshoe Cuchara Mountain Park, an abandoned ski resort now owned by the county and maintained for non-motorized recreational use.

Take the Highway of Legends Audio Tour and learn about the ancient geologic changes that have formed the surrounding landscape over millennia and hear tales of the old West, with its covered wagon trains and gun battles.

Play a round of mini golf at The Bear's Den.

Fish, hike, or take in the scenery at the Cuchara River Recreation Area.

Drive up to Cordova Pass, which sits on the western shoulder of West Spanish Peak. This mountain rises to an elevation of 13,625 feet and lies just outside the Spanish Peaks Wilderness.



SCOT MANGOLD



Gunnison

MATT BURT



MATT BURT

Incorporated on February 28, 1880, the City of Gunnison is the gateway to the beautiful Gunnison Valley. Located in the deep heart of the Colorado Rocky Mountains at an elevation of 7,703 feet, Gunnison is home to nearly 7,000 residents. It is the county seat and largest municipality in Gunnison County. Gunnison is what one would imagine when picturing a home on the range but surrounded by ski areas, a national recreation area, a national park, lakes, rivers, and mesas.

This Rocky Mountain city has an active, outdoor-oriented community and offers year-round activities for visitors and residents alike. The city acts as a base for access to regional natural areas such as Hartman Rocks Recreation Area, Curecanti National Recreation Area, and the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

In addition to close access to world-class skiing, fishing, and mountain biking, Gunnison embraces its agricultural and ranching history. The city annually hosts Cattleman's Days Rodeo, held continuously since 1900. Gunnison is also home to Western Colorado University, a four-year public, liberal arts university with a selection of graduate programs.

Among Gunnison's newest attractions is a manmade whitewater park on the Gunnison River. The park stretches several hundred feet, with various rock structures providing a playground for recreational kayakers and rafters. Fishing is also allowed in some sections.

SEE THE STARS

Best Viewing Spots

hartman rocks

Visitors will find mountain biking, dirt biking, hiking, trail running, dispersed campsites, and countless climbing crags.

taylor park reservoir

Surrounded by national forest, Taylor Park Reservoir provides a big mountain playground for a range of outdoor activities. Visitors can mountain bike the famous Doctor Park Trail, launch a boat from Taylor Park Marina, camp in developed and primitive campsites, and OHV nearby trails.

blue mesa reservoir

Colorado's largest body of water, it is part of the Curecanti National Recreation Area and offers two full-service marinas—Elk Creek Marina and Lake Fork Marina—as well as Pappy's Restaurant.

gunnison valley observatory

Enjoy unprecedented public access to professional quality instruments and knowledge of astronomy. With a 30-inch reflector telescope to maximize the thin and unpolluted Rocky Mountain atmosphere, a night at the observatory is a once-in-a-lifetime experience not to be missed.



Certification Status

The City of Gunnison included in its strategic plan working with the Gunnison Valley Observatory to investigate becoming a member of a dark-sky organization by December 31, 2021.



Mountain bike or hike at Hartman Rocks Recreation Area. Just minutes from downtown, these 14,000 acres of public land boast 45 miles of incredible singletrack.

Take a beautiful hike at Curecanti National Recreation Area, a series of three reservoirs along the once wild Gunnison River.

Go boating at Blue Mesa Reservoir. It offers two full-service marinas—Elk Creek Marina and Lake Fork Marina.

Fish at Taylor River. Making its headwaters high up in the Rockies amongst numerous fourteens, the Taylor descends from the high country for 9,300 feet before emptying into the Taylor Reservoir.

Head to the Gunnison Pioneer Museum to discover the history of those who came to Colorado and the Gunnison Country to make a life in the “middle of nowhere,” where making a life was no easy feat.

Nucla, Naturita, Norwood

DERICK WILSON

ALSO KNOWN AS THE WEST END



NOLA SVOBOLA

WEST END COLORADO

The rural and historical towns of Nucla, Naturita, and Norwood are part of the “West End,” a region tucked between Telluride and Moab on Colorado’s western slope. Together with other towns in the region, Nucla, Naturita, and Norwood proudly carry the slogan, “Many Towns. One Community.” This area is not a national park with paved walkways. Rather, it is raw and rugged and requires personal responsibility, wayfinding, and a John Wayne-like attitude.

These three towns embody a Colorado postcard—a slow-paced life among a landscape of dramatic red rock canyons, high desert mesas, wide-open pastures, and the confluence of two river systems. Surrounded by so much wilderness, the outdoor recreational opportunities in Nucla, Naturita, and

Norwood are endless. Visitors from all over come to camp, fish, hike, bike, hunt, raft, and more.

Connected by a shared history, Nucla, Naturita, and Norwood were all founded at the turn of the century as mining towns. Today, they are largely connected by the Unaweep-Tabeguache Scenic and Historic Byway.

The International Dark-Sky Association designated Norwood a Dark-Sky Community in 2019. In 2021, Nucla and Naturita joined it as a joint Dark-Sky Community. Now, all three of these towns in the West End are proud to hold the designation.



SEE THE STARS

Best Viewing Spots

hanging flume overlook

The Hanging Flume was an open water chute built over the Dolores River Canyon. The Montrose Placer Mining Company built the flume in the 1880s to facilitate gold mining.

miramonte reservoir

Miramonte Reservoir is one of the West End's top summertime destinations. The reservoir is Norwood's largest body of water and is considered to be one of the region's greatest outdoor recreational assets, offering a plethora of family-friendly outdoor activities.

ledges rockhouse campground

This campground is located in groves of cottonwoods along the San Miguel River. The river in this section flows over sandstone bedrock where rock ledges form large holes creating rapids during high water. It has 12 campsites for RVs and tents, a few cabanas, and hand-carry boat ramps.

wright's mesa

The Ute Indians were the original settlers of the area known as Wright's Mesa. Historical accounts describe it as a spectacular valley with wide, clear flowing grasslands surrounding the valleys and stretching for miles.

Certification Status

The International Dark-Sky Association designated Norwood a Dark-Sky Community in 2019. In 2021, Nucla and Naturita joined it as a joint Dark-Sky Community. Today, all three of these towns are proud to hold the designation.



Drive the Unaweep Tabeguache Scenic Byway, Colorado's off-the-beaten-path scenic byway that weaves its way through some of the wildest lands in America.

Hit the Rimrocker Trail. There's 4WD, OHV, and bicycle access through some of the West's most stunning scenery.

Hike or bike Colorado's West End, where visitors discover more than 30 trails catering to a multitude of activities and ability levels. Trail info is available at westendtrails.org.

Boat, water ski, wakeboard, stand-up paddleboard, canoe, kayak, or windsurf at Miramonte Reservoir.

Ascend Lone Cone Peak (12,614 feet). The extinct volcano formed 65 million years ago.





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