



# ALL ABOARD for Rocky Mountain Adventure

By Lou Jurassic

Let me get right to the point. There aren't enough words in this magazine to describe all that Colorado Springs offers visitors. So, I'll cut the fluffy stuff about the natural beauty, the historic qualities of a place founded as a healthful resort back in the locomotive day and the current cultural stuff. (There are lots of museums dealing with art, history and the like.) Suffice to say, if you haven't been there, go. If you've been, go again. This high-mountain community south of Denver offers access to more attractions and adventures than you can accomplish in this lifetime. Don't believe me? Check out this partial to-do-before-you-die list:

**1. CLAMBER TO PIKES PEAKS SUMMIT.** This apex may not be the highest of Colorado's 54 four-teens (mountains with an elevation of 14,000 feet or more), but it's undoubtedly the most famous. Get to the top via a winding 19-mile road or a ride aboard the Manitou and Pikes Peak cog railroad. Once there, enjoy the view that inspired the lyrics to *America the Beautiful*. (Think you're really tough? Try it on foot. The Pikes Peak Ascent is August 20 this year. A half-marathon takes place the next day. Registration for both events is open now.)

**2. PAUSE IN THE AIR FORCE ACADEMY CHAPEL.** A marvel of modern architecture, the design inspires awe and wonder. Worship services can be held simultaneously in four separate areas. It is open to the public every day and group tours are provided upon request.

**3. DINE AT THE BROADMOOR HOTEL.** Feeling really flush? Spend a night or longer. This five-star resort oozes class and tradition. Built in 1918 as a railroad destination resort, it remains the Queen of the Rockies and now includes three 18-hole golf courses, and a top-notch tennis facility. The Rocky Mountain views are worth the price tag.

**4. TRAVEL THE ROYAL GORGE BY TRAIN.** A trek through Colorado's deepest canyon combines unbelievable scenery, encounters with wildlife and a glimpse of history. (Feuding railroads resorted



to both violence and litigation in pursuit of the right to build this track. Bat Masterson was involved. Need I say more?). Today, outstanding meals and good wine are part of many trips. Budget-minded riders can go coach and still enjoy the jaw-dropping view beneath towering 10,000-foot cliffs. This

is the only means of traveling the narrow chasm other than rafting the Arkansas River. (Add that to another list.) The train departs from Cañon City 45 miles southwest of Colorado Springs.

**5. EXPLORE THE CAVE OF THE WINDS BY LANTERN LIGHT.** Cave of the Winds is located west of Colorado Springs near The Manitou Cliff Dwellings. (The "dwellings" are interesting to see, but with the caveat that the stones used in their construction were brought from southwestern Colorado near Mesa Verde and reconfigured to look like an Anasazi dwelling.) The cave is authentic and a huge attraction, not just because it holds good examples of delicate helectite formations. The real thrill is the chance to make like an old-timer and explore by the warm glow of a handheld lantern. The guide's spooky stories contribute extra spine tingles and add to the fun.

**6. HOWL AT THE MOON WITH A WOLF.** Less than an hour's drive from Colorado Springs, in the mountain town Florissant, the Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center offers an educational wildlife experience. Arctic wolves, timber wolves, Mexican grey wolves, wolf-dog hybrids, coyotes and foxes are all at home here. Informative tours end with a group howl that includes human spectators and the canines. Full-moon sessions, complete with cocoa and coffee, are held almost every month and conclude with a wolf meet-and-greet. (Children must be eight years of age to participate.)

**7. VISIT THE GARDEN OF THE GODS.** Red-hued spires, balanced rocks and peculiar geological formations with names like Kissing Camels and Llamas Heads are the main draw at this public park. Hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking are popular. So is rock climbing—as long as you obtain a permit from the Visitor and Nature Center. That facility also offers free nature presentations and natural history exhibits. There is no admission fee for the park. Guided bus tours are offered for a nominal fee. Nearby, the Rock Ledge Ranch Historic Site is a living history museum that re-creates various eras in Colorado Springs history with a 1775 American Indian settlement, an 1860s homestead, a ranch house circa 1880 and a 1907 Edwardian estate.

This is just a start. I could go on about the nation's only money museum, the sole high-mountain zoo in the Rockies, the Florissant fossil beds, Old West gold towns like Cripple Creek and Victor, but I'm out of room. You'll have to explore for yourself. ■



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