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Dog-Friendly Walsenburg

Head south for a weekend
getaway, PUPS IN TOW

By Jamie Lynn Miller

WHEN CONTEMPLATING a spontaneous getaway, it's tempting to cast a wide, invariably expensive net toward well-known destinations such as Vail, Winter Park or Breckenridge. Traveling with the pup—or pups, however, means different priorities. It's time to explore the wilds along I-25 with a trip to Spanish Peaks Country—hikes, bites, art and fishing, all within three hours of the southern suburbs.

A train whistle south of Castle Rock signals the feel of the open road, like a starting bell along the course



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MARIA COCCHIARELLI-BERGER / MUSEUM OF FRIENDS

to adventure, while the road into Walsenburg gives that first taste of small-town charm. A gateway to Spanish Peaks Country, downtown Walsenburg boasts a brewery, homespun antique stores and a local archive of regional artists. Dog bowls are a welcome sight on a road trip, especially near the Museum of Friends.

Artist and co-founder Maria Cocchiarelli-Berger spearheaded colorful flower boxes along the main drag and created the bright, mule-filled mural that welcomes visitors to town. Founded in 2005, the Museum of Friends, or MoF, sits inside the historic Roof and Dick Building, which is on the State Register of Historic Properties. Cocchiarelli-Berger and Brendt Berger have grown a place for community, education and local arts. Working with 500 donated art pieces, MoF's permanent collection now shares vast white walls with photography, paintings and tapestries that reflect the diverse surrounding cultures. A well-timed visit may catch the decorating committee for an upcoming gala, raising money for local programs and art initiatives throughout Huerfano County. "Made in Walsenburg" arts and curios stock the front shelves—authentic, one-of-a-kind mementos for your home collection.

Resembling a vintage gas station, Gub Gub's bar, restaurant and social hub is a leisurely affair. With outdoor patios, game areas and picnic benches for quality time en plein air, a large pizza and pitcher of beer becomes



Writer Jamie
Lynn Miller
and Toulia

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PHOTOS: SCHENDEL



PHOTO: CHRIS STARK

an extended outing. Dogs lounge about, catnapping beneath benches or waiting for ice cream cones to drip, while the indoor bar area bustles with the feel of the local crowd.

With expansive hiking and two lakes, Lathrop State Park, a few miles outside of town, bears the title of Colorado's first state park. The only Colorado State Park with golfing facilities, Lathrop is also home to Walsenburg Golf Course. With 1,460 acres to explore, activities range from camping and hiking to fishing, water sports and wildlife viewing. Watch for flashes of bobcats darting across hiking trails (on-leash dogs are a must throughout the park.) Visit

on a full moon for panoramic landscapes crowned by the brightly lit Spanish Peaks, which preside over all the park's activities.

A scenic drive along the Highway of Legends spills into Cuchara Mountain Park, a local playground. Through the Panadero Ski Corporation, dedicated local efforts are restoring winter access at the 10,810-foot ski resort. Meanwhile, aspen trees blossom and flutter, and slopes become a haven for the pups. With a disc golf course, mountain biking, kids' play areas and wooden benches adjacent to mountain streams, Cuchara Mountain Park is a splendid excursion with ample scenery.

In the nearby namesake town, stop by the Cuchara Country Store. The proprietor loves all things dog: Local lore lauds his beloved German shepherd, once the unofficial Mayor of Cuchara. If your pup's thirsty or in need of (more) affection, there's a spot and a bowl near the front counter. From area knickknacks to homemade fudge, essential groceries and all things fishing, it's a welcome stop along your way. And, of course, visit the neighboring Dog Bar, where canines are the guests of honor. With special orders for the pups, plus ample indoor and outdoor space, it's a natural place to wind down your dog-friendly trip to the Spanish Peaks Country.

