Discover hot springs, ancient ruins and the Old West on this 1,375-mile road trip.
There are few road trips that take you to the base of towering peaks, the heart of red-rock canyons, the front door of ancient ruins, the rim of the Grand Canyon and the rejuvenating waters of Colorado’s hot springs like this one.

Start in Denver before heading west to Glenwood Springs to take a dip. Farther west and south explore ancient ruins and artifacts in the Mesa Verde National Park area. Established by President Theodore Roosevelt, Mesa Verde National Park was actually the first national park created to “preserve the works of man.” It preserves the heritage of the Ancestral Puebloans who inhabited the area from 600 to 1300.

After exploring the park, cross into Arizona, stopping at Flagstaff, a university town (see page 79 for what to do while there), and then the Grand Canyon’s South Rim. You can read all about the park in our In the Park section on pages 6-19.

On your way back to Denver, visit Farmington, N.M., before heading to Durango to take a historic train to one of Colorado’s most scenic towns, Silverton. Continue north to take a dip in Pagosa’s legendary hot springs. Then press on to Alamosa where you can explore Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. Some of our favorite roadside stops follow in the next several pages.

MYGRANDCANYONPARK.COM
TOP 5 SOAKING SPOTS

Colorado is dotted with incredible hot springs. Dip into some of the state's best on your trip.

Glenwood Springs Pool
Glenwood Springs, Colo.
Take a break from I-70 at this historic resort at the intersection of the Colorado and Roaring Fork rivers, a place where Utes wintered. Today, it is home to the world’s largest hot springs pool, water slides, a kiddie pool and lodge; hotspringspool.com.

Hot Sulphur Springs Resort & Spa
Hot Sulphur Springs, Colo.
This quiet facility west of Grand Lake features a series of small, soothing pools, some blazing hot, and four for kids. A spa offers massages, herbal wraps and mud masques; hot sulphursprings.com.

Ourai Hot Springs
Ourai, Colo.
Nestled in a tight valley overshadowed by 13,000-foot peaks, these sulfur-free mineral pools on Main Street offer soaking and lap swimming. Three slides provide thrills. The pools are open year round; ourayhotsprings.com.

The Springs Resort & Spa
Pagosa Springs, Colo.
Home to the world’s deepest geothermal hot spring, this resort tucked in the mountains offers a variety of pools with temperatures ranging from 68 to 110°F. A ‘79-room hotel is part of the complex; pagosa-hot springs.com.

Joyful Journey Hot Springs Spa
Moffat, Colo.
Soak in three gorgeous pools maintained between 98 and 108 degrees and take in the views of 14,000-foot Sangre de Cristo peaks. Hotel rooms, tipis, camping and RV sites are available; joyfuljourney-hot springs.com.
FOUR CORNERS GEMS

The towns of Cortez, Mancos and Dolores offer more than just uncrowded trails in one of Colorado’s most undiscovered corners. Here are the top 6 things to do in Mesa Verde country.

1. MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK
WHY GO: Described as the pyramids of North America, the ancient ruins at Mesa Verde hold the early stories of our nation.
TIP: Take the 700 Years Tour that brings you via motorcoach on short hikes to see the earliest houses from 600 A.D. to complex villages built in the 1200s. Sign up for this four-hour tour at visitmesaverde.com.

2. ANASAZI HERITAGE CENTER
WHY GO: Grind corn, touch ancient pottery sherds and learn to weave on a Pueblo-style loom at this museum in Dolores, Colo., with real artifacts removed from area sites to preserve them.
TIP: This serves as the visitor center for the Canyons of the Ancients National Monument, and it digs deep into the 2,000-year history of the area, which culminated in the settlement of Mesa Verde.

3. WILDEdge BREWING COLLECTIVE
WHY GO: Opened in 2017, WildEdge in Cortez is wildly creative with its small-batch brews.
TIP: If it’s on the menu, order the Columbine, made from kettle-soured wheat beer refermented with boysenberries. Its bright magenta color captures the beauty of this concoction.

4. CORTEZ CULTURAL CENTER
WHY GO: Housed in a 1909 building, this center features free Native American dances Monday through Saturday at 7 p.m.

5. CROW CANYON ARCHAEOLOGICAL CENTER
WHY GO: Tour an excavation site, join a dig or analyze artifacts at this center founded three decades ago on the belief the public plays a critical role in archaeology.
TIP: Go on a free one-hour walking tour on select days to learn more about Crow Canyon’s archaeological research. Or dive in for an Archaeology Day Tour.

6. DOLORES RIVER CAMPGROUND
WHY GO: Fall asleep to the sounds of the Dolores River in a yurt, vintage trailer or cabin. Or pitch your tent or pull up an RV.
TIP: Reserve the 1950 Spartan Spartanette, a vintage trailer with original woodwork, a retro kitchen and a private patio.

Discover the top things to do in Mesa Verde National Park at MyGrandCanyonPark.com.
ROCKY MOUNTAIN MAGIC

CANYONS OF THE ANCEINTS

Just 12 miles from Mesa Verde National Park, this national monument often falls off travelers’ radar screens, making it a fantastic place to discover solitude and ancient history. It contains the highest known archaeological site density in the United States with 6,355-plus recorded sites.
It’s the sound of a railroad whistle echoing in the distance. It’s the feeling of awe at discovering an ancient civilization built in the cliffs. It’s hiking to 14,000 feet and finding more than a view.

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TREASURE HUNT
Native American history meets natural wonders in Farmington, N.M. Plus it’s just 35 miles from Bisti/De-Na-Zin Wilderness area, dotted by spires, sculpted rock and hills of various colors.

DINÉTAH ROCK & PUEBLITOS
Explore some of the more than 200 Navajo pueblos built between 1680 and 1775. Simon Canyon Ruin is a one-room structure built on top of a 20-foot-high boulder in 1754. It can be accessed via the Simon Canyon Recreation area 3.4 miles below the Navajo Dam. A half-mile hike will bring you to the ruin. Learn more at farmingtonnm.org/listings/dinetal-rock-art-pueblitos.

KOKOPELLI’S CAVE
Originally conceived to be geologist Bruce Black’s office, KokoPELLI’s Cave is a spectacularly wonderful bed-and-breakfast venue. Hike along a sandstone path to get to your 1,700-foot cave suite equipped with a kitchen, Jacuzzi tub, queen-sized bed and a replica Native American kiva. Sunset views of Shiprock, a sacred Navajo mountain, are gorgeous. Learn more at kokoscave.us.

THREE RIVERS EATERY AND BREWHOUSE
Located in the historic Andrews Building built in 1912, this local favorite has 12 of the brewery’s 50 beers on tap at any one time. While you are there, check out the more than 600 beer labels hanging on the walls. Donated by Henry and Margie Glosser in 1999, they constitute New Mexico’s largest beer label collection. Learn more at threeriversbrewery.com.

HOGBACK TRADING POST
Fourth-generation Native American trader Tom Wheeler runs this authentic trading post located in a 10,000-square-foot hogan-shaped building just outside of Farmington. Wheeler’s great grandfather established the family’s original post in 1871. Today, travelers can buy Native American jewelry, Navajo rugs, baskets and alabaster sculptures. Find it at 3221 Hwy. 64, Waterflow, N.M.

Learn more at Farmington Museum and Visitor Center, 3041 East Main St. or at farmingtonnm.org.
Named one of Budget Travel’s 10 Coolest Small Towns in America for 2018, Durango really lives up to its stellar reputation. Perched at 6,512 feet, this charming historic town has an awesome craft beverage and foodie scene, with six breweries, two distilleries, one winery and a plethora of award-winning restaurants. It also has fantastic mountain biking and hiking trails.

But at its heart is its Southwestern culture and Western roots. Founded by the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Co. in 1880, the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad operates year-round, taking passengers on a breathtaking ride through scenery only accessible by train. In the summer, you can take the nine-hour round-trip train excursion from Durango to the tiny, historic mining town of Silverton. Or if you have limited time, opt for the Skyway Tour, in which you ride the train one way and a bus the other way on the beautiful Million Dollar Highway.

Visit nearby Mesa Verde National Park to view some of the most well-preserved cliff dwellings in the country. There’s more than 600 known cliff dwellings amid 5,000 known archaeological sites. You can purchase your ranger-led tour tickets ahead of time at the Durango Welcome Center. It’s the only place outside the park to buy these tickets. And ranger-led tours are the only way to get up-close and personal with Mesa Verde’s outstanding ancient ruins.

Stop by The Durango Welcome Center at 802 Main Ave., or go to durango.org to learn more.
SANDY GETAWAY

Bring your sled and your beach umbrella to Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve 37 miles from Alamosa, Colo. From here, you can explore the tallest sand dune in North America. High Dune on First Ridge is a two-hour, 2.5-mile round-trip walk up 699 feet of sand. Sled down for a faster descent. Be sure to bring a lot of water, start early and wear closed-toe shoes as sand temperatures can reach 150°F mid-day.