



Visit Estes Park
The Destination
Marketing Organization
VisitEstesPark.com

Media Contact:
Rachel Oppermann
Visit Estes Park
ROppermann@VisitEstesPark.com
(970) 586-0500

Rocky Mountain National Park was 2018's 3rd most visited national park.

All of that world-class mountain scenery and adventure comes with a little dose of reality though—you won't be alone in wanting to experience it. The park's 4.59-million visitors in 2018 tell that story quite well, and summer road closures and lines at the park's east entrances and popular trailheads are common.

Take it from the folks who live and work in Estes Park – there are ways to avoid the effects of everyone realizing how awesome Rocky is (and, seemingly, visiting at once).

Most importantly – plan ahead. Knowing which trails to tackle first, how to get to them, the park's busy times and where you're going to stop for your morning coffee will save you a surprising amount of time – and a lot of frustration. Some things you can decide or do ahead of time?

- **When to leave.** We recommend an alpine start. In the biz we use this term to mean get an early start. Lines have formed and trailheads are often full by 10am. On the busiest days the most popular trailheads will be full earlier. Or start late. If the idea of an alpine start makes you shudder, start after 3pm. The park is busiest between 10am and 3pm. An alpine start means more time for happy hour in town, after your hike. Just sayin'.
- **Where to catch a shuttle.** Shuttles carry visitors from the Estes Park Visitor Center to the Park & Ride inside the park.
- **Buy an entrance pass online.** Cutting down the amount of time you spend at the entrance gate cuts down the amount of time everyone spends at the entrance gate. Important note: shuttlers still have to buy an entrance pass – buying one per carload ahead of time saves time and hassle.
- **Decide on your route.** Knowing where (and how) you plan to see the park before you get there means avoiding long lines to chat with rangers at the park's visitor centers or volunteers at the Estes Park Visitor Center. Consider a guided tour into the park. Numerous tour companies will be thrilled to give you a seat on their Jeep or bus and tell you why they love the park so much.
- **Make a plan B.** Know that your chosen #1 may not pan out—and that's OK. It'll be there tomorrow too, but have a plan B for how to fill your day, whether that's a scenic drive, a walk through town, or another trailhead or hike option.

Another idea: make a trip out of it. Stay overnight in Estes Park to make that alpine start or to have another day to shop Elkhorn Avenue. Game nights and live music happen regularly and there is always a smattering of special events going on. Pair that with excellent food and local booze tastings and you've got yourself one heck of an awesome trip; it's a great tactic to make sure you have a second chance to hit the park– and to live like a local.