

Get it. Do it. See it.

guide



HIDDEN GEM

Ditch the crowds and bike, paddle, climb or hike your way through the Western Slope's well-kept secret: Grand Junction, Colorado.

Words HEATHER BALOGH ROCHFORT

High-desert oasis: Behold the natural beauty of the Colorado National Monument.

MICHAEL UNDERWOOD/VISIT GRAND JUNCTION

Do it

GRAND JUNCTION IN 24 HOURS

Once upon a time, Grand Junction was a “flyover city” for adventurers traveling between Moab, Utah, and Colorado’s Rocky Mountains. But don’t let its scruffy perimeter fool you. This high-desert oasis is the perfect wine-and-hike destination thanks to world-class sandstone arches and trendy wineries. Dive straight in by pointing your tires toward the Colorado National Monument, where you can bike the 23-mile Rim Rock Drive, justifiably known as one of the grandest scenic routes in the American West. Dusky red canyons proudly stand in stark contrast to the snowcapped peaks of Colorado’s ski country. If water is more your thing, slap on some sunscreen, snag your swimsuit and head to Riverfront at Las Colonias Park. Centered in the heart of downtown, this 140-acre open-space park sits along the banks of the Colorado River and just upstream from the confluence with the Gunnison River. Locals bring inner tubes, SUPs or kayaks to paddle the lazy water channel and its two standing-wave features. If you don’t feel ready for the river action, don’t sweat it. The park also boasts three ponds—Butterfly Pond and Las Colonias Ponds—for beginners to practice their moves on calmer waters (no tubes allowed). Hiking is a popular option, too, and one often preferred by local Natalie Magee. As owner of Yogi Magee Adventures, Magee coordinates yoga adventure



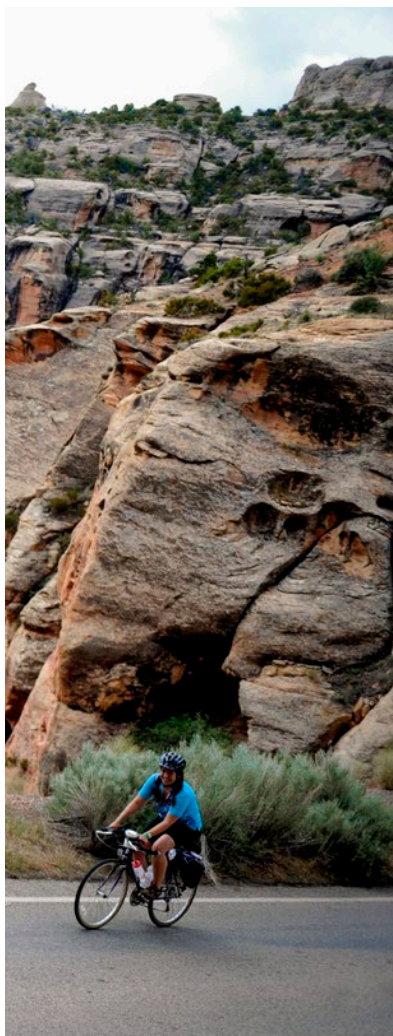
Considered one of the most scenic routes in the American West, the 23-mile Rim Rock Drive is one way to take in the sites around Grand Junction on two wheels. Roughly 40,000 cyclists pedal the road every year.

retreats and often suggests Mica Mine for families. At roughly 2.6 miles round trip along Ladder Creek, the mileage is manageable and the terrain fairly mellow. The destination is where the hike shines—literally. The turnaround point is the now-defunct Mica Mine, a historic quartz mine that dazzles everyone who makes the journey. A large undercut sits

at the end of the trail with bedazzled walls covered in sparkling quartz crystals that shimmer in the sunshine. **Stay** Tucked against the shores of the Colorado River in Las Colonias Park sits Camp Eddy, an adventure launchpad that just opened this summer. Here visitors cozy up inside tiny homes or sleek Airstreams. For the ultimate in quaint relaxation, head to the Castle Creek Manor Bed and Breakfast in central Grand Junction. **Eat** Start your day right with some fresh-baked eats at Kulina Lani Organic Sourdough Bakery, Magee’s

go-to for breakfast treats and baguettes. For juicy burgers, it’s Rockslide Restaurant & Brewery. Feeling fancier? Find your way to Bin 707 Foodbar for the bison ribeye and artichoke hushpuppies off the specialized rotating menu. **Drink** You’re in wine country, so the options are many. Start at Whitewater Hill Vineyards and enjoy a reisling or rosé while admiring the stunning views of the Palisade orchards to the east. For beer, visit downtown’s Ramblebine Brewing Company for a Habitual Sin IPA or Mamma Said Raspberry Stout.

Once considered a “flyover city,” today Grand Junction is a perfect wine-and-hike destination.



won't need to fuss with thousands of people or worry about timed entries. Instead, you'll find only solitude and serenity as you traverse the collection of 35 arches. Be sure to scope the 76-foot-long Rainbow Arch—the longest in the park—and Rattlesnake Arch, a spiny 40-foot-wide arch soaring more than 120 feet up in the sky. Next, you can cool off by exploring the glimmering waterways on an SUP. Grab a rental at Grand Junction Adventures (they have two locations) and put in at the Escalante boat ramp, 40 minutes south of town. Paddle 14 meandering miles through idyllic orchards and the soaring canyons of Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area before exiting the river at the Dominguez boat ramp. Mountain bikers won't want to leave without riding some of the best singletrack in the country. Experienced locals love Lunch Loops, a challenging trail system filled with big slick rock and technical drops. For beginners or visitors looking to improve their skills, the Lunch Loops

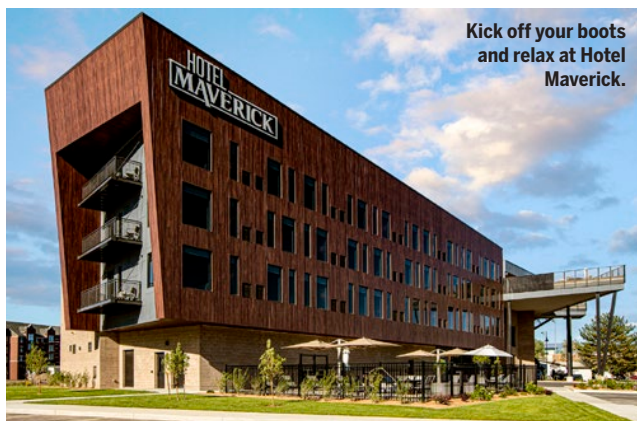
Bike Park at the trailhead boasts a number of jumps and features to hone your skills. **Stay** Step back in time at the Chateau at Two Rivers Winery, where elegant decor and hand-painted murals take their cues from a French country inn. The unique Hotel Maverick sits on the campus of Colorado Mesa University, oozing Western pride from every nook and cranny. The quaint Dancing Moon Bed and Breakfast in nearby Palisade offers a more personal experience. **Eat** Begin your morning with a savory breakfast frittata or sweet blueberry pancakes at

the Dream Café. The beloved 626 on Rood highlights local wines with beautifully plated seasonal fare. For something livelier, try Warehouse 2565 for classic American cuisine with a side of live music. **Drink** Two Rivers Winery is a family affair with a small yet mighty (six varietals) wine selection. Foam & Folly is Magee's pick for a brewery thanks to the large outdoor area where visitors can play cornhole. "Plus, the staff is so welcoming," she adds. The speakeasy theme at Moody's is a vibe, and the lounge boasts an impressively large selection of whiskey.

GRAND JUNCTION IN A LONG WEEKEND

"I love Grand Junction because of the access to all the outdoor activities," Magee says. Start your weekend on the right foot by lacing up your hiking shoes and loading up a 4x4 vehicle. From downtown, head 30 minutes west to explore the underrated crown jewel of the Centennial State: Rattlesnake Canyon. Tucked away within the 123,000-acre McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area, Rattlesnake Canyon is home to the world's second-largest concentration of sandstone arches outside of Utah's Arches National Park. But here you

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Kick off your boots and relax at Hotel Maverick.



Sip some vino at Two Rivers Winery.

Do it

More than 120 wild mustangs roam free at a U.S. reserve near Grand Junction.

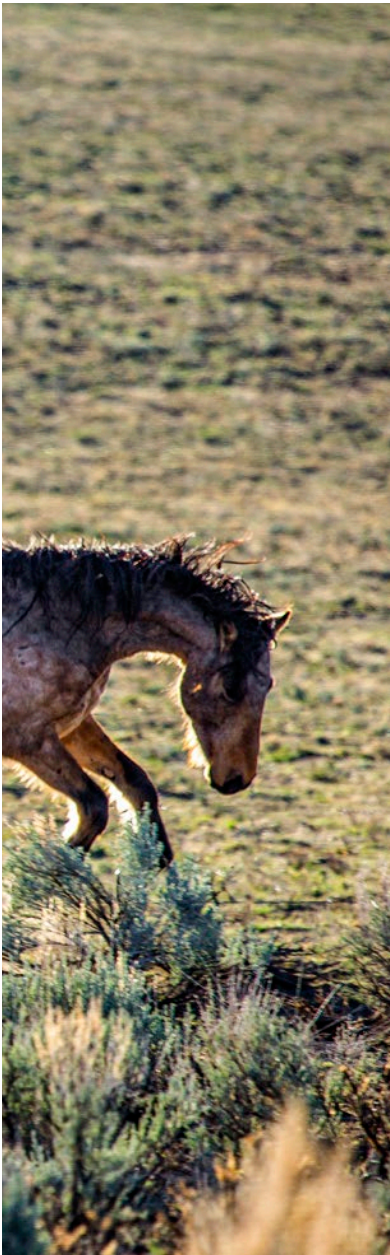
**GRAND JUNCTION FOR A WEEK**

There is nothing more Americana than free-roaming mustangs, and Grand Junction has one of only three U.S. reserves set aside for them in the Little Book Cliffs Wild Horse Range. Finding the range's 124 untamed mustangs takes some work, since the horses run in four to five smaller bands that roam 36,000 acres of land.

To visit, pack your hiking boots or saddle up a horse (Rim Rock Adventures has guided rides) before heading into the interior to scope picturesque plateaus and (hopefully!) an eyeful of palominos, paints and appaloosas roaming wild. Mygatt-Moore Quarry in nearby Rabbit Valley is the epicenter for budding paleontologists intrigued by Jurassic dinosaurs.

This active site still sees discoveries yielding more than 4,000 dinosaur bones since the 1980s, including the largest *Apatosaurus* femur ever found, in 2014. For further exploration, wander the Trail Through Time, a 1.5-mile interpretive loop that features dinosaur fossils from 140 million years ago. To get the heart pumping, Magee suggests hiking to the summit of Mount Garfield, a 4-mile

round-trip trek that sees nearly 2,000 feet of vertical gain. "Best views in town," she says of the 360-degree panorama you'll find at the top. Back to the adrenaline: The greater Grand Junction area offers some of the best rock climbing in the continental United States. Nearby Unaweep Canyon (or the "Canyon with Two Mouths" in Ute), boasts 2,300 climbing routes, including



Devil's Kitchen Trail area in Colorado National Monument is filled with deep slot canyons prime with snug squeezes and heart-pumping rappels. If you're inexperienced, head to Grand Junction Adventures and they'll set you up with a guided climbing or canyoneering experience.

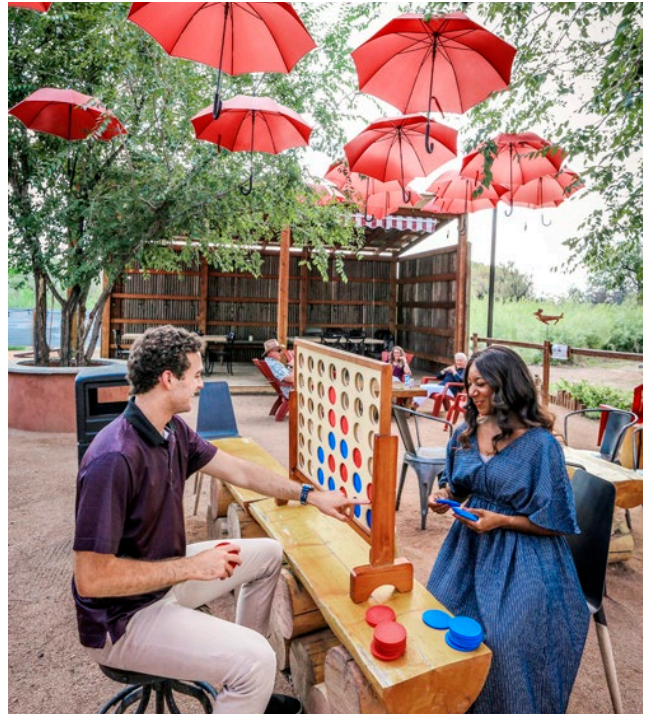
Stay The swank and luxurious Gateway Canyons Resort is an hour outside of town but the outdoor fireplaces and soaking pools more than make up for the commute. For a more intimate experience, consider the Grand Junction Bed and Breakfast. For rustic charm, cozy up inside your RV, tent or on-property cabins at the Palisade Basecamp RV Resort.

Eat Head to TacoParty, a locally sourced, quick-serve taco shop that promises appetizers, six tacos and soft-serve options that change weekly. Spoons bistro and bakery offers a Sunrise Menu packed with breakfast favorites made in-house. For an elegant sunset dinner, try Devil's Kitchen inside Hotel Maverick. The rooftop views—and the food—will not disappoint.

Drink Begin your wine crawl at Hermosa Vineyards, a welcoming winery that grows limited quantities of everything from syrah and chardonnay to malbec and merlot. Then hop over to Graystone Winery—the only port house in Colorado—to test out their unique white port called Lipizzan. Wrap up the week with the eclectic mixed-drink menu at Highlands Craft Distillery.

beginner-friendly bolted sport routes and more difficult multipitched trad routes. No ropes? No problem. You'll find epic bouldering, too. For visitors who want to go down rather than up, the

There is nothing more Americana than free-roaming mustangs, and Grand Junction has scores of them.



Finish your week with an eclectic drink menu at Highlands Craft Distillery.



Taste half a dozen locally sourced tacos at TacoParty.

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