

TRAVEL

# Head to Colorado's Mesa Verde for a Picture-Perfect Escape

I've said it before, the entire state of Colorado looks like a picture postcard. (Being from the pancake-flat Midwest, I have something to compare it to.) But southwest



Mira Temkin

Colorado offers something more: a glimpse of American Indian history, great outdoor adventure, fine restaurants, and vineyards. Anchored by world-renowned Mesa Verde National Park, Mesa Verde

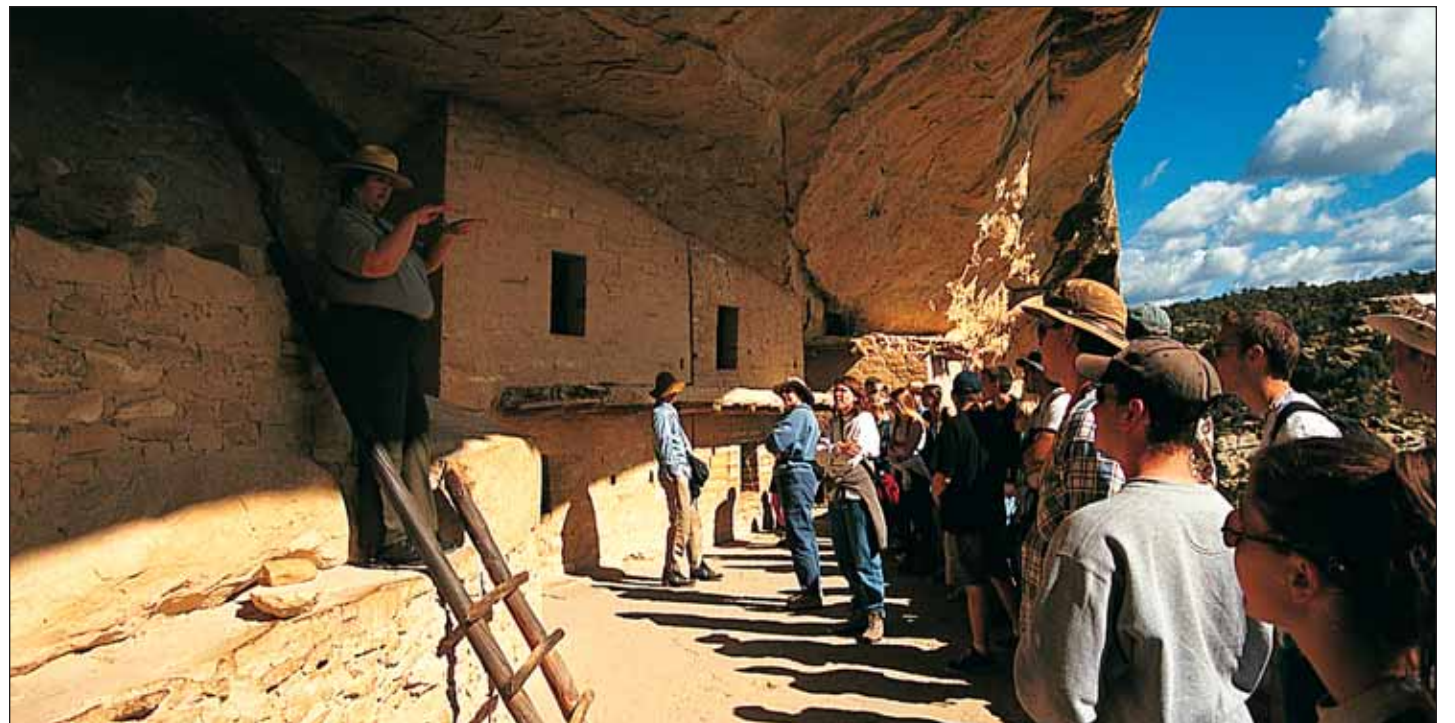
Country is located on two National Scenic Byways – The San Juan Skyway and Trail of the Ancients. These areas are ideal for exploring fascinating ruins and hiking rugged mountains.

**Mesa Verde – Cliff dwellings of the Ancient Pueblos.** This National Park and World Heritage site is the largest archeological preserve in North America and continues to be excavated. The Ancient Pueblos lived in the Mesa Verde area for 750 years. From 600-1300 A.D., they built elaborate stone villages that have been maintained remarkably well. When these American Indians abruptly departed, they left us with more questions than answers. Today, Mesa Verde is filled with more than 600 cliff dwellings and 4,700 archeological sites that tell the story of a people, their customs, and traditions.

A good way to begin your visit is at the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum. Watch the video for a great overview of the park. Then, take a walk down to the Spruce Tree House for a close up and personal view of the structures that protected the tribe from the elements of the sun. It's a steep walk on the way up, so take your time.

Cliff Palace, the largest and most famous cliff dwelling in the park, has more than 150 rooms and kivas (places for religious rituals). It's well worth seeing, but challenging to maneuver around in. I preferred to take in the magic of this palace from the overlook and was in awe of the thoughtful designs featured in these sandstone structures. Five cliff dwelling sites are open to visitors; some include half-day, ranger-guided tours. Mesa Verde is open year round.

**Far View Lodge – Awe-inspiring views and gourmet dining.** The impressive Far View Lodge, located inside Mesa Verde, is the perfect place to relax after a day of exploring. Designed in traditional Western décor, the lodge reflects the true essence of Mesa Verde, letting you take in the expansive views and watch wildlife from your private balcony. Recently renovated, the lodge provides an



MESA VERDE COUNTRY

Interpretive tours of Mesa Verde's balcony houses are very popular. The area boasts numerous cliff dwellings and archeological sites.

array of comfy amenities.

While one wouldn't expect an award-winning restaurant inside a national park, The Metate Room Restaurant is just that. It received an "Award of Culinary Excellence" for its contemporary cuisine inspired by local, organic, and sustainable ingredients. It's no surprise to visitors that the Metate Room is considered one of the area's best restaurants. My group was fascinated with the prickly pear jam, which we spread on the artisan breads. It was a great meal with a fantastic view. [Visitmesaverde.com](http://Visitmesaverde.com).

**Hovenweep National Monument – Appreciate ancient stone towers.** Straddling the borders of both Colorado and Utah, Hovenweep, which means "deserted valley," protects some of the finest ancient stone architecture in the Southwest. In this wild, remote area that spreads over a 20-mile expanse, hikers will find six Puebloan villages built around the 13th century. Most impressive is Hovenweep Castle with its several rooms and D-shaped towers. Be sure to watch the video at the Interpretive Center before you hike.

**Four Corners – Standing in four states.** At the Four Corners Monument, you can actually be in Utah, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico at the same time – it's the only point in the U.S. that's shared by four states. The more adventurous did a back bend to prove it! I was happy to stand in four states and say I did it.

**Guy Drew Vineyards – An experience to savor.** Imagine tasting wine in someone's

warm and wonderful kitchen. Look no further than Guy Drew Vineyards in Cortez. I've been to wine tastings before, but never in the intimacy of someone's home. Guy Drew and his wife, Ruth, have been growing grapes and making premium red and white wines since 2002. His Metate 2007 received national acclaim. The vineyard is open every day, from 12-5pm. [Guydrewvineyards.com](http://Guydrewvineyards.com).

Filled with dramatic adventure, magnificent scenery at every turn, and centuries of American Indian history, southwest Colorado is truly a unique corner of the world. For

more information, call 800-253-1616 or visit [mesaverdecountry.com](http://mesaverdecountry.com).

*Mira Temkin is a Highland-Park based freelance writer whose articles have appeared in Chicago Tribune, Family Time Magazine, and six-00-three-five magazine. In addition, she's a high-energy copywriter working with advertising and marketing services clients. She can be reached at [miratemkin@gmail.com](mailto:miratemkin@gmail.com).*

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Hovenweep National Monument protects ancient stone architecture in the Southwest.

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