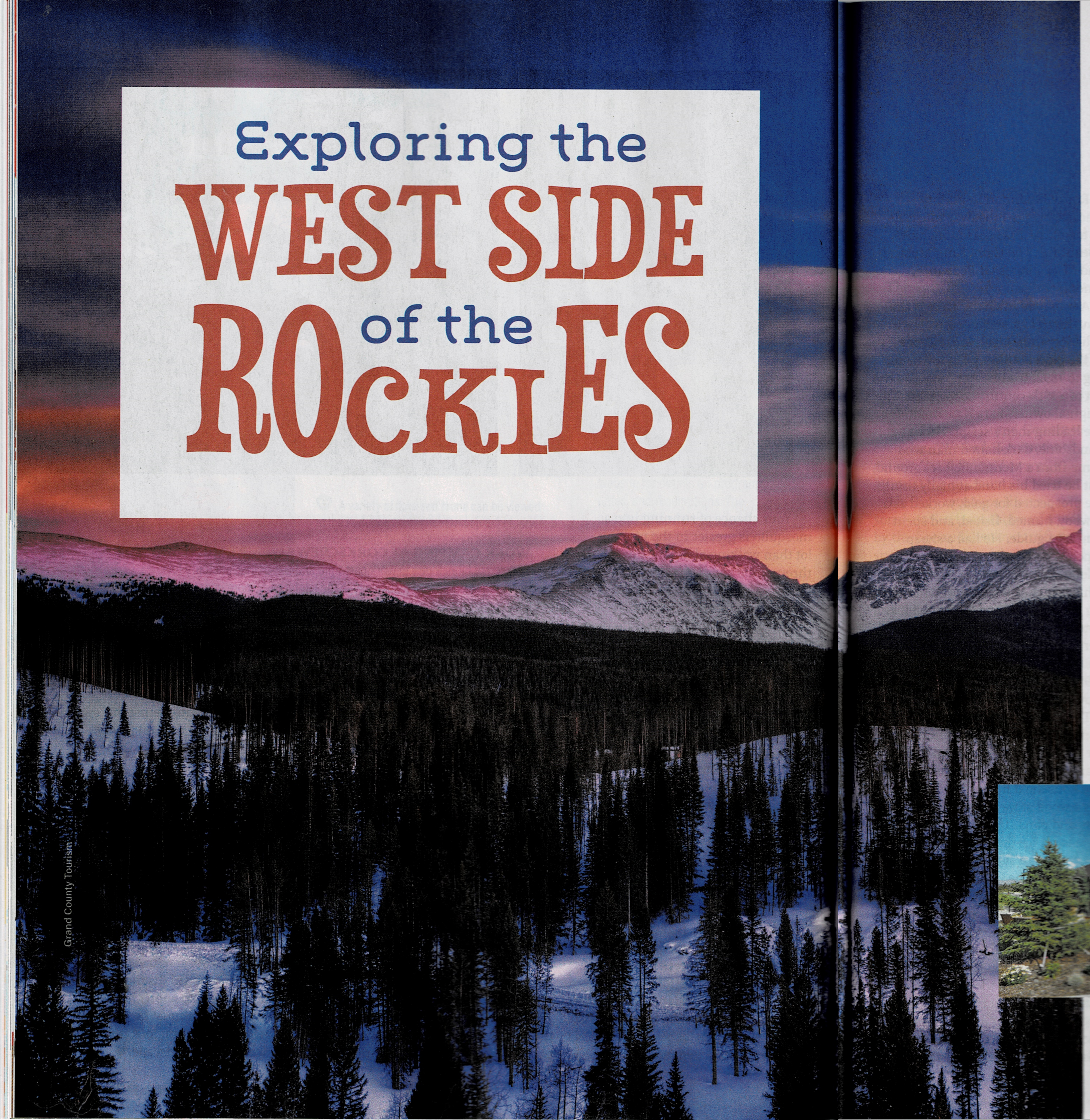

Exploring the WEST SIDE of the ROCKIES

Grand County Tourism

By Kathleen Walls, F522187

On January 26, 1915, President Woodrow Wilson signed the legislation that created Rocky Mountain National Park. Boasting 265,000-plus acres of hiking, driving, and fantastic mountain views that bridge the Continental Divide, it's one of the United States' most visited parks. To see what Rocky Mountain National Park offers while avoiding the crowds, visit the west side. You enter through Grand County in Colorado. It's often called "The Quiet Side," and that is a plus when driving your RV in the mountains.

Although the park contains just one campground on the west side — Timber Creek, which accommodates RVs up to 30 feet — other options are available nearby.

Grand County is composed of the towns of Granby, Grand Lake, Winter Park, Fraser, Hot Sulphur Springs, and Kremmling. Each town has special aspects. Sun Outdoors Rocky Mountains (formerly River Run RV Resort) in **Granby** may be the perfect base camp. It offers regular and waterfront sites with full hookups. All sites come with a barbecue pit and table. The resort has a lodge, cabins, and even glamping options with Airstream RV and Conestoga Wagon rentals. It is

The Rocky Mountains stretch from Canada into New Mexico. In Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park and several neighboring towns make a great place to experience a slice of the grand landscape.

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Left to right: The alpenglow across the Rockies is a magnificent sight to behold. Sun Outdoors Rocky Mountains provides visitors with comfortable amenities and proximity to the picturesque peaks. Relax on a dock overlooking Grand Lake.

open year-round, but the winter RV sites are for dry camping only.

You will always find something to do at the resort when you aren't exploring the national park or the nearby Arapaho National Forest. Recreational options include a fitness center and a "yoga lawn." The swimming pool is large and has three hot tubs. If you brought a furry friend along, consider visiting the large off-leash dog park near the resort entrance and a smaller one at the RV sites. If you don't feel like cooking, the Summit Bar and Grill and the Headwaters Tavern take care of foodie needs. A variety of live music is presented in the evenings. There is also a bowling alley, an arcade, a lake dock with paddle boards and kayaks, and more. The campground is about 20 minutes from the Rocky Mountain National Park entrance.

Granby is next to the Arapaho National Forest, which has multiple primitive campgrounds. The Fraser River runs through Granby and is near Colorado's third-largest lake, Lake Granby, so water sports are popular here. In the winter, you can go skiing or snowboarding at Granby Ranch ski resort.

The town of **Grand Lake**, 15 miles north, abuts the Kawuneeche Visitor Center, located at the western entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park. The town sits on the banks of Grand Lake. This glacier-formed basin is the largest natural lake in Colorado and is surrounded on three sides by Rocky Mountain National Park. A walk along the shore provides a peaceful experience.

Downtown Grand Lake features a variety of shops, art galleries, and restaurants. Blue Water Bakery, Rockies, and Sagebrush BBQ & Grill are all good choices for good eats while exploring. The restaurant at Grand Lake Lodge, Huntington House Tavern, is perfect for upscale dining. Many of the restaurants in Grand County are dog-friendly and offer patio dining. While you're in town, take a pontoon boat tour of Grand Lake or rent a boat at Trail Ridge Marina.

Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre brings Broadway musicals to town; the 2023 season includes "Beautiful: The Carol King Musical" and "The Pirates Of Penzance," among others.

A must-see in Grand Lake is the Kauffman House Museum. The solid-log Kauffman House is one of the oldest buildings in town, dating to 1892. It's like stepping into the set of a 19th-century soap opera. The original owner, Ezra Kauffman, fits the leading man's script. He was a handsome, dark-haired man who came from a Mennonite background, but he tried his hand at many things. He prospected for gold, worked as a cowboy, hunted, fished, and spent time as a guide. He had a sheep ranch and owned part interest in a saloon. In 1888, he married Clara Johnson. The couple moved into the log house in 1892 and operated it as a hotel. Clara didn't care for the frontier lifestyle, however. She left with their children and divorced him in 1899. Kauffman later married Belle Stowell, and they had three children.

The Kauffman House shows the home set up as a hotel, as it was at the turn of the century, and includes many of the Kauffmans' furnishings and household items. The kitchen has a wood stove and many cast-iron pots and pans. The dining room table is set for the guests to dine. Docent Susan said the dishes are authentic to the family. Guests paid $12 for a room, meals, and laundry.

The parlor, decorated with a replica of the wallpaper used when the Kauffmans lived there, was a room where guests could relax. A kerosene lamp hangs from the ceiling.

Interestingly, there is only one closet on the second floor where guests stayed. If walls could talk, this house could tell some tales.

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The Kauffman House, built in 1892, is now a museum operated by the Grand Lake Area Historical Society and has exhibits that change periodically. Its parlor was once a place for relaxation.

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Scenic anytime, Winter Park Resort is Colorado's longest continually operated ski facility, with 3,081 acres of skiable land.

The East Troublesome Fire Tribute also is worth a visit. It tells the story of the second-largest fire disaster in Colorado. The blaze started on October 14, 2020, near Kremmling in Arapaho National Forest. Conditions were right and it spread, ultimately burning more than 190,000 acres. It forced most of Grand County to evacuate. "We had 15 minutes to get out," said Susan Lawson, a guide at the museum.

The tiny museum shares personal stories from those affected by the fire and displays artifacts such as melted, twisted metal and glass from what was once a family's home. One couple didn't evacuate and died in the fire. Chamber director Emily Hagen's story had a bittersweet ending. When Emily got the word to evacuate, she loaded her kids and dog into the car, but her 12-year-old cat, Roquefort, panicked and ran, so it had to be left behind. Emily described the 30-minute drive as "pure terror."

When the family was able to return and put things back in order, they searched for Roquefort, with no luck. After almost two weeks, they found the cat under the porch. She sat amid a cluster of bones and feathers from the birds she had hunted for food in order to survive during their absence.

Winter Park, closest to Denver, is famous for its winter activities, ski slopes, backcountry climbs, and other outdoor adventures. Summertime offers plenty of choices as well. High-Note Thursdays, a free weekly musical event, is held at the Rendezvous Events Center. Music on the Square is a concert series held downtown at Cooper Creek Square, a mixed dining, shopping, and fun mall. Adventures Decanted is one example of what you'll find at this venue — a unique, elevated wine sampling and dining place. Wines from around the world are served via card-operated dispensers. You buy a card for any amount and use it to taste wines with varied prices. Dine on a charcuterie board while you sample. You can buy bottles of your favorite wine as well.



Of course, **Rocky Mountain National Park** is worth exploring. For those not accustomed to high altitudes, Adams Falls is a good place to start your adventure. This small, steep waterfall feeds into Grand Lake and is accessible via a short hike (a .6-mile round trip).

Just past Adams Falls, you will see a green meadow that is a popular spot for picnics. It's also a good location for viewing deer, moose, and other wildlife.

Kawuneeche Visitor Center, at the west entrance to the park, has a museum that reveals a lot about the Rockies. From there, you can drive Trail Ridge Road, known as the "highway to the sky." It's a 48-mile run between Grand Lake and Estes at the east entrance, and the only highway through the park open to RVs. The road is well marked with interesting stops and trails for hikers.

For example, Holzwarth Historic Site is just a short hike from the road. In 1862, the United States passed the Homestead Act, which gave people free land in the West if they settled and farmed it. German immigrants John and Sophia Holzwarth journeyed west and homesteaded 160 acres near the Colorado River in 1917. The two started with just one cabin and eventually added more, turning the property into one of the nation's first dude ranches. Visitors came mainly to fly-fish in the Colorado River.

Many of the original cabins remain, most of them viewable from the outside. One cabin is open and contains exhibits about the ways people worked in the Rockies long ago.

One of the most popular stops is at the Continental Divide, which spans the continent from Alaska to Central America and is where the waters in all of our rivers and streams begin. Waters on the east side flow into the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean, and western waters go into the Pacific. (For avid hikers, the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail spans 3,100 miles of the Continental Divide within the United States.)

Continuing up Trail Ridge Road, you will come to the Alpine Visitor Center; situated at 11,796 feet, it is the highest-elevation visitor center in the U.S. National Park System. The overlook view here is fantastic. You can go even higher on a short stretch of rugged mountain peak with a set of steps.

A museum in the visitor center explains how wildlife and plants survive at high altitudes. It also has a restaurant, with plenty of parking. The number of RVs, both motorhomes and travel trailers, driving to this height is amazing.

This is nature at its peak. You feel as though you are at the top of the world here. It just may be the highlight of your Rocky Mountain journey, both literally and figuratively.

MORE INFO

Grand County Colorado Tourism Board
www.visitgrandcounty.com
(800) 247-2636
(720) 530-1066

Rocky Mountain National Park
www.nps.gov/romo
(970) 586-1206 (general information)
(970) 586-1222
(Trail Ridge Road status)

Rocky Mountain National Park

COLORADO

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Adams Falls, located on the park's East Inlet Trail, leads to a glaciated valley with great views — perfect for photography. The trail is short and easy, so it's good for beginners.

