



48 HOURS IN

Colorado Springs

HIGH DESERT · HIGH COUNTRY

Welcome to Colorado Springs

Colorado Springs sits at 6,035 feet at the foot of Pikes Peak, the 14,115-foot summit that gave the surrounding region its 19th-century nickname — the mountain Katharine Lee Bates climbed in 1893 before writing "America the Beautiful." The city is a military town at its core: Fort Carson, Peterson Space Force Base, and the U.S. Air Force Academy all sit within its metro area, giving the streets a particular order and a visible, reassuring security presence that most mid-size American cities lack.

What draws visitors is almost entirely outside the city limits and almost entirely free. Garden of the Gods — 1,367 acres of red sandstone spires donated to the city in perpetuity — sits minutes from downtown and costs nothing to enter. Manitou Springs, a compact artist town at the base of Pikes Peak, still runs eight free mineral-water fountains through its historic downtown. The Cog Railway has carried passengers to the summit since 1891, and the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum downtown is one of the best-executed sports museums in the country.

For a solo traveler, the structure here does most of the work. Garden of the Gods is safe to walk alone at almost any hour, on paved trails that see thousands of daily visitors. Manitou Springs and Old Colorado City are both compact enough to wander without a plan, and Tejon Street downtown has a genuine restaurant row where a bar seat is always an option. Rent a car for Pikes Peak and the day trips; everything else in this itinerary is walkable or a short rideshare away.

Day One

Garden of the Gods · Manitou Springs · Old Colorado City · Tejon Street

Day One moves from the red rock formations at the edge of the city through the compact, pedestrian mineral-springs town at the base of Pikes Peak, ending downtown for dinner.

MORNING

8:00 AM - 1:00 PM

8:00 AM

Garden of the Gods — Central Garden

1805 N 30th St

1,367 acres of red, pink, and white sandstone spires, formed over millions of years and donated to the city in 1909 with the stipulation it remain "forever free to the world." The Central Garden's paved loop is an easy, well-marked solo walk with Pikes Peak as the backdrop for nearly every angle. Arrive before 8am for the clearest light and to actually get a spot in the northern parking lot — this is the single most visited free attraction in Colorado and it shows by mid-morning.

INSIDER TIP

The Visitor & Nature Center's 15-minute film on the park's geology is worth the small ticket price and a good way to orient yourself before walking the trails.

10:30 AM

Manitou Springs mineral springs walk

Manitou Ave, downtown Manitou Springs

A short drive or rideshare west from the Garden. Eight free mineral spring fountains — naturally carbonated, considered sacred by the Ute and Cheyenne for centuries — run through this compact, pedestrian-friendly downtown. The town is small enough to cover entirely on foot: independent galleries, the century-old Penny Arcade, and creek-side restaurants line Manitou Avenue for about six walkable blocks.

12:00 PM

Lunch: Red Dog Coffee or Border Burger Bar

Manitou Ave, Manitou Springs

Red Dog Coffee opens early and is the right call for something light after a morning of walking; Border Burger Bar, a few doors down, is the heartier option with a dog-friendly patio. Both sit directly in the walkable downtown strip — no rideshare needed between the springs walk and lunch.

AFTERNOON

1:30 PM - 6:30 PM

2:00 PM

Old Colorado City

West Colorado Ave, between 24th and 27th Streets

Founded in 1859 as the original territorial capital of Colorado, before the seat moved to Denver. The restored brick storefronts along West Colorado Avenue now house galleries, boutiques, and a solid concentration of independent restaurants — closer in spirit to Manitou Springs than to downtown Colorado Springs, and considerably less crowded. Worth an unhurried hour or two of window shopping.

EVENING

7:00 PM - Late

7:00 PM

Dinner: Jax Fish House & Oyster Bar

11 S Tejon St, Downtown

Sustainable seafood and a genuinely lively oyster bar in the heart of downtown's Tejon Street restaurant row, open since 2014. The bar seating handles a solo diner easily and the happy hour (daily 3-5pm, all night Monday) is a good way to eat well without committing to a full sit-down meal.

INSIDER TIP

MacKenzie's Chop House (128 S Tejon St), open since 1997 in the historic Alamo Building, is the classic steakhouse alternative if seafood isn't the mood — wood-paneled, old-school, and doesn't turn away a solo diner at the bar.

Day Two

Pikes Peak Cog Railway · U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum · Downtown Tejon Street

Day Two is built around the two institutions that define the region — the mountain and the Olympic training legacy — with an evening back on Tejon Street.

MORNING

8:00 AM - 1:00 PM

8:00 AM

Pikes Peak Cog Railway

515 Ruxton Ave, Manitou Springs

The most efficient route to the 14,115-foot summit without a full day of hiking. Swiss-built railcars, reopened in 2021 after a three-year, \$100 million rebuild, climb 8.9 miles through Englemann Canyon and above the treeline to America's Mountain. The round trip runs about 3.5 hours including 30-40 minutes at the summit. Book online at least two weeks out in summer — this sells out routinely.

INSIDER TIP

The altitude jump is real: 14,115 feet is more than 8,000 feet above the depot. Hydrate beforehand, move slowly at the summit, and skip the alcohol until you're back down.

1:00 PM

Lunch: Denver Biscuit Company

528 S Tejon St, Downtown

A hearty, casual Southern-style breakfast-and-lunch spot back in the downtown core — the Franklin biscuit sandwich, loaded with fried chicken and sausage gravy, is the reason people line up. Good rooftop seating when the weather holds.

AFTERNOON

2:00 PM - 6:00 PM

2:30 PM

U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum

200 S Sierra Madre St, Downtown

A polished, genuinely interactive museum in the Trolley District, built around the city's role as the U.S. Olympic Training Center headquarters. Hands-on exhibits let visitors test reaction time, wheelchair racing speed, and balance against Olympic and Paralympic athlete benchmarks. A comfortable, well-paced two hours for a solo visit — genuinely one of the better-executed sports museums in the country.

5:00 PM

Acacia Park & Tejon Street wander

Acacia Park, 115 E Platte Ave

Downtown's walkable green core, with a 24/7 Visitor Info Hub if you need directions or assistance. Walk south onto Tejon Street proper — independent boutiques, coffee shops, and galleries line the corridor. First Fridays bring an art walk in the Knob Hill Urban Arts District a few blocks over, if your dates line up.

EVENING

7:00 PM - Late

7:30 PM

Dinner: The Rabbit Hole

101 N Tejon St, Downtown

A subterranean, Alice in Wonderland-themed restaurant reached by descending a staircase behind a red British phone booth on Kiowa Street — reservations strongly recommended. The signature White Rabbit martini, made with vanilla vodka, coconut rum, and a flaming marshmallow, is as much a conversation piece as a drink. A memorable solo dinner destination on its own merits.

INSIDER TIP

Phantom Canyon Brewing Co. (2 E Pikes Peak Ave), the city's oldest brewery, housed in the 1901 Cheyenne Building, is the easy walk-in alternative — casual bar seating, award-winning beer, open until midnight most nights.

Where to Eat

Colorado Springs's Table

MANITOU SPRINGS & OLD COLORADO CITY

Red Dog Coffee · Manitou Springs · \$

Manitou Ave. Opens early, good post-hike coffee and light bites.

Border Burger Bar · Manitou Springs · \$

Manitou Ave. Heartier lunch option, dog-friendly patio.

DOWNTOWN TEJON STREET

Jax Fish House & Oyster Bar · Downtown · \$\$\$

11 S Tejon St. Sustainable seafood, lively oyster bar, daily happy hour 3-5pm.

MacKenzie's Chop House · Downtown · \$\$\$

128 S Tejon St. Steakhouse institution since 1997, wood-paneled dining room.

The Rabbit Hole · Downtown · \$\$\$

101 N Tejon St. Subterranean, Alice in Wonderland-themed, reservations recommended.

Denver Biscuit Company · Downtown · \$

528 S Tejon St. Hearty Southern-style breakfast and lunch, rooftop seating.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Phantom Canyon Brewing Co. · Downtown · \$\$

2 E Pikes Peak Ave. The city's oldest brewery, historic 1901 Cheyenne Building, casual bar seating.

Getting Around

Navigating Colorado Springs

Rideshare / rental car	Varies	A car is near-essential for Pikes Peak and any day trips beyond the city; rideshare is reliable citywide with longer waits in outlying neighborhoods.
Route 3 (Zero-Fare)	Free	Connects Downtown, Old Colorado City, and Manitou Springs — currently a fare-free pilot route, the single best transit hack for this itinerary.
The Zeb (Downtown Shuttle)	Free	Runs every 10 minutes across the downtown core between Cache La Poudre and Rio Grande streets.
Mountain Metro Transit	\$1.75/ride	Covers the broader city but with limited weekend service; better for commuting than touring.
Walking	Free	Downtown/Tejon Street, Old Colorado City, and Manitou Springs are each individually walkable; moving between them by foot is a stretch — use Route 3 instead.

Practical Information

Before You Go

Getting There	Colorado Springs Airport (COS) sits about 11 miles southeast of downtown — 15-20 min by rideshare or rental car, no direct rail link.
Best Time	June-September is the best window — warm days, cool nights, and every trail and the Cog Railway fully running. September-October brings excellent fall color and thinner crowds. December-February can bring heavy snow — check road and trail conditions before any hike.
Altitude	At 6,035 feet, and considerably higher on Pikes Peak, altitude symptoms — headache, fatigue, shortness of breath — are common in the first 24-48 hours. Hydrate more than usual and go easy on alcohol on arrival day.
Solo Dining	Colorado Springs has a genuine bar-dining culture — Jax, MacKenzie's, and The Rabbit Hole all seat solo diners comfortably at the bar, no reservation drama required.
Neighborhoods	The relevant neighborhoods for this itinerary are Garden of the Gods/Manitou Springs, Old Colorado City, and Downtown/Tejon Street — each roughly 15-20 minutes from the others.
Useful Apps	Uber/Lyft, Google Maps offline, the Pikes Peak Cog Railway app for timed tickets, OpenTable for The Rabbit Hole or MacKenzie's.

Colorado Springs awaits.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE: FINAL CHECKLIST

- ☐ Book Pikes Peak Cog Railway tickets 2+ weeks out - cograilway.com
- ☐ Reserve The Rabbit Hole for Day Two dinner
- ☐ Arrive at Garden of the Gods before 8am for parking and light
- ☐ Bring a water bottle - altitude effects are real, hydrate more than usual
- ☐ Bring layers for the Pikes Peak summit - 30°F+ colder than the base
- ☐ Download Google Maps offline before arriving
- ☐ Use Route 3 (Zero-Fare) to skip rideshare between Downtown, Old Colorado City, and Manitou Springs

Your interactive map is one scan away.

All locations from this guide, colour-coded by day, open on your phone.
goingsolo.life/maps/colorado-springs

Free to download. Made for the traveler going it alone.



SCAN FOR THE INTERACTIVE MAP