

**RV TRIPGEN**

The Complete Guide to  
RV Travel in  
**Colorado**

I-70 mountain corridor, Eisenhower Tunnel height limits, Trail Ridge timing, afternoon thunderstorms, and altitude that affects everything you tow.

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**[rvtripgen.com](https://rvtripgen.com)**

# RV travel in Colorado

Colorado is the high-elevation state. Of the lower 48's 100 highest peaks, 78 are here. Rocky Mountain, Mesa Verde, Great Sand Dunes, and Black Canyon of the Gunnison are spread across the state, the San Juan and Sawatch ranges deliver some of the best alpine RVing in the country, and BLM dispersed in the western half is plentiful. The complications are altitude and weather: most popular routes climb above 10,000 ft, naturally aspirated engines lose 30% of their power, propane and water heaters need extra time to ignite, and afternoon thunderstorms in summer are not optional -- they happen daily from late June through August. Plan your driving for mornings, your camp for early afternoon, and you'll love the state.

## Colorado by the numbers

<b>Boondocking + dispersed sites</b>	1,903
<b>Established campgrounds</b>	589
<b>Dump stations</b>	99
<b>Propane refills</b>	108
<b>Potable water fill-ups</b>	223
<b>Laundromats</b>	86
<b>RV showers</b>	100
<b>Verified-bad spots (overnight prohibited)</b>	111

Source: iOverlander community database (73% of Colorado spots verified in the last 24 months).

## Driving rules

<b>Interstate (cars + RVs)</b>	75 mph on rural segments, 65 mph metro
<b>Interstate (towing)</b>	Matches posted (no separate trailer limit)
<b>Mountain passes (CDOT chain laws)</b>	Traction law triggers Sep-May; chain law (commercial) and traction law (passenger 4WD/AWD or M+S tyres) common on I-70 west of Denver
<b>US/State highway (cars + towing)</b>	60-65 mph (posted)
<b>Built-up areas</b>	25-35 mph (posted)
<b>Drive on</b>	Right
<b>Cell phone use while driving</b>	Hands-free required for those under 18; texting prohibited for all drivers
<b>Seatbelts</b>	Required for front-seat occupants; all under-16 occupants in any seat

## Highways

### RV-friendly corridors

Highway	Note
I-70 (east of Denver)	Plains driving, easy. Wind storms can ground high-profile rigs near Limon and Burlington -- watch CDOT alerts.
I-25	Front Range spine from New Mexico to Wyoming. Heavy traffic Denver-Colorado Springs; wind storms south of Pueblo.
I-76	Denver to Nebraska via NE plains. Easy drive.
US-50 (eastern + western segments)	Across the southern half of the state. Crosses Monarch Pass (11312 ft) -- big rigs OK with low gears, but it's a long climb.
US-285 (Denver to South Park)	Major route to the upper Arkansas Valley. Crosses Kenosha Pass (10001 ft).
US-550 (Durango to Ouray, the Million Dollar Highway segment)	Spectacular but the segment between Silverton and Ouray has no guardrails and tight switchbacks at 11000 ft -- experienced RV drivers only, ideally rigs under 30 ft. Big rigs should detour via US-50 + US-285.

### RV-restricted segments

Segment	Restriction
I-70 Eisenhower-Johnson Memorial Tunnel	Maximum height 13 ft 11 in. Vehicles over this MUST use US-6 over Loveland Pass instead. Hazmat (including most propane-only RVs above placardable quantities) prohibited; standard RV propane is permitted.
Trail Ridge Road (US-34, Rocky Mountain NP)	Closed Oct-late May. Open season has 25 ft length advisory, no trailers over 30 ft, sustained 11000-12000 ft elevation. Park-it-and-drive-the-tow recommended for big rigs.
Independence Pass (CO-82, east of Aspen)	12095 ft. Closed Nov-May. 35 ft total-length limit including any tow. Tight switchbacks; not for fifth wheels.
Cottonwood Pass (CR-306, 12126 ft)	Closed Nov-May. Now paved both sides but RVs over 35 ft are still strongly discouraged.
Mt Evans Highway (CO-5)	14130 ft summit. Strict 30 ft length limit; trailers prohibited above Echo Lake. Great drive in a tow vehicle, terrible idea in any sized RV.

## Mountain passes

Pass	Elevation	Note
Loveland Pass (US-6)	11990 ft	Open year-round; chain laws common Nov-Apr; rigs over 13 ft 11 in must use this instead of the Eisenhower Tunnel.

Vail Pass (I-70)	10662 ft	Open year-round; truck restrictions and chain laws frequent in storms.
Wolf Creek Pass (US-160)	10857 ft	Open year-round; some of the heaviest snowfall in CO. 7% grades both sides.
Monarch Pass (US-50)	11312 ft	Open year-round; chain laws common Nov-Apr. Big rigs OK in low gear.
Independence Pass (CO-82)	12095 ft	Closed Nov-May. 35 ft length limit including tow.
Trail Ridge Road (US-34)	12183 ft	Closed Oct-late May.
Hoosier Pass (CO-9)	11541 ft	Open year-round; tight switchbacks; trailers under 35 ft only advised.
Cumbres Pass (CO-17)	10022 ft	Open year-round; quiet route to NM.

## National parks + monuments

National Park / Monument	Entry fee	Reservation note
Rocky Mountain NP	\$30/vehicle (1 day) or \$35 (7 days), \$80 America the Beautiful annual	Timed-entry reservation system in effect peak season (typically Memorial Day-Oct, check current rules at recreation.gov/timed-entry). Five reservable campgrounds: Moraine Park (rigs to 40 ft), Glacier Basin (rigs to 35 ft), Aspenglen (rigs to 30 ft) on the east side; Timber Creek on the west; Longs Peak tents-only. All reservable up to 6 months ahead -- popular dates fill in minutes.
Mesa Verde NP	\$30/vehicle (7 days)	Morefield Campground reservable May-Oct via the park concessionaire (Aramark); rigs to 40 ft full-hookup. Park entrance road has tight switchbacks but is RV-passable.
Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP	\$30/vehicle (7 days)	South Rim Campground reservable; rigs to 35 ft on Loops A+B. East Portal Road has 16% grade and 22 ft length limit -- tow vehicles only.
Great Sand Dunes NP + Preserve	\$25/vehicle (7 days)	Pinon Flats Campground reservable Apr-Oct; rigs to 35 ft. Free dispersed possible in adjacent NF/BLM.
Curecanti NRA (Blue Mesa Reservoir)	Free entry	Multiple campgrounds; Elk Creek + Lake Fork reservable, others first-come. Rigs to 40 ft most loops.
Dinosaur NM (Colorado side)	\$25/vehicle (7 days)	Echo Park requires high-clearance / not RV-suitable. Stay on the Utah side or in nearby Dinosaur, CO. Quarry exhibit is on the Utah side.
Florissant Fossil Beds NM	\$10/person (7 days)	No camping inside; nearby Mueller State Park or NF dispersed.

Hovenweep NM	\$20/vehicle (7 days)	31-site campground first-come; small rigs only (28 ft max).
Bent's Old Fort NHS	\$15/vehicle entry equivalent	No camping inside; nearby John Martin SP.

## State parks

Colorado Parks and Wildlife operates 43 state parks. Highline Lake (Grand Junction), Eleven Mile (South Park), Cherry Creek + Chatfield (Denver metro), Roxborough, Mueller, State Forest (north), and Steamboat Lake all take big rigs. Reservable 6 months ahead at [cpw.state.co.us](http://cpw.state.co.us). Day-use \$10/vehicle (or \$84 annual pass). Camping \$30-55. State park entry pass is per-vehicle, not per-person -- worth the annual if you're hitting more than five.

## Boondocking + dispersed camping

**BLM:** Western Colorado has extensive BLM dispersed: Grand Junction area (Rabbit Valley, North Fruita Desert), Gunnison Gorge, McInnis Canyons NCA, around Ridgway, and the lowlands south of the San Juans. Standard 14-day stay limit. Eastern Colorado has very little BLM -- the plains are mostly private agricultural land or state trust land (which you cannot camp on without a permit).

**National Forest:** Eleven National Forests cover most of the high country: White River, Routt, Pike-San Isabel, San Juan, Rio Grande, Gunnison, Uncompahgre, Arapaho, Roosevelt, Grand Mesa, Manti-La Sal. Dispersed camping along forest roads is generally permitted with a 14-day stay limit. Fire restrictions are common Jun-Oct; afternoon thunderstorms make rapid storm cells the bigger immediate hazard. Many popular FS roads (Buffalo Pass, Boreas Pass, Rollins Pass) have rough sections where any rig over 25 ft will struggle.

**Stay limit:** 14 days at any one location (federal rule, applies to BLM and NF dispersed).

## Tribal lands

Two reservations in the SW corner: Southern Ute (around Ignacio) and Ute Mountain Ute (around Towaoc + Cortez). Both operate small casinos and limited RV facilities. Ute Mountain Tribal Park offers guided tours of cliff dwellings adjacent to Mesa Verde NP. Dispersed camping is not permitted on tribal land; check current rules before pulling off the highway in either reservation.

## Propane, dump stations, fuel

**Propane:** Plentiful along the I-25 and I-70 corridors. Sparse in the central mountains -- carry full tanks before heading into the Sawatch or San Juans. U-Haul, Tractor Supply, and most KOA / Good Sam parks fill on-site. Note: at high elevation, propane vapour pressure drops; heavy usage in cold weather above 9000 ft can struggle with smaller tanks. Two 30 lb tanks beat a single 20 lb in a winter rig.

**Dump stations:** Dense along the Front Range and I-70. Sparse in the southern San Luis Valley and the far western plateau country. Most NPS campgrounds in CO have dump stations for registered guests. Flying J / Pilot on I-25 and I-70 charge \$10-15.

**Fuel:** Diesel widely available along I-25, I-70, I-76, and US-50. Notable fuel gaps: US-160 Walsenburg-to-Pagosa Springs has limited late-night options; US-50 Salida-to-Gunnison is fine in daylight

but quiet after 9pm; the Cottonwood/Tincup back-country roads have no fuel for 50+ miles. Fuel prices are typically lowest along the Front Range and highest in mountain resort towns (Vail, Aspen, Telluride pay 30-50 cents/gal premium).

## Weather windows

**Best months:** June through September at high elevation (passes are open, daytime highs in the 70s-80s F in valley towns, 60s-70s F at 9000+ ft). May and October in the lower elevations and the western plateau.

**Avoid:** October-May at any elevation above 9000 ft (most passes closed). January-March on I-70 west of Denver -- regular blizzard closures. Avoid the high country for the first few days after major snowfall regardless of month.

### Climate caution

Afternoon thunderstorms above treeline (11000+ ft) Jun-Aug are not optional. Lightning kills hikers and RVers every year. Be off summit drives like Mt Evans and Trail Ridge, and out of exposed alpine campsites, by noon. Watch the western horizon and start descending the moment you see vertical-development clouds.

## Emergency + road conditions

### State patrol

Dial 9-1-1 for emergencies; \*CSP (\*277) from a cell phone for non-emergency state patrol

### Road conditions

<https://cotrip.org>

## How RV TripGen helps

### We schedule mountain driving for mornings

RV TripGen plans every Colorado pass crossing Jun-Aug for early-morning departures, putting you below 10000 ft before the afternoon thunderstorm cells build.

### Eisenhower Tunnel re-route built in

If your rig is taller than 13 ft 11 in, we route you over Loveland Pass on US-6 automatically and flag the chain-law season so you carry the right gear.