

## [Smart Meetings - The Intelligent Way to Plan in the Western Region](#)

- [Contact Us](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Sign Up](#)
- [Sign In](#)



- [Home](#)
- [The Magazine](#)
- [Site Solutions](#)
- [Destinations](#)
- [Smart Events](#)
- [Smart Connections](#)
- [News / Videos](#)
- [My Properties](#)
- 0

[August 2011](#) > [Riding Slow in Colorado](#)



Enter Search Term  
All Categories  Exact  
Phrase

## Destination: Denver/Colorado Springs/Estes Park

Riding Slow in Colorado

By Nikki Gloudeman



In today's fast-paced world of slick cars and fancy jets, it's easy to forget that the nation's modern identity owes much to the steady pace of classic trains and automobiles. Nowhere is this impact more evident than in Denver, Colorado Springs and Estes Park, all of which have deep roots in early modes of transportation.

The region's history endures today in various attractions and museums that pay homage to old-fashioned passage. For planners, this adds another level of distinction to an area already known for its rugged surroundings, Old West heritage, array of brewpubs and microbreweries (including two of the largest in the nation), cutting-edge sustainability initiatives and assortment of meeting-friendly venues.

### DENVER

Denver's early history is often viewed through the lens of the Gold Rush, the storied boom that lured thousands of miners to the city in the middle of the 19th century. Yet Denver's formative years were, in a different way, equally as shaped by transportation as by the presence of a precious metal and its seekers.

In fact, it was transportation that helped rescue Denver after its gold boom was followed by bust, with dried-up resources prompting miners to skip town and find riches elsewhere. During this juncture, when the city could have become a ghost town, it instead became a nexus for travel. In 1859, the region's first overland wagon road route—equipped to transport "passengers, mail, freight and gold"—was established. Soon after, when the Union Pacific Railroad bypassed Denver on its transcontinental route, determined locals raised \$300,000 in three days to build their own 106-mile railroad, the Denver Pacific Railway, to meet up with the one in Cheyenne. Their gumption paid off: In 1870, the Kansas Pacific Railroad made Denver the final link in its coast-to-coast railway network. A few years later, the region's rail lines were used to

transport silver during the city's lucrative silver boom.

Today, Denver still plays a dominant role in the transportation scene. The green-friendly city has established 850 miles of off-road bike paths and a bike-sharing program that has become a model for other cities, while its speedy light-rail system is a modern marvel. These up-to-date transportation modes have kept Denver a popular spot for visitors and groups—as has a beguiling mix of nature, culture and charm.

“Denver’s businesses, forward-thinking residents and natural beauty create an atmosphere for the city that is laid back and friendly, yet wonderfully industrious,” says Rachel Benedick, vice president of convention sales and services for **Visit Denver, The Convention and Visitors Bureau**. “What other city can truly offer the natural beauty of the mountains—Denver’s Rocky Mountain playground—just 30 minutes away, along with amazing art museums, performing arts, fine dining, world-class accommodations and affordability?”

## ATTRACTIONS

Denver’s railway history is preserved in several area attractions. At the **Colorado Railroad Museum**, attendees can learn about the storied railroad roots not only of Denver, but of the entire Centennial State. Located on a 15-acre former railyard, the venue features 100 pieces of rolling stock, including old cabooses, refrigerator cars and boxcars. The **Forney Museum of Transportation** takes a broader approach in its artifact curation; with a collection of antique cars, motorcycles, trolleys, buggies, bicycles and more, the venue easily lives up to its mantra “Anything on wheels!” Among its finds is one of a limited supply of Big Boys, the world’s largest steam locomotive. In addition to a standard exhibit hall and meeting room, the facility also offers an old-fashioned trolley car up to 25 attendees can meet in.

Denver’s cultural offerings go far beyond a transportation focus. One of the top attractions in town is the **Denver Art Museum**, an imposing facility known for its new Hamilton building, which was designed by acclaimed architect Daniel Libeskind (who was selected to rebuild the World Trade Center). The venue’s striking exterior, featuring 9,000 titanium panels, gives way to an interior with walls that meet at sharp geometric angles—and, of course, an extensive art collection, including an exhaustive array of African art. A slew of event spaces are available for rental, from a 2,000-square-foot atrium to a new, 266-seat auditorium.

A contemporary cultural vibe also permeates the sprawling **Denver Performing Arts Complex**, the largest performing arts center in the Western Hemisphere and the second-largest in the world after New York City’s Lincoln Center. Spanning four blocks and 12 acres, with more than 10,000 seats in nine venues connected under an 80-foot-tall glass roof, it is a commanding space to take in touring Broadway productions, symphony orchestra concerts, operas and more.

To connect with Denver’s impassioned Colorado Rockies fans (of which there are many), groups can catch a game at **Coors Field**, where the team plays. Or they can meet in its facilities—including a brewery and smokehouse or the field itself—on non-game days.

## MAJOR MEETING VENUES

Denver’s transportation history is subtly infused in various local meeting spaces. At the **Colorado Convention Center**, for instance, a wall-mounted art installation contains an artifact meant to represent a railroad trestle. The piece is just one of several works scattered throughout the venue, the most well-known of which is the oft-photographed, 40-foot-tall blue bear looking in from outside the center.

Besides its art focus, the eco-friendly center is known for being tapped into the needs of meeting planners; when it was being constructed, more than 100 event professionals worked with the architects to ensure the space would satisfy group needs. In total, the facility provides 584,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space and 100,000 sq. ft. of meeting space spread among 63 meeting rooms.

The center is also conveniently within easy walking distance to more than 8,000 hotel rooms, 1,100 of which are contained inside the adjacent **Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center**. With its own 60,600 sq. ft. of meeting space, the hotel makes planning for most any group size easy, and offers such memorable touches as an award-winning spa and Altitudes restaurant, which offers views of bustling 14th Street via floor-to-ceiling windows.

New to the scene, and also downtown, the 239-room **Four Seasons Hotel Denver** debuted last October to much fanfare—a ticket to the property’s grand opening party was described by the *Denver Post* as “the most coveted...since President Barack Obama’s nomination acceptance speech at Invesco Field.” In addition to the Four Seasons service planners expect, the property offers a rooftop pool terrace, a 9,092-square-foot spa, an American steakhouse that sources ingredients from Colorado ranches and 17,000 sq. ft. of function space—some of which was utilized at the recent Smart Mart.

As befits a city as *au courant* as Denver, there are also several meeting venues with a hip ambience. Chief among them is the nearby **Curtis, a DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel**, which exudes a childlike sense of wonder in its 336 guest rooms and 20,805sq. ft. of meeting space. The hotel has 13 themed floors (including Chick Flick and Big Hair) and a 5 & Dime Store that peddles such nostalgic goods as Orange Crush and Etch-a-Sketches. Meetings here are filled with similar *joie de vivre*; planners can use Battleship or Connect Four as centerpieces and host groups in rooms with childhood-game names.

Housed in a 1911 building where Colorado’s second territorial governor once lived, the **Hotel Teatro** provides a historic counterpoint to Denver’s modern offerings. The property also touts a coveted location down the street from the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, and offers a restaurant that has earned a litany of honors, including Four Diamonds, Four Stars, *Wine Spectator*’s Best of Award of Excellence and *Travel + Leisure*’s 50 Best Hotel Restaurants. With Five-Star service, 110 guest rooms and more than 10,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, it is a premier site to bring a group to—so much so that in May, it even impressed 30 meeting planners brought on-site for a Silicon Valley Bank conference.

Leslie Schalk, the event planner who organized the meeting, says the “beautiful boutique hotel in a phenomenal area” wowed the tough-to-please crowd by “making every attendee feel pampered.” Schalk also singles out the property’s recently updated meeting space, located just around the corner from the main structure, which features state-of-the-art A/V and lighting.

Tracing even further back into Denver’s past, **The Brown Palace Hotel & Spa** opened its doors in 1892 and has welcomed guests every day since. Over the decades, it has hosted an impressive array of presidents, rock stars, movie stars and dignitaries, four of whom are honored in a collection of specially themed suites: The Beatles Suite, Reagan Suite, Roosevelt Suite and Eisenhower Suite (the latter includes a dent Ike made in the fireplace while hitting golf balls in the room). Groups of up to 20 can enjoy a private historical tour, either general or themed (Ghost, Architectural, Affairs of the Heart, Presidential or Ladies of The Brown), with a portion of the proceeds donated to Denver charities. The Brown Palace offers 241 guest rooms and 13,000 sq. ft. of elegant meeting space.

In Cherry Creek, an upscale neighborhood filled with shops and restaurants a short distance from downtown, you’ll find the **JW Marriott Denver Cherry Creek**, a stylish property replete with rich woods, bold colors and sophisticated art work. After getting business done in 8,400 sq. ft. of meeting space, attendees can enjoy people watching while sipping local microbrews, international wines, sangria or mojitos on

the patio at Second Home Kitchen + Bar, then retire to bed at one of the hotel's 196 recently renovated guest rooms.

For something outdoorsy, a memorable choice is **Red Rocks Amphitheatre**, an open-air venue a short drive from Denver in stunning Red Rocks Park. Built around two massive boulders, it can seat 9,000 attendees under clear Colorado skies. The park also features a 30,000-square-foot visitor center groups can meet it.

## COLORADO SPRINGS

Colorado Springs, about 70 miles south of Denver, is known for the sense of grandeur that defines its dramatic natural landscapes and physical structures, including a collection of championship mountainside golf courses and the iconic Broadmoor Resort.

As with so much in the area, the city's modern identity has roots in the railway system. It was William J. Palmer, a Denver and Rio Grande Railroad tycoon, who founded the city 140 years ago as the first destination served by his new railway. Palmer envisioned the town as a place for civilized society to enjoy, and it soon developed into just that, adopting the name "Little London" thanks to its opulent mansions and tree-lined streets.

Colorado Springs has changed over the years, but in many ways it still lives up to Palmer's original vision—yet appealingly for meeting planners, this upscale experience needn't cost a pretty penny.

"We have a plethora of amenities that rival a first-tier city, yet at a much more affordable price. We truly are a value destination," says Chelsy Murphy, public relations manager for **Experience Colorado Springs**, the city's convention and visitors bureau. Additionally, she says, "We have easy access to the great outdoors; trails and open space are literally minutes from the metro area and bustling downtown; and we have proximity to Denver and the Denver International Airport, just 70 miles [north], as well as our own airport." All these years later, it's easy to see why Colorado Springs continues to entice the out-of-town crowd, including an assortment of groups.

## ATTRACTIONS

Between 1887 and its closure in 1971, the West train depot of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad served as the primary hub for railway passengers. The depot has since been converted into a popular local restaurant, **Giuseppe's Depot Restaurant**, which features the structure's original 25-foot pine ceiling and floor tiles, as well as a collection of antiques, photos and souvenirs. The depot's ticket office is now a private banquet room.

While this depot has since been closed for rail business, an assortment of historic railroads in Colorado Springs continue to transport guests along mountain tracks. The most well-known is **Pikes Peak Cog Railway**, which runs year-round and is the highest cog railway in the world. Attendees who board the buggy are transported 8.9 miles up Pikes Peak, a 14,110-foot summit near the edge of the Great Plains, with vistas so striking they inspired Katharine Lee Bates to pen "America the Beautiful."

About an hour outside of Colorado Springs, the **Cripple Creek & Victor Narrow Gauge Railroad** and **Royal Gorge Route Railroad** are also available to whisk guests away in historic vessels through Colorado terrain. The Cripple Creek train is a century-old steam locomotive, and the 45-minute route integrates the area's gold-rush past. The Royal Gorge Route Railroad traces back to 1879, and offers panoramas of craggy red rock, the Arkansas River and patches of forest as it winds down more than 1,200 feet into one of the state's deepest canyons.

Of course, there are other ways to experience Colorado Springs' expansive beauty than by chugging along railroad tracks. To take in picturesque views on foot, attendees can head to the aptly named **Garden of the Gods**. (Fun fact: As the story goes, one of the surveyors who founded the park initially thought it would be an excellent location for a beer garden, to which his partner replied, "Beer garden! Why it is a fit place for the gods to assemble. We will call it Garden of the Gods.")

The National Historic Landmark features towering peaks ringed in surprising colors of red, blue, purple and white, the result of ancient sedimentation. Formations include the heavily photographed Balanced Rock, an immense boulder teetering on bedrock that appears ready to break away at any moment—but has yet to do so in thousands of years.

## MAJOR MEETING VENUES

About 25 years ago, a tycoon of the automobile industry—Charles Gates, Jr. of Gates Rubber & Tire Company (now the Gates Corporation)—decided to develop a parcel of land fronting the Cheyenne Mountain range into a national meeting facility. His vision led to the creation of the **Cheyenne Mountain Resort**, a property that mixes authentic Colorado flavor with a meeting-friendly layout.

The state's natural landscape is felt in every nook and cranny of this recently renovated venue, from the Colorado stone that shapes its structure to the sweeping windows in its completely redone lobby, which frame views of the mountain range and rolling landscape outside. At the same time, the resort's meeting spaces are wholly practical, with IACC certification and close proximity to one another.

John Branciforte, director of sales and marketing, says this fusion of the functional and natural lends itself to first-rate functions in more than 40,000 sq. ft. of space. "When you have a meeting here, you can command, control and focus—your meeting intent is very deliverable," he says. "And yet there are plenty of windows to gaze on Cheyenne Mountain and to get attendees to think deeper and better."

The 316-room property is also home to a Pete Dye-designed 18-hole golf course and an aquatic center that features a 35-acre lake with a sandy beach. As a distinctive offering, the resort works with the local Olympic Training Center, and can send groups there to work with athletes specially selected to meet their corporate needs. The program, **Five Ring Insight**, is led by Eli Bremer, an MBA and Olympic pentathlete.

Also near the mountain range, you'll find the area's historic crown jewel, **The Broadmoor**, which debuted in 1918. The 744-room property is situated amid 3,000 acres of lush land and features Cheyenne Lake out back, an emerald-blue reservoir filled with geese and paddle boats.

No matter what your attendees need, they will likely find it here, whether it be shopping (the resort features a collection of high-end retail shops), outdoor adventure (fly-fishing, rock climbing and ballooning can be arranged) or pampering and wellness (a Five-Star spa offers such treatments as a Chardonnay Sugar Scrub). They can also get business done in 185,000 sq. ft. of meeting space.

For a non-hotel meeting, you can bring your group to **Cheyenne Mountain Zoo**. Located 6,800 feet up on Cheyenne Mountain, the venue enables groups to feel like kids again by chugging around in a miniature train and spending time with more than 800 animals. Groups can utilize small spaces, including a Safari Cabin, or rent out the entire venue.

## ESTES PARK

About an hour-and-a-half drive north from Denver, Estes Park is most well-known for being the gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park, 416 square miles of stunning wilderness with towering peaks that are legion—60 are more than 12,000 feet high.

Yet the expanse's beauty is hardly limited to its soaring features. Traveling through the park's jagged terrain, you'll also find glaciers that trace back to the Ice Age, pristine meadows and lakes, more than a thousand flowering plants and an assortment of wildlife, including moose and bighorn sheep.

Outside of this world-famous landmark, Estes Park also offers mountain charm in its downtown vicinity, where you can watch taffy being pulled on an old-fashioned machine, buy Native American jewelry and peruse various mom-and-pop boutiques.

Like its Colorado neighbors, the area also has a transportation lineage: It was once home to F.O. Stanley, inventor of the famous Stanley Steamer automobile, which shattered world speed records in 1906 when it reached the impressive pace of 127.66 mph. Stanley's vision can still be felt in venues including the **Stanley Museum**, which preserves the history of steam cars, and the **Stanley Hotel**, which was built by the visionary and includes a preserved steam-powered auto in its lobby. The circa-1909, 138-room hotel is also known for its striking white façade and history of hauntings—it inspired Stephen King to pen *The Shining* and offers ghost tours led by an on-site paranormal investigator. Among 16,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, options include an intimate music room with a grand piano that the spirit of Stanley's deceased wife is said to sometimes play.

Many of the other hotels in Estes Park offer a rustic aesthetic that captures the spirit of their mountainous environs. Perched into the mountainside above the lake in its name, **Marys Lake Lodge and Resort** offers 75 units in a guest lodge and condos, many of which are brand-new. Up to 150 attendees can meet in the Grand Room with an adjoining conference room, the lobby or a mountainside veranda.

A sweeping option is **YMCA of the Rockies**; its Estes Park Center location (there's another outpost in Grand County at the western gateway to the park) is the largest lodging facility in Estes Valley. Situated on 860 acres of wilderness, the venue can accommodate up to 4,500 attendees in 600 lodge rooms and 206 cabins ranging in size from two to 16 bedrooms. As one would expect from a YMCA property, the venue also offers an exhaustive menu of outdoor team-building activities, including ziplines, hayrides and archery.

## Properties in this Destination

[Btn: See enlarged map view](#)

### Fast Facts

Population:  
 Altitude: ft  
 Temperature: °f - °f

### Destination Property Search

Rooms:

Meeting Space:

Passkey Enabled

SEARCH



Honor the service providers and their properties that have gone the extra mile to make your meetings this year a success.

[Click here to vote today!](#)

- [Find Smart Meetings on Facebook](#)
- [Follow us on Twitter](#)
- [Subscribe to our RSS feed](#)

©2011 All rights reserved. Smart Meetings is a division of Bright Business Media LLC.

[See All Event Planning Destination Guides](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Advertising Info](#) | [Meeting Professionals Magazine](#) | [About Us](#) | [Contact Info](#)