



6 Things to Do in Durango, Colorado in the Summer

Enjoy Dinner & a Show at Bar D Ranch

For a truly unique summer dining experience, head to [Bar D Ranch](#). The doors open at 4:30 where guests are free to enjoy the western-themed activities like a train ride, shooting gallery, gold-panning, and a playground.

You can also watch demonstrations, pick up souvenirs at the frontier land shops, and step into the little chapel in the woods where they hold "cowboy church" every Sunday.

Most of the activities are included in the price of admission, however, some activities require a small additional cost.

At 6:30, the dinner bell will ring and everyone will gather together for a hearty western-style chuckwagon dinner. The menu includes barbecue meat, baked potato, baked beans, biscuits, applesauce, and cake. It is delicious and filling!

After dinner, enjoy a live cowboy music and comedy show put on by the beloved Bar D Wranglers. The show first began in 1969 and is one of the longest-running live music events in Durango. It makes for a fun and memorable evening under the stars!

Check Out the Summer Activities at Purgatory Resort

Purgatory Resort isn't just a winter destination. In the summer, they offer a variety of [summer activities](#) that are fun for the whole family.

Guests can purchase an all-day pass that includes unlimited rides on the Mountain Coaster, Alpine Slide, and scenic chairlift. The pass also includes one session on the go-kart track, one treasure panning kit, and a kayak or paddleboard rental at Twilight Lake

We thought that the price was reasonable for everything that was included. The Mountain Coaster and Alpine Slide were our favorites. We visited on a weekday and the wait time wasn't too long.

The go-kart track was also a hit with our kids. Each session lasts 5 minutes and they had a blast!

I was surprised at how much our kids enjoyed the treasure panning as well. The kit comes with gemstones hidden in the sand. They spent a solid half hour sluicing through the sand then collecting and comparing their treasures.

The resort also offers Downhill Mountain Biking for an additional cost. Rental bikes are available and you'll be able to take the lift up then ride the bike down the mountain along the well-maintained dirt course.

There are enough activities to keep your family entertained for the entire day. We were there for about 6 1/2 hours before it closed and there were still some activities we didn't have time to do. I recommend arriving as soon as they open to make the most of your day!

Ride the Historic Narrow Gauge Railroad

Riding the historic Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad is ranked as the #1 thing to do in Durango by TripAdvisor. It has also been voted the "Best Scenic Train Ride in America" by USA Today.

This vintage steam train has been in operation since 1881 and travels between Durango and the historic mining town of Silverton. The journey follows along the Animas River offering spectacular views of the deep river gorge and rugged mountain terrain in the San Juan National Forest.

Once you reach Silverton, you'll have time to get out and explore this charming mining town. The Lacey Rose Saloon is a fun place to stop and get lunch. The food is delicious, the service is friendly, and the atmosphere is fun with a live piano player.

There are so many cute local shops to pop into, our kids especially loved the train store. If you have a sweet tooth, try the homemade fudge at the Old Arcade Trading Company and the gourmet funnel cakes at the Rocky Mountain Funnel Cake Factory.

The train ride is 7 hours round trip and you'll have about 2 hours to spend at Silverton, so plan for a full day.

They also offer a winter train ride to Cascade Canyon, see our guide [5 Things to Do in Durango in the Winter](#) for more details and recommendations.

Cool Off in the Animas River

The Animas River flows through the heart of Durango and is the perfect spot to cool off in the summer.

For a fun and free afternoon activity, go tubing down the river. Memorial Park is a popular place to float and play in the river. You can bring your own tubes, but just be sure they are durable. We like these [River Run tubes](#) on Amazon.

If you don't want to bring your own, [tube rentals](#) are available along with kayaks and paddleboards.

The city has published a helpful [Tubing on the Animas River](#) pamphlet with a river access map and safety information.

White water rafting is also a popular activity on the Animas River. There are several different tour operators to choose from, but we like this [family-friendly rafting excursion](#) that is fun for kids ages 4 years and older.

The Animas River is also a popular spot for fly fishing. Fishing pole rentals are available at [Go Play Durango](#) where you can cast your line and try to catch rainbow and brown trout. The same company also offers RC car rentals which would be fun for kids to drive along the riverbank.

You can also enjoy the Animas River while staying dry by renting e-bikes and riding along the 9-mile Animas River Trail. [Roll Durango](#) offers package deals including an e-bike and paddleboard rental along with a gourmet picnic lunch.

There are several restaurants and cafes with outdoor patios overlooking the Animas River. One of our favorites is Serious Texas BBQ on Camino Del Rio Street.

We love enjoying barbecue brisket, mac & cheese, cheesy potatoes, and homemade cobbler while taking in the river views.

After your meal, you can play mini-golf and cornhole. The restaurant also has easy access to the Animas River Trail and a wooden staircase leading down to the river where you can skip rocks.

Explore Historic Downtown Durango

Main Avenue is the bustling heart of historic downtown Durango. It is lined with heritage buildings that house restaurants, shops, hotels, galleries, and museums.

The Diamond Belle Saloon at the Strater Hotel is one of our favorite places to grab a bite to eat while listening to a live piano player. Seating is first-come-first-serve, so arrive early to avoid a long wait.

A few other recommended restaurants in downtown Durango include El Moro Tavern, Carver Brewing Co., Switchback Tacos, Fired Up Pizzeria, 636 Main Ave, and Steamworks Brewing Co.

Stop by the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad Depot and Railroad Museum. The depot and museum offer a glimpse into Durango's railroad history with exhibits, artifacts, and historic locomotives.

The Animas Museum is housed in a historic school building and features exhibits on the history of Durango and La Plata County, including Native American artifacts and local historical photos.

A few favorite shops include The Tippy Canoe for home decor, Pine Needle Mountaineering for outdoor clothing and gear, and Maria's Bookshop for a curated collection of books.

Take a Day Trip to Mesa Verde

Mesa Verde is an archaeological wonderland about 40 minutes outside of Durango. It was established as America's first Cultural National Park in 1906. In 1978, it became America's first World Heritage Site alongside Yellowstone National Park.

The purpose of the park is to preserve and educate visitors about the nearly 5,000 archaeological sites within the park.

Summer is the best time to visit Mesa Verde as they offer guided tours to three of the 600 cliff dwellings. These dwellings include Cliff Palace, Square Tower House, and Balcony House.

We took a tour of Balcony House and loved climbing ladders and squeezing through tunnels while exploring and learning about this fascinating Ancestral Pueblo cliff dwelling that dates back to 1240.

For more information about this tour and other sites in Mesa Verde, see our guide [How to Spend One Day at Mesa Verde](#).

A Few More of the Best Things to Do in Durango, CO in the Summer:

- **Spud Lake Trail:** This 3-mile loop trail leads to Potato Lake, a scenic alpine lake. The trail is clearly marked and fairly easy with an elevation gain of 430 feet. You will need a high-clearance 4WD vehicle to reach the trailhead.
- **Ghost Tour:** Learn about some of Durango's darker history and storied past on this fascinating [haunted history tour](#).
- **Durango Hot Springs Resort:** Purchase a day pass and soak in these natural hot springs with beautiful mountain views.
- **Thrifting:** If you love a good vintage find, Durango is home to 10 different thrift stores. A few favorites include Second Time Around, Rose Duds, Sideshow Studio: Redesigns & Vintage, Lizard Head Trading Co., and the United Methodist Thrift Shop.
- **Colorado Outdoor Adventures:** This is your one-stop shop for all things outdoor activities! [Colorado Outdoor Adventures](#) offers rafting, jeep and ATV tours, ziplining, go-

karts, and watersports.

- **Durango Fish Hatchery & Wildlife Museum:** This is Colorado's oldest state-owned fish hatchery where millions of fish are raised each year to stock the surrounding lakes. Be sure to bring quarters to purchase fish food to feed the fish!
- **Rock Climbing:** [San Juan Mountain Guides](#) offer climbing excursions for different ages and levels, it's a fun activity for the whole family!
- **James Ranch Grill:** James Ranch Grill is a fun place to enjoy a summer meal. They serve the best burgers in Durango with 100% grass-fed beef and artisan cheese. The outdoor tables offer views of the Animas River Valley and visitors can take a self-guided tour and scavenger hunt around the property.

I hope this guide will help you discover the best things to do in Durango, Colorado this summer!