



Helper, Utah: The Cutest Small Town You've Never Heard Of

There is the cutest little historic railroad and mining town hidden in the mountains of Central Utah, and I'm pretty sure you've never heard of it!

Let me introduce you to Helper, a small sleepy town at the base of Book Cliffs that once served as a bustling hub for miners, rail workers, and immigrants in the early 1900s. The town gets its name from the "helper" engines that pushed trains up the steep incline of Soldier Summit Price Canyon. Today, it's a hidden gem with an artsy, small-town vibe and so much history to explore!

My sister-in-law grew up in a small town near Helper and has been telling me for years that I need to visit. We finally made a day trip during my recent visit, and I'm so glad I finally got a chance to see this adorable town in person. I'm taking it upon myself to introduce you to this darling place, and I hope it inspires you to visit!

The Best Things to Do in Helper, Utah

Stop By the Helper Museum

The [Helper Museum](#) is a great place to kick off your visit to Helper. It will take you on a deep dive into the rich mining and railroad history of this historic town.

The museum is filled with artifacts and hands-on exhibits, giving visitors a taste of what life was like working in the underground coal mines.

If you are visiting with kids, they will especially like the model trains, as well as Caboose No. 55 that was built in 1918 and sits outside the museum.

Visit the Shops on Main Street

The town was first settled in the early 1880s with the arrival of the Denver & Rio Western Railway and the expansion of the nearby coal mines. In its heyday, it had a population of about 20,000 people. Today, it is home to just over 2,000 residents.

After the coal mines closed, this whistlestop town became a bit of a ghost town. Over the years, the residents of Helper have revitalized the town, and they have done a great job preserving the original buildings. It's even earned the catch phrase, "It's Happening in Helper, Utah"!

Walking the streets of Helper's Historical District feels like you've stepped back in time. In fact, several TV shows and independent films (such as *Rigoletto* and *Ghost Adventures*) have used Helper as a backdrop to depict small-town Americana vibes.

Many of the original buildings on Main Street have been repurposed to house shops, restaurants, and galleries. They have also been spruced up with colorful murals.

We loved walking along the sidewalk and popping into the different stores. We picked up some treasures at a vintage market, admired local art, and grabbed a souvenir train to remember our day exploring Helper.

See the Restored Vehicles at Vintage Motors Company

We stumbled across Vintage Motors Co., and it ended up being our favorite stop!

It's more than just a shop, it's a museum of sorts with restored vehicles and memorabilia. The owner was so kind and spent so much time showing us all of the vintage motorcycles and cars. He shared some interesting history of the area and answered so many questions.

The shop is housed in the old emergency station building that was used during the Great Depression. You can even see an original sign stating the rules for hobos traveling on the railway and looking for a place to stay. The sign was cemented to the wall during the Great Depression and hasn't moved since.

If you love vintage cars, you'll love seeing the different vehicles that they are currently restoring. I'm not a huge vintage car buff, but even I thought it was interesting!

Eat Lunch at the Balance Rock Eatery

After walking around town, we worked up an appetite and grabbed a table at the Balance Rock Eatery.

This cafe is located inside one of the oldest buildings in Helper. It was built in 1906 and served as a mercantile and furniture store.

They serve classic diner food, and the portions are huge! My sister-in-law ordered a pancake that was as big as the plate, and the hashbrowns were perfectly crisp.

I ordered the Mama's Grilled Cheese Sandwich with extra cheese grilled on the outside, and it paired perfectly with the fresh-cut home fries. I couldn't decide between the fries or the

homemade chips, they both looked delicious!

If I hadn't been so full, I would have ordered one of their hot signature scones that melt in your mouth!

Stroll the Helper Riverwalk Trail

After lunch, we took a stroll along the Helper Riverwalk Trail to help settle the food we had just devoured!

This picturesque little wooded trail follows along the Price River. The river was muddy from recent rains, but the locals said that in the summer, you'll find people fishing, kayaking, paddleboarding, or floating down the river in tubes.

The path starts at the Mining Museum parking lot on Poplar Street and 100 West. It follows the river north for about 1 mile to Martin Road. One of the main highlights of the trail is a scenic swing bridge.

If you're visiting with kids, they'll love adding a painted rock to "Rocco the Rock Snake"! Helper is filled with unexpected and thoughtful little details like this.

Go on a Self-guided Historic Walking Tour

We used the [Historical Markers Database](#) to create a self-guided walking tour of Helper. You can also download the free [TravelStorys app](#) and search for Helper, Utah, to find a fantastic free audio guide created by the Carbon County Tourism Board.

It was fascinating to learn the history of many of the town's original buildings and landmarks. For example, the Carbon Hotel was once the town's most popular brothel. We had to laugh at the mannequins they put in the window of a train conductor being entertained by ladies of the night.

The Barboglio Building was once a popular tavern and hotel run by Mrs. Barboglio. She would handwash all of the bedsheets and linens in the nearby Price River.

I love the cute little historic JCPenney store, the town Post Office, and City Hall. They are all a nostalgic reminder of yesteryear.

Make sure you step inside the post office and see the mural hanging over the door. The painting was the winner of an art competition sponsored by the Federal Works Agency and New Deal Public Arts Program as an effort to help revitalize communities after the Great Depression. It is one of only three post offices in Utah that contain public art.

There are also historic markers recalling devastating fires and explosions in the mines and memorializing those who lost their lives. These miners literally risked their lives every day

when they showed up to work.

You'll also learn about notable figures in Helper's history, such as Matt Warner. He was part of Butch Cassidy's band of outlaws and bank robbers. After serving time in prison, he was a changed man and went on to serve as Carbon County's most respected Deputy Sheriff.

And you can't miss the 18-foot statue of Big John, who stands as a symbol of pride, representing all of the miners who contributed to the rich history of Helper.

One of my favorite buildings, and an iconic Helper landmark, is the historic Conoco gas station. It was originally built in 1923 and served as the Midland Service filling station and auto parts store. It has been meticulously restored to its former charm and is one of the most photographed buildings in Helper.

The historic Sinclair station, located at the other end of Main Street, is also a reminder of a bygone era. If you want a unique place to stay, this old gas station has been restored and converted into a [vacation rental](#).

Attend an Event

Helper has been rising in popularity due to a few of their annual events that have put this obscure town on the map. The Saturday Vibes Outdoor Market is a fun place for locals and visitors to gather and enjoy live music and local vendors during the summer months.

The Outlaw Car Show has been running for 35 years and is the largest car show in the county.

Butch Cassidy has ties to Helper as he visited the area often, holding up trains and even robbing the nearby Pleasant Valley Coal Company. The Butch Cassidy Film Festival gives a nod to the notorious outlaw, and is a small-town version of Park City's Sundance Film Festival. The annual event is held at the Rio Theater and attracts Indie film lovers from all over.

If you're in the mood for a cozy, nostalgic Christmas, Helper could easily be the set for the next Hallmark movie! This small town is quickly getting recognized as one of Utah's best [Christmas Towns](#). Each year, they hold a holiday celebration that includes a parade, a tree-lighting ceremony, a fireworks show, and even breakfast with Santa.

Final Thoughts

I am so glad we took a day trip to explore this town. It is cute as a button and filled with so much charm and