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- Home to Mesa Verde National Park
- Trail of the Ancients National Scenic Byway
- Fine accommodations and restaurants for all budgets
- Gateway to the San Juan Skyway, “America’s Most Beautiful Drive”
- Day tours to historic and scenic wonders
- Indian dancers, storytellers, art, pottery, and trading posts
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- Beautiful 18-hole golf course

We have additional brochures about area Biking, Archaeology Tours, Hiking, Fishing Boating and even Skiing. Just ask, they’re free!

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DAY TRIPS

Guide to Scenic & Historic Tours in Mesa Verde Country®

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Experience Colorado from the Beginning!

SCENIC WONDERS AND 2,000 YEARS OF HISTORY IN AND AROUND MESA VERDE COUNTRY®

Welcome to Mesa Verde Country®, your home base for exploring the Four Corners Area. To learn more about all these spectacular regional locations, please visit the Colorado Welcome Center at 928 E. Main in Cortez.

1. Mesa Verde National Park

Mesa Verde National Park, a World Heritage Site, is the first National Park set aside to preserve the works of humankind. America's premier archaeological wonder, the Park tells the story of a civilization's dynamic growth and provides an opportunity for visitors to see and experience what life was like for the Ancestral Puebloans who lived there for over 700 years. National Geographic Traveler picked it as one of the "50 Must See Places of a Lifetime" and readers of Conde Nast Traveler selected it #1 in the Top Monuments category.

POINTS OF INTEREST: Cliff Palace, the largest cliff dwelling in the Park; Balcony House, one of the best preserved and most unique cliff dwellings in the Park; Spruce Tree House, a cliff dwelling that is open year round and contains a restored Kiva. Mesa Verde Museum displaying artifacts and dioramas and the Museum Book Store with excellent books on the area. In the summer visit Wetherill Mesa and Long House, the second largest cliff dwelling in the Park. Park Point provides spectacular views of Southwest Colorado and our three adjoining states.

DISTANCE FROM CORTEZ: Park entrance is 9 miles east.

DAY TRIPPIN' TIME: Allow a full day to see the Park.

ACCESS: Car, light walking or hiking, entrance fee.

SERVICES: Cortez, Dolores, Mancos, Towaoc, and Mesa Verde National Park.

2. Hovenweep National Monument

Known for its unique square, oval, circular and D-shaped towers, Hovenweep National Monument is located west of Cortez on the Colorado-Utah border. A visitor center, restrooms, and a two-mile moderate walk through a canyon and past several archaeological sites are located at the Square Tower headquarters area. Check at the visitor center for information on visiting the outlying sites.

POINTS OF INTEREST: McElmo Canyon Route passes through red rock canyons, and by orchards and vineyards--stop at Guy Drew Vineyards for a wine tasting. Note Battle Rock School, one of the last one-room school houses in operation. If you take the Pleasant View Route, you will pass many fields of beans in an area known as the Pinto Bean Capital of the World. On the Pleasant View Route also check out Lowry Pueblo, part of the Canyons of the Ancients National Monument.

DISTANCE FROM CORTEZ: McElmo Route is 45 miles one way. Cortez-Pleasant View loop is 85 miles.

DAY TRIPPIN' TIME: Allow a full day.

ACCESS: Car, highway and country roads. Entrance Fee.

SERVICES: Limited. Bring water and a picnic lunch and make sure you have a full tank of gas. There is a campground at Hovenweep.

3. Ute Mountain Tribal Park

Often referred to as "The Other Mesa Verde" the Ute Tribal Park contains spectacular cliff dwellings in a remote and "undisturbed" setting. This off-the-beaten track experience is led by Ute Indian guides who interpret the Ancestral Puebloan archaeology, Ancestral Puebloan and Ute rock art, and the more recent history of the Ute people in this area. The mystical feeling on this tour is that you are the first to walk on these ancient pathways and view these ancient sites.

POINTS OF INTEREST: Other Ute Mountain Ute ventures on the way to the Tribal Park include the Ute Mountain Pottery and the Ute Mountain Casino Hotel and Resort. While in the park you'll enjoy several cliff dwellings, including Eagle's Nest, and climb several ladders. This experience provides a real appreciation for the Ancestral Puebloan way of life.

DISTANCE FROM CORTEZ: 22 miles south of Cortez to the Visitor Center where you meet your Ute guide.

DAY TRIPPIN' TIME: Allow a full day. 1/2 day tours are available but do not go to the cliff dwellings.

ACCESS: Car, highway and gravel roads (you may ride with the guide for an additional fee.) Hiking and ladder climbing. Tour fee.

SERVICES: Limited, bring lunch and plenty of water. Wear layered clothing and comfortable walking/hiking shoes.

4. Anasazi Heritage Center, Dolores Overlook, and Lowry Pueblo

The Anasazi Heritage Center interprets the history and culture of the Ancestral Puebloan people and is a "must see" for Mesa Verde Country® visitors. The Center features ancient pottery, interactive displays, changing exhibits and special events as well as two 12th century archaeological sites and a short interpretative walk. Pick up information on visiting Lowry Pueblo at the Center. Head west on Highway 184 and north on Highway 491 to County Road CC at Pleasant View to visit Lowry Pueblo, a National Historic Landmark that contains a Great Kiva. Return to Highway 491 and continue north to the south edge of Dove Creek, then east to the Dolores Canyon overlook. This is the Grand Canyon of the Colorado—a 1/2 mile deep, red-walled canyon with the Dolores River winding far below.

POINTS OF INTEREST: At the Heritage Center take the 1/2 mile walk to Escalante Pueblo and take in the panoramic views of the Montezuma Valley; enjoy the remoteness and solitude of Lowry Pueblo; be sure to take your camera for the breathtaking views of the Dolores Canyon.

DISTANCE FROM CORTEZ: Heritage Center is 10 miles from Cortez; Lowry Pueblo is 28 miles from Cortez, Heritage Center and Dolores Canyon overlook, without Lowry, is 114 miles round trip.

DAY TRIPPIN' TIME: Allow a full day.

ACCESS: Car, highway and gravel roads. Entrance fee at the Heritage Center. **SERVICES:** Dolores and Dove Creek.

5. Upper Dolores Valley – Rico and the Meadows

The headwaters of the Dolores River are high in the San Juan Mountains near Lizard Head Pass. This lazy day trip follows the river upstream to the beautiful West Fork Valley, past the Dunton Hot Springs Resort. You then travel through the Meadows and tall aspens to meet Highway 145 above Rico. This day trip is especially spectacular in the fall.

POINTS OF INTEREST: The town of Dolores and the Galloping Goose Rail Car and Museum; Fishing on the Dolores River or hiking in the San Juan National Forest. The Meadows is the gateway to the Lizard Head Wilderness area with its spectacular scenery and wilderness hiking.

DISTANCE FROM CORTEZ: 106 miles round trip.

DAY TRIPPIN' TIME: Allow a full day.

ACCESS: High clearance car or 4-wheel drive vehicle.

SERVICES: Cortez, Dolores, Rico.

6. McPhee Lake

McPhee is the second largest lake in Colorado and offers great fishing, boating, camping, hiking, and relaxing. There are fisherman access points, boat ramps, picnic and recreation areas all around the lake. The lake overlook offers a 360-degree panorama of four states and several mountain ranges.

POINTS OF INTEREST: The town of Dolores and the Galloping Goose Rail Car and Museum; the Anasazi Heritage Center Museum.

DISTANCE FROM CORTEZ: 30 miles round trip.

DAY TRIPPIN' TIME: Several hours to all day.

ACCESS: Car, boat, camping fee.

SERVICES: Cortez, Dolores. There is no marina at the lake.

7. Telluride

Nestled deep in the San Juan Mountains, Telluride offers a wonderful day's worth of history, romance and adventure. Telluride is a National Historic District located in a box canyon surrounded by towering peaks. Even Butch Cassidy visited Telluride--he robbed his first bank there. Telluride is famous for its festivals, with one happening every weekend during the summer. Nature puts on her own show during fall.

POINTS OF INTEREST: Telluride and Mountain Village, the Gondola, Bridal Veil Falls and the Ames Power Plant, Ophir, Alta Lakes, Lizard Head Pass.

DISTANCE FROM CORTEZ: 74 miles one way.

DAY TRIPPIN' TIME: 5 hours to all day.

ACCESS: Car.

SERVICES: Cortez, Dolores, Rico, Telluride.

8. San Juan Skyway

Called the "Most Beautiful Drive in America" the San Juan Skyway is a 236-mile loop that takes you through the heart of the San Juan Mountains. Cortez is the southwestern gateway to the San Juan Skyway and from here you may take the loop in either direction, passing through Mancos, Durango, Silverton, Ouray, Ridgway, Telluride, Rico and Dolores. The Skyway is an excellent way to capture the grandeur of Southwest Colorado. Don't forget to take your camera!

POINTS OF INTEREST: In the fall this drive is even more spectacular. Every town on the drive is unique. Ouray, called the "Little Switzerland of America," has a hot springs pool. Mining towns and history abound. Take time to hike in the San Juan National Forest or take a ride on the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad.

DISTANCE FROM CORTEZ: 236-mile loop.

DAY TRIPPIN' TIME: All day or several days.

ACCESS: Car.

SERVICES: All towns along the Skyway.

9. Monument Valley and The Four Corners Monument

Driving west from Mesa Verde Country® takes you into John Wayne country and the majestic and mysterious rock formations of Monument Valley. The geology of the area is fascinating and so is the culture of the Navajo people. There are two routes to Monument Valley and both have exciting side trips. The Four Corners Monument, on the main route to Monument Valley, is the only place in the United States where four states meet and where on hands and knees you can be in all four states at one time. Why not go one way and take the other way back to Mesa Verde Country®?

POINTS OF INTEREST: Valley of the Gods, Goosenecks, and Muley Point from Utah Highway 163, Four Corners Monument from Highway 160 out of Cortez. Goulding's Trading Post at Monument Valley.

DISTANCE FROM CORTEZ: 145 miles each way.

DAY TRIPPIN' TIME: All day.

ACCESS: Car, entrance fees.

SERVICES: All towns along the route.



10. Canyonlands National Park

Canyonlands is a magical collection of sinuous red rock canyons dissected by intermittent streambeds and washes. It's a great place to explore, whether hiking, mountain biking, or by jeep. You'll find Ancestral Puebloan sites, natural arches, and breathtaking vistas. There are two entrances to Canyonlands; the first at Newspaper Rock, an Ancestral Puebloan rock art site, the second north of Moab at the awe inspiring Island in the Sky area.

POINTS OF INTEREST: The Needles District; Dead Horse Point State Park; Arches; town of Moab.

DISTANCE FROM CORTEZ: 75 miles to Newspaper Rock entrance, 125 miles to Island in the Sky entrance.

DAY TRIPPIN' TIME: All day.

ACCESS: Car, jeep, mountain bike, hiking, entrance and camping fees.

SERVICES: Cortez, Dove Creek, Monticello, and Moab.

11. Arches National Park

Arches National Park has the largest concentration of natural arches in the world—over 1000 arches have been mapped here. Many formations of red rock sandstone are visible from the road, but don't cheat yourself. Take time to hike in Arches and experience the incredible views. Stop at the Visitor Center to pick up park and trail information.

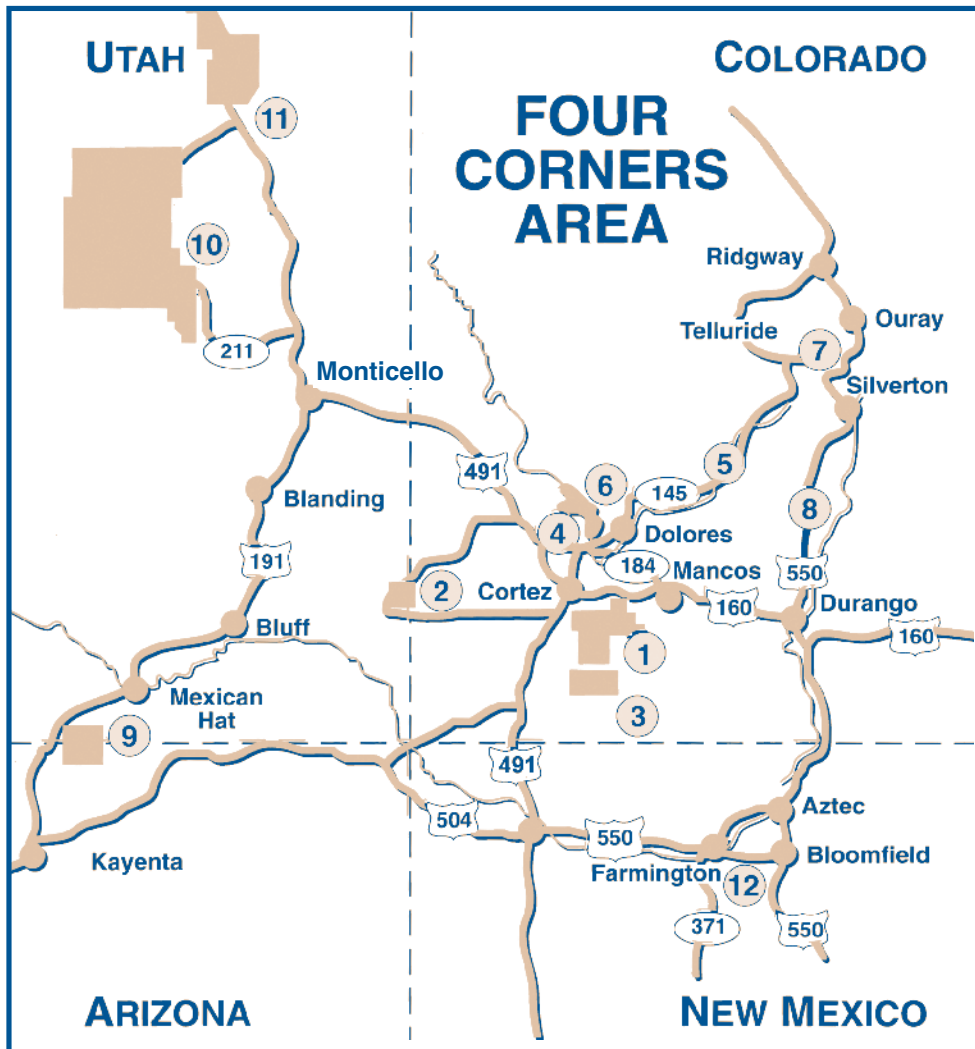
POINTS OF INTEREST: The Manti-La Sal National Forest; Devils Garden; Fiery Furnace; three mile round trip hike to the famed Delicate Arch.

DISTANCE FROM CORTEZ: 120 miles.

DAY TRIPPIN' TIME: All day.

ACCESS: Car, hiking, entrance and camping fees.

SERVICES: Cortez, Dove Creek, Monticello, and Moab.



12. Aztec National Monument, Salmon Archaeological Site, Chimney Rock

Take this loop drive into Northwest New Mexico to explore the Ancestral Puebloan sites of Aztec National Monument near Aztec, NM and the Salmon Archaeological Site near Farmington, NM. On the return journey stop at Navajo Lake straddling the Colorado-New Mexico border on the Southern Ute Reservation. Farther north on Highway 151 visit Chimney Rock, where prominent and beautiful spires mark one of the most unusual and intriguing archaeological sites in the Four Corners.

POINTS OF INTEREST: The Great Kiva at Aztec National Monument and the spectacular views from Chimney Rock. This is a great fall trip.

DISTANCE FROM CORTEZ: 270 miles round trip.

DAY TRIPPIN' TIME: All day.

ACCESS: Car, entrance fees.

SERVICES: Cortez, Durango, Aztec, Farmington, Ignacio.

