

GEAR UP

In the Denver area, check out the following retailers for great hiking equipment:

DICK'S SPORTING GOODS
(multiple locations)
dickssportinggoods.com

REI (multiple locations)
rei.com

BASS PRO SHOPS
7970 Northfield Blvd.
Denver
720.385.3600
basspro.com

In Boulder, try **BOULDER OUTDOOR CENTER**
boc123.com

In Aspen, **UTE MOUNTAINEER** offers climbing, camping and hiking equipment.
utemountaineer.com

OUTDOOR DIVAS
(Boulder and Denver locations)
outdoordivas.com

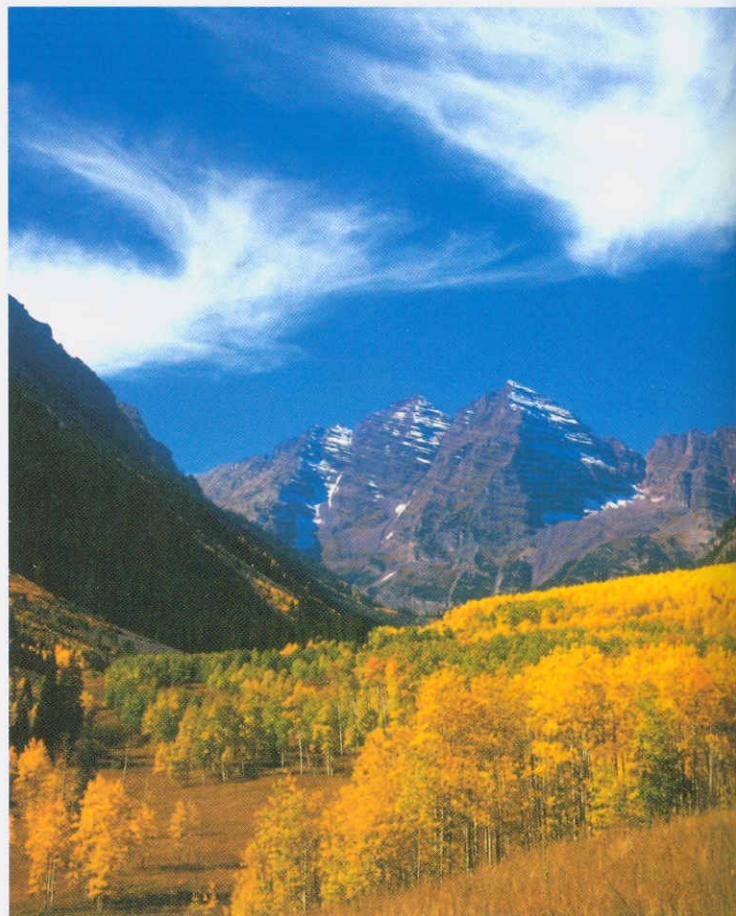
Heavenly Hikes

Colorado is renowned for its recreation. Snowmobiling, mountain biking, kayaking, horseback riding, skiing and hiking are just the beginning of the buffet. We Denverites feel blessed to live at the foot of the Rockies and know that nowhere in the world compares to the beauty and splendor found here as a hiker's heaven. As summer wanes into autumn, now is an ideal time to drink in the sunset colors falling from the trees. Jeanne Szczech who co-owns and operates Colorado Mountain Expeditions with her husband Chris, says, "The fall is an excellent time for hiking as the warm days and crisp nights combine with dry trails."

And there are countless dry trails worth trekking. Glacier Gorge in Rocky Mountain National Park is an ever-popular destination for its wealth of paths with various terrains. At an elevation of 9,240 feet, there is a superb sense of escapism, nature-nurturing and freedom. The Glacier Gorge junction is the starting point for several majestic trails. The Gorge offers wildflowers, waterfalls and lots of chances for wet and wild activities like fishing, swimming and whitewater rafting. A weekday hike in the fall is the perfect time to see the Gorge as the crowds are minimal and the parking more readily available.

Mount Elbert is another pick for those seeking a hiker's "high." It's the highest mountain in Lake County, highest in Colorado and highest in the Rockies. The mountain is located in central Colorado near Twin Lakes. Getting to the peak is easier and more pleasant than would be expected. The terrain up to the summit is relatively moderate and accommodates a wide variety of fitness levels. But for those advanced hikers, Black Cloud Trail, which takes 10 to 14 hours, might be preferable.

Before attempting any trail,



moderate or menacing, it's important to have the right gear. Fall is a perfect time for negotiating many of Colorado's trails because of the stunning scenery. But despite lack of scorching summer heat or woeful winter temperatures there are still some necessary hiking essentials to remember. Any hiker needs a quality pair of boots and poles. As Szczech says, "Hiking is a simple sport really, and it can be relatively simple to acquire the proper gear. The most important piece would be properly fitting and 'broken-in' footwear." Sunglasses, spare clothing, sunscreen and a hat should also be considered imperative. In addition, it's important to have a water bottle, a high protein snack like trail

mix or an energy bar, a first aid kit, pocket knife and insect repellent.

If leaving the city far behind and really enjoying the fall foliage is the mission, than the best place for an urban shake-off might be Maroon Bells. Nestled in National Forest land, the Maroon Lake Scenic Trail takes just around two hours (but will likely cost much more time due to excessive picture taking) and the Maroon Creek Trail takes a similar amount of time but leads through a valley. These trails allow for exploration of glacial valleys, a breathtaking panorama of the two Bells (both 14ers) and winding and weaving through areas of Columbine flowers, pines and deer crossings. For the skilled hiker, the Crater Lake Trail



will be a solid moderate challenge lasting around an hour and a half and is the most spectacular fall hike imaginable, as it takes the hiker into a thick Aspen forest and boasts a scenic spot with a view above Maroon Lake.

If taking a daytrip hike just won't satisfy a lust for the autumn outdoors than a trip to East Longs Peak Trail, a hiking hotspot for experienced trail trekkers, could be especially fulfilling. Amazing views abound here, especially when staring straight down from atop 14,259-foot Longs Peak—Rocky Mountain National Park's highest point. It can be done in a day but is more enjoyable in a two-night venture. Another overnight delight is seated over the Continental Divide, the east and west sides offer differing climates, vegetation and terrain. Take the North Inlet Trail near Grand Lake, past fields of mountain flowers and spectacular peaks to Flatop Mountain on the Divide, which will mean changing trails, heading downward past views of sparkling lakes and snowcapped peaks (usually) to Bear Lake. To experience

both sides of the park involves a 15-mile hike and should be completed over a two-day span. Of the Divide, Szczech says, "One of my favorite sections of the trail is the 17 miles on the Continental Divide from Spring Creek Pass to Carson Saddle. This section is located near Lake City, has panoramic views for most of the day and traverses some challengingly rugged terrain."

Even for the experienced hiker (the rugged terrain types), it's important to be safe and take the proper precautions to avoid any major mishaps. It's usually a good idea not to hike alone when possible (in case of injury or getting lost). Make sure there is some sense of comfort with the chosen hiking area, have a guidebook or map and check the weather. Also, let someone at home or back in town know your plans and intended route. Never veer off marked trails or try stunts on paths or in lakes which could have unexpected hazards. Hiking safe is a must but after all the precautions, it should feel similar to heaven—a place of endless expanse, beauty and joy.

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TAKE A HIKE!

Want to hike with a group or hire a guide? Colorado offers a plethora of local companies that offer guides, group treks and gear...

COLORADO MOUNTAIN EXPEDITIONS specializes in taking smaller groups through stunning scenic spots. They offer well-qualified hiking guides and a variety of dates and trails for a hiking venture. 970.375.1250; coloradoexpeditions.com

THE COLORADO MOUNTAIN CLUB offers a group for those with wilderness passion and dedication to assemble share and explore the mountains of Colorado together. 303.279.3080; cmc.org

GET OUT COLORADO! offers a range of hiking selections. Choose to hike for four hours or prepare for a whole day (eight hours) on a trip to Rocky Mountain National Park or other regions. getoutcolorado.com