

15 Incredible Things To Do In Beautiful Boulder, Colorado



SANDY BORNSTEIN

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Hiking on NCAR Trail in Boulder
PHOTO CREDIT: SANDY BORNSTEIN

From the time I first visited Boulder as an incoming college student in the 1970s, I have continued to admire Boulder’s majestic beauty and have repeatedly taken advantage of this mecca for outdoor adventures.


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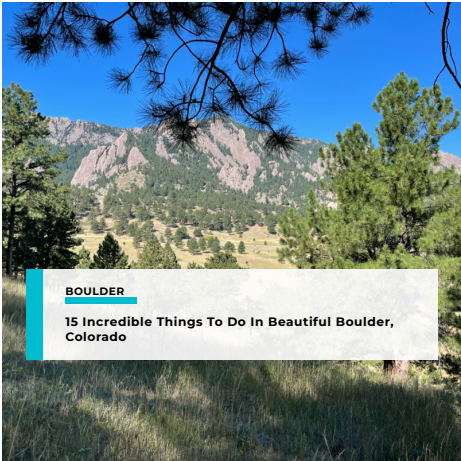
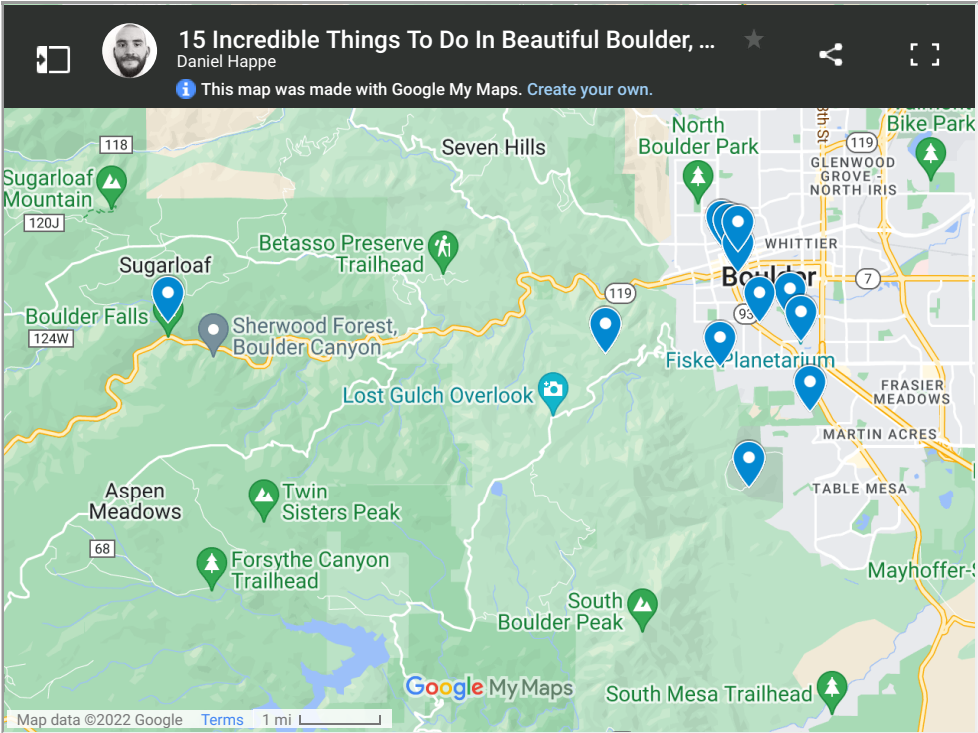


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While the city's foothill location and landmark [Flatirons](#) make it an ideal destination to enjoy Mother Nature by trekking on hiking trails and rock climbing, Boulder is also well known for an assortment of worthwhile attractions. Some of these places are associated with the [University of Colorado](#), while others are either private endeavors or places run by the city. Year-round, Boulder offers fantastic spots to engage both young and old.

Boulder is less than an hour's drive from Denver International Airport. Visitors can arrange day trips to nearby Eldorado Canyon State Park, Estes Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, Red Rock Amphitheatre, and some popular ski resorts in the Rocky Mountains.



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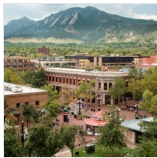
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Sunrise Circle Amphitheater at the summit of Flagstaff Mountain
PHOTO CREDIT: SANDY BORNSTEIN

1. Flagstaff Mountain Scenic Drive

To reach the summit of [Flagstaff Mountain](#), it is necessary to drive up a series of hairpin turns. Along the way to the Realization Point parking area, some drivers stop at designated places to hike and enjoy the view. From the parking lot, one can walk to outlooks offering pristine views of Boulder and the surrounding area, the Sunrise Circle Amphitheater, the Flagstaff Nature Center, and a few hiking trailheads. Parking is available for a small fee.



2. Chautauqua Park

[Chautauqua](#) is a treasured Colorado National Historic Landmark. At the base, visitors can rent cottages, eat in a historic dining room, pick up snacks at the general store, and seek information from the ranger cottage. Crowds also flock to the park for film festivals, concerts, and programs that are held in the auditorium and community building. Throughout the year, multitudes of people access the easier trails heading into the mountains while more experienced hikers and climbers tackle the iconic Flatirons.

Pro Tip: Parking can be an issue on weekends from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Arrive early or consider taking the [Park to Park free shuttle](#).



Boulder Falls is about 20 minutes from downtown Boulder.
PHOTO CREDIT: SANDY BORNSTEIN

3. Boulder Falls

For many generations, visitors have driven to [Boulder Falls](#) to take pictures at the base of a 70-foot waterfall in a narrow canyon. Most combine this simple photo opportunity with day trips to Nederland or hike the moderate Devil's Thumb Pass Trail or the easier Forsythe Canyon Trail.

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Pro Tip: Before heading up Boulder Canyon, it is always advisable to check the Boulder Falls website and the [Boulder Trails App](#) for closures.



Old Main, the first structure build on the University of Colorado-Boulder.
PHOTO CREDIT: SANDY BORNSTEIN

4. University Of Colorado Boulder

Bits and pieces of University of Colorado history can be collected during a [self-guided walking tour of the campus](#). Start at Old Main, where the university opened its doors in 1877. Inside the building, the [Heritage Center](#) hosts exhibits chronicling the university's history. Other notable campus landmarks are the Mary Rippon Theater where the Colorado Shakespeare Festival performances are held during the summer, the Henderson Building, the Museum of Natural History, The University of Colorado Art Museum, Varsity Lake, Macky Auditorium, the University Memorial Center, Folsom Field, the CU Events Center, and Fiske Planetarium.



Game Day for the Colorado Buffaloes
PHOTO CREDIT: SANDY BORNSTEIN

5. Colorado Buffaloes

On game days, football and basketball fans are easy to spot. T-shirts, jerseys, and hats vividly display the team colors of black and gold along with references to the team's mascot, Ralphie. Ticket holders for football games should arrive before the game begins so they can watch Ralphie and her handlers run the field. Anyone who loves the spirit generated by a college marching band and cheerleaders shouldn't miss the opportunity to attend the Ralphie Stampede event the night before a football game at the Pearl Street Mall. This can be combined with an exploration of historic Downtown Boulder and a stop at a microbrewery or distillery.

6. Outdoor Colorado Shakespeare Festivals

For decades, Shakespeare performances have been a popular summer attraction on the CU campus. These annual events are held in the Mary Rippon Theater, named after Mary Rippon (1850–1935), the first CU female professor and the first woman in the U.S. to teach at a state university. Tickets for performances at this outdoor pavilion are available at the CU Presents website.



Projection on the dome inside Fiske Planetarium in Boulder
PHOTO CREDIT: SANDY BORNSTEIN

7. Fiske Planetarium

Take a respite from Boulder’s sunshine by watching a celestial show displayed on a 65-foot dome, the largest planetarium between Chicago and Los Angeles. Weekend matinees are offered to accommodate school-aged children who are mesmerized by space. The upcoming schedule for full dome films and star shows, laser fantasy and liquid sky music shows, music concerts, and live talks are posted on the [Fiske Planetarium website](#).



Exhibit inside CU Natural History Museum
PHOTO CREDIT: SANDY BORNSTEIN

8. The CU Museum Of Natural History

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this room, the [museum](#) shares dozens of stone tools discovered in Boulder that date to approximately 13,000 years ago. Consider stopping at this museum in conjunction with a self-guided campus tour.



Pearl Street Mall

PHOTO CREDIT: SANDY BORNSTEIN

9. Pearl Street Mall

Four blocks of the historic downtown area are designated as a pedestrian mall. Locals and visitors walk along this route to check out the assortment of eclectic shops, restaurants, cafes, and street performers (buskers) on [Pearl Street Mall](#).

Breweries And Restaurants

Take time to sample Boulder's diverse culinary scene at one or more of Boulder's downtown restaurants. Beer lovers can sample an assortment of local craft beers by following the [Downtown Boulder Walking Beer Trail](#). However, be aware that this self-guided tour may not be up-to-date; some places may have recently closed. When weather permits, take advantage of the outdoor seating at cafes and restaurants or head to nearby Boulder Creek Path.

Indoor Attractions

Popular indoor attractions near Pearl Street include the Dushanbe Teahouse, the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, and live music at the St. Julien Hotel and Hotel Boulderado. Don't forget to search the Boulder Colorado USA site for annual event dates that bring additional entertainment, summer outdoor concerts, and crowds to the mall area.

10. Museum Of Boulder At The Tebo Center

The Boulder Experience Gallery, the museum's permanent exhibit, reveals the impact that Boulder had on Colorado and the rest of the world. Young and old will become engaged with the hands-on interactive displays that showcase key aspects of Boulder's remarkable history. Check the [museum's website](#) for information about the temporary exhibits, as well as kid-friendly Playzeum and Google Garage. This popular indoor attraction is just a few blocks from the west end of the Pearl Street Mall.



Lobby of the Hotel Boulderado

11. Hotel Boulderado Tour

When the [Hotel Boulderado](#) opened for business in 1909, Boulder had approximately 6,000 residents, and the hotel's daily room rate was between \$1 and \$2.50. Even though the structure has been renovated and updated numerous times, many of the historic details remain. The multi-tiered lobby staircase is one prime example. Original furnishings and black-and-white photos enhance the guide's spiel.



View of NCAR while hiking in Boulder

PHOTO CREDIT: SANDY BORNSTEIN

12. Tour NCAR

Perched on a mesa near the base of the Flatirons is [NCAR](#) (National Center for Atmospheric Research), an architectural treasure designed by I. M. Pei. Inside this iconic structure, which was designed to resemble the Native American dwellings at Mesa Verde National Park, are the offices of an impressive group of award-winning scientists. Since 1960, these individuals have collaborated with scientists throughout the world. Guided and self-guided tours introduce visitors to these researchers' award-winning accomplishments.

Pro Tip: NCAR's parking lot is also used by day hikers who begin their hikes at nearby trailheads.

13. NOAA

Locals often take their out-of-town guests to NOAA's 90-minute guided tour where participants are escorted through four areas of the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric](#)

[Administration complex](#). Unlike many other outings that replicate the work of scientists, this tour allows visitors to watch scientists monitoring real-time data on Earth and in space — as well as the interaction between the two. At the end of the tour, school-age children will be fascinated by the interaction of complex environmental processes by watching animated images of atmospheric storms, climate change, and ocean temperatures displayed on a 6-foot diameter sphere.

Pro Tip: Reservations are required for the free Tuesday afternoon tours. Make sure to bring along an ID card for the security screening prior to entry. The post-pandemic tours are anticipated to commence soon.

14. Boulder County Farmers Market

[Boulder County Farmers Market](#) is considered one of the best in the state. Dozens of “growers only” vendors and locally sourced items are showcased at each week’s market, which takes place on Saturdays from the first weekend in April through the Saturday preceding Thanksgiving. The less busy Wednesday market has live music and a beer garden and runs from early May to early October. Parking close to the event at 13th Street between Canyon Boulevard and Arapahoe Avenue may be an issue during peak times.



Boulder Theater has been around since 1906.
PHOTO CREDIT: JENLO8 / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

15. Boulder Theater

Boulder has multiple venues to showcase live performances and cinema presentations. The [Dairy Arts Center](#) is Boulder County’s largest multidisciplinary art center. Visitors and locals come to admire art exhibitions and to watch dance and theatrical productions as well as to view cinema showings. [Mackay Auditorium](#), on the CU campus, is another multi-use building with a seating capacity of a little more than 2,000 people. Their annual schedule includes Grammy Award-winning artists, local, domestic and international performers, the Boulder

Philharmonic Orchestra, the Boulder Ballet, and musical performances by University of Colorado students and faculty. Smaller entertainment venues offering local, domestic, and international talent include the [Boulder Theater](#) in the downtown area and the [Fox Theatre](#) on The Hill.

Pro Tip: Plan ahead by checking online sites for updated lists of performances and the availability of tickets.

To maximize your time in beautiful Boulder, it is advisable to add both outdoor adventures and indoor explorations to your itinerary.

For more on [Boulder](#), explore these articles:

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Sandy Bornstein is a Colorado-based, award-winning travel and lifestyle writer who focuses on active adventure, food and beverages, history and culture, cruises, luxury boomer travel, family travel, health and wellness, worldwide Jewish culture, and the importance of...
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