

40 FINALISTS FROM OUR CROSS-COUNTRY SEARCH



AMERICA'S FAVORITE Small Towns

Inviting Places

*from Coast
to Coast*

+
AMERICA
250
Celebrations

INCLUDING

Historic Villages • Beach Escapes
Food & Wine Destinations • Hiking Trails
Antiquing Gems • Outdoor Adventures
Music Festivals • Mountain Getaways
Hidden Havens • Offbeat Fairs

Grand Junction Colorado



Peach blossoms in the valley of Mt. Garfield



FOUNDED: 1881

POPULATION: 70,554

CLOSEST MAJOR AIRPORT:
Grand Junction (GJT), 5 miles north

ONE GREAT STAY:
The last of downtown's twelve historic hotels, The Hotel Melrose, from 1908, was completely reimaged into 16 rooms, opening in 2023. Its speakeasy Melrose Spirit Co. blends Western spirit with a tropical twist.

ONE GREAT MEAL:
The owners of Pêche, a beloved upscale neighborhood restaurant in nearby Palisade, just opened a new concept, Tiki Bird, downtown on North 7th Street.



Market on Main

PHOTOS: COURTESY, VISIT GRAND JUNCTION

Grand Junction may have gotten its name from its position where the Gunnison and Colorado Rivers meet, but it sits at another convenient juncture: It's perfectly located to visit three of the country's most spectacular natural wonders (see sidebar). As a bonus, they're all lesser known, without the need to plan around the crowds flocking to popular national parks these days.

But that's not where the outdoor adventures end. Also nearby is Little Book Cliffs Wild Horse Area, a 36,000-acre preserve where more than 100 wild horses roam in safe sanctuary. After dark, the entire region is blanketed in the gift of some of the darkest skies in the nation. To take advantage of them, Western Colorado Astronomy Club invites everyone to learn about astronomy at its monthly meetings, or to gaze through telescopes during its public observatory sessions. The Grand Valley River Fest educates guests the fun way each May with paddleboard jousting and a rubber duckie scramble on the local waterways. But the summer's signature event is The Market on Main, drawing 5,000 visitors downtown every Thursday.

What may come as a surprise is that this area is also Colorado wine country. With irrigation provided by the Colorado River, the region's high-desert climate provides long, sunny days and cool nights, ideal growing conditions for grapes (and certain fruits, including peaches, which are celebrated each August at the neighboring town's Palisade Peach Festival). Visit some of the 30 established and emerging wineries producing notable varietals of Cabernet Franc and Malbec, along with popular reds and whites, as an alternative to pricier wine-region trips. Whether you opt for a packaged or self-guided tour, you're guaranteed to enjoy some good sips and gorgeous scenery along the way. •

Taking in Nature's Trifecta

It's breathtaking to behold Colorado's vast and magnificent Western Slope landscape, and being able to access three different stunners in a little over an hour's drive (and less) makes Grand Junction an ideal base for outdoor adventurers. The first of what's locally known as "Nature's Trifecta" is Colorado National Monument, often referred to as a mini Grand Canyon. Despite being just a few minutes' drive from downtown, this is a land of sky-grazing monoliths, vast plateaus, and red-rock canyons. To best experience the park, drive the 23-mile Rim Rock Drive. Next, inside the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area, is Rattlesnake Canyon, where 35 natural arches are clustered, making it the second-largest concentration in the world. Finally, Grand Mesa is a different brand of mesmerizing, as it's the world's largest flat-top mountain, spread across 500 square miles with 300 lakes, all 10,000 feet above sea level.



Grand Mesa