

# 800-Year-Old Cliff Palaces by Day, Four States at Once — A 3-Day Mesa Verde & the Four Corners Road Trip

Three days through the Four Corners country, where Ancestral Puebloan cliff dwellings, a Gold Rush-era steam train, and the only place in the U.S. where four states touch are all within a couple hours' drive of each other. A night in a historic Durango hotel, a full day riding the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad into the San Juan Mountains, and a final day inside Mesa Verde National Park's 800-year-old cliff palaces before standing in Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico at once. Real hotels, a real train, and 2026 prices for every stop.

## DURATION

**3 Days**

## BEST TIME TO GO

**September & Early October**

the San Juan Mountains turn gold with aspens, daytime highs sit in the 60s-70s°F (16-24°C) at Mesa Verde's elevation, summer crowds and monsoon storms have passed, and the Durango & Silverton train still runs its full route through early October before shifting to a shorter winter schedule.

## FROM

**\$560 USD / person**

for 2 people, incl. 2 nights at a historic Durango hotel, a 3-day rental car, round-trip Durango-Silverton train tickets, and Mesa Verde & Four Corners admission (excl. flights)

## Day 1

### Durango Arrival & Historic Main Avenue

*A rental car pickup at Durango's small regional airport and an afternoon exploring the brick storefronts of a 1880s railroad and mining town, with the Durango & Silverton depot as the next morning's starting line.*

#### Rental Car Pickup — Durango-La Plata County Airport (DRO)

~25 min to downtown Durango · from ~\$55-75 USD / day

A small regional airport 18 miles southeast of downtown with Avis, Budget, Enterprise, Hertz and National counters on-site — the practical starting point for the loop up to Silverton and out to Mesa Verde and the Four Corners.

#### Hotel Check-In — Historic Strater Hotel

From \$220-280 USD / night, for 2 people

An 1887 Victorian landmark on Main Avenue with 93 antique-furnished rooms, a working player piano in the lobby, and the Diamond Belle Saloon downstairs in honky-tonk, can-can dress — Louis L'Amour wrote several novels in room 222.

Historic Strater Hotel · +1 (970) 247-4431 · strater.com

### Walk — Main Avenue Historic District & D&SNG Depot

~1.5 hours, self-guided · free

A dozen blocks of brick false-front buildings dating to the 1880s silver boom, ending at the Durango & Silverton depot to confirm tomorrow's boarding time and look over the coal-fired steam locomotives being readied in the yard.

### Dinner — Carver Brewing Co.

~1.5 hours · ~\$18-28 USD / person

A longtime Durango brewpub a block off Main Avenue, pouring its own ales alongside green chile, burgers, and a big breakfast-all-day menu in a converted 1920s building — a reliably casual first night in town.

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Carver Brewing Co. · +1 (970) 259-2545 · carverbrewing.com

## Day 2

## The Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad

*A full day on a coal-fired, steam-powered train that has run the same route along the Animas River since 1882, climbing into the San Juan Mountains to the old silver town of Silverton and back.*

### Train — Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad

~9 hours round trip incl. 2-hour Silverton layover · from ~\$120-190 USD / person

A National Historic Landmark railway whose vintage steam locomotives and open-air gondola cars climb 45 miles from Durango along the Animas River gorge into the San Juan National Forest, with no road running alongside for most of the route — narrated, with assigned seating by class.

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Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad · +1 (888) 872-4607 · durangotrain.com

### Free Time — Silverton, a National Historic Landmark Town

~2 hours, self-guided · free (lunch on your own)

A former silver-mining boomtown at 9,300 feet, its entire downtown — one unpaved main street of Victorian storefronts ringed by 13,000-foot peaks — preserved as a National Historic Landmark District, with just enough time off the train to walk Greene Street and grab lunch.

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Handlebars Food & Saloon · +1 (970) 387-5395 · Silverton, CO

### Train — Return to Durango

~3.5 hours · included with round-trip ticket

The same gorge route back downhill, with the afternoon light usually hitting the Animas River canyon walls at a different angle than the morning climb up — most trains are back at the Durango depot by early evening.

### Overnight — Historic Strater Hotel

Second night, same rate as Day 1

Back at the Strater with the evening free for dinner on Main Avenue before an early start to Mesa Verde the next morning.

Day 3

## Mesa Verde's Cliff Dwellings & the Four Corners Monument

*A self-drive morning into Mesa Verde National Park for its 800-year-old cliff dwellings, then a short detour south to stand in four states — Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico — at the same instant.*

### Self-Drive — Durango to Mesa Verde National Park

~45 min via US-160 West · park entrance ~\$20-30 USD / vehicle

A short, scenic drive west on US-160 to the park entrance, followed by a climbing 15-mile road up onto the mesa itself — allow extra time, since the road is narrow with switchbacks and frequent pullouts for views.

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Mesa Verde National Park · +1 (970) 529-4465 · [nps.gov/meve](https://nps.gov/meve)

### Ranger-Guided Tour — Cliff Palace & Mesa Top Loop

~2.5 hours total, timed-entry ticket required · from ~\$8-15 USD / person via [recreation.gov](https://recreation.gov)

The largest cliff dwelling in North America, 150 rooms and 23 kivas built into a sandstone alcove by Ancestral Puebloans around 1190-1280 CE and abandoned by 1300 — rangers lead small groups down a short trail with stone steps and one wooden ladder to walk through the rooms themselves; the 6-mile Mesa Top Loop Drive afterward adds overlooks onto Square Tower House and the Chapin Mesa Museum's Ancestral Puebloan pottery and tools, all included with park entrance.

### Four Corners Monument

~1.5 hours' drive from Mesa Verde, ~45 min on-site · ~\$10 USD / vehicle

A Navajo Nation tribal park built around a survey marker where Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico meet at a single point — the granite-and-brass monument is ringed by Native-run craft and food stalls, and the classic photo is a hand or foot in each of the four quadrants at once.

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Four Corners Monument Navajo Tribal Park · +1 (928) 871-6647 · [navajonationparks.org](https://navajonationparks.org)

## Return Drive — Four Corners to Durango-La Plata County Airport

~1.5-2 hours via US-160 East · return rental car at the terminal

The drive back east on US-160 retraces much of the morning's route past Mesa Verde's mesa-top silhouette, with time to return the rental car and check in before an evening flight home.