



*The Sangre de Cristo Mountains over the sand dunes © Erika Nortemann/TNC*

# Colorado

## DATES

May 14<sup>th</sup> – May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## PRICE

Double Occupancy: \$5,875  
Single Occupancy: \$6,670

Your journey begins in Denver, Colorado where you will be met by your Iconic Trip Leader before departing to Boulder, a city nestled in the foothills where the rolling plains meet the Colorado Rocky Mountains. Our first afternoon will be spent at Chautauqua Park, whose striking, slanted, sandstone formations are a sight to see. Your home for the next two nights is the historic Hotel Boulderado.

With TNC local staff, explore the Larimer Foothills, where TNC has protected 140,000 acres over the last 35 years. A mosaic of vegetation communities and fertile landforms, this landscape is rich in human history and host to an incredible diversity of plants, animals, and natural communities. We'll spend time at Phantom Canyon Preserve, hiking and discussing community-based conservation strategies.

The next day, head towards the San Luis Valley, stopping along the way to stretch our legs, taking in the breathtaking mountainscapes that surround us.

We'll arrive at Medano-Zapata Ranch in the afternoon, our home for the next three nights of our journey. Owned by The Nature Conservancy, it is home to a conservation herd of bison that run in a single 50,000-acre pasture. During your stay, spend time exploring the scenic and ecologically diverse meadows, wetlands, sand dunes, and cottonwood groves.

Hear how TNC and its partners have been raising, managing, and studying the bison herd and its interaction with the landscape over the last 20 years. Looking towards the future, learn how TNC is supporting the National Park Service in incorporating a small bison herd at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve to allow visitors to observe the landscape and wildlife as they were thousands of years ago.

With exclusive insight from TNC experts, visits to local preserves, and local highlights, you'll experience unique places throughout Colorado that most visitors never see.



*View of the Flatirons in Boulder, Colorado © Tim Romano*



*Wildflowers in Phantom Canyon © Wayne Ostle*

### **HORSEBACK RIDE IN THE SAN LUIS VALLEY**

During your time at Zapata Ranch, you'll have an opportunity to horseback ride amongst the landscape. Keep an eye out for wildlife sightings including elk, pronghorn, coyotes, eagles, and great horned owls!

### **VISIT HISTORIC CHAUTAUQUA PARK**

In 1898, Boulder residents purchased 80 acres to be used as a "Chautauqua," an adult education and social movement in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. An iconic historic landmark, Boulder has been preserving wild lands ever since.

### **HIKE IN GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE**

Home to the tallest sand dunes in the United States, a centerpiece of the National Park, you'll find that this park land is unique and varied. Grasslands, wetlands, forests, alpine lakes, and tundra all make up this diverse landscape. Pack your hiking boots for an educational day out in the park!

Your trip supports the local communities you're traveling in and The Nature Conservancy's efforts locally and globally. This trip has been planned specifically by The Nature Conservancy's team of scientific experts and travel liaisons to immerse you in the work the Conservancy is doing on the ground that has global consequences.

## TNC TRAVEL VALUES

### **KEY ACCESS:**

Travel with renowned Conservancy experts and local partners for an exclusive, behind-the-scenes experience. You won't just see amazing places, you'll witness how you are helping save them.

### **IMPACT:**

See how your commitment to our planet and your passion for conservation are making a difference. You will see the wild places and the communities you are impacting.

### **KNOWLEDGE:**

Learn how we are applying the latest cutting-edge science to affect global change and drive conservation.

### **INSPIRATION:**

Immerse yourself in local cultures and awe-inspiring landscapes to foster your own connection to our world.

### **GLOBALLY MINDED:**

Elevate your understanding of our work by seeing first-hand how TNC and our partners act locally and how we turn local results in to global impact by scaling solutions that work.

### **TRAVELER EXPECTATIONS & CODE OF CONDUCT:**

Please read [TNC's Traveler Expectations](#), our guide for ensuring that we treat each other with respect, fairness and integrity beyond reproach during travel in accordance with [TNC's Code of Conduct](#).

Following the Code is an expectation and responsibility for everyone in the larger TNC community, including our staff, partners, vendors and supporters. To that end, when registering for a TNC trip, you are agreeing to uphold the Code.



*TNC's partners at Ranchlands round up the bison to safely and humanely collect data about the herd for genetic research © Brennan Cira/Ranchlands*

## THE CONSERVATION LANDSCAPE

### **LARAMIE FOOTHILLS**

Found almost nowhere else on Earth, the protection of the rare flower - Larimer aletes - was the catalyst for The Nature Conservancy's efforts to conserve Phantom Canyon more than 35 years ago. In the years that followed, TNC began to look outside this property, scaling the bounds of borders to understand the impacts of conservation in a larger landscape. While Phantom Canyon remained the focal point, TNC, along with local governments, land trusts, and landowners, began protecting over 140,000 acres of land stretching from the mountains to the plains. The vegetation here is fertile, steeped amongst rich and complex lands with red-rock outcrops and expansive grasslands. To visit the Laramie Foothills is to see the legacy of conservation work, and how early restoration efforts such as invasive weed management, reintroduction of natural ecological practices such as grazing and fire, and restoring the prairie, still impacts the lessons learned about conservation today.

### **BRINGING BISON BACK TO THE SAN LUIS VALLEY**

In 1999, The Nature Conservancy made conservation history by acquiring the Medano-Zapata preserve, its largest in Colorado. Flanked by the San Juan and Sange de Cristo mountain ranges, the landscape is made up of thousands of acres of meadows, wetlands, sand dunes and cotton groves set against 14,000-foot mountain peaks. In 2001, TNC acquired a bison herd, with the goal of providing a place where bison could interact with the land as they did thousands of years ago. A keystone species on the plains, they create habitat for many plants and animals, aerate soil and plant seeds with their hooves, and disperse native seeds to maintain a balanced ecosystem. The herd has helped advance research and conservation for bison around the country; by managing the herd like wild animals and allowing them to range freely, TNC and their partner, Ranchlands, are letting bison make the major decisions on managing the land.

## ITINERARY

**DAY 1 — Tuesday, May 14<sup>th</sup>** | Welcome to Colorado! Upon arrival at Denver International Airport, you will be welcomed by your Iconic Trip Leader and Nature Conservancy Host before driving about an hour to Boulder. A vibrant city best known for its outdoor activities, we will check-in to the The Bradley Inn once in town. After settling in, drive 15 minutes to join park staff for a historic walking tour of the Colorado Chautauqua National Historic Landmark; you'll have an opportunity to view the historic buildings while strolling by Boulder's impressive scenery. In the evening, continue to savor the spectacular views at the enchanting Chautauqua Dining Hall, a Boulder tradition since 1898.

### OVERNIGHT AT THE BRADLEY INN

**DAY 2 — Wednesday, May 15<sup>th</sup>** | After breakfast at the hotel, we will travel 1.5 hours to Phantom Canyon Preserve. Considered one of the last great Front Range landscapes, there are rolling native grass hillsides, protected basins and draws, and granite rock outcroppings. This area represents an ecological phenomenon where two ecosystems collide - open shortgrass prairie and the rugged Rocky Mountains. Our day begins with a visit and safety briefing at the visitor center before hiking to the river, passing by scenic overlooks along the way. On the riverside, local TNC staff will discuss preserve history, flora and fauna in the area, and how this special landscape is serving as a model for landscape-scale conservation state-wide. We will have a picnic lunch, before additional time to explore the Preserve.

In the afternoon, return to Hotel Boulderado. There will be free time to walk around downtown before dinner.

### OVERNIGHT AT THE BRADLEY INN

**DAY 3 — Thursday, May 16<sup>th</sup>** | Enjoy a final delicious breakfast at the Hotel Boulderado before backing your bags for our next stop. We'll start our 4.5-hour drive to Medano-Zapata Ranch early, stopping en route to stretch our legs and enjoy the views. Lunch will be enjoyed in the sunshine.

We'll arrive at Medano-Zapata Ranch in the afternoon, allowing time to check in before learning about the history of the ranch and TNC's story. Purchased in 1999, TNC coordinates management with Ranchlands, protecting significant natural value within the 100,000-acre landscape and demonstrating how cattle and bison operations can co-exist with conservation efforts.

Gather for dinner in the evening on-site, an experience that is second-to-none.

### OVERNIGHT AT ZAPATA RANCH

## LODGING



### The Bradley Inn

Quiet, private and comfortable, The Bradley Inn is a small 12 room boutique hotel located in the heart of downtown. Just steps away from Pearl Street, a must-visit while in town, be sure to roam the charming stores and eateries that draw both locals and visitors alike.

Photo Credit: The Bradley Inn



### Zapata Ranch

The Medano-Zapata Ranch is owned by The Nature Conservancy and managed by Ranchlands in a partnership model that emphasizes environmental conservation practices. Located on the eastern edge of the San Luis Valley of southern Colorado, the ranch borders Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. Accommodations are in the ranch's historic 17-bedroom Lodge, the original ranch homestead built in the 1800s. Enjoy private, peaceful views of the landscape at your doorstep at this incredible ranch.

Photo Credit: Zapata Ranch



## ITINERARY, CONT.

**DAY 4 — Friday, May 17<sup>th</sup>** | Enjoy a homemade meal at the ranch this morning before beginning our day's adventure. Our morning will be spent on horseback; you will join your wrangler in the truck to go for a ride on the historic Medano side of the ranch. We will depart from the original Medano Homestead which dates back to the 1860s and explore the fascinatingly diverse ecosystems on this side of the ranch. Ride amongst wild bison while keeping an eye out for the other animals that call this side of the ranch home. Elk, porcupine, coyotes, golden eagles, great horned owls, and pronghorn are commonly spotted. Lunch will be enjoyed out in the field.

Our afternoon will be spent with TNC Preserve Manager, Caitlyn Kelly, on a driving tour of the preserve and the surrounding landscape of the San Luis Valley. There will be several stops along the way to spot bison, wildlife, flora and fauna, and converse as a group.

There will be downtime in the afternoon before another incredible dinner.

### OVERNIGHT AT ZAPATA RANCH

**DAY 5 — Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup>** | Rise early and pack your day bag as we drive to visit Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. On arrival, hear the story of a land conservation project that began decades ago and recently completed its final phase with the transfer of approximately 9,362 acres of land at TNC's Medano-Zapata Ranch for inclusion in the National Park. We will spend the day hiking through the area and enjoy a picnic lunch in the landscape.

In the afternoon, we will head back to the ranch before visiting with local farming partners who will discuss their agricultural strategies and shared communal practices, and how the San Luis Valley has evolved in the hundreds of years their family has been in the area.

We will gather for a final dinner as a group this evening, reflecting on our time in Colorado and the work that TNC has accomplished to date, and will hear from TNC's local staff about their goals for the future.

### OVERNIGHT AT ZAPATA RANCH

**DAY 6 — Sunday, May 19<sup>th</sup>** | Transfers back to Denver will begin at 10:00 AM; a 4-hour transfer, lunch will be included along the way. Please plan to book flights that depart after 5:00 PM.



#### **Zapata Ranch: Food, Activities, and More!**

Visiting a TNC Preserve is always a unique and educational experience but staying on-site is unlike any other. Your time at Zapata will be intimate, spending time with local TNC Staff and experts, exploring the land extensively by foot and on horseback. Meals include local produce and meats, including bison from the Medano's herd, wild trout caught from the Arkansas River, and herb roasted carrots from local farmers cooked over wood grown on the property. Photo credit: Zapata Ranch



#### **PRICE DETAIL**

Double Occupancy: \$5,875  
Single Occupancy: \$6,670

Price is based on a minimum of 13. Trip size not to exceed 14 travelers.

Price **includes** all lodging, domestic transportation, activities, tips, meals, TNC expert staff and local guides. Price does **not include** your roundtrip flight to Denver, Colorado.

**PLEASE NOTE:** This itinerary is representative of your trip, and like all natural history excursions, activities are subject to modification based on weather and unforeseen events. We will do our best to keep you informed on any necessary changes.