



A SEASONAL GUIDE FOR ADULTS 50+

Fall, Close to Home

*Thirty-one ways to spend an afternoon in South Denver,
September through November.*

Littleton · Centennial · Lone Tree · Highlands Ranch · Castle Rock · Parker

The season is short

Fall in Colorado is generous and it is brief. The aspens turn on the high passes in the third week of September and are finished by the middle of October, and the good slanting light along the Front Range lasts perhaps six weeks after that.

Most of us know this. We still let the season go past from inside the car. The problem is rarely wanting to go — it is not having a list, and not having anyone to go with. This handles the first half.

Everything here is within reach of South Denver. Most of it is flat, most of it is free, and none of it asks you to be in better shape than you are. It is organized by how far you have to drive and by when in the season it is worth going.

One deliberate omission: there are almost no dates in this guide. Festivals move, hours change, and a printed date is a promise somebody has to keep. What is here instead is the week or the month a thing usually happens, so check before you drive. Addresses are included so you can put any of it straight into your phone.

SECTION ONE

The Aspen Weeks

Roughly the third week of September through mid-October. Six of them, ordered by how far you have to drive.

Guanella Pass. About forty miles out, climbing to 11,670 feet. It turns first — usually the third week of September — and you do not have to hike a step, because the pull-offs on both sides of the pass do the work. Go on a weekday if you possibly can.

- I-70 exit 228 at Georgetown, then Guanella Pass Road (CR 381) south about 11 miles

Kenosha Pass. An hour down 285, at 10,000 feet, and probably the most photographed aspen stand in Colorado for good reason. The Colorado Trail crosses the highway here and runs flat in both directions, so you can walk as far as you feel like and turn around. The lot fills by nine on a September Saturday.

- US 285 at the summit, just north of Jefferson

Golden Gate Canyon State Park. Up past Golden, a bit over an hour from South Denver. Panorama Point has one of the widest mountain views on the Front Range, and you can drive right up to it — which matters on a day when your knees are voting no.

- 92 Crawford Gulch Rd., Golden

The Lariat Loop. Golden up over Lookout Mountain to Evergreen and back, paved the whole way. Add a walk at Alderfer/Three Sisters Park if the weather holds. This is a drive first and a hike only if you decide you want one.

- Alderfer/Three Sisters east trailhead, 30357 Buffalo Park Rd., Evergreen

The Georgetown Loop Railroad. A narrow-gauge steam train between Georgetown and Silver Plume, about forty miles out. Someone else drives, the aspens go past the window, and there is nothing at all to plan. Book ahead in the fall.

- Devil's Gate Depot, 646 Loop Dr., Georgetown

Rocky Mountain National Park. Ninety minutes, so a full day rather than an afternoon. September brings the elk down into Moraine Park and Horseshoe Park, and the bugling at dusk is the kind of thing you still describe to people years later. Check whether timed entry is in effect before you commit to the drive.

- Estes Park, about ninety minutes north-west

SECTION TWO

Close to Home

No highway, no altitude, no planning. Most of these are twenty minutes from your door and most of them are free.

The Highline Canal Trail. Seventy-odd miles of flat, shaded path threading Littleton, Centennial and Highlands Ranch, most of it under old cottonwoods. Pick any access point, walk out twenty minutes, walk back. It is the least dramatic recommendation here and the one you will use the most.

- Access at Goodson Recreation Center, 6631 S. University Blvd., Centennial

South Platte Park and the Carson Nature Center. A long stretch of river bottom in Littleton with wide, level trails and cottonwoods that go gold well after the mountains are bare. Free. The nature center is a good excuse to stop walking and talk.

- 3000 W. Carson Dr., Littleton

Hudson Gardens. Thirty acres along the Platte with flat looping paths and free admission most of the year. In October it hosts an evening jack-o'-lantern display — worth seeing once, and much better on a weeknight.

- 6115 S. Santa Fe Dr., Littleton

The Littleton Museum. Free, and genuinely unusual: two working historic farms, one 1860s and one 1890s, with animals and interpreters in period dress. There is a harvest festival in October. Allow more time than you think you need.

- 6028 S. Gallup St., Littleton

Roxborough State Park. Red sandstone fins tilted straight out of the ground. The Fountain Valley Trail is the gentle one — a little over two miles, mostly flat. No dogs allowed, which keeps it quiet. Parking is limited and fills on weekends.

- 4751 E. Roxborough Dr., Roxborough

Castlewood Canyon State Park. Out past Franktown, about the same drive as Roxborough and with a fraction of the people. The rim trails are easy, and down in the canyon are the ruins of the dam that failed in 1933.

- 2989 S. State Highway 83, Franktown

Chatfield State Park. A big reservoir, big cottonwoods, and miles of level path. Good for the kind of walk where the point is the conversation rather than the destination.

- 11500 N. Roxborough Park Rd., Littleton

Deer Creek Canyon Park. Steeper than the rest of this list, so know that going in. The Meadowlark Trail is the manageable piece, and the view back over the plains is the payoff.

- 13388 Grizzly Dr., Littleton

Downtown Littleton. Four or five walkable blocks of Main Street, decorated through October, with lunch at one end and coffee at the other. On the last Friday of the month the shops stay open late.

- W. Main St., Littleton

Park Meadows, indoors. Worth knowing about for the week the weather turns ugly. The mall opens to walkers before the stores do — flat, climate-controlled, well lit, and free.

- 8401 Park Meadows Center Dr., Lone Tree

SECTION THREE

Harvest Season

October, mostly. The part of fall that smells like something.

The Pumpkin Festival at Chatfield Farms. Denver Botanic Gardens' working farm property in Littleton. The festival usually lands on the second weekend of October, tickets go in advance, and it sells out. Go early in the day.

- 8500 W. Deer Creek Canyon Rd., Littleton

The corn maze at Chatfield Farms. Open through October and far better on a weekday morning, when it is you, the corn, and about four other people.

- 8500 W. Deer Creek Canyon Rd., Littleton

Carboy Winery. Set in an old dairy building on South Santa Fe. Tastings run year round, and there is a harvest party in October with music.

- 6885 S. Santa Fe Dr., Littleton

The last weeks of the farmers markets. The Douglas County markets run into October, and the final few weeks are the good ones — winter squash, apples, cider, and vendors relaxed because the season is nearly done.

- Locations vary — check the Douglas County market schedule

A drive with no destination. South on 105 through Palmer Lake, or east on 86 toward Elizabeth. Rolling grassland, cottonwoods down in the draws, almost no traffic. Bring a thermos and no particular plan.

- CO-105 south from Sedalia, or CO-86 east from Castle Rock

SECTION FOUR

When the Weather Turns

It will. Somewhere in late October there is a week of grey, and this is what it is for.

Lone Tree Arts Center. A small hall where nobody sits far from the stage, ten minutes from most of South Denver. The season runs fall through spring — music, theatre, comedy — and a good deal of it falls on weeknights.

- 10075 Commons St., Lone Tree

The Newman Center for the Performing Arts. On the University of Denver campus. Chamber music, jazz and touring dance in a room built for sound rather than size.

- 2344 E. Iliff Ave., Denver

Town Hall Arts Center. Community theatre in a historic building on Main Street, and you can walk to dinner beforehand.

- 2450 W. Main St., Littleton

Denver Botanic Gardens on York Street. The conservatory is warm and green in November, which is the entire point. A good one for a grey afternoon when nobody wants to be outside.

- 1007 York St., Denver

The Denver Art Museum and the Museum of Nature & Science. Both are large enough that you will not see them in one visit, which is an argument for going more than once rather than a reason to put it off. Weekday mornings are the quiet ones.

- 100 W. 14th Ave. Pkwy. and 2001 Colorado Blvd., Denver

SECTION FIVE

November

The month everyone writes off. It contains the best evening on this list.

Veterans Day at Ketrin Park. A morning ceremony in Littleton on the eleventh. Short, well done, and worth standing outside for.

- 6000 S. Gallup St., Littleton

Castle Rock Starlighting. The star on the butte gets lit in late November and the whole town turns out. Dress properly — it is cold and you will be standing for a while.

- Festival Park, 300 Second St., Castle Rock

The Littleton Candlelight Walk. Main Street lined with luminaries on the Friday after Thanksgiving, and the tree lit at the end of it. It is the best evening on this list and it costs nothing.

- W. Main St., Littleton

The Denver Christkindlmarket. Downtown, opening in mid-November. Go on a weekday evening rather than a Saturday and it is a different event entirely.

- Tivoli Quad, Auraria Campus, 1000 Larimer St., Denver

The morning after the first real snow. Not an event, and the best thing in November. The Highline Canal after a storm is quiet in a way it never is otherwise. Boots, not shoes.

PRACTICAL NOTES

What a Colorado fall asks of you

Six things that are obvious in hindsight and never in the moment.

Aspens turn by elevation, not by date. The high passes go first, usually the third week of September. The foothills follow. The cottonwoods along the Platte are last, often not until late October. If you miss the mountains, you have not missed fall.

Trailhead parking fills early. Nine in the morning on a September Saturday is late. A Tuesday is a completely different experience, and there is no rule that says this has to happen on a weekend.

Thirty degrees in a day is normal. A morning that starts at 38 can reach 70 by two o'clock. Layers you can take off and carry, not the coat you are committed to.

The sun is stronger than it feels. October at 10,000 feet still burns. Sunscreen and a hat, even when it is cold — especially when it is cold, because that is when nobody bothers.

Daylight goes quickly after the time change. Sunset lands just before five in the first week of November, and earlier every week after. Afternoon plans quietly become evening plans.

Most state parks need a vehicle pass. If you expect to go more than a handful of times this fall, price out the annual pass before you start buying day passes.

None of this requires being in better shape than you are. Most of it is flat, most of it is free, and the parts that cost money cost less than dinner.

Pick three. Put them on the calendar before the weather decides for you. The season is short, and it does not come back around for a year.

ABOUT

50 Plus Monthly Mingle is a social club for adults 50+ in South Denver. Six gatherings every month — indoor walks, coffee and conversation, hands-on service, and outings that somebody else planned end to end. Food, tickets and coordination are included. You show up.

www.50PlusMonthlyMingle.com · info@50PlusMonthlyMingle.com