

ROAD TRIP

COLORADO HOT SPRINGS



► **Miles:** 388 • **Days on the Road:** 6 • **Best Scenic Overlook:** Independence Pass • **Best Off-the-Beaten-Path Hot Spring:** Penny Hot Springs



Coloradans like to boast about having higher red blood cell counts than their sea level-dwelling counterparts. This is true: At an average elevation of almost 7,000 feet, the body is forced to do more with less oxygen. But there's another secret behind that healthy, hardy Coloradan glow. Balneotherapy, or the use of natural hot springs to ease muscle aches and mental

stress, has been around since ancient times. Native Americans sought out Colorado's soothing mineral vapors long before the silver miners showed up in the late 1800s.

Now, a new hot springs route has connected the Centennial State's most prized balmy bathing spots—and you can test the waters.

—Alex Schechter

Refresh your spirits among the mountains in Conundrum Hot Springs, located near Crested Butte, Colorado.

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STOP 1

Cowboy Country

Start in downtown **Steamboat Springs**, which has blossomed lately with a spate of craft cocktail bars and small-plate dining rooms (try The Laundry). Then head to Mad Creek Trail, a serene hiking loop outside of town, where you'll pass sage-scented meadows and aspen groves before reaching **Strawberry Park Hot Springs**, an open-air spa and campsite. Once the sun goes down, the pools switch to clothing optional—so be ready to check your inhibitions at the door. strawberryhotsprings.com

STOP 2

Dive Into History

Since 1888, the town of **Glenwood Springs** has held the title for the world's largest mineral hot springs pool. For something more intimate, check out **Iron Mountain's** 16 pocket-size pools. The hottest one (108°F) pairs perfectly with a can of Durango-brewed Modus Hoperandi from the on-site café. hotspringspool.com, ironmountainhotsprings.com

STOP 3

Super Soaker

Sitting between the Colorado Trail and the Continental Divide is **Mount Princeton Hot Springs Resort**, a cozy year-round retreat built on a 120°F artesian well. To access the springs, you'll have to climb down into a creek and wade around the shallow rocky pools until you find the right mix of scalding jets and cold water. mtpinceton.com

STOP 4

Chili Chowdown

Continue your ascent through the Rockies with a mid-morning stop at Leadville, America's highest incorporated city at 10,578 feet. On Harrison Avenue, the main drag, stroll past the grand facade of the historic **Tabor Opera House**, where Harry Houdini once performed, then settle in at a booth at the **Golden Burro Cafe**. Breakfast at this Old West saloon is no joke—try the “golden burro-ito,” a missile-size pouch of eggs and potatoes slathered with green chili sauce and melted cheese, or the chicken-fried steak and eggs, topped with house-made sausage gravy. taboroperahouse.net, www.goldenburro.com

STOP 5

Treat Yourself

Boulder balances the buzz of a modern metropolis with the tranquility of a close connection to nature. Nowhere is that dual spirit more evident than at the **Boulder Farmers Market**, a weekly ritual where multiple generations of local farmers mix (from April to November) with artisan food trucks. You can fill up on samples, including Fortuna Chocolate's dangerously addictive Mexican cacao bars and ganache truffles. Then head to **Shine**, a holistic brewery and bar that also specializes in herb-based, nonalcoholic “potions,” such as the black cherry- and basil-infused Three Laughing Monks. Not that you'll need much of a health boost: After days spent soaking in hot springs, that native Colorado shine will have rubbed off on you too. bcfm.org, shineboulder.com



GUILLERMO TRAPIELLO (MAP); PREVIOUS PAGE: JACK BRAUER (POOL); TAMER KOSELI (ILLUSTRATION)