

# Warm up a cold night in Colorado's Hot Springs Loop

Susan B. Barnes, Special for USA TODAY 7:48 a.m. ET Feb. 16, 2017



(Photo: Visit Pagosa Springs)

On a recent cold Colorado winter night, we leave the warmth of the bath house and scamper across the frigid sidewalk dotted with patches of ice and snow, clinging to our towels. “Which one are we going to?!” I eagerly ask my friend Nikki, who’s scampering alongside me. We make a beeline for the nearest cloud of steam rising from the ground, toss our towels aside and gingerly step into the steaming hot water, lowering our chilled bodies into its warmth.

This scenario played out time and again as Nikki and I spent a few days visiting a handful of the 19 natural hot springs found in the Rocky Mountains along the 720-mile [Colorado Historic Hot Springs Loop](http://www.colorado.com/hotspringsloop) (<http://www.colorado.com/hotspringsloop>).

Natural hot springs are essentially nature’s hot tubs: Hot water filled with minerals flows from deep inside the earth, bubbling up to the surface through springs and rivers. This natural phenomenon happens throughout the world, and soaking in the mineral-rich waters has long been believed to increase wellness and promote relaxation.

Here we take a look at the hot springs we recently visited in Colorado, all of which are open year-round and the perfect places to soak aching muscles from myriad outdoor activities, or to simply soak your cares away. And here’s an insider’s tip: pack a bathrobe and a pair of flip-flops no matter the season; both will keep you comfortable when going from one tub to the next.

## Glenwood Springs

Three historic hot springs can be found in [Glenwood Springs](http://www.visitglenwood.com/) (<http://www.visitglenwood.com/>), in the heart of the Rocky Mountains between Aspen and Vail, and about a three-hour drive from Denver.

The underground hot springs vapor caves at the [Yampah Spa](http://www.yampahspa.com/) (<http://www.yampahspa.com/>), the only known natural vapor caves in North America, opened for commercial use in 1887. Inside the caves’ three rock chambers, 125-degree water flows through the floors, creating a natural hot mineral water steam bath that averages 110 to 112 degrees in temperature. Upstairs, mineral baths and spa treatments compliment the cave experience.

[Glenwood Hot Springs](http://www.hotspringspool.com/swim) (<http://www.hotspringspool.com/swim>) opened in 1888 and features the world’s largest mineral hot springs pool filled with water from the Yampah spring (Yampah means “Big Medicine” in the Ute Indian language), from which 3.5 million gallons of water flows daily. The 405-foot pool’s 1.07 million gallons of water is consistently a warm 90 to 93 degrees, while its neighboring therapy pool maintains a temperature of 104 degrees. The historic bathhouse has been converted into the [Spa of the Rockies](http://www.spaoftherockies.com/) (<http://www.spaoftherockies.com/>), and both the spa and the [lodge](http://www.hotspringspool.com/stay) (<http://www.hotspringspool.com/stay>) are geothermally heated from the hot springs.

The newest hot springs on the loop are those found at [Iron Mountain Hot Springs](http://www.ironmountainhotsprings.com/) (<http://www.ironmountainhotsprings.com/>), which opened in 2015. The springs’ 16 naturally-shaped mineral pools sit along the Colorado River and are filled from natural springs that sit on the property and flow at a rate of 400 gallons per minute. The 16 mineral pools’ temperatures range from 99 to 108 degrees, and there’s also a 95-degree fresh water family pool, so there are plenty of options from which to choose.

Side trip: Before or after soaking in Glenwood Springs’ hot springs, get your adrenaline fix at the [Glenwood Caverns Adventure Park](http://glenwoodcaverns.com/) (<http://glenwoodcaverns.com/>) atop Iron Mountain. Aside from Colorado’s longest alpine coaster and the highest elevation roller coaster in North America, the park’s cave systems are worth checking out, too.

## Chaffee County

Along the Continental Divide is [Chaffee County](http://www.colorfulcolorado.com/) (<http://www.colorfulcolorado.com/>) and its six historic hot springs surrounded by the most 14,000-foot peaks in Colorado, about three hours southwest of Denver.

The historic bathhouse at [Mount Princeton Hot Springs Resort](http://mtprinceton.com/swim/) (<http://mtprinceton.com/swim/>), at the foot of Mount Princeton in [Nathrop](http://www.visitnathrop.com/), was established in 1867; people have been enjoying the hot springs long before then and ever since. The bathhouse sits on a creek in which natural individual pools have been created, ranging in temperatures from 70 to 120 degrees. More formal pools can be found in the resort as well, including the relaxation pool which maintains 99 degrees, an exercise pool at a comfortable temperature in the 90s, the cascading hot springs pools that range in temperatures from 101 to 107 degrees, and the 75-degree upper pools with a 400-foot-long waterslide and lazy river. Make a day or more of it and [stay](http://mtprinceton.com/stay/) (<http://mtprinceton.com/stay/>) in the resort’s lodges or cabins.

Additional hot springs that can be found in Chaffee County, but we didn't have a chance to visit include [Alpine Hot Springs Hideaway](http://www.alpinehotsprings.com/) (<http://www.alpinehotsprings.com/>) in Salida, [Antero Hot Springs Cabins](http://anterohotsprings.com/) (<http://anterohotsprings.com/>) [Creekside Hot Springs](http://www.creeksidehotsprings.com/) (<http://www.creeksidehotsprings.com/>), a home rental in Nathrop, [Cottonwood Hot Springs](http://cottonwood-hot-springs.com/colorado/the-hot-springs/) (<http://cottonwood-hot-springs.com/colorado/the-hot-springs/>) in Buena Vista, and the [Salida Hot Springs Aquatic Center](http://salidarec.com/public-pool/) (<http://salidarec.com/public-pool/>), the largest indoor hot springs facility in the USA.

Side trip: Before or after soaking in Chaffee County's hot springs, visit [St. Elmo](http://www.colorfulcolorado.com/enjoy-chaffee-county/156-ghost-towns/) (<http://www.colorfulcolorado.com/enjoy-chaffee-county/156-ghost-towns/>), Colorado's "Most Original Ghost Town," established in the 1870s.

## Ouray

On a previous visit to Colorado, Nikki and I soaked in the five hot springs found in [Ouray](http://www.ouraycolorado.com/) (<http://www.ouraycolorado.com/>), a small mountain mining town known as the "Switzerland of America" in the [San Juan Mountains](#), near Telluride

The original structure of the [Historic Wiesbaden Hot Springs Spa & Lodgings](http://www.wiesbadenhotsprings.com/) (<http://www.wiesbadenhotsprings.com/>) was built in 1879, and has served as entry to a continually flowing hot springs vapor cave with a 108-degree vapor cave. When it got to be too hot in the cave, Nikki and I adjourned to the outdoor mineral hot springs-fed swimming pool, which stays at a cooler 99 to 102 degrees.

The [Ouray Hot Springs Swimming Pool](http://ourayhotsprings.com/hot-springs/) (<http://ourayhotsprings.com/hot-springs/>) is actually three connected pools with a combined nearly one million gallons of clear hot springs water ranging in temperatures from 80 to 105 degrees; seven different springs supply the pools' water. Established in 1927, the pool has long been a place of recreation and relaxation.

Just outside of town, [Orvis Hot Springs](http://www.orvishotsprings.com/) (<http://www.orvishotsprings.com/>) is a clothing-optional natural hot springs on the loop. Orvis' seven soaking areas range in temperatures from 98 to 112 degrees, and are both indoors and outside with spectacular views of the Colorado landscape and night sky. Try the Lobster Pot if you dare: Water temperatures range from 108 to 114 degrees.

Additional hot springs in Ouray can be found at the [Box Canyon Lodge & Hot Springs](http://www.colorado.com/motel/box-canyon-lodge-and-hot-springs/) (<http://www.colorado.com/motel/box-canyon-lodge-and-hot-springs/>) and the [Twin Peaks Lodge & Hot Springs](http://www.twinpeakslodging.com/hot-springs.html) (<http://www.twinpeakslodging.com/hot-springs.html>), where the hot springs facilities are open 24 hours a day.

## Manitou Springs

Though it's not officially part of the Colorado Historic Hot Springs Loop, [Manitou Springs](http://www.visitcos.com/manitou-mineral-springs) (<http://www.visitcos.com/manitou-mineral-springs>) outside of [Colorado Springs](http://www.visitcos.com/) (<http://www.visitcos.com/>) is worth a visit, too. Eight springs are open to the public for soaking and relaxing, just as people have been doing since a resort was established in 1871, and the Mountain Utes long before then. Manitou's Cheyenne Spring is believed to be 20,000 years old. Nearby, [SunWater Spa](http://www.sunwaterspa.com/soaking/) (<http://www.sunwaterspa.com/soaking/>) draws its mineral waters from the Seven Minute Spring to fill its eight tubs for soaking, complimenting the spa's therapies and classes.

Side trip: Get up close and personal with the furry, howling, four-legged residents of the [Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center](http://www.wolfeducation.org/) (<http://www.wolfeducation.org/>) in nearby Divide, or spend some time hiking in [Garden of the Gods](http://www.gardenofgods.com/) (<http://www.gardenofgods.com/>) in Colorado Springs.

During our recent visit to Colorado, we didn't have time to visit all of the springs on the Colorado Historic Hot Springs Loop and need to plan another trip to round out the experience. Added to our list is [Steamboat Springs](http://www.steamboatchamber.com/) (<http://www.steamboatchamber.com/>) and its [Strawberry Park Hot Springs](http://strawberryhotsprings.com/) (<http://strawberryhotsprings.com/>) (clothing-optional after dark) and [Old Town Hot Springs](http://www.oldtownhotsprings.org/) (<http://www.oldtownhotsprings.org/>); and [Pagosa Springs](http://visitpagosasprings.com/) (<http://visitpagosasprings.com/>), where the world's deepest aquifer is found, along with [The Springs Resort & Spa](http://www.pagosahotsprings.com/) (<http://www.pagosahotsprings.com/>) on the San Juan River, [Healing Waters Resort & Spa](http://www.colorado.com/hot-spring/healing-waters-resort-spa) (<http://www.colorado.com/hot-spring/healing-waters-resort-spa>) and its newest hot springs, [Overlook Hot Springs](http://www.overlookhotsprings.com/) (<http://www.overlookhotsprings.com/>).

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