

The defining characteristic of the West is scale. Everything is huge, the sky, the landscape, the geology, everything is almost overwhelming. And don't even think of taking a picture that will capture the immensity of what you're seeing. Professionals have been trying since the camera was invented.

Driving US 160 West into Cortez CO the most eye catching and massive geologic feature on the skyline is Mesa Verde (translated Table Green) to the South and West. Situated within the Mesa Verde National Park the mesa stands 8000 feet above sea level and is the home to some very interesting archeology and artifacts, not to mention the breathtaking geology and views.



Nearly a thousand years ago early inhabitants of North America made their homes and built a vibrant culture here. Little is known definitively about how they lived their lives, why they moved from the mesa top to cliff dwellings we see remaining, or why they just moved on 700 years ago, but the Park rangers do a wonderful job of sharing what is known and what is speculated during the hour long guided tours of the archeological sites. Those individuals who choose to invest a day or two touring and hiking Mesa Verde National Park will be well rewarded with exceptional views of geology and architecture. There are guided tours available hourly for a small expense and areas that can be explored as self-guided tours. In my opinion the guided tours are well worth the expense and adherence to the published schedule. The detailed knowledge shared by the rangers and the ability to get up close to the craftsmanship of the cliff dwellings make it an easy choice. There are many of the informational placards common to the National Parks located at the many overlooks available along the park road. While much of the park is accessible to any person with a car or average health there are hikes and guided tours that are recommended only to those comfortable with strenuous exercise, no fear of heights and being physical at 8000 feet above sea level where the effective oxygen in the air is about 16% as opposed to the 21% oxygen we are accustomed to in other parts of the country closer to

sea level. Another cautionary note is to bring plenty of water; the park is located in a desert area.

There is a hotel complex at Farview Lodge within the park boundaries that would be very convenient if you're making a trip dedicated to exploring the park. Additionally, there is Morefield campground immediately inside the park boundaries and Ancient Cedars RV campground just outside the park in Mancos, CO.

During our recent visit we elected to stay in Cortez CO a ranching and farming community of about 9000 people ten miles West of the Mesa Verde NP. Cortez appears to be a quiet little Western town with several community parks and even youth baseball and other sports. One attraction of worthy of special note is the Hawkins Preserve located on the Southside of town. The preserve is a 122-acre public park supported by the town of Cortez. The park has hiking and biking trails along with views and vistas to take your breath away. Well worth your time if you're looking for quiet relaxation near early or late in the day.



For more information on Mesa Verde NP or the City of Cortez check out the

following: <https://www.nps.gov/meve/index.htm>

<https://cortezculturalcenter.org/hawkins-preserve/>