

An aerial photograph of a desert landscape. The top portion of the image shows a dense canopy of green trees on a hillside. Below this, a solid red banner spans the width of the image, containing the title text. The bottom portion of the image shows ancient stone ruins built into a sandstone cliff face, with a group of people gathered on a path to the right. The foreground is filled with lush green trees and shrubs.

MESA VERDE TRIP PLANNER

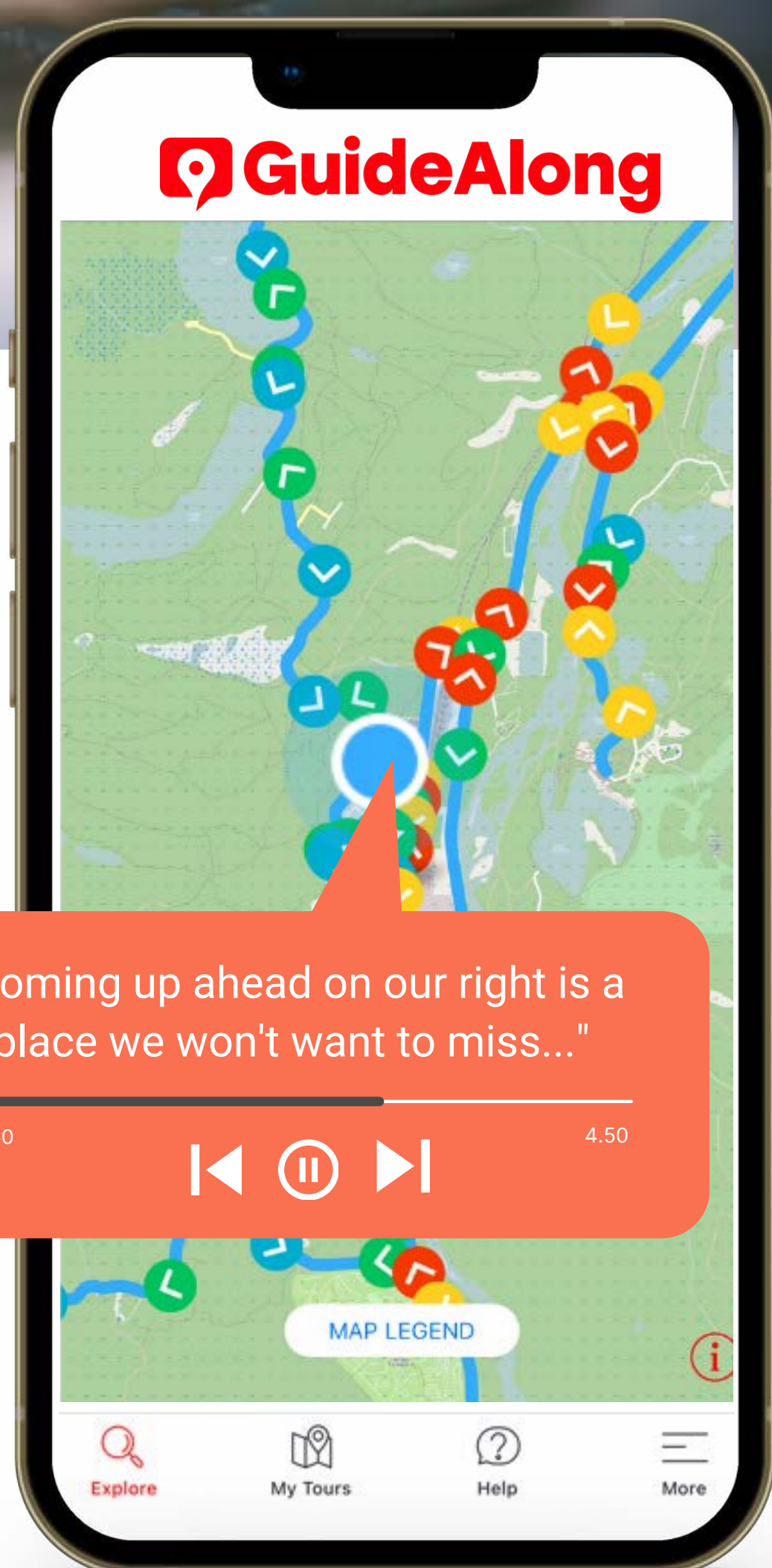
It's like a tour guide along for the drive

LOCATION-BASED AUDIO TOURS

Don't miss a thing as stories, local tips & directions guide you to the best things to see and do.

Commentary autoplays as you drive, based on your location.

Download and tour offline, no data signal required.



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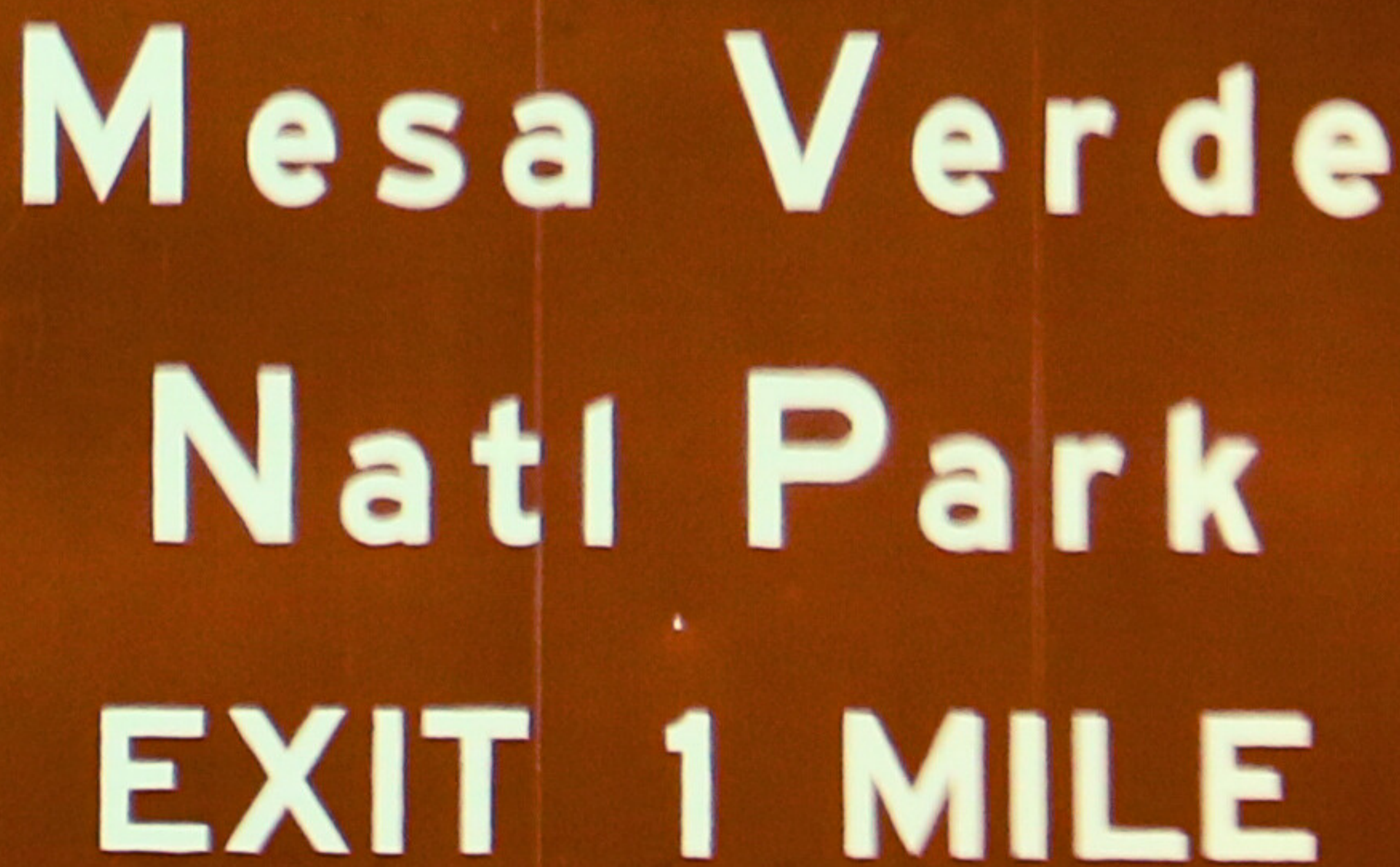


MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK TRIP PLANNER

For over 700 years, the Ancestral Pueblo people flourished in this corner of the desert southwest, building elaborate cliff dwellings and interesting mesa top structures. For reasons still not clearly understood today, they abandoned the area by the early 1300s and moved south into present-day Arizona and New Mexico leaving behind not only their homes but many of their possessions as well.

Designated a national park in 1906, Mesa Verde preserves the history of the Ancestral Puebloan people. Short hikes, scenic overlooks, and museums artifact displays top the to-do list but the best way to explore the park is on a ranger-guided tour of one of the park's famed cliff dwellings.





Mesa Verde
Natl Park
EXIT 1 MILE

HOW TO GET HERE

Mesa Verde National Park is located in southwestern Colorado about 35 miles (56 kilometers) west of Durango, Colorado. Most people arrive at Mesa Verde National Park by car; public transportation is extremely limited in this part of Colorado. The best way to explore the park is by car. There are no park shuttles and bicycles are not allowed on the Wetherill Mesa Road.

HOW TO GET HERE



BY PLANE

Albuquerque International Sunport (ABQ) in Albuquerque, New Mexico is the closest international airport to Mesa Verde National Park. It's about a four hour drive from Albuquerque to Mesa Verde National Park. The Grand Junction Regional Airport (GJT) is also four hours away and is a good option if you're also visiting Arches, Canyonlands, and/or Black Canyon of the Gunnison national parks. A handful of major airlines also service the Durango La Plata County Airport (DRO) in Durango, Colorado.

BY CAR

With only one entrance to Mesa Verde National Park, you'll be arriving eastbound on 160 from Cortez (approx 10 miles or 13 minutes) or westbound on 160 from Durango (approx 36 miles or 40 minutes). Allow another 20 minutes or so driving time, inside the park, if you want to immediately visit any cliff dwellings.

ENTRANCE FEES

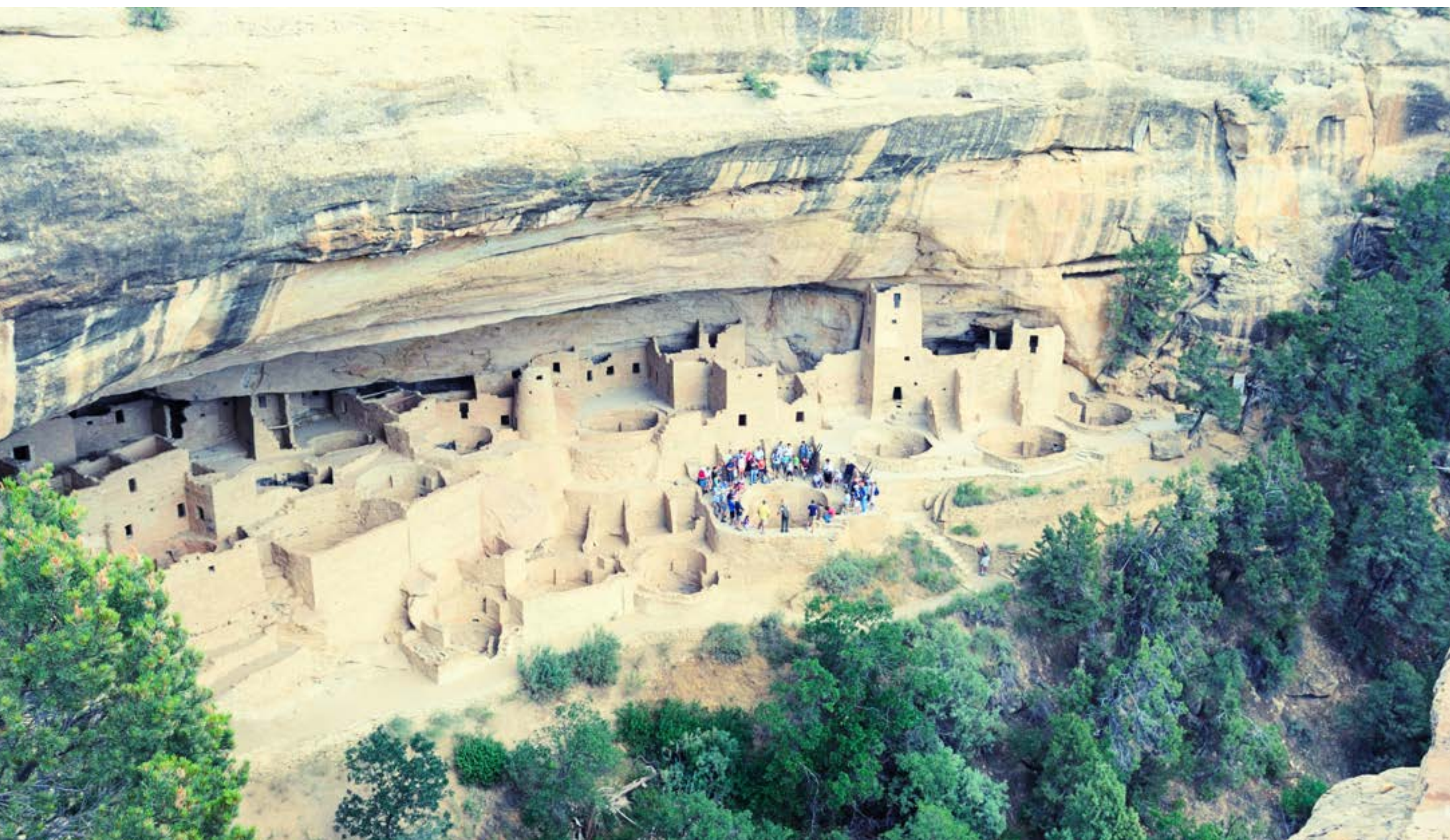
A park pass is required for all private vehicles and bicycles entering Mesa Verde National Park. Visitors can purchase a digital entrance pass on recreation.gov in advance or at the park entrance station. Passes are good for seven consecutive days.

If you plan to visit other national parks on this trip or during the next year, it may make more sense to purchase an annual parks pass, if you don't have one already. In addition to covering the entrance fee to Mesa Verde National Park, the America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass covers most entry fees to all other national parks, national monuments, national historic sites, and other federally managed lands. Current military members, families of fourth-grade students, and U.S. citizens with disabilities can receive a free annual pass and seniors are eligible for a lifetime parks pass at a discounted rate.



CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS AFFECTING ROADS

The Wetherill Mesa area will remain closed through the 2024 season for construction. Check the National Park Service website for updates.



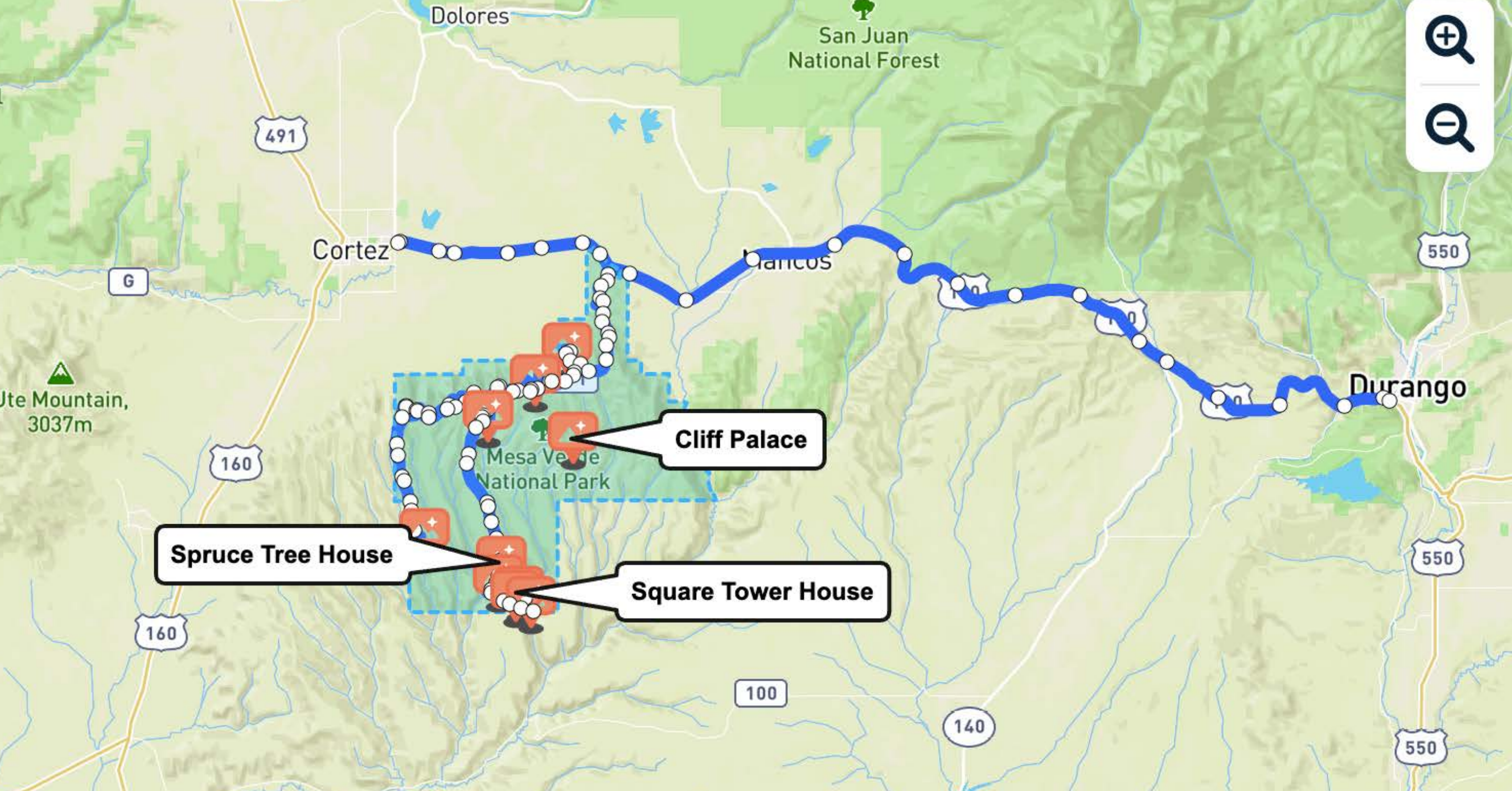
CLIFF DWELLING TOUR TICKETS

Most cliff dwellings in Mesa Verde National Park can only be entered as part of a ranger-led tour and advanced tickets are required. Ticket pricing varies based on tour type and tickets can only be purchased 14 days in advance on [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) or by calling 1-877-444-6777. Cliff dwelling tours are typically offered from early May through late October.

Tour tickets are in high demand so we strongly recommend purchasing tickets as soon as they become available. Your receipt serves as your tour ticket so make sure to either take a screenshot of your receipt or print out a paper copy before you arrive at the park since cell service is limited in the park and rangers cannot access tour reservations.

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED

Most cliff dwellings can be entered only on a ticketed tour with a ranger, and must be booked in advance. Tickets are released 14 days prior, and can be booked online on the [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) website.



MESA VERDE ROAD TRIP

 *interactive map*





WHERE TO STAY

INSIDE MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK

CAMPING

The Morefield Campground is the only developed campground in Mesa Verde National Park and it's typically open from late April through early October. Reservations are available but are not required unless you're looking to stay at one of the 15 full hook-up RV sites. For RV sites, we highly recommend reserving as soon as you know your travel dates. Standard sites rarely fill but it's still a good idea to book ahead for holiday weekends, just in case.

All campsites include a designated fire pit, picnic table, gravel tent pad, and access to drinking water, hot showers, a laundry facility, camp store, and a dog kennel, if you're looking for someplace safe to board your pet while you explore the park.

LODGING

The Far View Lodge is located right in the center of the park and offers hotel-style accommodations with fantastic views of Mesa Verde. The lodge is open from mid-April through late October. Each room features its own private balcony and pet-friendly rooms are available.



WHERE TO STAY

OUTSIDE MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK

CORTEZ, COLORADO

Cortez is the closest major town to Mesa Verde National Park. It's only ten miles from the center of Cortez to the park's entrance sign. Visitors will find several lodging options in Cortez including RV parks, camping cabins, and plenty of hotel-style accommodations. Additional lodging options are also available in nearby Macos and Dolores, Colorado.

CORTEZ, COLORADO

Some Mesa Verde National Park visitors choose to base themselves in Durango, Colorado, which is about a 40-minute drive from the park entrance. Durango is a happening college town located at the base of Colorado's San Juan Mountains which offers incredible access to outdoor recreation. In addition to world-class mountain biking, skiing, and whitewater rafting opportunities close to town, Durango also has a lively dining and craft beverage scene, dozens of art galleries, and an interesting railroad history to explore.

WHEN TO VISIT

Mesa Verde National Park is open year-round but no cliff dwelling tours are offered during the winter months. The best time to visit is during spring and fall when temperatures are more mild and all park roads and trails are open.

Summer is peak visitor season but you can expect high daytime temperatures. The Wetherill Mesa Road is only open from mid-May through the end of October and ranger-guided tours of Long House are only available during the summer months.

HOW TO AVOID THE CROWDS

Mesa Verde National Park is not as crowded as other nearby national parks but it's necessary to plan ahead if you'd like to go on a cliff dwelling tour. Tour tickets are always in high demand and are available up to 14 days in advance online. Cliff dwelling tour tickets often sell out the day they become available. If you'd rather explore a cliff dwelling on your own, head to Step House on the Wetherill Mesa where you're free to visit the dwelling at your own pace.

If you're visiting during the peak summer months, make sure to get an early start to avoid the crowds at the park's top attractions along Chapin Mesa. If you'd really like to beat the crowds, consider making the 12-mile (19-kilometer) drive out to Wetherill Mesa. Only a small percentage of park visitors venture out here and many of the area's archaeological sites rival that of the more popular areas of the park.



HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU NEED?

Mesa Verde National Park is open year-round but no cliff dwelling tours are offered during the winter months. The best time to visit is during spring and fall when temperatures are more mild and all park roads and trails are open. Summer is peak visitor season but you can expect high daytime temperatures. The Wetherill Mesa Road is only open from mid-May through the end of October and ranger-guided tours of Long House are only available during the summer months.

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

IF YOU ONLY HAVE ONE DAY

Start your day out at the Visitor Center or the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum to get acquainted with Ancestral Puebloan history. With only one day, you'll most likely only have time to explore either Chapin Mesa or Wetherill Mesa. Depending on what cliff dwelling tour you're doing, you'll want to center your attention near there so you don't spend the entire day driving from one mesa to the other.

If you're touring Cliff Palace or Balcony House, you'll have the time to drive both the Mesa Top and Cliff Palace loops. If you have extra time, you can also check out the mesa top structures at Far View. If you're touring Long House at Wetherill Mesa you can also do the self-guided tour of Step House and hike to the overlook of the Nordenskiöld Site #16 cliff dwelling. As you leave the park, make sure to stop by the Park Point Fire Lookout at sunset.



SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

IF YOU HAVE TWO DAYS OR MORE

With more than two days in Mesa Verde, you can take your time exploring the sites along the Mesa Top and Cliff Palace loops and spend an entire day out at Wetherill Mesa. This will also give you the time to do more than one cliff dwelling tour if you'd like.

On your first day, you can take a ranger-guided tour of Cliff Palace or Balcony House, hike to Petroglyph Point, and have the time to check out many of the main sights along the Mesa Top and Cliff Palace Loops. On your second day, you can head out to Wetherill Mesa and do the self-guided tour of Step House or the ranger-led tour of Long House. You'll also have the time to explore the mesa top ruins at Far View and check out the views along the Knife Edge or Point Lookout trails.



THINGS TO SEE AND DO



CLIFF PALACE

Cliff Palace is the largest cliff dwelling in North America and a definite must-see during your trip to Mesa Verde. In its heyday, Cliff Palace's 150 rooms and 21 kivas are thought to have been home to over one hundred people. Some researchers think that it was an important ceremonial place given its numerous kivas and interesting rock art. The only way you can enter Cliff Palace is on a ranger-led tour. Even if you don't have tickets for the tour, you can still get a good look at it from the Cliff Palace Overlook.

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

SPRUCE TREE HOUSE

Although ranger-led tours are no longer offered at Spruce Tree House, this elaborately constructed cliff dwelling is still worth a visit. Constructed throughout the mid-1200s, Spruce Tree House contains about 130 rooms and 8 ceremonial kivas. It's one of the best-preserved structures in the park but due to weathering of the arch above Spruce Tree House the National Park Service has determined it's no longer safe to enter. You can still get a pretty good look of the dwelling though from the paths and overlooks near the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum.

FAR VIEW SITES

Mesa Verde National Park is much more than cliff dwellings. In fact, prior to moving into the cliff dwellings, the Ancestral Pueblo people lived in villages scattered throughout the mesa top and Far View is one of the best spots to see what's left of these villages. This .75-mile (1.2-kilometer) loop trail passes through several former villages including six excavated sites and a reservoir which is now thought by some to have been a large ceremonial structure.

CHAPIN MESA ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

For a window into the daily lives of the Ancestral Pueblo people, stop by the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum to browse the items they left behind. The museum showcases hand-crafted jewelry, carved stone tools and weapons, and even clothing such as sandals woven from yucca leaves, all abandoned when the Ancestral Pueblo fled Mesa Verde.



BEST HIKES

SODA CANYON OVERLOOK TRAIL

If you only have time for a short hike, the Soda Canyon Trail packs in a ton of great views of Balcony House and other cliff dwellings in Soda Canyon. This quick and easy 1.2-mile (1.9-kilometer) out-and-back trail passes through pinyon and juniper forest on its way to several overlooks on the edge of the canyon.

BEST HIKES

KNIFE EDGE TRAIL

The Knife Edge Trail follows the old steep and narrow park entrance road which offered fantastic views of the Montezuma Valley but proved too difficult to maintain considering it was built on the edge of a cliff. This 2-mile (3.2-kilometer) relatively flat round-trip trail follows part of the original road and offers great views of Sleeping Ute Mountain to the west. The trail takes off from the Morefield Campground and makes for a great sunset hike.

POINT LOOKOUT TRAIL

If you're looking for a bit more challenge, the Point Lookout Trail climbs to the top of Point Lookout, an imposing mesa that towers over the park entrance. The trail is a bit steep and follows a series of switchbacks to the top but the views across the Montezuma and Mancos Valleys make it well worth the trek. It's a 2.2-mile (3.5-kilometer) round-trip to the top of Point Lookout from the trailhead at the Morefield Campground.



REVIEWS



★★★★★

Excellent and informative
Well worth the money! Everyone in the car ages 19-82 found the narrative informative and entertaining. Highly recommend this download.



ZarZarL

★★★★★

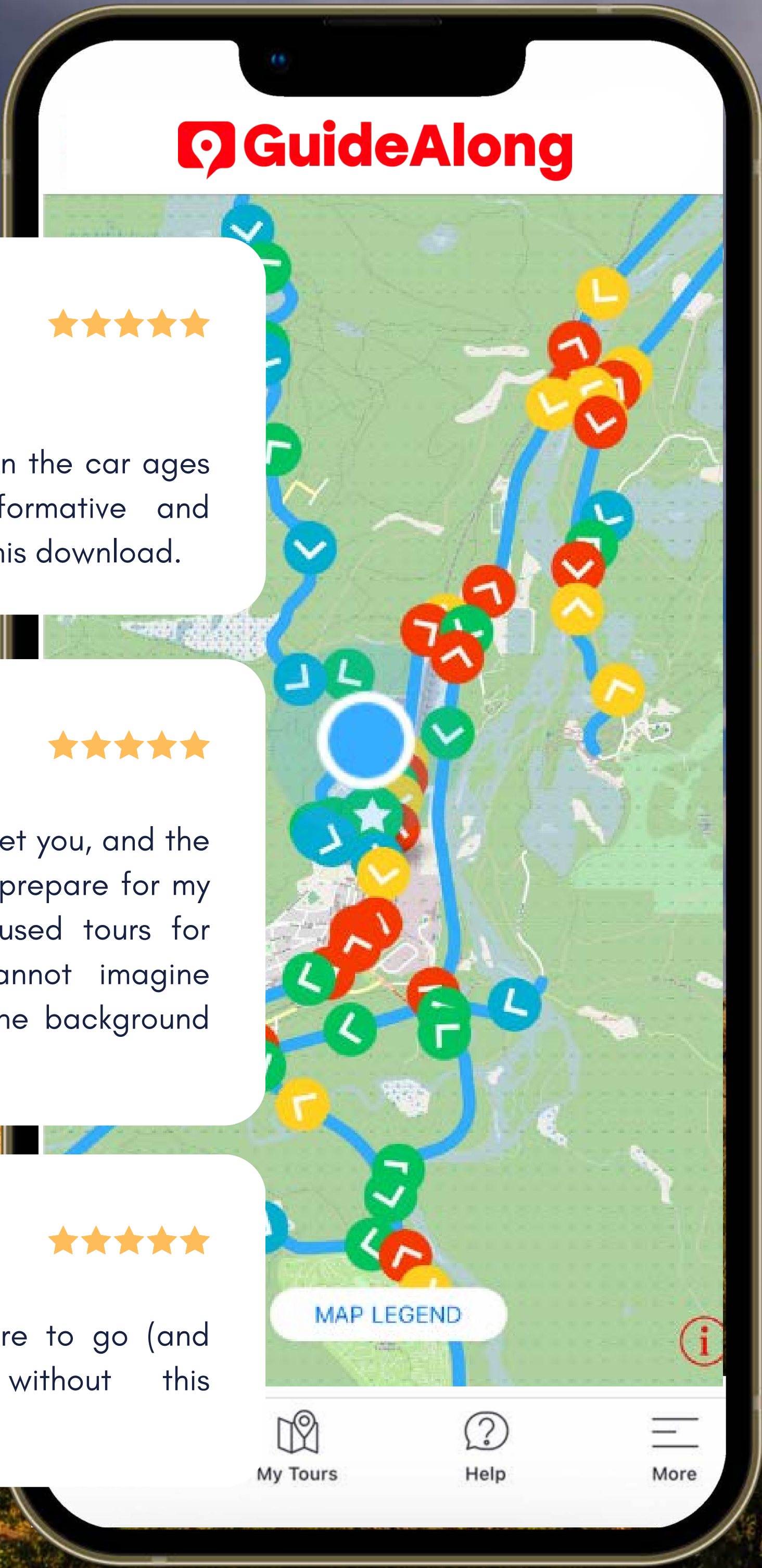
I never paid for any apps until I met you, and the best purchase I've ever made to prepare for my trips! I've already bought and used tours for Hawaii and US west, and cannot imagine traveling without your voice in the background anymore



17484 Apple

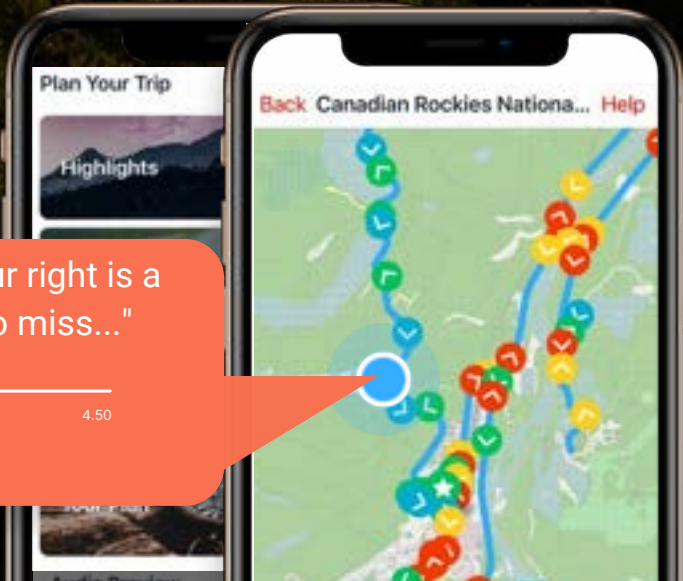
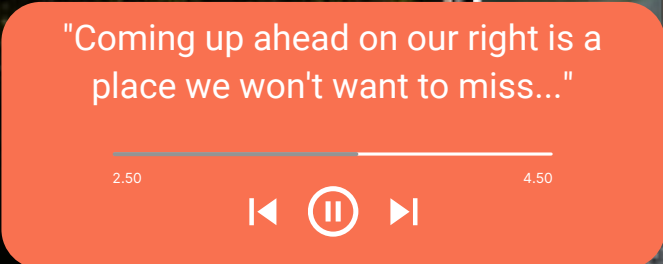
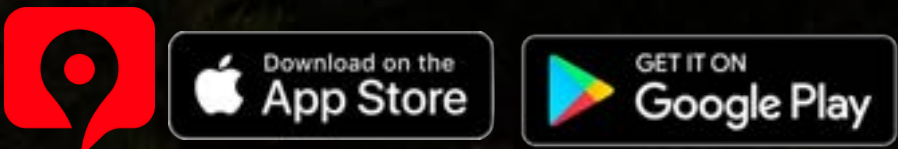
★★★★★

We would not have known where to go (and when to beat crowds) without this audio...Ridiculously great value



AUDIO TOUR GUIDES

Stories, local tips & directions that autoplay, based on your location



AWESOME EXPERIENCES

TOUR THE INSIDE OF A CLIFF DWELLING

Stepping inside one of Mesa Verde's many cliff dwellings is definitely the highlight of visiting Mesa Verde National Park. Most dwellings can only be entered on a ticketed ranger-led tour. Tours of Cliff House and Long House are ranger-assisted, meaning you can tour the dwelling somewhat at your own pace with a timed entry ticket. Tours of Balcony House, Mug House, and Square Tower House are fully ranger-guided. All tours involve some degree of uneven walking and some ladder climbing with Balcony House being the most adventuresome.

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED

Most cliff dwellings can be entered only on a ticketed tour with a ranger, and must be booked in advance. Tickets are released 14 days prior, and can be booked online on the [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) website.



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TAKE A SELF-GUIDED TOUR OF STEP HOUSE

If you weren't able to get cliff dwelling tour tickets or you'd prefer to tour a cliff dwelling at your own pace, visit Step House on Wetherill Mesa. This is the only cliff dwelling that can be entered without an advanced ticket. On this self-guided tour, you'll not just see cliff structures but pithouses as well. There's even a ranger stationed there to answer any questions you may have. This one-mile loop trail is steep in spots and is accessible at the end of the Wetherill Mesa Road.

CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS AFFECTING ROADS

The Wetherill Mesa area will remain closed through the 2024 season for construction. Check the National Park Service website for updates.



AWESOME EXPERIENCES

VIEW ANCESTRAL PUEBLOAN ART AT PETROGLYPH POINT

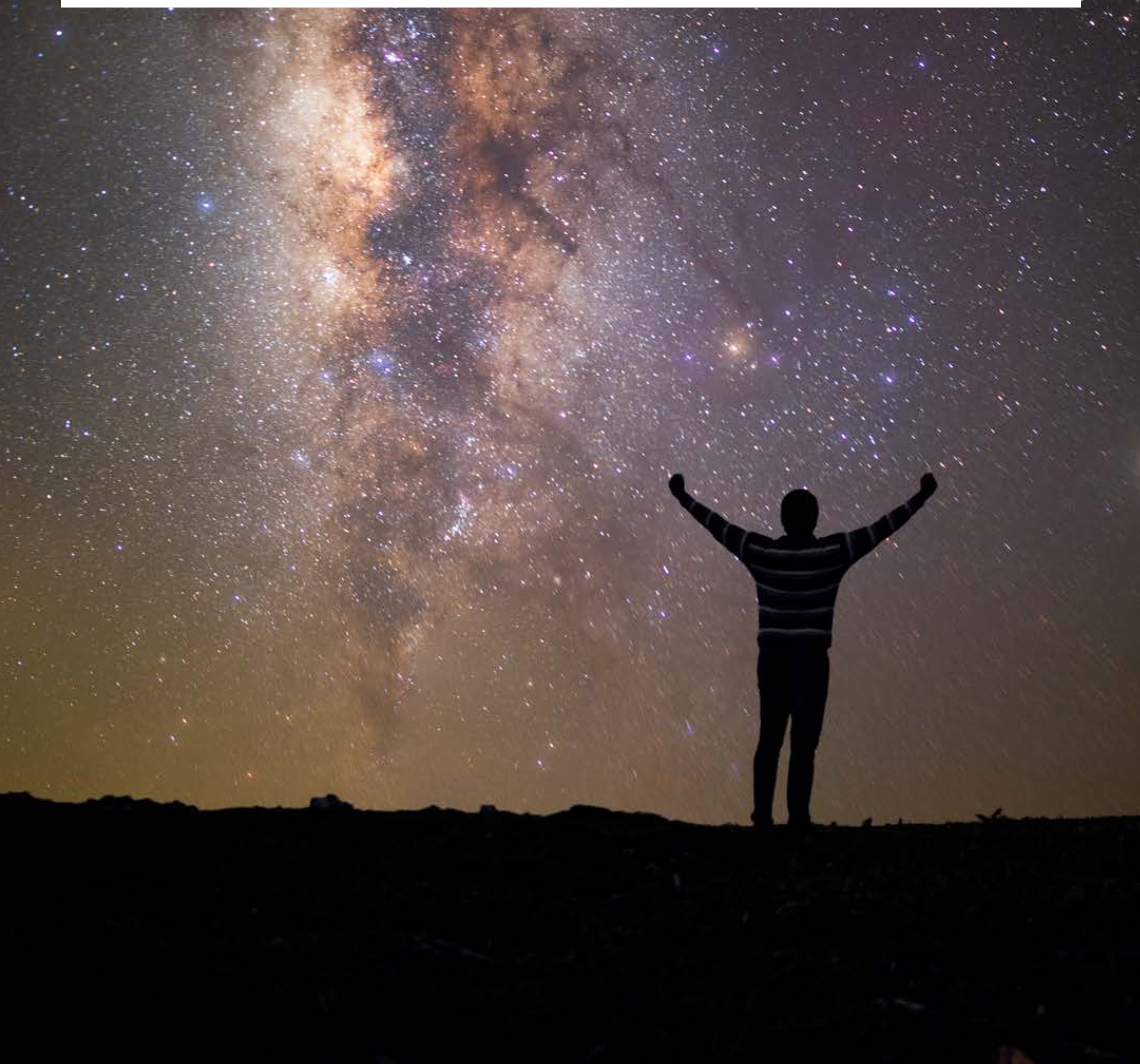
The 2.4-mile (3.9-kilometer) round-trip Petroglyph Point Trail is one of the few places in the park to see rock art. Although the Ancestral Puebloan left behind many rock carvings and paintings throughout Mesa Verde, very few of these sites are open to the public. The trail starts near the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum and leads to a large panel filled with hand prints, spirals, animals, and human-like figures.

CHECK OUT THE VIEW FROM THE FIRE LOOKOUT

Built in 1939 by the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Park Point Fire Lookout is one of the few remaining fire towers in Colorado consistently staffed during the fire season. The fire tower sits at the highest point in the park at 8,572 feet above sea level so it's a great spot to take in the views. On a clear day, you can see all the way into Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico from here.

GAZE UP AT THE NIGHT SKY

You'll find some of the darkest skies remaining in the contiguous United States right at Mesa Verde. By day you'll see evidence that the Ancestral Pueblo people were keen astronomical observers, so return by night and be dazzled yourself by the exceptional stargazing from many of the outlooks, pullouts or with ranger-led evening programs at Morefield Campground and Far View Lodge.



PACKING LIST

Layers: You could expect hot sun, rain, cold wind anytime, or sudden storms especially in summer. Conditions can change rapidly, so pack extras layers in case.

Trail Shoes or Hiking Boots: Cliff dwelling tours require hiking over uneven terrain and ascending ladders so you'll want to make sure to wear sturdy shoes with good traction.

Sun Protection: If you're visiting Mesa Verde during the summer months, sun protection is a must. Trails have little shade and the park's higher altitude makes the sun's rays even more intense. Don't forget the sunscreen and a wide-brimmed hat.

Binoculars: Binoculars are a must-pack for any trip to Mesa Verde National Park. Many of the cliff dwelling overlooks are quite a distance from the dwelling itself. Binoculars will give you a closer view of the dwellings, plus it can be fun to scan the cliffs to discover other structures hidden in nearby alcoves.

Camera with a Telephoto Lens: Speaking of cameras, if you have a camera with a telephoto lens you'll want to for sure bring it to Mesa Verde. Often, you'll be viewing cliff dwellings from a distance and a good telephoto lens will get you better shots.

Portable Phone Charger and Cable: If you're taking pictures with your phone, running out of batteries may result in missed opportunities.

Daypack (that fits a camera): If you're doing a cliff dwelling tour, you'll need both hands free for climbing ladders and navigating the terrain required to reach the site. Bring along a daypack that fits not only the essentials like extra layers, water, snacks, and sunscreen but that fits your camera as well.

Water Bottles: Always bring water. And make sure you drink it! No matter what time of year you visit, dehydration is always a risk - even if you're not doing much physical activity. In summer, it's recommended that you drink a gallon a day. At the same time, remember that in order to stay hydrated, you also need electrolytes, like potassium and sodium. Drinking a huge amount of water without supplementing it may flush all these important salts out of your system. We like to just pop a flavored electrolyte tablet into a water bottle whenever we're in the desert for this very reason.

Portable Phone Charger and Cable: If you're taking pictures with your phone, running out of batteries may result in missed opportunities.

Plastic Bag: We always carry a plastic bag when we hike, so we can do our part and help keep the trails and waterways clean. If you see some trash along the way, pick it up, drop it in the bag. When you get back to the trailhead, simply drop your bag in the recycling or trash bin and voila! You've helped keep the parks beautiful for everyone who visits.

TOP TIPS

Book Cliff Dwelling Tours in Advance:

Considering how popular cliff dwelling tours are, tickets often sell out the day they become available. Make sure to purchase tickets early in the morning the day they become available to ensure your preferred tour. Set yourself an alarm for 8:00 am MST, 14 days before your visit to secure tickets at [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov).

Stay Inside the Park: Most of the main park sites are over an hour drive from the park entrance. Staying inside the park keeps you from having to drive into and out of the park each day so you'll be able to see more of the park during your visit.

Bring Copies of Your Tour Ticket: Your ticket receipt acts as your tour ticket so make sure to bring along a paper copy or have a photo of the receipt available on your phone prior to arriving at the park. Cell service is limited in the park so don't count on being able to access your receipt at the tour meeting spot. Park rangers cannot access tour reservations.

Know the Park's Vehicle Restrictions:

Trailers and towed vehicles are not allowed beyond the Morefield Campground. If you're towing a camper, you may leave it in the parking area near the entrance station. Due to sharp curves and steepness, vehicles over 25 feet in length are not permitted on the Wetherill Mesa Road.

Hike First Thing in the Morning: Summer afternoon temperatures can get quite hot in Mesa Verde and there isn't a lot of shade on park trails. Plan to hike first thing in the morning to avoid the midday sun.

Photography: Try to take your photos without the sun directly behind or in front of you. Using shadows can make your cliff dwelling photos spectacular. Try and use the 1/3 2/3 rule. 1/3 sky - 2/3 land, or 2/3 sky - 1/3 land make more interesting pics.

Check for National Park Service Ranger Programs: Check what's on in the Visitor Center for the excellent ranger-led programs, hikes and talks.

4 EASY STEPS TO GETTING AN AUDIO TOUR FOR THE DRIVE



1.

DOWNLOAD THE FREE APP

Download the free app from the Apple App or Google Play Store.

2.

SIGN IN

Sign in with your existing Apple or Google Play account ID.

3.

BUY A TOUR, SAVE A BUNDLE

Buy direct from our website and save. Tours never expire, so you can buy now and travel anytime.

4.

HIT THE ROAD

Just one tap will get you touring, or if you're a planner, check out our trip guides and travel tips.

