



ROLLING THROUGH COLORADO AND UTAH

Rocky Mountains and Red Rocks on Rocky Mountaineer

By Katherine Rodeghier

As the luxury train Rocky Mountaineer departed Denver, Colorado, Amtrak's California Zephyr pulled alongside. Passengers on both trains smiled and waved, surprised to see each other in such close proximity.

"We have better windows," someone on the luxury train cried. "We have better food," came the chorus. Soon Amtrak's Silver Service train cars sped ahead on their way west, while Rocky Mountaineer would average just 35 mph in the two days it would travel 354 miles to Moab, Utah.

Speed isn't the point. Stellar service and spectacular views seen at more than a blur set Rocky Mountaineer apart from other sightseeing journeys by rail. It has earned multiple awards for its routes in Western Canada since its founding 31 years ago. Now Rocky Mountaineer repeats its formula for luxury rail travel on its first itinerary in the Southwest U.S. The Rockies to the Red Rocks route launched Aug. 15 and continues through Nov. 19 before resuming next spring.

No Sleeping Cars

Glass domed coaches provide panoramic views of steep canyons and Colorado River valleys while you relax in roomy, reclining seats. Upgrade from SilverLeaf to SilverLeaf Plus service and you also have access to a lounge car where hosts mix cocktails and serve premium alcoholic beverages. Poke your head from an open-air vestibule to view the train's sleek navy, white and gold cars rounding a curve.

Rocky Mountaineer does not have sleeping compartments.

ROCKY MOUNTAINEER



So as not to miss a moment of scenery, you disembark before nightfall in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, where accommodations have been arranged at nearby hotels. While still on the train, hosts distribute keys so you go directly to your room and find your luggage, which arrived separately by road, waiting. Such service allows ample time to explore the town known for its hot springs and Wild West history, have dinner and sleep in a real bed to rise rested and ready for an early morning departure.

Onboard Rocky Mountaineer, hosts serve meals restaurant style on navy napery at your seat. Breakfast might be a frittata or a waffle with local berries. Main course lunch could be a choice of coriander-crusted coho salmon or rosemary and Durango honey-roasted pork loin followed by a dessert from the Aspen Baking Company. A charcuterie and cheese plate has bites of Colorado-raised bison, elk and venison. Hosts serve alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks throughout the journey; rail fare includes all onboard food and beverages.

Scenery and Storytelling

An easy camaraderie forms among passengers and hosts as they tell stories and prepare you for get-your-camera-ready scenery. In the 13-mile-long Tunnel District, you can count off 28 of 30 tunnels still standing since construction in 1904. At the 6-mile-long Moffat Tunnel, you'll learn about the Denver banker who spent his fortune on a railroad cutting through the Continental Divide. You might spot whitewater rafters on the Colorado River as it surges through Gore Canyon. In Burns Canyon, red sandstone cliffs first appear and reach their rugged peak in Glenwood Canyon, largest on the Upper Colorado.

Along the way, hosts encourage passengers to call out when spotting wildlife, perhaps bighorn sheep, elk or mule deer. "Moose," someone cried and heads swiveled right as the dripping beast scrambled from a trackside stream.

After its overnight in Glenwood Springs, Rocky Mountaineer rolls past Palisade and Grand Junction, Colorado's wine country on the west range of the Rocky Mountains. Orchards dot the base of the Book Cliffs with 6,765-foot Mount Garfield, named for President James Garfield, at their highest point.

Red sandstone rises along the rail line through 25-mile-long Ruby Canyon. "Wait for it," said the host directing attention to soon-to-be-visible words painted on the canyon wall marking the Colorado/Utah state line.

Red rock country continues to draw oohs and aahs as the train skirts Arches National Park on its approach to Moab, the end of Rocky Mountaineer's westward journey. The discovery of uranium put this small desert town on the map in the 1950s but today tourism rules thanks to its position as the gateway to Utah's "Mighty 5" national parks: Arches, Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands, Capitol Reef, and Zion.

Pre- and Post-Experiences

The Rockies to the Red Rocks route can be started in either Denver or Moab and typically includes hotel stays in each city. The 2022 season begins April 17. Purchase packages from two to eight days with options to add stays in Las Vegas or Salt Lake City, self-drive explorations by rental car or guided motorcoach tours of national parks.

Health and Safety

According to current protocols, anyone exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms will not be allowed. You must wear face coverings on motorcoaches and the train except when eating and drinking. Seats and tray tables are sanitized daily and high-touch areas are disinfected throughout the day. Fresh air circulates through rail cars every 3.5 minutes. Bipolar ionizers in air ducts eliminate most bacteria and viruses. ■

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Holiday 2021

EVP & Chief Operating Officer: Jim McCallery | **Associate Editor:** Lynne Flew | **Senior Designers:** Amanda Johnson, Morgan Keith | **Graphic Designer:** Rachel Hawkins | **Editorial Inquirer:** Assoc. Editor: jeflowe@aaaonline.com 6600 AAA Drive, Charlotte, N.C. 28212 | **Postmaster:** Send address changes to Go Magazine Address Change, AAA Carolinas, PO Box 29800, Charlotte, N.C. 28229-8000. Periodicals postage paid, Charlotte and additional mailing offices. A publication of AAA Carolinas. Go Magazine (ISSN 1077-8089) FEA#2020020 is published five times a year by AAA Carolinas, 6600 AAA Drive, Charlotte, N.C. 28212. The subscription rate is \$1 annually (included in principal AAA Membership dues). Nonmember subscription rate is \$3 annually. To Advertise: Rickles and Company | Scott Rickles 770-331-9662, articles@artclike.net | Dan Tomkiewicz 770-640-1881, dantomkiewicz@artclike.net | **Privacy Policy:** Please visit AAA.com/Privacy for details.

GO MAGAZINE
VOLUME 101, NUMBER 6
FALL/DAY 2021

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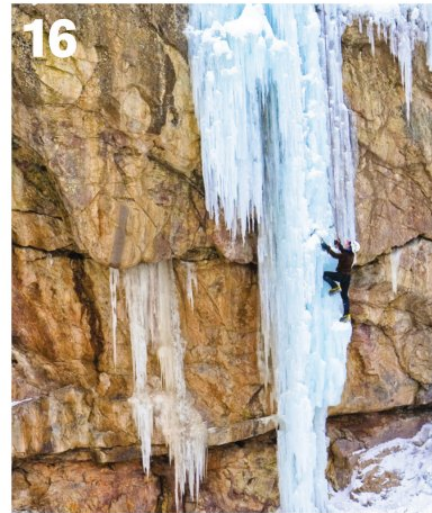
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