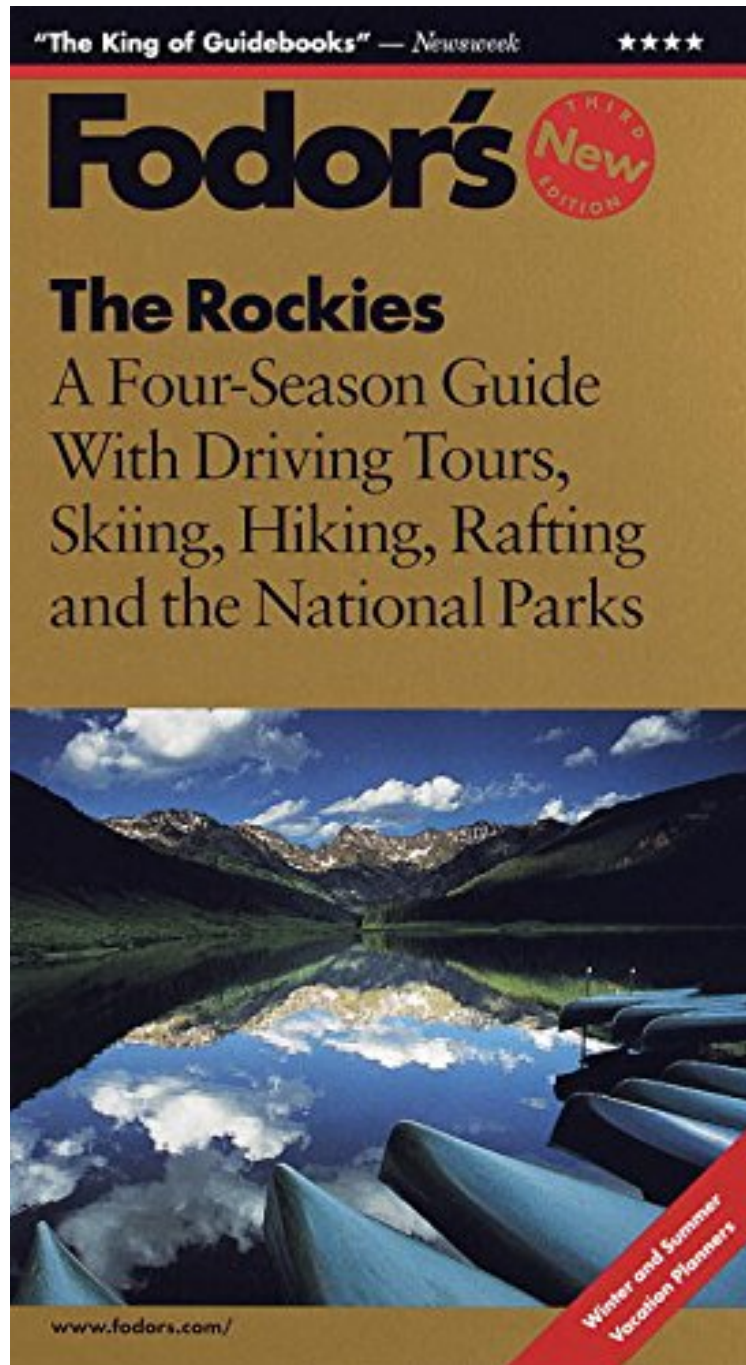


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Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Destination: The Rockies Pleasures and Pastimes Climbing and Mountaineering Climbing in its various forms -- mountaineering, rock climbing, ice climbing -- is a year-round sport in the Rockies. Many "fourteeners" (peaks over 14,000 feet), such as Long's Peak in Colorado, are a relatively easy (although long) ascent for the well-conditioned and well-prepared, but there are also dozens of highly technical climbs, such as the spires of El Dorado Canyon in Colorado, the City of Rocks in Idaho, and the jagged Grand Teton in Wyoming. In many areas, especially in the national parks, climbing permits are required, primarily for safety reasons. Rangers want to be sure that you have the experience and skill necessary to undertake the challenge at hand. Thus, it probably goes without saying that no one should attempt technical rock or mountain climbing without proper skills and equipment. Cycling Mountain biking, as a sport and cultural phenomenon, has a huge following in the Rockies and is more popular in the region than touring on paved roads. Moab, Utah, has become the mountain biker's mecca, with its fortuitous spreads of asphalt-smooth sandstone, or slickrock, formations. (The Slickrock Trail has both a practice and a main loop.) For an expedition-length ride, the 100-mi White Rim Trail near Moab offers spectacular views of Canyonlands National Park. In Colorado, Crested Butte vies with Moab as the mountain biking center of the Rockies; the trip over the demanding Pearl Pass is supposedly how the biking craze originated. As for road cycling, the San Juan Mountains loop is as beautiful a ride as there is in the country. Keep in mind that elevations in the Rockies are high, and that they exact their physical toll in an aerobic sport such as cycling. Not only should you be physically fit, but you should be prepared to settle for riding shorter distances than you might be capable of handling at lower elevations. Dude Ranches Dude ranches fall roughly into two categories: working ranches and guest ranches. Working ranches, in which guests participate in such activities as round-ups and cattle movements, sometimes require horsemanship experience. Guest ranches, with a wide range of activities in addition to horseback riding, rarely do. The slate of possible activities can vary widely from ranch to ranch. At most establishments, guests will be given some taste of the working-ranch experience with demonstrations of rodeo skills and the like. Fishing tends to be given second priority, and after that, almost anything goes. At a typical dude ranch, guests stay in log cabins and are served meals family-style in a lodge or ranch house. Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming have ranches on both ends of the spectrum. Hiking There are literally thousands of miles of hiking trails in the Rockies. The national parks have particularly well-marked and well-maintained trails, and admittance to all trails is free. In fact, hiking is sometimes the only way to get close to certain highlights on protected land; for example, the famed Mesa Arch rock formation in Canyonlands National Park, Utah, can be reached only on foot. Hiking in the south is usually best in spring, when water is plentiful and before the heat of summer sets in. Primarily for safety reasons, overnight hikers are usually expected to register with park or forest rangers. Also keep in mind that run-ins with bears and

mountain lions have become increasingly common, especially in northern regions. Horse-Pack Trips Horse-pack trips are a great way to visit the Rockies' backcountry, since horses can travel distances and carry supplies that would be impossible for hikers. Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness is the perfect example; as the largest stretch of roadless wilderness in an already spacious state, a horse-packing trip is almost the only way to travel the huge expanses. Although horsemanship isn't required for most trips, it is helpful, and even an experienced rider can expect to be a little sore for the first few days. June through August is the peak period for horse-packing trips; before signing up with an outfitter, inquire about the skills and experience they expect. National Parks Together, the Rocky Mountain states have a phenomenal amount of national-park land (not to mention the national monuments, national forests, state parks, etc.). National parks are open 365 days a year, and they offer a tantalizing range of facilities, including campgrounds, hiking trails, picnic areas, and more. Featured in Fodor's The Rockies are detailed descriptions of national parks in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming. Skiing Skiing has enormous clout in the Rockies. Downhill skiing is the most popular activity by a large margin, although cross-country skiing and snowboarding have loyal followings. In recent years, resorts have offered an ever-increasing range of special-interest programs, such as classes for women skiers, for skiers with disabilities, or for recreational racing. Rockies resorts may open their lifts as early as October and close as late as July; the ski season, however, usually runs from December until early April. Christmas through New Year's Day and the month of March tend to be the busiest periods for most ski areas. The slower months of January and February often yield good package deals, as do the early and late ends of the season. Cross-country skiing generally has a shorter season owing to lack of snow, but as avalanche risks lessen in April, backcountry skiers may take advantage of the sun-baked snow. Overall, ski resorts are each area's best source of information on everything from lodging to snow conditions. Water Sports Spring, when rivers are flushed with snowmelt, is the best time of year for white-water enthusiasts. April through June is the best time to run rivers in the south; June through August are the principal months on rivers farther north. In general (except on dammed rivers), the flow of water lessens as the season wears on. River runners seeking the maximum white-water thrills should come early; families and those who want a gentler float should come later. Also included in Fodor's The Rockies, sections on: dining, fishing, and shopping.