

PRIVATE GUIDED EXPERIENCES

# The Estes Park *Insider Playbook*

How to experience Rocky Mountain National Park  
without the stress, crowds, or guesswork

ESTES PARK CONCIERGE

## What You'll Learn Inside

How to experience Rocky Mountain National Park the right way — without the crowds, stress, or guesswork.



WILDLIFE  
VIEWING



LOCAL  
DINING



PACKING  
GUIDE



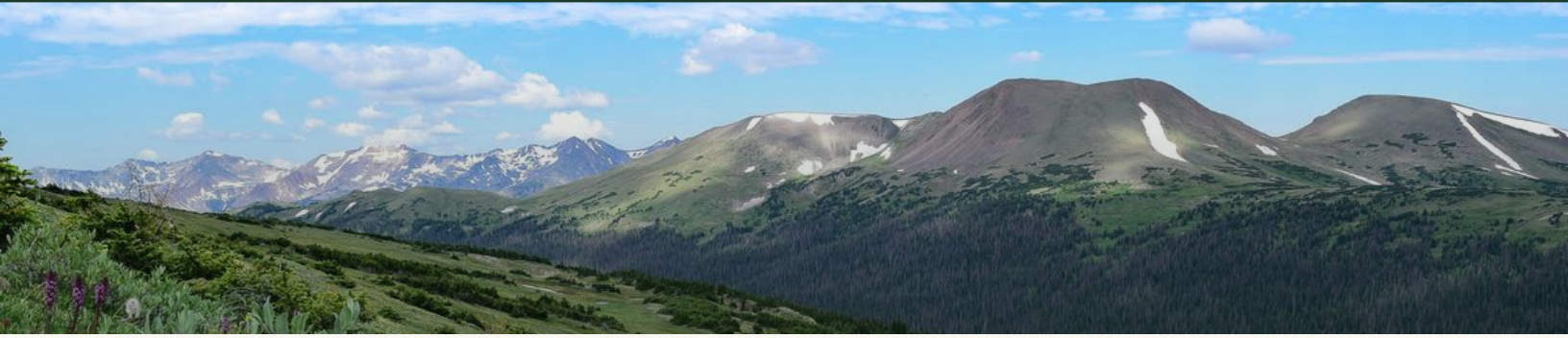
SEASONAL  
TIPS



PRIVATE  
TOURS

*Built from real experience — not Google searches.*

Plan your trip the right way → [esteparkconcierge.com](https://esteparkconcierge.com)



Rocky Mountain National Park — wildflowers in bloom along the alpine tundra

*"You can come all this way... and completely miss it.  
This guide will help you avoid that."*

— STEPHEN, LOCAL GUIDE & FOUNDER

## WELCOME

# Hey — I'm Stephen.

I'm a local guide here in Estes Park, and most mornings I'm inside Rocky Mountain National Park before sunrise — tracking wildlife, watching patterns, and helping visitors experience this place the right way.

Here's the truth most people don't realize: you can come all this way and completely miss it. **Wrong time. Wrong place. Too crowded.** This guide will help you avoid that.

## PARK ESSENTIALS

# What You *Actually* Need to Know

- ▶ **Timed-entry permits required May–October** — they sell out fast. Book early or book a private tour.
- ▶ **Private tours bypass timed-entry entirely** — no permits needed. We have commercial access.
- ▶ **Trail Ridge Road** — 12,183 ft. The highest continuous paved road in the U.S. Worth every mile.
- ▶ **Best wildlife times** — sunrise and sunset. Mid-day is when most visitors show up and see nothing.
- ▶ **Altitude** — Estes Park sits at 7,522 ft. Drink twice as much water as you think you need.

## INSIDER TIP

The **Bear Lake Corridor** is the most crowded part of the park. There are quieter locations with equal — or better — scenery. This is exactly what we help our guests navigate on private tours.



Bull elk during the September rut — one of North America's great wildlife spectacles

#### WILDLIFE VIEWING

## Wildlife Is About *Timing* — Not Luck

Most visitors show up mid-day and leave thinking there's nothing here. **They just missed it.** The animals are there — they're just not where the crowds are, and not at the hours most people are looking.

*"If you only remember one thing from this guide: the best wildlife viewing happens at sunrise and sunset. Everything else is secondary."*

#### BEST LOCATIONS

- ▶ **Horseshoe Park** — Most reliable elk viewing in the park
- ▶ **Moraine Park** — Wide-open valley, consistent herds
- ▶ **Kawuneeche Valley** — West side. Best place to see moose
- ▶ **Estes Park Town** — Elk regularly walk through downtown
- ▶ **Upper Beaver Meadows** — Quiet, consistent wildlife activity

#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- ▶ **Elk** — Year-round. September rut is extraordinary
- ▶ **Moose** — Rare and thrilling. West side of the park
- ▶ **Black Bear** — Dawn and dusk, berry season
- ▶ **Bighorn Sheep** — High elevation, rocky terrain
- ▶ **Marmots & Pikas** — Alpine tundra above treeline

#### INSIDER TIP

**Most sightings happen in under 15 minutes** — if you're in the right place. This is exactly what we help our guests experience on private tours. September is the single best month to visit.

- ▶ **Sunrise (5:30–8am)** — Peak activity. Animals are moving, light is golden
- ▶ **Evening (6–8pm)** — Second-best window. Elk return to meadows to graze
- ▶ **Mid-day (10am–4pm)** — Animals rest in shade. Most visitors arrive now
- ▶ **September** — Elk rut. Bulls bugling at dawn. The single best wildlife month
- ▶ **May–June** — Baby wildlife season. Calves, fawns, and cubs
- ▶ **Winter** — Elk and deer visible near town. No crowds, dramatic scenery

WHAT TO PACK

## Pack for *All Conditions*

This is where most visitors underestimate the park. You can be warm in town and freezing above treeline 30 minutes later.

### Layers

Fleece or light down jacket, even in July. Cold above 11,000 ft.

### Rain Jacket

Afternoon thunderstorms are common June–August. Pack one every day.

### Sunscreen & Sunglasses

UV exposure is significantly stronger at altitude. Don't skip this.

### Water — 2L Per Person

Dehydration at altitude sneaks up on you. Drink more than you think.

### Binoculars

This changes everything for wildlife viewing. A good pair transforms the experience.

### Sturdy Footwear

Even short walks involve uneven terrain. Leave the flip-flops behind.



Bull moose in the Kawuneeche Valley — west side of the park, where moose are most reliably spotted

#### WHERE TO EAT

## Local Picks — *Not Tourist Lists*

These are places we actually go — not tourist lists.

#### BREAKFAST & COFFEE

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Coffee on the Rocks | <i>Best morning stop in town</i>               |
| Cinnamon's          | <i>Worth the wait. Always a line.</i>          |
| Donut Haus          | <i>Hidden gem — look for the Sinclair sign</i> |

#### LUNCH & CASUAL

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Burger Stop              | <i>Local favorite, drive-through at Sinclair</i> |
| Smokin' Dave's BBQ       | <i>Always worth it</i>                           |
| Food Trucks @ The Barrel | <i>True Estes vibe, rotating vendors</i>         |

#### DINNER

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Bird & Jim           | <i>Best overall dining in Estes</i>              |
| Ember                | <i>Upscale — reservations required</i>           |
| Twin Owls Steakhouse | <i>Classic mountain feel, exceptional steaks</i> |
| Wapiti               | <i>New favorite — done right</i>                 |
| Avant Garde Aleworks | <i>Local ale house with food trucks</i>          |

#### INSIDER TIP

Make reservations **before you arrive** — especially in summer. Bird & Jim and Ember fill up weeks out.



Bear Lake — one of RMNP's most iconic views. Arrive before 8am to beat the crowds.

## WHEN TO VISIT

# Every Season Has a Story

Every season offers something different — but not every season is right for every traveler. Timing your trip correctly changes everything.

SEASON	HIGHLIGHTS	WATCH OUT FOR
<b>Spring</b> Apr–May	Waterfalls at peak flow, baby wildlife, fewer crowds	Snow at elevation, Trail Ridge Road may still be closed
<b>Summer</b> Jun–Aug	Wildflowers, full park access, long days	Peak crowds, timed-entry permits, afternoon thunderstorms
<b>Fall</b> Sep–Oct	Elk rut (September), golden aspens, fewer crowds	Some restaurants reduce hours in October
<b>Winter</b> Nov–Mar	Solitude, wildlife in snow, no timed-entry needed	Trail Ridge Road closed, some roads icy

### INSIDER TIP

**Our honest recommendation: September.** The elk rut is one of the most dramatic wildlife events in North America. Bugling echoes through the valleys at dawn. Most visitors have no idea it's happening — and those who witness it never forget it.

## GETTING THERE

- ▶ **Denver International Airport** — 90 minutes to Estes Park. Rent a car — you'll need it.
- ▶ **Rocky Mountain National Park** — 5 miles from downtown Estes Park
- ▶ **Parking in the park** — fills by 8am in summer. Arrive early or use the shuttle.

## IN TOWN

- ▶ **Estes Park Visitor Center** — free maps, ranger advice, trip planning
- ▶ **Cell service** — spotty inside the park. Download offline maps before you go.
- ▶ **Gas up in town** — no gas stations inside the park



Highlights of

# Trail Ridge Road

PRIVATE TOURS — ESTES PARK CONCIERGE

## Don't Leave Your Trip to *Chance*

Most visitors come hoping they'll see something incredible. Some do. Most don't. Not because it isn't here — **but because they didn't know where to be.**

We guide private tours daily — tracking wildlife, avoiding crowds, and positioning our guests for moments most visitors never witness. We're in the park before sunrise. We know where the elk are this morning. We know which trails are empty right now.

**NO PERMITS NEEDED**

Commercial access bypasses timed-entry entirely

**100% PRIVATE**

Just your group, your guide, and the park

**FULLY CUSTOMIZED**

Built around your group, pace, and interests

**LUXURY SUV**

Sunrise, half-day, and full-day options

*This is the difference between visiting the park... and actually experiencing it.*

BOOK YOUR PRIVATE EXPERIENCE

[estesparkconcierge.com](https://estesparkconcierge.com)

Call or text: (970) 724-4453 · [stephen@estesparkconcierge.com](mailto:stephen@estesparkconcierge.com)

PLAN MY TOUR

ESTES PARK CONCIERGE

*"Just your group, your guide, and the park."*