



Planning Your School Group Visit

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Sites to Visit Within the Park

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Subject to seasonal closing

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This information is to assist you and your school group in planning your upcoming visit to the park. We recommend that teachers visit the park in advance of their class visit, if possible, in order to plan group activities. Visits to cliff dwellings are strenuous. Elevation in the park ranges from 6,000 to just over 8,500 feet. Trails are frequently steep, narrow, uneven and often require climbing steps and ladders. Hiking or touring cliff dwellings is not recommended for persons with heart, joint, or respiratory ailments. Most of the cliff dwellings can be viewed from mesa top overlooks.

General Information on Mesa Verde

Educational Tours of Balcony House

The majority of the park is self-guided. However, subject to availability, Mesa Verde National Park offers a 90-minute, curriculum-based, ranger-guided tour of Balcony house for 3rd to 12th grade students, at no additional cost for educational groups. **Tours are offered in the spring, from mid-April to mid/late-May, and in the fall, from early September to mid-October.** If you are planning an educational visit to the park and would like more information about these tours, please contact the education coordinator at 970-529-5079.

Directions to Mesa Verde

Mesa Verde National Park is located in the high plateau country of southwestern Colorado. The park entrance is 9 miles east of Cortez and 36 miles west of Durango, off US Hwy 160. Roads within the park are scenic drives with sharp curves, steep grades, and reduced speeds. For your safety, do not park on any roadway. Allow at least one hour for the drive to Chapin Mesa and the cliff dwellings from the Park Entrance.

Entrance Fee

If you are part of a nonprofit educational institution on an educational field trip, you may qualify for a waiver of the park entrance fee. If you qualify, please complete and send a [Fee Waiver Application](#) to the Chief Ranger's Office at least one month prior to your visit.

Tour Fees

If a free program is not available, you may purchase tickets for a ranger-guided tour of Cliff Palace or Balcony House, depending on availability. Each tour lasts one hour and tickets must be obtained in person before the tour. Tours are offered from April to November. Tickets cost \$5.00 per person per tour. Tickets may be purchased in person at the Mesa Verde Visitor and Research Center or the Colorado Welcome Center in Cortez, up to two days before the tour. **(Please note that there will be no Cliff Palace tours in the spring of 2017. [Please see schedule.](#))**

If you would like a guide for your group as you tour the park, ARAMARK, the park concessionaire can provide this service for a fee. You may contact ARAMARK at (877) 264-4946 or (800) 449-2288.



Sites to Visit Within the Park

Mesa Verde Visitor and Research Center (*allow 20 - 30 minutes to purchase tour tickets if desired or allow at least 45 minutes to view exhibits and purchase tour tickets*)

The Mesa Verde Visitor and Research Center is open every day except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years Day. Visitor Center displays help visitors plan their visit to the park and offer a glimpse into the richness of Ancestral Puebloan culture and daily life. Exhibits include four life-size dioramas and a variety of flat panel and interactive exhibits that help tell the story of Mesa Verde. The Mesa Verde Museum Association bookstore offers a wide variety of books, pins, patches, and postcards. Tickets for one-hour ranger-guided tours of Cliff Palace, Balcony House, and Long House may be purchased for \$5.00 per person, per tour. Restrooms are also available.

Mancos Overlook (*allow about 20 minutes*)

Mancos Overlook is located on the left, about 3 miles into the park, and offers a panoramic view of the Mancos Valley. This is a good area to discuss geography, map reading, etc., major landmarks including US Hwy 160, the town of Mancos, and the La Plata Mountains.

Morefield Village and Campground

The village is located on your right, four miles into the park, and is open late spring to late fall. Services available include showers, restrooms, laundry, groceries, gifts, and camping. When open, this is another good stop for a bathroom break as you are coming into the park. If you are planning to camp, group site reservations may be made in advance by calling [ARAMARK](#) at (877) 264-4946 or (800) 449-2288.

Knife Edge Trail (*2 miles round-trip, allow 1 to 1-1/2 hours*)

Located in the campground, the Knife Edge Trail was once part of the main park road. It is fairly flat and an easy walk, which offers a wonderful view of the Montezuma Valley. This trail is a good eco-hike opportunity, especially for those with time limitations and also because it is rarely, if ever crowded.

* Please note that two other trails in the campground, Prater Ridge and Point Lookout, are not recommended for groups of children due to safety concerns and the intense level of supervision that would be required to assure a safe hiking experience.

Montezuma Overlook (*allow about 20 minutes*)

Montezuma Overlook is located past Morefield Village, about 6 miles into the park, and offers a beautiful view of the Montezuma Valley. This overlook is a good place to discuss geology and geography.

Park Point (*allow about 30 minutes*)

At 8,572 feet, Park Point is the highest elevation in the park and offers an unobstructed 360 degree view of the area surrounding Mesa Verde. Sleeping Ute Mountain, the La Plata Mountains, Shiprock, and other

features surround Park Point. There is also a fire lookout, operated by a ranger during fire season. A short trail from the parking lot leads to the lookout and overlooks. Park Point is a good place to discuss fire ecology, geology and geography. Please note that due to the higher elevation, it is often windy and colder at Park Point than at other areas of the park. Park Point is located on the right, just past mile 10, and is subject to seasonal closing.

Cedar Tree Tower & Farming Terrace Trail (*allow about 10 to 15 minutes to see Cedar Tree and about 45 to 60 minutes to hike the trail*)

Cedar Tree Tower is a surface archeological site with a kiva. Just before the Cedar Tree Tower site is the trail head for the Farming Terrace Trail. This trail offers a short hike (1/2 mile round trip) to prehistoric farming terraces. This is also a good location for an eco-hike. Please note that parking is limited in this area and large buses will have difficulty maneuvering if other vehicles are present. Please do all loading/unloading at the tower/kiva site, not at the Farming Terrace trail head.

Far View Sites Complex (*allow 20 minutes to see a couple of sites and 45 to 60 minutes to see all*)

Far View is a collection of six surface sites joined together by a short trail. Far View is a good place to view pueblo architecture up close. Remains of towers, kivas, and a prehistoric reservoir may be seen at this location. Guidebooks for these sites are available on site as well as in the visitor center and the museum. Watch for Far View Ruins on your way out of the park. These sites are located four miles north (towards the park entrance) of the museum area. Please note that parking is limited in this area and large buses will have difficulty maneuvering if other vehicles are present.

Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum (*allow about 30 to 60 minutes to tour museum, allow another 30 minutes to see film*)

Here, you will find dioramas illustrating Ancestral Puebloan life. There are also many exhibits of prehistoric artifacts and other items related to the park. In addition to the exhibits, a twenty-five minute orientation film is shown on the hour and half-hour. This film offers an excellent overview of the history of Mesa Verde. Restrooms are located near the museum.

Spruce Tree House (*1/2 mile roundtrip, allow about 1 hour*) *Closed in 2018 but can be viewed from overlook.*

During fall and spring, Spruce Tree House will be open for self-guided tours from 9:00 to 5:00 pm. From Memorial Day to Labor Day, Spruce Tree House opens at 8:30 and closes at 6:30. Spruce Tree House is the park's best preserved cliff dwelling and is the only cliff dwelling available without a tour ticket and the only site in which one can go into a kiva. It is also the only cliff dwelling that is handicapped accessible. Access to Spruce Tree House is gained by walking a steep, paved trail that begins near the museum. In winter (early November through early March), park rangers lead three guided tours per day of Spruce Tree House, weather and trail conditions permitting. These tours are free of charge.

Petroglyph Point Trail (*2.4 miles, 1-1/2 to 3 hour hike*) and **Spruce Canyon Trail:** (*2.4 miles, 1-1/2 to 2 hour hike*)

Both trails are open most of the year, weather permitting in winter. Ask a ranger in the museum for trail conditions. Both trails are one-way loops that begin from the Spruce Tree House exit trail. Hikers must register at the trailhead. Guidebooks for the Petroglyph Trail are available at the trailhead and at the museum. The Petroglyph Trail is very rocky and sandy for the first half. At Petroglyph Point, midway on the trail, you will see a panel of petroglyphs, one of only a few in the park. After the petroglyphs, the trail continues on top of the mesa. The second half of the trail is easier than the first. Total change in elevation is 330 feet.

In contrast, Spruce Canyon Trail is steeper, with an elevation change of 560 feet. This trail offers a wonderful trip into Spruce Canyon and a chance to view the ecology of the canyon. This trail is fairly smooth until the last 1/3, where it become somewhat rocky.

* Hiking boots and water are highly recommended for both trails.

Mesa Top Loop Road (*6 mile drive, allow 1 to 1 1/2 hours*)

On this six-mile loop road, your group can observe several surface sites, and continue on to excellent views of cliff dwellings. Stops 1, 4, 6, 7 and 10 are recommended for school groups. Parking is very limited at stops 8 and 9. The Mesa Top Loop is part of Ruins Road, which is at the turnoff to the Museum Loop, 20 miles into the park.

Cliff Palace/Balcony House Road (*allow 30 minutes if not hiking Soda Canyon Overlook Trail or 1 hour if hiking the trail. Remember to add at least another hour for each ranger guided tour*)

This six-mile loop road leads to both Cliff Palace and Balcony House. If you are not going on a Cliff Palace tour, there is a good overlook off of the parking lot (There is also an excellent overlook of Cliff Palace from Sun Temple, which is stop #10 on the Mesa Top Loop). The **Soda Canyon Overlook Trail** (1.2 mile round-trip) offers a distant view of Balcony House and is located just past the Balcony House parking lot. The Cliff Palace/Balcony House Loop is off of the Mesa Top Loop Road. Make a left at the four-way intersection (20 miles into the park), and then make another left onto the Cliff Palace/Balcony House Loop Road.

Food, Gifts, Postcards, Books, T-shirts, etc.

- Mesa Verde Museum Association Bookstore in the Mesa Verde Visitor Center (*just before the park entrance station, open all year except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years Day*).
- Morefield Village (*4 miles into park, closed in winter*)
- Far View Terrace (*15 miles into park, closed in winter*)
- Spruce Tree Terrace (*20 miles into park, near museum, open all year except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years Day*).
- Mesa Verde Museum Association Bookstore (*20 miles into the park, in the museum, open all year except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years Day*).

Where to Eat Lunch

A large and scenic picnic area is located on the right shortly after turning onto the museum loop on Chapin Mesa, 20 miles into the park. There are over 30 picnic tables in this area. **Caution: Please keep a close watch on students at picnic sites near the canyon's edge. There are some steep drop offs here.**

You may also purchase lunch at Far View Terrace (15 miles into the park) or Spruce Tree Terrace (near the museum). Far View Terrace is better for large groups, but is open on a seasonal basis.

Restrooms

Open all year:

- Mesa Verde Visitor and Research Center (*just before the park entrance station, only closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years Day*)
- Entrance Station (*pit toilet*)
- Montezuma Overlook (*pit toilet*)
- Museum Loop (*20 miles into park, across street from museum*)
- Stop 5, Mesa Top Loop (*may be portable in winter, with no water*)

Subject to seasonal closing:

- Cliff Palace (*pit toilets, on Cliff Palace Loop*)
- Balcony House (*pit toilets, on Cliff Palace Loop*)
- Morefield Village (*good for large groups, has sinks, 4 miles into park*)
- Park Point (*pit toilet, 10 miles into park*)
- Far View Terrace (*15 miles into the park, has sinks*)
- Far View Sites (*portable, 16 miles into the park*)
- Picnic Area (*portable, 20 miles into park on museum loop*)
- Sun Temple (*portable, Mesa Top Loop*)



What Students Should Bring

- A small backpack
- Bag lunch with drink, no glass
- Plastic water bottle
- Comfortable clothes and closed toe shoes
- Socks and long pants to protect against scrapes
- Sunscreen and hat
- Notebook or sketchbook
- Pen or pencil
- Rain gear or jacket depending on the weather
- Good attitude and interest in the Ancestral Puebloan culture

■ **Do not bring:** headsets, electronic games, or sports equipment



Safety Considerations

- Have groups stay with chaperones and use the buddy system. We recommend one adult per every eight to ten children. No student should ever be left alone on a field trip.
- Use sunscreen, wear a hat, drink plenty of water and remember to eat. Hot, arid weather conditions zap energy and can lead to dehydration, so drink lots of water.
- Do not climb trees, buildings, archeological sites, rocks or cliffs.
- Do not disturb wildlife. Observe quietly.
- Immediately report any accidents or injuries to a park ranger. Have trained park staff treat any injuries promptly.
- No running or horseplay
- Do not throw rocks, sticks or other objects
- Stay on established trails. Walking off trails can lead to extensive resource damage.