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How to choose the best rafting adventure in Colorado

Whether you want gnarly whitewater or a soothing family float, there's a trip for you



Provided by Three Rivers Resort

A family enjoys a rafting trip on the Taylor River with Three Rivers Resort.
(Provided by Three Rivers Resort)

By **MINDY SINK** | Special to The Denver Post

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In Colorado there are multiple options for a summer whitewater splash. You can make it a long day trip, stay at affiliated lodging for a cushy overnight, get GoPro video of your thrills, chill out on a float trip, get a geology lesson from a private guide, pack a sleeping bag for an overnight along the river and more. Here are a few suggestions for planning a summer river trip.



Joshua Berman, Special to The Denver Post

Members of an OARS rafting trip through Cataract Canyon stop to make camp on a multiday trip down the Colorado River in July 2021. (Joshua Berman, Special to The Denver Post)

Stay overnight

Don't drive for hours just to spend a few hours on the water — make a weekend of it. Some outfitters can meet all of your needs offering tents, cabins and other accommodations. Echo Canyon River Expeditions near Cañon City, for example, has a variety of options. Basic glamping tent? Check. Luxury glamping tent with air conditioner? Check. Cabin with vaulted ceiling, indoor-outdoor fireplace, kitchen and shower? Check. Getting up early for your rafting trip is easy when you're a 30-second drive from the gathering spot.



Three Rivers Resort in Almont has lodge-style rooms, rustic cabins and larger vacation homes close to the Taylor River where the rafting trips take place. Make sure to note housekeeping and marijuana use policies when booking. Rancho del Rio near Bond lets you camp close to the Colorado River, stay in a nearby cabin or rent a bunkhouse for up to six people. Lawson Adventure Park & Resort in Dumont has yurts and cabins for rent. You've got plenty of options.



Jason Fulton, provided by Arkansas Valley Adventures

AVA's Granite via ferrata near Buena Vista is built above the Arkansas River. You can raft and climb in one day. (Jason Fulton, provided by Arkansas Valley Adventures)

Rafting and more!

Consider maxing out your adrenaline rush with a rafting and zipline package, floating to dinner at a local restaurant, going from rafting to the local rails, or other activities. [Echo Canyon River Expeditions](#) has partnered with local businesses to offer "raft &" packages such as Royal Gorge Raft & Zipline, Raft-n-Rail and Raft & ATV. [Three Rivers Resort](#) offers "Float n' Dine" which includes a scenic float trip on the Gunnison River to Garlic Mike's Restaurant.



[Arkansas Valley Adventures](#) has an extensive menu of combo activities to choose from, including rafting, rock climbing and ziplining. One option packed with Colorado action offers an afternoon rafting Clear Creek or Browns Canyon and then heading to a via ferrata route. [American Adventure Expeditions](#) has raft/hot springs and raft/horse riding packages that feature a ride in Browns Canyon near Buena Vista.



Echo Canyon River Expeditions

A multigenerational group of rafters is all smiles as they float down a gentle stretch of river. Echo Canyon River Expeditions offers photos and video from GoPro cameras mounted on the front of rafts. Some companies also offer photos of rafting trips taken by shore-based photographers – usually at large rapids. (Provided by Echo Canyon River Expeditions)

Float on

Not everyone is hip to Class IV-V rapids and potential swims in icy snowmelt. A float trip with mild Class I-II rapids could be plenty of adventure for families with young children. These trips are great later in the season when runoff is lower and the water is less bumpy. [Echo Canyon River Expeditions](#) has a float trip designed for visitors age 4 and older through Bighorn Sheep Canyon (yes, you may see sheep). [Arkansas Valley Adventures](#) has full-day float trips on the Upper Colorado River for rafters age 5 and older. [Three Rivers Resort](#) has a





The smiles of a multigenerational group of rafters are captured on a raft-mounted GoPro camera during an Echo Canyon River Expeditions trip on one of Colorado's more gentle stretches of river. (Provided by Echo Canyon River Expeditions)

Get a video or photo

It's complicated: Your hands are gripping a paddle and your eyes are focused on the whitewater in front of you. How are you going to snap that Instagram-worthy photo of your wild ride?

It's become pretty standard on commercial rafting trips to have a photographer on the riverbank to snap your expression as you hit the biggest rapid, but it's not a given. So ask about photos when booking your trip.

[Echo Canyon River Expeditions](#) has GoPro cameras mounted on every raft to capture your awesome and possibly hilarious reactions to the rapids on video. You can select a photo and video package as a souvenir of this quintessential Colorado experience. There is also a photographer stationed at the biggest rapid.





Andy Cross, The Denver Post

An OARS Rafting expedition heads down the Yampa River at the start of a five-day trip near Deerlodge Park in the Dinosaur National Monument on May 24, 2019. (Andy Cross, The Denver Post)

Tailor your ride

You don't have to go rafting with a group of strangers. You'll pay more, but you can book a guide for your next rafting trip. [Whitewater Rafting in Glenwood Springs](#) has private raft trips for up to eight people with Class II-IV rapids on the Colorado and Roaring Fork rivers. You can even opt for a catered lunch with beer or wine. [Arkansas River Tours](#) out of Cotopaxi offers half-day, full-day, and two-day private raft trips for beginner to intermediate rafters (at least age 4 or 35 pounds). [Colorado River Center](#), affiliated with Rancho del Rio near Bond, rents inflatable kayaks and rafts (along with gear such as helmets, paddles, PFDs) so it's just you and the water — it doesn't get more private than that!





Cheeto, a guide with Echo Canyon River Expeditions, rigs a GoPro camera to the front of a raft and then tests it before setting out on the river with a group of rafters. (Provided by Echo Canyon River Expeditions)

Trip tips

Yes, you should tip your guide unless asked not to do so by the company. This is a widely-accepted practice and appreciated by the guides who have safely navigated you to/from and down the river. Many rafting companies ask you to watch safety videos ahead of your trip and sign waivers online. Pay attention to the video and in-person safety demonstration to determine if everyone in your group is ready for the experience. Snacks or lunch may be included in your trip. Ask ahead of time. If not, take your own and research options for nearby meals.

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Mindy Sink

Tip

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