

Del Norte, Colorado. Photo Credit: Stephen Martin, OutThere Colorado.

Getaway Guide: Spend a Weekend in Del Norte, Colorado



BY Spencer McKee
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Known as the “gateway to the San Juan Mountains”, Del Norte is a hidden Colorado gem that’s just waiting to be found. What the small town lacks in population (less than 2,000 people call Del Norte home), it makes up for in space for outdoor recreation. Its less-trafficked nature has allowed the town to retain its true old-school Colorado feel, where everyone is a secret badass and anyone will happily point you in the direction of a trail you’ll love.

Day 1 – Mountain Bike Extravaganza

One thing that attracts visitors to Del Norte is the accessible trail system. Whether you explore on two wheels or your own two feet, you're sure to have a great time. If you're used to hiking and biking on the Front Range, expect to be shocked at how few people you'll see on the recently cut trails.



Mountain biking on the Pronghorn Loop in Del Norte, Colorado. Photo Credit: Stephen Martin, OutThere Colorado.

If you're gearing up for a long day in the sun, you can't skip the most important meal of the day...breakfast. Check out the newly opened [Mystic Biscuit](#), known for their griddlecakes and green chili doused biscuit sandwiches.

For gear rentals, trail intel, and a bike tune-up before you head out on the trails, head to [Kristi Mountain Sports](#). This local outdoor retailer has been in the area since 1969, and they have all the gear you need for your outdoor adventures, including sandboards if you're headed to Great Sand Dunes National Park.

The Pronghorn Loop is the perfect trail for a morning ride.

At roughly nine miles in length, this single-track trail is definitely a work-out but should leave you with enough energy for a longer, more technical ride after a late lunch. Note that while this trail is generally ranked as an intermediate route, it does include several tricky rock features. It's definitely not for someone that hasn't been on a mountain bike before, but the downhills are worth the extra effort it might take to walk your bike.



Mountain biking on Del Norte's Pronghorn Loop. Photo Credit: Stephen Martin.

The Stone Quarry Trail System is another great set of trails. These trails are a little tamer in difficulty, but can be tricky to navigate. This area is also great for trail running. To prevent getting lost, make sure you're using an app like Strava on your ride.



Photo Credit: Spencer McKee

Trail runners tackle some of the trails in the Stone Quarry area.

After either of these rides, you'll definitely have worked up an appetite. One place that seems to be a Del Norte favorite is [Three Barrel Brewing](#). Not only do they have craft beer, they've also got a creative selection of Italian food, including brick oven pizza. One popular pie is "the House," topped with olive oil, pesto, feta, artichoke hearts, Greek Kalamata olives, house-roasted chicken, sun-dried tomatoes, and cheese.

Eat your fill, but don't overstuff yourself. The afternoon will be just as active as the morning. If you're ready to hop back on trail with your bike or hiking boots, head to either the iconic [Penitente Canyon](#) for more flowy rocks or to Middle Frisco Creek Trail for a steep climb and descent. Both routes are draining so prepare with plenty of water and build in time for rest stops.

If you choose Penitente Canyon, you'll be in for technical single track with more ups and downs than both the Stone Quarry area or the Pronghorn Loop. Don't let this dissuade you though, there's plenty of flow. Penitente Canyon is part of a 7,500-acre swath of Bureau of Land Management protected land. It's a popular place for hiking and rock-climbing, with more than 300 sport climbing routes and hiking. Even if you don't end up biking here, you should stop by and check it out before you leave town.

The Middle Frisco Creek Trail, a six-mile out-and-back uphill, will be the tougher option for an afternoon ride. The trail gains more than 2,500 feet with very few breaks. You'll be rewarded, however, with awesome views along the way and six miles of downhill on the back end. One thing that makes this trail unique is that it's one of the few true alpine trails in the area. Just make sure you bring plenty of water. For an easier ascent, take the West Frisco ATV trail to where it meets the Middle Frisco Trail. Descend on the Middle Frisco Trail.

Spend a much-needed night of rest at [The Windsor Hotel](#) in Del Norte. The hotel was built in 1874 but recently renovated. Today, it's bar is one of the hottest spots in town.



Del Norte, Colorado. Photo Credit: Stephen Martin,

[OutThere Colorado](#).

Day 2 – Explore the Area

Set a more leisurely pace for the second day of your weekend trip. We recommend starting off your day at another favorite breakfast spot, [Boogie's](#). You'll be able to stuff your face for a relatively low price.

The first half of your day today will be spent at the turn of the 20th century at the Summitville Ghost Town. Even though this decaying town is situated at over 11,000 feet, it remains one of the most well-preserved ghost towns in the Centennial State. Expect amazing views and elk, eagle, and deer sightings on your way to Summitville. Keep in mind that the approach is a long, bumpy mountain road, so weather can prevent access during certain times of the year. You might prefer to have a 4WD vehicle, but it's not totally necessary.