

Colorado Weather Comparison

One of the most most frequently asked questions I get is.... what is the weather like in Colorado? And let me tell you - its not that easy to answer! Colorado weather varies GREATLY depending on the month, yearly cycles, and regions. I've lived in Colorado for over 25 years (born, raised and educated in humid Iowa), and each year seems to be different. We can be wearing T-shirts in February and snow gear in September, Memorial Weekend! Seriously. This past year (2020) we had a 60-degree drop in temperature over Memorial Weekend that threatened our shrubs, bushes and trees. Our weather can be fickle day-by-day, and at the same time there are trends in our weather. So, I created this guide to help you figure out Colorado weather by month, year-round, average temperatures, and regions.



December 2020 near Beaver Creek, Colorado | Photo by Rebecca Marie Photography ©

BREAKDOWN BY REGION: SPLIT THE STATE IN HALF

Okay - this is for our destination couples who have never visited Colorado. If you are a native or "local", you can skip this section. One thing that doesn't change is the region in which you want to get married. Explanation here. If you look at the map of Colorado it looks like a rectangle. Draw a line down the middle, top to bottom. Denver and east are the plains. Once you start driving west of Denver, you'll

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approach the foothills and keep climbing to our mountain regions - the Western half of the state. When climbing in elevations, temperatures drop and the climate changes. So, if you want the dramatic mountain destinations, you'll be looking a weather that is different from he wether along the "Front Range".

In following sections, you'll see a chart where I've dived the weather between **The Front Range**, Denver/Boulder/Colorado Springs and Fort Collins and the **Mountains**, areas west of of the middle of the state. Custom Weddings of Colorado (I and our vendors) are mainly based long the "Front Range". However, we mostly service weddings in the **Central Mountain** regions (west of that vertical line you drew). These will be your destinations like Estes Park, Breckenridge, Vail, Crested Butte, Beaver Creek, Grand Lake, Keystone. Very rarely will we do wedding in the Grand Junction (the "Western" area) and Telluride ("Southwestern" area), so they are not included in the Colorado weather climate guide. Though, expect temperatures to be much warmer around Grand Junction that the rest of the state.

If you've never been to Colorado and plan to fly into Denver International Airport (DIA), please know that DIA is really located on our Eastern Plains - about 40 minutes EAST of Denver. So, no - DIA is actually not very close to downtown Denver. We occasionally get the request to have a scenic mountain ceremony site no more than 1-hour from DIA. Well, that will put you in the Foothills, like Golden, Colorado which is my *favorite* place along the Front Range, but not necessarily the dramatic scenic mouton views the most our couples desire. Please do know though, that Colorado services MANY tourists and we are accustomed to the world traveler. From DIA, if you hop onto Interstate-70 and drive West, in an hour and



September elopement style ceremony Vail Mountain, Colorado | Photo by Andrea Flanagan Photography ©

half, you'll be deep in the mountains. Another 30 minutes and you'll be in world class ski territory at such resorts like Breckenridge and Vail. It seems like a long drive, but it's *EASY*, and *beautiful*. The drive to Estes Park (Rocky Mountain National Park) is just as gorgeous as you'll travel through famous Boulder, Colorado with refined-natural dining, and shopping - or, skip all that and hike in the Flatirons to stretch the legs before the 45-minute journey to Estes from Boulder.

As an aside, most our couples will host weddings within a 2-hour drive from DIA: Estes Park, Grand Lake, Winter Park, Breckenridge, Keystone, Vail, Beaver Creek, Denver, Boulder, Colorado Springs. These are all destinations within the 2-hour drive time. Destinations like Crested Butte, Steamboat Springs, Buena Vista (my favorite) and Aspen are all a little more of a trek (about 3 to 4 hours give or take).

THINGS TO KNOW

The Sun. Please keep this in mind, from a girl born/bred in Iowa. The **temperatures** in Colorado are **NOT** like what you may feel in other regions of the country. Iowa blizzards are way more brutal than anything I've experienced in Colorado. We may get the snowfall and describe it using with different identifiers (powder, pow-pow, cement, slush, crust, dump, cardboard, freshies, black ice, crystal, grains, pellets), but it is nothing like icing cold temperatures of a good-old Midwestern blizzard. With low humidity and thinner air which makes the use more powerful, that means you are at risk of UV exposure, year round no matter the temperatures. So, if the sun is even ¼ way exposed and its 20°, **WEAR SUNSCREEN NO MATTER WHAT** - trust me on this!

The Humidity. Colorado has a dry temperature. When you take away the humidity, it feels warmer. And, Colorado experiences over 300 days of sunshine a year, wither they greens of humidity. So, when the sun is out and the skies are blue, the solar energy from the sun can make it FEEL like it is 10° warmer than humid regions. We often plan weddings during the smack-dab coldest months of the year, and if the sun it out - it *feels* warm. That isn't to say, it can get down-right cold. But, luckily, those days are few and far between. To prepare for those bitter cold days, we bring feet/hand warmers, and furs for the women - we know how to keep warm!

The Elevation. Since most of our clients are traveling from out-of-state, we often get inquiries for the spring, which are ideal temperature months in Southern state before the summer heat envelopes our Southern states. Though we can have gorgeous spring days along the Front Range, the Mountains are just coming off (or are still **in**) ski season. The elevation makes a HUGE difference in what you'll experience.

April and May can be "mud season". The ski resorts are just closing after the first week of April. And, if we happen to have heavy snowfall that season, they'll stay open as long as they can. Arapahoe Basin Ski Area often stays open the longest, into May and even June. Yes, you'll ski in pants and no shirt (remember my sunscreen comment - wear it!), but the point being - you won't be hiking in dry trails. Bring your fleece, waterproof boots and gators if you plan to do any hiking. Don't let that dissuade you - April and May are the BEST months to find deals on lodging. You might find that since it is off-season, restaurants may close for a month, but there are plenty, especially in our resort communities, that will remain open.

Accessibility. Though we have scouted many sites, there are some that won't be accessible until the snow melts. This is because not all our roads in Colorado are maintained. So, in an average season when we receive an average of 17 FEET of snow in the mountain areas every season, it has to melt off in April, May and even in to June. However, there are many sites along the Front Range that don't receive the snow fall amounts that the mountains experience, and they also have great views or unique landscapes (i.e. Garden of the Gods). There are some mountain passes and roads that will also be closed in the winter, like Trail Ridge Road, Independence Pass, and Guanella Pass. If you want that rogue mountain spot that is only accessible by an unmaintained road, it is best to hold off wedding plans until late June, but make sure you do it by mid-September.

Clothing. No matter the season, always plan for layers. We have ever changing temperature shifts that can feel extreme, even in a 10-hour period. If the sun is shining, you'll get hot. But, once you hit the shade, you'll need to do a long sleeve - and yes, this is even in summertime. The days can be bright, but once the sun goes down, it can be chilly. So, always plan layers: base layer, long sleeve and a jacket/coat. Shorts are fine, but you'll want the jeans or leggings at night sitting by the campfire. Vests are highly popular too for that in-between stage. Warm socks, glove and a hat can make all the difference.

WHAT IS THE BEST MONTH IN COLORADO TO GET MARRIED?

I often get asked that question. And, it's an easy, simple answer. July. Okay, that is my *opinion*, but here is why I think that. First, it's my birth month. But seriously, the days are warm, it is peak wildflower season, the trails are accessible (hiking, mountain biking), and it is likely *before* wildfire season (usually August) hits. Of course, we've had years in which the snowfall was so deep the ski season prior we were STILL



July 2020 near Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado | Photo by Andrea Flanagan Photography ©

melting and the trails were snow-packed, and we've had dry seasons in which wildfires were at their peak in June. And, we've had many seasons with NO wildfires - so don't let that worry you either.

Yes, you'll have people tell you about our afternoon thunderstorms. Here's what happens: they roll in quickly, and they roll out quickly. They are SCATTERED. Literally, we've done weddings in Summit County where there was a thunderstorm in Breckenridge, and the sun was shining 9 miles away in Frisco. It is something to prepare for, but also know that a 15-minute delay should't consume your worry. It can happen anytime between 1pm and 7pm. Its not worth the strategizing, over-analyzing, over-thinking - flexibility and trust will win out on this situation. So, honestly, pick a date, pick a time and trust. July is my choice for best month to get married in Colorado.

WHAT IS THE MOST POPULAR MONTH IN COLORADO FOR WEDDINGS?


That is an easy answer - September. This is when the threat of those pesky thunderstorms *usually* dissipate, the days are warm, and the nights are cool. The aspen trees start changing into their brilliant yellow (yes, unlike the East Coast with their mix of colors, ours is just yellow) at higher elevations the 2nd to 3rd week of September and the lower elevations the end of September. The mountain biking and hiking is still full-on accessible. I've literally been on a trails in an aspen groves and it felt like the world was glowing amongst the golden aspens. But here's another the secret - the first weeks of October are also golden! At higher elevations the aspens will still be 1/2 on their trees, at lower elevations mostly still hanging on. And, the lodging rates tend to drop slightly from their September peak.

WHEN CAN WE FIND DEALS IN COLORADO?

As you may have gathered, there are peak season and off-seasons in Colorado. This is mainly referring to our RESORT (mountain) communities. Areas along the Front Range are busy year-round due to their commerce. Though in mountain communities, for lodging, you'll find deals in late April and May ("mud" season), and then again in late October and early November (pre-ski-season). Our peak, highest season in the resort communities will be over the holidays - Christmas/Winter break, MLK weekend, Presidents weekend and March. But again, this doesn't necessarily ring true to Denver/Boulder and the Front Range. So, if you are looking for the "sweet spot" in which you'll find a chance of amiable weather, great lodging deals, I would look at:

- **Fall/Winter:** the week prior to Thanksgiving, or the first couple weeks of December
- **Spring/Summer:** the first week of April (if you still want skiing), or or the first week of June

If you plan to travel during the holidays, spring break or the summertime from June to September, lodging rates will be at their highest. Expect to encounter minimum night stay requirements, especially if you are traveling to resort communities and/or plan to stay in a vacation home.

Month	Front Range: Denver, Boulder, Colorado Springs, Fort Collins	Mountain Regions: Estes Park, Winter Park, Grand Lake, Breckenridge, Keystone, Vail, Beaver Creek, Crested Butte, Steamboat Springs, Aspen
January	<p>The sunlight is short at the beginning of the month and gradually increases by a 1/2 hour towards the end of the months. The Front Range is usually dry and doesn't get the <i>amount</i> of snowfall that the mountains receive. But, there can be the frequent light snowfall. And, if the sun stays under, the ice can stick around in the shady areas. But likely, the sun will come out and melt everything. So, yes, we are still hiking the Front Range trails, even in January.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 17-45° • Pros: Can be off-season along the Front Range - plenty of lodging availability • Cons: Short daylight hours. It is also booking season in the industry, so many vendors will be running tight schedules. • Activities: hiking, biking, sledding (if there is snow), outdoor ice skating rings. 	<p>January tends to be the coldest month and if the snow hasn't fallen, it can....in FEET! Snowfalls can average 40" during the month. We like a good old DUMP in January to create those ski bases. Grand Lake and Estes Park experience less skier visits because the closest downhill ski areas are around a 40-minute (give or take) drive. So, you can find some lodging deals in those communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: -8° to 22° • Pros: better lodging rates than over the holidays or spring break (March) • Cons: the MLK weekend can have peak rates. • Activities: downhill skiing and snowboarding, x-country skiing, ice fishing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, tubing, ice skating rinks.
 <p><i>January micro wedding inn Beaver Creek, Colorado Photo by Andrea Flanagan Photography ©</i></p>		

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<p>February</p>	<p>February is a lot like January. Though, towards the end of the month when the daylight hours start to get longer, it can feel warmer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 18-50° • Pros: it is generally low tourism, so lodging deals can be found (avoid Valentines when it is buy) • Cons: The landscape can see brown, though you can brighten it up with flowers. It can be unpredictable, so prepare for bright sunlight or a snow storm. • Activities: hiking, biking, sledding (if there is snow), outdoor ice skating rings. 	<p>The mountain ares will continue to receive snow falls and it can be cold, especially at night.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 11-31° • Pros: Great skiing conditions! Pretty white landscapes. • Cons: Presidents weekend is heavily visited in ski resort communities • Activities: downhill skiing and snowboarding, x-country skiing, ice fishing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, tubing, ice skating rinks.
<p>March</p>	<p>With daylight hours increasing, March can progressively start to warm by the end of the month. The end of March can brings hints of spring with trees starting to bud, but evening freezing temperatures will hold many of them until April.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 30-60° • Pros: warmer days, more daylight hours • Cons: there's always a chance for a freak winter storm (usually we get warning though). The landscape can still look a little dull before spring truly comes. • Activities: hiking, biking.... And the start of hanging out on patios in the warmer afternoons. 	<p>Spring break! This is peak ski season (besides the holidays) when lots of travelers are visiting. If skiing on a sunny day, you may want to take that jacket off! However, we've had some of the HEAVIEST (wet) snow storms in March.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 17-38° • Pros: Warmer skiing, warm days • Cons: Spring break, higher visits (busy) • Activities: downhill skiing and snowboarding, x-country skiing, ice fishing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, tubing, ice skating rinks.
<p>April</p>	<p>Though there are warmer temperatures, is it common that snow will make its appearance and grace our tulips with white "cement". Though, it doesn't last long and by the next day its melted!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 31-60° • Pros: temperatures continue to warm and tourism is still relatively low. Most hiking trails at lower elevations will be accessible. • Cons: evenings can still be chilly. There is always risk for moisture, including snow (but that usually melts quickly) • Activities: walking tours and museums, spas, shoppings, hiking and biking, 	<p>The ski resorts typically close after the first week of April. If you are wanting to ski on a bargain, that is the week! If we happen to have a heavy snowfall that season, the resorts may decide to remain open longer. By the end of the month, some of the more exposed trails start to dry out. But, don't anticipate going on a huge hike just yet.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 22-43° • Pros: off-season rates for lodging • Cons: most trails, especially those at high elevations will not be read for hiking. By mid-month, some restaurants may start to close for a month. • Activities: shopping, spas, hot springs, Sasquatch festival in Estes Park


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April wedding in Summit County, Colorado | Photo by Jeanine Thurston Photography ©

<p>May</p>	<p>There will be some rain in May resulting in the “greening” of the Front Range. The landscapes start to transition from wintery brown to green as the ground soaks up moisture (what limited amounts there are).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 41-75° • Pros: It feels like spring! Flowers are emerging and the landscape turns green. Farmers markets start to open. • Cons: There are many graduations and festivals. Make sure to check even calendars as loading and roadways can become busy. • Activities: hiking, biking, botanic gardens, the Bolder-Boulder 10K 	<p>May is “mud season” in the mountains. It will still be cool, and the snow will be melting. Some trails at lower-high elevations will be accessible, while high elevation (anything above 9,000) will likely still be snow-packed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 29-51° • Pros: Memorial Weekend starts to transition out of off-season into early-summer season. Great lodging rates. • Cons: though the sun can warm the days, the nights will still be chilly. Some restaurants may be closed. • Activities: limited hiking at elevations lower than 8,000 feet, at the end of May white water rafting.
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June	<p>June can be the start of afternoon thunderstorm seasons. And though it sound threatening, they move in, and move out quickly. And, since we don't get much moisture, we need those thunderstorms!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 50-87° • Pros: Peonies, festival, its full on wedding season! Warm evenings, fire pits. • Cons: can be peak season for tourism. Weekend traffic is heavy on Friday afternoons; this will last through September. • Activities: hiking, biking, camping, fishing, music festivals 	<p>Early June can still feel cool, but by the end of the month, it has warmed up and will be officially summer season! Tourism visits will increase as the month progresses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 42-73° • Pros: Warmer days. Most mountain roadways and passes will be open, like Trail Ridge Road, Independence Pass and Guanella Pass • Cons: still some snow when we are ready for summer! It can be chilly at high elevations. Weekend traffic - its heavy going up to the mountains on Fridays/Saturdays and returning from the mountains on Sundays. This will last through September. • Activities: hiking, biking, camping (it may be damp), adrenaline-rush white water rafting, fishing
July	<p>Hot days, lots of sunshine!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 78-94° • Pros: evening concerts at Red Rocks, Fourth of July with fireworks over Grand Lake, water parks. Baseball games at Coors Field. • Cons: its Colorado's hottest month, sunburns • Activities: hiking, biking, camping, fishing, boating, kayaking, concerts at Red Rocks 	<p>Blue skies and wildflowers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 46-69° • Pros: Wildflowers across the landscape • Cons: lots of visits to Rocky Mountain National Park. Traffic, especially on Fridays and Saturdays, from the Front Range to mountain communities can be horrendous • Activities: hiking, biking, camping (it may be damp), white water rafting, fishing
August	<p>Though the average temperatures seem to be lower than July, August can feel hot especially if we enter drought from not enough rain in June and July. Rain can be scarce. So, if we haven't had much, this is when wildfires can pop-up.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 54-90° • Pros: Evenings can still be warm for those outdoor dining spots. Pre-season Broncos games! • Cons: College students head back to Boulder and Fort Collins mid-August - check the move-in schedules. • Activities: hiking, biking, camping, fishing, boating, kayaking 	<p>Like July, the days are warm and the nights are cool. Later in the month the average temperatures start to drop with hints of fall around the corner. The afternoon thunderstorms start to dissipate, making it the prime month for camping (if there aren't fire bans!).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 68-79° • Pros: Kids go back to school in mid-August, so the last two weeks/ends tend to not be as hectic. • Cons: During first couple weekends of August, families are taking their last summer trips, so the mountain resort communities can be busy • Activities: whitewater rafting turns into float trips as the snow melt is done.

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September	<p>The temperatures drop from the heat of the summer and its unlikely to have an afternoon thunderstorm. On rare years, we'll have the first snowfall, even along the Front Range. But, it doesn't stick around long and will likely be melted the next day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 45-80° • Pros: Taste of Colorado festival • Cons: Labor Day weekend traffic! • Activities: hiking, biking, camping, fishing, boating, kayaking 	<p>Gold in the mountains - that is, the gold glowing from yellow aspens. If there is precipitation, it will turn the mountain peaks white. You'll be comfortable in your jeans, t-shirt and flip-flops during the day, bring out the fleece and slippers at night.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 37-61° • Pros: Yellow aspens! • Cons: Labor Day weekend traffic! • Activities: hiking, biking, camping, fishing.
 <p>September 2020 near Georgetown, Colorado Photo by Kathryn Kim Photography ©</p>		

Month	Front Range: Denver, Boulder, Colorado Springs, Fort Collins	Mountain Regions: Estes Park, Winter Park, Grand Lake, Breckenridge, Keystone, Vail, Beaver Creek, Crested Butte, Steamboat Springs, Aspen
October	<p>The days can be a lot like September - warm during the day and cool at night. Be sure to have a warm fleece with you at all times because the temperatures can change quickly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 34-65° • Pros: tourism tapers off which means lodging rates are better than popular summer months • Cons: expect some snow at some point during the month (likely toward the end). Farmers markets will either start to close or be closed. • Activities: Broncos games, shopping, museums, Denver Botanic Gardens, hiking/ biking trails are still accessible (likely through the month) 	<p>At the beginning of the month, we hold on to remnants of September. During the first week, there is usually still a few golden leaves on the aspen trees. A week later, they'll likely be gone. By the end of the month, we'll experience a couple of major snow falls that will contribute to building a base. The ski resorts will start "blowing snow" (making fake snow) so that they can either open by the end of the month, or at the beginning of November.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 27-48 Average snow fall is 10" • Pros: Off-season with great rates. Elk bugling (elk rut) in Rocky Mountain National Park. • Cons: a transition unpredictable month • Activities: hiking, biking, fishing, hunting, and possibly even hitting a ski run or two.
November	<p>The daylight hours start to shorten, which drops temperatures. Though the Front Range doesn't see the snowfall like the mountain regions, it can still feel like winter is approaching. And, because of that, we can still enjoy activities like hiking and biking - just with some more clothes. The landscape will look a little brown, unless we have some snowfall which is sure to happen at some point during the month.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 23-55° Average snow fall is 5" • Pros: holiday lighting ceremonies • Cons: outdoor dining will be chilly (if its even open!) • Activities: brewery tours, hiking <u>with</u> micro spikes 	<p>November starts to look a lot like winter in the mountain elevations. Though the snowfall may not be deep at this point, there will be dustings at lower elevations and the peaks will be white. More exposed trails and paths will still have gravel peaking through the white, but if there is a snow event, you'll need your snow boots. And no - cowboy boots with their slick soles won't provide you any warmth or grip. Make sure they are lined boots with grippy rubber soles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 23-55° Average snow fall is 20" • Pros: off season rates with some downhill skiing available • Cons: not all runs will be open at the downhill ski resorts
	 <p>November 2019 near Keystone, Colorado Photo by Rebecca Marie Photography ©</p>	 <p>November 2018 in Summit County, Colorado Photo by Andrea Flanagan Photography ©</p>

Month	Front Range: Denver, Boulder, Colorado Springs, Fort Collins	Mountain Regions: Estes Park, Winter Park, Grand Lake, Breckenridge, Keystone, Vail, Beaver Creek, Crested Butte, Steamboat Springs, Aspen
<p>December</p>	<p>We will hike year round along the Front Range. But, because it will have snowed at some point by December, bring your micro spikes as the snow turns to ice patches in the shady spots. From experience, a slight slip can break a wrist and give you a concussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: 16-45° • Pros: the Kris Kringle market in Denver, Zoo lights and the holiday lights at Denver Botanic Gardens • Cons: It can seem a bare landscape, but if visiting areas where there are red rocks (Garden of the Gods, Roxborough, Boulder) it can be spectacular. • Activities: hiking <u>with</u> your micro spikes! 	<p>The days are short and the nights are cold. But, that makes good weather for bundling up in some furs for an outdoor ceremony, and then celebrate by a crackling fire. The ski resorts are all open by December, with most of the runs open If we have gotten adequate snowfall to create a solid base. If not, some runs and the backcountry will remain closed. The holiday season is PEAK tourist season and during late December, you'll experience the highest lodging rates of the year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Temps: -4-27° Average snow fall is 20" • Pros: snowy landscapes, more ski runs open • Cons: weekend traffic kicks up, snow storms • Activities: downhill skiing, snowshoeing, ice fishing, shopping, tubing
	 <p><i>December 2020 near Beaver Creek, Colorado Photo by Rebecca Marie Photography ©</i></p>	 <p><i>December 2019 in Summit County, Colorado Photo by Fototails Photography, Jeanine Thurston ©</i></p>

I hope this guide helps you with choosing the right wedding date for you. If you have any experiences, comments, ideas, suggestions or questions, please feel free to connect with me!

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