

Colorado Stargazing -- Crestone

10 Ways to Experience the Dark Skies and Sunny Days of Crestone

One of our most diverse stops along the Colorado Dark Sky tour is Crestone, a beautiful, secluded village that lies at the western base of the craggy 14,000-foot tall Sangre de Cristo (or “blood of Christ”) mountain range in the San Luis Valley of southern Colorado. In the high altitude (8,000 feet) and dry air of Crestone, the dark night sky is clear, quiet, and stunning. Take a night hike across 300-foot tall sand dunes at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Reserve just south of town, watch thousands of free-tailed bats explode out of a mine shaft, or take a telescope tour of the night sky at our local Colorado College branch or the Baca National Wildlife Refuge, just west of town.

When you’re not being awed by the grandeur of the night skies above Crestone, there’s plenty of daytime activities to keep you occupied. From tours of our local spiritual centers to a UFO viewing tower, there’s lots of ways in Crestone to make memories for everyone!

1. TAKE A HIKE

Miles of hiking trails start at the edge of town and head straight up into the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness. Each canyon, each creek, each mountain is an adventure. Breathe the crisp, clean air, relax your mind, and marvel at the quiet as you hike to Willow Lake or through the cool shade along North Crestone Creek. Some of the best mountaineering and most challenging fourteeners in the state are found in our remote and rugged mountains.

(photo of Willow Lake from Enchanted Forest Bed and Breakfast)



<https://trails.colorado.gov/>

<http://www.sangres.com/colorado/wilderness/sangredecristowilderness.htm#.XfkwXGRKiUk>



2. EXPERIENCE THE MYSTICAL

Do some soul searching and experience the surprising international spiritual mecca of Crestone. Over 15 spiritual groups with unbroken lineages, from a Catholic hermitage to ashrams to Buddhist monasteries, give visitors an amazing array of spiritual experiences. Experience a full moon fire ceremony at Haidakhandi Universal Ashram or marvel at the night sky views from the Tashi Gomang Buddhist stupa. Listen to Taiko drummers at Shumei International

Institute's open-air amphitheater. Visit many of our religious centers with a week-long inter-spiritual pilgrimage along the gorgeous Camino de Crestone or arrange for a shorter stay at one of our many retreat centers. Some of the most sacred mountains to Native Americans overlook our area, including Blanca Peak or White Shell Mountain as it is known to the Navajo. Come and experience the spiritual connections that local tribes have known for generations.

Most of the spiritual centers in the Crestone area are open to the public, but it's best to call ahead to confirm visiting expectations.

<http://www.manitou.org/foundation/spiritual-centers/>

3. CLIMB A ZIGGURAT

Climb the curving stairs up Crestone's 40-foot tall ziggurat for sweeping views of the Sangres and the San Luis Valley. Ziggurat is a word derived from an ancient Assyrian word ziffurantu, meaning light pinnacle. Crestone's ziggurat is a structure modeled on the temples of ancient Babylon and was commissioned by Najeed Halaby, father of Queen Noor of Jordan. Now open to the public, the ziggurat is just a short hike, and offers a stunning spot for reflection.

<https://crestoneeagle.com/ziggurat-climb-up-commune-with-the-divine/>

4. TOUR OUR HISTORIC ECO-FRIENDLY TOWN

Pick up a historic walking tour map at the Crestone Historical Museum and after checking out the museum's exhibits on old-time ranching, mining, schooling, and home life, amble through the tree-lined streets of downtown. Stop for some local craft beer at Crestone Brewing Company or a hand-tossed pizza at Mandela Pizza, or pop into some of our other local art galleries, restaurants, and gift shops. Explore the alternative eco-friendly architecture that Crestone is famous for during our annual Crestone Energy Fair held every August.

https://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g33378-Crestone_Colorado-Vacations.html

<https://crestoneenergyfair.org/>

5. RELAX AND TAKE THE WATERS

Take in our star-filled sky or bask in the majestic beauty of the Sangre de Cristo mountains while



soaking in the healing waters of one of three natural geothermal hot springs resorts within 45 minutes of Crestone. Relax your mind and body with nourishing mineral waters at Sand Dunes Pool, Joyful Journey, or Valley View hot springs, or go a little further afield to Cottonwood, Pagosa, or Ojo Caliente hot springs.

<http://sanddunespool.com/greenhouse/>

<http://joyfuljourneyhotsprings.com/>

<http://www.olt.org/vvhs>

6. SKI SAND DUNES

Who needs snow! Take a spring or fall shush down one of the 200-foot tall sand dunes at Great Sand Dunes National Park, just a 45-minute drive south of Crestone. Sand sleds or skis can be rented at numerous locations around the park. After shaking the sand off your boots, take in the rest of this incredible park that hosts the tallest dunes in North America. Join a ranger-led walk on the dunes under a bright full moon for another unforgettable experience!

<https://www.nps.gov/grsa/planyourvisit/sandboardingsandsledding.htm>

7. FEED ALLIGATORS

Alligators are one of the last things you'd expect to find at 7,500 feet in the mountains of Colorado! But at the Colorado Gators Reptile Park just south of Crestone you can meet, feed, pet, and hold alligators or other reptiles, including huge African tortoises. The Park, which rescues reptiles and educates the public about proper reptile ownership, began in 1977 as a fish farm created from geothermal well water. In 1987, the first alligators were brought in as 'garbage disposals' for dead fish and now some of those original gators are 12 feet long!



<https://coloradogators.com/>

8. TAKE A CLASS

Study the stars or local geology and ecology at Colorado College's Center for Global Education and Field Study Crestone campus. The College offers 3 1/2-week long classes, with 4-day breaks to see the rest of what Crestone has to offer.

(<https://www.coloradocollege.edu/offices/globalandfieldstudy/fieldstudy/the-baca-grande/index.html>)

If you are looking for shorter learning opportunities, take in the ranger-led talks at Great Sand Dunes National Park, or telescope astronomy tours at the Orient Land Trust.



9. LIVE ON THE WILD SIDE AND GO BATTY

Join docents at the Orient Mine during summer evenings to witness an amazing wildlife spectacle as over 250,000 Brazilian free-tail bats exit the mine in one immense cloud to forage all night. The Orient Mine is just a 40-minute drive north of Crestone and is a designated Colorado Natural Area and Colorado Division of Wildlife Watchable Wildlife site. (*photo courtesy of Orient Land Trust*) (<http://www.olt.org/news/item/566-bats-return-2019>)

Just next door to Crestone, you can tour the Baca National Wildlife Refuge and enjoy more phenomenal wildlife viewing and bird watching, study its educational wildlife displays, and take scheduled guided tours. Check the Refuge's website for the latest information. (<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/baca/>)

In March, thousands of sandhill cranes pass through the Valley on their annual spring migration. Experience one of the largest and oldest animal migrations in North America and see over 20,000 cranes and hundreds of ducks and geese against a backdrop of mountain scenery during the Monte Vista Crane Festival. (<https://mvcranefest.org/>)

10. LOOK FOR UFOs

Try to spot unidentified flying objects at the UFO Watchtower just southwest of Crestone. The Watchtower is dedicated to the observation of UFOs and all things unexplained from the stars. The San Luis Valley has a long history of unexplained phenomena in the night skies and Judy Messoline, the Watchtower owner, will regale you with tales of UFO experiences in the Valley.

<http://www.ufowatchtower.com/>

