

Grand Junction

GRAND JUNCTION , 246 miles west of Denver on I-70, is often neglected as a destination, even though its immediate environs abound with outdoor opportunities, and within a fifty-mile stretch you can trace the transition from fertile valley to full-blown desert. Another town that sprang into life in the 1880s with the arrival of the railroads, it now makes its living primarily through the oil and gas industries. Although initial impressions are bound to be unfavorable - an unsightly sprawl of factory units and sales yards lines the I-70 Business Loop - downtown is much better, with leafy boulevards encircling a small, tree-lined, historic and retail district.

Although the Colorado section of Dinosaur National Monument is ninety miles north of Grand Junction along Hwy-139, the town itself holds the superb Dinosaur Valley Museum , 362 Main St (summer daily 9am-5pm; rest of year Tues-Sat 10am-4.30pm; \$4.50), which houses a collection of reconstructed reptiles and giant bones excavated in the region.

But the main local attraction around town is the splendid local network of trails, many through parched, rugged and spectacular desert country. Especially enticing for hikers is the remarkable scenery of the Colorado National Monument , while mountain bikers flock to the smooth rolling single-track trails around Fruita . Both activities are possible year-round, and are in fact generally more pleasant in the winter months. Trail information and rental bikes (front suspension \$28 per day) are to be had from Over the Edge Sports, 202 E Aspen Ave (tel 970/858-7220), a block east of the roundabout at the center of Fruita or from several shops in Grand Junction including Bicycle Outfitters, 248 Ute Ave (tel 970/245-2699). The area is also a rock climber's dream; Summit Canyon Mountaineering, 549 Main St (tel 970/243-2847), can supply you with the necessary information and gear. Amtrak stops at Second Street and Pitkin Avenue. Greyhound buses serve Durango, Denver and Salt Lake City from 230 S Fifth St. The helpful visitor center is at 740 Horizon Drive (tel 970/244-1480 or 1-800/962-2547,). Budget motels on the interstate - such as the Best Western Horizon Inn , 754 Horizon Drive (tel 970/245-1410; \$50-75), with pool, spa, and continental breakfast - offer great rates; alternatives include the downtown HI-Grand Junction in the historic Hotel Melrose , 337 Colorado Ave (tel 970/242-9636 or 1-800/430-4555), where bunks cost \$12 and private rooms start at around \$30. Daniel's Motel , at 333 North Ave, is basic but cheap and clean, and convenient to downtown (tel 970/243-1084; \$35-50).

You can eat casually and inexpensively at the busy Blue Moon Bar & Grill , 120 N Seventh St (tel 970/242-5406), which serves sandwiches, salads and bar food, or at The Rockslide Brew Pub , 401 Main Grand Junction (tel 970/245-2111), offering filling portions of tasty bar food (burgers \$7; Cobb salad \$8) alongside a good variety of local beers.