



Living and Serving in Southern Colorado! Important stuff! Please read!

When you think of serving in AmeriCorps, you may imagine the type of work you will be doing, the kids you'll be working with, the professional and personal growth you'll experience, etc. We'd like to encourage you to also put some thought into the place you will be living for a year. Oftentimes when people think of Colorado, they think of Denver, ski resorts, and little mountain towns nestled at the base of snow-capped peaks. South Central Colorado is quite different from the rest of the state, and AAI operates in its two largest valleys: the San Luis Valley and the Arkansas River Valley.

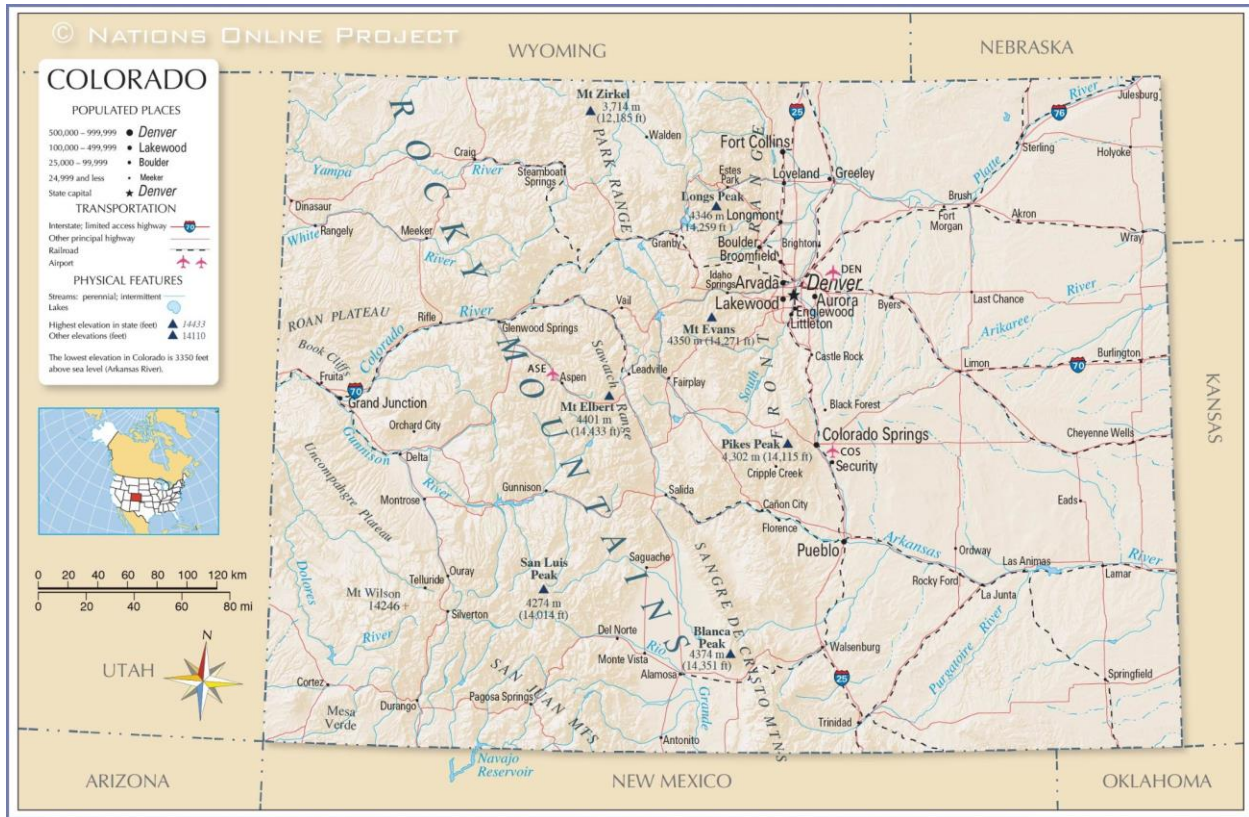


The San Luis Valley (SLV) is a wide-open alpine valley, 65 miles wide by 100 miles long, with its lowest points around 7,500 feet above sea level. Compare that to the “Mile High City” of Denver at 5,280 feet! And while there are certainly many snow-capped peaks to climb, the region also contains flat expanses of agricultural fields, canyons, rivers, and pine forests.

The SLV economy is primarily based on agriculture, so there are lots of farms and ranches. The important part to understand is that the SLV is truly very rural. In other parts of the country, that might mean living next to rolling farmland with some horses, while still being able to drive to the nearest metropolitan area in 30 minutes or so. This is NOT what rural Colorado is like. For example, there is no public transportation here, there are no Target stores (gasp!), and nightlife is very limited.

Also, in order to reach urban amenities, you will need to drive two to four hours, and you will generally need to drive over one or more mountain passes to get there—tricky during the

winter months. This means you may not always be able to go where you'd like due to weather restrictions.



The towns of Saguache, Alamosa, and Monte Vista are found in the south-central portion of the map above (at fewer than 300 people, Creede is too tiny to appear on this map, but it is located northwest of the towns of Del Norte and South Fork). These are the four towns in the SLV served by AAI.

The Arkansas River Valley (so named because the Arkansas River begins here) is just north of the SLV. AAI serves the towns of Salida, Poncha Springs (a small town just west of Salida), and Cañon City. At just under 18,000 people, Cañon City is the largest in the area we serve.



The economies in these towns are based more on tourism and outdoor recreation, including biking, rafting, and hiking. Additionally, the area has employment opportunities in federal correctional facilities, with three located in the Lower Arkansas Valley near Cañon City and one in the Upper Arkansas Valley near Buena Vista.

While some communities have limited access to resources and economic opportunities, others have a more established infrastructure. The South-Central Colorado region includes a wide range of communities, with some having a strong Hispanic heritage, particularly in Alamosa

and Monte Vista, while others have less variation in cultural backgrounds. Towns also differ in political and social dynamics, with some leaning more traditionally conservative and other more varied in perspective.

The population in this region includes farmers, ranchers, seasonal farm workers, retired executives, outdoor enthusiasts, and government employees working for agencies such as the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. These groups often live in neighboring communities with overlapping connections.



We say all this because we want to be very clear and upfront about what it might feel like to live in these towns if you come from a more cosmopolitan area. Some AmeriCorps members describe serving here as moving to a different country—with all the excitement and challenges that might bring!

As an organization, we are committed to welcoming AmeriCorps members from a variety of backgrounds and experiences to serve in this region. We believe that young people benefit from learning alongside mentors who bring different perspectives and life experiences, helping them both connect with familiar role models and expand their understanding of the world.

We also prioritize the well-being of our members. If any situation in the community feels uncomfortable or concerning, we will fully support you. While most experiences are positive, challenges can arise. We value open and honest conversations and encourage you to reach out if you'd like to discuss this further.

Even so, this can be a beautiful, magical, place to live. Living a rural life is a chance to slow down, connect with people and the environment more deeply, gaze at the spectacular array of

stars, engage in or learn a new outdoor activity, and learn about a very unique part of our country.



To learn more about our communities, feel free to check out some of the links below:

Alamosa

Wikipedia article on [Alamosa](#)
[Alamosa School District](#)
[Alamosa Town Website](#)
[Boys and Girls Club of the San Luis Valley](#)

Creede

Wikipedia article on [Creede](#)
[Creede Parks and Rec](#)
[Creede Town Website](#)
Creede [Public Health Website](#)

Cañon City

Wikipedia article on [Cañon City](#)
[Cañon City Schools](#)
[Cañon City Official Website](#)

Monte Vista

Wikipedia article on [Monte Vista](#)
[Monte Vista School District](#)
[City of Monte Vista Website](#)

Poncha Springs

Wikipedia article on [Poncha Springs](#)
[Poncha Springs Town Website](#)
[The Schoolhouse at Poncha Springs](#)

Saguache

Wikipedia article on [Saguache](#)
[Saguache County Website](#)
[Mountain Valley School District](#)

Salida

Wikipedia article on [Salida](#)
[Salida School District](#)
[City of Salida Website](#)