Chaffee County

Area Resource Guide

Your complete guide to living in Buena Vista, Salida, and the surrounding high country.

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Welcome to Chaffee County

Welcome to one of Colorado's most remarkable places to live. Chaffee County sits in the heart of the Arkansas River Valley, surrounded by 14,000-foot peaks and bisected by some of the best whitewater in North America. Whether you've just purchased a home in Buena Vista or Salida, or you're planning your move, this guide will help you get settled, connected, and confident in your new community.

With over $125 million in closed local transactions and nearly a decade of living here, I created this guide to share the practical knowledge I wish I'd had when I moved to Buena Vista in 2016. I hope it serves you well.

— Clark Hess, Managing Broker, Worth Clark Realty

High Altitude Living (8,000 – 10,000 ft)

Chaffee County sits at elevations ranging from about 7,900 ft in Salida to over 9,000 ft in parts of Buena Vista. If you're coming from lower elevation, your body will need time to adjust. Most people feel the effects for the first 1–2 weeks; give yourself grace and follow these tips:

- **Hydrate aggressively:** Drink at least 3–4 liters of water per day during your first weeks. Altitude significantly increases fluid loss through respiration.
- **Limit alcohol initially:** Alcohol hits harder at altitude and accelerates dehydration. Ease in during your first week.
- **Sun protection is critical:** You're getting 30–40% more UV exposure here than at sea level. Wear SPF 30+ daily, even on cloudy days.
- **Sleep may be disrupted:** Mild insomnia and vivid dreams are normal during acclimatization. They typically resolve within 7–10 days.
- **Headaches & fatigue:** Common in the first few days. Ibuprofen helps. If symptoms are severe or persist beyond 3–4 days, see a doctor.
- **Physical activity:** Take it easy for the first week. Your aerobic capacity will feel noticeably lower until your body adapts.
- **Nosebleeds:** The dry, thin air can cause nosebleeds. A saline nasal spray and humidifier can help.

Note: Pets, infants, and elderly individuals may need extra monitoring during acclimatization. Contact your healthcare provider with any concerns.

Medical Resources

Access to healthcare is a top concern for newcomers. Here's what's available in and around Chaffee County:

- **Salida Hospital (Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center):** Located in Salida, this is the primary full-service hospital for the region. It offers emergency services, surgery, obstetrics, and imaging. Address: 1000 Rush Dr, Salida, CO 81201 · Phone: (719) 539-6661
- **Collegiate Peaks Hospital:** A critical access hospital in Buena Vista. Handles emergency care, lab, imaging, and primary care. Address: 1 Collegiate Dr, Buena Vista, CO 81211 · Phone: (719) 395-8131
- **Salida Family Medicine & Urgent Care:** Walk-in urgent care for non-emergency needs. A great first stop for common illnesses and minor injuries.
- **Chaffee County Public Health:** Provides immunizations, family planning, and community health programs. Phone: (719) 539-4510
- **Dental Care:** Several dental practices serve the Buena Vista and Salida areas. Ask neighbors for recommendations as wait times for new patients vary.
- **Nearest major trauma centers:** UCHealth in Colorado Springs (~2 hrs) and Denver Health (~2.5 hrs) for specialized care.

Tip: Establish care with a local primary care physician soon after arriving — new patient slots fill quickly in rural Colorado.

Pharmacy & Mental Health

- **Walgreens (Salida):** The closest major pharmacy chain. Many locals also use Safeway Pharmacy in Salida.
- **Mental Health Resources:** Chaffee County has active mental health and substance abuse programs through Mind Springs Health. Phone: (719) 539-1671
- **Telehealth:** Given the rural setting, telehealth services are widely used and often covered by insurance. Excellent for specialist follow-ups.

Emergency Services

- **Emergency:** Call 911 for all life-threatening emergencies.
- **Chaffee County Sheriff:** (719) 539-2596
- **Buena Vista Police:** (719) 395-8643
- **Salida Police Department:** (719) 539-2596
- **Mountain rescue:** Chaffee County Search & Rescue is volunteer-based and highly skilled. If you're recreating in the backcountry, let someone know your plans.

Outdoor Recreation

If you moved here for the outdoors, you made the right call. Chaffee County consistently ranks among the top outdoor recreation destinations in Colorado. Here's a snapshot:

- **Arkansas River Whitewater:** The Arkansas is one of the most commercially rafted rivers in the US. Brown's Canyon (Gold Medal fishery) and Numbers (expert class) are local favorites. Browns Canyon National Monument is right in your backyard.
- **14ers:** Chaffee County is home to more 14,000-foot peaks than any other county in Colorado, including Mt. Princeton, Mt. Yale, Mt. Harvard, Mt. Columbia, and Mt. Oxford — the Harvard Range.
- **Monarch Mountain Ski Resort:** A hidden gem ~20 miles west of Salida. Known for deep powder, no crowds, and affordable lift tickets. Great for families.
- **Hiking & Trails:** The Colorado Trail runs through the county. Hike to Ptarmigan Lake, Agnes Vaille Falls, or the Cottonwood Lake area for stunning alpine scenery close to BV.
- **Mountain Biking:** The Midland Trail and surrounding singletrack make Salida and BV increasingly popular biking destinations.
- **Hot Springs:** Mt. Princeton Hot Springs Resort (Nathrop) and Salida Hot Springs Aquatic Center offer natural geothermal soaking — a local tradition.
- **Fishing:** Brown's Canyon is a Gold Medal fishing designation. The Arkansas River corridor offers excellent trout fishing year-round.
- **OHV / ATV Riding:** Extensive forest roads and OHV trails in the surrounding San Isabel National Forest.
- **Rock Climbing:** Penitente Canyon (near La Garita) and various granite walls around the county.

Parks & Open Space

- **Buena Vista River Park:** A beloved in-town park along the Arkansas with fishing access, play areas, and river views.
- **Riverside Park (Salida):** Central Salida gathering spot with the hot springs pool, sports fields, and river access.
- **San Isabel National Forest:** Surrounds the entire county — millions of acres of public land for camping, hunting, and exploring.

Dining & Entertainment

The Buena Vista and Salida restaurant scenes punch well above their weight. Both towns have a thriving local food and arts culture.

- **Eddyline Brewery (BV & Salida):** A local institution. Great craft beer, river views, and casual food. Always a good call.
- **Deerhammer Distilling (BV):** Award-winning small-batch whiskey. Tasting room in downtown Buena Vista.
- **Moonlight Pizza (BV):** Local favorite for wood-fired pizza and a laid-back atmosphere.
- **Benson's Tavern (BV):** Classic dive bar with surprisingly good food and great locals energy.
- **Amica's (Salida):** Italian in downtown Salida. One of the top-rated restaurants on the Western Slope.
- **Fritz (Salida):** Farm-to-table with a sophisticated menu. A special-occasion spot.
- **Salida Arts Scene:** Salida has one of the highest concentrations of working artists per capita in Colorado. The ArtWalk and Salida Circus are community highlights.
- **Live Music:** Riverside Park in Salida hosts free summer concerts. The Victoria Hotel & Tavern is a music venue locals love.
- **Farmers Markets:** Both BV and Salida have seasonal Saturday markets. Great for produce, local crafts, and community.

Schools & Education

- **Buena Vista School District:** Serves BV and surrounding areas. Includes Avery Parsons Elementary, Buena Vista Middle School, and Buena Vista High School.
- **Salida School District R-32-J:** Serves Salida. Known for strong athletics and community involvement.
- **Colorado Mountain College (Salida):** Two-year college offering associates degrees, workforce training, and continuing education.
- **Private & Charter Options:** Limited locally; many families homeschool or use online charter programs through the state.

Utilities & Essential Services

- **Electric:** Sangre de Cristo Electric Association – (719) 395-2412
- **Natural Gas:** Atmos Energy – (888) 286-6700
- **Water/Sewer:** Buena Vista Sanitation District – (719) 395-8751 · Salida City Utilities – (719) 530-6264
- **Trash & Recycling:** Several private haulers serve the county. Chaffee County Recycling Center in BV accepts most materials.
- **Internet:** CenturyLink (now Lumen) is the primary wired provider. Many rural areas rely on satellite (Starlink works very well here).
- **Post Office (BV):** 115 Linderman Ave, Buena Vista, CO 81211 · (719) 395-8505
- **DMV:** Chaffee County Clerk & Recorder handles vehicle registration. 104 Crestone Ave, Salida.

Ready to make Chaffee County home?

Whether you're buying, selling, or just exploring —
I'm here to help you every step of the way.

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