How to Spend Three Unforgettable Days Around Idaho Springs

Idaho Springs sits in a narrow canyon about 40 minutes west of Denver, surrounded by national forest and high-country trails. It is a compact town with a mining history, hot springs, and quick access to the Continental Divide. Three days here gives you enough time to settle in, explore a few different zones, and still leave wanting more. The key is to plan each day around a different direction or activity so you see variety without driving too far.

Start by getting oriented. Idaho Springs RV Campground puts you close to the main road through town, which makes it easy to reach the interstate and the forest roads that lead to trailheads. If you are staying in an RV or tent, having a basecamp near Rocky Mountain trails lets you head out early and come back to a hot shower and reliable Wi-Fi in the evening. That rhythm works well for a three-day trip because you can pack each day with hiking or sightseeing and still return to a comfortable spot to rest.

Day One: The Mount Evans Scenic Byway and Echo Lake

The first day should be a gentle introduction. Drive up Colorado 103 from Idaho Springs toward Echo Lake. This road climbs quickly through dense pine forest and opens into meadows with views of the surrounding peaks. Echo Lake itself is a small alpine lake with a short, easy trail around its perimeter. The walk takes about an hour and gives you a feel for the elevation without being strenuous.

From Echo Lake you can continue up the Mount Evans Scenic Byway, which is one of the highest paved roads in North America. The road is narrow and winding, so take it slowly. Watch for mountain goats and bighorn sheep near the summit. The summit of Mount Evans sits above 14,000 feet, and the views stretch for miles. Spend some time at the top, but do not stay too long if you feel lightheaded. The altitude affects everyone differently. Head back down in the late afternoon and stop at the pullouts for photos.



For dinner, Idaho Springs has several casual restaurants and brew pubs. You can walk from the campground into town in about ten minutes. Try to get a seat outside if the weather cooperates. The evening air cools quickly, so bring a jacket.

Day Two: The Sawtooth Ridge and Waterfall Hikes

On the second day aim for a longer hike with a rewarding destination. The area around the Sawtooth Ridge offers several trails that lead to waterfalls and high meadows. The Saint Mary’s Glacier trail is a popular choice. It starts at the end of a gravel road about six miles from Idaho Springs. The trail climbs steadily through a forested canyon and then opens into a basin with a small glacier and a waterfall. The total round trip is about four miles with moderate elevation gain. Bring plenty of water and snacks, and start early to avoid afternoon thunderstorms.

Another option is the hike to Silver Creek Falls. This trail follows a creek through a narrow gorge and ends at a broad, tiered waterfall. It is shorter than Saint Mary’s Glacier, about two miles round trip, but the trail is rocky and uneven in places. Watch your footing near the creek crossings. Both trails are well marked, but it is smart to carry a map or download the route on your phone. Cell service can be spotty in the canyon.

After the hike, drive back to town and visit the hot springs. There are a couple of commercial pools in Idaho Springs where you can soak tired muscles. The water is naturally heated and rich in minerals. An hour in the pool before dinner is a good way to wind down.

Day Three: The Continental Divide and Georgetown Loop

For your last day, head west on Interstate 70 toward the Continental Divide. The drive crosses the Eisenhower Tunnel and then descends into Summit County. You can stop at the Loveland Pass overlook for a panoramic view of the divide. The pass is a popular spot for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing in winter, but in summer it is a great place for a short walk along the ridge.





From there, continue to the town of Georgetown and ride the Georgetown Loop Railroad. The narrow-gauge train runs between Georgetown and Silver Plume, climbing steep grades and crossing a high trestle. The ride takes about an hour and gives you a sense of the mining history of the region. The train runs several times a day, so check the schedule when you arrive. If you prefer to stay on foot, there are hiking trails around the old mine sites near Silver Plume.

Return to Idaho Springs in the late afternoon. If you have energy left, take a short walk along the Clear Creek trail that runs through town. The path follows the creek for a couple of miles and passes under the highway bridges. It is a flat, easy walk that is good for stretching your legs before packing up.

Practical Tips for Your Stay

A few things will make the three days smoother. Elevation in Idaho Springs is about 7,500 feet, and most hikes climb higher. Drink extra water throughout the day, even if you do not feel thirsty. Altitude sickness can hit anyone, so take rest breaks and do not push yourself on the first day.

Weather in the Rockies changes fast. Afternoon thunderstorms are common from June through August. Start hikes early in the morning and plan to be below treeline by early afternoon. Lightning is a real danger on exposed ridges. A rain jacket and warm layer should be in your daypack every day.

Food and gas are available in Idaho Springs, but the selection is limited. If you have special dietary needs, bring your own supplies. The campground has a small store for basics, but for a full grocery run you will need to drive to Georgetown or Evergreen.



Wildlife is common around the campground and on the trails. Keep food stored properly and do not approach animals. Deer, elk, and the occasional black bear live in the area. Making noise while hiking helps avoid surprising them.

Having a basecamp near Rocky Mountain trails means you can spend your energy on the trails instead of on driving. Idaho Springs is well positioned for day trips in several directions, and the campground amenities let you reset each evening. With a little planning, three days here will feel full but not rushed.