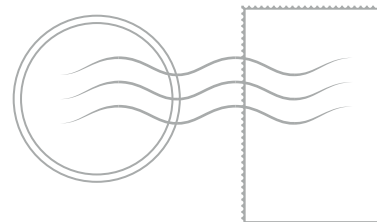


POSTCARD

Rocky Mountain National Park



Laura French explores Colorado's most talked-about park on a drive along the Trail Ridge Road

The air is cool and filled with the scent of fresh pine. A crisp wind hits my skin as I gaze across the forest-green slopes, rising and falling like sheets of billowing fabric beneath a sky painted sheer, shining opal.

I'm in Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park, on the edge of the Trail Ridge Road; a winding, scenic route that meanders 48 miles through the heart of this dramatic region, climbing to more than 3,700 metres.

It's the highest continuous paved road in the US, and as we drive its hairpin turns and narrow twists we pass an impressive array of terrain: first clusters of yellowish aspen and ponderosa pine, then subalpine forests of asparagus-green fir and spruce, then dry, alpine tundra where it's empty and stark but for the craggy brown peaks that point up like shards, topped with white, glistening snow.

When we reach the highest point on the road, it feels eerily remote and silent. In the distance you can see as far as Wyoming and the Great Plains, and directly below us, the slopes of the park seem to roll on and on, covered in towering trees that glow a deep, dark green, flecked here and there with wisps of burgundy and orange.

As we continue, descending into warmer terrain, it starts to get more hospitable again. The forested mountains return, and there's life in the form of mountain goats grazing and big-horned sheep roaming.

We stop for a hike at the Milner Pass, where a huge, glassy lake glimmers out in a pool of blue, and wander up a woodland path that takes my breath away – and not just because of the altitude. But it's when we're just about to leave the park that the real magic happens. We spot a crowd of people crouching by the roadside, cameras poised, voices silent. Less than a few metres away a giant moose grazes among the grass, its huge antlers jutting out, its chocolate-brown fur glistening like silk against the spindly aspen forest. By now it's dusk, and the whole scene is bathed in a golden tint that somehow makes it look ethereal and other-worldly. It's a beautiful spectacle, and it reminds me just how powerful and invigorating pure, untamed nature can be. **TW**



BOOK IT

Aspire Tours offer a full-day Rocky Mountain National Park Tour from Denver for \$129 including lunch, transport and a guide. aspire-tours.com

FROM TOP: Pine forest in Rocky Mountain National Park; Laura at the edge of the Trail Ridge Road; moose stops to graze by the roadside **PICTURE CREDIT:** Shutterstock; Laura French