

# Ascend Youth Colorado Trip

## June 25–July 1, 2026



Get ready for an incredible week of high adventure, stunning mountain views, and new experiences in Colorado! This trip is designed for high school students interested in challenging outdoor activities and exploring a different part of the U.S.

Lebanon Countryside YMCA sponsors this trip, and eight participants are selected from those who complete an online application. There is no cost to participants.

The trip runs from Thursday, June 25, to Wednesday, July 1, 2026. The group, including chaperones, will be flying from Cincinnati to Denver, then driving to Twin Lakes, Colorado.

The week is packed with fun, strenuous, and exciting activities in central Colorado:

- **Whitewater Rafting & Rock Climbing:** Raft down the Arkansas River through Brown's Canyon National Monument with a professional outfitter (Noah's Ark) and try your hand at rock climbing!
- **Hiking Adventures:** Hike to the nearby Interlaken historical site on the shores of Twin Lakes, and to an alpine lake such as Windsor Lake or Lost Lake. You'll stand atop the Continental Divide, and explore the Grotto rock formations.
- **Iconic Landmarks:** Visit the breathtaking Maroon Bells peaks near Aspen, and the unique Great Sand Dunes National Park.
- **Historical Exploration:** Visit the historic mining town of Leadville (the highest elevation town in the U.S.), and a nearby ghost town.
- **Twin Lakes & River Fun:** Enjoy paddleboarding on Twin Lakes, and check out the town of Buena Vista and the Arkansas River.



## Adult Chaperones

Your hosts are Jeff and Jennifer Ensman, who live in Lebanon, but spend their summers in Colorado. Jennifer is the Media Specialist at Lebanon Junior High School, and Jeff runs the Outdoor Adventure program at the Countryside YMCA. They started the Ascend High Adventure Christian Fellowship program for adults in 2017, which is an annual hiking trip to Colorado. This is the second year for the youth trip, which is similar to the adult trip.



Two additional chaperones from the Countryside YMCA staff will be with us for the week. You'll be traveling with the chaperones from Ohio to Colorado and back. In 2025, the chaperones were Trish Kitchell and Josh Gadzala.

## Where You'll Be Staying

You'll be staying at the Ensmans' cabin in Twin Lakes. The cabin has a bunkhouse that can accommodate twelve people. There is one bunk room for the guys and one for the girls.



The cabin is at an elevation of 9300 feet. At this altitude, there is less oxygen, so physical activity will feel more strenuous than in Ohio.

The area is high desert, so in June and early July, the high temps are in the 60s and 70s, while mornings are cold, with temps in the upper 30s and low 40s. Expect lots of blue skies and sun, but afternoon thunderstorms are not uncommon.

Adult male and female chaperones are in adjacent bedrooms.

We cook, eat, and wash dishes together outside under a picnic shelter.



## Application & Selection Process

This trip is offered to students from several area high schools. Participants are selected based on interest, enthusiasm for the outdoors, and teacher recommendations. Because the trip is limited to eight participants, the application asks you to tell us why you want to attend and why you should be selected if more people apply than there are slots available.

Once the selection process is complete, we will hold a couple of get-togethers to meet each other, ask questions, and get excited for the trip.

## Expectations for Participants

The following expectations are in place to ensure everyone has the best experience.

- **Physical Preparation:** Some activities are strenuous (hiking, rock climbing, rafting). If you're not physically active, you must start exercising to prepare yourself.
- **Participation:** Interact, engage, and help with cooking and washing dishes.
- **Cleanliness:** Help maintain the bunkhouse and bathrooms.
- **Policy Adherence:** Abide by all rules and follow the cell phone policy.

**Cell Phones:** Daily activities (7 am–7 pm) will keep you busy. During this time, you may use your phone only for taking pictures and communicating with family—no internet surfing or social media. We encourage you to unplug for the week; however, there will be plenty of time each evening for phone use.

**Bunk Rooms:** Boys may not enter the girls' bunk room/bathroom, and vice versa.

**Buddy System:** You must follow the buddy system at all times:

- Be with one or more participants of the same sex.
- Chaperones must always know your whereabouts.
- Being alone and away from the group with a participant of the opposite sex is prohibited.

**Prohibited Items:** Knives, lighters, vaping paraphernalia, illegal drugs, and cigarettes and other tobacco products are not permitted.

**Consequences:** If behavior issues are not resolved, an adult will drive you to the Denver airport for you to be flown back to Cincinnati at your family's cost.

## Gear

You will need EVERYTHING on this list. Some specific items are required for hiking and rafting. If you don't own these items, we can help you get them.

<b>Clothing</b>	<b>Outerwear/Accessories</b>	<b>Footwear/Other</b>
Long pants	Hoodie or jacket	Gym shoes (see note below)
Long sleeve shirt (non-cotton for rafting)	Warm coat	Closed-toe shoes for rafting (different pair than for hiking)
Shorts (non-cotton for rafting)	Lightweight gloves	Backpack (school backpack is fine)
Socks (thick ones for hiking)	Beanie	2 reusable water bottles
Short sleeve shirt	Ball cap/visor/hat with brim	Toiletries
Pajamas	Sunglasses	
Swimsuit		

\* Gym shoes with a good tread are fine, but NOT Vans, Converse, or Crocs

## Comments from Prior Participants

We asked the youth who went on the 2025 trip to share their thoughts about the trip at the end of the week. Here are some of their comments:

- I loved trying hard things and succeeding and making myself proud, especially at the sand dunes and Maroon Bells. I loved seeing all the scenery and being in nature and feeling free and unconnected from social media.
- I want to say thank you for the amazing new experience and amazing adventures, from hiking the mountains to whitewater rafting. I just can't explain how grateful and happy I am for being chosen for this great adventure.
- From the beginning of this trip, I have been so excited to go rock climbing and visiting the sand dunes. Along with the amazing views and the crazy hiking adventures.
- Thank you for making this trip possible. My favorite part of this trip was making new friends and the long-lasting relationships between everyone.

## To Apply

Please share and discuss this flyer with your parent/guardian. Then, if you're interested in applying for the 2026 Ascend Youth Colorado trip, [click here to fill out the application](#) or scan this:



We recommend looking over the application before starting to fill it out so you are prepared to provide the information it requests.

**Application deadline is November 30th, 2025.**