

Photo Itinerary...

Photographing Garden of the Gods

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Long used as a summer encampment by visiting Cheyenne, Arapaho and Ute Indians, and later; explorers and adventurers from the East, Garden of the Gods, in the City of Colorado Springs, has always been a favorite destination – just as it is today. From the mid-1800s through the early 1900s, the park saw a string of gold seekers, settlers, and entrepreneurs filter through. Eventually, Charles Eliot Perkins, a friend of William Palmer (founder of Colorado Springs), purchased the Garden of the Gods and several large parcels surrounding it, hoping to eventually build a summer home there. These plans never materialized and he eventually made it known to his family he wished to turn the park over to the City of Colorado Springs. Two years after his death, just before Christmas 1909, the city council voted to accept the park, given the conditions by Perkins' heirs that it would forever remain free to the public, that no intoxicating liquors be sold there, no other building constructed, and that the city maintain the area as a public park.



Some of the best photo opportunities are available in the winter or spring when you may find soft snow-covered sandstone rocks. In June, the yuccas may bloom, providing an interesting foreground to the rocks. Late September brings forth the brilliant colors of fall. The best lighting on the rock formations will be early morning or late afternoon. April and October are the best months for shooting the full moon behind the rocks at sunrise.



To start our photo tour, begin by purchasing a "Guide to the Garden of the Gods" at the visitor's center the day before. Next, let's get an early start the next morning and find some of the classic photo locations throughout the park. Some of these may even be worthy of a postcard! Don't forget to stick to the trails while in the park and to avoid blocking the trails with your tripod, if you use one.

Some of the classic photo icons have been taken from the top of the hogback just east of North Gateway Rock. Park your car in the main parking lot at the foot of North Gateway Rock and hike back along the road to the east side of the hogback. Carefully climb up to the top trying to stay on established (but unmarked) trails. There are groves of single-seed junipers and pinion pine along the top, with numerous photo possibilities. Try to frame the rock formations with the juniper branches. This is a perfect location for sunrise shots of the rocks.

Now head in the direction of Balanced Rock and take the right turn to the Spring Cañon parking lot. Our destination is the Siamese Twins formation, just a short ¼ mile walk (take the trail in either direction, as it is a loop). Not only is the formation picturesque, but if you line things up just right, Pikes Peak may be framed within the Siamese Twins Arch. This is best shot during the morning hours so that the sunlight hits the rocks.

Of course, Balanced Rock is another classic shot. From the Siamese Twins, continue west a little further and try shots from the southeast and southwest. The rock just across the street from Balanced Rock, called Steamboat Rock, used to be an old vantage point for early photographers. Notice the steps carved into the rock and the remnants of the old railing around the edge. Just northwest of Balanced Rock (accessible from Rampart Range Road) is another interesting rock formation worthy of exploration.

For an overall shot of the park, park in the Visitor's Center lot and you will be able to frame Pikes Peak between the Gateway Rocks. Elevated views of the park may also be taken from the pull-off on Mesa Road. One of my most popular prints was taken by the visitor center parking lot. I happened to be driving along and noticed the full moon just starting to set. The result was this unique shot of the full moon over the Kissing Camels formation taken with a 500 mm lens. It pays to be observant!



So there you go - a few local photo hotspots where you can capture the essence of historical Garden of the Gods. I'd encourage you to try hiking some of the trails and search for your own special photo spots you can call your own and to experience God's wonders close-up. More information may be obtained by visiting their Web site at <http://gardenofgods.com>.

Editor's note - More images by Ken Wyatt may be viewed at www.wyattphoto.com.

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