The park entrance is midway between Cortez and Mancos on U.S. 160. It is 34 kilometers (21 miles) from the entrance to the museum and the Chapin Mesa ruins area. The Moenkopi campground is 25 kilometers (15 miles) away. The narrow, mountainous road has sharp curves and steep grades. A limited number of turns are provided for emergency parking or to allow for picture taking along the way. For your safety, do not park on the roadway.

Depending on traffic and weather conditions, allow at least 45 minutes to make this drive. Park roads are generally designed as scenic drives with reduced speed limits. The average speed limit in the park is 55 kilometers (35 miles) per hour.

There are scheduled flights to Cortez and Durango. The nearest railroad stations are at Grand Junction, Coloc, and Gallup, N. Mex., with bus service to Cortez from Gallup.

To reach Mesa Verde National Park from Cortez mid-May to mid-October. All nearby cities have rent-a-car service.

To get out of the way, we urge you first to go to the Far View Visitor Center (open only in the summer from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., 7 days a week, from June 1 to Labor Day). A guided tour of the Cliff Palace is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Check at the ranger station for the location of hiking trails. To protect the fragile, irreplaceable ruins, hiking is restricted to only four trails within the park.

Visits to cliff dwellings, whether on a ranger-guided tour or a self-guided walk, are subject to fire hazards. Often the climbing of stairs and ledges, the uneven and rocky terrain, and the cold winter weather, such as hiking boots or sturdy shoes, are required. Small cameras are allowed, but tripods are not permitted. Pets should not be left unattended for more than 24 hours. If a campsite contains a table, benches, and wood or charcoal burning grills for which fuel can be bought at the store. The natural environment at Mesa Verde is very fragile; therefore the gathering of firewood or injury to trees or shrubs is prohibited. There are no utility hookups, but there is a waste disposal station for dumping trailer holding tanks. Groceries, gifts, souvenirs, carry-out food, a gasoline station, holding tanks, and newspapers are available. Maximum interpretive services begin mid-June and last until Labor Day. From mid-November to mid-April all concession facilities, including gas stations, food, and lodging, are unavailable. The museum and Ruins Road are open. Tours of Spruce Tree House are conducted all year when trail and weather conditions permit.

In summer, daytime temperatures are comfortably warm with highs ranging from 23°C (78°F) to 30°C (86°F). Evening temperatures are cool with lows ranging from 10°C (50°F) to 15°C (59°F) in July and August. Winter highs range from -1°C (30°F) to 15°C (60°F) with lows of -30°C (-22°F) to -10°C (14°F). Snow covers ground in all areas of the canyon rims. Elevations vary from nearly 2,200 meters (7,200 feet) at the park entrance and the Chapin Mesa area to 4,000 meters (13,000 feet) at Park Point. Morfield campground is 2,380 meters (7,600 feet) and Far View Lodge are open all year when trail and weather conditions permit.

Camping is permitted only in designated campgrounds. Check at the ranger station for the location of hiking trails. To protect the fragile, irreplaceable ruins, hiking is restricted to only four trails within the park.

Any violations of the rules related to safety and protection of the fragile, irreplaceable ruins, and our visitors may be asked to leave. Our goal is to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all visitors.
Wetherill Mesa

Private vehicles are prohibited on the Wetherill Mesa Road. The area is open only during the summer with access by bus. The bus service starts adjacent to the Far View Visitor Center parking lot. Sandwiches and cold drinks are available at a snack stand on Wetherill Mesa. The 19-kilometer (12-mile) bus ride offers excellent views of the surrounding area. The ruins sites are reached by mini-bus and trail. Long House and Step House ruins are open to the public. Park rangers are on duty to answer questions about the ruins. Other ruins may be open to the public in the future. Please check the schedule at the visitor center.

Chapin Mesa

Headquarters for the park and the office of the superintendent are at Chapin Mesa. The U.S. Post Office there operates all year. The archeological museum contains displays of artifacts found in the Indian ruins of Mesa Verde. Dioramas and exhibits explain the life-style of the people who lived here centuries ago. The Spruce Tree Store, open from early spring through fall, provides meals, snacks, groceries, gifts, and souvenirs. Bicycles can be rented at this store.

In the summer park rangers conduct guided tours through several of the cliff dwellings. Check at the museum or visitor center for the current schedule. During the winter months tours are conducted to Spruce Tree House only, weather and trail conditions permitting. Two short hiking trails lead into Spruce Tree Canyon. Visitors must register at the chief ranger's office before using either of these trails. Two 10-kilometer (6 mile), self-guiding loops of the Ruins Road are open from 8 a.m. to sunset. Many cliff dwellings can be viewed from canyon rim vantage points along both loops. On the Ruins Top Ruins loop, exhibits at five stops explain the development of the Pueblo culture from the Basketmakers through the classic period of the cliff dwellings. A picnic area is located in the museum area. Picnic sites with restrooms are on each of the Ruins Road loops.

This profile of mesas and canyons corresponds to the white, dotted line on the map below.

Elevations on the map below are all in feet. Those on the park map are in metric and customary measurements.