Tips for Your Visit

Travel

* Please allow enough time to drive, get through base security, find parking, and walk (at altitude) to the location. In the military world, “if you are on time, you are late.”
* ID will be necessary to enter the base – be prepared to open the trunk too. Speed limits on base are strictly enforced.

Altitude

* Many people feel the effects of altitude. USAFA at 7258 ft. is higher than Denver! Common symptoms include headaches, nausea, fatigue, and shortness of breath. Plan to move more slowly and be sure to hydrate, hydrate, hydrate.
* Keep in mind the sun is also stronger since you are closer to it, so use sunscreen and sunglasses at all times.

Weather

Colorado weather is unpredictable and notoriously changeable. It can be in the 40s in the early mornings and rise up into the 80s by afternoon. Severe storms can come on suddenly. Please be vigilant - check the forecast, dress in layers, and be prepared for anything.

Attire

Good walking shoes are a must as there are hills and stairs throughout campus. Also keep in mind you will be sitting outside on bleachers for the parade and graduation. The Commissioning Ceremony is the dressiest of all the week’s events. USAFA provides the following guidelines for each on-campus event:

* Cadet Wing Parade and Mitchell Hall Reception: business casual (no shorts or jeans)
* Commissioning: slacks, skirt, or dress for women; suit, or coat and tie for men
* Graduation: casual/business casual

Political Conversations

The military personnel and cadets serve at the pleasure of the Commander-in-Chief and his administration. Please refrain from political discussions while on base and while attending events. We are here to celebrate the cadets and their service to country!

Our Contact Information

We are staying at

To-Do

On-campus, be sure to visit the USAFA Visitor’s Center and the iconic USAFA Chapel ! (Access to the secure cadet area requires cadet escort.)

Suggested activities in Colorado Springs:

* Garden of the Gods (easy walk through famous red rock formations, free of charge)
* The Broadmoor Hotel (legendary resort building and grounds) and Seven Falls (shuttle for free from the hotel, there is an admission fee, walk the paved path or ride the bus to the falls)
* Pikes Peak (a breath-taking 19-mile drive up this Fourteener, there is an admission fee, allow 3 hours roundtrip)
* Eagles Peak (a strenuous hike/rock scramble, 3.5 miles roundtrip with 1800 ft. elevation gain, near USAFA’s Visitor’s Center with an incredible view of the Academy)

USAFA Information and Class of 2019 Statistics

History

* In January 1950, the Service Academy Board, headed by Dwight D. Eisenhower, then president of Columbia University, concluded that the needs of the Air Force could not be met by the two existing U.S. service academies and that an air force academy should be established.
* Congress authorized the construction of the Academy on April 1, 1954, and established an advisory commission to help determine the site of the new school. 582 sites were considered and Colorado Springs was announced as the winning site on June 24, 1954.
* On July 11, 1955, the first class of 306 cadets was sworn in at a temporary site at Lowry Air Force Base, Denver while construction was completed in Colorado Springs. On August 29, 1958, a wing of 1,145 cadets moved to the present site. Less than a year later the Academy received accreditation. The first class graduated on June 3, 1959.
* President Gerald R. Ford signed legislation permitting women to enter the U.S. service academies. On June 26, 1976, 157 women entered the Air Force Academy with the Class of 1980. Four years later, 97 of the original female cadets completed the program and graduated from the Academy.
* The campus of the Academy covers 18,000 acres on the east side of the Rampart Range of the Rocky Mountains, at an altitude of 7,258 feet above sea-level.

Cadet Wing

* Approximately 4000 cadets are enrolled at USAFA. Congressional nominations are required for an appointment.
* USAFA has the highest percentage of any service academy of female cadets at 30%.
* The cadets are divided into 40 squadrons (~100 in each). They spend freshman and sophomore years in one squadron. After their sophomore year, they transition to a new squadron for the final two years.
* A total of 1248 cadets started with the Class of 2019, 71 did not complete basic training, and about 1000 cadets will graduate (~20% attrition rate).

Program of Study and Training

* USAFA offers 26 majors. Due to the science and engineering core requirements, every degree conferred is a Bachelor of Science regardless of major.
* During the summers, cadets complete mandatory trainings, leadership roles, and airmanship programs.
* Throughout the academic year, cadets are very busy! They participate in mandatory physical fitness classes, Division 1 or intramural sports, and periodic fitness tests *as well as* military training exercises, room and personal appearance inspections, and extracurricular clubs.
* Character development is emphasized in course work as well as USAFA’s core values (Integrity First. Service Before Self. Excellence In All We Do.) and honor code (We will not lie, cheat or steal, nor tolerate among us anyone who does.).
* About half the graduates will go on to pilot training. The other half work in support jobs (e.g., Security Forces, Intelligence, Acquisitions). After graduation, the new officers are committed to at least 5-10 years of active duty service. Pilots have the longest mandatory commitment.

Event Information

Wednesday, May 29

7:30-9:00am Cadet Air Show and Demonstrations (Stillman Parade Field)

* The USAFA competition parachute team Wings of Blue will perform as well as the Honor Guard and Sabre Drill Team. USAFA has the only performing mascot in the NCAA – watch the falcons fly around and then dive (at speeds close to 120 mph) toward the lure swung by cadet falconers on the field.

9:00-10:30am Graduation Parade (Stillman Parade Field)

* All 4000 cadets will march in by squadron. Firsties (Seniors) are wearing the gold sashes. At the end, the Firsties will march out of formation as they symbolically leave the cadet wing. **After the parade, there will be plenty of family pictures on the field, as this is the only time we will see our cadet in full parade dress uniform!**

10:30am-1:00pm Graduation Reception (Mitchell Hall – tickets required)

* Fun fact: this dining facility holds all 4000 cadets and serves (all of them at once) their mandatory breakfast and lunch meals in just 20 minutes. The buffet reception will be lunch = carving stations, shrimp cocktail, roasted veggies, charcuterie, mini pastries, etc., and we will have the opportunity to meet senior leadership including the Superintendent of the Academy as well as the Thunderbirds pilots. After a brief time at the reception, we will move the cars on base, get our clothes and change for Commissioning – bring everything with you that morning as there will not be time to return to the hotel.

1:30-3:30pm Commissioning Ceremony for Squadron 10 (Arnold Hall Theater)

* This is when the cadets receive their new rank of Second Lieutenant and take the Oath of Office. About 29 cadets from Squadron 10 will be individually commissioned in alphabetical order, and each will take about 2-3 minutes. Many say this is the most emotional time of all the events during Graduation Week. Cadets take great care in selecting who will participate and who will administer the Oath of Office. Only active or retired military and a select few others can administer the Oath. After the Oath is over and salutes have been exchanged, our new officer will face the audience and we will put on his new 2nd Lt gold bar shoulder boards.

Thursday, May 30

10:30am-2pm Graduation Ceremony and AF Thunderbirds Show (Falcon Stadium – tickets required, gates open 6am and stadium opens 7am)

* Be sure to have your tickets and clear bags available for inspection. A list of prohibited items is included. Don’t forget sunscreen and hats – there are no shaded seating areas. We will be sitting in assigned seats in section M1 with other guests of Squadron 10. Stadium concessions and restrooms are open throughout the ceremony. If you are interested in renting a seatback ($6, cash only), do so when you see them for sale because they will run out. The opening March-On by the graduating class is unbelievably impressive. The commencement speaker will be President Donald Trump. The Distinguished Graduates receive their degrees first. They are the top 10% of the class in overall ranking (combined academic, military, and athletic rankings). Then degrees are conferred in squadron order. After the last cadet gets the diploma, the class is dismissed. This is the cue for the now 2nd Lts to throw their white hats into the air and for the Thunderbirds to roar overhead. Custom is for the owner of the hat to place $20.19 in the hat. Children ages 7-10 are allowed on the Stadium floor to retrieve and keep one hat. For safety sake and to comply with FAA regulations, no one is permitted to leave the stadium until after the Thunderbirds performance ends. The Thunderbirds show is a mix of formation flying and solo routines which demonstrate the training and precision of Air Force pilots and highlight the maximum capabilities of the F-16. For those of you with flexible travel plans, we recommend having snacks and drinks at your car to avoid the departure gridlock. Thank you for sharing this experience with us!



Please plan to arrive early for all on-campus events.

There are over 20,000 people expected to attend Graduation Week events!