

Highlands Ranch, CO — Your Complete Relocation Guide (2025)

Welcome to South Denver's master-planned suburban success story. Highlands Ranch isn't just another suburb—it's a lifestyle choice offering four recreation centers, 70+ miles of trails, top-rated schools, and seamless access to Denver's booming tech corridor. Whether you're relocating for work, seeking the best schools for your family, or simply craving the perfect balance of outdoor adventure and suburban convenience, Highlands Ranch delivers.



Fast Facts: Know Before You Go

Here's what sets Highlands Ranch apart from other Denver-area communities. These numbers tell the story of a thriving, family-focused community with exceptional amenities and strong property values.

Location & Size

Douglas County, 12–20 miles south of
Downtown Denver

Population: ~103,000 residents

Median age: 40–41 years

Economics

Median household income: ~\$156,000

HRCA quarterly assessment: \$171
(includes all 4 rec centers + Backcountry
access)

Outdoor Paradise

26 parks across the community

70+ miles of public trails

~2,644 acres of open space

8,200-acre Backcountry Wilderness Area

The Highlands Ranch Community Association (HRCA) master HOA ensures consistent community standards while providing unmatched recreational amenities. Your quarterly assessment unlocks access to four world-class recreation centers, miles of private trails in the Backcountry Wilderness Area, and year-round programming for all ages. Douglas County School District serves the area with open enrollment options, and while there's no light rail station within Highlands Ranch proper, the Lincoln & RidgeGate stations in neighboring Lone Tree offer convenient Park-n-Ride connections.

Who Loves Highlands Ranch?

Growing Families

Parents love the combination of top-rated schools, safe neighborhoods, and endless youth programming. From swim lessons at the rec centers to summer camps in the Backcountry Wilderness Area, your kids will never be bored. The walkable neighborhoods and community parks mean children can safely bike to school and play with friends down the street.

Outdoor Enthusiasts

Wake up and step directly onto miles of trails. Mountain bikers, runners, and hikers treasure the extensive trail network that connects neighborhoods to open space. Chatfield State Park sits just minutes away, offering boating, paddleboarding, and one of Colorado's best off-leash dog areas. Weekend adventures to Rocky Mountain National Park are under two hours.

Tech & Business Professionals

Your commute matters. Highlands Ranch offers quick access to the Denver Tech Center, Inverness Business Park, and Meridian International Business Center—all within 15–25 minutes. Need to reach Downtown Denver? Park-n-Ride buses connect to light rail, getting you there in under an hour. Major employers like Lockheed Martin, Charles Schwab, and Arrow Electronics are nearby.

Value-Conscious Buyers

Master-planned communities offer predictability and consistency that protect your investment. HOA amenities rival private country clubs, but you're sharing the cost across thousands of households. The strong resale market and steady appreciation make Highlands Ranch a smart long-term investment for your family's future.

Neighborhood Cheat Sheet

Highlands Ranch isn't a monolithic suburb—it's a collection of distinct neighborhoods, each with its own personality and perks. All fall under the HRCA master association umbrella, but local sub-HOAs add unique amenities and architectural standards. Here's your insider guide to finding the perfect fit.

BackCountry (Gated)

The crown jewel of Highlands Ranch. Custom luxury homes on larger lots with direct access to 8,200 acres of wilderness trails. The stunning Sundial House clubhouse features pools, fitness facilities, and mountain views. Expect homes from \$1M to \$3M+.

Kentley Hills / Weatherstone / Falcon Hills

These gated communities offer spacious lots, dramatic mountain views, and proximity to top schools. Popular with families who want more land and privacy while staying close to HRCA amenities. Rocky Heights Middle School and Rock Canyon High School are nearby.

The Hearth

Located in East Highlands Ranch, this neighborhood combines newer construction with an extensive trail network. Close to Rocky Heights MS and Rock Canyon HS, The Hearth attracts families who prioritize schools and outdoor access. Strong community spirit with regular neighborhood events.

Indigo Hill

Known for quiet streets and a tight-knit community feel. The neighborhood pool and spa are summer gathering spots, while the surrounding open space offers immediate trail access. Residents rave about the community vibe—block parties and holiday decorating contests are the norm.

The Ridges (Westridge, Southridge, Eastridge, Northridge)

These classic Highlands Ranch subdivisions surround each of the four rec centers, offering the most convenient amenity access. Price points vary widely, from townhomes to large single-family homes. Perfect for families who plan to use the rec centers frequently.

Tresana

Lock-and-leave luxury for professionals and downsizers. These townhomes and condos feature Italianate architecture, a community pool and spa, and minimal yard maintenance. Ideal for those who want Highlands Ranch amenities without the upkeep of a large property.

Housing Market Snapshot

What the last 60 days tell us (as of September 2025)

\$695K

Median Sale Price

Strong value compared to closer-in
Denver suburbs

27

Days on Market

Well-priced homes move quickly

100%

Sale-to-List Ratio

Properties selling at or near asking
price

1.0

Months of Supply

Tight inventory favors sellers

Market Insights

The Highlands Ranch market remains competitive but not frantic. Updated two-story homes with finished basements and well-maintained yards are the velocity leaders, often receiving multiple offers within the first week. The BackCountry luxury segment operates as its own micro-market with different dynamics.

For Buyers: Pre-approval is non-negotiable, and having an appraisal gap strategy can make the difference on the best listings. Work with an agent who knows HRCA nuances and can move quickly when the right property appears.

For Sellers: First impressions matter tremendously here. Minor exterior touch-ups—fresh paint, new mulch, updated landscape lighting—yield disproportionate returns. Declutter garage spaces and mudrooms; buyers want to visualize their rec-center-ready lifestyle, complete with bikes, kayaks, and ski gear.

Getting Around: Your Commute & Connectivity



Highway Access

Multiple routes to anywhere: C-470 for east-west movement, I-25 via E-470 or County Line Road, Santa Fe Drive (US-85) for local access, and University Boulevard as your north-south connector through the community.



Light Rail Options

The R Line's Lincoln and RidgeGate stations in Lone Tree offer Park-n-Ride access to Downtown Denver. While there's no station within Highlands Ranch proper, these connections are just 10-15 minutes away and provide stress-free commuting.



Bus & Park-n-Ride

Highlands Ranch Town Center serves as the main Park-n-Ride hub with local and limited-stop routes connecting to light rail stations and key employment centers throughout the south metro area.

Typical Drive Times (Off-Peak)

- **Denver Tech Center:** 15–25 minutes
- **Park Meadows Mall:** 10–15 minutes
- **Downtown Denver:** 30–45 minutes
- **Denver International Airport:** 40–55 minutes
- **Boulder:** 45–60 minutes
- **Colorado Springs:** 50–70 minutes

The strategic location means you're close enough to Denver's job centers and cultural attractions without dealing with urban congestion. Most residents find the commute trade-off well worth the quality of life benefits.

Schools: Top-Rated Education Options

Douglas County School District Excellence

Douglas County School District (DCSD) consistently ranks among Colorado's top-performing districts. Highlands Ranch is served by four comprehensive high schools, each offering rigorous academics, competitive athletics, and extensive extracurricular programs.

High School Feeders:

- **Highlands Ranch High School** — Strong performing arts and athletics programs
- **Mountain Vista High School** — Known for academic excellence and college prep
- **Rock Canyon High School** — Newer facility with state-of-the-art amenities
- **ThunderRidge High School** — Comprehensive programs with community partnerships

Attendance boundaries vary by address—always verify your specific feeder pattern before purchasing.

Choice & Charter Options

DCSD offers **Open Enrollment**, allowing families to apply to schools outside their boundary area when space is available. This flexibility helps families find the perfect academic fit.

Popular charter schools nearby:

- **STEM School Highlands Ranch** — Project-based STEM curriculum
- **SkyView Academy** — Core Knowledge curriculum with character education



Pro Tip: Charter school applications typically open in January for the following fall. Popular programs fill quickly, so research and apply early. Your real estate agent can connect you with local parent groups for insider insights.

Parks, Trails & The Great Outdoors



This is where Highlands Ranch truly shines. The combination of maintained parks, extensive trail networks, and the massive Backcountry Wilderness Area creates an outdoor lover's paradise right outside your door.



Community Parks & Trails

The Highlands Ranch Metro District maintains **26 parks** throughout the community, connected by **70+ miles** of public trails covering **~2,644 acres** of open space. These aren't just paths—they're transportation corridors that let you bike to school, run to the grocery store, or walk to dinner without ever getting in your car.



Backcountry Wilderness Area

HRCA members enjoy exclusive access to **8,200 acres** and **~26 miles** of member-only singletrack trails. This isn't just hiking—you'll find guided nature programs, archery ranges, horse corrals with trail rides, and summer camps. It's like having a private wilderness preserve as your backyard.



Highlands Ranch Mansion

This beautifully preserved historic landmark offers free public tours during open hours and hosts community events year-round. The surrounding Historic Park provides additional green space and a connection to the area's ranching heritage.

Beyond Highlands Ranch: Nearby Natural Treasures

Chatfield State Park

Just minutes away, this 5,600-acre park offers a massive reservoir for boating and paddleboarding, a swim beach, camping facilities, and 26+ miles of paved paths. The off-leash dog area is one of the largest in Colorado—a paradise for dogs and their humans.

More Local Favorites

- **Bluffs Regional Park (Lone Tree):** Scenic loops with city and mountain views
- **Daniels Park:** Historic bison herd and stunning sunset vistas
- **Red Rocks Amphitheatre:** World-class concerts 25–35 minutes northwest

Four World-Class Recreation Centers

Your quarterly HRCA assessment unlocks access to four exceptional recreation centers—each with its own personality and amenities. This isn't your typical community gym; these facilities rival private country clubs in quality and programming.

Eastridge Recreation Center



Home to a spectacular **30-foot climbing wall** that challenges climbers of all skill levels. The aquatics center features multiple pools, while the fitness studios offer everything from yoga to high-intensity interval training. Modern gym equipment and group fitness classes round out the offerings.

Westridge Recreation Center



Features multi-use courts and gyms perfect for basketball, volleyball, and indoor soccer. The elevated indoor track lets you log miles regardless of weather. Aquatics facilities and fitness studios keep the whole family active. Currently undergoing periodic updates to maintain top-tier quality.

Southridge Recreation Center



The most unique of the four, featuring **Wildcat Mountain Auditorium** for performances and events, a pottery studio for creative pursuits, and an indoor pool with a **lazy river** that's a kid favorite. The golf simulator lets you practice your swing year-round.

Northridge Recreation Center



The original Highlands Ranch rec hub maintains its position as a community favorite. Comprehensive fitness facilities, group classes, and outdoor amenities make this a go-to destination. Its central location and established programming draw long-time residents.

Beyond the Buildings

HRCA membership extends far beyond brick-and-mortar facilities. Enjoy tennis and pickleball courts throughout the community, organized youth and adult sports leagues, arts programs and camps, and specialized programming for seniors and therapeutic recreation. The variety ensures every family member finds their activity.

Community Events: Year-Round Connections

Highlands Ranch's event calendar brings neighbors together throughout the year, building the strong community bonds that make this more than just a place to live—it's truly home.

Summer Celebrations (June–August)

July 4th Parade & Fireworks at Highland Heritage Regional Park draws thousands for patriotic festivities. The **HRCA Summer Concert Series** brings live music to outdoor venues every week. **KidFest** and **Kids' Fishing Day** create lasting childhood memories, while the **Ice Cream Social & Sunset Concert** in August marks the end of summer.

Winter Wonderland (December)

The historic Mansion transforms into a holiday showcase with seasonal decorations, special tours, and festive events. Community holiday celebrations bring warmth to Colorado's cold months.

1

2

3

Fall Traditions (September–November)

Western Fest (formerly Pioneer Days) celebrates the area's ranching heritage with entertainment, vendors, and family activities at the historic Mansion. **Veterans Day Celebration** in November honors those who served with a moving ceremony.

These aren't massive impersonal events—they're neighborhood gatherings where you'll see familiar faces and make new friends. The consistent calendar helps newcomers quickly integrate into the community.

Everyday Life: Shops, Eats & Local Favorites



Your Daily Destinations

Highlands Ranch offers the convenience of major retail without sacrificing local charm. Here's where residents actually go.


Highlands Ranch Town Center serves as the community hub with **Smokin' Fins** (beloved for fresh seafood and creative sushi), plus essential services and shops that keep you from driving to larger centers for every errand.

Coffee Culture: Lost Coffee has earned a loyal following with locations in Town Center and BackCountry. Their craft coffee and cozy atmosphere make them the default meeting spot for residents.

Healthy Eats: Toastique along University Boulevard brings wholesome, Instagram-worthy breakfast and lunch options perfect for the active Highlands Ranch lifestyle.

Major Retail Access

Park Meadows Mall sits just 10–15 minutes away, offering upscale shopping with Nordstrom, Dillard's, and 180+ specialty stores. The surrounding area includes every big-box retailer and restaurant chain you might need. County Line Road and University Boulevard corridors provide additional shopping, dining, and service options without the mall crowds.

 **Insider Tip:** While major chains dominate the retail landscape, keep an eye on Town Center and new developments for local restaurants and unique shops. The community actively works to attract more local businesses to compete with the national brands.

Healthcare: Top Medical Facilities Nearby

Quality healthcare sits minutes from your door. Highlands Ranch and the surrounding area offer exceptional medical facilities, from routine care to emergency services to specialized pediatric treatment.

UCHealth Highlands Ranch Hospital

This full-service hospital opened in 2019 and brought comprehensive medical care directly to the community. Emergency services, surgical suites, imaging, laboratory services, and specialized care units mean less driving for routine procedures and peace of mind knowing expert care is close. The modern facility incorporates the latest medical technology and patient-centered design.

Children's Hospital Colorado — South Campus

When your child needs care, you want the best—and Children's Hospital Colorado consistently ranks among the nation's top pediatric facilities. The South Campus provides emergency care and urgent care specifically designed for children, with pediatric specialists who understand that kids aren't just small adults.

Sky Ridge Medical Center (Lone Tree)

Just minutes away in neighboring Lone Tree, this full-service hospital offers additional options for care. The variety of nearby facilities means shorter wait times and more choice in selecting providers. Competition among high-quality healthcare systems benefits residents with excellent service and care.

Beyond hospitals, Highlands Ranch supports numerous urgent care clinics, specialty practices, dental offices, and wellness providers. The medical infrastructure matches the community's high standards and growing population.

Utilities & Services: New Resident Essentials

Setting up your new home in Highlands Ranch? Here's what you need to know about essential services. These details help you plan your move and budget accurately.

Water & Sewer

Highlands Ranch Water (formerly Centennial Water & Sanitation District) provides water and wastewater services throughout most of the community. Contact them before your move-in date to establish service and ensure continuous water access. Their customer service team can explain billing cycles and conservation programs.

Internet & Cable

Xfinity and **CenturyLink/Lumen** serve different neighborhoods, so availability varies by address. Check coverage maps before moving to ensure your preferred provider serves your specific location. Some newer neighborhoods may have fiber options, while others rely on cable or DSL. Remote workers should verify upload speeds if video conferencing is essential.

Trash & Recycling

Unlike some HOA communities, Highlands Ranch allows residents to choose from multiple private haulers for trash and recycling service. However, HRCA offers an **opt-in discount program** with preferred providers. Compare options—the HRCA discount often provides the best value while simplifying service setup.

Electricity & Gas

Xcel Energy provides both electricity and natural gas throughout Highlands Ranch. Contact them at least a week before move-in to establish service. Consider their budget billing option for predictable monthly payments despite seasonal usage variations.

Local Gotchas: What Nobody Tells You

Every community has unwritten rules and surprises that catch newcomers off guard. Here's what long-time Highlands Ranch residents wish they'd known from day one.

1

Architectural Review Committee (ARC) Approval

That fence you want to install? The new paint color? Solar panels? Even significant landscaping changes typically require **ARC approval before you start work**. Each neighborhood has specific guidelines, and the approval process can take several weeks. Plan ahead for any exterior modifications, and submit detailed plans with your application. Some neighborhoods are strict about adherence to approved color palettes and materials.

2

Trail Etiquette Matters

The extensive trail system means you'll encounter cyclists, runners, dog walkers, and families on the same paths. **Keep dogs leashed** outside designated off-leash areas (Chatfield is your best option for unleashed play). Cyclists have the right of way on multi-use trails, so stay alert and move to the side when you hear "on your left." These aren't mountain trails—they're transportation corridors requiring urban awareness.

3

Backcountry Access Rules

That beautiful wilderness area? Some trails and programs are **HRCA members only**, and certain areas require guided access beyond specific gates. Don't assume you can explore everywhere independently. The restrictions exist to preserve the wilderness character and wildlife habitat while managing safety. Check the HRCA website or visitor center for current access rules and required permits.

4

Parking & RV Storage

Many neighborhoods have strict rules about street parking, RV storage, and commercial vehicles. That boat or camper may need to stay at a storage facility rather than your driveway. Some neighborhoods restrict overnight street parking entirely. Review CC&Rs carefully if you have recreational vehicles, work trucks, or multiple cars.

What's Next: Sterling Ranch & New Development



Sterling Ranch: The Neighbor to Watch

Just west of Highlands Ranch, **Sterling Ranch** represents the next generation of master-planned communities in Douglas County. This large-scale development brings new construction homes, extensive parks and trails, and modern amenities to the area.

Key development: A new **Douglas County School District elementary school** is slated to open in Sterling Ranch for the **2027–28 school year**, addressing growing enrollment in the area. This addition benefits both Sterling Ranch and nearby Highlands Ranch neighborhoods by relieving capacity constraints.

The development's growth expands retail and dining options accessible to Highlands Ranch residents while maintaining the open space and outdoor lifestyle that defines the region. Some buyers consider Sterling Ranch for new construction options while others prefer Highlands Ranch's established amenities and mature landscaping.

Try-Before-You-Buy: Your 30-Day Exploration Plan

Considering a move to Highlands Ranch? Whether you're visiting from out of state or just want to thoroughly evaluate the community before committing, this four-week plan helps you experience life like a resident, not a tourist.

01

Week 1: Amenity Deep Dive

Visit all four HRCA recreation centers during different times of day. Morning visits show the retiree and stay-at-home-parent crowd; evenings reveal after-work and family usage patterns. Take a morning walk or bike ride at **Highland Heritage Regional Park** and **Redstone Park** to experience the trail system. Do a driving tour of key neighborhoods: BackCountry, Kentley Hills, The Hearth, and Indigo Hill. Note street conditions, home maintenance, and yard sizes.

03

Week 3: Lifestyle Immersion

Spend a Saturday at **Chatfield State Park**—rent a kayak or paddleboard, visit the dog park, and explore the trails. Check the HRCA event calendar and attend a **summer concert** or take a tour of the **Highlands Ranch Mansion**. Do the coffee crawl: start at **Lost Coffee** in Town Center, grab lunch at **Toastique**, and explore the retail areas along University Boulevard. Shop for groceries like you live here—which stores would you use?

02

Week 2: Commute Reality Check

Test your actual commute during rush hour. Drive to the **Denver Tech Center** on a Tuesday morning at 7:30 AM. Time your return trip at 5:00 PM on a Thursday. If you'll use transit, do a complete Park-n-Ride experience from **Lincoln or RidgeGate stations** to Downtown. Experience both directions to understand real travel time including parking, waiting, and walking segments. Consider the commute in bad weather—Colorado's sudden snowstorms change everything.

04

Week 4: Decision Time

Visit schools if you have children (call ahead for tours). Run the budget numbers including HRCA assessment, estimated utilities, and property taxes. Compare 3–5 neighborhoods that matched your criteria. Create a shortlist of specific homes if you're ready to buy. Meet with a local real estate agent who specializes in Highlands Ranch—they'll provide neighborhood comps, school boundary details, and HRCA insights you can't get online.

This systematic approach reveals whether Highlands Ranch fits your lifestyle before you sign papers. The investment of four weeks can save years of regret or confirm you've found your perfect community.

Ready to Make Highlands Ranch Home?



Let's Find Your Perfect Highlands Ranch Home

I specialize in helping out-of-state buyers and relocating families navigate the Highlands Ranch market. From neighborhood comparisons to school boundary verification, HRCA nuance explanation to on-the-ground video tours of properties, I provide the local expertise that makes your transition smooth and confident.

What I offer:

- Detailed neighborhood comps and market analysis
- School attendance boundary verification
- Video tours of homes and neighborhoods
- HRCA amenity and assessment guidance
- Connections to trusted local service providers
- Ongoing support after closing

You're not just buying a house—you're choosing a lifestyle and community for your family. Let's make sure you get it right.