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mobil'homme

Top 10 Aspen Outdoors Adventures

Aspen, 1 Day

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Guide Description

AUTHOR NOTE: The mountains, rivers and lakes of Aspen are amongst the most beautiful in Colorado--and arguably, on planet Earth! From the exhilarating and semi-technical North Maroon Peak to the aspen-lined alpine trails, there's something for adventurers of every level. These are my top ten favorites when I'm in the Aspen area.

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Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Aspen

North Maroon Peak
Classic Colorado route for experienced climbers

Castle Peak
Climb to the summit of the Elk Range's highest peak

Maroon Bells
Colorado's trademark mountains rise over 14,000 ft!

Aspen to Crested Butte
Epic cross-country skiing

Cathedral Lake Trail
Excellent day hike with rewarding views

Lost Man Trail
Explore the rocky, wild side of Colorado's mountains

Difficult Creek Trail
Stunning aspen forests with mining ruins

Maroon-Snowmass Trail
Hump through the mountains with a pack

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Day 1 - Aspen

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 970-925-3445
www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver

location:
806 W. Hallam
Aspen CO 81611

1 North Maroon Peak

Photo courtesy of Josh Steinitz

DESCRIPTION: One of the true jewels of Rocky Mountains, 14,014 ft. North Maroon Peak is a coveted summit for those bagging 14ers or simply climbers looking for an adventure. North Maroon is a difficult, semi-technical climb that is not for inexperienced climbers; those lacking mountain experience can hire a guide in town. The round trip adventure ascends over 3,000 ft. and is a 16 mile round trip. For this reason, many chose to camp out and do the peak in two days instead of in an epic 1-day push. Even the easiest route up North Maroon is a technical climb on steep snow and rotten rock, so be ready for tough terrain and class 4 moves if you want to top out! © NileGuide

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2 Castle Peak

Photo courtesy of White River National Forest

DESCRIPTION: Standing 14,265 above sea level, Castle Peak is one of Colorado's famous 14ers and the highest point in the Elk Range. Despite its lofty presence, a hike to the top of Castle Peak is a non-technical but strenuous trek that is best made in summer or early autumn. Get an early start to avoid storms! The round trip mileage for a trip to Castle's apex is roughly 12 miles if you start from the passenger car trailhead and 7 miles if you drive farther up the rugged 4x4 road. Most reasonably fit people can reach the top; just make sure to take a few days to adjust to the altitude if you are coming from out of town. For more detailed information on routes, please visit 14ers.com. © NileGuide

contact:
tel: +1 970 925 3445
http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm

location:
Maroon Creek Road
Aspen CO 81611

3 Maroon Bells

DESCRIPTION: If you have to choose one outdoor related activity while in Aspen, put a visit to Maroon Bells at the top of your list. Its three prominent and sharply defined peaks are some of the most photographed mountains in North America. Hike the trail around Maroon Lake, which is easy and offers spectacular views of the mountains reflecting off the shimmering water. Due to heavy traffic, this area is accessible only by bus during the summer, unless you prefer to hike or bike in. Between Memorial Day and Labor Day, buses run daily from 8:30am to 5pm. After Labor Day, car traffic is allowed on weekdays up until the road closes for the winter due to snow. Pack water and food for there are no refreshment stands. © wcities.com

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contact:
tel: +1 970 925 3445
http://www.fs.fed.us/

location:
806 West Hallam Street
Aspen CO 81611

hours:
Open 24 hrs daily mid-Dec-late Mar

4 Aspen to Crested Butte

Photo courtesy of Aspen to Crested Butte

DESCRIPTION: Those looking for an epic winter adventure will love the challenge of the 25-mile Aspen to Crested Butte ski traverse. This hut-based adventure can take anywhere between 1-3 days and ends in the town of Crested Butte, where you'll need to either leave a vehicle or take a shuttle back to Aspen. Established but ungroomed trails go over a 12,075 ft. pass that cuts through the Elk Range and ends in the town of Crested Butte. Huts must be reserved in advance (contact the Ashcroft Ski Touring Center (970) 925 1971 for more info) and include Tagert and Friends Huts. © NileGuide

contact:
tel: 970-925-3445
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location:
806 W. Hallam
Aspen CO 81611

5 Cathedral Lake Trail

"Photo courtesy of Cathedral Lake Trail

DESCRIPTION: Cathedral Lake Trail is a hearty day hike, but don't let its strenuous nature deter you. The 6.4 mile round trip is an out and back, on-trail adventure that climbs steeply to the amazing amphitheater of Cathedral Lake. Huge rock formations surround the alpine waters, making for an incredible all-natural setting. Nearby Electric Pass provides even more scenery for fit hikers or backpackers that have the energy to explore the area. To reach the trailhead, drive 1/2 mile west of Aspen on Highway 82 and at the roundabout, turn onto Castle Creek Road. Continue 12.2 miles up Castle Creek and turn right onto a gravel road, driving a 1/2 mile to the trailhead. © NileGuide

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location:
806 W. Hallam
Aspen CO 81611

6 Lost Man Trail

DESCRIPTION: This is a moderate climb with a couple steep sections. This trail is good for hiking and backpacking. Fishing is fair in Independence Lake, Lost Man Lake, and Lost Man Reservoir. The trail is not a complete loop; it is a good idea to set up a shuttle. The narrative is from Lost Man Campground, follow in reverse if starting from the upper parking lot. The trail begins to the left of the bulletin board and quickly crosses a wooden bridge. At the 1/2 mile mark, the trail forks. Take the right (left goes to Midway Pass) and continue to Lost Man Reservoir and keep left around the reservoir. At approximately the 3-1/2 mile mark there is a junction, turn right (left goes to South Fork Pass). The trail gradually ascends to Lost Man Lake. From the lake the trail ascends steeply to the top of a pass and then descends steeply to Independence Lake. The trail descends gradually to Highway 82, about 4 miles to the trailhead. Directions: 1. Lost Man Campground: Drive 14 miles east of Aspen on Highway 82 to the parking lot directly across from Lost Man Campground. The trailhead begins on the left (north) side of the highway. 2. Last Switchback: Drive 18-1/2 miles east of Aspen on Highway 82 to the parking lot at the last switchback before the top of Independence Pass. The trailhead is on the left (north) side of the highway.

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location:
806 W. Hallam

7 Difficult Creek Trail

DESCRIPTION: Difficult Creek campground is the starting point for this backcountry adventure. The trail crosses several streams and sagebrush flats before ending 2.6 miles at a series of old mining cabins. Those hoping to explore off-trail can continue on into the wilderness, provided

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Aspen CO 81611

they are adequately prepared to self-navigate in the woods. Wildlife abounds in this area and photographers will have plenty of opportunities to shoot images of the mountain wilderness. To reach the Difficult Creek Trail, drive 5 miles southeast of the Aspen Ranger District Office on Hwy. 82 and turn right into Difficult Campground. 0.6 miles down the road, park your vehicle at the picnic area on the right. © NileGuide

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location:
806 West Hallam Street
Aspen CO 81611

hours:
May-Oct: Daily 24 hrs

8 Maroon-Snowmass Trail

Photo Courtesy of USDA Forest Service

DESCRIPTION: This 17-mile hike presents a continuous visual buffet line of amazing mountain scenery. Gin-clear alpine lakes, cascading streams, beaver ponds, and endless mountain peaks are the norm rather than the exception. Time this two-day hike in late July for an amazing wildflower display. Camping options abound in the Minnehaha Gulch area. As an exclamation point to the hike it ends at the base of the famous Maroon Bells. From Snowmass follow Divide Road past Krabloonik's Restaurant. After a deep descent, take the left fork. The trailhead is at the end of the road. This trail is one of the most heavily used trails in the Aspen area. Hikers, backpackers and horse travelers enjoy the wildflowers, views and access to other areas within the Wilderness. Camping at Crater Lake (designated sites only) and Snowmass Lake can get very crowded. This trail description starts at Snowmass Falls Ranch following a road that turns into a single track. In a little over 1 mile the trail forks, stay left (right goes to West Snowmass Trail). The trail ascends to the east side of the Snowmass Creek for about 6 miles. The trail continues to the left of a large beaver pond and shortly crosses a second beaver pond via a large log jam. The trail continues (south) on the other side ascending several switchbacks then entering forest. About 1/4 mile before Snowmass Lake the trail forks, take the left fork to continue on the Maroon-Snowmass trail or find the group and fire sites area (the right goes to Snowmass Lake). Continue past the group sites to another trail junction. Stay left, the trail descends through forest and crosses Snowmass Creek via a ford. The trail ascends into the valley and begins a steep ascend to Buckskin Pass. From the top of Buckskin Pass the trail switchbacks down to the junction with the Willow Lake Trail. Take the right fork to continue on the Maroon-Snowmass Trail. The trail descends through Minnehaha Gulch to the junction for Crater Lake. At the Crater Lake bulletin board take the left fork. The trail continues to descend to Maroon Lake. Directions: Drive 4.7 miles west of Aspen on Highway 82 and turn left onto Brush Creek Road. Follow Brush Creek Road 4.8 miles and turn right onto Divide Road. The road passes the Krabloonik Restaurant at 10.3 miles, and descends steeply before reaching a fork. Continue straight to the end of the road (Passing the East Snowmass Trail at 11.9 miles on the left.) where there is parking (12.1 miles). © wcities.com

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Aspen Snapshot

Local Info

Aspen is, of course, best known as a high-end skiing destination but many parts of the area remain quaint and provincial even today(outside of the posh resorts, chalets and bistros). Located west of Denver, the town is set at 7,908 feet and offers spectacular mountain scenery in any season. If you're thinking of visiting at a time other than the winter months, there are many fun things to do all round the area. But if you're planning a visit to ski, you're in for a one-of-a-kind experience.

Skiing and Snowboarding

Ski resorts are everywhere around Aspen and the favorite of many visitors, including jetsetters and Hollywood stars, is Aspen Mountain on Colorado 82. There are no beginner runs here--only intermediate and advanced--so it's perfect for skiers and snowboarders who don't like cluttered slopes. Snow enthusiasts who are just starting might try Buttermilk Ski Resort, located outside Aspen Mountain, where beginners are welcome. Two other resorts in the Aspen area are Aspen Highlands and Snowmass. Lift tickets bought at any are good for all.

Backcountry skiing in Aspen is also a popular activity. Many visitors head to the trail that leads to the Alfred A. Braun Hut System, where you can enjoy an overnight stay. Backcountry skiing allows you to experience nature's most beautiful sites but you have to be in good shape to do this on your own. You can hire a guide to help you out, if you're inexperienced.

If you don't want to do any work yourself, snowmobiling is the way to get around. There are plenty of rentals near the White River National Forest. You can also hire a guide to lead you, which is a good idea, since the terrain can be unpredictable.

Dining and Nightlife

Skiing and partying go hand in hand and Aspen carries on this tradition as nowhere else.(A lot of visitors leave out the skiing altogether.) There are over 100 bars and restaurants to choose from, offering everything from quick meals to gourmet food, and the city is alive with action at night.

Gusto Ristorante is a fairly new dining establishment with authentic Italian food. At Jimmy's the specialties are steak, tequila and Saturday-night salsa dancing. Elevation serves sumptuous dinners and is a late-night watering hole for guests who enjoy techno music and international sounds. 39 Degrees is another hotspot with pool bar, outdoor firepits and delicious cocktails. For lunch, try Johnny McGuire's, a local favorite with deli food and affordable sandwiches perfect for picnics and ski tours.

Festivals

Aspen has a lot of fun things to do year-round. The Aspen Dance Festival is an international event held during summer months, with troupes performing from all over the world. The Jazz Aspen Snowmass Festival is actually two festivals: the June Festival in the last week of June and the Labor Day Festival at summer's end.
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History

Aspen was not always a quirky town filled with posh eateries, hotels, multi-million dollar homes and fur-clad celebrities on skis. What is now the winter hub for the rich and famous, and a world-class destination for extreme sport fans, was once the summer hunting home of the Ute Indian tribe. Archaeologists have found evidence of an ancient people in the Roaring Fork Valley some 8,000 years ago.

By the time Colorado achieved statehood in 1876, the rush for gold and silver was in full swing. Mining settlements sprung up on the high country, as prospectors pried their fortunes from the rock with an undying urgency. At the time, Leadville was the state's second largest city next to Denver. The settlement, tucked away on the east side of the Continental Divide, had some of the deepest veins of silver ever found. But it was not until 1879, when a few pioneers surmounted the divide at what is now Independence Pass and ventured into the Ute's hunting ground, that the ground was literally spitting silver. They quickly set up camp, pushed the tribe out of the valley and named it Ute City. In 1881, the city changed its name to Aspen.

Mining camps popped up everywhere west of the divide and took names like Ashcroft and Independence. But Aspen benefited from more than just mining. Two railroads utilized the town as a hub. Plus, outside investments from the likes of Macy's president Jerome Wheeler and lawyer David Hyman helped build a solid industrial infrastructure and urban framework.

By the late 1880s, Aspen's population topped 12,000. The town now had an opera house, six newspapers, a red light district, three banks, a host of churches and a hospital. At that point, close to a million dollars worth of silver and one of the biggest nuggets ever(weighing in at 2,200 pounds) had been extracted from the area mines.

Once the Sherman Silver Act was passed and silver was devalued in 1893, those hunting fortune vanished, and the area settlements stood empty and dilapidated. Most of them ultimately crumbled and disappeared. The remnants of Independence and Ashcroft are now ghost towns popular among tourists. Aspen survived, but the population dwindled, bottoming out to about 700 people in the 1930s. In 1935, a group of international investors came to the Roaring Fork Valley looking for an ideal location to build a ski area on par with European resorts. Andre Roch, a renowned Swiss outdoorsman, was given the task, but after constructing a lodge, boat tow, and initial slope, World War II began and eliminated any hope of completion.

The 10th Mountain Division, a military ski unit stationed at a camp outside of Leadville, returned to Aspen Mountain once the war ended. The most prominent of these soldiers was an Austrian named Friedl Pfeifer. Pfeifer, who purchased a number of the mining claims and some of the surface rights to the area, partnered

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with Walter Paepcke, a wealthy industrialist, to transform Aspen.

Paepcke sought to create the “Aspen Idea.” He wanted the town to be a cultural Utopia, a place where great thinkers could assemble and share ideas, a place where people could travel to renew the spirit and rejuvenate the mind. Pfeifer just wanted to build a major skiing center and watched with pride as the longest chair lift(Lift-1) in the world at the time escorted the first skiers up the slopes for Aspen Mountain's official opening in the winter of 1947.

Two years later, Paepcke conceived the Goethe Bicentennial Convocation, where Dr. Albert Schweitzer and other distinguished minds put Aspen on the intellectual map. This event spawned a number of programs in music, theater, art and dance, including the Aspen Musical Festival. Paepcke also hired Bauhaus architect Herbert Bayer to leave a visual impression on the town. Bayer, along with Fredric Benedict, designed the Aspen Institute and Aspen Meadows Conference Center, which acted as the grounds for Paepcke's intellectual meetings. Bayer also restored existing structures like the Wheeler Opera House.

In 1950, the ski area hosted a prestigious downhill championship, attracting the best skiers in the area. This event, the first of its kind in the states, established Aspen as a world-class ski destination. The stage was set for Aspen's final conversion from a mining hub to an elite cultural and sport center.

In 1958, Pheifer went on to construct slopes at neighboring Buttermilk Mountain, while Whipple Van Ness Jones carved the trails for Aspen Highlands. An avalanche of development spread across the valley as investors sought to make Aspen attractive year-round. The Aspen Golf Course soon popped up and condominiums became the preferred choice of housing.

The Aspen Ski Corporation, which took over management of Aspen Mountain, Highlands Mountain and Buttermilk, built Snowmass in 1967 to complete the four-mountain resort. Snowmass, back then, featured around 50 miles of trails.

The 1970s and 1980s brought about the quaint pedestrian malls. Posh restaurants, five-star hotels, mansions, and, of course, celebrities followed, solidifying Aspen as a high-class ski wonderland.

The town John Denver put into song has come a long way from its mining heydays. The population now hovers around 6,000. Issues of growth have forced locals to take extreme measures to preserve its sanctity. Commercialization is rampant and high monthly rents, especially in the Downtown vicinity, have sky-rocketed to be more than most people's annual salary. Condos sprawl along the four mountains and many of the mammoth mansions littering Red Mountain and the upper West End sit empty most of the year.

Unlike many other Colorado resorts, Aspen maintains a small town charm. The locals are exceptionally friendly and make a great effort to take away any preconceived pretensions associated with the town. Sure, the stars like Kevin Costner, Jimmy Buffet, Michael Jordan and Jack Nicholson are just a few that frequent the town. But under a mass of stylish ski wear, they look just like anyone else.

Aspen Mountain recently celebrated 50 years, reminding everyone just how far a town will go for the love of a sport. Through all the glitz and glamor, the “Aspen Idea,” is still at the heart of the town.
©

Hotel Insights

Aspen is a town ruled by seasons and when it comes to finding accommodations, the time of year can mean the difference between hundreds, and even thousands, of dollars. Unfortunately, you cannot categorize everything into four simple seasons. Aspen has a multitude that make lodging decisions even more complicated. Most hotels are in and around Aspen proper and the four ski mountains, although you can also find inexpensive options Downvalley. Aspen is so small that on a good day you can probably throw a snowball from one end to the other. The slopes of Aspen Mountain and all the shops, galleries and restaurants of Downtown are within walking distance of most hotels.

West End

The Ullr Lodge B&B, located on the outer edge of the West End, is a bare bones lodge perfect for those who enjoy a bit of quiet, although Main Street traffic can border on being obnoxious during certain seasons. At the edge of Downtown, the lodging levels of luxury and price escalate dramatically. The Sardy House occupies a charming Victorian hidden beneath lofty spruce trees. The pleasant suites, with vaulted ceilings, period antiques and cherrywood beds, not to mention the whirlpools and feather comforters, are popular with couples. Two doors down, the Hotel Aspen offers a contemporary alternative to the Old World, European style lodging prominent in town.

Other choices includeSki Magazine favorite, the Boomerang Lodge, one of the first built after Aspen became a ski town in 1947. You can choose from a studio or upgrade to a posh three-bedroom suite, complete with a soaking tub to rest your body after a long day on the slopes. The St. Moritz Lodge& Condominiums is another no frills, affordable choice only five blocks from Downtown. The Limelite Lodge, is a short walk across Wagner Park to the Cooper Avenue Mall.

The Aspen Meadows Conference Center, designed by Bauhaus architect Herbert Bayer, is an ideal setting for business retreats. Although it is quite far from Aspen Mountain, the hotel is within walking distance of the music tent that hosts the yearly Aspen Music Festival. The rooms are some of the most modern and interesting around.

Downtown

For the experience of staying in a backcountry hut that's still within six blocks of Downtown, consider L'Auberge d' Aspen. These 16 cottages look like something out ofHansel and Gretel, and each features individual decorations that range from simple to ornate. Just past Third Street, you run into the Aspen Mountain Lodge. Famous for its towering river rock fireplace, the lodge offers a variety of stylish rooms, but watch out for the five-day minimum stay imposed during the winter ski season.

The Innsbruck Inn, just across from the Aspen Mountain Lodge, has a friendly staff that makes you feel like they really want you to be there. The rooms are cozy and some offer views of Aspen Mountain. The French toast served with the Continental breakfast is worth the room rate alone. Over on the other side of Main Street, the holiday spirit is always alive at the

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Christmas Inn. The small, family owned inn, accented with the traditional green and red colors of the holiday season, is one of Aspen's more affordable finds. A mammoth sculpture of an eagle, easily seen from Main Street, is a signal you have reached the Tyrolean Lodge, which offers cheap and spacious rooms.

If you crave a bit of history and extravagance, the Hotel Jerome is the jewel of Main Street. Built in the late 1800s, at the height of Aspen's silver boom, the hotel is now one of the most sought after. Seven conference rooms make it ideal for business, and with room names like Grand and Premier, that hover around a thousand dollars per night, staying here is a real treat. If you cannot secure a room reservation, make sure you stop by the hotel's famous The J-Bar or stroll around the lobby just to check out the architecture.

The ski-in/ski-out crowd can opt for The Little Nell, a five-star gem at the base of Aspen Mountain. Not only are you a few steps from the Silver Queen Gondola, but Downtown is only a block away. The only drawback is that the Little Nell is one of Aspen's most expensive hotels. With designer decor, fireplaces, jacuzzis and every other amenity imaginable, the rooms are worth the money. The St Regis Aspen has many of the same luxuries as the Little Nell without the ski-in/ski-out access, but Lift 1A is just up the road.

Easy access to the slopes does not have to cost a fortune. Places like the Skiers Chalet, Lift One Condominiums and the Mountain Chalet are great alternatives to the high priced hotels.

Aspen only has a few bed-and-breakfasts. The Independence Square Bed and Breakfast, located across from the Cooper Street Mall, and the Snow Queen Victorian Bed& Breakfast Lodge are the only two in the Downtown area.

Buttermilk/Snowmass Village

Beginning skiers and snowboarders flock to Buttermilk Mountain to hone their skills, but the Inn at Aspen is the only lodging choice, and it does offer ski-in/ski-out access.

Snowmass Village, which is 12 miles west of Aspen, not only offers over 50 miles of downhill trails, but has a wealth of shopping, après ski activities and lodging. The Snowmass Club, which offers one, two and three-bedroom condos, is a complete resort, with skiing in the winter and golfing and tennis in the summer. If business is on the agenda or you are planning a big wedding, the Silvertree Hotel has a number of conference and banquet rooms, many with slopeside views. Plus, the spacious suites, some with whirlpools and balconies, are very affordable. The Woodbridge Condominiums offer two-bedroom units available directly adjacent to Lift Six, and give you the feeling you never left home.

Downvalley

During the ski season and high summer season Aspen becomes so crowded you get the feeling you are walking around a rock concert—the traffic congestion is an annoyance, parking is impossible, and the streets are jammed with people. To avoid this, give up the convenience of staying in Aspen and opt to find lodging in Basalt or even Carbondale.

Basalt, in addition to the Best Western Aspenalt Lodge, has a couple of notable bed-and-breakfast houses, including the cozy Midland House. Located in an old Victorian home that once served as a bunkhouse for railroad workers, this family owned B&B has four comfortable rooms bedecked in western motifs. The Shenandoah Inn, located on the banks of the Roaring Fork River, also has four rooms, including one that has a balcony that hangs over the river. If you still miss the comforts of a chain and do not mind staying 30 minutes outside of Aspen, Carbondale has a Days Inn and a Comfort Inn.

Solving the Seasons

Low ski: The time from opening day(usually mid-November) until the holiday season, which starts mid-December. Rooms in Aspen are still easy to come by and relatively affordable.

Holiday: The period from mid-December until January 1 is the most expensive time to stay in Aspen, and lodging is hard to find unless you reserve well in advance. Also, most places require a minimum stay of up to seven days, which can get costly considering you will find few rooms under USD200.

Value Ski: With people sluggish from the holidays and pinching pennies after their gift buying sprees, the month of January tends to be slow in terms of visitors, making it a perfect time to hit the slopes. Many hotels and bed-and-breakfasts still require a minimum stay(usually two to three days), but room prices do come down.

Regular Ski: February and March bring more snow and more people to the slopes than any other time during the ski season. Room rates become expensive and the minimum stays remain in effect. But the powder is awesome.

Spring Ski/Spring/Mud Season: During April(although only at Snowmass and sometimes Aspen Mountain) you can don a bathing suit and ski the heavy-snow slopes beneath the sun. But once the ski slopes close, the entire area goes into brief hibernation from April until early June. You cannot ski, and the snow run-off mucks up the trails making summer activities like biking and hiking difficult. Many businesses close shop for a week or so during this time. But rooms are easy to book and at some of the cheapest rates of the year. No minimum stays in most cases.

Summer: Room rates shoot back up over the summer(mid-June through September), but they are not nearly as high as during the ski season. Although a large number of visitors occupy area campgrounds such as Difficult and Weller, or head off into the backcountry, rooms still fill up, especially during Aspen Jazz Fest and the International Outdoor Festival. If you look around you can usually find a good deal on a room, but many units in the luxury hotels, especially the suites, still run upwards of $500 a night.

Fall Off-Season: If you are looking to avoid crowds, head to Aspen from October to mid-November. The town is literally empty of tourists and the rooms are as cheap as they get. The daytime weather for October tends to be mild, so you can still hit the trails, and if a heavy snowfall does blanket the area, you can snowshoe or cross country ski. Rooms are easy to come by, and you can even show up without a reservation and quickly find a room on the spot for as low as$60 a night(the fancy hotels still charge over USD100 a night). Many of the restaurants and shops close during the beginning of November, but you can easily find enough going on to make the trip worthwhile. Plus, it is cool to see the locals giddy with anticipation over the ski area's approaching opening day.
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Restaurants Insights

When it comes to choosing a restaurant in Aspen, good luck. The cosmopolitan selection of eateries in the Downtown area is so overwhelming, you could go hungry trying to decide on where to dine. Ambling from street to street, and weighing the menus of the numerous five-star gourmet restaurants and endless local food havens, becomes quite a task. You'll find the most selection Downtown, but don't be afraid to explore the options in Snowmass Village or Downvalley as well.

Downtown

If you need a quick bite before you hit the slopes, stop by the Paradise Bakery for a muffin and espresso. Located just across the Cooper Avenue Mall, it is also the place to find Gelati in the summer. Aspen Bagel Bites is always a popular stop on the lower end of Downtown and offers quick sandwiches. At Zele you can perk up with an assortment of caffeine beverages, bagel sandwiches, croissants and scones. Poppycocks offers the standard bacon and eggs breakfast, but also has granola and yogurt. It is also close to the Silver Queen Gondola.

For a sit down breakfast, there are few places in town that can top the blueberry pancakes at Jack's. Good luck getting a table in the morning at Wienerstube, a local Austrian favorite that serves up eggs benedict, sausages and Viennese pastries. During the peak season, this is the place to be before hitting the slopes.

Inexpensive lunch and dinner options include an array of typical pub fodder, but if you look around a bit you will find a number of creative alternatives. When it comes to bargain Mexican fare, locals flock to the Aspen Underground for the burritos, and to The Cantina for its hearty helpings and potent margaritas. La Cocina has a charming patio that is heated in winter and tree lined in summer.

You will discover big slices of pizza you have to fold to fit in your mouth at New York Pizza, which also offers sandwiches and salads. Keeping with the Italian theme, Lucci's serves up food in huge portions—from chicken parmesan to lasagna to baked ziti. Trattioria Toscana is an excellent find for those in the mood for romance; it takes you from the mountains of Colorado to the hills of Northern Italy for a taste of Tuscan-inspired entrees.

Old-fashioned pub grub keeps Aspen honest, and there are plenty of places you can kick back with a burger and a beer. Bentley's, located in the historic Wheeler Opera House, is a restored Victorian English pub popular with locals. You will see all kinds gathered around the bar, from yuppies bedecked in fancy leather coats to young hippies draped in trendy 70s streetwear. J-Bar, the Hotel Jerome's landmark bar, has drawn a crowd since the late 1800s. It is a casual stop that features normal burger and sandwich bar fare. Little Annie's Eating House is a neighborhood joint with an eclectic menu and multiple personalities. Part Western saloon, part country club, the popular spot is a haven for locals and tourist alike. The 100-year-old Red Onion is another traditional drinking spot. Besides the abundance of microbrews available, you can also order Mexican food, burgers, soups and salads.

Perhaps the most famous cheap eat destination in the Downtown area is the Popcorn Wagon. From hot dogs and sandwiches to gyros and crepes, this 1913 Cretor's Special Model D wagon stocks a wide range of quick treats. Regardless of season, seating is outdoor only. Provided heat lamps, however, do make the winter chill less biting.

Olives, located in the St Regis Hotel, is where chef Todd English wows visitors with his mix of the Mediterranean among the mountains. Try the Brick Oven Roasted Chilean Bass. The signature community table is a great place to meet travelers from around the world. Syzygy is a hip restaurant with a chef skilled in preparing wild game, a master sommelier, and a jazz-laden atmosphere.

If you can track down a member to sponsor you for a week's membership to the Caribou Club, the doors of high society will open for you. Being in this place is like hanging out in a dignitary's den, and it features five-star meals, pricey cigars and a wine list that tops 5,000 bottles. After dinner, the Club's disco heats up for dancing. Cache Cache takes you on a gastronomical journey into the heart of Provence, while Campo de Fiori explores the cuisine of Tuscany. The Mother Lode has been the place for Italian standards and romance for more than 40 years.

If you are craving a taste of Colorado, head over to Pinons for Roasted Lamb Chops, a tasty cut of elk or sautéed Colorado Pheasant. The surf and turf crowd has been filling the Steak Pit since 1960 for juicy cuts of meat and fresh crab and lobster. Meat lovers can find BBQ in Aspen at Rusty's Hickory House.

Aspen has a number of restaurants specializing in sushi and Asian cuisine. Matsuhisa Aspen brings the artful ideas of one of the worlds most respected sushi chefs to Aspen. Celebrity chef Nobu Matsuhisa raises the art of sushi to a new level, fusing traditional Japanese ideas with a variety of worldly influences. If you are hoping to share sashimi with the stars, it just might happen here. Kenichi is another world-class sushi stop, and offers one of the best sake stocks in town, while Little Ollie's is both delicious and easy on the wallet.

Snowmass Village

Over in Snowmass Village you will find a number of diverse fine dining options. Mangia Mangia keeps the ski and snowboard crowd happy with impressive specialty pizzas like the Powder Pie and the Big Daddy. You can also build your own pizza, or opt for a sandwich, salad or bowl of pasta. Snowmass Pizza is perfect for a quick, on-the-go slice. Sno'Beach is a local favorite on the Snowmass Mall, serving burgers, ribs and a huge breakfast menu. At The Stew Pot you can warm up with a big bowl of steaming chili or old-fashioned beef stew. Seafood aficionados can get their fill at Butch's Lobster Bar.

The Brother's Grille features a predominantly American menu, with lots of steak, chicken and pasta dishes. You can also order beef at the Village Steakhouse, or instead opt for trout, pasta or chicken. For French fare head over to La Provence for filet mignon, rack of lamb, and a striped bass that melts in your mouth. Or for wild game in a cabin setting try Krabloonik.

Downvalley

To get a taste of real mountain ambiance, venture outside of Aspen to the Woody Creek Tavern. The menu is a hodgepodge of some Mexican, burgers, steak and seafood. The food is good, but the real reason to visit is the local clientèle. The quirky, but immensely popular, tavern resides in a trailer park and is the watering hole for some interesting characters.

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Perhaps the gem of the Downvalley cuisine offerings is Carbondale's Six 89. The seasonal new American menu features Colorado classics such as lamb and smoked duck created by famed chef Mark Fischer.
©

Nightlife Insights

Once the snow melts and the mud dries, the valley becomes a Mecca for everything from biking and hiking to camping and fishing. The mountains surrounding Aspen offer endless ways to spend the lazy days of summer. Tourists fill the town for festivals, and Aspen's other cultural offerings, which rival that of most major cities. But without the four ski mountains attracting millions of visitors each year, Aspen would probably have more horses than people. So here is a quick look at the slopes.

Skiing

Aspen Mountain

The original ski mountain presents some of the most challenging terrain in the state. If you are putting on skis for the first time or are still in the beginning phases, go somewhere else, because these trails are unforgiving. Out of Aspen Mountain's 76 trails, 65 percent fall into the advanced or expert category—double black diamonds are everywhere. On the west side of the mountain are several intermediate trails(i.e. Blues), but only a few like Roach Run and International are cruisers. If you want big bumps, almost every steep has them, and the tree skiing is awesome. After years of banning snowboarders, Aspen Mountain finally gave in at the end of the 2001 ski season and opened its slopes to boarders.

Aspen Highland

Although developers keep chipping away at Aspen Highland's throwback appeal, the area is still a major draw for backcountry and telemark enthusiasts looking for lots of trees and steeps. The Highland Bowl, with its fan of double black diamond runs, is a true favorite of locals. The 112 trails have terrain suitable for all skill levels, but if you are looking for the cruising runs(minus the Greens), you might choose another mountain, because these slopes are loaded with bumps. You will constantly hear the locals talking about it, especially for spring skiing when the moguls really begin to soften.

Buttermilk

If you are still in the snowplow phase and could use some instructions, spend a few days on this beginner-friendly mountain. Buttermilk has one of the most extensive and thorough ski schools around, and after a few days of lessons, you can cruise with far more confidence. This is also the place to bring the kids. The wee ones have their own lift and hill here. Out of the 43 trails, almost 75 percent are in the beginner and intermediate range.

Snowmass

This mountain has come along way from its early days when it was known as Slowmass. Now, thanks to three terrain parks, the area is a favorite with snowboarders and even attracts the wild two-day Boardfest. In addition, Snowmass, the largest of the four area mountains, boasts incredibly diverse terrain which includes cruising runs, mogul fields and stretching glades. Beginners may be out of luck(only 7 percent of the 83 trails are greens), but intermediate and advanced skiers will find plenty to their liking, especially on the double black steeps off the Black Burn lift. Because this area is tourist heavy the locals tend to avoid it.

Sunlight

If the lift prices in Aspen scare you off, do what a good deal of the locals living paycheck to paycheck do: head to Sunlight. Located 40 miles outside of Aspen the terrain is 75 percent beginner/intermediate, but the 32 dollar lift ticket is the cheapest around.

Winter Sports

Other winter activities include mushing with the Krabloonik Dogsleds and ice-skating at the outdoor Silver Circle Ice Rink, or the indoor Aspen Ice Garden.

Both the Aspen Cross Country Center and the Snowmass Club Cross Country Center offer nordic skiing on over 50 miles of groomed trails. Trail maps are available in the local ski shops and at the Aspen Visitors Center. The Ashcroft Ski Touring Center also has groomed trails, and after cross-country skiing you can refuel at the nearby Pine Creek Cookhouse. Although most locals despise the activity, snowmobile rides are also available in the area. Or, you can strap yourself into a pair of snowshoes and get a new perspective on hiking.

Camping and Fishing

When the seasons change and the weather heats up, Aspen and the Roaring Fork Valley transform into havens for outdoor summer activities. Campgrounds, such as the Silver Queen and Difficult, fill with RVs and car campers, and tourists flood the town for the music and foods festivals.

Fishermen wade into the Frying Pan and Roaring Fork Rivers gathering new fish tales, while rafters splash through the rapids under the guidance of Riff Raft and Blazing Adventures. Mountain and road bikes adorn the top of sport utility vehicles, and the jet set begins to sweat, except for those opting for a game of high altitude golf at the Aspen Golf Course.

Hiking

A myriad of hiking trails run up the surrounding mountains, and many are easily accessible from Downtown. Both the Ute Trial and the Aspen Mountain Trail reward you with views of Aspen and the surrounding valley. The Rio Grande Trail runs through lower Downtown along the Roaring Fork River and heads downvalley. It is an easy alternative to trails that require serious elevation gains. If you want to hike with the locals, head over to the Smuggler Road Trail, a relatively easy 1,000-foot ascent on a dirt road to a sundeck overlooking Downtown. Or if time is an issue try the Maroon Creek Trail.

More experienced hikers can trek the endless trail system in the surrounding backcountry. For a real challenge, you can set off on an expedition to summit one of the 14,000-foot peaks(fourteeners) towering above the valley, including the most photographed mountains in North America, the Maroon Bells. The Maroon Peak Trail provides great access to the peaks.

Biking

If you did not bring your bike, you can rent one at a number of area shops. Mountain bikers have a number of trail options for all skill levels. Technical nuts can take on the Government Trail or hop on the Burlingame Lift to the top of Snowmass and shoot down the mountain. Those who prefer to take it easy can pedal along the Rio Grande

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trail or try the Lincoln Creek Road, a four-wheel drive road that ascends to the Ruby ghost town. Guided bike tours are available through Blazing Adventures, and will even transport you up to Maroon Lake so you only have to ride down. Road bikers can test their lungs on Independence Pass or ride up Maroon Creek Road for a look at Colorado's famed Maroon Bells.

A hot air balloon ride is a great way to see the valley, and jeep tours through Blazing Adventures are available for those looking for a bumpy thrill. For the really adventurous Aspen Paragliding provides lessons.

Museums and Theaters

On days when you aren't out in nature, you can check out Aspen's arts and culture side. A plethora of galleries in the Downtown area display everything from modern art to decorative art. The Aspen Art Museum, located in an old hydroelectric plant in lower Downtown, hosts rotating exhibitions from established contemporary artists. The museum also offers classes for aspiring painters. Smaller galleries include the Huntsman Gallery, the Omnibus Gallery and the Joel Soroka Gallery.

During the summer you can catch a number of plays and musicals at Theater in the Park, and the Aspen Stage group presents staged readings of original work at a number of area venues. And you can always deck the fancy duds for a night at the opera when productions are running at the Wheeler Opera House. The Crystal Palace is the place to go for comic relief. You can dine on a gourmet dinner while watching a stage show of biting political satire. History buffs will enjoy exploring how life was in the Victorian age at the Wheeler/Stallard House Museum.

Festivals

Festival-goers will find something going on in Aspen at all times of the year. During the height of ski season, the world's best comedians converge on the town for a laugh-a-thon like no other at the US Comedy Arts Festival. Summer brings the Aspen Music Festival. This celebration of classical music spans nine weeks and most concerts, which consist of both up-and-coming and professional musicians, takes place in the famed Music Tent.

The Aspen Santa Fe Ballet hosts the Aspen Dance Festival during July and August of each year. This festival of movement invites dance troupes from across the nation to present productions on everything from ballet to flamenco. The renowned Food& Wine Festival brings together sommeliers, superstar chefs, vintners and gastronomy aficionados for a food fete in the spring. This event was originally started to attract people to town in the off-season, but has now blossomed into one of the food world's premier events that usually sells out.

Perhaps the most popular festival is Jazz Aspen Snowmass. Over Labor Day, some of the biggest names in jazz, rock, blues and reggae perform at the base of the Snowmass slopes. Tickets go fast and hotel rooms are impossible to find, so make sure you reserve well in advance. In the fall, the Aspen Filmfest takes place, bringing out the celebrities. More than 100 independent films, shorts and documentaries roll on area movie screens.
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Things to Do Insights

Once you arrive in Aspen, settle in, catch your breath(you'll be 7,908 feet above sea level), and give yourself some time to decide what to do. Unless, of course, its winter, and your options are limited to skiing, partying, or skiing. Aspen is interesting, fun and enriching year-round. Most locals say, “I came out here for the winters, but stayed for the summers.”

Aspen Art Museum Downtown Aspen is filled with many cultural offerings. One of the largest, the Aspen Art Museum is housed in an old hydroelectric plant. There are also many influential small galleries to explore, such as the photography-focused Joel Soroka Gallery and the artist-run Huntsman Gallery. Dine at the Red Onion. In the summer months, check out Aspen Theatre in the Park.

Aspen Mountain The Compromise Mine, where the largest silver deposits were found, stretches 2,000 feet into the depths of Aspen Mountain. Take a stroll through Wagner Park. A famous dining spot for visitors is the Tavern, although there are also several other restaurants on the Mountain. Tour the historical Hotel Jerome, the Wheeler/Stallard House Museum and the famous Lift One.

Ashcroft Ghost Town Rent a car and drive 10 miles south of Aspen, to the Ashcroft Ghost Town, which features an array of buildings that somehow continue to survive the harsh winters. Guided tours are available for a mere 3 dollars. The mountain scenery in this area is stunning. The nearby town of Independence was once a fierce competitor with Aspen. But the fall of silver ended that. Today, the remnants of the town reside just below Independence Pass, and self-guided tours allow you to wander in the footsteps of prospectors. Grab a fresh pizza from nearby Bonnie's or head over to the Alpine Mountain Market for more variety.

Snowmass Mountain Explore the trails around Snowmass Mountain on foot, or wander down the Rio Grande Trail, which is perfect for those looking for an accessible trail that doesn't require hiking. If you have the energy to do something more, go skating at the Aspen Ice Garden in the West End. Then, head back Downtown and shop on Galena Street. Have dinner at the famous Blue Maize, where the food never fails to please.

Aspen Highlands The Aspen Highlands are filled with natural wonders that will both delight and inspire. You can opt to buy a combination pass for the Silver Queen Gondola and the bus that goes to Maroon Lake. Be sure to bring the camera, because the lake is at the base of Colorado's famed 14,000 foot Maroon Bells. If time permits take the 45-minute hike on the Crater Lake Trail for a truly close look at the Maroon Bells. In the summer, try some of the weekly attractions such as the Tuesday Night BBQ Dinner or the Sunday Bluegrass Festival.

Many of the tour companies that operate in Aspen focus on outdoor-activities. Catch a sky-high view of the mountains on a balloon tour, or gear up for a day outside and be led through the wilderness on horseback.

Horseback Tours T Lazy 7 Ranch(+1 970 925 4614/http://www.tlazy7.com)

Horsedrawn Carriage Tours Aspen Carriage Company(+1 970 925 3394)

Balloon Tours Unicorn Balloon Tours(+1 800 755 0935/http://www.unicornballon.com/colorado.htm)
Adventure Tours Glenwood Caverns Adventure Park(+1 970 945 4228/http://www.glenwoodcaverns.com) Aspen Expeditions(+1 877 790 2777/http://

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www.aspenexpeditions.com/) 5 Star Adventures(+1 970 544 4700)

Ghost Tours Ghost Walk Through Pioneer Cemetery(+1 970 945 4448/http://www.glenwoodhistory.com/events.htm) Ashcroft Ghost Town Tours(+1 970 925 5756/http://www.aspenhistory.org/ac.html)
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Travel Tips

Getting There

Air

Aspen is serviced by the Aspen/Pitkin County Airport+1 970 920 5384http://www.aspenairport.com

Denver International Airport is located approximately 220 miles away from Denver.

The following carriers offer flights to the Aspen/Pitkin Airport:

US Airways(+1 800-428-4322/http://www.usairways.com) Northwest(+1 800 225 2525/http://www.nwa.com) United(+1 800 241 6522/http://www.ual.com)

From the Airport

Numerous transit options are available from the airport to Aspen and Snowmass.

Bus: Buses offer service twice an hour on Highway 82 near the terminal.

Shuttle: Aspen Snowmass Limo and Airport Express(+1 970 925 5549) CLS Transportation(+1 970 925 2674/http://www.clslimo.com) Colorado Mountain Express(+1 970 949 4227) Hy Mountain Transportation(+1 970 925 8294/http://www.hmtaxi.com) Snow Limousine(+1 970 544 6475/http://www.snolimo.com)

Car Rental: Alamo(+1 800 327 9633/http://www.alamo.com) Avis(+1 800 831 2847/http://www.avis.com) Budget(+1 800 527 0700/http://www.budget.com) Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/http://www.hertz.com)

Taxi: Aspenite Express(+1 970 544 5854)

Train Amtrak(+1 800 872 7245/http://www.amtrak.com) offers services to Glenwood Springs located 20 miles south of Aspen along the California Zephyr line.

Bus Aspen is accessible to Greyhound(+1 800 231 2222/http://www.greyhound.com) and Colorado Mountain Express(+1 800 525 6363/www.ridecme.com) bus lines.

Highway Boulder is easily accessible from I-25, I-70 and US Route 82.

Getting Around

Bus Aspen and Snowmass are serviced by the RFTA(+1 970 925 8484/http://www.rfta.com) bus system.

If traveling overseas, take the safety precaution of registering your trip athttps://travelregistration.state.gov and for helpful, practical advice about traveling technicalities and safety standards check outhttp://travel.state.gov/
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Fun Facts

Aspen

State: Colorado

Country: United States

Aspen by the Numbers:

Population: 5914

Elevation: 7945 Feet/ 2.421 m

Average Snowfall: 300 inches/ 7.620 mm

Average Winter Temperature: 0-32°F/ -18°C-0°C

Average Summer Temperature: 41-79°F/ 5-26°C

Quick Facts:

Electricity: 110 volts, 60Hz, standard two pin plugs

Time Zone: GMT-7

Country Dialing Code: 1

Area Code: 970

Did You Know?

Aspen was discovered by the Ute Indians and originally called'The Shining Mountains' for its rich silver mines. Aspen is now considered one of America's elite winter resorts.
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