



# Colorado ski safari

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A first-time ski trip to Colorado in March this year delivered big time for **BRIAN THACKER.**

**T**hink of skiing in the US and Colorado is the first name that comes to mind. Resorts like Vail, Aspen and Telluride are legendary. The state has 28 major ski areas and they all offer something different and have their own personalities. So how do you choose which resort to go to? Why not rent a car and take a road trip

for a Colorado ski smorgasbord? You'll get to experience unique mountain towns, diverse terrain, vastly contrasting landscapes and historic towns.

My own adventure took me to four renowned resorts and, being my first time in Colorado, I got a true taste of why everyone raves about this skier's paradise.

### STOP ONE: Denver

Consider having a night or two to enjoy Denver before heading off skiing. Not only will it help you beat jet lag, but it will also help you acclimatise to the altitude (Denver is known as the Mile High City). Plus, there's plenty to keep the whole family amused: do a

90-minute walking tour with **Historic Denver**; dine at one of the city's excellent restaurants (there are over 20 restaurants in Larimer Square alone); drop into one of the many brewery pubs – kids are welcome; or take your brood to the **Children's Museum of Denver**, the **Denver Museum of Nature & Science** or the **Downtown Aquarium**.

### STOP TWO: Winter Park

The terrain at **Winter Park Resort** is so extensive that it is split into seven distinct territories, so it's a good idea to join the free two-hour mountain orientation tour (9.30am and 12.30pm daily) to get a lay of the land. Even better, Winter Park recently started a ski guide program (you pay by the hour) commencing at 8am – an hour before the lifts open to the public. You'll get perfect groomers, or even some fresh powder, all to yourselves. Lucky me, I got both.

Winter Park is particularly good for intermediates, with kilometres of groomed runs to ski all day long, while the kids will enjoy threading the trees of Fireberry Glade or hitting the banked turns of Dilly Dally Alley. And if they're in ski school, they get to wear a GPS tracker attached to their pants so the instructors can track them in real-time. Curious parents can also access the whole day's data at the end of the class.

### STOP THREE: Vail

**Vail Ski Resort** truly is legendary. Even non-skiers have heard of it. But there's a reason why people flock here: as the third largest ski area in the US, it's also home to some of the biggest and best ski terrain in North America. It's also incredibly easy to get to. My hotel, the luxurious and family-friendly **Arrabelle at Vail Square** in Lionshead Village was literally four minutes off the highway. Plus, it's a two-minute walk to the Eagle



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01 Kids skiing between the aspens in Aspen © Anna Stonehouse 02 Kids in lessons at Winter Park © Winter Park 03 The view over the town of Telluride is jaw-dropping © Telluride

Bahn Gondola, which whisks you to Adventure Ridge, a snow adventure park with tubing, snowmobiling and snowbikes.

Vail is so big that it needs three separate trail maps to cover it all. While the trails on the 'Front Side' offer mostly long, sweeping, family-friendly runs, head over the back to the legendary 'Back Bowls' for some serious skiing. On my first day I headed straight there with no map and skied around for hours muttering, "Oh, there's another lift". Even after three hours, I still hadn't worked my way around the massive area.

**STOP FOUR:**  
**Aspen Snowmass**

Aspen Snowmass is the Beverly Hills of the Rockies, with celebrities to be spotted. Aspen is actually made up of four ski areas (Aspen Mountain, Aspen Highlands, Buttermilk and Snowmass), with Snowmass the largest resort of the quartet, packed with extra-long, extra-wide intermediate runs.

Snowmass village is also home to the Treehouse Kids Adventure Center, a huge two-storey facility with a climbing room, nature-themed playrooms and ski school. While on the slopes, kids make a beeline for the Lizard Lodge/Dawdler area, where they ski through wooden forts, tunnels, bridges and snow-covered aspen groves filled with hidden characters.

There are tell-tale signs that Aspen is a playground for the rich and famous. I'm used to soggy pizzas and hamburgers for on-mountain dining, but Aspen has **Sam's**, a fine-dining Italian restaurant. You'll need to make a reservation, but it's worth it for the homemade pasta and extensive wine list. At the end of the day, I skied right to the **Limelight Hotel's** ski valet door, then spent an hour soaking in the hot pool overlooking families spinning around the ice rink and cooking s'mores in the firepits.



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**STOP FIVE:**  
**Telluride**

Of all Colorado ski resorts, **Telluride** is touted as the prettiest – and I can see why. The old mining town sits in a classic box canyon, with cliffs and mountains hemming three sides. On my first day, I skied with 'Telluride Tom' (town councillor, volunteer fireman and Director of Communications). We hit some serious steeps (Telluride is renowned for its expert and extreme inbounds steep, trees and glades), but it also has long cruisy runs like the seven-kilometre Galloping Goose run and the aptly named See Forever run. We were skiing the steep Plunge run when we came over a rise and I was met with my first spectacular panoramic view of Telluride town. We skied right into town, took off our skis, had lunch (a delicious burger and

margarita at **Oak, The New Fat Alley** – great for home-cooked barbecue fare), then hopped back on the gondola – without crossing a street.

Hint: the free up-and-over gondola goes back to Mountain Village and runs until midnight.

I've stayed at some fancy places in the mountains, but the **Fairmont Heritage Place, Franz Klammer Lodge in Mountain Village** (rated one of the Best Family Ski Resorts in the USA in the *Ski & Snowboard with Kids* 2020 Readers Choice Awards) was truly special. My 'room' (which was actually seven rooms) had huge leather lounge chairs, a lavish dining room and two deep spa baths. And on my last morning, after skiing in four resorts, I had to drag myself away from the large cosy fireplace to get in just a few more runs in on my perfect Colorado ski safari. ■

**Colorado Report Card**

**Info** [colorado.com](http://colorado.com) [telluride.com](http://telluride.com)  
[winterparkresort.com](http://winterparkresort.com) [vail.com](http://vail.com)  
[aspensnowmass.com](http://aspensnowmass.com)  
[visitdenver.com](http://visitdenver.com)

**Getting there & around** There are regular flights to Denver from most major US cities. You can also fly direct into Aspen, Vail and Telluride (Montrose Regional Airport is 90 minutes away from Telluride). If you do hire a car, it's only 35 minutes into Denver's city centre from the airport, or the airport train also takes you right into Union Station.

**Stay Denver:** The Crawford Hotel [thecrawfordhotel.com](http://thecrawfordhotel.com)

**Winter Park:** The Vintage Hotel [winterparkresort.com](http://winterparkresort.com)

**Vail:** The Arrabelle at Vail Square [rockresorts.com](http://rockresorts.com)

**Aspen Snowmass:** Limelight Snowmass [limelighthotels.com](http://limelighthotels.com)

**Telluride:** Fairmont Heritage Place, Franz Klammer Lodge [fairmont.com](http://fairmont.com)



*F* 7:12 PM  
*The moment you came home to Telluride.*

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Located at the base of Telluride Ski Resort, the lodge is perfect for families wanting a private, residential stay with all the amenities of a luxury hotel. Amenities include complimentary airport transfers, ski valet and our private Himmel Spa.

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