

# S B L S

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NOT A CLOUD IN THE SKY



# On Mountain Time

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People say it's hard to get to Telluride. But I can assure you it's not, it's hard to leave. The scenic hour and a half drive from Montrose Airport (which has direct flights from LAX) is enjoyable and passes through snow-blanketed mountain towns and remote ranches (including Ralph Lauren's). What proved difficult was parting with a town of exceptionally friendly people, intriguing history, and breathtaking vistas.

My first impression of Telluride is that it looks out of a storybook. It's in a box canyon surrounded by picturesque mountains and the main street is lined with colorful Victorian houses. Even in February the town is lit up with Christmas lights. Upon arrival, my friends and I check into Hotel







Telluride. The location is walking distance to bars, restaurants, and the gondola. It's cozy and quaint. Personally, my favorite thing about the hotel is the ever-present tea and coffee bar in the lobby. However, the lobby's lodge-like feel, with a fireplace, chandeliers made of antlers, freshly baked cookies, and friendly staff, are wonderful as well. A couple days later when I forgot my key in my room, I went to the front desk and upon sheepishly explaining, and saying I had my ID if necessary, she just smiled and said "I remember you, Ottocina" and coded me a new key.

To get to know the lay of the land, and the former mining town's history, we take a tour from a guy in a cowboy hat named Ashley. If that he greets almost everyone we pass by name isn't a giveaway of how small the town is, Ashley jokes that he got called for jury duty and although he knew the judge, arresting officer, and defense attorney, he was still placed on the jury.

What Telluride lacks in stoplights (the closest is a two and a half hour drive away) and population (around 2,500) they make up for in friendliness and culture. The residents are intelligent, kind and cheerful. The atmosphere and beauty of the town attract celebrities and beneficiaries of the arts that allow children and adults alike to experience festivals (most notably the film festival), speakers, cuisine, musicians, etc. at a level you would expect to only find in a major city.

Post tour, we head to dinner at The Tunnel, a speakeasy restaurant. I find the password to enter in a classifieds ad in a newspaper lying on the bench across the way. Upon stating "Mangiamo" the chef's wife swings open the door and greets us excitedly. We enter through the kitchen which leads to a hidden dining room with a table set for twelve. For this month's 6-course menu, Chef Mark Krasic chose a Northern Italy theme. Wine pairings are on point and each course is beautifully plated and delicious. It's comfort food, but not heavy. I sit next to a couple from Texas who have been coming to Telluride for the past 22 years. I come to realize that their story is the norm.

The next morning, having never skied before, I sign up for a lesson. A quick fitting at Telluride Sports and I'm on the gondola (which runs 6 a.m.-midnight and 2 a.m. on weekends, and is the only free transportation of its kind in North America) up and over the mountain to Mountain Village. The ski instructors are the most patient people I've ever encountered. When I fell, my instructor even sat down next to me to show me how to get up.

We break for lunch at the mountain top Allred's Restaurant. At 10,545 feet it offers the most breathtaking view of the surrounding San Juan Mountains and Mountain Village. The second best part? They have slippers for guests to wear. I was almost ready to take off my ski boots and walk around in socks before I realized that, yes, of course they'd thought of that.





freely until it's time to head back. Exhausted, we ride the gondola to Mountain Village in peaceful silence, everyone mesmerized by the sparkling snow.

Tipped off by our ski instructor that Telluride Distilling's new tasting room has free popcorn, we beeline there after snowmobiling. We scoop bowls of popcorn before even sitting down. Priorities, you know. We pair our crunchy snack with tasting flights of vodka, peppermint schnapps, and whiskey and are immediately partial to their peppermint schnapps. It's barely sweet, with the minimum amount of sugar to qualify it as a schnapps, and won the gold medal at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition, the only schnapps to ever receive this honor. Also deserving of an award are the Telluride Mules; I can taste the freshly peeled ginger in the homemade ginger beer.

One of the many things that's special about Telluride is there are beginner and intermediate runs at the top of the mountain, so less advanced skiers can have the same experience (and views) as those who would opt for a double black diamond. After a day of lessons, I finally graduate from the learning area and move onto a green run. Next visit I'll be ready for heli-skiing.

As the sun dips behind the mountain we head to The New Sheridan Hotel's historic bar for après ski Flatliner Martinis. The combination of Vodka, Baileys and espresso, while nestled into vintage green velvet couches, hits the spot after a day in the snow.

When our glasses are empty we head to dinner at The National. Its modern decor with walls covered with wine bottles sets the scene for a meal of approachable yet innovative flavor combinations. Before we know it our table is spread with tempura rock shrimp, duck liver mousse, and truffle-miso aioli topped beef carpaccio, followed by seared scallops atop lentils and compressed fennel, bathed in grapefruit beurre blanc. We clean the plates almost as quickly as they appeared, and end the night on a sweet note with baked Alaska with bourbon and chartreuse ice creams and olive oil chiffon cake, and a hazelnut nougat glacé with rye whiskey caramel.

The next day, post skiing and lunch at Taco Del Gnar (went for the name, stayed for the ahi tacos) we get ready for snowmobiling with Telluride Outfitters. Once on our vehicles near Alta Lakes, the instructor gives us the safety rundown, "Stay single file because there are a lot of people in the forest today. And by a lot I mean 18 people." Excited for the scenery and adrenaline rush to come, we rev our engines and are off. After three minutes our guide stops us at the "Oprah turnaround." Here he gives anyone who's scared the opportunity to turn around and go back to their hotel room to watch Oprah. Luckily no one takes him up on it and we continue zooming through the snowy forest. We pass a ghost town and the telephone pole where Telluride was the first place to have electricity. Ever in the world. Our destination is a snowy meadow where we get to drive



On my last morning I wake up to snowflakes dusting the town and birds chirping from snow-covered branches outside my window. The mountains overpower the view from my balcony. I watch the snow from bed before heading out to get tea at The Butcher & The Baker down the street. It's a cozy place with large windows and a case full of irresistible pastries and cakes. The sort of cafe you would be excited to go to every morning. A place to look forward to returning to on my next visit. And the next.

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