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SEDUCTIVE SAHARA

Desert beauty casts its spell **F4**

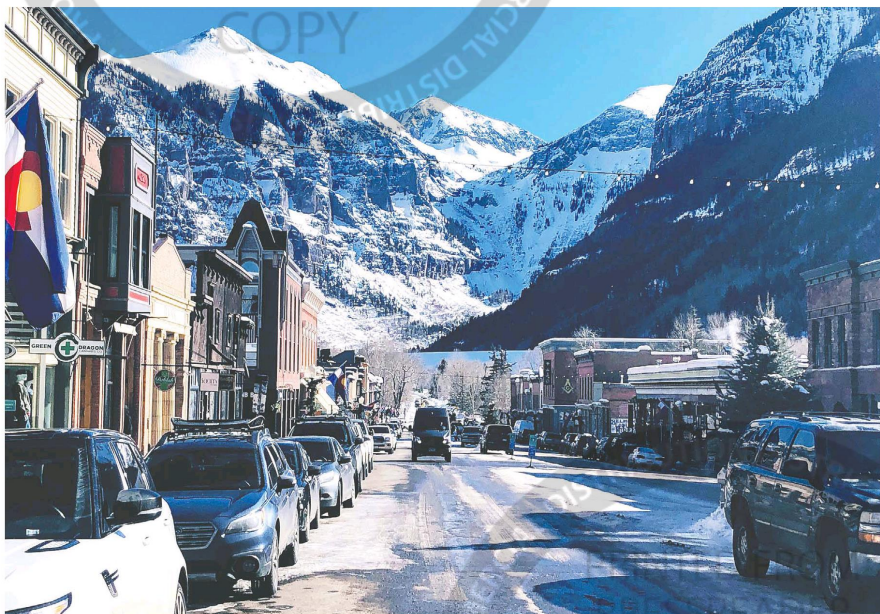


DELIGHTFUL DINING

Memorable meals in California **F8**

VANCOUVER SUN SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, 2020

SECTION F



Founded as a silver mining outpost in the late 1800s, Telluride is today one of America's prettiest ski towns. PHOTOS: VAIL RESORTS

MARK SISSONS

Long before it became synonymous with one of the world's most prestigious film festivals, Telluride — its name derived from the old saying "to hell you ride" — attracted an entirely different type of celebrity. On June 24, 1889, Robert LeRoy Parker, better known as Butch Cassidy, held up the San Miguel Valley Bank on Telluride's main street and made off with \$20,000.

Today, it is arguably America's most picturesque ski town, still well off the beaten path where southwest Colorado meets Utah, Arizona and New Mexico. Such splendid isolation suits Telluride just fine.

"There is not a single traffic light in our entire county, which is larger than the state of Rhode Island," local historian Ashley Boling says with evident pride as we explore Telluride's main strip, Colorado Street, on a sunny January morning. Rising above us on the edge of town like stairways to Valhalla are ski slopes so steep they could be ski jumps.

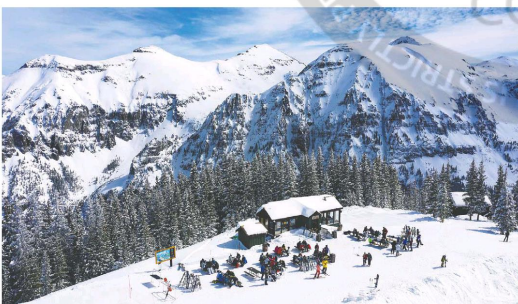
A resident since 1990, Boling personifies Telluride's friendly, unpretentious and naturally laid-back vibe. A self-described ski bum, he holds down multiple jobs, including drumming in a local band, while still finding the time to hike and ski many of the nearby peaks in a state that contains more than 14,000 plus footers than the rest of the country combined.

We duck into another Telluride landmark, the Sheridan Opera House, first opened in 1913 as a venue for wealthy mine owners and local aristocrats to throw lavish parties and formal dress balls. Resurrected in the early 1990s, this quaint Art Nouveau pleasure palace can seat up to 240 patrons in the theatre seating.

"This room has showcased more world and North American film premiers than any theatre between

COLORADO'S LAST GREAT SKI TOWNS

Superb terrain and a frontier feel make Telluride and Crested Butte classic winter destinations



The lodge at Telluride, which boasts storied slopes amid a dazzling setting.

New York City and Los Angeles, all because of the Telluride Film Festival." Boling explains as he recalls some of the numerous Hollywood stars and directors he has introduced to audiences as festival MC. As Boling reminisces about the time he helped Slumdog Millionaire

director Danny Boyle overcome opening night nerves. I envision scores of cinema glitterati jammed into the garishly painted and wallpapered former vaudeville hall, which has premiered more Oscar-winning films than Sundance. Next door is the 26-room New

Sheridan Hotel, a Telluride fixture since 1895. "Back then, it was perfectly acceptable to ride your horse into the hotel lobby; just not up the stairs," explains Boling, adding that "beds were 50 cents, with no more than five to a bed if you please, and funerals were on the

house if you happened to expire while staying here?"

Historical tour complete, it's time to hit Telluride's storied slopes. With nearly 1,200 metres of lift-served vertical spread over 810 hectares, two high-speed gondolas and seven high-speed quads, this mountain is a joy to ski.

And because of its relatively remote location well off the often congested interstate highway that connects many of Colorado's other major ski resorts, Telluride visitors often have its renowned steep and bumpy mostly to themselves.

As I navigate the mountain's legendary terrain, gliding down corduroy cruisers, dipping into glades of aspen trees, tackling bumps and plunging down tight chutes, the high altitude (reaching nearly 13,000 feet) isn't the only thing that catches my breath.

Telluride's setting is among the most dazzling I've ever seen, while the downtown resembles a Hollywood set populated by some of the most happy and helpful folks you'll find. It's no wonder that this Rocky Mountain gem was again rated the continent's No. 1 ski resort by Condé Nast readers in 2018.

THE UNTAMED DESTINATION AT THE END OF THE WORLD

If Telluride were the lead actor in an action-adventure movie, Crested Butte could be his stuntman sidekick — a bit more wild and rugged, even more easygoing, and as humble and down to earth as it is handsome.

And while not huge in terms of skiable hectares or vertical, its eponymous mountain resort is perhaps even more famous for its signature extreme double-black terrain. Even for non-experts, this otherwise intimidating hill still has plenty to offer, including immaculately-groomed wide-open rollers that you can ski and ride forever. SEE COLORADO ON **F2**



Eleven Experience's luxurious Scarp Ridge Lodge offers premium accommodation in Crested Butte. **VAIL RESORTS**

ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH ON COLORADO'S SLOPES

COLORADO FROM F1

Crested Butte was home to the first Winter X Games, the longest running extreme skiing competition in the world for good reason. Its infamous upper chutes, bowls and cliffs, some only accessible by hiking up to them, offer a severe test of skill and mettle amid some of the gnarliest lift-served extreme downhill terrain in the U.S.

Venturing entirely out of bounds, I spend an incredible day exploring the nearby Elk Mountains with Crested Butte-based Irwin Snowcat skiing, which offers plenty of ultra-dry Colorado powder to play in. Owned and operated by the Eleven Experience, a deluxe experiential adventure travel provider that also owns the posh Scarp Ridge Lodge in the centre of Crested Butte, Irwin has exclusive

access to a thousand acres of pristine Forest Service land.

After nine exhilarating descents down beautiful bowls and rollers, hidden couloirs and thick tree runs, I'm happily exhausted, with just enough energy left to participate in a celebratory 'shotski' whiskey tasting at Irwin's cosy on-mountain day lodge.

Beyond its celebrated slopes, what truly makes the five-hour drive or 40-minute flight to near-by Gunnison from Denver worthwhile is experiencing the town of Crested Butte itself. Populated by committed fun-seeking nature lovers, this community of around 1,700 truly lives up its marketing tag line — "the untamed destination at the end of the world."

Instagram worthy Elk Street is lined with a watercolour painter's palette of Victorian-era wooden



Telluride's legendary terrain is a joy to ski. **VAIL RESORTS**

shops, restaurants, businesses and bars, all surrounded by acres of largely accessible backcountry.

The soulful vibes in Colorado's last two great ski towns — both accessible with Vail Resorts' Epic

Pass — remind me of legendary B.C. Powder Highway stops like Fernie, Nelson and Rossland, only with more upscale dining and accommodation options.

Like their West Kootenay coun-

Text

IF YOU GO

Getting there

From Denver International Airport, you can connect to Telluride Airport, or to Gunnison/Crested Butte Airport, just over midway between Crested Butte and Telluride.

Where to stay

In Telluride, the Peaks Resort & Spa offers convenient ski-in/ski-out access. Located in the heart of Crested Butte, the Eleven Experience's Scarp Ridge Lodge feels like a European chalet exuding Rocky Mountain style. www.thepeaksresort.com
elevenexperience.com

Where to eat and drink

In Telluride, head to 221 South Oak, a fine-dining bistro set in a tastefully refurbished historic home featuring signature dishes like Molasses Braised Bison Short Rib. In Crested Butte, Secret Stash serves up hearty pizzas with names like Notorious F.I.G. and Mac Daddy. On the mountain, break for lunch at Uley's Cabin, named after a notorious bootlegger, for Colorado cuisine with French influences. www.22southoak.com
www.secretstash.com
www.skicb.com

About the Epic Pass

Vail Resorts' Epic Pass offers unlimited, unrestricted access to 37 mountain resorts worldwide, including Whistler Blackcomb and Crested Butte, plus additional access to partner resorts like Telluride. www.epicpass.com

padres, many locals here came for the skiing but stayed for the lifestyle and the chance to live life more naturally while connecting with fellow adventure lovers.

All that, along with 300 days a year of bluebird skies, make a ski holiday in Telluride, or Crested Butte the ultimate Rocky Mountain high.

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