

Get it. Do it. See it.

# guide



## ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH

If you're heading to Colorado to hit the slopes but craving some in-person experiences, extend your stay in Denver for a long weekend filled with immersive art, good brews and gourmet bites in this vibrant capital city. Words CARLY FISHER

# Do it

One could argue that Denver has become more synonymous as the Beer Capital of America than an outpost of the Old West, but every January, the town turns into a real cow parade as it transforms into the home of the National Western Stock Show. Over 30 Longhorn cattle can be found walking through the streets of downtown Denver during this annual spectacle, which might look like another surrealist room ripped out of the recently opened immersive art experience, Meow Wolf.

You just can't expect anything less than quirky in the Mile High City, even with all the extreme sports, vinyl-themed wine bars, music festivals and craft beer that already lure in hipsters from across the country. This is the state that legalized cannabis in 2012, housed Hunter S. Thompson, served as the backdrop to countless Westerns and became the inspiration for John Denver's soulful, iconic ode "Rocky Mountain High." Point being: You likely come to Denver because it's still a little wild in the Old West.

While Denver still bears the reputation as a gateway to the slopes during ski season, the city has grown exponentially over the past decade and is finally coming into its own as a worthy destination—even in the dead of winter. With trains running directly from the airport to downtown's Union Station, it's easy to take in the city by foot even without a car. Here are the coolest things you can do if you extend your stay for a couple of days.

## WHERE TO DRINK

Dubbed "the Napa Valley of Beer," Denver and its surrounding suburbs are home to more than 148



At the recently opened Beer Spa, you can enjoy brews on tap after a long soak in a beer hydrotherapy bath.

craft breweries, essentially necessitating its own pilgrimage. When you're short on time, it's best to let the experts do the work. Hop on one of the Denver Microbrew Tours through LoDo (Lower Downtown), where you can sample four breweries on a 1.5-mile guided walking tour, or the RiNo Beer and Graffiti Tour, which winds through River North's (RiNo) tagged-up streets, sampling beverages along the way. For something truly immersive, check out the recently opened Beer Spa, which offers private 90-minute "beer therapy" experiences, including a beer hydrotherapy bath, infrared sauna, rain shower and wooden deck.

Tipplers should know that Denver isn't just a beer town anymore. In addition to the Denver Craft Beer Trail, the city also has its own spirits trail, with many locations between RiNo and the Highlands. Among the stops: Ironton Distillery, the Family Jones Spirit House and Mythology Distillery, a craft distillery focused on environmental sustainability that was inspired by a trip to Alaska. Mythology's water conservation measures save up to 500 gallons per batch;



spent grain is repurposed for cattle feed; and 90 percent of all waste is composted or recycled. Mythology's Foragers Gin uses botanicals harvested from the Denver Botanic Gardens. Discerning spirits enthusiasts should also check out Colorado Sake Company, the state's first sake distillery, offering six types, all using traditional brewing methods and local ingredients.

## WHERE TO EAT

Although you can still comfortably wear jeans to most any restaurant, Denver has built a reputation as a major foodie town thanks in part to James Beard-winning chefs like Jennifer Jasinski of Rioja and Alex Seidel of Mercantile Dining & Provision, who helped put the city on the map. Since their early wins, the scene has grown substantially to include more than 18 James Beard semifinalists in 2020. Sunday Vinyl, from the James Beard Award-winning team at Frasca Hospitality Group, is a seasonally driven restaurant and wine bar with a curated music theme.

The gourmet food halls and markets aren't too shabby, either, where you can taste everything under one roof. Chef Caroline Glover's restaurant, Annette, located within Stanley Marketplace, was named one of the "50 Best New Restaurants in America" by *Bon Appétit* in 2017 and has earned four James Beard nods between 2017 and 2020. Broadway Market features an open-concept layout of restaurant stalls ranging from fried chicken and pizza to curry and sushi, plus a chocolatier, coffeehouse, bar and self-serve beer wall.

Taste your way through indie restaurants like Bellota,



Taste gourmet food at the Stanley Marketplace in Aurora, an eastern suburb.



Immersive art at the new Meow Wolf exhibit.

## Award-winning restaurants abound in the Mile High City.

a regional Mexican restaurant and tequila bar; Melted, an inventive ice cream shop from renowned restaurateur Bryan Dayton and pastry chef Jennifer Akina; and Temaki Den, a modern hand-roll concept from the team behind Denver's acclaimed Sushi Den at the Source Hotel + Market Hall. Sample the state's best taprooms, tasting rooms, food and entertainment at the indoor/outdoor venue Number Thirty Eight (named because Colorado was the 38th state in the Union), housed within a massive 12,000-square-foot former neon sign factory in RiNo that opens onto an 18,000-square-foot outdoor "lawn" that includes year-round live

entertainment and panoramic views of the Rockies.

### WHERE TO PLAY

Book ahead if you want to visit Meow Wolf. The Santa Fe-based company known for its wildly popular immersive art exhibits opened a permanent installation in Denver to sold-out crowds. More than 110 Colorado-based artists contributed to the Denver venue, which features four floors of colorful, interactive rooms to explore as well as a 450-capacity music venue, café and retail space.

Denver's most historic block, Larimer Square, transformed into a modern destination over the past year, featuring a floral design studio, vintage clothing shop and tattoo parlor, as well as a Chinese street-food spot, fried chicken shop, ice cream parlor and a year-round farmers market.

Red Rocks, Denver's iconic outdoor amphitheater, shuts down for winter, but Mission Ballroom, the state-of-the-art, 4,000-person venue in RiNo, is expecting to have an incredible lineup that's worth the trip, including Thundercat, Chvrches, Purity Ring, My Morning Jacket, Ministry, the Flaming Lips, Ty Segall, Lorde and Judas Priest.

After a \$150 million renovation, the Denver Art Museum reopens to the public this fall just in time to explore eight levels of art galleries and its new outdoor public spaces. Among its first exhibitions: *Whistler to Cassatt: American Painters in France*, a retrospective of American works between 1855 and 1913 that features transatlantic painters such as James Abbott McNeill Whistler, John Singer Sargent and Mary Cassatt.

### WHERE TO STAY

Boutique hotels are destinations within themselves, with state-of-the-art lodgings and some of the city's newest bars and restaurants. Set up base camp at Catbird, a unique and stylish home away from home featuring adaptable guest rooms with custom-built, multifunctional furniture and premium amenities—such as full kitchens and a 4K ultra HD projector with 6-by-8-foot drop-down projection screen. There's also a 3,300-square-foot rooftop deck with fire pits that offers sweeping views of Denver's skyline and the Rocky Mountains. In late fall, the Slate Denver opens at the historic original Emily Griffith Opportunity School—a sleek boutique property adjacent to Emily's Alley, Denver's newest dining and shopping destination.



The 3,300-square-foot rooftop deck at Catbird offers great views of Denver.