

SKIERS' STATISTICS

Peak elevation:11,570 ft
 Vertical rise: 3,450 ft
 Snowmaking: 390 acres
 Average annual snowfall: ..348 in
 Total skiable area: 5,289 acres

High ALTITUDE INDULGENCE

Find the perfect
 winter getaway in
 Vail, Colorado

Words by Alison DeLory

RIGHT: The exterior of the famous Lodge at Vail, a Rock Resort, located just steps from the Vista Bahn chair lift in Vail Village; TOP: a magnificent view from the penthouse balcony at the Lodge at Vail, a Rock Resort, in Vail Village; LEFT: Arrabelle at Vail Square



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VAIL RESORTS INC.

Nestled high up in the Colorado Rockies, Vail will leave you breathless, if not from the altitude then from the dizzying array of options for the adventure-seeking, luxury-loving traveler.

Vail has everything – fantastic skiing, world class dining, and drinking, dazzling accommodations, and high-end shopping – all at 8,150 feet above sea level.

Located about 100 miles, or a two-hour drive from Denver, the Vail Ski Resort opened in December 1962 and to say development has been rapid in the past 50 years is an understatement. It has exploded.

These days, you can ski down your choice of 193 mountain trails, enjoy après ski in the hip bars along Bridge Street, dine on Colorado lamb cooked by famous chefs in restaurants with wine lists of 350, and retire to your posh condo, first-class ski resort, or cozy lodge.

SKIING

For the past 20 years Vail has consistently ranked high on *SKI Magazine's* top U.S. ski resorts. Its website reports: "Vail has a 'wow factor' that other resorts lack." Essentially there are three skiable sides: the front, better for beginners and intermediates; the legendary Back Bowls for those more experienced; and Blue Sky Basin which provides backcountry skiing that is lift accessible for experts. You might start the day skiing in fresh powder snow that reaches your knees and you'll continue to find plenty of challenging terrain. Vail Mountain is so vast that on the busiest day of the year, while certainly bustling, there is still an average of only four skiers per acre and lift lines no longer than 15 minutes.

ACCOMMODATIONS

You can book the finest rooms both on the mountain and in the upscale European-style Vail Village at the base of the mountain. If you're not within walking distance of a lift you can hop on the free shuttle buses that run throughout East and West Vail between 5:45 a.m. and 2 a.m. A bus stop is only ever a short walk away.

The Vail Cascade features a resort, spa, and condominiums. The Sonnenalp Resort of Vail is part of the Bavarian chain and it also includes a spa. Other options include the Vail Marriott Mountain Resort and Spa, a European-style chateau, and the recently rebuilt Tivoli Lodge, a luxury resort known to provide friendly, personal service.

In adjacent Lionshead Village there is the newly developed Arrabelle at Vail Square. It features an enchanting town square encircling a skating rink and fire pits, with impressive archways and a butler on every floor.

DINING

Local icon Kelly Liken was named by *Bon Appétit* magazine as a chef to watch. She owns Vail's current "it" place, named Kelly Liken. The restaurant is both swanky and intimate, offering exciting seasonal American cuisine that relies heavily on local produce like elk carpaccio, potato-crusting trout, and homemade ice creams.

Don't worry if you're having difficulty choosing from the extensive wine list at La Tour. Help is close by. This contemporary French restaurant has six sommeliers on staff and serves such delicacies as panco-crusting sea bass with a tomato provençale sauce and Denver sole meunière.

For a truly unique experience and unrivaled views, check out Game Creek Restaurant, tucked high above Vail in Game Creek Bowl. Take the Eagle Bahn Gondola and a short snow cat ride to reach this European-style chalet with a world-class wine list and unmatched fusion of seasonal American-European cuisine. On the other end of the gondola you can

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enjoy Centre V at the Arrabelle. It is a French brasserie style restaurant with a combination of fine dining and a casual bar area, usually with live music during après ski and a slope side patio.

APRÈS SKI

For a night on the town, Bridge Street is a two-block long pedestrian streetscape defined by two- to four-storey neo-Tyrolean chalet style buildings, replete with outdoor patio cafés, a variety of upscale shops, sculptures, and many bars.

If you're looking to escape the Bridge Street cacophony and want a place to enjoy conversation, background music, and a glass of wine, try Mickey's Piano Bar in the famous Lodge at Vail hotel.

SHOPPING

Shopping along Vail's pedestrian-only streets is a pleasure. You'll find all your sports equipment and active wear needs at Gorsuch. In Lionshead try Avalon for its large selection of fine men's clothing. There are shops featuring local artists and artisans as well as noteworthy jewelry stores including The Squash Blossom and Betteridge, which also sells exquisite men's watches. Kemo Sabe and Axel's specialize in fine Western ware. There are also great designer outlets 25 minutes East of Vail off I-70 in Silverthorne.

For some light noshing back in your room, pick up fine wine, cheese, and deli meats in the gourmet shops that make up the Marketplace on Meadow Drive. And if you're looking for a souvenir more unique and delicious than a t-shirt, consider bringing home a chocolate ski slope from the Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory on Bridge Street. ☘

THIS PAGE: Groomers in formation