

Telluride: Outside the Box

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Telluride is not what you think.

Having cut your teeth on Colorado's traditional fare — Aspen, Vail — you're predicting glitz, Gold Rush charm and Gorsuch style... perhaps even some '70s ski bum style that's long gone from the central Rockies but could well be lingering in Colorado's quieter southwest.

Or, having read Vanity Fair, you're aware TomKat and Suri have a vacation home in Telluride. And on the drive up, you noted Ralph Lauren's 18-mile ranch adds a certain celebrity chic you just don't find on the way to your local hill. It's rumoured, after all, that Ralph blew \$3.5 million on brass bolts for his ranch's fence simply because it looks better. So perhaps in Telluride, the glitz 'n glam thing is what you'll get.

Turns out, you're wrong on all fronts.

On first pass, it's obvious the town of Telluride has its western-outlaw image down pat. Butch Cassidy robbed his first bank right here on Colorado Avenue: June 24, 1889. And just by the architecture, you can see how whoring, high-grading and bootlegging were once mainstays in this mining town. When it comes to hippies, you see the odd trustafarian but not many aging New Agers. As for glamour, no matter how good you are at slyly snapping photos with your cell phone, there aren't any starlets in sight.

Instead, there's something about this place that smells smart. It's locally accepted that Telluride's population is so highly educated your bartender at The Dog or The Buck likely has a master's degree, or a Ph.D... and he's OK with that. Neon signs are, by law, outlawed. Faux fur and mukluks are replaced by technical fabrics with internal backers and tricot knits. And while it's not exactly true, Telluride likes to think it's the inspiration for Galt's Gulch in Ayn Rand's 1957 novel Atlas Shrugged. In certain circles, that defines smart.

As for skiing, Telluride requires some smarts, too. Its trail map is scarily perplexing at first. Runs spill dauntingly into the town of Telluride — fun double-black bumpers developed in the '70s with names like Bushwacker and Spiral Stairs. The hot-dogging, hip-hugging vibe is palpable on these narrow, retro runs. As you move west along the San Juan Range, the fare gets newer, broader and easier. There's a healthy portion of blue runs mid-map, and you'll locate some decent cruisers a little further along.

If you're an expert, you'll note Telluride hardens at Chairs 6, 12 and 14. Trees are steep and tight near Sully's and Allais Alley off Chair 6. Chair 14's pistes are positively Whistler-esque. And Chair 12's hike-to Black Iron Bowl — which opens to the public for the first time in '08 — drops 1,000 vertical feet and includes risky glades, faces and chutes. It's no wonder Franz Klammer keeps an upscale lodge here; Telluride's terrain can be exhausting and tough.

Still, you wonder, what makes it such a smart choice?

Telluride's varied terrain, for one. While cruisers can find runs that glide and coast, storm chasers have enough double black to keep them coming back.

Telluride's beauty, for another. You can't help but notice the historic town of Telluride is dead-ended by a particularly pretty box canyon. A surplus of artists and culture-istas hang out in its shops and cafés. And there's enough fire- and candlelight in Telluride's Alp-ish lodges to get some serious romance going.

Of course, you remember, there's also that smart smell in Telluride's air... fanned by all those overachievers tending bar. It makes you feel, if only for a week, you're pretty smart, too... smart for skiing Telluride.

FoMoInfo: TellurideSkiResort.com

[[Callout]]

There's something about this place that smells smart.

SIDEBAR 1 (replace bullets with Telluride logo???)

Things You Should Know:

- The town of Telluride is officially historic, plus it's boxed-in by a canyon... hence, no room to expand. So its expansive sister, Mountain Village, has been developed up at 9,500 feet. The Village houses the bulk of Telluride's hotels, condos and lifts. Town and Village are connected by a free, 13-minute gondola that runs from dawn to midnight.
- Flights are offered by Air Canada and United from Toronto and Calgary to Denver, then on to Telluride, Montrose, or Grand Junction, CO.

SIDEBAR 2

Telluride Hotties

- Grab lunch on-mountain at Gorrano Ranch.
- Allred's is a private, mid-mountain dining club at 11,000 feet; it's open to the public for dinner... and worth making a reservation.
- The Cosmopolitan's dining in town is cozy and couple-friendly.
- Baked in Telluride is a worthy, delicious local hangout.
- Fly Me to the Moon Saloon is the place to hear live bands.
- The Last Dollar Saloon is good for beer, pool and darts—call it “The Buck” and you’ll blend.
- Brown Dog Pizza — call it “The Dog” — is good for flatscreens, late-night food and sports talk.