

MONTECRISTO



The Filmmaker

DEEPA MEHTA

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Peak to Peak

—Colorado

IT'S RARE FOR dedicated skiers and snowboarders to find bucket list runs on resort slopes, but Aspen is home to more than a few surprises, and not just the expected celebrity sightings. The four local mountains in the Aspen Snowmass family are teeming with graduated slopes and sweeping chutes. The baby of the bunch, Buttermilk, is prime beginner and intermediate territory, but has also become something of an icon to park and pipe enthusiasts as the home of the Winter X Games for 14 consecutive years. Sister peak Snowmass is teeming with terrain—94 trails and 1,343 meters of vertical, to be exact. There is perhaps, though, no view to be beaten on a bluebird day than the one from the top of the Highland Bowl.

Situated behind Aspen Highlands mountain's main face, off Deep Temerity, the Highland Bowl is the holy grail of in-bounds skiing. Skiers line up at the ridge to hitch a free ride on a Snow Cat that will drop them at the base of the hiking trail. From there, it's about a 45-minute trek to the top (depending on fitness and how acclimatized one is to the altitude). Although the size of the route can make you feel like you're in the backcountry on a windy day, the ridge is plenty safe, boot packed and bombed by ski patrol each viable morning to eliminate the threat of avalanches. At 12,392 feet above sea level, Nepalese-style prayer flags are a cheerful indicator of the summit, and a small lift chair is anchored for photo ops—doing a bowl run ensures serious bragging rights, and photo evidence is a necessity. The beauty of skiing the bowl is finding those bits of untracked snow through one of the chutes, and lining up early to catch the cat for a first run can reap serious rewards. Whichever route you choose (there are nearly 20), they all funnel back to Bear Hollow Road and the Deep Temerity chair.

"If you hike the bowl, you've definitely earned a trip to Cloud Nine," declares Lea Tucker, international public relations, senior manager for Aspen Snowmass. Reservations are a necessity at the small mid-mountain fondue restaurant, where generally there are two seatings, the later of which cements Aspen's reputation as a party city and sets the bar for all other après to follow. The food is good, yes, and first timers may note that almost every diner has paired their meal with a bottle or two of Veuve Clicquot.

Visiting the Aspen Art Museum and grabbing a fresh farmhouse-style lunch from Meat and Cheese are great sendoffs before departing to Telluride, a four-hour drive south and west. Along the highway there are few stops. Mountain passes are lined with craggy cliffs that show flesh tones of red, orange, and purple through drifts of snow. In Telluride, the frontier roots of the Midwest start to show through, and on an historic walking tour with local guide Ashley Boling, remnants of the town's cowboy, mining, and saloon days remain. An unassuming white door on East Colorado Avenue holds a plaque alerting passersby to a unique historic event on June 24, 1889. "This is the site of Butch Cassidy's first-ever bank robbery," announces Boling, personifying Telluride's quiet pride. The mountain speaks for itself.

A gondola connects the town of Telluride to Mountain Village. No less than six dining experiences are noted on the Telluride trail map, with some stellar standouts: Alpino Vino is North America's highest restaurant, but the views are merely an amuse bouche. Located at the top of See Forever trail just below Lift 14, the on-mountain spot serves Italian bites, and, as its name suggests, a nice selection of wine.

Settling in on a daybed and choosing a bottle from the outdoor bar is a must for lunch. At dinner, wine continues to flow from the Allred's award-winning list, best paired with sustainably-sourced elk, lamb, or steak.

The trails of Telluride offer something for everyone, and draw many an outdoor enthusiast far from home. A variety of backcountry trails for eager freestyle skiers are accessible directly from lifts, and beginner, intermediate, and advanced skiers can find common ground in the myriad runs off of Prospect Express. A quick recognition of like minds arises after spending time in Colorado—perpetual grins are plastered to the faces of visitors and locals alike, on and off the slopes, and it's not hard to understand why. Surrounded by the majesty of the San Juan and Elk mountain ranges, there is a calling heard by those who seek the peak, quieted only by the soft downfall of snow.

—Kimberly Budziak

BELOW: Aspen Mountain, Aspen Highlands behind.

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