

travel & escapes

FORKS & THE ROAD

Ecuador grows three beloved products the best on earth: bananas, potatoes and chocolate. Ecuador is the largest exporter of bananas in the world — but then bananas are well ... bananas. Potatoes are a bigger deal (well over 2,000 native varieties) and each has their own name. Even people have potato nicknames. Those from the Highlands are dubbed “mel-loco” named after the tiny, slimy but flavourful potato they love to eat. Ecuadorians love soups and tend to start each dinner with one so, of course, while there are over 180 different Ecuadorian soup recipes, a favourite is locro de papa made from potatoes. Then there's chocolate. At the store Chocoterie Chez Tiff in Quito's Calle de la Ronda, the owners told me Ecuador was the largest exporter of cocoa beans in the world up to the early 1900s. Now, though other producing countries have surpassed them in volume, they are the No. 1 in quality. (About 5% of the total cocoa bean production is considered gourmet and of that 67% comes from Ecuador.) Executive Chef Tony Pérez at Hotel Oro Verde in Guayaquil took this fact to heart in creating an all-chocolate dinner as one in his series of “extraordinary culinary experiences,” held six times a year in the hotel's Le Gourmet restaurant. I ate seven courses of exquisite dishes starting with calabaza soup with foie gras and chocolate nibs, lobster cooked with vanilla, chipotle and chocolate, veal with a chocolate mole sauce and ending with several delectable bite size chocolate desserts. I was in chocoholic heaven. [over-deguayaquil.com](#) Margaret Swaine, Weekend Post



No matter what way you face in Telluride, the views are inspirational.

TICKET TO TELLURIDE

The options for traversing the peaks of this old Colorado mining town are plentiful, and all carry bragging rights

BY MARYAM SIDDIQI

Altitude is a common conversation topic in Colorado ski country. Restaurants and bars are named after specific heights, and it is imprinted into the tiles of hotel room foyers. Aspen, a miniature Christmas village come to life, has four mountains. Telluride, which though polished now, still retains some of the charming grit of its mining-town history, has one. The options for traversing them are plentiful, and each comes with its own set of bragging rights, most often — but not always — related to how far above sea level you are.

The easiest mode of transportation is simply riding the gondolas all day, and given the breathtaking landscape, especially on bluebird days, no one would blame you for simply wanting to enjoy an aerial perspective. In Telluride, lift 10 or the Sunshine Express is also known as the real estate tour because it passes over Kid Rock's

abode (when he's in town), and Dan Quayle's luxe lodge. The gondolas here also act as public transport, taking visitors from the ski village on one side of the mountain into town on the other. But let's be honest, an adrenalin boost adds a glossy sheen to everything.

Snowmobiling is one way to get that rush while still seated. Driving one, it's said, is like riding a bike, though I'm inclined to equate it to

My favourite method for going downhill is now snow biking

driving a golf cart — either way, first-timers pick it up quickly. Aspen's TLazy7 offers two tours through rolling forested terrain. One takes guests to Maroon Lake and the base of the Maroon Bells, which they claim are North America's most photographed mountains. Instead of fact checking, I opted to pull out

my camera. No matter which direction you're facing, the views are inspirational. The second is their Klondike lunch tour. Riders wind their way through White River National Forest, stopping for a cabin lunch and a view of the 14,000-foot Pyramid Peak. The cabin is Western rustic, with animal heads mounted on walls and saddles turned into seats. Lunch, an appetizer spread, hearty cheeseburgers

the hills, but given how fast one feels adept at riding, this mode of transport will only get more popular.

Speaking of skiing and snowboarding, the options are plentiful for both skill level and intensity of adrenalin rush. From Panda Peak for newbies to the 22-foot Superpipe for X Games wannabes at Aspen's Buttermilk Mountain, and from the Highland Bowl atop Aspen Highlands to Telluride's Black Iron Bowl and Palmyra Peak (altitude of 13,320 feet) for experts/daredevils, runs for skiers of all abilities are so plentiful in these towns that you'll be hard pressed to feel crowded on any hill. And while moguls, groomed steeps and hundreds of inches of snow per year are enough to attract most skiers and snowboarders, even jaded types have something to look out for: The Oasis, Aspen's pop-up Champagne bar. It's location on Aspen Mountain is revealed via Twitter, and Veuve Cliquot and caviar is served to those who happen upon it. Clearly, something else worthy of bragging about.

Weekend Post

[Twitter.com/msiddiqi](#)

Maryam Siddiqi was a guest of Colorado Ski Country.

IF YOU GO

There are no direct flights to Aspen or Telluride from Canadian cities; the majority of connections are through Denver, which Air Canada flies to. For all things Aspen, visit [aspensnowmass.com](#). For all things Telluride, visit [tellurideskiresort.com](#).

ROOM KEYS

Cowboyhats and a free minibar

Hotel Jerome

330 E. Main St., Aspen, Colo.
970-920-1000; [hoteljerome.aubergeresorts.com](#)

Built in the 1880s, Hotel Jerome is an Aspen landmark that, over the course of just four months in late 2012, was renovated to open for this skiing season. Interior design by Todd-Avery Lenahan of TAL-Studio pays homage to the hotel's storied history, and the eclectic collection of pieces, apparent in every detail from the couch in the lobby to the artwork in the suites, is charming and authentic. This is one of those rare instances where there's as much to see within the hotel as there is to see outside.

The Neighbourhood

The Jerome is located in the centre of Aspen, an easy drive in and out of town to nearby hills, and a short walk to the base of Aspen Mountain. And, if you don't feel like walking or driving, the friendly door staff — who are always in cowboy hats — will gladly chauffeur you to your destination. It's also just a couple blocks to the main pedestrian area of the town, where shopping, eating and drinking are plentiful.

The Vibe

Hotel Jerome is as much a local spot as it is a visitor destination. If you want to mingle with Aspenites, head to the always busy J Bar, once the hang-out of Hunter S. Thompson. If you want to lounge, couches are plentiful in the Living Room — and the bartender there knows his way around gin-based drinks. Prospect, the main dining room, serves up meals throughout the day, with light automatically controlled to complement what's going on outside — it's bright in the morning, cozy for dinner. There's not much that hasn't been thought of in this hotel, but the execution of these well-considered details has been completed with an expert touch to make it all seem so natural. Staff is friendly and accommodating, and will insist on taking your small carry-on luggage to your room, even if it's really light. It's their job, they'll explain to you, and there's no point resisting. Besides, you'll be too busy admiring the interior of the elevators, which are adorned with a variety of belts, quite possibly no two the same (at least I couldn't make a match).

The Rooms

With 93 rooms over three floors, the Jerome has a cozy atmosphere without skimping on spacious suites for its guests. Rooms run from 525 to 775 square feet (the Presidential Suite is 1265 sq. ft.), with spacious bathrooms, a sofa and workspace in every room, and wonderfully comfortable beds. Televisions are framed like artwork, so that, when off, they fade into the background, and mini bars (which, for the first stocking, are complimentary!) are designed to look like a leather campaign chest. Wifi is gratis, as is a cheese plate that welcomes guests to the hotel (be sure to try the herbed cheddar). The hotel also has on-site ski storage, as well as a shop, should you misplace goggles, etc., and is pet friendly.

Maryam Siddiqi, Weekend Post

Rates start at \$445 in the summer and \$695 in the winter. For more information visit [hoteljerome.aubergeresorts.com](#) or call 970-920-1000. Travel assistance provided by Colorado Ski Country.

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