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Conquering the mountains of Colorado

By: RoseAnna Schick, Travelations

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PHOTO BY ROSEANNA SCHICK [Enlarge Image](#)  
A group of brave skiers board the chairlift on their way to ski down the slopes of Colorado. [Photo Store](#)

Seeing Colorado for the first time filled me with a sense of pure wonderment.

The vast and rugged landscape was one of the nicest I'd ever seen. Even though I'm not a religious person, the term "God's country" actually came to mind as I gazed upon the mountains and valleys.

At the same time, it also filled me with utter apprehension. The phrase "God help me" became my mantra when I realized I'd be skiing these slopes. Considering I'd only skied once before in my life, I wondered how I would make it to the end of the week still intact.

Steamboat Springs on a wintry day is like a Christmas card come to life. Situated in the Yampa Valley three hours northwest of Denver, the winding Highway 40 that traverses through town was once the main road that spanned the continent coast-to-coast. Today it leads to an outdoor paradise, home to more Olympians per capita than any other U.S. locale.

Skiing happens everywhere in the valley — from slick ski-jump practice runs and steep mogul training slopes, to backcountry crests along the continental divide, to one of Colorado's premier ski and snowboard destinations.

Steamboat Ski Resort is situated on a mountain range made up of six peaks, the highest being Mt. Werner at 3,224 meters. People come from all over the world to play in Steamboat's powder and terrain parks. In the first week of January it's also home to more cowboys per capita than everywhere but Texas, as thousands of Texans flock to their annual MusicFest consisting of six days, 40 bands, and what looked like one hell of a good time.

The Steamboat Grand, conveniently located beside the ski resort, is a sprawling hotel with 328 luxury rooms, impressive fitness centre, full-service spa, outdoor heated swimming pool, hot tubs, sauna and steam-room, and choice dining. The nearby Gondola Square offers additional restaurants, rental shops, retail services, equipment storage, and more.

Steamboat boasts dozens of ski runs of all difficulty levels. My goal was to attempt the easiest and not hurt myself. With the help of sweet-as-a-button ski instructor Melissa, and co-learner Liz from Texas who was hellbent on breaking the sound barrier on the bunny hill, I mastered the very scary chairlift (a.k.a. the "scarelift") and the beginner run, called Preview.

Oh, how I loved it! Determined to gain as much confidence and progress as possible, by the end of the first day I had graduated to the bigger chairlift and higher launch point halfway up the mountain. With Melissa's encouragement, much to my relief I managed to cautiously and carefully make it down completely fall-free. A technique I much preferred over Liz's free-falling.

Feeling like I'd just conquered Everest, we took the gondola up Thunderhead Peak to dine at Hazie's. Named after one of the region's most legendary women, we enjoyed panoramic views and delectable cuisine. I was glad the gondola also returned to the bottom, so I wouldn't have to ski down from that height. After all, my goal was to not hurt myself, and our trip had only begun...

More to come: My next Travelations will continue with more on Colorado, in the second of a two-part series. Please join me as I discover cross-country skiing, horseback riding, hot springs, another mountain to conquer, and my inner Olympian.

RoseAnna Schick is an avid traveller and music lover who seeks inspiration wherever she goes. Email her at [rascreative@yahoo.ca](mailto:rascreative@yahoo.ca)