



Book It Later

Book It Now



Vail, Colorado

Mother Nature's Four-Season Playground

BY JUDI ROTHENBERG

BOOK IT NOW

When you look at the numbers, it's pretty obvious why Vail Mountain is one of the most popular ski resorts in the country. This virtual winter wonderland has seven miles of mountain front, seven powdery back bowls and three terrain parks on more than 5,289 acres. Add to that 300 days of sunshine and an annual snowfall of 350 inches and you've got skiing nirvana!

But if schussing down the slopes isn't your thing, there are plenty of other winter activities to keep you busy: Take a snowshoe hike with a [Nature Discovery Center](#) ranger, ice skate at Vail Square or enjoy a sleigh ride. Spend an afternoon at [Adventure Ridge](#), a fun-filled snow park that offers tubing, ski bikes, bungee trampolining and – for pint-sized thrills – Blizzard Speedway, where kids 6-12 can race miniature snowmobiles.

Feeling venturesome? The [Nordic Sports Center](#) runs a two-day hut trip which includes guides, equipment, hut fees and meals. Ski season runs through April, vail.com. snow.com.

BOOK IT LATER

Melting snow gives way to a myriad of new outdoor activities to enjoy in spring and summer. The Rocky Mountain air is fresh, and sunny days are ideal for everything from fishing and white-water rafting to hiking, golf, horseback riding and biking. Bikes are easily rented in town and can be brought up Vail Mountain in a gondola. Whether you want to careen down a single track at

Clockwise from top left: The Lodge at Vail/Dan Coffey; Beaver Creek Golf Course/Robert Miller; Betty Ford Alpine Gardens/Richard Rothenberg; Vail Mountain/courtesy of Vail Resorts



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a breakneck pace (specialized equipment and pads please!) or traverse the mountain at leisure, there are dozens of trails to choose from.

In addition, local bike shops will drive you to the top of [Vail Pass](#), where you can access a paved 15-mile downhill path that winds its way along Gore Creek and back into town. Horticulture enthusiasts should stop by the [Betty Ford Alpine Gardens](#) for a stroll through a colorful collection of wildflowers and high elevation plants. The [Vail Nature Center](#) runs morning bird walks, an evening beaver pond tour and family campfires. [gorerange.org](#)

Cultural activities abound as well. The [Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater](#), a spectacular outdoor venue on a grassy terraced hillside, hosts both the [Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival](#) (June 25 to August 3) and the [Vail International Dance Festival](#) (July 26 to August 10). The season kicks off with multi-Grammy winning cellist, Yo-Yo Ma, and pianist Kathryn Stott. [vailmusicfestival.org](#), [vaildance.org](#), 888.920.ARTS (2787)

GASTRONOMY

With so much energy expended during the day, you're bound to work up an appetite for some seriously good food and Vail does not disappoint. From creative pizza to world class gourmet cuisine, food festivals and workshops, there's something to please even the most finicky foodie.

The [20th Annual Taste of Vail](#), a four day celebration of fine food and wine (April 7-10), features winemakers' dinners, seminars, the Colorado Lamb Cook-Off and a ski-in mountaintop picnic with proceeds going to charities. [tasteofvail.com](#)

If you're in town on a Sunday, the [Vail farmers' market](#), the largest farmers' market in Colorado, is a lovely way to start your day. The market runs from the end of June to September and coincides with a special educational package offered by The Lodge at Vail. The hotel's Colorado Cookin' package includes a

tour of the market with executive chef, Rahm Fama, brunch at The Wildflower, a cooking class and, finally, dinner created with ingredients purchased at the market. [lodgeatvail.com](#)

RESTAURANTS

Game Creek Club

Half the fun is getting there. After riding the Eagle Bahn gondola you'll be escorted across Game Creek Bowl by snowcat in the winter and shuttle in the summer. The charming Bavarian style lodge boasts incredible views and an eclectic menu with offerings like Rocky Mountain Elk with achote, wild mushrooms, red cabbage and whisky sauce or Moullard Duck Foie Gras with ginger pear nectar, shallot jam and balsamic figs. Lunch is strictly for members, who often ski in, but the public is welcome for dinner and Sunday brunch. Reservations essential. [gamecreekclub.com](#), 970.754.4275



Sweet Basil

Your mouth waters as you read the menu – it's so hard to choose! Colorado lamb shank with Moroccan spiced raisins and eggplant? Brioche crusted bone marrow with wild mushrooms? Marcona almond dusted sea scallops with green apple, spinach and bacon slaw, and sunchoke apple puree? Such are the temptations that chef Paul Anders conjures up to entice you. The attractive bistro has lovely views of Gore Creek and has been a fixture on the culinary scene for more than 30 years. [sweetbasil-vail.com](#), 970.476.012



The Wildflower

Creative American cuisine prepared under the guidelines of Vail Resorts' Appetite for Life program. The initiative strives to use organic, natural, seasonal, local and regional food and beverage components. The Wildflower boasts an extensive wine list that has earned Wine Spectator's Award of Excellence for the last 15 years. The restaurant is especially lovely in the summer when you can dine in the tiered flower garden. [thelodgeatvail.com](#), 970-476-5011

Clockwise from top left: great room at the Arrabelle/Robert Miller; ski biking at Adventure Ridge/Bob Winsett; skating at Vail Square/courtesy of Vail Resorts; rooftop of the Arrabelle/Robert Miller; Vail Pass downhill bike path/Richard Rothenberg. Above, fine cuisine at Game Creek Club (pictured below)/Kimberly Gavin/Rick Stovall

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Butler service and guest room at the Arrabelle/Robert Miller

Blue Moose

Casual, comfortable and conveniently located in Vail Square across from the Arrabelle Hotel, the Blue Moose turns out surprisingly good pizza. We ordered (and loved) the cremini mushroom, garlic, goat cheese (we substituted mozzarella) and truffle oil pie and washed it down with the locally bottled (Breckenridge) Avalanche beer. Wings, subs, salads and Italian entrees round out the menu. bluemoosepizza.com, 970.476.8666

STAY

A slope-side location (just a few steps from the Eagle Bahn gondola), luxurious rooms and a professional staff make the two-year-old [Arrabelle at Vail Square](#) an ideal choice for your vacation. At check-in, a ski valet will whisk your equipment away and when you're ready to ski, you'll be presented with warm boots and freshly waxed skis. Guest rooms are graced with 1,000-thread-count sheets, fireplaces and heated bathroom floors.

The hallmark of the hotel's commitment to service? A personal butler to attend to your needs — everything from delivering complimentary coffee or hot cocoa to your room, unpacking your suitcase and drawing your bath. The elegant property also boasts a 10,000-square-foot spa, a state-of-the-art fitness center, rooftop pool and Centre V, a classic French brasserie. arrabelle.rockresorts.com, 866.662.7625

A long-standing favorite for its rustic elegance, [The Lodge at Vail](#) is prized for its plush rooms, acclaimed cuisine and close proximity to the Vista Bahn chairlift, tony boutiques, nightlife and restaurants. The intimate Alpine chalet has accommodations that range from single guest rooms to three-bedroom suites with

wood burning fireplaces. On-premises dining includes the AAA Four Diamond award-winning Wildflower and Cucina Rustica, which serves up Italian-inspired cuisine and a hearty breakfast buffet in the winter. Other perks include on-mountain ski storage, an outdoor pool and access to Red Sky Golf Club in summer. Aching muscles can be soothed with all types of treatments in the newly-opened Rockresorts Spa. The 7,500-square-foot facility also features a 3,500-square-foot fitness center outfitted with LifeFitness equipment and a movement studio for yoga and Pilates. thelodgeatvail.com, 877.528.7625

GETTING THERE

Colorado's Vail/Eagle County airport has reopened after extensive renovations. Airline service from Newark includes Delta, American and United, with Continental offering the only nonstop route. The airport is 30 minutes from the center of Vail and can be accessed by rental car, taxi or shuttle. www.eaglecounty.us/airport, Colorado Mountain Express, cmex.com, 800.525.6363




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