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# beyond the slopes

in Telluride, there's an outdoor  
experience in every season,  
for every adventurer

Ascending up and over the San Juan Mountains, the free Telluride gondola connects Telluride with Mountain Village, offering bird's eye views of the towns, aspens, and mountain scenery.



The Hotel Telluride

I never thought I would get to visit Telluride, Colorado. My skier friends rave about its beauty and challenging slopes. But what I wondered, could this elevation- and weather-challenged lass possibly find to do in a land famous for snow and fourteeners?

Thanks to a gracious invitation from **The Hotel Telluride**, I got to find out. From Albuquerque I flew into **Montrose Regional Airport**, then enjoyed a comfortable, 80-minute shuttle ride directly to the hotel via **Telluride Express**. In the middle of summer, the only snow visible was decoratively arranged atop mountain peaks in the far, far distance.

The Hotel Telluride calls itself “European alpine ski lodge meets Rocky Mountain rustic chic,” and I would certainly agree. The award-winning, 59-room boutique hotel is a mere five-minute stroll from Telluride’s charming, easily walkable downtown. Like Telluride itself, the hotel is very dog-friendly. My room, a spacious king, was appointed with rustic chic furnishings, a mini kitchen, delicious linens, and a balcony view.

After pre-dinner cocktails in The Hotel Telluride’s warm, comfy lobby, **The West End Bistro** served us up a delicious dinner of fine American and Colorado-inspired cuisine.

## looking up

It was the promise of birding at elevation with an expert guide that piqued my interest in staying at The Hotel Tel-

Above: Like a true alpine lodge, the lobby of The Hotel Telluride is always cozy and welcoming, with a fire roaring in the massive hearth and plenty of seating scattered about for reading, board games, and conversation.



luride, which in recent years has been offering a host of **adventure packages** and getaways. I actually had the option of two adventures: a Via Ferrata and rock climbing experience called **“Ropes & Rungs,”** or the much more earthbound **“Wings Over Telluride,”** a half- or whole-day birding excursion led by Eric Hynes, a Telluride resident who is an international guide for Field Guides, Inc. Birding packages are available from June 1 through December 20 (conditions permitting) and include a packed lunch, three nights at the hotel, daily breakfast for two, and even some hotel swag.

In about five hours, traveling by SUV to and from **Miramonte Reservoir** in the **Dan Noble State Wildlife Area**, we spotted 31 species, including a thrilling pair of peregrine falcons,

Below: During a “Wings Over Telluride” birding excursion, expert guide Eric Hynes points out an eagle’s nest built high on a cliff and encourages group members to get a closer look through a scope. Left: An adult bald eagle keeps an eye out for lunch.



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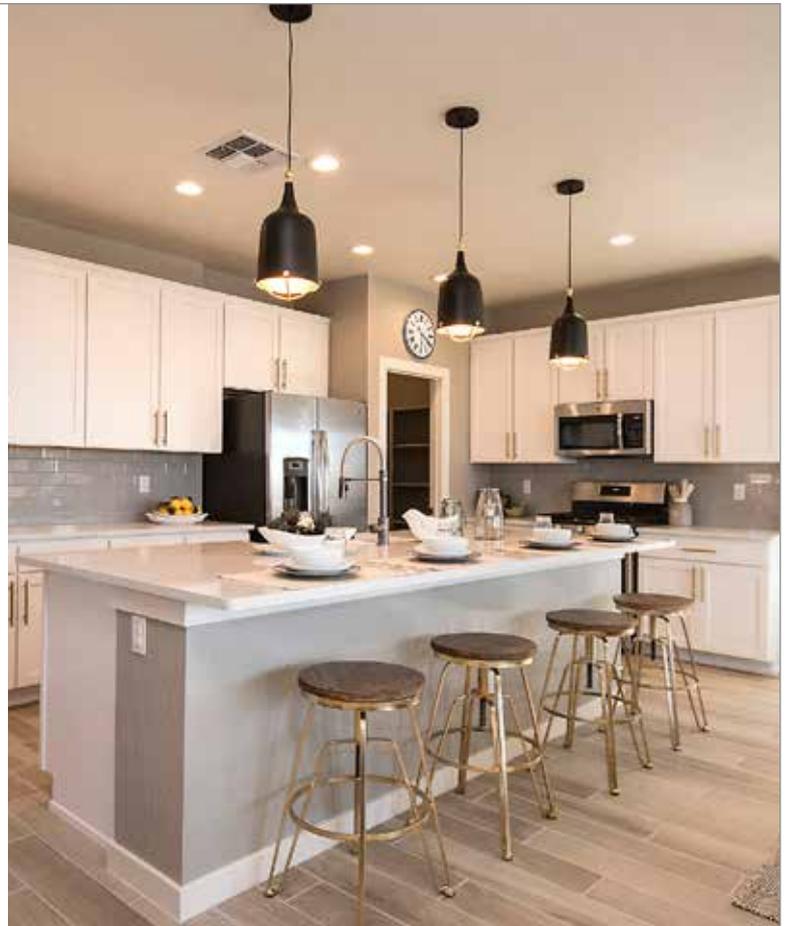
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Lewis's woodpeckers, a colony of cliff swallows, and bald and gold eagles.

With free time in the afternoon, I jumped aboard the free **gondola** that connects Telluride to Mountain Village. The 360-degree mountain and city views are nothing short of astonishing, and I can only imagine how much more so when the aspens turn. At the mid-point of the eight-mile ride is **Allred's**, a sophisticated Italian restaurant with enviable views, where I later enjoyed a cocktail. At **The Cosmopolitan** the pan-roasted duck breast with scallops, sweet potato puree, and oyster mushrooms was positively swoony.

### Looking down

Telluride famously hosts nearly weekly festivals celebrating everything from bluegrass music to yoga. **The Telluride Mushroom Festival** is in mid-August, so our timing was perfect to experience The Hotel Telluride's "**Mountains & Morels**" alpine mushroom foraging and hiking package, guided by Tara Butson of **San Juan Outdoor Adventures**. Starting at 10,300 feet, we hiked slowly up a mountain trail to just shy of 11,000 feet, stopping periodically along the way to search for, and learn about, mushrooms and fungi. During our mycology adventure we learned how to differentiate between nonedible and edible mushrooms and scored a number of varieties with fabulous names: shingled hedgehog, orange brown milky, and the coveted king bolete, a big, meaty mushroom that our hotel chef grilled up for us the next morning with breakfast.



Above: Hop off the gondola at its midpoint and enjoy cocktails or dinner at Allred's, an Italian restaurant with breathtaking mountain views.

Later I strolled the lovely downtown area with its numerous bistros, coffee houses, boutiques, museums, and yes, pot shops, and thoroughly enjoyed my first-ever visit to a salt cave at **Pure Beauty & Wellness Spa**. **The Telluride Historical Museum**, Telluride's former hospital, tells the story of how this tiny mountain town reinvented itself from hardscrabble mining area to luxury ski resort. I wrapped up my trip with dinner at **221 Oak**, a lovely bistro boasting a menu well dotted with venison, elk, and other Rocky Mountain delicacies.

### looking ahead

Whether you're sipping a latte outdoors at **The Coffee Cowboy**, window shopping, or tucking into a blackberry chocolate cone at **Telluride Truffle**, Telluride's famously, almost unspeakably, beautiful mountain views are just a glance upward. The grandeur of the landscape surrounds the town like an embrace; there is not one place where you cannot appreciate the scenery. It's why every soul from nine to 90 is feverishly planning their next hike on one of the area's myriad trails.

The main takeaway from my trip was learning that there is no "off season" in Telluride, and no shortage of experiences for those of us for whom snow has no siren call. Simply whisper the word *adventure* to Telluride, and she will gladly provide. 

**The Hotel Telluride, [thehoteltelluride.com](http://thehoteltelluride.com)**

*Online exclusive! Read about editor Amy Gross's complete Telluride adventure at [SuCasaMagazine.com](http://SuCasaMagazine.com).*



Amy Gross

Above: Tara Butson of San Juan Outdoor Adventures leads a mycology (mushroom) foraging hike.

Left: A platter of sauteed mushrooms and wild garlic from the day's foraging.



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