

TRAVEL

DECEMBER 5, 2004 • DAILY NEWS

The High Life



Find your groove in Telluride — a ski haven that remains down to earth

By BRIAN SCHOTT

TELLURIDE SKI & GOLF COMPANY

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INSIDE TELLURIDE

By Brian Schott

In my 25-year relationship with skiing, I've had affairs with many mountains. I've fooled around in Vail. My heart raced in Steamboat. I even had a crush on Sun Valley. But with Telluride, it's love.

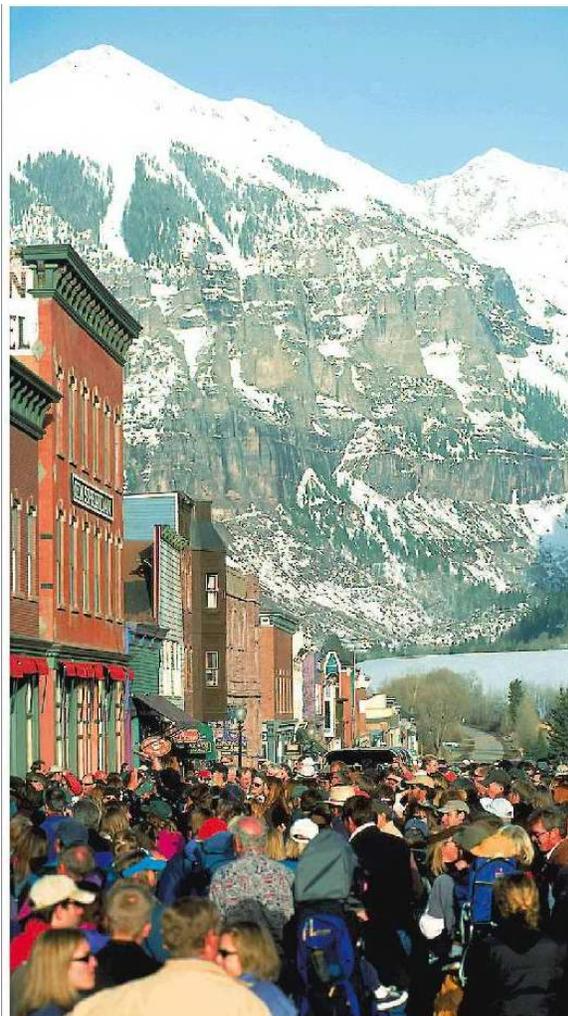
In many ways, life in this Colorado ski town is a paradox. Ski bums packed like sardines in small condominiums mingle with executives vacationing at million-dollar mountain castles. A teepee and an outhouse sit at the far end of Main St.; a mansion sits on a cliff at the beginning of town. Visitors may grab a hot dog from a cart on skis or savor passion fruit-smoked salmon at a gourmet restaurant. They can shop for new duds at a chic boutique or grab a ratty sweater from the "Free Box" downtown. Dogs are everywhere.

Telluride is also a ski mountain that can compete with the best: It offers a huge north face, a 3,500-foot vertical drop, 84 trails, 16 lifts, nonexistent lift lines and more than 300 inches of snow each winter. Although many mountains can boast similar stats, few come close to Telluride's natural beauty. Quaint, multicolored Victorian houses with clapboard siding line the spacious Main St., and the jagged, in-your-face mountains surrounding the box canyon make visitors feel small and cozy, like the world is holding you in its arms.

Kind of like being in love.

FROM PICKAXES TO SKI POLES

"This is the Alps in Colorado," says Kim Havell, a local skier and real-estate agent who moved here from New York City eight years ago. "The natural beauty of the town and the way it's been preserved — there aren't many places in the world like it."



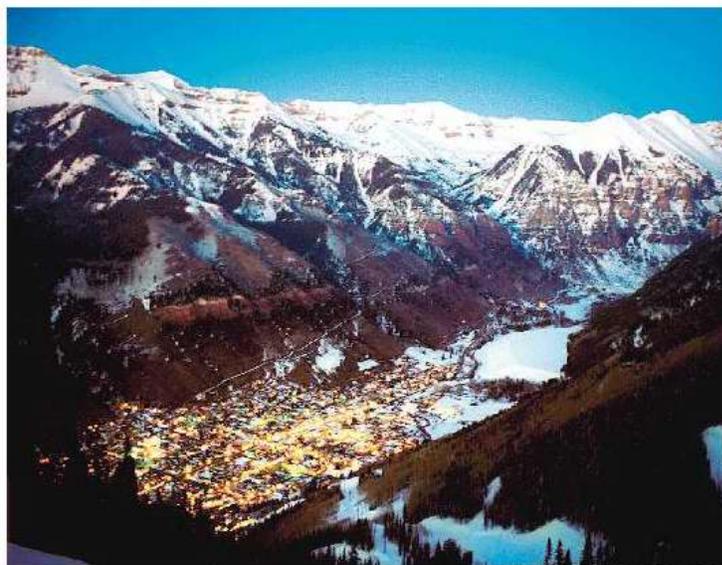
TELLURIDE SKI & GOLF CO., RANDY BARNE
QUITE A SCENE Telluride's January Winter Carnival draws crowds to Main St.

Though its snow-capped mountains are a far cry from the streets of New York, Telluride pulses with big-city energy. "Telluride is similar to New York in the types of people that you meet here," Havell says. "It's a nonstop place. There's always something new to climb or somewhere new to ski. It's also a diverse and open-minded community. Whether it's art, politics or the environment, there's a tolerance and appreciation for difference."

Jack Carey, also known as Captain Jack, settled in Telluride just three years after the Coonskin Lift was built in 1972 to give skiers direct access from town to the slopes. He runs a tree-cutting business in the summer, works at Telluride Sports during the snowy months and organizes various extreme skiing competitions in British Columbia. He's also a hang-gliding pilot.

"I have a beautiful lifestyle, but I work for it," he says. Since he left his teaching job in New Hampshire for the Western ski life more than 30 years ago, he hasn't looked back.

Founded in 1878, Telluride, most locals say, was named for tellurium, a lustrous element that can contain deposits of gold and silver that is found in the surrounding mountains. Money poured in from the mines, and by the turn of that century, Telluride had more millionaires per capita than New York City.



TELLURIDE SKI & GOLF CO., TONY DENIM
HAPPY VALLEY Telluride is just a 12-minute gondola ride from the slopes.

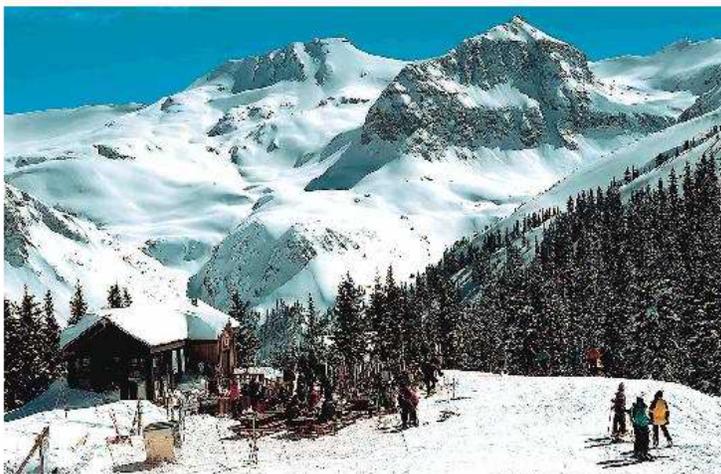
DAILY NEWS
CHRISTOPHER MONTAGNA

Others say the town's name originated from an old-time colloquialism. "To-Hell-You-Ride" is said to have been shouted by those who frequented Telluride's saloons, gambling halls and red-light district. Be it for gold or vice, people were drawn to this young town that seemed so full of potential. It even attracted the likes of Butch Cassidy, who began his bank-robbing career here. Telluride's heyday, however, was short-lived. When several area mines shut down in 1953, Telluride dimmed into a quiet ghost town.

In the early '70s, Joe Zoline, a Beverly Hills entrepreneur, saw an opportunity to create a resort here, and eventually skis and all businesses associated with ski culture replaced the pick and shovel. Today, the population hovers around 2,200 in the historically preserved town, and the only stealing that occurs is when skiers "poach" powder runs before the ski patrol opens them.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

I first visited Telluride in 1992, a college-educated ski bum looking for deep snow and big moguls. I stayed at the historic New Sheridan Hotel and took a stroll down Main St. before loading the lifts and skiing the famous bump runs of Kant-Make-M and Spiral Staircase. More recently, Mountain Village, with Europe-an touches, posh shops and a conference center, has sprouted up on the shelf above town.



TELLURIDE SKI & GOLF CO., DOUG BERRY
COME IN FROM THE COLD Skiers can grab a bite to eat at Giuseppe's atop Lift 9.

Telluride sits at 8,750 feet and the tops of its slopes hit over 12,000 feet, heights that can be a wakeup call to even the fittest skier. But by staying hydrated, most people can avoid altitude sickness. The steep runs off the Apex Chair and Gold Hill are challenging enough to keep advanced skiers satisfied, but the awesome views are half the joy of skiing them. The intermediate run See Forever is a thrill for any skier — the views are never-ending. And for those in search of uncut powder, Telluride also offers new guided hike-to terrain in the challenging and breathtaking Mountain Quail area of Prospect Bowl.

When Prospect Bowl opened on the mountain's back basin in 2002, it added more than 700 acres to the resort. The bowl caters to intermediate and beginner skiers, with gentle runs undulating beneath knife-edge peaks and some backcountry chutes mixed in for the experts.

APPETIZING ALTERNATIVES

Telluride's thin mountain air will definitely work up your appetite. Try the burgers, chili and other casual fare at Goronno Ranch Restaurant, an authentic, historic barn located midmountain on the Misty Maiden ski run, or soup and a sandwich at Giuseppe's atop Lift 9. For post-skiing treats in Mountain Village, The Poacher's Pub has a casual atmosphere with televised sports, affordable food, cool brews and the occasional mellow poker tournament.

What Mountain Village lacks in energy at day's end, the town of Telluride makes up for in the evening. The view from the gondola into town is worth the 12-minute ride alone. We tried Mexican at Sofio's and grabbed beers with the locals at the Last Dollar Saloon, known around town as "The Buck." Late night, we danced at the Fly Me to the Moon Saloon. The gondola closes at midnight, but there are plenty of taxi services for night owls.

Most visitors to Telluride fly into Montrose airport and take the beautiful 90-minute drive through the desert into the San Juan Mountains. Telluride Regional Airport is in the midst of an expansion to lengthen the runway, a move that will allow medium-sized regional jets to land there in the near future, heralding a boom in development. But with 75% of the surrounding land controlled by the forest service, a canyon that prevents sprawl and continual community efforts to preserve open space, Telluride also is poised to stay as beautiful as it is today.

Like many mountain towns, as Telluride continues to grow, the question remains as to how to maintain the integrity of its diverse population (500-square-foot shacks are listed for half a million dollars). Affordable-housing programs and open-space initiatives continue to take hold while the city, county and residents duke it out over how Telluride should look in the future.



EASY STREET Skiing See Forever, an intermediate run with stunning views; below left, a historic ski cabin.
TELLURIDE SKI & GOLF CO., T.R. YOUNGSTROM

"I think there are enough of us catching it early enough that Telluride will continue to thrive," Havell says. "I have a lot of faith that we won't be here in 20 years asking, 'Where are all the cool, funky people?'"

As for Captain Jack, his funkiness is here to stay.

"The people who come here are looking for something off the beaten path," he says of his adopted hometown. "But no matter who they are or what they do, they are passionate, live their lifestyle and are involved. Bring it on."

IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE

Continental Airlines (1-800-523-3273) serves Montrose Airport (about 65 miles from Telluride) directly from Newark. **America West** (1-800-433-7300) and **United** (1-800-241-6522) fly to Telluride Regional Airport (6 miles from town).

WHERE TO STAY

The New Sheridan Hotel, built more than a hundred years ago, features elegant Victorian decor and period furniture. Its Chop House restaurant serves elk loin and ostrich fillet and Opera House next door is home to regional theater. Packages start at \$100 per person, double occupancy, for a stay of two nights or more, including lift tickets and full breakfast. 1-800-200-1891; www.newsheridan.com.

The Wyndham Peaks Resort in Mountain Village has 174 luxury rooms and suites, all with panoramic mountain views, ski in/ski out convenience, down comforters and plush terry cloth robes — ideal for slipping away to the in-house Golden Door Spa for a treatment or massage. Ski packages including one-night luxury accommodations, access to the spa and one daily lift pass. Prices start at \$320 per person, double occupancy. 1-800-789-2220; www.thepeaksresort.com.

ON THE SLOPES

Regular lift tickets are \$74. Telluride also offers three special ticket options: a \$69 season pass for children under 12, a five-day transferable ticket pack at \$55 per day with no blackout dates (must be purchased seven days in advance) or limitless ski and snow-board lessons for \$149. 1-800-778-8581; www.tellurideskiresort.com.

SNOW ALERT!

Telluride is seeing some of the best early-season skiing conditions in 20 years.