



Majestic Rocky Mountain scenery around Aspen

MINI GUIDE

WINTER IN ASPEN

As ski towns go, the resort of Aspen is one of America's best, combining panoramic scenery with jet-setting glamour. Here, take snowshoe tours, learn about the local ecology and climb a frozen waterfall.

Nature

WINTER STAR GAZING 1

Aspen is a prime spot for seeing meteor showers, and the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies (ACES) holds monthly Winter Star Gazing nature trail walks at Rock Bottom Ranch, which allow you to experience the solitude of Aspen's skies on cold winter nights. Hot drinks are provided (aspennature.org; 2001 Hooks Spur Rd; donations of £6 advised).



Clear nights offer unrivalled star gazing in valleys around Aspen

ASHCROFT SNOWSHOE TOURS 2

On these half-day snowshoe tours to the pristine Castle Creek Valley, naturalists share expertise on tracking animals and studying the sub-alpine ecosystem. Trail walks will take you through serene spruce and fir forests, and peaceful groves with stellar views. The tour concludes with a gourmet lunch at Pine Creek Cookhouse – lunch, snowshoe rental and trail pass are included (aspennature.org; tours £65).

GET INTO WINTER 3

Basic winter ecology day classes, hosted by ACES, are great introductions to the nature and geology of Aspen and its surrounding area. Classes are limited to eight people. Days begin at Aspen's Hallam Lake Nature Preserve and Learning Center, with a snowshoe trek to Hunter Creek. This focuses on tracking animals in winter, and animal and plant survival strategies (aspennature.org; 100 Puppy Smith St; classes £13).

Skiing

ASPEN CROSS COUNTRY CENTER 4

Local outdoor outfitter Ute Mountaineer has operated this centre for more than 25 years. The centre is a good base from which to head out on cross-country skis onto the 60-mile Aspen Snowmass Nordic Trail System (utemountaineer.com/aspenxc.html; Aspen Golf Course, Hwy 82; Nov–Mar; ski rentals £14, group lessons £22).



The Silver Queen Gondola is the main link to Aspen Mountain

ASPEN MOUNTAIN 5

One of four ski mountains near Aspen, the 3,417m peak of Aspen Mountain is accessible from town via the free Silver Queen Gondola. On the way up, take in views of the Elk Mountains – their sculpted peaks shine in the late afternoon sun – before skiing down Ruthie's, a wide-open run with even more sweeping views. The Sundeck restaurant, at the top of the mountain, cooks up lunchtime grills, sandwiches and homemade pizzas (aspensnowmass.com; day passes £15).

ASHCROFT SKI TOURING 6

This local Nordic ski outfitter serves 20 miles of groomed ski trails through 600 acres of sub-alpine countryside. The mountain backdrop is astonishing, and in addition to classic cross-country ski equipment, snowshoes are also available for hire. Individual and group lessons as well as group tours are offered daily (pinecreekcookhouse.com; 11399 Castle Creek Rd; full-day passes £9, lessons £45).

Other activities

SILVER CIRCLE ICE RINK 7

Aspen is home to three ice rinks, but only one that's outdoors. At the foot of Aspen Mountain, this small but scenic ice rink is a joy to skate on, especially in the evening, when downtown Aspen and the mountains provide a wonderfully pretty backdrop (cpburger.com; 433 E Durant Ave; 12pm–9pm Nov–Mar; admission £4.40, skate rentals £2.20).



Get to grips with an ice wall courtesy of Aspen Expeditions

ASPEN EXPEDITIONS 8

Based in the Aspen Highlands ski area, this place organises adventurous itineraries, including outstanding winter ice-climbing day expeditions at a frozen waterfall 10 minutes down the valley from Aspen. No experience is necessary for these expeditions – boots, hardware and ice-climbing tools are all provided for you (aspensexpeditions.com; Dec–Mar only; from £110).

ASPEN PARAGLIDING 9

If you fancy a bird's-eye view of Aspen and the glistening peaks of the Rocky Mountains on a bright day, this paragliding outfitter operates tandem flights year round. In winter, flights lift off from Snowmass Village. Four sessions operate each morning, and private instruction and group courses are available (aspensparagliding.com; 426 S Spring St; flights £140).

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Sights & Activities Where to stay



Aspen essentials

TRANSPORT

There are no direct flights to Aspen from the UK, but you can fly via major US cities to Aspen-Pitkin County airport, four miles north of town. United and American Airlines fly from Heathrow (from £660; aa.com). Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA) runs a free, twice-hourly bus service to and from the airport (rfta.com) and RFTA also operates free ski shuttles between Aspen, Snowmass and Buttermilk.



Oversized chairs add a theatrical touch to the Sky Hotel's lobby

WHERE TO STAY

- 1 One of Aspen's few centrally located and affordable lodges, the family-owned **Tyrolean Lodge** resembles a Native American version of an Austrian ski lodge. The rooms here are spacious, with nifty accents including stone fireplaces and dark-wood panelling behind queen-sized beds (tyroleanlodge.com; 200 W Main St; from £60 in winter).
- 2 There's a certain b&b intimacy at the **Hotel Lenado**, set in a

modern farmhouse-style building. Rooms have old wood-burning stoves and high ceilings. There's a hot tub on the roof deck and gourmet breakfasts every morning (hotellenado.com; 200 S Aspen St; from £110).

- 3 **The Sky Hotel** is one of the town's most elegant resorts. Rooms are playful with Southwestern-style wooden beams, white linen, down duvets, and faux-fur throws. The hot tub and slick 39 Bar are further plus points (theskyhotel.com; 709 E Durant Ave; from £225).

The know-how

FAMOUS FACES

Aspen has long been a playground for the rich and famous. Here's a few who have called this outpost home:

Hunter S Thompson

Gonzo journalist Hunter S Thompson settled in town in the early 1960s, even running for county sheriff in 1970.

John Denver

The singer-songwriter and humanitarian wrote two songs in Aspen's honour. He was named poet laureate of the state of Colorado in 1974.

Lance Armstrong

The controversial pro-road racing cyclist owns a home in Aspen. He was recently banned for life from competitive cycling.

Kevin Costner

The *Dances With Wolves* actor settled on a 165-acre Aspen ranch in the early 1990s.



TOP TIP

Aspen locals are keen to avoid visitors getting behind the wheel after partaking in its glamorous après-ski scene. Tippy Taxi offers a free ride home to those who really need it. If in doubt, ask a bartender to make the call (tipsytaxi.com).

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Colorado* (£14.99) features good recommendations on winter accommodation and activities in Aspen. You can download the Vail, Aspen & Central Mountains chapter (£2.99) at lonelyplanet.com. For local and regional news and events, try the online edition of the *Aspen Times* (aspentimes.com), while *Aspen Magazine* has event listings and local interest articles (aspenmagazine.com).

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