

BLUE SKY *days*

Contemplating a holiday to “King of American ski resorts”, Vail, Colorado? Well, do believe the hype, says Bianca Martin. The powder is fresh, the people are friendly, and celeb-spotting all part of the après fun



DOWNHILL THRILLS

Powder flies and adrenaline pumps as a skier makes their descent down Vail Mountain, home to nearly 200 kilometres of awe-inspiring runs.

Prior to arriving in Vail, Colorado, the closest I had ever come to serious powder was in my laundry doing the Sunday wash. Sure, I ski, but I don't think I ever truly felt like a “skier” until a blue-sky day in January when I sink knee-deep into the white stuff, gripped by utter fear and unrivalled exhilaration in equal measure. In that moment, I understand why, despite the ski-boot blisters and frozen fingers and endless dressing and undressing, skiing is so addictive. I'm left wanting more. Thankfully, Vail delivers.

SNOW BUSINESS

With eight mountain resorts and three urban ski areas across the US – plus the recently acquired Perisher Ski Resort in NSW, Australia – Vail Resorts is a juggernaut of the ski industry. And with a golden ticket – the annual Epic Pass (snow.com/epic-pass.aspx) – you can gain access to all 140 square kilometres of its ski terrain, including Vail.

Vail Ski Resort is a three-hour drive from Denver, Colorado, blessed with 300 sunny days each year and up to 900 centimetres of snow. Team that with a slick man-made operation, and it's no surprise that this is a premier ski destination. >

POWDER DAYS

You know those shiny, happy people who appear to have mainlined coffee? Well, imagine them en masse and there you have Vail's ski and snowboard instructors, all beaming smiles and unbridled enthusiasm. Ours, Charlie (a Colorado local) and Kylie (an Aussie export), are two of the most experienced – and on our first morning they tell us there has been a big dump of fresh powder overnight so excitement is at fever pitch.

If you want to hear grown men and women shriek like seven-year-olds, take a lift up Vail Mountain on one of those days – our introductions are interrupted by whoops and screams as snow-hounds below glide through their own patches of untouched paradise. At one point we spot a seven-year-old who squeals with delight before landing face first, and disappearing, into a pile of powder. Such fun.

With more than 195 kilometres of runs, there is no way you could cover the lot, but Charlie does an impressive job trying. Over a few days we cover terrain on The Front Side and Blue Sky Basin, cruising over corduroy (ski-speak for groomed runs), gliding through cat tracks and skiing among spruce trees on virtually empty runs. This is a well-oiled machine ... lift lines are almost non-existent, runs are well signposted and pit stops perfectly placed.

I don't think I've used the word "awesome" this much since I was 15 and by the end of the week my hand almost hurts more from high-fiving than the near-frostbite. All the while Charlie just smiles like the cat that got the cream. Yep, he's seen his fair share of Vail converts. I am one, and I will be back.



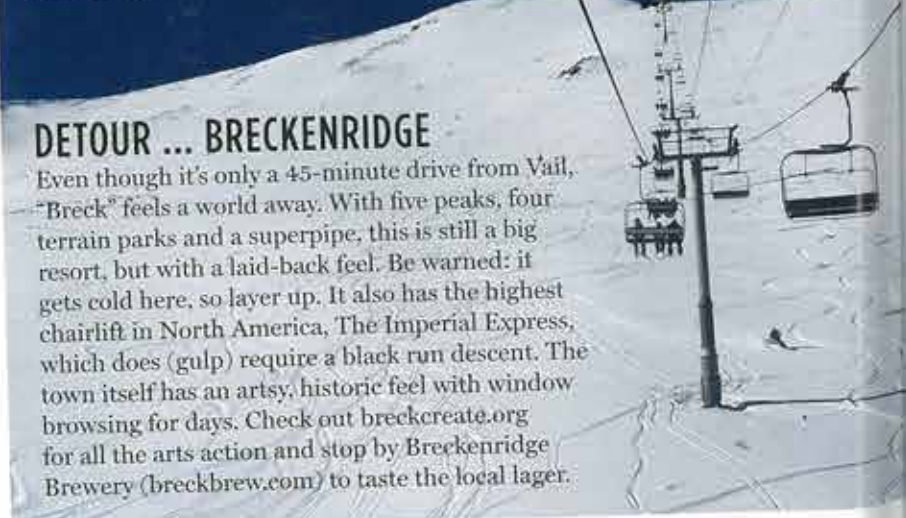
Vail Village, all quaint storefronts and cobbled streets, mimics a Bavarian alpine town.



GET APPY

Download Vail Resort's EpicMix app and you can check snow conditions and lift-queue times, plus compare your ski stats with friends. Visit epicmix.com.

NOT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED, THE IMPERIAL EXPRESS IS THE HIGHEST CHAIRLIFT IN NORTH AMERICA, LOOMING NEARLY 4000 METRES ABOVE SEA LEVEL



DETOUR ... BRECKENRIDGE

Even though it's only a 45-minute drive from Vail, "Breck" feels a world away. With five peaks, four terrain parks and a superpipe, this is still a big resort, but with a laid-back feel. Be warned: it gets cold here, so layer up. It also has the highest chairlift in North America. The Imperial Express, which does (gulp) require a black run descent. The town itself has an artsy, historic feel with window browsing for days. Check out breckcreate.org for all the arts action and stop by Breckenridge Brewery (breckbrew.com) to taste the local lager.

SLOPESIDE STAR-SPOTTING

Vail is a magnet for the rich and famous – whether they're hitting the world-class pistes or parading their fur-lined fashion.



RETAIL THERAPY

When it's a white-out on the slopes, it's time to hit the shops. Here are five fab stores to get you started:



1 Kemo Sabe Quality cowboy boots, hats, belts and bags. Visit kemosabe.com.



2 Worth Home Furniture and homewares for your own mountain lodge. Visit worthinteriors.com.

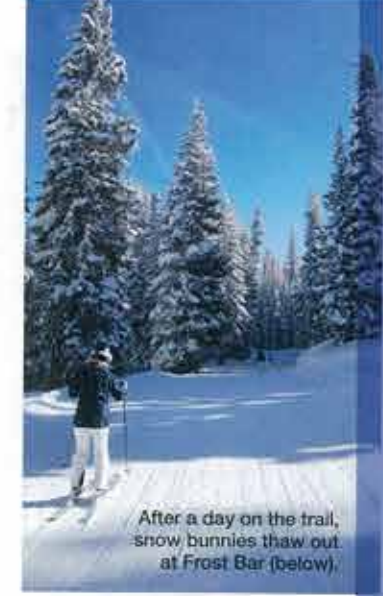


3 Fuzziwig's Candy Factory A wonderland of all-American sweets. Need we say more? Visit fuzziwigscandyfactory.com.



4 Craniologie Goggles, helmets and headgear for the serious snow bunny. Visit craniologie.com.

5 Perch Stocks countless clothing and accessories brands, from casual to couture. Visit perchvail.com.



After a day on the trail, snow bunnies thaw out at Frost Bar (below).



7 APRÉS EXPERIENCES



1

The 10th

This ski-in, ski-out restaurant at mid Vail offers fine dining, views to die for, and slippers for sore feet. The Pot Pie is a winner.

2

Matsuhisa

Save your pennies for chef Nobu's Japanese-fusion eatery. The menu is experimental and the Matsutini cocktail delicious.

3

Mountain Standard

Hipster heaven with a cabin-like feel and a menu of the best local produce. Great food, good vibe. Book ahead.

4

Frost Bar at The Sebastian

Finish a day on the slopes with the Signature Hot Chocolate, a sugar-loaded taste sensation.

5

Sweet Basil

A long-time favourite among locals and visitors, with a modern-American menu.

6

Bol

This city bar on the slopes boasts a 10-lane bowling alley, DJ line-up and a permanent party atmosphere.

7

Beano's Cabin

A 20-minute motorised sleigh ride takes you to this restaurant in the wilderness near Beaver Creek. A Colorado experience not to be missed. ☐



STAY HEALTHY

With high mountains comes altitude, and for the unacclimatised that can mean nausea, headaches and dizziness. Remember to drink double the water, use double the sunscreen, and avoid too much alcohol.

LUXURY LODGING ... THE SEBASTIAN

Located in Vail Village, this stunning hotel is the ultimate in ski chic with stone fireplaces and oversized sofas, a gallery-like art collection, in-house spa, outdoor heated pool and hot tubs. We love the ski-in, ski-out valet service. Visit thesebastianvail.com.