

Aspen Travel Guide

Written by Arizona Foothills Magazine

Wednesday, 11 January 2012 17:02 - Last Updated Monday, 16 January 2012 11:20

Perched high in the Elk Mountains branch of the Rockies, Aspen and its sister town of Snowmass Village boast four major ski areas, the highest concentration in all of Colorado. Known as an posh ski resort destination for the international jet-set, Aspen is just under a two-hour flight from Phoenix – making it a fabulous retreat for Arizona's desert dwellers for premier powder, posh partying, and plenty of pleasures by snow and by land. If you're planning a getaway to our favorite wintertime destination, use our handy-dandy guide of all the places to see and be seen in Aspen, Colorado.



Stay

Sky Hotel

Adjacent to the Silver Queen Gondola at the base of Aspen mountain, this chic boutique hotel is a playful alternative to the serious Alpine-theme luxury resorts of the area. Conceived by San Francisco-based Kimpton Hotels (owners of SF's Hotel Monaco and San Diego's Solamar), the former Aspen Club Lodge was the recipient of a complete makeover resulting in a hip hotel destination equipped with trendy eatery and be-seen lounge. The interior lobby features granite and limestone walls with towering lampshade-shaped chandelier above white-leather chairs and faux-fur rugs. During high season (Dec. – Mar.) the lobby is home to Aspen's hottest après-ski scene with DJ's spinning lounge anthems starting at 4pm daily. Grab a comfy banquette and settle in with some beverages - the people watching is phenomenal and the tunes are top notch - so trust us, you'll be here for awhile. With so much to see and do in Aspen, we did little more in our room than sleep, but the rooms are modern and comfortable with luxe touches like goose feather duvets and iPod docks double as charging stations – a nice touch. Sky Hotel's literal ski-in, ski-out location makes it the perfect location to stay and play in the center of it all.

TIP: The bottom floor of Sky Hotel has a ski/snowboard rental shop and they will wax and store your equipment for you nightly, at no additional charge.

www.theskyhotel.com

Play

Western Adventures

Naturally, if you're in Aspen, you're going to want to tear up the slopes on one of the area's four legendary peaks. But if sliding down the mountain on a waxed up piece of carbon fibre isn't your style, don't miss the opportunity to experience Aspen's stunning landscape via snowmobile. Western Adventures is the premier winter sports tour operator in Aspen, having led breathtaking snowmobile tours of the high country for celebrities like Mariah Carey to President Bill Clinton to 50 Cent and everyone in between. Fortunately for us, Western Adventures caters to everyone with their private and group tours. Snowmobiling in Aspen requires no prior experience or athletic ability (phew) - all you need to bring is your need for speed. Upon arriving at the Western Adventures meeting point, you will be whisked away via Suburban on a scenic drive up to higher elevation. At the second meeting point, you'll be assigned your very own Audi S4 snowmobile. From there, you'll experience a positively exhilarating two or three-hour tour of the area's most magnificent peaks. Don't forget your camera – there are major photo ops to be had along the way. Lunch is provided on two and three hour tours, which includes sandwiches with all the fixins with hot cocoa. Oh, if you are offered hand warmers (you will be) take them. Ask nicely, and they'll give you an extra set for your toes too.

TIP: Be sure to request Hiram as your tour guide. Not only does he know the Aspen highlands like the back of his hand, he will also dig your snowmobile out of 10 inches of powder (ok, so it's not like riding a bicycle) and treat you to memorable one-liners such as "Oh my scrud!" Trust

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us. He's awesome.

Reservations: 970-923-3337



Eat

Ellina

Like many of Aspen's best restaurants, Ellina is hidden underground in a cozy, stone-walled space reminiscent of Colorado's mining days. After descending the stairwell leading to the restaurant and being greeted by two cheerful bottles of orange-label Veuve Cliquot (Help myself? But, of course!) diners are escorted to the intimate and romantic dining room. This is the place to see and be seen in Aspen. Ellina features a palette of farm-to-table ingredients crafted by Chef Miguel Diaz into a selection of dishes worthy of their award winning wine list. (Silver Oak, Littorai...hello!) After hearing Aspen regulars rave like alllllll day about the Braised Artichoke Heart Bruschetta with organic poached egg, shaved truffles, creamy parmigiano – we had to try it. Yes, it's a \$26 starter – but it's worth it. For good measure, we also tried the Rare Kampachi app with smoked sea salt, cucumber radish salad and blood orange caviar. At \$20, this melt in your mouth crudo was well worth the investment. Aligning with the "eat local" mantra practiced by The Braised Colorado Lamb Shank with caramelized cipollini onions, poblano pepper polenta, lamb jus was sheer perfection. Moist, flavorful, juicy and absolutely fall-off-the-bone decadence. A must-eat in Aspen. On the evening we dined at Ellina, Barrmundi was offered with pan seared, potato leek ravioli, chanterelle mushrooms and yellow tomato sauce – a perfect, light alternative to the rich lamb dish and a contender for one of the Best Dishes We Ate in 2011. Seriously. For dessert, order the perfect rev-me-up dessert - Ellina's signature Afogato with house made caramel gelato, espresso and house made biscotti that is as indulgent as it is packed with caffeine. Feeling extra daring (or tired?) Order the Afogato Correcto, which includes a shot of grappa.

TIP: Ellina is not the easiest reservation to be had in Aspen. If you don't mind eating late, score a 10'oclock reservation and languish over a bottle of wine before heading out to one of Aspen's happening hotspots.

www.ellinaaspen.com



Play

Escobar

The crown jewel of Aspen's nightlife scene, Escobar is the place to hang up your mink, pop a bottle of champagne and and get down to business. Party business. After all, where else but Aspen can you party with the likeness of cocaine kingpin Pablo Escobar in a private jet repurposed as a swanky, super-exclusive underground nightclub? Seriously. We partied for four consecutive nights at Escobar (and lived to tell about it), and it is our expert opinion that this venue offers the best overall nightclub experience anywhere in Aspen. We hear that the boys have opened up a sister location down the hill at Copper Mountain, and locations in Denver and New York are on the drawing board. (Don't worry, we dropped our beloved Scottsdale in the Suggestion Box.) We're not sure if it's the domineering door guy who red-roped us in each night like our name was Paris Hilton, the packed dance floor full of glamorous socialites from Europe and both coasts, or the champagne that just kept coming...and coming...and coming our way, but we think the fun, chic atmosphere of Escobar is like a breath of fresh air in Aspen's otherwise stodgy nightlife scene. Sure, Caribou is fab, but when you really want to let loose and get crazy – these guys have got the "St. Tropez in the

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snow" scene right.

TIP: Need to namedrop your way in? Ryan Chadwick is the owner and mastermind of this establishment. You're welcome.

BONUS TIP: Get a table so you can stand on the furniture and spray champagne on people. Disclaimer: We're not responsible for your dry cleaning bill.

www.escobaraspen.com



Shop

Must-Stop Shopping

If you are into fashion, Aspen is a wonder to behold. You can shop international fashion houses along Galena Street, pick up a flirty designer frock at unique boutiques, or choose from carefully curated collections of one-of-a-kind western wear and fur at historic shops nestled all throughout the ritzy alpine enclave. Must shop spots include Moncler (for chic ski bunny duds & luxe winter-wear), Boogie's (to get a tee shirt that says Boogie's Diner Aspen, what else?), Aspen Thrift Store (Um, hello...barely worn Chanel snow boots circa 2007? Yes, please.), J Crew at the Mountain (for the Jenna Lyons-obsessed, this is the cold weather version of the J Crew you know and love - I.e. Sweaters! Sequins! Plaid!), and the legendary Gorsuch, Ltd. (for fur-trimmed everything – including home décor - look out for the super chic fur/cashmere throws). Also, be sure to window shop (and swoon) the high-fashion stores strategically placed around town. The stunningly-styled windows at Prada, Fendi, Louis Vuitton and Gucci in Aspen rival those of New York City at Christmastime. Also: don't miss Carl's Pharmacy on Main street. It's pretty hard to miss this place, as it's the only pharmacy in town (and the only pharmacy for 50 miles in any direction, for that matter) but it's a marvel in its own right. This old fashioned style pharmacy has an estimated billion or so products crammed (started counting, then wandered into the liquor store) onto the shelves ranging from Tylenol to Tiger Balm to Gummi Bears to an extensive collection of anti-aging vitamins and an Estee Lauder makeup counter inside the store. Hell, there is even a fish pond stocked with Koi and an (aforementioned) liquor store with a full walk-in wine cellar featuring some very choice bevs - but that's not even all. There's an entire upstairs area that you will have to go see and let us know what's up there because we didn't make it that far. This is where you go to get bottled water and other hotel-room sustenances. File Carl's under Essential.

TIP: Cowboy hat? Check. Floor-length fur coat? Check-check. Seriously, if you've got it – flaunt it. If ever there was a place to drape yourself in diamonds and fur, Aspen is it. Whether it's vintage, faux, or unearthed from your grandmother's attic, more is more in Aspen so daring fashionistas shouldn't hesitate to pile it on. All of it, and all the time. Should you wear a fur vest with a fur hat? Absolutely. A well-worn Stetson and a pair of Sorel snow boots? You bet. A floor-length spotted mink at nine o'clock in the morning? I think you know the answer.



Eat

Casa Tua

Casa Tua restaurant & private club is housed within a massive 5,000-square foot space with all-day dining options and late night scene surely to be the toast of Aspen high season. A hearty menu liaised by chef Sergio Sigalai inspired by the Miami original. Their infamous menu features an Italian menu of grilled octopus with potatoes, elaborate caviar service and seared foie gras with ginger marmalade. Decadent, homemade pastas include Farro risotto with Maine Lobster or white truffles, tagliatelle with diced pumpkin and shrimp and a Tagliolini topped with caviar and crème fraiche. Main course usually arrives with an already satiated appetite with grilled Wagyu steaks, veal tenderloin with zucchini gratin

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and popular whole Branzino deboned table side.

It's our favorite Italian restaurant in Miami, tucked along a quiet South Beach street where mature shade trees envelop a terrace and restaurant with upper-level member's club. Owned by Mickey Grendene, Casa Tua brings its exclusive member's club and open-to-the-public eatery to a luxe lodge steps from the base of Aspen mountain. The two-story space is emancipated from its rustic Aspen ways into a more-elegant but still rustic Alpine-space with swanky dining room, small lounge, and larger upstairs member's club with both short-term and full membership options.

TIP: After dinner downstairs, you may find yourself invited up to the members club for a look around – and if you're really lucky – a drink at the private bar. Play it cool and you may be invited to stay awhile to hob nob with not-to-be-named celebrities, heiresses and oil magnates. If you get the chance to visit upstairs, be sure to check out the rotating art installation. During our visit, an exquisite collection of Marilyn Monroe's personal photographs were on display.

www.casatualifestyle.com

Party

Belly Up is Aspen's legendary live music venue in the center of town. Belly Up does not discriminate according to musical taste or talent – which means one night there may be a totally random dub step show and the next night Lil Wayne is onstage. It's a total crap shoot unless you are planning your trip specifically around the dates a particular artist will be in town. Fortunately, it doesn't matter who is onstage – it is pretty much guaranteed you'll have a killer time if you see a show at Belly Up. With capacity for only 450, every seat in the house is pretty much the best seat in the house. Since opening in 2005, The Belly Up, Aspen has hosted many musical talents from around the world including: Jane's Addiction, Wu Tang Clan, Thievery Corporation, The Raconteurs, Ben Harper, B.B. King, Paul Oakenfold, Gov't Mule, SEAL, ZZ Top, Xavier Rudd, Chris Isaak, Gomez, G Love, Blues Traveler, Steel Pulse, Method Man and Redman, John Legend, Damian Marley, Stephen Marley, Ky-Mani Marley, Lucinda Williams, Snoop Dogg, Tiësto, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Joe Cocker, Wyclef Jean, Ice Cube and many, many more. The spot is pretty no nonsense, with vinyl banquettes lining the upper areas and standing-room-only in front of the stage, but where else can you get this close to Perry Farrell and the rest of Jane's Addiction for the world's most intimate New Year's Eve show?

TIP: The coat check is absolutely insane here and that is no understatement. Be smart and send someone in your group to retrieve your coats approximately 15 minutes before the end of a show. Otherwise, prepare for a mosh-pit-style free for all when trying to get your coat. Seriously, the cops came. To the coat check line. Someone called the cops to the coat check. Yeah. That happened.

www.bellyupaspen.com