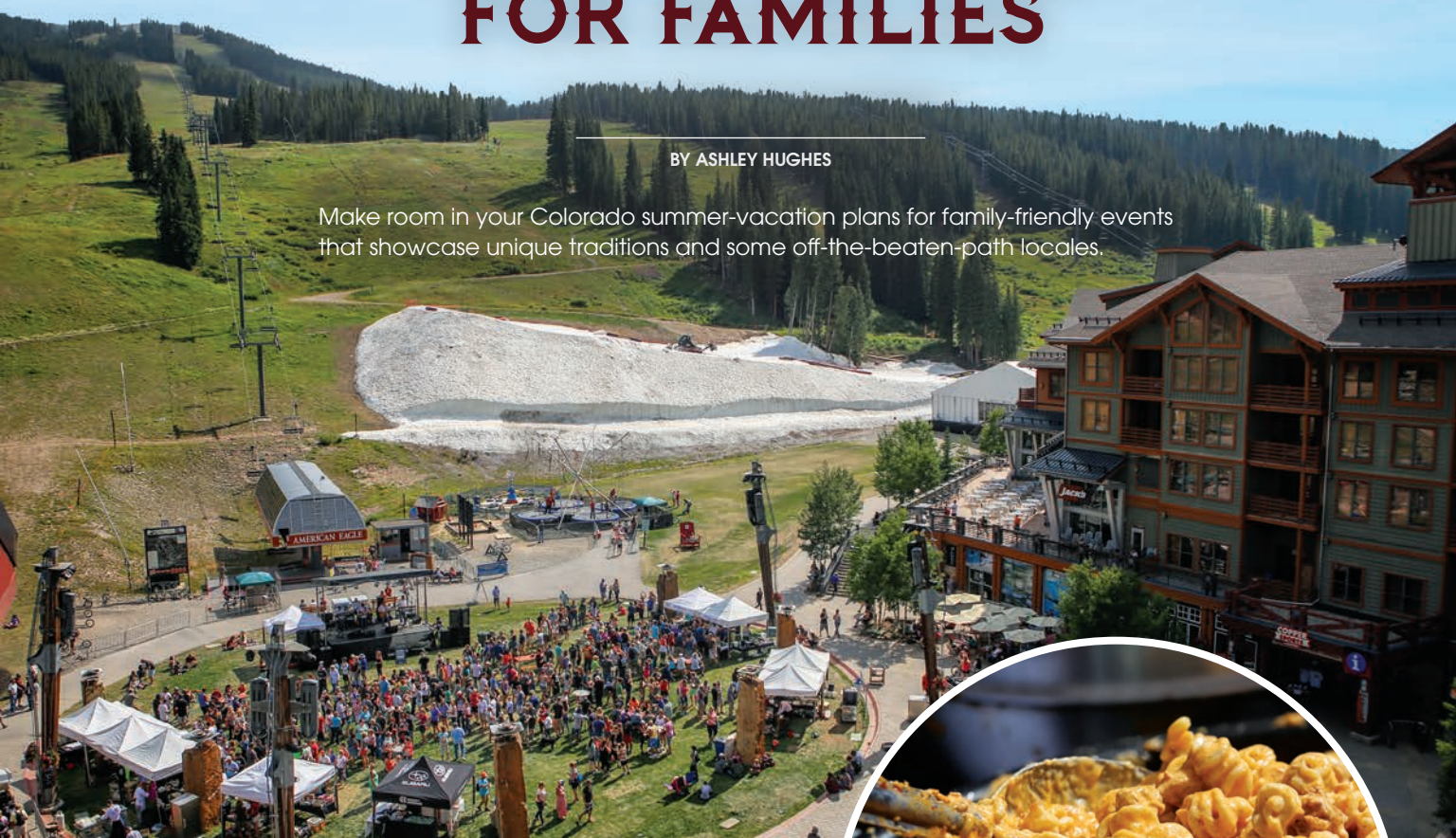


LESSER-KNOWN SUMMER FESTS FOR FAMILIES

BY ASHLEY HUGHES

Make room in your Colorado summer-vacation plans for family-friendly events that showcase unique traditions and some off-the-beaten-path locales.



MAC & CHEESE FEST. COPPER MOUNTAIN

JULY 29-30, 2017

Have a picky eater or two in the family? Odds are mac and cheese is always a go, so bank on an enthusiastic response when you suggest a day devoted to this crowd-pleasing staple. The young and young-at-heart will appreciate sampling the goods, but the really ambitious can enter an eating contest — that is, if downing two pounds of cheesy pasta in two minutes sounds doable. When you're not indulging, check out the kids' activities and a magic show, or work off some of the damage by participating in the free family 5K on Sunday.





COLORADO DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL, DENVER

JULY 29-30, 2017

Each year, dozens of teams descend on Sloan's Lake for two days of dragon-boat races, an ancient sport that originated in China. Along with the thrill of cheering on competitors, the crowd is also immersed in Asian culture with the help of five performing-arts stages, two food courts, cultural demonstrations and a marketplace. Point the kiddos in the direction of Dragonland, an area designed to entertain and educate. Highlights include face painting, decorating masks and fans, origami, games and even the chance to walk on water, thanks to inflated tubes called Water Zorbs that keep curious kiddos nice and dry.

MIKE THE HEADLESS CHICKEN FESTIVAL, FRUITA

JUNE 3-4, 2017

A weekend dedicated to a headless chicken — what the cluck? For nearly two decades this event has celebrated the spirit of a fowl that narrowly escaped the dinner table back in 1945. Despite literally getting the ax, most of his brain stem was retained and, thanks to a supply of water and grain fed from an eyedropper, Mike continued on with his life for another 18 months. Bird-themed festivities like a rooster-calling contest, wing- and peep-eating contests, and a poultry show help keep his strange story alive, while families can round out the schedule with live music, food, artisan booths, a disc golf tournament and the 5K race/walk.

MEEKERPALOOZA, MEEKER

JUNE 3, 2017

Soak up the small-town vibe in northwest Colorado at this convivial gathering for music, dance, and visual and culinary arts. Parents won't want to miss the beer garden featuring pours from Palisade Brewery, while little ones will be right at home in the kids' art zone. Exploring creativity is the name of the game, with activities ranging from building fairy houses, painting, giant Jenga, pottery and bubble wands. Hit up Taste of Meeker for bites from the town's favorite restaurants and food trucks, and swing by the stage to catch an array of boogie-worthy musical acts.

RIDGWAY RENDEZVOUS

AUG. 12-13, 2017

Coined as the gateway to the San Juan Mountains in southwest Colorado, Ridgway is a scenic setting for this annual arts-and-crafts affair the whole family can enjoy for free. Perusing seriously cool art at booths set up by juried artisans in the picturesque town park is a must, but there's plenty of other fun, too. Live music provides a soundtrack, and sponsor Weehawken Creative Arts offers an assortment of things for children to do — think sand art, tie-dying, a magic show and a mini-train ride.

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HEAVENLY ICE CREAM SHOPS

What better way to top off a busy summer afternoon than with a cool scoop? Satisfy your sweet tooth with these favorite parlor picks around the state.

- Old-fashioned malts and shakes at **Tutti Scoops in Trinidad**
- Frosty Mountain Glacier concoctions at **Graff Dairy in Grand Junction**
- Homemade cinnamon-and-nutmeg-infused waffle cones at **Josh & John's in Colorado Springs**
- An artisan selection crafted from local and organic ingredients at **Cream Bean Berry in Durango**
- Thick and buttery flavors start with cream, sugar and natural flavorings at **Sweet Cow in Louisville, Boulder and Denver**
- Non-dairy options made with coconut and cashew milks at **Third Bowl Home-made Ice Cream in Crested Butte**

COLORADO DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL: BETH SCHNEIDER.