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Amazing Weekends

A year's worth of ideas for what you should do when 5 o'clock on Friday (finally) arrives.

[BY JULIE DUGDALE AND LINDSEY B. KOEHLER]

SPRING

Re-center Yourself

Invest in some bona fide “me time” at the **Shoshoni Yoga Retreat** near the tiny mountain town of Rollinsville by booking an eco-friendly cabin with solar-powered radiant floor heat. Your mind and body will thank you after morning and evening meditation sessions, twice-daily yoga classes, and three vegetarian meals a day. For a true spiritual cleanse, some guests observe contemplative silence during their stay. Take your retreat to whatever level you're comfortable with, and leave with a refreshed soul. www.shoshoni.org

Get Your History On

With 600 cliff dwellings that were inhabited by the Ancestral Puebloans nearly 1,000 years ago, the archaeological gem that is **Mesa Verde National Park** is worth the nine-hour drive. Start your weekend on Thursday with an Archaeology Day Tour at the nearby Crow Canyon Archaeological Center. At the park, stay in the Far View Lodge, and take the hour-long guided tours (\$3 each) of both the Cliff Palace and the Balcony House. www.crowcanyon.org; www.nps.gov/meve

Roll the Dice

For years, Colorado's casino culture felt

underdeveloped, but with recent changes to gaming rules that brought craps and roulette to the floor and allowed up to \$100 bets, the state's gambling corridor is starting to feel a bit more authentic. That's especially true at the new **Ameristar Casino Resort Spa** in Black Hawk. With 1,500 slot and video machines, 23 table games, 14 live poker tables, a two-level casino that rivals those in Vegas, and a Rocky Mountain location that puts the Strip to shame, Ameristar serves as an easier way to play away a weekend. www.ameristar.com

Health Kick

Click on the “Last

Take Thee to the River »

Get your feet wet in the water of Rancho Del Rio.

Along the Colorado River Headwaters Scenic Byway between Bond and Kremmling lies a river-sports outpost ideal for those looking for a good adventure and camaraderie. Fair warning: This is a straight-up river rat's paradise; the folks who visit Rancho like to paddle hard and play hard—there's never a lack of patrons (or cold brews) at the outdoor bar and restaurant, KK's BBQ. Crash in one of the basic log cabins (bunks, microwave, and fridge) or pitch your tent on Rancho's 20 acres of riverfront for some late-night revelry before hitting the froth in the a.m. With some of the finest white water in the state, the Colorado River offers everything from beginner-friendly floats to Class V rapids through Gore Canyon.

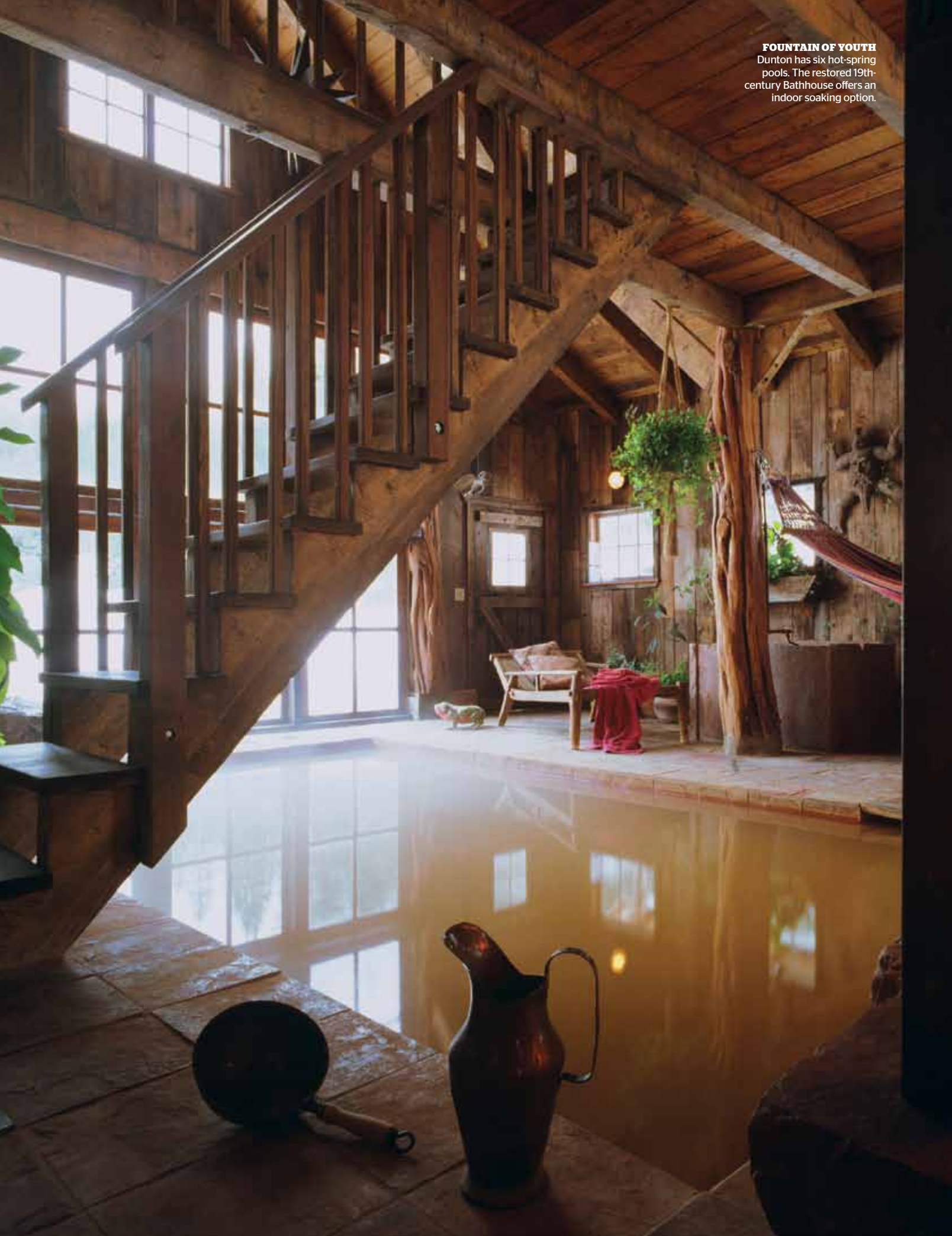
More of a fisherman than a paddler? The water flattens out beyond Gore Canyon into a stretch deemed Wild Trout Water by the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Take a fly-fishing tour and pull out foot-long rainbows. During spring runoff, the salmonfly hatch produces huge catches. Whatever your goal for the weekend—lazy float, big white water, fishing escape, beer and burgers—you'll find it at Rancho. www.ranchodelrio.com

PADDLE HARD
The Colorado River offers
both easy floats and
monster Class V rapids.



PHIL SCHOFIELD/GETTY IMAGES

FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH
Dunton has six hot-spring
pools. The restored 19th-
century Bathhouse offers an
indoor soaking option.



Minute Deals” button on **Red Mountain Resort & Spa’s** Web site to find can’t-miss specials on the southwestern Utah resort’s signature packages, which include daily hikes, fitness classes, and three healthy meals a day. www.redmountainspa.com

Where Creativity Roams

Artists of all kinds will want to sign up for some creative alone time at **Luna Creative Retreats**. Just north of the New Mexico border, in the tiny town of San Acacio, rests a respite for self-described artsy folks. Here, in a studio-filled building, artists can find space to create. Luna’s studios—which also function as sleeping quarters—are available for \$75 per night. For reservations, e-mail

j.m.owens@hotmail.com

Set a Hook

When the bugs start hitting your windshield like thousands of winged raindrops, you’ll know a hatch has begun. And while the famous burgeoning of insects on the **Arkansas River** is purported to happen around Mother’s Day (hence “the Mother’s Day caddis hatch”), the melee often begins in mid-April. Set up shop at the San Isabel Bed and Breakfast, just outside of downtown Salida, pull out your favorite black foam caddis fly, and wet a line—the Arkansas rushes just a short car trip away. www.sanisabelbandb.com

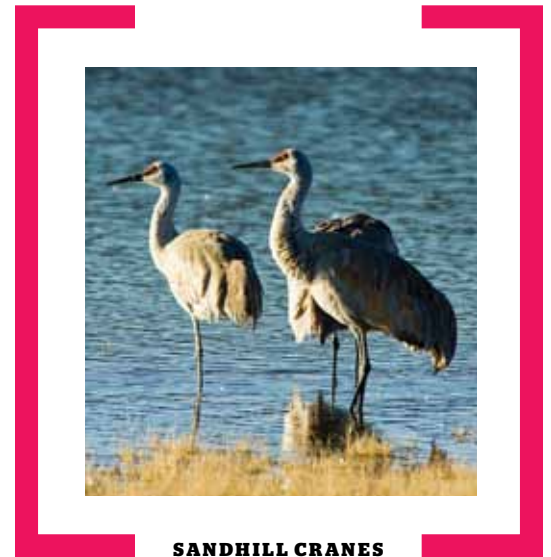
Fly Away

From mid-March to

mid-April, you can see **greater sandhill cranes** coast into the Fruitgrowers Reservoir near Eckert, Colorado. The site is a key stop-over for the migrating birds as they move from their wintering area in New Mexico to their breeding grounds in the northern United States. Onlookers can observe the cranes as they circle upward, riding rising columns of warm air to gain enough elevation to fly over the Grand Mesa. The visual display is Mother Nature at her finest, and the guttural, primordial chortle the cranes unleash is unlike anything you’ve ever heard. The cranes typically land between 4 and 6:30 p.m. and take off between 9 and 11 a.m. Fill a thermos with coffee, grab your binoculars and a blanket, and sit on your vehicle’s tailgate for hours of unmatched bird-watching. For local accommodations, try the Cedars’ Edge Llamas Bed & Breakfast or the Lovett House Bed & Breakfast. www.eckertcranedays.com; www.llamabandb.com; www.lovetthousebandb.com

What Girls Are Made Of

Grab your best girlfriend (or maybe your mom for Mother’s Day!), tell your husband he’s a bachelor for the night, and scoot downtown for an over-the-top (yet not too spendy) girls’ getaway at Denver’s **Brown Palace Hotel**. For \$180, you can add the Sugar & Spice spa



SANDHILL CRANES

and tea package to any overnight reservation. Along with the Brown’s unequaled service and stately elegance, you’ll enjoy tea for two accompanied by luxurious pedicures. www.brownpalace.com

Take Me Out to the Ballgame

When warmer weather arrives in Denver, you’ll want to make two important reservations: one at the **Gregory Inn LoDo**, a bed-and-breakfast in north Denver, and another for tickets at **Coors Field**. With just a handful of blocks separating the inn from the ballpark, you’ll be able to wake up in the morning, eat a leisurely breakfast (Scotch eggs, breakfast pizza, crêpes), and then walk to the Rockies game. www.gregoryinn.com; www.rockies.mlb.com

Jolly Good Time

For a not-quite-roughing-it outdoorsy escape, a 45-minute drive from Denver will land you at a four-bedroom, fully fur-

nished ranch house in the middle of Golden Gate Canyon State Park. The Harmsens, founders of the Jolly Rancher candy company, donated the house to the park in the ’70s. The sprawling **Harmen Ranch Guest House** (\$220 per night) has a patio, gas grill, and full kitchen, all surrounded by hiking, fishing, and biking options aplenty. www.parks.state.co.us

Road Runners

Every year on Memorial Day, more than 50,000 people infiltrate “the bubble” for one of the most famous road races in the country. The 10K **Bolder Boulder** loops through the scenic, tree-lined streets of the People’s Republic and ends in Folsom Field, where festivities ensue. Both elite athletes and amateurs flock to this race for its happy-go-lucky vibe. Shack up the night before and after at the St. Julien Hotel & Spa for some much-needed R&R. www.bolderboulder.com; www.stjulien.com

« Soak Up Some R&R Dunton Hot Springs’ rustic elegance soothes the soul—and hiking-weary bodies.

A three-night spa package getaway at Dunton Hot Springs near Dolores, Colorado, will set you back a month’s pay (approximately \$3,980 for two), but this ultra-exclusive San Juan Mountains retreat (a lovingly restored mining town complete with a saloon, general store, and chapel) leaves little—OK, nothing—to be desired, even during the shoulder season.

You’ll start each day with a yoga session, move onto the forested hiking trails for some muscle-tormenting exercise, spread out a picnic in a high meadow (weather permitting), soak in hot springs (Dunton has six pools that range in temperature from 85 degrees to 106 degrees), enjoy a massage with all-natural products, and savor a delicious meal in the old saloon.

Depending on the spring snowpack, Dunton offers snowshoeing, heliskiing, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing as well. Trust us, it’s worth every penny. www.duntonhotsprings.com

com



SUMMER

Ride that Train

With only one opportunity to ride **AAA Colorado's wine train** this year (July 23, 2010; \$740 double occupancy), you'll need to sign up well in advance to snag a seat on this wine-lover's rail ride. Departing from Union Station on a Friday, winos enjoy a private rail car with cozy seats as the train winds its way through the Rockies. Upon arrival in Grand Junction, guests prep for two days of vineyard tours, where nearly all of the winemakers are on hand to pour and answer questions. Guests are encouraged to pick up bottles of their favorite Pinot Noirs, Rieslings, and Cabernets. www.aaa.com

Guitar Heroes

In honor of the summer solstice, kick back and drink in the charm—and a few cold ones—at the **Telluride Bluegrass Festival**. The extravaganza (June 17–20) rocks with the likes of Béla Fleck and the Del McCoury Band, and every watering hole in town pumps out “NightGrass” after the outdoor stage lights go dim for the evening. Forego the concierge and commandeer space in one of the nearby campgrounds. Tip: For a true “Telluride festivarian” experience, you'll want to enter the online lottery in mid-November to score a wooded Town Park campsite. [\[bluegrass.com/telluride\]\(http://bluegrass.com/telluride\)](http://www.</p>
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Docksiders

Let's face it—mountains and boats don't usually go hand in hand. Which is why **Grand Lake**, the state's largest natural lake, at more than 8,300 feet in elevation, is such a treasure. Set up shop in a lake cabin or condo in town, and visit Boater's Choice at the Grand Lake Marina to rent a decked-out pontoon by the hour or day. Toting a big group? Leave the navigating to a pro and arrange a catered sunset dinner cruise with your own skipper and a post-card view of the Continental Divide at dusk. www.glmarina.com; www.grandlakechamber.com

Cool Ranch

Dig out the Stetson and boots for a real-deal cowboy experience at **Black Mountain Ranch**, a family-owned working guest ranch in McCoy, about halfway between Vail and Steamboat Springs. If you're not pleasantly exhausted after your backcountry trail rides, trap shooting, private-pond fly-fishing, and a visit to Steamboat's rodeo on Friday night, Saturday's Texas Longhorn cattle drive will tucker you out. You'll ride along with the wranglers to round 'em up, then learn roping and branding techniques before retiring to the lodge. www.blackmtnranch.com



AAA COLORADO'S WINE TRAIN

Survive the Wilderness

If you've ever watched *Man vs. Wild*'s Bear Grylls climb inside an animal carcass to stay warm overnight and thought *I would so die out there*, then the Cottonwood Institute's survival course (June 12–13) is for you. During the two-day **Essential Survival Skills Overnight course**, based outside of Boulder, survivalists will practice nature-awareness skills, minimum-impact camping techniques, survival priorities, and natural shelter building. Once you're prepared, you'll participate in a simulated 24-hour survival scenario. It's hard work, but in an I'm-actually-learning-something-and-it's-still-fun kinda way. www.cottonwoodinstitute.org

Lake Effect

Tucked into the ponderosa pines surrounding peaceful **Dowdy Lake** near the Red Feather Lakes wilderness is a lakeside campground ideal for splashing the day away on a family crawdad hunt or for exploring the lake's glassy surface by kayak. Once the sun sets, you'll want to toast some marshmallows and feed your spirit at the lake's edge under a brilliant arrangement of stars. www.colorado.com/red-featherlakes.aspx

Park it in Boulder

During the summer-long **Colorado Music Festival** in Boulder's historic Chautauqua Park, a leisurely way to enjoy a concert or two is to rent one of Chautauqua's 60 idyllic cottages. Without the distraction of TVs or phones, sip your

morning coffee from your screened-in porch, then hit one of the park's trails through wildflower fields and ferny canyons. Toward evening, grab a blanket and a basket of goodies for an outdoor picnic. As dusk sets in, head to Chautauqua Auditorium for a classical- or world-music performance. www.coloradomusicfest.org; www.chautauqua.com

Freshwater Fun

Denver isn't as far away from white sand beaches as you might think. In fact, it's only a three-and-a-half-hour drive to the shores of **Lake McConaughy**—or “Big Mac”—a 20-mile-long, four-mile-wide reservoir near Ogallala, Nebraska. While you can rent attractive lake-view homes, the easy thing to do is car camp right on the

BASE CAMP The floor of the Black Canyon offers killer campsites and easy river access.



sand. That's right, you can park your vehicle, pitch a tent, break out the cooler, and start a campfire at water's edge. www.lakemcconaughy.com

Bursts of Color

There's no single event that makes Fourth of July in **Crested Butte** a must-do—it's the entire experience. First, you'll want to make a reservation (like, immediately, for summer 2010) for one of the eight

Pioneer Guest Cabins that nestle into aspen groves and stands of Douglas firs a handful of miles outside of downtown CB. Views of the area's famous wildflowers alone make the trip worth it. But you'll also want to venture into town for the Independence Day parade and fireworks display. www.pioneerguestcabins.com

Horsin' Around

While there are many

Sleep Riverside Camp under the stars—way under—on the floor of the Black Canyon.

The tallest sheer cliffs in Colorado tower above the Gunnison River and shimmer with the setting sun at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. The 53-mile-long gorge is worth a trip for profound scenic value alone, never mind the endless adventures it offers. There's camping to be had on both the north and south rims, but the most secluded sites are at the East Portal on the canyon floor, just steps from the river and excellent fishing. The 15-site wooded area lies at the bottom of a winding, steep road with a 16 percent grade. The turnoff is just past the park entrance station on Highway 347, and the tricky drive down is worth it.

The vistas are spectacular along the rim trails, which offer jutting overlooks of the frothy river below. For the more adventurous, try an inner-canyon hike such as the Gunnison Route, a plunging, mile-long descent that begins at the South Rim Visitor Center and includes an 80-foot, hand-over-hand scramble along a chain halfway down. You'll work up an appetite and fall into your sleeping bag that night—if you can tear your gaze away from the endless blanket of stars above the canyon walls. www.nps.gov/blca



Be There With (Maroon) Bells On

Trek from Aspen to Crested Butte during festival season.

For an archetypal Colorado hike, take the West Maroon Pass Trail from Aspen to Crested Butte during wildflower season (July through August). Allow five to eight hours to cover the 11-mile trail, which starts at Maroon Lake on the Aspen side and ends at Schofield, a former mining encampment just outside Crested Butte. The cardio kicks in early as you climb steadily upward, crossing rivers and rock fields, but the astounding views of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness area are more than worth it.

Carry a change of clothes in your pack and stay a night or two in the Butte before looping back to Aspen. Call Dolly's Mountain Shuttle to prearrange pickup at the Schofield trailhead, and the driver can take you to your lodging of choice—try the Ruby of Crested Butte for a cozy B&B stay in the heart of town. Time your weekend with Crested Butte's Wildflower Festival (July 12-18) to get your fill of CB's summer festivities before hitting the return trail. www.gunnisoncrestedbutte.com/hiking-info; www.dollysmountainshuttle.vpweb.com; www.therubyofcrestedbutte.com

options for horseback riding at **Cordillera's Bearcat Stables**, the July and August Vail-to-Aspen overnight hut trips are quintessential Colorado escapes. The three-night, four-day trips have a maximum of 10 guests, who spend gorgeous summer days riding along Squaw Creek, through the Holy Cross Wilderness, and over Mt. Yeckel, the summit of which affords

breathtaking views of the Maroon Bells. Each day of riding ends at one of the 10th Mountain Division huts or at a guest ranch. www.bearcatstables.com

Foodie's Delight
Aspen's Food & Wine Classic takes place each summer (June 18-20, 2010) in the crown jewel of the Rockies. Open to the public (tickets are a spendy \$1,185 after March 15),



TAKE A HIKE You'll need sturdy boots for the 11-mile march from Aspen to Crested Butte.

the event offers unprecedented access to the country's best chefs, industry leaders, and wine experts through a full schedule of seminars, demonstrations, and dinners. It's a must-do occasion for anyone who enjoys his food just a little too much. www.foo-dandwine.com

FALL

Play in the Sand
If your previous visit

to **Great Sand Dunes National Park** went something like this—drove four hours from Denver, walked through the visitors' center, hiked up one dune, and left—then you missed out. This park has so much more to offer than you can absorb in one hour. In early September, make plans to spend the weekend camping along the Medano Pass Road, which has 25 first-come-first-served, primitive campsites near the dune fields. You can spend time exploring the dunes as well as splashing in Medano Creek and sandboarding. Plus, camping along the pass road means you can hike through the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness, one of Colorado's most beautiful natural areas. Tip: You'll need a high-clearance, 4WD vehicle on the pass. www.nps.gov/grsa/index.htm

Tee Time

Book a golf and spa package (yes, guys can enjoy spa treatments, too) at the **Broadmoor** in Colorado Springs. Reserve one of the new Broadmoor Cottages as well as a round of golf on one of the three stunning mountain-view courses. After your post-18-hole, 70-minute massage at the Broadmoor's spa, chow down at the Golf Club Dining Room, where you can sip on a nightcap around the patio's outdoor fire pit after dinner. www.broadmoor.com

Will Travel for Food

Indulge in a gourmet getaway on the Western Slope during one of **Smith Fork Ranch's** culinary weekends (Sept. 24–27 and Oct. 1–4). The ultra-exclusive ranch has a team of chefs that specially prepares each meal with the freshest ingredients from surrounding orchards, farms, and vineyards. Guests are willing participants in the feast creation: Watch and learn through live cooking demonstrations or forage for wild mushrooms before a streamside lunch. The ranch also cooks up events like mountain-top tastings complete with hors d'oeuvres and wine—all of which you'll have to ride to on horseback. www.smithforkranch.com

Northern Neighbor

Scout over the border to one of Wyoming's best-kept secrets—the quaint, riverside town of **Saratoga**, which rests in the shadow of the Snowy Range and Sierra Madre mountains. Spend the day soaking in the free Hobo Hot Pool mineral springs, then belly up to one of the town watering holes to hear live music—try to catch the local Rimrock band. Stay at the pristine A Bar A Ranch to roll out of bed and onto the golf course, then saddle up to explore more than 140,000 acres on horseback. Or trek into the solitude of the Encampment

River Wilderness for camping and low-traffic trout fishing. www.saratogachamber.info; www.abararanch.com

Get Your Hands Dirty

Make your weekend count with a “voluntourism” stint through **Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado's Stewardship Adventure** on the Colorado River (Sept. 9–12). While you're enjoying a scenic canoe trip through the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area, you'll also help restore

Swimming Holes

Conundrum Creek Trail is one of Colorado's most revered hike-and-soak destinations, but this jaunt isn't for the fair-weather outdoorsman. At the end of a rigorous 8.5-mile ascent through the Maroon Bells–Snowmass Wilderness are two pools (pssst: clothing optional) fed by natural hot springs. Stake your claim in one of the 13 campsites and melt into a steamy natural bath. For more information, call the Aspen Ranger District at 970-925-3445.



GREAT SAND DUNES

the riparian ecosystem by removing the tamarisk tree—an invasive species that's shoving out native plants. With the help of a Bureau of Land Management ranger and a naturalist, you'll replant the area with cottonwood seedlings as you make your way through Ruby and Horsethief canyons, camp along the river, and hike into the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Area. www.voc.org

Discover Canyon Country

Drive into the sunset on I-70 and you'll eventually end up in **Moab** (OK, you have to go south on U.S. 191 for a little while, but still...), the gateway to one of the most spectacular desert-canyon playgrounds anywhere on Earth. Take a three-dayer, and make the luxurious Sorrel River Ranch Hotel & Spa Resort your base. Spend a day moun-



Full of Hot Air Rise to the occasion at the festive Colorado Balloon Classic.

The drive is relatively short, but Colorado's longest-running hot-air balloon event, on Labor Day weekend, is worth a couple nights' stay in Colorado Springs—especially since the spectacular launching process begins at 6 a.m. each morning. Consider staying at the Holden House, a quaint Victorian bed-and-breakfast with an Early Riser's breakfast so you can enjoy your ruffled crêpes Isabel and still catch the early balloon launch at Memorial Park. After takeoff, watch the balloons attempt the tricky Splash and Dash maneuver as they dip to skim the surface of Prospect Lake. Stick around for lively concerts, the Pikes Peak Powered Paragliding Club, and other morning entertainment. Thrill-seekers can even hop in a basket and take their own balloon rides. Your afternoon will be free to explore—hit the Pikes Peak Cog Railway or Cave of the Winds—before returning to the park for the Evening Balloon Glow, a gorgeous spectacle of illuminated balloons that softly light the black sky for a surreal effect. www.balloonclassic.com; www.holdenhouse.com

tain biking the world-famous Slickrock Bike Trail if you're a technical buff looking for five hours of intensity, or try the Bar-M loop just outside Arches National Park if you actually want to enjoy the red-rock scenery. www.sorrelriver.com; www.discovermoab.com

Go for the Gold

You'll be hard-pressed to find a better headquarters for a fall leaf-peeping weekend than the **Redstone Inn**. Located along

the rushing Crystal River, the old-school inn, complete with an outdoor pool and a dark-wooded bar-restaurant, rests in the shadow of McClure Pass, one of Colorado's most spectacularly beautiful settings for autumn's golden aspens. www.redstoneinn.com

Call of the Wild

Coloradans often take the state's natural gifts for granted, but Mother Nature puts on a racy, can't-miss-it display during the

elk-rutting season in Estes Park. From late August through early October, herds of elk gather in and around Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park to mate. For the best viewing and listening—yep, the bugling of the bulls is one of the best parts—rent a cabin from the YMCA of the Rockies. These two- to four-bedroom cabins dot the landscape just minutes from the park, and you can often hear elk summoning their mates



WATER BALLOONS
Pilots take their baskets to the surface of Prospect Lake during the Colorado Balloon Classic.

CHRISTOPHER COLEMAN, MIKE TITTEL

throughout the night.
www.yocarockies.org

Find a Shoulder-Season Deal

The Ritz-Carlton Bachelor Gulch, an ultra-luxurious resort located just west of Vail, often offers fire-sale-type rates in the shoulder seasons. If you score a deal with a spa treatment included, you'll be living large. www.ritz-carlton.com

Hunt for Hoodoos

Carved into a slot canyon— and hoo-

doo-rich landscape by thousands of years of erosion from rainwater and frost, **Bryce Canyon National Park** in southern Utah looks like something out of a Tim Burton movie. The park's 56 square miles of ghostly spires and mazelike geography wow hikers and landscape photographers year-round. But late fall and early winter lend a special touch as sparkling white snows contrast beautifully with the rust-colored hoodoos. Grab your hiking boots

and the camera, and explore one of the country's smallest yet most visually alluring national parks. www.nps.gov/brca/index.htm

Catch a Show

The **Denver Center for the Performing Arts** and the **Hotel Teatro** are two Denver institutions that go hand in hand to create a cultural, chic, and convenient weekend in the city. Book one of the Teatro's gorgeous guest rooms and reserve tickets at the box office—the Denver Performing Arts Complex is less than one full block away. This fall, *Shrek the Musical* (November 16–28) comes to the Temple Hoyne Buell Theatre; tickets are on sale now. www.denvercenter.org; www.hotelteatro.com

WINTER

Ice, Ice Baby

Typically slated for early January (it'll be held Jan. 6–9 in 2011), the **Ouray Ice Festival** is the premier international gathering of its kind. Nearly 4,000 professional and amateur climbers, gear heads, and winter lovers come out to the Swiss Alps–style town of Ouray each year for its famous ice park. Although the festival draws ice climbers from around the world for in-depth seminars, expert-taught clinics, and some serious invite-only competition, the fête also pulls pure spectators, who watch the action from bridges above the ice.

After darkness falls, the tiny town gets hopping with dinners and parties, where climbers and climbing voyeurs knock back a few together. www.ourayicefestival.com

Find the Freshies

Nothing makes a powder hound happier than untracked snow, which is why a weekend of skiing or riding with **San Juan Snowcat** is close to heaven on Earth for backcountry die-hards. The six-hour drive to the legendary San Juan Mountains is a no-brainer for epic adventures on untouched terrain, accessible via 10-person cats. www.sanjuansnowcat.com

Rough it in the Backcountry

They're secluded and sparse, but the **Never Summer Yurts** are a backcountry enthusiast's dream. The circular, tentlike huts are scattered in the Northern Colorado

Rockies, and require a short trek in during the winter. Bring a sleeping bag and food-stuffs for a propane stove, and prepare to get cozy around the fire. You'll wake up to a remote paradise with vast bowls and ridges that offer the kind of all-to-yourself skiing every backcountry bum yearns for. www.neversummernordic.com

Snuggle by a Fire

After a killer day threading the Outback glades at Keystone, there are few things more inviting than a mug of hot chocolate and a cozy fireside seat at a rustic mountain lodge. Welcome to **Ski Tip Lodge**, a throwback bed-and-breakfast tucked away in the hills beyond the buzz of Keystone Village. Aside from the lodge's own rotating four-course dinner menu, guests can enjoy themed wine dinners such as Wines of the



OURAY ICE FESTIVAL

SNOW BANK Colorado's Grand Mesa collects epic snowfalls, which makes it a haven for winter sports of all kinds.



World or Celebrating Australia Day. Settle in by the hearth with your honey and you'll be hard-pressed to pull on those boots the following day. www.kestoneresort.com

Pamper Yourself

Treat yourself to some swanky R&R at Telluride's newest lavish resort in Mountain Village, **Capella Telluride**. Hit the powder with ski-in-ski-out ease for jaw-dropping vistas, then soothe your ski-burned muscles with a visit to the couples' mountain-view spa suite. www.capellatelluride.com

Ski Utah

Colorado's slopes leave little to be desired, but there's nothing wrong with trying something new next ski season. For the '09-'10 ski season (and hopefully years to come),

the Park City Chamber of Commerce (yes, that's **Park City, Utah**) offered a fly-and-ski deal that allowed passengers to convert their airline boarding passes into free same-day lift tickets. An early-morning flight puts you into Salt Lake City, just 40 minutes from the Park City slopes. Hop in a rental car at the terminal and you can be on the lift by 9:30 a.m. Tip: Southwest Airlines sometimes offers round-trip winter fare specials for a 7 a.m. Saturday flight for \$50. www.parkcityinfo.com

Gallery Hop

Indulge your artsy side and explore the gallery-dotted streets of **Santa Fe**—the second-largest art market in the country (behind NYC), just six and a half hours away. Take a stroll on Canyon Road, the city's traditional art gallery district and a

perfect place to gift-hunt for that special someone. Stop at El Farol, Santa Fe's oldest cantina, for Spanish tapas and a flamenco show (Saturdays at 7 p.m., \$25) before retiring to a Japanese-style room at the Ten Thousand Waves spa resort. www.canyonroadarts.com; www.tenthousandwaves.com; www.santafe.org

Slopeside Chalet

Perched at the edge of Vail Mountain's Game Creek Bowl, the **Game Creek Chalet** is one of the state's few upscale on-mountain cabins. This four-bedroom ski pad—with a gourmet kitchen, deck-surrounded hot tub, large wet bar, fireplace, and cozy furnishings—is all the more special because you can only get there by gondola or snowcat. Sitting on the expansive deck, you can watch skiers schuss through the trees before moseying over to the Game Creek Restaurant for a dinner of elk tenderloin or Colorado rack of lamb. www.gamecreekclub.com

Spoil Yourself

The word luxury is so overused in the travel business these days that it's often hard to discern over-the-top pricey from truly commendable indulgence. At **Aspen's Little Nell**, it's always the latter. True, you won't get out of this Ajax-adjacent, recently renovated icon for under \$810 per night in the winter, but then again you won't find the



ASPEN'S LITTLE NELL

service, comfort, and killer location at any other spot in the state. www.thelittlenell.com

New Digs

Book a stay at the only world-class hotel to open in Snowmass in recent history. Not only can you make turns down one of Colorado's best mountains, but the **Viceroy Snowmass'** ski-in-ski-out access will have you enjoying the resort's stylized brand of elegance whenever your muscles need a break. Tip: Order the penne with asparagus, mushrooms, and truffle cream at the swanky Eight K Restaurant for dinner. www.viceroyhotelsandresorts.com/snowmass

Escape the Crowds

Sometimes you just don't want a glitzy resort or a crowded ski town for your getaway. Sometimes you just want to get away to a place with a little serenity. **Creekside Hot Springs**—a three-bedroom vacation home with its

own on-site private mineral pool—is that place. Tucked along Chalk Creek, this unique respite is close to Salida, Buena Vista, the Arkansas River, and a smattering of other hot-springs resorts. www.creeksidehotsprings.com

Be a Romantic

Just outside Rocky Mountain National Park rests **Della Terra Mountain Chateau**, a 10-month-old retreat perfect for a dreamy escape. Della Terra rests just up the hill from the famous Stanley Hotel, but it feels worlds apart. Fourteen lavish suites are finished with giant, walk-through showers for two, copper tubs, king-size beds, see-through fireplaces, and private balconies with hot tubs. The two-night, romantic-getaway winter special (\$550) offers champagne, candles, rose petals strewn across the bed, breakfast in bed, and a couple's massage. www.dellaterramountainchateau.com ▲

« Romp in the Snow

Enjoy the spoils of winter atop the Grand Mesa.

Here in Colorado we dig the ubiquitous pointy peaks. But our square state is also home to the largest flattop mountain in the world. A towering block of a mountain—it's about 800 square miles of geography—Grand Mesa juts out of the earth just east of Grand Junction. Atop this behemoth you can frolic in nearly 35 feet of the white stuff—some of Colorado's deepest snow totals—which make for world-class snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. Our advice? Hole up in one of Grand Mesa Lodge's rustic cabins (request the one with the lake view and wood-burning fireplace), sign up for a half-day snowmobiling tour, rent a pair of skinny cross-country skis (trails start from your cabin's front door), and simply enjoy the snow globe-worthy landscape. www.coloradodirectory.com/grandmesalodge