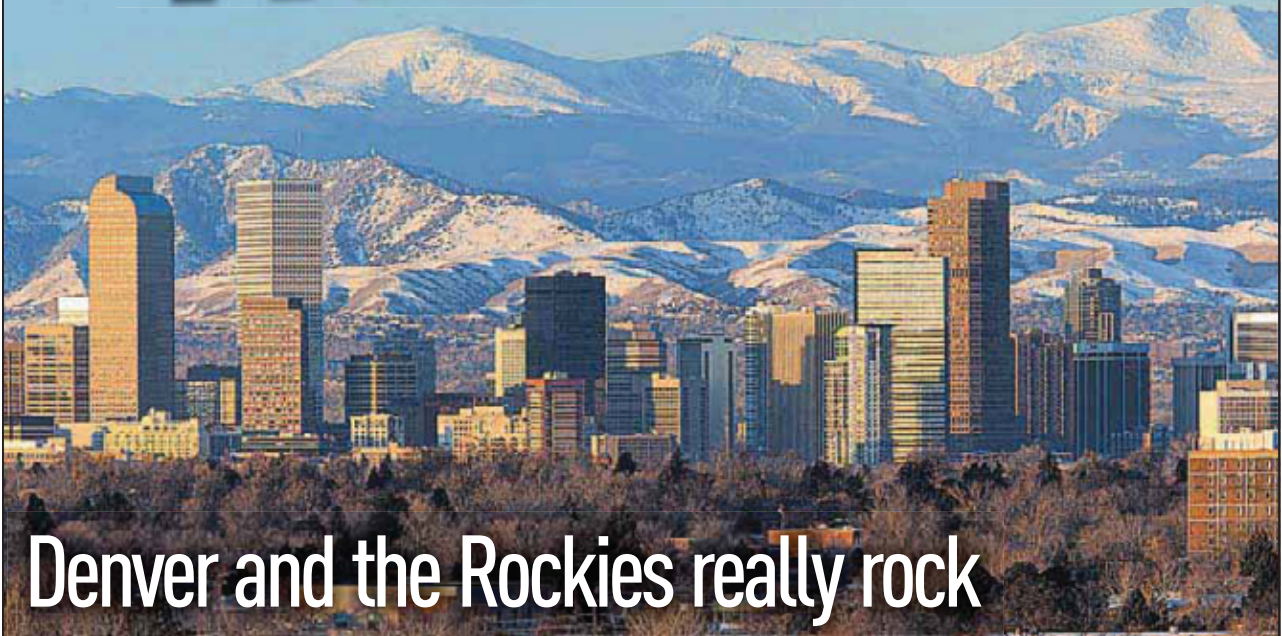


# Travel



## Best of.. **THE WEST**



### Denver and the Rockies really rock

by **Sofia Bouzidi**

**I'M not the most outdoorsy girl so a trip to the Wild West had me slightly nervous.**

I've seen a lot of Bear Grylls and know I would probably not survive

if nature decided to take me on.

Yet there I was in Colorado – ideal for skiers, snowboarders, mountain-bikers, hikers, horse riders, kayakers or other sort of adventurers.

I'm none of those and the prospect

of trekking up the Rocky Mountains seemed like a gargantuan task.

But I'm not one to turn down a challenge. And with the promise that **Denver** was going to fulfil all my sophisticated city hipster needs, I



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agreed to pack my hiking boots and head for my adventure.

The airline did an excellent job of easing me into to the trip with celebration vibes on board for the first direct Gatwick to Denver flight.

First stop on the adventure trail was Estes Park, the base camp for Rocky Mountain National Park.

We hiked up to it as the sun was breaking up and dark shadows washed drama on to the landscape. Just as I was remarking on the spooky atmosphere, our guide asked us whether we'd heard of the Stanley Hotel

A little way above us stood a mysterious whitewashed colonial mansion which happened to be the most haunted hotel in the US. The place was the inspiration behind the novel *The Shining*. Next day we were

up at 5am for a trek into the hills. Estes park is brimming with options for adventurers – two legs, two wheels, four legs or four wheels.

We opted for four legs, which allowed me to fulfil a lifelong ambition of becoming a cowgirl.

My horse Ethel had other plans and treated our short time together as an all-you-can-eat buffet.

She definitely took me off the beaten track and into every tasty shrubbery on our trail.

On our return into the town a bit of wildlife had followed us. There was an angry-looking elk causing havoc in the car park of our hotel.

After cycling, kayaking, trekking and horse riding I was ready for the metropolis. An action-packed few days in the city had been planned and as a bonus we were staying in one of Denver's new boutique hotels

with a perfect view of the iconic landmark, Union square.

The renovated 1914 Beaux-Arts train station boasts everything from high-end food big breakfasts to cocktails and bookshops.

The first port of call for me was the Rockmount Ranch Wear store, inventors of the snap button shirt.

### Cowboys

This haunt of Eric Clapton, Paul McCartney and Bruce Springsteen provided me with a reasonably priced orange cowboy hat.

Denver celebrates its cowboy and mining history but also looks to the future. The gold rush has turned green and people are inspired to embrace nature and the environment through healthy lifestyle.

Denverites are serious outdoor folk and it shows with all the green space and nature trails. They are

also serious beer folk. The beer trail is fast becoming the most well know thing about Denver, with the city brewing more beer than anywhere in the US.

Go out with ID. If you look under 40 you will be asked for it.

My friend's 60-year-old mother had no proof of age and was turned away – much to her delight.

Denver, known as the mile-high city because it rises a mile into the clouds, is bursting at the seams with urban glamour,culture, art and social activity.

A trip to the 160 million-year-old Red Rocks is essential. Music superstars across the world love it as a venue because it is an acoustically perfect natural amphitheatre.

About an hour by car out of Denver, it is between two 300ft giant monolithic rocks. It was by far the most impressive venue I had ever seen. You sway with a crowd over 9,000 under the stars and the sound is awe-inspiring. Tickets are priced according to who is on. If your favourite band is playing there I urge you to make sure of a ticket.

Like Denver, the show is guaranteed to be breathtaking.

**FACTFILE:** Norwegian has direct flights from Gatwick to Denver International on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from £179 one-way. Go to [www.norwegian.com/uk](http://www.norwegian.com/uk) or call 0330 828 0854. Rooms at The Crawford Hotel ([thecrawfordhotel.com](http://thecrawfordhotel.com)) start at £200 a night. For more information visit [colorado.com](http://colorado.com).

## TRAVEL TIPS

■ No matter how old you are you will be asked for ID in bars so make sure you carry your passport everywhere.

■ As an urban centre, Denver has come a long way but you will still catch a Stetson or two walking down the 16th St Mall

■ Pack gear for cycling, walking and water sports as this city has plenty of options to work off the extra calories gained in the brewpubs.

