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You Can Shred for Miles and Miles

Winter Park, Colo., with its 1,000 km of trails, is the perfect place to ride and chill for a week

by **Tara Nolan**

There's something humbling about watching a child rip down a hill with speed, agility and no fear. I always wish I had found mountain biking as a kid, rather than as an adult whose sensibleness interferes with her riding. There are two 12 year olds in my group. The bravest is Hayes. At first, I think it's a self-given badass nickname, spelled H-a-z-e – but realize it's more likely the trendy given name, like that of Kevin Costner's son.

I'm taking a downhill skills clinic through Trestle Bike Park in Winter Park, Colo. Having already shredded in Collingwood, Ont., and Whistler, B.C., before the trip, I'm eager to up my game, but these kids are making me feel like a newb. Though, I later redeem myself on the technical downhill. I guess they've honed their skills on the fast and flowy, rather than the rocky and rooty.

These trails are just a small part of the network in Winter Park, a.k.a. Mountain Bike Capital USA™. It sounds a bit boastful (and the name is actually trademarked) considering there are so many other notable places to mountain bike in the States. But it's quite a reasonable nickname once you realize there are 600 miles (that's almost 1,000 km) of mountain biking trails, as well as two

Details

How to get there

We flew to Denver to acclimate for a couple of days. The Mile-High City is about 1,600 m above sea level, but Winter Park is 2,770 m in town and 3,300 m at the top of the Winter Park Ski Resort. We rented a car at the airport and drove west and then north from Denver.

Where to stay

I highly recommend staying at least a week. Rent a condo (maybe with a pool and/or hot tub) and just enjoy the multitude of riding opportunities. We stayed at a rental in the Beaver Village Condos area. It was a short drive from the mountain and had a full kitchen and a cosy fireplace, which was necessary at night.

Where to eat

Enjoy lunch on the patio at Vertical Bistro & Tap (verticalbistro.com), within the Winter Park Ski Resort. In town, I had a delicious gluten-free pizza at The Peak (thepeakwp.com). My husband says his gluten-positive pie was pretty tasty, too, as were the brews. Caffe Giocondo (caffegiocondo.com) in town had a great light breakfast. Deno's Mountain Bistro (denoswp.com), along the main drag, was also quite tasty and had a nice outdoor patio. Since we stayed in a condo, we also made a few of our own meals.

What to do in the area

It is well worth the drive to head from Winter Park past Granby and Grand Lake (take a detour through the town with its western boardwalk storefronts) into Rocky Mountain National Park. We drove through the mountains toward Estes Park, stopping here and there for brief hikes, and then turned around and headed back the way we came. It was almost dusk during the ride back. It is moose central. Be alert and be prepared to pull over. We had a mother and her calf step in front of us on the road. We also stopped to take a photo of a moose nibbling among the aspens.

Where to find support

We rented bikes from Granby Ranch's bike shop (granbyranch.com), Trestle Bike Park Shop (trestlebikepark.com) in Winter Park Ski Resort and Epic Sports (epicmountainsports.com) in town for our ride with a local guide.



lift-access bike parks in this small town. The permanent summer population hovers at about 1,000.

The ski town has smartly incorporated the trails on the ski hills to create a giant singletrack playground to sustain the businesses throughout the snow-less season. Intrawest runs the ski area – the village has a similar vibe, though on a much smaller scale, to Whistler.

The day we arrive, we pass through Winter Park and head to Granby Ranch, about a half hour away. It's absolutely pouring. We take our time getting our rentals and changing into our bike gear. The rain stops just in time. There appears to be a high school race going on. We're given permission to use the lift as long as we stick to the cross country trails and avoid the DH. In line, a kid emphatically informs us that we'd better stay off the DH trails. These kids are serious.

For our first run, we do the entire Fraser Canyon Trail, which leads us through aspen groves (I initially mistake them for birch trees), where the leaves are already starting to change to a sunny yellow even though the official start to fall is a few weeks away. The trails are surprisingly dry and we're rewarded with some amazing views and fun descents. At one point, we're riding on exposed, scrubby hills full of sagebrush and the odd fancy cabin on steroids, some of them likely winter residences. We go up again and take Fraser Canyon to Ike's Trail. After lunch, we hit the other side of the mountain, which is a bit looser and rockier with technical climbs, but fun on the downs. We take Vista Ridge Road to Upper Backside to 2-Stroke and down Ying.

By the time we ride at Trestle Bike Park at the Winter Park Ski Resort (with Hayes and co.), it's Labour Day, so the village is quiet. Heading up the chairlift, our instructor, Dave Hanson, points out the Continental Divide and talks about all the work that's been done on the trails here. The original build team was sent to B.C. for a couple of years to learn from Gravity Logic, the company behind the design of Whistler's bike park. In 2007, things really started to move at Trestle.

My husband Rich, who is a big fan of fast, flowy trails with the opportunity for air, liked that there was more narrow, singletrack here as opposed to the doubletrack flow trails at Whistler. We would speed through the woods before being spit out into open spaces with stunning mountain views. "Most trails are flowy with big jumps and some of our black and double blacks are steep and raw,"

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Hanson says. "Great vibes, great community, everyone's stoked to be here," he adds.

After the lesson ends, we do several more runs: there's so much to explore and we don't want to leave. The trails here are pretty fantastic. There are lots of little jumps if you want them; gap jumps are well-marked and there is a ton of flow singletrack. Rich even says it might have an edge on Whistler as a new favourite.

We piece together some fantastic runs. Shy Ann is a super fun, fast flowy entry point that leads to fun short-cuts, such as Blue Crush or longer more technical trails, such as Double Jeopardy and Cruel and Unusual.

At the bottom of Shy Ann, we cut across Free Speech to Dyno Bones to the Olympia lift. Here we get to experience the new Spicy Chicken. This trail got its well-seasoned name from the Wendy's that had just opened in town. It was the only place open late to grab food after a long day. The trail builders would reward themselves with spicy chicken sandwiches. Our guide tells us there is the



potential to get more speed than you need on this run, so it's recommended you control your velocity.

With the two bike parks out of the way, it's time to explore the trails you can take from town. You can find multiple entry points along the main drag. Our guide, Joanna Goodman, meets us at the visitor centre, which is close to a trailhead. Today's the day my body decides to feel the altitude. We had been warned by a few people about altitude sickness. Without the lift access and with a slight cold coming on, I'm winded, but Goodman patiently waits as I labour up some of the hills.

This is your typical woodsy singletrack that rewards your climbing efforts with the inevitable thrill of pedal-free flow. The ride that Goodman has pieced together is similar to the Idlewild ride that's laid out in the town's detailed trail map. On Arrow, we're led through pine forest where the needles brush my arms as I ride through. Then before the South Fork Loop, which runs parallel to a creek, Goodman stops and says: "This next part is a half mile of grins." She's right. This part I don't need oxygen for; it's just pure downward twists and turns.

With the area's seemingly unlimited mix of DH and cross country, Rich and I often talk about gathering a group of friends and renting a house so we can ride for a week. On our trip, we only scratched the surface of those 1,000 km of trails. 📍

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