

HIGH SCORE

The food, arts and culture scene in Denver—a.k.a. the Mile-High City—is worth a weekend visit

BY TARA NOLAN



DENVER UNION STATION

PHOTO BY DENVER UNION STATION

“I hope we’re staying close to here,” I say to my husband as we turn a corner in downtown Denver and inch our rental car past what looks to be a vibrant hub of activity. It’s a warm, sunny day and you can feel the energy emanating from this particular block. After glancing at the map, we discover this is Denver Union Station and pull over because it is indeed where we will be spending our first night.

This renovated train station, which helped consolidate transit lines and established a bustling collection of shops and restaurants, seems to have become the beating heart of downtown Denver. This is just part of the charm of Colorado’s capital, often merely a stopover on the way to the Rocky Mountains. But after we leave the car with the valet, ditch our bags and head out to stroll around the Mile-High City, we determine it’s worth sticking around to explore for at least a couple of days.



INSIDE DENVER UNION STATION



MUSICIANS BATHED IN GREEN LIGHT AT FIRST FRIDAY ART WALK

RELAX Even if you're not staying overnight, venture into the middle of Denver Union Station (unionstationindenver.com) where you can get a great vantage point of the building from the comfy couches. Conceptualized by Dana Crawford, a developer known for transforming derelict spaces, it is referred to as Denver's Living Room and is ringed by shops and restaurants.

I fell in love with the comfy vibe of Tattered Cover (tatteredcover.com), an indie bookstore in walking distance from Union Station (there also happens to be a much smaller version in the station).

From our hotel in Cherry Creek, we walked to a Denver B-cycle (denver.bicycle.com) bike stand and pedaled to Denver Botanic Gardens (botanicgardens.org)—there's a convenient B-cycle depot out front. This urban oasis bordered by apartment buildings and stately old homes is a great place to spend an afternoon gathering garden ideas and learning about plants. Hive Garden Bistro offered a shady patio where we rehydrated with fancy lemonades.



DENVER B-CYCLES WAITING TO BE RIDDEN

PLAY Our weekend coincided with a few events, including the First Friday Art Walk in the Art District on Santa Fe (artdistrictonsantafe.com). We wandered among a throng of people sauntering into galleries and lining up for food trucks.

Another walk revealed small shops and outdoor gear behemoth REI near Confluence Park where we watched a few girls with inner tubes float down the river, squealing as they were splashed and sucked into the odd rushing whirlpool. There is a lovely path that runs along both sides of the river—perfect for a bike ride.

STAY The Crawford Hotel's (thecrawfordhotel.com) lobby is essentially the main floor of Denver Union Station, with its front desk on one side and elevators leading to the rooms with their spacious, modern 70s vibe on the other.

Moving to a different hotel for our second night—the JW Marriott Denver Cherry Creek (jwmarriottdenver.com)—allowed us to explore the Cherry Creek neighbourhood with its eclectic shops, restaurants and little galleries along quaint, colourful streets.



DENVER BOTANIC GARDEN

EAT Starving after an early morning flight, we dropped our bags at the hotel that first day and headed across the street to Machete Tequila + Tacos (machedenver.com) for a quick, cheap and cheerful meal. There are lots of great restaurants surrounding Union Station and in walking distance, including the city's oldest and most historic block Larimer Square (larimersquare.com) and around 16th Street Mall, a busy pedestrian thoroughfare.

Mercantile Dining & Provision (mercantiledenver.com)—in the station—was a favourite breakfast spot. It offers a really nice selection of preserves, pastries, cheese and charcuterie—perfect for stocking a picnic basket. Union Station Farmers' Market is also a great place to grab in-season produce and other artisanal treats on Saturday mornings.

We made sure not to let our coupons (issued by the hotel) for a free scoop from Milkbox Ice Creamery (milkboxicecream.com) go to waste. Our sweet tooth also led us into Whatever Pops Up (whateverpopsup.com) on Larimer Street for caramel corn (I highly recommend sopapilla—caramel with cinnamon and honey, dusted with powdered sugar).