



# GOLD STANDARD



**Breckenridge** has evolved from a rugged mining camp to one of the American West's most inviting and quintessential mountain towns.

BY J.B. BISSELL



With rolling mountains, rows of pine trees, and 26 miles of shoreline, Lake Dillon, located 12 miles north of Breckenridge, paints the perfect backdrop for any Rocky Mountain vacation.

**RIGHT:** With 121 fully enclosed cabins, each carrying up to eight passengers, the Breckenridge Gondola is a popular — *and free* — attraction that transports riders to the top of Peak 8. **INSET, TOP RIGHT:** The Denver, South Park, and Pacific Railroad, which became part of the Union Pacific rail system in 1880, was one of the main tracks that ran through Summit County into Breckenridge and other neighboring towns.



Glenn Ross Images/Getty Images; Colorado Historic Society/Breckenridge Tourism Office; Krista Long/Getty Images

A century and a half ago, you likely would *not* have wanted to visit Breckenridge. There were no comfortable resorts or funky souvenir shops. There was no skiing. Hiking was done out of necessity, not as an enjoyable recreational activity. And a can of beans with bacon was about the best meal you could come by.

Breckenridge was born as a mining town, and if you've seen any Hollywood versions of late 1800s-era Western frontier outposts, you have an idea of what was going on during this hamlet's initial historical heyday. The promise of gold in the area's rivers and mountains enticed fortune seekers and lovable scoundrels (lovable in those Hollywood movies) to journey across the plains and over the foothills, and into some treacherous alpine terrain that's now known as the Tenmile Range — which tops out at 14,265 feet above sea level at the summit of Quandary Peak. Once here, they spent hard days panning or mining for precious metal, and even harder nights tossing back white lightning in one of the 18 local saloons.

It wasn't a glamorous life back then, but all that gritty history

is exactly what makes Breckenridge such a cool place to visit nowadays. It's a *real* town, with real community roots. A few rough-and-tumble folks who were facing potentially dire stakes founded Breckenridge in 1859. Their stories and mythology are a permanent piece of this place.

A place that has become a perfect mountain destination, a combination of gorgeous scenery, endless recreation, and the type of Old West charm most people only see in movies.

### MAIN STREET

Things have changed a bit, of course. For starters, there's now a collection of nearly 100 restaurants and bars, so you've got plenty of choices when it comes to deciding where to throw back whatever your favorite version of white lightning might be.

Plan a fancy night out (as fancy as things get in the mountains) at Hearthstone Restaurant. The artisan cheese plate and organic mushroom soup are top-notch, but the true highlights are the

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Comprising one of the largest historic districts in Colorado, Breckenridge's Main Street embraces its past and present with just as many historic structures as 21st-century storefronts.



Colorado lamb and elk steak entrees. Empire Burger is a great lunch — or casual dinner — spot. You can get wings, nachos, and fried zucchini chips, and you can't go wrong with the Western burger.

Other delicious options include breakfast at the Columbine Cafe, pizza at Giampietro, fish tacos at Angel's Hollow, and Vietnamese soups at Pho Real.

No matter where you decide to eat, be sure to sidle up to the bar at one of the town's original drinkeries. According to local lore, a watering hole called Long's Saloon opened its doors (figuratively speaking, since it probably didn't have much in the way of actual doors) on Main Street in 1861. It was most likely a large A-frame structure with canvas walls and ceiling, a simple wooden bar, maybe a few tables with chairs, and some random tree stumps on which weary miners could relax. Eighteen years later, a permanent building was constructed in place of the ramshackle tent. The establishment, now called the Gold Pan, remains a fixture of downtown Breckenridge, and was recently declared a local historic landmark.

In addition to the beverages and cool, old-timey bar, the Gold Pan is essentially the starting point to one of Colorado's largest — and most visually striking — nods to yesteryear. More than 200 structures scattered around town rank on the National Register of Historic Places. And when you first arrive, it will seem as though the vast majority are all right on Main Street — because many of the storefronts seem out of place without a horse or two lingering at a hitching post.

About a block from the Gold Pan, you'll find the Breckenridge Welcome Center. Stop by for information about regional museums — including Victorian homes, a sawmill, and more — and to join one of the guided walking tours hosted by the Breckenridge Heritage Alliance,

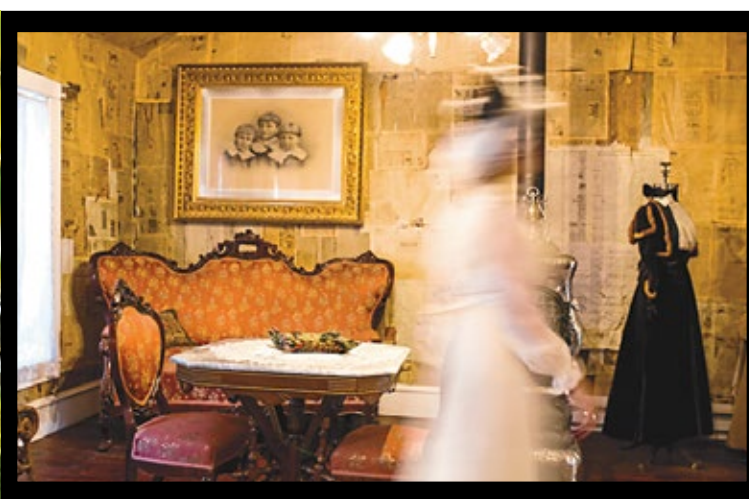


Located in the 125-year-old Victorian-style Kaiser House, Hearthstone Restaurant has been a Breckenridge staple since 1989, offering a selection of naturally raised beef and game dishes, and sustainably caught seafood items.

many of which are offered year-round and run the subject-matter gamut from saloon excursions to paranormal investigations.

If you want to live a bit of history, consider a jaunt to the Country Boy Mine. Through October (depending on the weather), there are all sorts of family-friendly mining-camp activities available, including panning for your own gold. The can't-miss attraction is a hard hat-required mineshaft expedition that takes you some 1,000 feet into a mountain, where you'll see a jackleg drill demonstration, experience a moment of utter darkness when the lights go out (simulating conditions when candles were inadvertently extinguished), and acquire

Breckenridge Tourism Office; Breckenridge Tourism Office; Liam Doran/Breckenridge Tourism Office



Take a Breckenridge Haunted Tour of the William H. Briggie home, where the ghost of Katie Briggie, William's wife and one of Breckenridge's well-known socialites, is rumored to live.

Beginners — whether you're brand new to the sport or feel as though some more practice would be a good idea — might want to consider enrolling in a day or two of lessons. Options include age-specific children's classes for 3-year-olds and up, adult tutorials, family sessions, and women's-only programs. After you've mastered your "pizza" and "french fries" turns, head to wide-open, easy-going green runs such as Springmeier on Peak 8 or Lower Lehman, Frontier, and Silverthorne off of Peak 9's Quicksilver SuperChair.

While the bottom portion of Peak 9 is about as good as it gets for beginning skiers and snowboarders, the backside of the mountain is a secret stash for advanced riders. Over the past few years, the ski management team at Breckenridge has worked diligently to open new and more expert terrain. The majority of this is found in bowls and chutes above tree line on peaks 6, 7, and 8. Some of it is hike-to only, and some is accessible after a quick ride on the Imperial Express SuperChair, which was installed in 2005 and remains the highest chairlift in North America.

The backside of Peak 9, however, is old territory and seems to have been nearly forgotten by most Breckenridge visitors. But veteran skiers and snowboarders continue to make their way up

a basic understanding of the sacrifices early settlers made in their attempts to hit the mother lode.

### WHITE GOLD

Breckenridge's modern-day mother lode isn't found in dark mountain tunnels or roaring rivers. It falls from the sky in the form of light, fluffy snow. Some 300 inches or so per year. Indeed, the majority of intrepid travelers who make their way across the plains and into the high country these days do so for the world-class skiing and snowboarding.

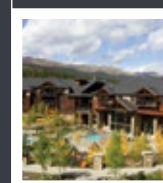
The season typically kicks off in mid-November, and once it's in full swing, the resort area becomes a winter wonderland with 187 runs spread out across 2,908 acres and five mountains (peaks 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 from the aforementioned Tenmile Range).

the Mercury SuperChair and then a skier's left to the ridgeline where trails with ominous names, such as Inferno, Hades, and Mine Shaft, begin. The runs are tight and steep, and are often embellished with moguls big enough to play hide-and-seek behind. When you get to the bottom, simply hop on the E-Chair and it will transport you right back to the top.

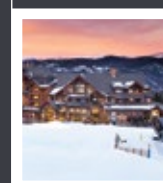
And if you find yourself wanting something between the slow-going Lower Lehman and rush-of-adrenaline Inferno, don't worry — about 31 percent of Breckenridge is dedicated to intermediate runs. Some of the most fun are the gentle rolling slopes on Peak 7, such as Monte Cristo and Claimjumper.

A century and a half ago, back when Breckenridge was not nearly as hospitable as it is today, claim jumping would most likely have landed you in some serious trouble. Fortunately, things have changed quite a bit since then. So go ahead, have some fun on Claimjumper, and then head to the Gold Pan for happy hour. Because this mountain town truly has grown into a wonderful place to visit. ■

### AREA RESORTS



**Grand Timber Lodge (GTR)**  
Nestled between the Snowflake Chairlift and the Beaver Run SuperChair, Grand Timber Lodge offers ski-in/ski-out access, and is just a short walk from downtown Breckenridge. Enjoy the on-site Lodgepole Bar and Grill, Refresh Spa, video arcade, ski equipment rentals, and courtesy shuttle.



**Grand Lodge on Peak 7 (GP7)**  
This Breckenridge Grand Vacations resort offers wintertime ski-in/ski-out convenience to Breckenridge Ski Resort, and in summer, access to hiking and biking. Amenities include a family game room, movie theaters, an après-ski bar, and an indoor/outdoor aquatics area.



**Grand Colorado on Peak 8 (GP8)**  
Grand Colorado on Peak 8 is a Breckenridge Grand Vacations resort, located just steps from the Colorado SuperChair and Summer Fun Park. A lobby bar, family entertainment center, movie theaters, and an extensive indoor/outdoor aquatics area are on-site.



**Hyatt Residence Club Breckenridge, Main Street Station (HMS)**  
Overlooking Maggie Pond, Hyatt Residence Club Breckenridge, Main Street Station is located on Main Street at the base of Breckenridge Ski Resort. Surrounded by snowcapped mountains, the resort is within walking distance to the ski lifts and the nearby shops and restaurants.

To view all of the Breckenridge resorts in Interval's network, go to [intervalworld.com](http://intervalworld.com).

## Changing Seasons

There's no way around the fact that fall is a tricky season in Breckenridge. Temperatures can easily range from the mid-50s to well below freezing, so it's important to have a few ideas of what you'd like to do while visiting, and then play it according to what Mother Nature gives you. Shopping is weatherproof, and Breckenridge is home to more than 200 stores, ranging from eclectic boutiques and fine jewelry to art galleries, mountain-themed home furnishings, and kitschy souvenir shops. If you arrive before the snow, but still want to get outside, go for a hike. The Mohawk Lakes Trail, just south of town, is about as scenic as it gets, with a mix of open meadows, pine forests, and picturesque high-altitude tarns.