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LIFESTYLE GUIDE | MOUNTAINS/SKI

At Home on the Slopes



Kevin Moloney for The New York Times

A snowboarder launches off a jump in the backcountry at the top of Loveland Pass, Colo. [More Photos >](#)

By WENDY KNIGHT

Ski towns like Jackson Hole, Wyo., and Telluride, Colo., have long held a powerful allure for hard-core skiers and weekend warriors drawn to steep terrain and challenging runs. The phenomenal growth of sports like snowboarding and snowshoeing has fueled the appeal of mountain living.

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Sipping a pint of ale around a fire after a day of making fresh tracks on powdered slopes is heaven to skiers. And if that fire happens to be crackling from a two-story stone fireplace in your great room filled with family and friends and sprawling views of the peaks, all the better.

It takes just a little planning to make it happen. To make ski weekends more enjoyable, many second-home owners visit their mountain dwellings early in the season to “open up” the house or have property managers do so. Vehicles left at mountain homes will need snow tires. At a minimum, a shovel, emergency flares, water and chains should be stowed in the trunk. Gutters, furnaces, wood stoves, chimneys and wells should all be checked to ensure they are functioning properly, and propane and oil tanks need to be filled. Firewood is usually acquired during the late summer or early fall. Cases of wine are inventoried, skis tuned and sweaters dry-cleaned. Then the winter is all about the mountain.

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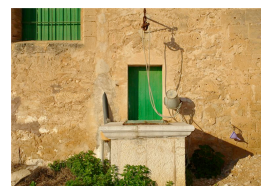
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But the snow-capped peaks and glacial streams also attract a new breed: the nonskier. Plenty of people simply enjoy the pine-scented air and relative solitude of the mountains. In a nod to this growing market, ski resorts are investing millions in spas, boutiques, restaurants and other amenities.

By far their heaviest investments, however, are in residential properties, leading some to conclude that real estate has usurped recreation as the ski industry's primary interest.

RECREATION

In Winter

Aspen/Snowmass in Colorado has the steepest vertical drop in the state, and Whistler Blackcomb in British Columbia the longest continuous run on the continent. Vertical drop. Continuous run. Skiable terrain. Average snowfall a year. These are the statistics bandied about in ski towns, with opinions about the "best" fierce and firm. However rancorous or playful, these debates reveal the towns' paramount philosophy: Get on the mountain and have fun.

Beyond downhill skiing, buyers are attracted to other cold-weather adventures, from the silly (snowbikes) and lazy (Sno-Limos) to the energetic (Nordic skiing) and extreme (Airboarding). Snowshoeing has become increasingly popular in recent years, as have ice climbing and ski mountaineering, albeit within a narrower group of skilled athletes. In the White Mountains near Jackson, N.H., is some of the best ice climbing in the east, while Tuckerman Ravine and the Presidential Range are legendary for ski mountaineering.

In Summer

While a good share of people looking to buy a home in the mountains are skiers or snowboarders, many ski towns, like Jackson Hole, originated as summer destinations. Many second-home owners and tourists gravitate to the mountains in the warmer months for biking, hiking, white-water kayaking, rafting and fly-fishing. Most ski resorts have invested significantly in mountain biking trails or spas to appeal to summer visitors.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

As evidenced by the manicured women at [Ralph Lauren](#) or the blackjack players at Lake Tahoe, not everyone living in a ski town actually skis. Plenty of people would rather duck out for an hour of shopping or spa treatments than take another run. Fortunately for these folks, most mountain towns offer many off-piste adventures.

Aspen has a cooking school and Jackson Hole a nature museum. At Whistler, a popular attraction is the zip line, an elevated steel cable for gliding across the timbers, while fly-fishing reigns at Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming, less than an hour from Big Sky, Mont.

Arts and Culture

Mountain towns are often magnets for artists and writers who establish galleries, art schools and bookstores, all of which provide artistic and intellectual outlets for second-home owners. Writing workshops and artist retreats bring in outside talent and help to fuel a year-round arts community.



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Performance arts flourish in the mountains as well. The Aspen Music Festival and School holds year-round performances, including opera productions and symphonies. The school offers extensive programs in conducting and instrumental music. Telluride holds a world-renowned bluegrass festival, while Jackson Hole has the Grand Teton Music Festival. Even smaller towns have active arts communities. Jackson, N.H., home of the White Mountain Art School, puts on the White Mountain Fine Arts and Music Festival.

Volunteering

In many mountain towns, second-home owners have long generational ties to the area and spend entire summers or other considerable chunks of time there. They are often quite active in civic and charitable organizations that protect wildlife corridors, clean up rivers, preserve open space or otherwise focus on environmental issues. Fund-raising for local hospitals, libraries and other town services is also taken up by many part-time residents.

Teton County, for example, which includes Jackson Hole, has the highest per capita giving in the country. In a single day last year, Jackson Hole managed to raise \$7 million for local charities during the Old Bill's Fun Run, which is held in September each year.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Air Travel

Ski towns often attract second-home owners and visitors who live several hundred miles away, necessitating air travel. Because year-round populations of 10,000 or less cannot sustain sizable jet service to multiple cities, direct flights are often limited to regional hubs, and connecting flights are common. The topography and smaller planes often make for nausea-inducing flights. And the very things that attract buyers to the mountains — remote towns in deep valleys surrounded by white-capped peaks — can also keep them away.

“You’ve got to make an effort to get here,” said Tara Young, an agent with BJ Adams & Company in Aspen, a four-hour drive from Denver over several mountain passes. Big Sky is 45 minutes south of Bozeman, which offers direct service to only Seattle, Salt Lake City and Minneapolis-St. Paul.

Weather and Climate

Second-home owners fleeing hotter climates relish the relatively cool, dry atmosphere of the mountains, but high peaks attract dramatic weather, including thunderstorms, blizzards, ice storms and avalanches. While heavy snowfall and gusty winds may be nirvana for powder hounds, they can make for treacherous travel. The wide, flat valleys that snake through the mountains act as wind tunnels, channeling snow and ice onto the highways. It is not uncommon for highways or steep passes in the Rockies, the Cascades and other mountain regions to close during winter storms, thwarting plans for a ski getaway.

Mountains experience dramatic fluctuations in precipitation and in temperature, with hot days and cool nights, so residents must dress accordingly. That means plenty of layers.

“We wear thin layers with zippers everywhere so we can constantly regulate our body temperatures,” said Michael Saftler, a real estate agent in Telluride, which sits at 8,750 feet.

The sun is more intense at higher altitudes, so sun exposure is a significant consideration in mountain towns. Frequent application of sunscreen, good eye protection and appropriate headwear are necessities. More important, the air gets considerably thinner with elevation, making breathing a challenge even for healthy adults. Those with respiratory or cardiovascular illness need to be especially careful.

Wildlife

To meet the growing demand for housing, developers are building farther into the mountains, encroaching on wildlife habitat. While many Western states have tried to protect wildlife corridors, especially for grizzly bears and mountain lions, interactions between humans and large animals are unavoidable. A family of white-tailed deer eating your tomato plants may be annoying, but watching your Chihuahua get carried off by a mountain lion will elicit an entirely different emotional response.

Property Management

Mountain homes require special maintenance in the winter, as snow and ice can damage roofs, rip out trees, shut down power and freeze pipes. Most ski towns have a well-established infrastructure for home maintenance, with professional landscapers and property managers abundant. Alarm systems that detect when the temperature of a house has dropped sharply are de rigeur in many second-home communities like Jackson Hole and Park City, Utah.

MOUNTAIN AND SKI TOWNS

Markets for second homes in the mountains are concentrated in the Rocky Mountain States, the Pacific Northwest, California and [New England](#). Below is a list of some towns that appeal to second-home buyers based on real estate, ski terrain and conditions, nonskiing activities, housing availability and price, and natural beauty.

Aspen, Colo.

With its designer stores (Ralph Lauren and Prada), hip hotel lounges (the Little Nell) and celebrity homeowners (Kevin Costner and Jack Nicholson), Aspen radiates with glamour and nightlife. But at 7,900 feet, Aspen is still a real mountain town with a thriving arts community, old brick buildings and a Wild West charm.

Home prices in Aspen, a turn-of-the-century mining town, can border on the stratospheric. In July, Tommy Mottola, the recording industry executive, paid \$47 million for a 12,000-square-foot house on 949 acres at the base of Mount Sopris, 30 miles northwest of Aspen. Prince Bandar bin Sultan of Saudi Arabia recently listed his 56,000-square-foot mansion for \$135 million. Fifty-eight properties are currently listed for \$10 million or more. With these prices, the \$5 million average cost of a home in Aspen seems reasonable.

Many houses priced below \$5 million are “functional obsolete,” said Carol Ann Jacobson, managing broker at Carol Ann Jacobson Realty, meaning they are too outdated to appeal to buyers who want luxury turnkey homes.

Tara Young, a broker with BJ Adams & Company, added, “Inventory is at an all-time low with no lack of buyers.” Quite often these are younger people with technology or finance backgrounds, the kind of buyers who are purchasing the new 2-to-15-acre parcels in Double Bar X Ranch for \$4.5 million to \$7.5 million.

The new development, abutting Maroon Creek and a golf course, is one of the few areas

permitting larger house construction (7,500 to 10,000 square feet) since laws limiting size have been enacted. With the billionaires pushing out the millionaires, adjacent towns like Basalt, 17 miles northwest of Aspen, are attracting a young, hip clientele, who are buying properties in the \$1-million-to-\$3-million range.

Bend, Ore.

Bend sits at 3,700 feet on the east side of the Cascades with a mix of high desert and alpine terrain climate, making it possible to hit the slopes in the morning (Mount Bachelor is 18 miles from town) and mountain bike after lunch. The hybrid climate attracts year-round lovers of the outdoors from major West Coast cities like San Francisco and Portland who mountain bike, rock climb, ski or golf.

“Bend is the iPod of lifestyle real estate,” said Rob Mitchell, 42, a semi-retired outdoor industry executive who owns property in Bend and is exploring sustainable development projects in the area. “The growth has been ridiculous in the last six years.”

Mr. Mitchell estimates that the one-third-acre lot he bought seven years ago on the west side of Bend has increased in value tenfold.

“The market has leveled out a bit,” said Terry Skjersaa, a broker with Duke Warner Realty. “It’s definitely transitioned into a buyers’ market.”

At \$360,000, the median price of a house in Bend is a bargain compared with those in other mountain communities. Most people seeking a second home in Bend are looking at properties in the range of \$400,000 to \$525,000. A three-bedroom house with gardens, a cedar deck and detailed woodwork is listed for \$424,900.

In recent years, there has been an emphasis on developing communities where commercial space, homes and open space coexist. The Arts and Crafts style has been a dominant theme in home design, though log houses seem to be favored in new golf developments like the 640-acre Pronghorn, where homes range from \$400,000 to \$1.8 million and fractional ownerships in villas begin at \$140,000. With its long season, Bend has become a golf mecca, now with more than 20 courses in the area, including the side-by-side [Jack Nicklaus](#) Signature and Tom Fazio Championship courses at Pronghorn.

Big Sky, Mont.

Situated at 7,500 feet and sandwiched between the Madison and Gallatin mountain ranges, hundreds of miles from a major city, Big Sky is about as remote as you’ll find in a mountain town. The area was developed as a ski resort relatively late, in the 1970’s, and remains decidedly rural compared with other Rocky Mountain ski towns.

“Big Sky appeals to people searching for the next big thing,” said Rich Hohne, a spokesman for the Moonlight Basin Resort. Selling itself as “the last best place,” the area has historically attracted second-home owners from the Upper Midwest and the Southeast, but “more and more we’re selling to people from New York and the Northeast,” Mr. Hohne said.

Housing is concentrated at the two alpine resorts — Big Sky Resort and Moonlight Basin — and in the town of Big Sky, known locally as Meadow Village, eight miles from the resorts. Formerly timber company land, Moonlight Basin has sought to preserve open space and protect wildlife corridors. Building sites in the 20-acre parcels in the Ulerys Lake and Timber Range developments are limited to two acres. In Cowboy Heaven, a development near the Moonlight Lodge Twenty, 2,200-square-foot houses on 1-to2-acre lots sell for \$1.25 million to \$1.5 million. Significantly larger parcels (160 acres and up)

are available at the Ranches at the Reserve for \$6 million to \$11 million.

Yellowstone National Park has world-class fly-fishing on the Gallatin River (where scenes from “A River Runs Through It” were shot) and the Madison River, and there is stellar hiking in the Spanish Peaks. The full-time population of Big Sky hovers around 1,500, so certain amenities can be scarce. While you will find more than two dozen builders, there is one medical clinic and one dentist in town. The nearest hospital is 45 miles north, in Bozeman, where you will also find the regional airport, a university and plenty of shopping.

Jackson, N.H.

One enters Jackson by crossing over a one-lane covered bridge and into a different era. Amid the clapboard buildings sits a 19th-century schoolhouse that still functions as a school. People stroll around the village green, and drivers in cars wave even to strangers. People congregate in a handful of pubs after a day in the woods.

Charming attributes aside, people are drawn to the region for outdoor recreation. Jackson sits in a deep bowl in the Mount Washington Valley, surrounded by national forest. There are four alpine resorts within a 10-mile radius of town. Crawford Notch, Cathedral Ledges and the wind-swept Mount Washington, popular with mountaineers and climbers, are within a 30-minute drive from town. The area may be best known for its Nordic skiing; 100 miles of trails snake through town and the surrounding hillsides.

Younger outdoor types and active couples in their 50’s and 60’s buy homes in Jackson and neighboring North Conway as eventual retirement properties. There is a mix of 1970’s A-frames, slope-side condos and newer houses with equally variable prices. Two-bedroom condos in town at the Eagle Mountain House are in the \$30,000 range, while a three-bedroom ski-in-ski-out condo at Mountainside on Attitash lists for \$669,000. A new three-bedroom trail-side home with mountain views and a gurgling brook is \$1.25 million.

Jackson Hole, Wyo.

With the majestic Teton mountain range looming to the north and the Snake River weaving through town, it is not surprising that Jackson Hole is a haven for hard-core skiers and other adventure seekers. Beyond the flip-flops and trail-running shoes zipping around town, you’ll find plenty of cowboy boots and driving loafers, and the occasional stiletto heel. After all, this is a town that holds the Grand Teton Music Festival and weekly rodeos in the summer.

Historically a haven for East Coast financial and media types, Jackson Hole has been luring in second-home owners from across the country in the last decade, most recently from Texas, [Florida](#) and Atlanta.

Ninety-seven percent of the land in Teton County is publicly owned, pushing up property prices. The average price for a one-acre lot in Jackson is \$1 million. The median price of a home in Teton County has risen to \$800,000, though that has not deterred buyers.

“It’s a busy market,” said Charlie Ross, a broker with Sotheby’s International Realty.

“Most second-home owners are interested in 5-to-35-acre parcels with water, trees and views,” Mr. Ross said, adding, “You’ll pay a premium for Grand Tetons views.”

Old cattle ranches are being developed with significant open space and conservation easements. One such development is the Bar B Bar Ranch, where 35-acre lots are selling

for \$5 million to \$15 million. Homeowners are building 6,000-to-8,000-square-foot custom homes, many using materials from old barns and railroad yards to create a vintage aesthetic. Second-home owners priced out of these developments are beginning to look in neighborhoods populated by locals, Mr. Ross said. A quarter-acre lot in Stilson Ranch sells for \$400,000 to \$500,000.

Park City, Utah

While the Sundance Film Festival brings in the Prada-wearing stars, it is the powder that lures the ski addicts to Park City. Surrounded by the Wasatch Mountains 36 miles from Salt Lake City, Park City offers three resorts — besides Park City, they include Deer Valley and the Canyons — and acres of backcountry skiing. Studded with red brick and clapboard buildings, the city's historic Main Street is filled with shops, galleries and restaurants.

“The 2002 Olympics helped turn on our faucet,” said Chris Robertson, regional manager with Prudential Utah Real Estate. “We’ve seen phenomenal growth since then.”

Total real estate sales volume has more than tripled since 2002, with the average sale price of a home increasing to \$714,281 from \$352,714 in 2002.

The slope-side resort development occurring in mountain communities across North America is showing up in Park City as well. Slated to open in 2008, the St. Regis Resort and Residences, Deer Crest will have 67 hotel condos and 26 private houses, ranging from a 1,300-square-foot two-bedroom to a four-bedroom that costs \$5 million. A two-bedroom condo at the St. Regis is listed for \$2.2 million.

Telluride, Colo.

Telluride is a 19th-century gold and silver mining town in the southwest corner of Colorado. Zoning laws have preserved the historic brick buildings and Victorian houses that line Main Street. Wedged in a box canyon surrounded by the San Juan Mountains at the end of a state highway, Telluride is clearly remote, but not isolated.

The town's annual international film festival attracts a cosmopolitan crowd, who are discovering Telluride's allure and returning to buy homes. Coming from Mexico, France, South Africa and Australia, these buyers “have a lot of experience around the world and have decided Telluride is the place they want to invest,” said Mr. Saftler of Telluride Premier Properties.

He said today's vacation buyers in Telluride are “looking to get into the market at a lower level,” although that level has risen to \$625,000, compared with \$425,000 two years ago. Second-home owners seem to be in two camps: those looking at properties priced around \$625,000 and \$650,000, and those willing to spend \$6 million or more. “The \$1-to-\$6-million market has flattened,” Mr. Saftler said. “There are some good buys right now in the \$1.5-to-\$2.5-million range.”

A two-bedroom, two-bathroom condo in town with 1,000 square feet is \$1 million. Buyers willing to look 35 to 45 minutes outside Telluride, in places like Norwood, can find 1,200-to-1,400-square-foot homes with two bedrooms for \$240,000 to \$260,000.

Truckee, Calif.

An old railroad town, Truckee sits near the north shore of Lake Tahoe within striking distance of seven ski resorts, including Squaw Valley and Northstar-at-Tahoe. Tucked into the west side of the Sierra Nevada, the area's fabled snow (snowfall averages 450

inches) pulls in serious skiers. Yet summer is equally popular in the Sierra, with hiking, white-water kayaking and tubing on the Truckee River favorite pursuits.

Eighty percent of home buyers in Truckee live elsewhere year-round. The majority of them come from the San Francisco Bay Area and Sacramento, 100 miles to the west, making it a relatively easy drive on Interstate 80. There is a small airport near town that is seeing more private planes and a larger airport in Reno, Nev., 40 miles west.

“Prices have softened a little,” said Nancy Davis, a partner with Davis Yoder Realty Group. “This is the first time in eight years we have a nice selection of properties.”

Those include 2,000-square-foot houses in the new Tahoe Donner subdivision that start at \$700,000. The subdivision has a championship golf course, an outdoor pool and other amenities but has preserved open space for hiking trails and wilderness areas.

The region is in the throes of a major expansion. Tahoe Mountain Resort, a luxury four-season resort at the base of the expanded Northstar-at-Tahoe, will have mountainside and golf course residences and condos starting at \$550,000.

Warren/Waitsfield, Vt.

Buttressed by forested mountains, Warren lies along the Mad River in Vermont, in the Mad River Valley, an hour from Burlington, the state’s population center. You will find an antique store, a general store, an inn and municipal buildings in the historic village of Warren, which has not changed much in 200 years. Ski and snowboard shops, casual restaurants and pubs, and a handful of galleries exist in the adjacent hamlets of Waitsfield and Fayston, but skiing reigns here.

“We’re on the mountain at 7:30 on a powder day,” said Chris Hayes, a technology sales executive from [Manhattan](#) who bought a three-bedroom condo in 2005 at Sugarbush, the area’s dominant resort. Mad River Glen is the other, a local favorite, with the country’s only operating single-chair lift and no artificial snow.

At \$150,000, Mr. Hayes’s condo was a bargain, though he acknowledged it needed a lot of work.

“There’s virtually nothing habitable under \$200,000,” said Bill Elliott, an agent with Sugarbush Real Estate (which is not affiliated with the resort). As with many mountain towns, land to be developed is in short supply, but there is plenty of new building in the area, at the \$25 million, multiyear construction of Lincoln Peak Village at Sugarbush.

“There’s been no new development near the mountain in 25 years,” said Wendy Brauer, a sales executive with the resort’s real estate division. The first phase of the residential project is Claybrook, 61 luxury condos and houses set to open in December 2006. The units are being sold as whole or fractional ownership, a trend at many ski resorts across the country. Three-, four- and five-bedroom units at Claybrook “were snapped up” at \$900,000 to \$1.4 million for whole ownerships, Ms. Brauer said. Seventy percent of the units sold to date have been fractional ownerships, an economical and practical option for people “who don’t have 13 weeks of vacation,” she said.

Whistler, British Columbia

Set in the Coast Mountains of British Columbia, Whistler is known for its expert terrain and stunning landscape. The Whistler Blackcomb Ski Resort recently opened 400 acres of terrain on the mountain’s west side. With more than 90 restaurants and bars, there is plenty of nightlife once you are off the mountain.

“The market peaked in 2002 during the Olympic bidding, when the weak Canadian dollar stimulated substantial American investment,” said Shauna O’Callaghan, an agent with Whistler Real Estate. “But prices have come down,” she said, with Hong Kong buyers particularly strong right now. A large number of second-home buyers in Whistler are from Vancouver, other parts of British Columbia and Washington State.

As with many ski towns, Whistler buyers are predominantly second-home owners who are making lifestyle purchases and want ski-in-ski-out properties in luxury buildings. A three-bedroom condo in a prime mountainside location starts at \$750,000, and a 1,000-square-foot hotel condo can be found for \$600,000 to \$700,000. A three-bedroom log house with a two-story river-rock fireplace is listed at \$3.2 million. One of the newest developments at the base of the lodge is the Four Seasons Private Residences, with underground parking and an outdoor pool. A furnished 1,500-square-foot unit with two bedrooms, two bathrooms and two fireplaces sells for just under \$2.1 million.

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