

Come to the **MOUNTAINS**

By Linda Castrone

Colorado is your home for high-altitude meetings





Sunrise at a ranch in the Rocky Mountains.



Left, Aspen Meadows Resort; right, Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel.

Say "Colorado" and people immediately think of mountains, as well they should. Two-thirds of the state is covered with them, and its first white settlers came to prospect these peaks for lucrative gold and silver. The first wave followed the gold rush to Pikes Peak, bringing enough people to earn recognition as the Colorado Territory in 1861. Today, visitors come to those same mountains for a different reason—to enjoy the high-

altitude scenery and unrivaled outdoor activities. As Colorado prepares to celebrate its 150th birthday as a territory in 2011, many of its cities are crowing about their natural assets. The mountains are still the state's greatest resource, but now more for their beauty than for the ores within. Visitors usually flock to cities along the Front Range and in the central mountains, because they are the most accessible—via Denver International Airport and Interstates 25 and 70—and because they are fairly self-contained. Each is only an hour or two away from the others.

Seeds planted decades ago are just now sprouting, thanks to residents willing to tax themselves to fund the finer things in life. In 1988, they approved the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District, a lifeline to the city's art, history, natural history and art museums, the zoo, and a four-square-block performing arts complex. Visitors get to enjoy the results, including a new wing at the Denver Art Museum, which opened in 2006; a Museum of Contemporary art in Denver's historic LoDo district that opened in 2007; and a host of other cultural projects still in the pipeline.

GETTING THERE

- **Denver International Airport** is the state's main hub and the fifth-busiest airport in the nation, providing 1,600 daily flights on 17 commercial airlines to 160 nonstop destinations. The airport is 45 minutes from downtown Denver, about an hour from Boulder, 1.5 hours from Fort Collins and Colorado Springs, and within a 2–3 hour drive of many of the state's ski areas.
- **Colorado Springs Airport** is about 11 miles from downtown Colorado Springs and has eight airlines providing nonstop service to 11 U.S. cities.
- **Eagle County Airport** is 35 miles from Vail and 26 miles from Beaver Creek. Four airlines provide nonstop service to 11 U.S. cities.
- **Aspen/Pitkin County Airport** is 3 miles from Aspen and 8 miles from Snowmass, with nonstop flights to and from Denver, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

DENVER ▼

Denver was born as a boom town during Colorado's silver and gold rushes, and many of its downtown high-rises were built during the energy boom of the 1980s. In 2011, the Queen City of the Plains is ready to reclaim that title. *Lonely Planet* travel guides chose it as the sixth-best U.S. travel destination in 2011, describing it as "Paris in the West," and civic leaders love the comparison.

Most credit the 2008 Democratic National Convention with bringing Denver's best into the limelight. Under national and international spotlights, it performed quite well. "We refer to the convention as B.C. and A.D.," says Rich Grant, communications director for **Visit Denver, the Convention & Visitors Bureau**. "It transformed the city and the way people view it."

"The world sat back and said, 'Wow, Denver is a real city,'" says David Gauthier, director of sales for the **Grand Hyatt Denver** and the **Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center**. "Here we have a Four Seasons and a Ritz-Carlton downtown. This is not a cowtown."

Adds Richard Scharf, president and CEO of Visit Denver: "Denver is seen as a great outdoor city that also has a wonderful appreciation of culture."

A new history museum is underway at 12th Avenue, and across Broadway a new single-artist museum is being built next to the DAM that will hold the paintings of abstract expressionist Clyfford Still. The Denver Botanic Gardens has a new greenhouse complex in the works; the Denver Zoo is building a new 10-acre Asian Tropics exhibit for elephants, rhinos and tapirs; and voters have approved a new symphony center at the Denver Performing Arts Complex that has yet to break ground.

During the early boom years of the new Millennium, a bevy of downtown hotels debuted. The 239-room **Four Seasons Hotel Denver** joined the 202-room **Ritz-Carlton Denver**, which has 13,000 sq. ft. of meeting space and earned Denver's first Five-Diamond designation. The Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center was built to complement the city's conference hub, with 1,100 guest rooms and 60,600 sq. ft. of meeting space. Nearby is **The Curtis – a Double-Tree Hotel** with 336 rooms and 20,800 sq. ft. of meeting space. The Grand Hyatt Denver is three blocks away, with 516 rooms and 60,000 sq. ft. of space.

Another long-awaited 500-room, \$170-million **Westin** hotel is planned for the south end of Denver International Airport as part of a citywide light-rail renaissance. It's still unnamed and in the planning stages, but designs are expected to include up to 26,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. The hotel will be packaged with the new 22.8-mile rail line that will connect DIA with downtown's Union Station by 2015.

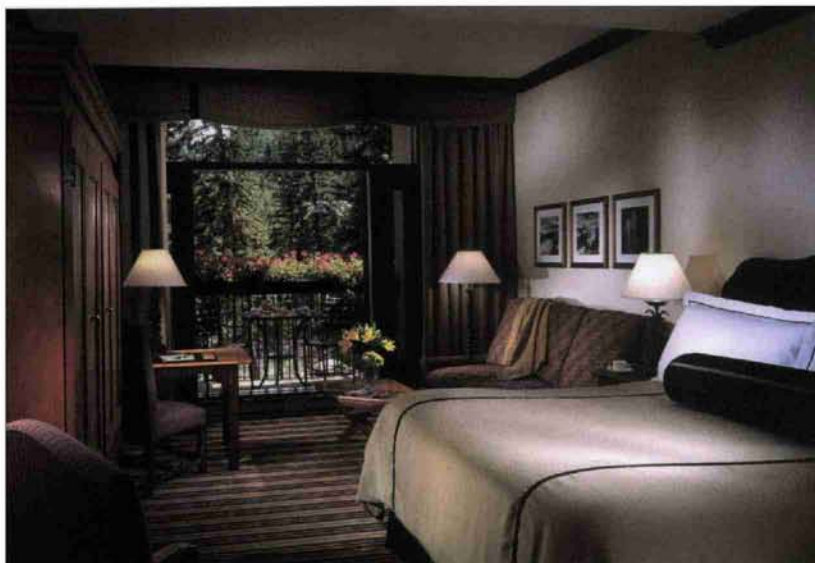
Denver is among the easiest cities to navigate using mass transit, thanks to the largest light-rail project in America's history. Once all 122 miles are completed, travelers will be able to ride trains downtown from the airport, and to suburbs on all sides of the city's core. The southern routes, including one that stops outside the convention center, opened in 2006. They will be followed by the western link to the town of Golden in 2013 and the eastern route to DIA, already underway.

Denver's historic Union Station depot and the 20 acres that surround it will become the hub for rail and bus service, modeled after Washington D.C.'s Union Station. Development is in the early stages, but once completed, Union Station's abandoned rail yards will become an urban high-rise neighborhood with retail and office space.

It will complete a renaissance that began in 1995, when Coors Field baseball park opened in the historic warehouse district on the east side of Union Station. LoDo attracted some of the city's earliest loft dwellers and is still nightlife central. Contiguous neighborhoods such as Commons Park, Ballpark, Highland, River North and South Broadway came next, gaining a reputation for their edgy art galleries and new restaurants.

More than 60,000 people now live within 1.5 miles of the city center, bringing with them the energy to make a vibrant, walkable core. When the Democratic National Convention arrived in 2008, Denver was ready for its cameo.

The momentum continues as downtown's infrastructure is upgraded to accommodate the crowds. The mile-long 16th Street pedestrian mall has always been the center of attention, with free shuttle buses and horse-drawn carriages carrying visitors from one end to the other. It is undergoing a facelift while nearby 14th Street is getting a makeover that by fall 2011 will formalize its designation as the Theatre District. Sidewalks are being landscaped and widened



Vail Cascade Resort.

to hold outdoor cafes. Neon billboards advertising upcoming performances add excitement along the street that connects the Colorado Convention Center with cultural facilities and the Civic Center.

Attention to walkability, mass transit and other environmentally friendly practices is what attracted the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education to hold its 2010 conference at the **Colorado Convention Center**. Events Manager Danielle Faris' mandate was stricter than some—to match the group's sustainability mission with the site of their convention. As one of the country's greenest cities, she says, "Denver was a natural fit." She worked with the convention center's in-house sustainability officer to create a carbon-balanced event, with the guarantee that waste generated on-site would be composted and recycled.

"We utilized everything we knew would be attractive to our constituents," she says, from arranging a ride-sharing program to selecting locations that were pedestrian friendly. And when walking wasn't feasible, they lined up pedicabs, hybrid taxis and hybrid buses. By using the city's Green DINR, a network of sustainably oriented restaurants, they created a guilt-free dine-around night. And by pre-screening hotels, they were able to identify a variety of suitable lodging options.

"People were not as interested in the nuances of green building as with social justice, recycling and composting, so we listed them all in the materials," Faris says.

The three-day event included tours to local colleges with sustainability curricula. On an all-day trip to Boulder, for example, they toured the University of Colorado Chancellor's Residence, which operates entirely off-the-grid. Later in the day they stopped in Golden, a suburb of Denver, to see the National Renewable Energy Laboratory and its wind farm.

B-Cycle, Denver's new bike-share program, provided attendees with shiny-red Trek three-speeds waiting for them outside the convention center, ready to be ridden and dropped off at any of 50 stations scattered throughout downtown.

"That was a real energizer," Faris says. "Denver is a true destination, with lots of smaller stories so people could leave with a sense of place." The conference, held Oct. 10–12, attracted 2,300 participants, up from 1,700 in 2008.

AASHE is not the only group that has chosen Denver. SnowSports Industries America moved its annual Snow Show there from Las Vegas in 2010, bringing 18,000 attendees, and the American Academy of Family Physicians brought 11,000 members to its four-day convention in late 2010.

"Groups say they set record attendance records here for lots of reasons," Grant says. "We have a tremen-



Pikes Peak Cog Railway, Colorado Springs.

- Year-round weather that's not too extreme, thanks to Denver's location near the mountains but not in them. Days can be mild and sunny, while snow piles up in some of the nation's best ski resorts.
- 8,400 downtown hotel rooms, 300 restaurants.
- Walkable streets with 850 miles of bicycle trails.
- Plenty of after-hours options, including seven pro sports teams and a beverage industry that includes 11 distilleries, a handful of wineries and countless breweries.

"Denver's first permanent structure was a saloon," quips Grant, "and we've been working on perfecting that for a long time."

COLORADO SPRINGS ▼

Colorado Springs is about 65 miles south of Denver and has an elevation of 6,035 feet and a population of 380,000. Home of the United States Air Force Academy, the North American Aerospace Defense Command, Peterson Air Force Base and Fort Carson Army Base, it is accustomed to host-

ing the government and military conferences that have continued throughout challenging economic times. Its civic leaders also like to promote the town's rich western heritage and broad range of wholesome attractions.

"We are a family destination, so it is easy to combine meetings with vacations," says Chelsy Murphy, public relations manager for the **Colorado Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau**. The natural red rock Garden of the Gods Visitor & Nature Center is its best-known attraction, followed by 14,110-foot Pikes Peak and the Pikes Peak Cog Railway that climbs nearly 7,500 feet in 8.9 miles. Visitors can now get a lift to the top and bike back to the base of the mountain.

Key conference sites are the downtown **Antlers Hilton Colorado Springs Hotel**, with 292 guest rooms and 27,500 sq. ft. of meeting space, and, in the western foothills, **The Broadmoor** and **Cheyenne Mountain Resort** with 1,016 rooms between them and 225,000 sq. ft. of space. Coming in late summer is **The Mining Exchange**, a new downtown boutique Wyndham Grand hotel and spa being built in the historic former Mining Exchange Building,

- dous package available." Among its selling points:
- The state-of-the-art Colorado Convention Center, with 100,000 sq. ft. of meeting space and 584,000 sq. ft. of contiguous exhibit space.
 - Location near the center of the country, making it convenient for people from across the U.S.
 - Denver International Airport, an all-weather airport with nonstop service to 167 cities.

Colorado Springs, CVR



Left, The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs; right, Copper Mountain Conference Center.

which dates back to 1902. "They're using the old vaults for treatment rooms," says Murphy. When it opens, it will have 117 rooms and more than 9,000 sq. ft. of space.

FORT COLLINS ▼

Fort Collins, home to vibrant Colorado State University and a nascent microbrew industry, is 65 miles north of Denver and a world apart. The town of 140,000 was first settled as a wilderness fort along the historic Overland Trail, then became a major source of sugar beets at the throat of a mountain canyon carved by the Cache La Poudre River.

The city's historic town center is still intact and was the inspiration for Disneyland's iconic Main Street. Its agricultural roots now nurture a microbrew industry, with small-but-mighty players such as New Belgium, Big Horn and Odell's situated alongside the giant Anheuser-Busch Brewery. Conference facilities ring the university campus, and many are within walking distance of downtown restaurants and bars. The city's largest venue is the 292-room **Hilton Fort Collins**, which is adjacent to Colorado State University and can accommodate groups of up to 1,300 in 27,500 sq. ft. of meeting space. It also offers Italian dining at its Toscana at the Park restaurant.

BOULDER ▼

Just 30 miles northwest of Denver, Boulder is best known for its open-minded, health-conscious environment and striking surroundings. Its mountain backdrop first attracted gold seekers and the merchants who supported them. Those forward-thinking founders soon established the state's first university, setting a tone that still presides over this city of 102,000—25,000 of which are University of Colorado students.

Boulder is tucked into the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, making it an excellent place for world-class runners, cyclists and rock climbers to train. Visitors can partake of as much outdoor activity as they choose, or content themselves with enjoying the scenic view from a cafe in any of Boulder's outdoor shopping districts.

The city supports nearly 2,000 lodging units in facilities that range from historic to luxurious, with 60 cottages at the historic **Colorado Chautauqua** retreat providing a unique option. The newest hotels are clustered along the west end of Boulder's Pearl Street pedestrian mall and on the eastern edge of the CU campus.

The city's largest conference facilities are in the downtown **St. Julien Hotel & Spa**, which has 201 guest rooms, 16,500 sq. ft. of meeting space, a 10,000-square-foot spa with 12 treatment rooms and a weekly Saturday afternoon tea; and the **Millennium Harvest House Boulder**, with 269 rooms, 18,000 sq. ft. of space, 15 tennis courts, indoor and outdoor pools, and Boulder's original cigar bar.

BRECKENRIDGE ▼

Interstate 70 is the major artery between Denver and its high-altitude ski resorts. Just 80 miles west of Denver in Summit County, Breckenridge is a 150-year-old Victorian mining town that has remained nearly intact. At an elevation of 9,600 feet, it is in the middle of the Ten Mile Range and gets 300 inches of snowfall each year. That almost guarantees good skiing and ice-skating options, but during the summer it also creates the backdrop for one of the state's best mountain golf courses. Flatlanders eager to escape summer heat flock here for excellent hiking, mountain biking and a dozen festivals that are anchored by downtown's popular Riverwalk Center. The entire downtown is a protected National Historic District.

Half a dozen large hotels and dozens of smaller options can accommodate groups of up to 1,000, with a combined 100,000 sq. ft. of meeting space and 2,810 guest rooms, many of which back up onto the town's long, sprawling complex of ski mountains. **Beaver Run Resort & Conference Center** is among the largest, with 527 guest rooms and 40,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, including the Imperial Ballroom, which features floor-to-ceiling views of the Rockies. The resort also offers an extensive spa and dining options that range from an on-site grocery market to an upscale steakhouse.

The town is walkable, with complimentary transportation for those times when attendees would rather ride. And if you'd prefer to hold a smaller meeting in a 10,000-foot-high mountaintop lodge, several private retreats are available as rentals.

COPPER MOUNTAIN ▼

Copper Mountain Resort is about 75 miles from Denver, on the western side of the same Ten Mile Range that shelters Breckenridge on the east. It is a self-contained development built around a challenging ski mountain and two high-altitude creeks. A late 1800s mining camp at the base of Copper Mountain failed to attract more than 225 residents, but futurists envisioned it as the perfect site for luxurious R&R. Today it is marketed to active groups who enjoy team building around a day of skiing, fishing, hiking or a round of golf. Although the core Village has its share of restaurants, shops and bars, you'll have to travel to Frisco or Vail for real town life. The only lodging option in town is the **Copper Mountain Conference Center**, with 600 guest rooms and 16,000 sq. ft. of meeting space.

VAIL ▼

At 8,150 feet above sea level, Vail offers some of the state's best ski terrain. It is 100 miles west of Denver; its sister resort area Beaver Creek is 15 miles further. Vail was the first of the two to gain

international fame. Compared with Colorado's other mountain towns, it's a baby, created in 1962 as a destination ski resort in the narrow Vail Valley. It resembles an Alpine village with a green swath alongside Gore Creek that's used for golfing in the summer and cross-country skiing and snowshoeing

the state's four Five-Diamond hotels. The **Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort & Spa** is Beaver Creek's largest conference hotel. It has 190 guest rooms and 20,000 sq. ft. of meeting space.

Development has since spilled west into areas claimed by miners. Less expensive dining, lodging

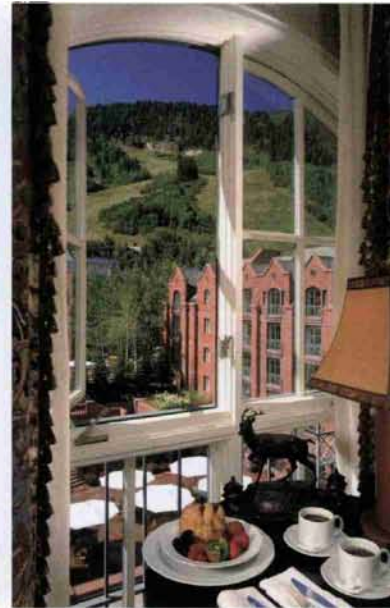
“Groups say they set record attendance records [in Denver] for lots of reasons. We have a tremendous package available.”

Rich Grant, Visit Denver

in the winter. The **Vail Cascade Resort** is the town's only Four-Diamond ski-in/ski-out resort, with 292 guest rooms and 4,500 sq. ft. of meeting space.

A decade after Vail was founded, its developers turned their attention to a peak slightly southwest and built Beaver Creek, an even more exclusive community with a dozen small lodges. It's home to **The Ritz-Carlton at Bachelor Gulch**, one of

and entertainment options are available down the valley in Avon, Minturn and Edwards. Lift tickets purchased in Vail can also be used in Beaver Creek, as well as the nearby Bachelor Gulch and Arrowhead resort areas. During summer months, the mountains come alive with championship golfing, fishing, whitewater rafting, dude ranching and trekking to ghost towns.



ASPEN & SNOWMASS ▼

Aspen, located about 200 miles west of Denver, doesn't require an introduction, but it may need an

explanation. It's a world-class destination at 7,890 feet, well-known for its challenging ski slopes and glam celebrities. But as Sarah Reynolds, national sales manager for the **Aspen Chamber Resort Association**, points out, "People don't think of spring and fall in the mountains. I like to remind them that Aspen is thriving year round, even after the ski lifts close for the year or the kids go back to school in the fall. There is great value then, a good opportunity to get large groups in."

Those seasons are perfect for fall leaf walking, Jeep tours, hiking, biking, horseback riding and, for the right audience, an annual John Denver Festival. Foodie Food Tours are guided walking trips through Aspen's culinary venues. For those interested in more active adventures, the year-old Outside In Aspen festival is packed with chances to run, bike, fish and learn to do stand-up river paddling.

Even during peak summer and winter seasons, when venues are filled for festivals and events, Aspen's 5,800 residents know that many free options are available. One option: "During the Aspen Music Festival in the summer, you can sit on the lawn outside the tent for free and listen to world-class musicians," Reynolds says.

Aspen's newest convention venue is the state-of-the-art **Doerr-Hosier Center** at **Aspen Meadows Resort**, a LEED Gold-certified facility that can accommodate up to 800 participants with 22,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. Guests stay in Bauhaus-style suites as large as 1,200 sq. ft. and are free to wander

Left, **The Curtis** – a DoubleTree Hotel, Denver; right, **St. Regis Aspen Resort**.

the institute's 40-acre campus. Its creekside setting is so pristine that "it gets everyone into that renewal spirit," Reynolds says. Other popular conference sites include the 94-room **Hotel Jerome** and the **Gant**, with smaller groups at the 92-unit **Little Nell** and the 126-room **Limelight Lodge**.

Aspen's sister destination **Snowmass Village**, 15 miles to the northwest, is a self-contained resort area built around the base of Snowmass Ski Area in a valley that was first settled by ranching families. In addition to excellent skiing, it boasts the Anderson Ranch Art Center and, during the summer, the Jazz Aspen/Snowmass festival. The **Viceroy Snowmass** is one of several luxury hotels clustered around the area. It has 173 guest rooms and 9,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, including a unique ski-in, ski-out ballroom. ❧

Linda Castrone is the former features editor and assistant business editor of the Denver Post. She is also the author of The Insiders' Guide to Denver.



For more information about properties, venues and attractions in Colorado, visit smartmeetings.com/event-planning/colorado.

CVB RESOURCES

- **Aspen Chamber Resort Association**
aspenchamber.org
- **Boulder Convention and Visitors Bureau**
bouldercoloradousa.com
- **Breckenridge Resort Chamber**
gobreck.com
- **Colorado Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau**
visitcos.com
- **Fort Collins Convention & Visitors Bureau**
visit.ftcollins.com
- **Snowmass Tourism**
snowmassvillage.com
- **Vail Valley Chamber & Tourism Bureau**
visitvailvalley.com
- **Visit Denver**
denver.org

DENVER & BOULDER	ROOMS/MEETING SPACE	WHAT'S DISTINCTIVE
The Curtis – a DoubleTree Hotel thecurtis.com	336 rms/20,800 sq. ft.	This hotel has a playful pop-culture theme and is located across the street from the Denver Performing Arts Complex.
Grand Hyatt Denver granddenver.hyatt.com	516 rms/57,000 sq. ft.	In the heart of Denver's bustling downtown, this Four-Diamond property includes meeting space in the 38th-floor Pinnacle Club, rooftop jogging, tennis and swimming.
Hyatt Regency Denver at the Colorado Convention Center denverregency.hyatt.com	1,100 rms/60,600 sq. ft.	This Four-Diamond, full-service hotel has a spa, rooftop lounge, fitness center and indoor, heated lap pool.
Millennium Harvest House Boulder millenniumhotels.com	269 rms/18,000 sq. ft.	Near the University of Colorado and major shopping centers on Boulder's east end; features 15 tennis courts and expansive outdoor patio areas.
Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel sheratondenverdowntown.com	1,231 rms/133,000 sq. ft.	Denver's largest hotel recently completed a \$70-million renovation and offers an outdoor heated pool and a range of restaurant choices.
St. Julien Hotel & Spa stjulien.com	201 rms/16,500 sq. ft. indoor/outdoor	Boulder's newest luxury hotel is nearly mountainside and features a 10,000-square-foot spa with 12 treatment rooms.
COLORADO SPRINGS		
Antlers Hilton Colorado Springs Hotel antlers.com	292 rms/27,500 sq. ft.	Four-Diamond hotel located downtown features the 54-seat Learning Center and the 9,672-square-foot Heritage Ballroom.
The Broadmoor broadmoor.com	700 rms/185,000 sq. ft.	Five-Diamond, Five-Star landmark hotel includes 18 on-site restaurants; cafes and lounges; 3 golf courses; a tennis club; and a Five-Star, full-service spa.
Cheyenne Mountain Resort cheyennemountain.com	316 rms/40,000 sq. ft.	On the city's western mountainside flanks, this Four-Diamond suburban resort has 38 conference rooms, on-site golf, a lake and 4 pools.
ASPEN & SNOWMASS		
Aspen Meadows Resort dolce-aspen-hotel.com	98 rms/22,000 sq. ft.	Home of the Aspen Institute and operated by Dolce Resorts, this resort's new Bauhaus-style Doerr-Hosier Center has state-of-the-art facilities.
Limelight Lodge limelightlodge.com	126 rms/4,000 sq. ft.	Pet-friendly hotel is located steps away from Aspen Mountain and features an outdoor pool, hot tub and ski valet.
St. Regis Aspen Resort stregisaspen.com	179 rms/20,000 sq. ft.	Located at the base of Aspen Mountain, within walking distance of downtown shops and restaurants, with the full-service Remede Spa, butler service and a ski valet.
The Viceroy Snowmass viceroyhotelsandresorts.com	173 rms/9,000 sq. ft.	Luxury ski-in/ski-out resort in the heart of Snowmass Village offers a 7,000-square-foot spa and fitness center, a pool, and skiing and hiking options.
BRECKENRIDGE & COPPER MOUNTAIN		
Beaver Run Resort, Breckenridge beaverrun.com	500+ rms/35,000 sq. ft.	Features lodging that ranges from hotel rooms to 4-bedroom suites; and amenities including the 2,800-square-foot Spa at Beaver Run, tennis and an on-site ski school.
Copper Mountain Conference Center coppermeetings.com	600 rms/16,000 sq. ft.	Lodging units range from hotel rooms to 3-bedroom condos surrounding Copper's core village, with more than 20 bars and restaurants.
VAIL & BEAVER CREEK		
Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort & Spa beavercreek.hyatt.com	190 rms/20,000 sq. ft.	One of the first full-service resorts in Beaver Creek Village, it has restaurants, a lobby bar, the Allegría Spa and an outdoor pool with whirlpools beneath a waterfall.
Vail Cascade Resort vailcascade.com	292 rms/4,500 sq. ft.	Vail's only Four-Diamond ski-in/ski-out resort has a private chairlift that takes guests to the Lionshead slopes. Amenities include an infinity-edge pool.
DEBEQUE		
The High Lonesome Ranch thehighlonesomeranch.com	30 rms/625 sq. ft.	This 300-square-mile dude ranch on the Western Slope of the Rockies offers horse-back riding, cattle drives, fly fishing and big-game hunting.