

Colorado COOL

Denver offers a surprising summer break with a Rocky Mountains twist, writes **Bridget McGrouther**

Denver isn't the first American destination that springs to mind for most British travellers – especially outside the ski season. But after a summer visit to the Colorado capital, I can't help wondering: why not? Sunshine 300 days of the year? Check. Flights from UK airports, including the option to pre-clear US immigration at Dublin Airport when flying Aer Lingus? Check. A \$10 train ride from Denver International Airport to the glorious art deco Union Station in the city centre? Check. Plus stylish hotels, restaurants, family-friendly attractions and a walkable Downtown. With the Rockies on the doorstep too, no wonder the Mile High City gets a high-five from those who want to swap skis for summer breeze.

CULTURAL CAPITAL

Light summer evenings lend themselves to the magnificent Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre,

a natural outdoor venue 20 minutes from Denver, where I danced and sang along to Beatles classics while surrounded by towering, floodlit sandstone rocks. My visit coincided with a Fab Four tribute act, recalling the Beatles' first appearance here in 1964, and joining the likes of John Denver and U2 in the list of legendary past performers. But whoever is headlining, put a concert here at the top of your clients' to-do list. After all, what other venue offers a brush with wildlife (mule deer are regular visitors) as well a view of the sunset, stars and twinkling city lights?

Denver is a city of sports fanatics, and our central, baseball-themed Rally Hotel was opposite Coors Field, home of the Colorado Rockies. Major League Baseball's highest-altitude field means batters and spectators alike love how far the ball flies – literally – through the thinner air. In fact, a row of purple seats close to the top of the stadium marks 1,600 metres above sea level. ➤

Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre

PICTURE: Scott Dressel-Martin

DESTINATIONS

THE US | DENVER



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Empower Field at Mile High, home of the Denver Broncos; the city is known for street art; otherworldly immersive art at Meow Wolf Denver's Convergence Station

PICTURES: So-GNAR Creative Division; Zack Altschuler; So-GNAR Creative Division/Kristi

Five minutes' drive away, catch American football stars the Denver Broncos at Empower Field at Mile High, which holds 85,000 fans and doubles as a concert venue.

Art lovers will be drawn to Denver's museums, galleries and murals, especially in the trendy RiNo (River North) district. An architectural wonder in itself, Denver Art Museum hosts world-class collections, including interactive works by Indigenous artists.

The Center for Colorado Women's History is next door, while the Molly Brown House Museum is a 10-minute stroll away. This Victorian mansion was once owned by the 'Unsinkable Molly Brown', a formidable Denver socialite who survived the sinking of the *Titanic*. And for families or fans of sci-fi, there's the immersive art exhibition Meow Wolf Denver's Convergence Station, where four 'alien' worlds are joined together by a rare cosmic event.

CALL OF NATURE

Sightings of elk and a bald eagle made for a wildlife-filled welcome to Rocky Mountain National Park, a 90-minute drive from Denver. Stretching for 3,000 miles, the Rockies are also home to black bears, moose, marmots, mountain lions and more than 270 bird species. The scenery is just as memorable, particularly as the fall colours start to turn the trees golden from as early as August.

Local excursion operators such as Aspire Tours offer full-day guided tours from downtown Denver (from \$189 per person). Our moderate five-mile hike soon left most day-trippers behind as we enjoyed breathtaking panoramas of snow-capped peaks and a picnic lunch by crystal-clear Mills Lake.

Other summer adventures include rafting, climbing, horse riding, biking, fishing and ziplining. For horror fans, dare to book a stay at the Stanley Hotel, which is

allegedly haunted and said to have inspired Stephen King to write *The Shining* after staying there in 1974.

IN GOOD TASTE

Denver's dining scene is flourishing, with acclaimed openings such as Le Colonial (French-Vietnamese), Magna Kainan (Filipino) and Mexican-inspired Alteño – one of 31 restaurants in the city acclaimed by the Michelin Guide last year.

Yet foodies don't need to spend a fortune – there's a plethora of farm-to-table restaurants, street food, markets and diners. Pop into the Milk Market in LoDo (Lower Downtown) for everything from Italian to Ethiopian with a side of spicy margaritas; or try Denver Central Market in RiNo, home to seafood at Tammen's Fish Market, ice cream at High Point Creamery and sweet souvenirs at Temper Chocolate.

With 150 breweries, Denver is also big on beer. Coors, the state's largest and most famous brand, was

founded in 1873 in nearby Golden and still uses Rocky Mountains spring water. Clients can follow the Denver Beer Trail, perhaps kicking off at Wynkoop, the first brewpub to open in downtown Denver after Prohibition.

We joined a guided RiNo Beer and Graffiti Tour (from \$55 with Denver Microbrew Tour) to combine street art with craft beer producers, toasting the fact there are 20 within a one-mile radius. If clients aren't big beer drinkers, there are cocktail lounges and wineries aplenty, as well as some of the biggest and best food and drink festivals in the American West. Cheers to that! **TW**

BOOK IT

America As You Like It sells a four-night Denver city break from £1,315 per person, based on two sharing room-only at The Rally Hotel. Includes economy flights from Heathrow via Reykjavik departing in September. americaasyoulikeit.com

ASK THE expert



Cath Pusey,
product director,
America As You Like It

"Denver is an exciting city with a great mix of culture, Western heritage and a young, progressive vibe. It's friendly, with locals enjoying the cafes, markets and nightlife alongside visitors. It offers lots of opportunities for outdoor recreation, both in the city and the surrounding area, while enjoying almost year-round sunshine. Denver makes an ideal alternative to other US city breaks, plus it has some great boutique hotels and provides good value for money."