

TRAVEL

Experience the Spirit of the Old West in Durango, Colorado

Southwest Colorado welcomes all with a hearty, "How d'you do?" These folks know they've got a good thing going, and you're invited to share in all the wonders of the



Mira Temkin

grandiose San Juan Mountains, Animas River, and Mesa Verde National Park. Known for its outdoor recreation, Durango is often considered the "mecca of mountain biking."

It's also a year-round destination with awe-inspiring scenery and great snow skiing as well as a cornucopia of arts, culture, music, even a casino/resort.

Durango – "City of Brewerly Love." This is the kind of town where you can spend a few days and feel as comfortable as you would in your own pair of cowboy boots. Durango's also a foodie town. I've been told there are more restaurants per capita here than in San Francisco – and they're just as diverse. The award-winning Cypress Cafe, Francisco's, Serious Texas Bar-B-Q, and Sushitarian are all great dining choices. For Chicago folks, there's even a taste of home at Derailed Saloon and Eatery. But if you're hankering for a hamburger, Steamworks Brewing Company has one of the best, and they have a beer-bread that's out of this world. Speaking of brew, Durango is home to four craft beer microbreweries; beer lovers can hop on an official "Tour de Brews" tasting tour to sample them.

From the Wild West to the railroad to Hollywood, Durango has its roots steeped in the past. In downtown Durango, you'll find historic hotels, award-winning dining, art galleries galore, and eclectic shopping. The Streator Hotel is the oldest continually operating hotel in the West. Even if you don't stay there, do poke your head in and have a drink at its saloon-style bar.

I stayed at Rochester Hotel, a B and B with a sister hotel, The Leland House, across the street. Within walking distance to downtown and the train, it made a perfect place to stay. The rooms are decorated in an Old West motif inspired by Western movies filmed in the Durango area. Their gourmet breakfast of fresh breads, blueberry pancakes, or cheese omelettes was great, with a sweet treat of homemade cookies and tea in the afternoon. Rochesterhotel.com.

What's also cool about Durango is that if you want to go rafting, the river flows through the heart of the city. Instead of having to drive miles away for river access, you'll find several rafting spots along the main streets.



SVEN BRUNSO

The Streator Hotel, the oldest continually operating hotel in the West, boasts a beautiful facade as well as a traditional saloon-style bar.

Ride the rails aboard the Durango-Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad. The historic Durango-Silverton Rail, which opened in 1882, is considered one of the world's top 10 train rides. On the three-and-a-half-hour ride to the old mining town of Silverton, this popular excursion passes by rushing waterfalls, river rapids, and mountainous caverns. I couldn't help but think about the 500 men who built this railroad and the prospectors who rode it in hopes of discovering gold.

Upon arrival in Silverton, visit the many restaurants and shops and pick up a few souvenirs in this town of yesteryear. For your return to Durango, you have the option of taking the train or a 90-minute bus ride back to town (suggested). Reservations are recommended. Durangotrain.com.

Chuckwagon Supper and Live Country Music Show. The Bar D Chuckwagon in Durango has been entertaining folks since the late '60s, so you know it's got to be good. Bring your appetite for a hearty BBQ supper with homemade biscuits, foil-wrapped baked potatoes, and beans. It's all served with metal plates and cups in a tribute to the Old West. The show is performed outdoors under the vast Colorado sky, and features the best of country and bluegrass music blended with a little comedy and lots of fun. Come early so you can explore the frontier town with its miniature train ride and cute shops. Don't forget to bring home some Rocky Mountain Fudge, a little taste of heaven. Bardchuckwagon.com.

Sky Ute Casino Resort – You can bet on it! This magnificent venue is more than just a relaxing resort. Try your luck at the extensive gaming floor with slots, poker, blackjack, craps, roulette, and bingo. The luxurious accommodations and five restaurants will tempt you, and there's a fascinating story to learn in the brand-new Cultural Center and Museum, which showcases the history of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe. The Sky Ute Casino is also the area's largest employer; their financial contribution to the community is unparalleled. Skyutecasino.com.

Filled with dramatic adventure, magnificent scenery, and a fascinating history, this is the Western town you've been dreaming about! To learn more about Durango, call 800-525-8855 or visit durango.org.

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