



Sunset over downtown Telluride. Southern Colorado offers a more rugged appeal than its neighbors to the north, Denver, Aspen and Vail. COURTESY TELLURIDE TOURISM

# Road-tripping

## THROUGH SOUTHERN COLORADO

**Stunning vistas, high-octane adventure, luxury and serenity off the beaten track**

By Lindsay Taub  
For The Tennessean

**T**ELLURIDE, Colo. — Colorado is no stranger to visitors seeking outdoor adventure, from skiing to mountain biking and beyond. But the Colorado Rockies' front range — think Denver, Aspen, Vail — is quite different from what you find in Colorado's southern sisters of Telluride, Ouray and Durango.

Equally beautiful, Southern Colorado has a down-home vibe that is both sophisticated and lacks pretension, where the "wild west" is still palpable. What you'll find are people who are all about the adventure, the natural serenity of the mountains, and getting in the most of it they can. You won't find the highbrow attitude that so often accompanies luxury.

But don't be fooled — there's plenty of luxury to be found (Southern Colorado is home to Ralph Lauren's 17,000-acre ranch and a secret favorite of celebrities such as Jerry Seinfeld, Tom Cruise and Oprah); it's just flavored a little differently, with a hint of rugged and a whole lot of rebel.

As the towns in this area are small, one of the best ways to experience it for the first time is to do a road trip. In winter, be sure to rent a four-wheel-drive vehicle, and pay attention to road closures, as with snow and ice come treacherous conditions.

It's no coincidence that people joke that the Million Dollar Highway begs for a million-dollar life insurance policy with steep cliffs to the side of the windy road and no guard rail. But it's a drive not-to-be-missed as it also offers million-dollar views and is a direct route between Ouray and Durango through the historic mining town of Silverton.

Road trips in this region are epic — there's but one stoplight in the 100 miles between Durango and Montrose.

Explore the area and see what towns suit your fancy, so when you return — and you will — you'll know where to make your home base, as each town has its own distinct personality. No matter the season, one thing doesn't change in this area: the breathtaking beauty.

**Telluride: Rocky Mountain High**  
Telluride has just 2,000 full-time residents, but visitors come in droves



Dunton Hot Springs Bathhouse at dawn. COURTESY DUNTON HOT SPRINGS

year-round, making it feel much larger, not to mention the influx of money in recent years that has brought in a cosmopolitan buzz. For example, the town has attracted culinary talent from Manhattan and music and film buffs who are bringing in upward of 20,000 people annually to attend what are arguably some of the best festivals in the country.

A ski resort since 1972, the season to visit Telluride depends entirely on the activities in which you want to partake. Naturally, the winter season is the busiest with skiers seeking perfect powder conditions and monumental runs with lift lines no longer than five minutes all season long.

There's a host of winter activities to keep even the most active people busy for a week from snowmobiling to dog sledding to snow biking. That's right: Local outfitter Paragon-BootDoctors specializes in outfitting Salsa Mukluk fat bikes with sturdy tires that can be tailored to various riding abilities. One of their rides offers a stop at the Telluride Brewing Co. for an après bike libation.

If you're lucky, you'll be in town when "Roudy," Telluride's quintessential cowboy, rides in and visits his favorite watering hole, The Sheridan Bar. Telluride is one of the few places where you can still ride a horse into the bar for a beer, with the original high and wide door frames still intact. A Telluride gem, Roudy runs a sledding operation during the winter, and horseback riding adventures in the summer.

While some choose to stay in the more modern Mountain Village facilities (an easy 10-minute gondola ride from town), downtown Telluride is where you find the charm and uniqueness of the locals.

If you're coming from sea level, be prepared to feel the altitude and allow time to adjust — in town you're at around 9,000 feet, and it only goes up from there. Aspirin, water, coconut water and proper rest will help ease the effects.

### Ouray: 'Switzerland of America'

Just an hour's drive from Telluride is the tiny box canyon of Ouray, home to just 900 full-time residents. With one main street, the history is long. Step into the Outlaw Restaurant on Main Street and be in the company of John Wayne's cowboy hat.

As legend has it, the actor was filming "True Grit" in the nearby town of Ridgway when he called the Outlaw for information. A woman named Addie Bonatti answered the phone, gave him some 'tude, and he had to come in to find out who this sassy broad was mixing drinks behind the bar. He ended up leaving his hat behind as a token of appreciation for her hospitality. Bonatti, 94, can still be found from time to time at the Outlaw, mixing drinks and giving 'tude!

Known as the "Switzerland of America," Ouray's roots, like most Southern Colorado towns, goes back to mining. It was a bustling town during its heyday, but it wasn't until two years ago that the town began a resurgence in popularity. Gold mining operations were reactivated, creating more than 100 jobs in the area.

Thus, it's beginning to attract more than the annual Jeep fanatics cruising the Million Dollar Highway and avid climbers, who visit year after year to climb the ice walls at Ouray Ice Park.

» COLORADO, 7E

### IF YOU GO TELLURIDE RESOURCES

- » **Element 52**, ski in/ski out luxury condos for rent, <http://element52.com>
- » **Hotel Madeline**, ski in/ski out hotel in Mountain Village, [www.hotelmadelinetelluride.com](http://www.hotelmadelinetelluride.com)
- » **There Bar**, owned and operated by Andrew Tyler, Nobu's former bar program director, this is the place to take "shot skis" (group shots served on a ski), [www.therebars.com](http://www.therebars.com)
- » **The Sheridan Bar and Sheridan Chop House**, for a casually elegant dinner, [www.newsheridan.com](http://www.newsheridan.com)
- » **Alpino Vino**, for an elegant five-course meal in a quaint chateau perched near the top of Gold Hill. At 12,000 feet, it is touted as the world's highest wine bar. Reservations required as you take a snow coach from the top of the gondola another 20 minutes up the mountain (only open in winter). <http://tellurideskiresort.com/TellSki/info/alpinovino.aspx>
- » **Allred's**, for an après-ski drink or bite, [www.allredsrestaurant.com](http://www.allredsrestaurant.com)
- » **The Butcher & Baker**, breakfast or lunch, [www.butcherandbakercafe.com](http://www.butcherandbakercafe.com)
- » **Telluride festivals and events**, [www.visittelluride.com](http://www.visittelluride.com)

### OURAY RESOURCES

- » **The China Clipper Inn**, a beautiful B&B in the heart of town, <http://ouraylodging-inns.com>
- » **The Beaumont Hotel**, historic hotel, [www.beaumontel.com](http://www.beaumontel.com)
- » **Ouray Ice Park**, <http://ourayicepark.com>
- » **San Juan Mountain Guides**, for various alpine adventures, <http://ourayclimbing.com>
- » **Ouray House Brewery**, for craft brews only and a sense of humor required at the hands of owner "Mr. Grumpy Pants" (this is his legal name, no joke), [www.ourayhouse.com](http://www.ourayhouse.com)
- » **The Outlaw**, 970-325-4366
- » **Weisbaden Hot Springs**, [www.wiesbadenhotsprings.com](http://www.wiesbadenhotsprings.com)
- » **Orvis Hot Springs**, [www.orvishotsprings.com](http://www.orvishotsprings.com)
- » **Colorado Boy Pub & Brewery**, in nearby Ridgway, is the best place to go for homemade pizza and craft beer, [www.coloradoboy.com](http://www.coloradoboy.com)
- » **Ouray events and information**, <http://ouraycolorado.com>

### DURANGO RESOURCES

- » **The Strater Hotel**, historic hotel with modern conveniences, hopping bar scene and convenient location, [www.strater.com](http://www.strater.com)
- » **Jean-Pierre The French Baker**, for authentic French pastries, <http://jeanpierrebakery.com>
- » **Ken and Sue's**, for lunch or dinner, [www.kenandsues.com](http://www.kenandsues.com)
- » **Oscar's Cafe**, for breakfast, <http://breakfastdurango.com>
- » **Steamworks Brewing Co.**, for a bite or microbrew, <http://steamworksbrewing.com>
- » **Historic Durango-Silverton Train**, <http://durangotrains.com>
- » **Purgatory Skiing**, [www.durangomountainresort.com](http://www.durangomountainresort.com)
- » **Durango events and information**, [www.durango.org](http://www.durango.org)

### DUNTON HOT SPRINGS

- » **Dunton Hot Springs and Cresto Ranch Tents**, [www.duntonhotsprings.com](http://www.duntonhotsprings.com)
- » **Sutcliffe Vineyards**, <http://sutcliffewines.com>

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