

Downtownner

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Escape to Estes

by Michelle Hurri
Photos by Michelle Hurri
& Danial Griggs

The mountain community of Estes Park has said goodbye to its cheesy t-shirt and moccasin past and upgraded its image from the restaurants to the river walk. It's still no Aspen, but it's only an hour and a half from Littleton to this slice of paradise. You are invited to head up to the cool mountains for a day of hiking, shopping, and eating.

Eat

Upon arriving in town, head up to Stanley Village to Notchtop Bakery and Café (459 East Wonderview) for breakfast. Don't let the generic sign fool you; step inside for the best bagels west of the Mississippi. Locals go for the lattes and smooth chai, then stay for a signature green chile breakfast burrito. For the more daring, the heartstopping burrito filled with scrambled eggs, bacon, and chorizo is a hit. Later in the day, enjoy a glass of wine or beer with tapas on the patio overlooking the continental divide.

Sweet Basilico (430 Prospect Village Drive) relocated in the spring to a site on the Big Thompson River, just behind the Fun City slide, but it's still the same attentive staff and mouthwatering food, and open for lunch and dinner. Dine outside on the patio with the river blocking out any other sounds. You probably can't get better alfredo sauce in Italy, and the hot rolls melt in your mouth. Combine a glass of wine with any of the "from the sea" entrees and you'll think you're on a beach near the ocean instead of in the Rocky Mountains. For a lighter appetite, the specialty pizzas start on a perfect thin crust and are topped with pesto or alfredo sauce. Reservations are recommended if you plan to go for dinner.

True international mountain food is available at Nepals (184 East Elkhorn), served at an eclectic buffet on the river walk with outdoor seating available. The décor at Thai Kitchen (401 South Saint Vrain Avenue) is an interesting mix of barbed wire and elephants, but the Gang Panang Phet (Thai Duck Panang Curry) leaves no doubt that the cooks know their genre.

Cheese (330 East Elkhorn Avenue) is the ideal place for an evening snack. The cozy cellar-like atmosphere draws you in, but it's the carefully selected wines from five continents and fresh cheese, pate, and meat platters that will make you stay.



Notchtop Bakery and Café



Cheese



Walk

Park at the new Estes Park Visitors Information Center (500 Big Thompson Avenue) and let the river walk take you away from the traffic and into the downtown shopping district. In the courtyard downtown, look for the bronze mountain lion, or let the river lull you as you relax on the stones beside the crystal clear water. The Town of Estes Park carefully tends the flowerbeds scattered throughout town, keeping it colorful throughout the year.

For an easy but picturesque walk, the paved bike path completes a 3.75-mile loop around Lake Estes. A new expansion up Fish Creek Road makes a nearly flat loop, completed either on foot or bike. Bike rentals are available at the Estes Park Mountain Shop (2050 Big Thompson Avenue) and Colorado Bicycling Adventures (184 East Elkhorn).

The new Lumpy Ridge trailhead on Devil's Gulch Road makes access to Gem Lake easy, even if the 1.7-mile trail is a bit of a challenge. On the way up to the tranquil mountain lake, keep an eye out for Paul Bunyan's boot, a perfect Kodak moment spot.





Shop

Okay, so you can still get t-shirts and moccasins in Estes Park, but now a splurge on specialty items is also within reach.

Gourmet coffee from Jackie's Java can be purchased at your local farmers market, or at Mocha Angelo's (133 West Elkhorn). Alongside the whimsical wine glasses and mugs are tastes of Colorado-made jams from the western slope, salsas, and hot sauces. It's the only place in town where you can purchase private label "Mocha Angelo" products.

Let the fragrant scent of candles envelop you at the door of Rustic Mountain Charm (135 East Elkhorn), then take a little Rocky Mountain interior back to the city. From candle sticks to lamps, there's a treasure in every nook. "Bliss in a Bottle" is an apt description for Wine (332 East Elkhorn Avenue). The knowledgeable staff will help you select from their array of delicious wines, and a taste is available for every budget and occasion.

The mom-and-daughter gallery of Dianka Designs (410 East Elkhorn Avenue) has unique jewelry made in their studio. Take home a piece of the Rocky Mountains with jewelry made from butterfly wings and aspen leaves.

Enjoy Estes on the weekend, when art and craft festivals held in Bond Park are the norm, or during the week, when the locals shopkeepers have time to chat. 5

