

MOUNTAIN MAGIC IN TELLURIDE

By Anne Z. Cooke, Tribune Media Services
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TELLURIDE, CO
-- Any time of year is a good time to stay at the Mountain Lodge in

Telluride, which is located in southwest Colorado's San Juan Range. Though my heart belongs to Longs Peak, in the Front Range, I'm willing to concede that the 14,000-thousand foot giants looming over Telluride, rocky hunks tracing a ragged barrier above the village, are surely Colorado's most spectacular.

You'll see them at their rosy best at twilight when you're standing on the pool patio at the Mountain Lodge, in Telluride's new ski town development, called Mountain Village, built on a sloping meadow above the Valley Floor. I was staying there because the annual jazz festival had starting and every hotel room in Telluride was booked.

I'd been looking forward to my status as a temporary village resident, hoping to get up and out early for a cafe breakfast, and expecting to stroll the streets after dinner, window-shopping and feeling the mountain breezes rustle the trees.

But the switch was fortuitous. Our one-bedroom condominium at the Mountain Lodge, one of 128 condos at this luxury complex, was compact but lavish, endowed with every feature a contemporary log-house must have. Handsome pine doors and woodwork set the tone, along with two stone fireplaces, leather sofa and chairs, a plump bed with a quilt and pillows and a dining area big enough to seat five.

The kitchen, fully equipped with gleaming granite counters, stove and microwave, a set of dishes, a blender, coffeemaker and cookware, put my own kitchen to shame. The condo even had a private balcony, French doors and two patio chairs, where I sat at first light to drink a cup of coffee and commune with the birds twittering in the aspen trees.

Two unfortunate design flaws might send a more demanding guest to the concierge. The toilet and tub, which were located together and crammed into an awkwardly small space, were barely big enough for one, much less two people. And the two wall-mounted TVs were installed far above our heads, too high for pleasant viewing.

But the condo had everything else, including a CD player and sound system, a large storage closet for coats and ski lockers on the main floor. The Main Lodge and registration desk, across the road, was an

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impressive log structure with 25-foot ceilings, open beams, a pool, a bar and lounge, a sundries shop, an exercise gym, a free coffee and tea bar, Wi-Fi connections within 150 feet and a parking garage.

To my surprise, the location, at 9,540 feet-elevation, about 800 feet above Telluride, was just as convenient as being in town, and much more rustic. Groves of mature aspen and spruce shaded the roofs and paved walkways, providing both quiet and seclusion. We were a three-minute walk from a small mall, with a large commercial grocery store, ski and snowboard rental shop and a post office, and from the base of one of the two free gondolas, which ferry riders down into Telluride and skiers to the base of the slopes.

Summer in Telluride is iconically Western, with brilliant sunny days and blue skies, and activities that run from hiking, horseback riding and fly fishing to half-day jeep rides to historic mining sites high in the upper canyon's farthest reaches. Cultural events include a half-dozen popular music and film festivals, and several art shows.

But Telluride is probably most identified with its first-class ski resort. Although two ski lifts and the gondola load and unload in town, it was obvious from the beginning that the only feasible way to enlarge the resort, adding more lifts and ski terrain, was to go up. In 1987, real estate developers moved to the upper meadow, laying out Mountain Village's network of serpentine streets. Today, dozens of trophy homes, and hundreds of condominium properties sprawl over 2,100 acres, close to but out of sight of historic Telluride.

If you're a skier, Mountain Village should certainly be your first choice for lodging. And the rest of the year? You decide.

REPORT CARD:

Biggest Surprise: Getting Wi-Fi Internet access on our front balcony.

Memorable Moment: Mountain views from the Main Lodge.

Best Buy: Off-season rates in the fall.

Primitive pleasure: Smelling the sagebrush after the rain.

Forgettable: The \$20-per-day charge for garage parking.

Don't Miss: Sunset on the pool patio at the Mountain Lodge.

STAYING THERE: The Mountain Lodge's room rates vary seasonally, from \$129 to \$599 per night. For other Mountain Village lodging call 888-728-8160. For Telluride Lodging and Lift Ticket packages, call 800-778-8581. Call Telluride Tourism at 888-355-8743, or visit www.telluridetourism.com.

GETTING THERE: Fly directly to the Telluride Regional Airport, the world's second highest commercial airport. Or fly into Montrose and rent a car, or take the Telluride Shuttle, 888-212-8294. It's \$95.40 round trip.

(Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty explore the world from Venice, Calif.)

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