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## 36 Hours in Crested Butte, Colo.



Michael Brands for The New York Times

**CRESTED BUTTE, COLO.** A coal-mining past enhances a ski center's cachet.

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**THE** former coal-mining hub of Crested Butte in the south-central Colorado Rockies began attracting skiers in 1961, when the ski area that wraps around the town's like-named peak opened. It remains one of the most historically authentic and captivating ski towns in the state. The small downtown, a National Historic District, oozes charm. Stroll down Elk Avenue, the main thoroughfare, and you're likely to spot residents cycling by, toting skis on their shoulders, and moms pulling toddlers in sleds on snow-packed sidewalks. No chain stores or overabundance of T-shirt shops mar the town's singular appeal. The Butte, as many refer to it, offers a combination of laidback lifestyle, abundant ski terrain at both resort and backcountry, and rugged beauty that perennially attracts some of [Colorado's](#) most soulful ski bums.



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## **Friday**

**4 p.m.**

### **1) A Walk Through Time**

Step into the past, literally, at the Crested Butte Mountain Heritage Museum (331 Elk Avenue, 970-349-1880), in a building from 1883 that housed a blacksmith shop, then a hardware store and a gas station. Portraits of early Butte residents — many of Croatian and Slovenian descent — line the back wall, revealing the often hardscrabble character of those who kept the town going before the fading mining industry was eclipsed by tourism and skiing. The

backroom (\$3 admission) includes exhibits on daily life in the mining era and the evolution of skiing, as well as the Mountain Biking Hall of Fame. Later, as you amble past the town's vibrant Victorian houses and false-facaded storefronts, stop in at Milky Way (310 Elk Avenue, 970-349-2107) for offbeat gifts and eclectic clothing for women and infants; Natural Butte (309 Sixth Street, 970-349-7775) for custom skin potions that counter the drying effects of the high altitude; and the Alpineer (419 Sixth Street, 970-349-5210), which is chock-a-block with ski wear and gear from hardcore brands like Marmot, Mountain Hardware and Cloudveil. At the Rijks Family Gallery (310 Second Street, 970-349-5289), you can view largescale tableaux (starting at \$1,600) by the local plein-air painter Shaun Horne, whom you might even spot at his easel somewhere in town; his smaller paintings run \$250 to \$450.

**8:15 p.m.**

### **2) Mining for Morsels**

Crested Butte's number of excellent restaurants is disproportionate to its modest population of about 1,600. One of the standard bearers is the petite Soupçon (127A Elk Avenue, 970-349-5448), nestled in a renovated miner's log cabin from the early 1900's. Scott Greene, the chef and owner,

frequently changes the French/American menu; you might start with [Hudson Valley](#) foie gras accompanied by butternut squash prepared three ways (\$17), followed by perfectly crisped duck with apricot glaze (\$26). Then while the snowflakes pile up outside, you'll be cozily tucking into a velvety crème brûlée (\$9). Reservations are a must for the two nightly seatings.

## **Saturday**

9 a.m.

### **3) Mountain Mettle**

Ride one of the free shuttle buses (colorfully decorated by local artists) the three miles to Mount Crested Butte, where the 1,125 acres and 121 trails of the Crested Butte ski area await. In 2004, new owners bought the resort and embarked on a multiyear, \$200 million capital improvement project that has breathed new life into the mountain and put Crested Butte back on the ski tourist radar. The double-black-diamond Extreme Limits, 548 acres of vertiginous drop-offs, burly rock outcroppings and wasp-waisted chutes, encompasses some of the mountain's best-known terrain; the U.S. Extreme Freeskiing Championships are held here every February. If your skiing skills are up to the challenge, take a guided tour of the area (\$30 a person, 970-349-2252). Or test your relationship with gravity on Rambo, said to be the steepest-cut ski run in North America, at up to 59 degrees in pitch. More than half of Crested Butte's groomed trails, however, are rated intermediate. If fast cruising is your style, there are buffed runs like International and Upper Keystone, off the Silver Queen Express lift. A one-day lift ticket is \$69 (800-544-8448, [www.skicb.com](http://www.skicb.com)).

3:30 p.m.

### **4) Après at the Avalanche**

At the slopeside Avalanche Bar & Grill (433 Emmons Road, 970-349-7195), pull up a stool to the fire pit and order a hot buttered rum (\$4). The locals don't mind that the décor hasn't seemed to change in 20 years; they're too busy recounting their epic runs in Spellbound Bowl.

4:30 p.m.

5) Nice Ice

You can find on-mountain dinners at many ski resorts; few, however, give you the opportunity to ski down afterward. The Last Tracks dinner (970-349-2211 for reservations) begins with a ride up the Red Lady Express lift and a ski (or snowshoe) to the outdoor Ice Bar (970-349-2275), which is indeed made of sculptured ice blocks. Order a Pomotini (\$13), a richly crimson martini made with fresh pomegranate juice, from the fur-clad barkeeper. Then head into the rustic wood A-frame for a five-course meal (\$69); entrées may include medallions of beef tenderloin in brandied shiitake mushroom sauce or Pacific salmon with a ginger demi-glacé. After dinner the real fun begins as you don headlamps to make your way down the mountain with the help of guides.

9 p.m.

6) Hip to Hippie

Lobar (303 Elk Avenue, 970-349-0480), a lounge/sushi restaurant that opened in November, adds a hipster element to Crested Butte's traditionally downscale bar scene (though its unprecedented \$100 cover on New Year's Eve turned heads). Sink into one of the black microsuede sectional sofas and sip a Chaitini (Bacardi, green chai tea and Godiva white chocolate liqueur, \$9) while you consider the pros and cons of progress in the Butte. For a study in contrasts, pop into Kochevar's (127 Elk Avenue, 970-349-6745), one of Crested Butte's oldest bars (Butch Cassidy allegedly left his gun here when scurrying out the back door to avoid capture) for a round of pool and a bottle of Budweiser (\$2.50). Close out your night at Eldo (215 Elk Avenue, 970-349-6125), an upstairs brew pub that also plays host to the sort of up-and-coming roots rock/funk/jam bands that mountain folk love to groove and twirl to (\$3 to \$10 cover).

## **Sunday**

8 a.m.

7) Latkes and Lattes

At Izzy's (on an alley off Elk Avenue, behind the post office, 970-349-5630), squeezed into a former storefront barely wider than a train car, load up on hearty breakfast latkes (eggs and cheese served on a potato latke, \$3.95) or a helping of saucer-size blueberry cornmeal pancakes (\$5.50). Accompany it with a jump-starting latte (\$3.25) made with coffee from Camp 4, a local coffee roaster and coffeehouse.

9 a.m.

## 8) The Backcountry Beckons

Head out with a guide from the Crested Butte Nordic Center (620 Second Street, 970-349-1707; [www.cbnordic.org](http://www.cbnordic.org)) for a half-day ski or snowshoe tour in the nearby Gunnison National Forest (\$50 a person, including rental equipment and transportation). You might kick and glide up Washington Gulch, once a gold-mining hotbed, or take a longer trip to visit the former silver mining town of Gothic (winter population: 5), with its stunning views of the high peaks that rise sentrylike over the valley. If you prefer to explore solo, the Nordic Center grooms 50 kilometers (31 miles) of winding trails just a snowball's throw from town (\$12 to \$20 for rental snowshoes or skis; \$14 for a trail pass). Relive childhood Olympic dreams at the center's free outdoor skating rink (skate rental, \$6) or experience the thrill of flying face first through the snow on the groomed sledding hill (sled rental, \$5).

## The Basics

Daily flights from [Denver](#), as well as nonstop flights from [Dallas](#) in winter, arrive at the regional airport about 30 miles from Crested Butte. Alpine Express (800-822-4844) offers shuttle service to and from the airport (\$53 round trip). The next closest airport with commercial flights is in Montrose, 96 miles away. Crested Butte is about a four-and-a-half-hour drive southwest of Denver.

The 19-room Elk Mountain Lodge (129 Gothic Avenue, 800-374-6521; [www.elkmountainlodge.net](http://www.elkmountainlodge.net)), two blocks off Elk Avenue, was built as a boarding house for miners in 1919. Today it's a relaxed, homey inn, with the

requisite reputed (but rarely sighted) ghost. Rooms range from \$120 to \$160, including breakfast.

The Crested Butte Club Boutique Inn & Spa (512 Second Street, 800-815-2582; [www.crestedbutteclub.com](http://www.crestedbutteclub.com)), a former bar and brothel, now has nine luxurious suites, each with jetted tubs and gas fireplaces. Room rates are \$130 to \$320. Lodging and lift packages are also available.

At the base of the ski area, the Grand Lodge Crested Butte is the resort's largest and only full-service hotel (6 Emmons Loop, 888-823-4446; [www.grandlodgecrestedbutte.com](http://www.grandlodgecrestedbutte.com)). Accommodations include hotel rooms and two-room suites with kitchenettes. Rooms are \$89 to \$259; suites are \$209 to \$319.