



## *Colorado ... Sans Skis*

From snowshoeing and dog sled rides to hot springs and hikes, there's more to the Rockies than slopes

BY MATT ALDERTON

“  
**O**h, cool. Do you ski?”  
That's what people in my adoptive city of Chicago invariably ask me when they find out I'm from Colorado. In response, I sheepishly confess that the last time I was on skis was in the »





**If you don't** want to ski, Colorado also offers horse-drawn sleigh rides and ice climbing.

first grade, when my parents left my cousin and me at ski school during a family vacation to Steamboat Springs. I don't know if it was the feeling of abandonment or the lack of feeling in my toes, but I spent the day in tears and haven't worn skis since.

"Is that why you moved?" people sometimes jest, pointing out the treason I've committed against my Rocky Mountain heritage. "Did they kick you out?"

Luxury travel consultant Lindsey Epperly can relate to my embarrassment. She and her parents visited Colorado from Georgia for the first time in 2011, excited to try skiing.

"My mom loves seeing snow, so we decided to plan a snow trip to see if we could ski — which apparently is a lot harder than it looks," says Epperly, owner of Atlanta-based Epperly Travel. "We were horrible and spent the

whole time falling down. Clearly, we were not meant to ski. So we decided to try some other activities, like snowmobiling."

The Epperlys — who now take annual "we-don't-ski" trips to popular destinations like Vail and Aspen — discovered what I've known since childhood: There's more to do on a winter trip to Colorado than ski.

"One of the big misnomers about Colorado is that the whole state is (skiing)," says Colorado

Tourism Office spokesperson Carly Holbrook.

"There's tons to do for people who don't want to ski, but still want to enjoy that snowy, wintry mountain environment."

Instead of skiing, try snowshoeing, suggests adventure travel blogger Brad Nierenberg of Denver, whose sister snowshoes during family trips to Vail while he skis and snowboards.

"It's a great workout and a lot of fun," says Nierenberg, who suggests Vail Mountain's Nature Discovery Center ([walkingmountains.org](http://walkingmountains.org)), which offers free snowshoeing tours of the surrounding forest. Winter trips start in December.

Although most winter sports involve going



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COLORADO TOURISM OFFICE

down mountains, at least one is designed for scaling them: ice climbing. You can try it at the Ouray Ice Park ([ourayicepark.com](http://ourayicepark.com)) in Ouray, which Holbrook calls the “Switzerland of America.” The season begins in mid- to late December.

For serene instead of sporty, stop along the Colorado Historic Hot Springs Loop ([colorado.com/hotspringsloop](http://colorado.com/hotspringsloop)), a 720-mile loop comprising 19 hot springs, including Iron Mountain Hot Springs ([ironmountainhotsprings.com](http://ironmountainhotsprings.com)) in Glenwood Springs, which offers 16 mineral hot springs soaking pools, as well as a freshwater family pool.

Finally, there’s always shopping. There are more than 200 shops on historic Main Street in Breckenridge, where there’s also a new 1-acre Arts District ([breckcreate.org](http://breckcreate.org)) featuring galleries, studios, workshops and theaters — plus art classes in everything from textiles and ceramics to metalwork and painting — for those who’d rather exercise mind than body.

Skis? You don’t need them. ●

## SKI-FREE FUN

Alternatively, you can traverse snow-capped mountains by:

### ► HORSEBACK

Winter horseback riding is a staple at **The Home Ranch** ([homeranch.com](http://homeranch.com)), a luxury dude ranch about 20 miles north of Steamboat Springs. Help feed the horses in the morning, then ride them down snow trails in the afternoon.

### ► ICE SPIKES

Runners should head to Estes Park, where the **Estes Park Running Club** ([facebook.com/estesparkrunningclub](http://facebook.com/estesparkrunningclub)) hosts a weekly 5K fun run departing 6 p.m. Tuesdays from The Stanley Hotel, made famous by *The Shining*. Or pick up ice spikes in town, then go running on the lower trails of **Rocky Mountain National Park** ([nps.gov/romo](http://nps.gov/romo)), suggests Terry Chiplin, founder of high-altitude athletic-training company Active at Altitude.



### ► DOG SLED

**Krabloonik Restaurant and Dog Sledding** ([krabloonik.com](http://krabloonik.com)) near Snowmass Village offers morning, afternoon and twilight dog sled rides with a guide and eight to 10 Alaskan huskies. At \$315 per adult and \$195 per child ages 3 to 9, excursions include an hour-long wilderness ride with a stop for warm drinks and soup around the campfire.

### ► FAT BIKE

At **Snow Mountain Ranch** ([snowmountainranch.org](http://snowmountainranch.org)), located just outside Winter Park, rent winterized bicycles with fat tires, chunky handlebars and deep treads. Explore more than 6 miles of groomed trails exclusively for fat bikes.

### ► INNER TUBE

**The Frisco Adventure Park** ([townoffrisco.com](http://townoffrisco.com)) in Frisco offers lift service to the top of its tubing hill, which has six 1,200-foot tubing lanes of varying terrain. The cost is \$25 for the first hour — \$30 from Dec. 20 to Jan. 3 — plus \$10 per additional tubing hour.