

CITY LIFE



48 HOURS

Denver: Old West Meets High Art

Seven top experiences in Colorado's cultured, outdoors-loving capital. By ADAM KLEINER

The votes are in, and the winner is clear: Denver rules as the cultural hub of the Rockies. Broadway-caliber theater draws applause at the sprawling, 11-venue Denver Performing Arts Complex. There's a thriving art scene now anchored by two internationally celebrated museums. In August, the city hosts the Democratic National Convention. Yet city officials still don cowboy hats for an annual longhorn cattle drive downtown. "We still are a cow town," says Tom Noel, professor of history at University of Colorado Denver. "A lot of us with a sense of history think that's a positive."

FAST FACTS Denver sits at roughly 5,280 feet above sea level—one mile high. The air is dry at this altitude, and the sun's rays are extra powerful. Two words: water, sunscreen. Denverites enjoy all four seasons and 300 sunny days a year, but spring nights pack a chill. Keep an extra layer of clothing handy.

The Buckhorn Exchange, dating from 1893, is part steak house, part celebration of taxidermy.



The Denver Art Museum's new Hamilton Building evokes the surrounding Rocky Mountains. Rockmount Ranch Wear (right) sells cowboy hats and its signature snap-button western shirt.

1 Admire the Art “Between New York and Los Angeles, there are a few places now where you can get a cosmopolitan art experience, and one is Denver,” says local artist Clark Richert. His art installation “Riemannian Tangencies” can be found outside the new glass-walled Museum of Contemporary Art Denver (www.mcartdenver.org). Inside, acclaimed British architect David Adjaye has created a light-filled, community-friendly space using recycled materials and wood from sustainable sources. Current exhibits include a video installation by Taiwanese artist Yu-Cheng Chou and photographs by South African Trevor Appleson. The MCA's formal cube contrasts with Daniel Libeskind's bold and spiky, titanium-covered addition to the Denver Art Museum (www.denverartmuseum.org), which opened in October 2006 and evokes the crags and peaks of the Rocky Mountains. The building houses African, Western American, and Oceanic art, as well as contemporary works.

2 Shop a Western Original Jack Weil, founder of Rockmount Ranch Wear, created the iconic snap-button western shirt. At 107 years old, he still greets visitors to his redbrick warehouse store. “It's been a romance,” he says of six decades in the city. Displays of vintage shirts and framed photos of Rockmount-clad celebs, including Elvis Presley, tell part of the story.

Racks of modern Rockmount shirts, cowboy hats, and other duds crowd the wooden floor (www.rockmount.com).

3 Learn About Black Coyboys Hollywood's stories of the Old West largely overlook a key demographic: one-third of the cowboys were African American. The Black American West Museum's (www.blackamericanwestmuseum.com) unparalleled



collection of photographs, frontier clothing, ranching tools, and other artifacts sets the record straight. “All these towns where you would never think of finding African Americans,” says executive director La Wanna Larson, “we were there.” Displays fill three floors of the historic home where Colorado's first African-American doctor, Justina Ford, formerly practiced.

4 Visit a Microbrewery Colorado leads the nation in beer production. Behemoth facilities for Anheuser-Busch and Coors help the stat, but beer geeks salute the thriving craft brewing scene. Breckenridge Brewery (www.breckbrew.com) and Great Divide Brewing Co. (www.greatdivide.com) bottle their strong, flavorful brews in downtown Denver. Walk between their tasting rooms—and to locals'

Denver Hotel Finder: Five Insider Picks

● **Brown Palace Hotel** The grand dame of Denver hotels has an original stained-glass ceiling that tops the gold onyx bedecked atrium lobby. Harp music accompanies afternoon tea, served daily from noon to 4 p.m. Tours of the 241-room property run Wednesdays and Saturdays. From \$375; www.brownpalace.com.

● **JW Marriott Denver** Shoppers especially delight in this upscale hotel's tony Cherry Creek North location. Its 196 rooms are



The Brown Palace Hotel opened in 1892.

walking distance from trendy clothing boutiques and art galleries. Dining options nearby include steaks at Elway's. From \$309; www.jwmarriottdenver.com.

● **Hotel Teatro** Gray marble accents the halls of this luxury boutique hotel, which neighbors the Denver Center for Performing Arts. Guests in all 110 rooms of the converted tramway building steep in deep tubs drawn by the bath butler. From \$269; www.hotelteatro.com.

● **Oxford Hotel** Wooden floors and iron railings in this lower-downtown fixture help sustain its Old West appeal. But flat screen TVs and 400 thread-count sheets in the 80 rooms are a far cry from 1891. The Cruise Room Bar off the lobby serves some of Denver's favorite martinis. From \$180; www.theoxfordhotel.com.

● **Capitol Hill Mansion Bed & Breakfast Inn** This charming, eight-room B&B offers residential neighborhood quiet a short walk from the State Capitol. Wake up to jalapeno smoked cheddar egg soufflé. From \$114; www.capitolhillmansion.com.



Benches outside Wynkoop Brewing Company tout their flagship amber-red beer.

beloved Wynkoop Brewing Company (www.wynkoop.com). “Ask what beer sells the most,” says Brewers Association president Charlie Papazian. “That way you get an idea of what locals identify as the highlight.” Rockies baseball ticketholders also can sample the Sandlot Brewery at Coors Field.

5 Pedal Cherry Creek Trail *Bicycling* magazine ranks Denver among the nation’s top cities for cycling. Join packs of local pedal pushers on the Cherry Creek Trail, popular for its central location and cruise-friendly, concrete surface. The trail starts at Confluence Park downtown, where the brown water of Cherry Creek flows into the South Platte River. The trail rolls along the tree-lined creek banks, 40 miles through the burbs, and past the boat-filled Cherry Creek Reservoir.

6 Bite into Buffalo Denver’s oldest restaurant, the Buckhorn Exchange (www.buckhorn.com) features buffalo prime rib and other western fare. Hunting trophies, antique rifles, and frontier paintings crowd the walls. “It’s western kitsch at its best,” says *Denver Post* food editor Kristen Browning-Blas.

7 Tap Toes at “The Pec” When top names in jazz play Denver, word is they take post-show beers at El Chapultepec. They also tend to sit for impromptu jams. Chet Baker, Frank Sinatra, and Wynton Marsalis have all played “The Pec.” Music starts nightly at 9 p.m. A long cherry-wood bar dominates the cramped front room. It’s cash only. There’s no cover charge and no misbehaving. “There are people here from all walks of life,” says owner Jerry Krantz.