

Mountains, slopes and stars define Aspen

Celebrities, skiers flock to the intimate Colorado town

Mountains, snow and stars comprise a Colorado town that offers prime skiing and more celebrities than a Las Vegas heavyweight title fight.

Aspen – also known as “Mini Hollywood” – is a sparsely populated Tinseltown blessed with luxurious resorts, magnificent scenery and premium shops, boutiques and restaurants.

The town’s reputation precedes itself. But its history piques curiosities. Just how did it become a second home for our country’s brightest stars?

The story dates nearly 90 years ago. The 1936 Olympics included alpine skiing as an event. The sport gained traction, becoming a trendy activity, particularly among the elite.

Businessmen and investors took notice and began building ski resorts in this charming town, knowing it would take the power of celebrities to attract common folks. Movie stars Gary Cooper, Claudette Colbert and Norma Shearer are said to be among the first to visit Aspen in the 1940s. Cooper originally made Aspen a second home, making him the town’s first iconic celebrity synonymous with it.

The migration of celebrities enhanced Aspen’s reputation. Visitors shouldn’t be shocked to run into



BREATHTAKING – Maroon Bells rises into the sky to create a wondrous setting in Aspen, Colorado. *Image: Mike & Valerie Mille. Adobe Stock.*

big-screen stars and singers. Leonardo DiCaprio, Will Smith, Elton John and Sting be among the many who consider it a second home.

Celebrities aside, Aspen also is considered one of the U.S.’s best skiing destinations and attracts more than 7 million tourists annually. Skiers and snowboarders seek thrills and entertainment and rarely are

disappointed.

Winter-sports enthusiasts find nirvana in Snowmass – Aspen’s largest and most popular ski area. It offers 150 miles of trails, multiple lifts and an intimate village. Intermediate skiers can take advantage of a host of trails created especially for them.

Novices flock to Buttermilk. Its more than 20 miles of trails are considered

an ideal location for beginners. The trails are groomed. And the runs are wide, giving skiers plenty of room to maneuver. Trails also accommodate intermediate and expert skiers, and its 22-foot superpipe is an X Games-inspired course.

Hikers and sightseers flock to Maroon Bells and Independence Pass. Maroon Bells rises more than 14,000 feet and boasts beautiful vistas and magnificent scenery. Its jagged peaks and multicolored slopes make it one of the most photographed sites in North America. Travelers have described Maroon Bells as “stunning,” “awe-inspiring” and “one of the loveliest places on Earth.”

Rent a vehicle at Independence Pass and absorb the 20-mile drive. The scenic road is one of the highest in North America and meanders along the Continental Divide at more than 12,000 feet. Paved hiking trails lead to a sightseeing platform, with jaw-dropping views of the Continental Divide.

Aspen’s variety of eateries and bars are meant to satisfy the tastes of an eclectic group of tourists. Browse through its exclusive shops and boutiques and keep your eyes open for a resident of Tinseltown.

Remain alert. You might only get one chance to shine.

Sun shines bright on Saint Lucia

Isle steals show among the Winward Islands

Saint Lucia is a crowning jewel – a gem that shines brightly, rising out of the Caribbean Sea. It's wedged between Martinique and St. Vincent and is dominated by twin volcano peaks of the Pitons.

Saint Lucia is a star among the Winward Islands. Beauty and nature know no boundaries. Guests are drawn by lush mountain highlands, banana plantations and white- and black-sand beaches.

Horseback riding, mountain biking or hiking the island's rugged terrain ranks high among its list of adventures. Cruise ships dock at Place Carenage or Porte Seraphine – both are within walking distance to capital city Castries. Visitors have gathered more than a century at the Castries Market and adjacent Craft Market. They come for the fresh fruits, spices and local crafts.

Saint Lucia's Marigot Bay is stunning. Author James Michener once described it as "the most beautiful bay in the Caribbean." It's a star – even on the big screen, serving as a setting for Sea-Star Island in the 1967 version of "Dr. Dolittle".

Discovered by Columbus in 1499, the island quickly became a precious charm for England and France, changing hands 14 times between the countries before the French ceded it to Great Britain in 1814.



WATER COLORS – Diamond Falls sparkles among a lush forest in Saint Lucia.

Image: Elena Skalovskaia. Adobe Stock.

Soufrière served as capital during the French colonial era. Shaded under the long shadow of Petit Piton, it's best known as the birthplace of Napoleon's Empress, Josephine.

Diamond Falls is less than a mile east of Soufrière and is considered to be one

of Saint Lucia's finest natural wonders. Its brilliant palette of colors – a rare mixture of minerals in the water – vibrantly paints the rock face. Guests spend the day walking the lush botanical garden or relaxing in the mineral baths and spa.

Learn about processing coconuts,

cocoa and coffee at Morne Coubaril, a working plantation. See an authentic mule-powered, sugar-cane mill. The gardens are comprised of a peaceful oasis of flowers and greenery. Legend has it that visitors grow taller in the rich volcanic soil. The estate's Hotwire Zipline flies over a canopy of banyan, coconut and mango trees and across a bamboo-shaded gorge.

Soufrière is French for sulfur and Saint Lucia is home to the Caribbean's only "drive-through volcano" at Sulphur Springs. A road leads up to the now-dormant caldera, which still bubbles with steam, sulfur, mud and boiling water. Travelers "take the cure" in one of the more than 20 sulfur and mineral baths.

The black-sand beach of Anse Chastanet is north of Soufrière. It rests under the shadow of the Pitons and is one of the island's premier diving sites. The reef is near the beach and shelters an astonishing variety of coral and marine life.

A natural bay connects with an 80-acre, manmade lagoon at Rodney Bay on Saint Lucia's west coast. Many of the island's best resorts call it home. Spend the afternoon surfing or relaxing at Reduit Beach – a stunning stretch of white sand that faces the Caribbean.

Saint Lucia glistens from all directions and never loses its luster.

Sleep deprivation doubles crash risk

AAA Foundation study reveals the dangers of drowsy driving

Not getting a good night's sleep can be a rude awakening for drivers.

Motorists who miss between one to two hours of the recommended seven hours of sleep in a 24-hour period nearly double their risk for a crash, according to research from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 35% of U.S. drivers sleep less than the recommended seven hours daily. Drowsy drivers are involved in more than one in five fatal crashes on U.S. roadways each year. AAA warns drivers that getting less than seven hours sleep may have deadly consequences.

"You cannot miss sleep and still expect to be able to safely function behind the wheel," said Dr. David Yang, executive director for the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. "Our new research shows that a driver who has slept for less than five hours has a crash risk comparable to someone driving drunk."

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety's report reveals that drivers missing 2-3 hours of sleep in a 24-hour period more than quadrupled their risk of a crash compared to drivers getting the recommended seven hours of sleep. This is the same crash risk the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration associates with driving over the legal limit for alcohol.

The AAA Foundation found that in a



TIRED ACT – Drivers getting fewer than seven hours of sleep are more likely to get into a car crash, according to a AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety survey.

Image: Maksym. Adobe Stock.

24-hour period, crash risk for sleep-deprived drivers increased steadily when compared to drivers who slept the recommended seven **hours more**. Statistics show:

- Six to seven hours of sleep: 1.3 times the crash risk.
- Five to six hours of sleep: 1.9 times the crash risk.
- Four to five hours of sleep: 4.3 times the crash risk.
- Less than four hours of sleep: 11.5

times the crash risk.

Nearly 100% of drivers told the AAA Foundation they view drowsy driving as unacceptable behavior, but nearly one in three admit that at least in the past month, they drove when they were so tired they had a hard time keeping their eyes open.

"Managing a healthy work-life balance can be difficult and far too often we sacrifice our sleep as a result," said Jake Nelson, director of Traffic Safety

Advocacy and Research for AAA. "Failing to maintain a healthy sleep schedule could mean putting yourself or others on the road at risk."

Symptoms of drowsy driving can include having trouble keeping eyes open, drifting from lanes and not remembering the last few miles. However, more than half of the drivers involved in fatigue-related crashes experienced no symptoms before falling asleep behind the wheel.

AAA urges drivers to not rely on their bodies to provide warning signs of fatigue and should instead prioritize getting plenty of sleep (at least seven hours) in their daily schedules. For longer trips, drivers should also:

- Travel at times when normally awake.
- Schedule a break every two hours or every 100 miles.
- Avoid heavy foods.
- Travel with an alert passenger and take turns driving.
- Avoid medications that cause drowsiness or other impairment.

The AAA Foundation report is based on the analysis of a representative sample of 7,234 drivers involved in 4,571 crashes. All data is from the NHTSA's National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey, which comprised a representative sample of police-reported crashes that involved at least one vehicle that was towed from the scene and resulted in emergency-medical services being dispatched to the scene.