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Weekend Trip Guide: Where to Stay, Eat, and Drink in Vail, Colorado

It's like visiting the Alps without needing your passport!

[Ashley Mateo](#) Dec 22, 2017



Welcome to MarieClaire.com's series on weekend travel—a smart girl's guide to making the most of those glorious two days off.

'Tis the season for ski weekends, but Vail should be at the top of your winter vacation bucket list even if you aren't a regular on the slopes. That's because this quintessential mountain town—perched high up in the Rockies, just two hours from Denver in Eagle County—is an outdoor playground for all kinds of cold-weather adventure.

Plus, it's easier to get to than ever. This winter, you can fly direct to Vail's Eagle County Regional Airport from major cities including Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Newark, Phoenix, Toronto, and Washington D.C.

Once you're there, it's easy to make the most of the Swiss-inspired ski village in just a few days. Here's how to maximize your time.

Where to Stay

I stayed at the [Sonnenalp Hotel](#), a family-friendly resort that still feels grown-up thanks to the Bavarian-inspired decor that skews more towards chic than kitsch. It's located right in Vail Village, which makes it an easy free shuttle ride from the slopes at Lionshead Village and Beaver Creek. But with an indoor/outdoor pool, three hot tubs, a gym, a 10,000-foot European spa, five restaurants, and generously sized rooms with alpine views, you'd be forgiven for not wanting to leave the property.

If your tastes lean more towards ski cabin than five-star hotel, there are tons of affordable Airbnb rentals, like this [dome home](#) or this [wooden townhome](#) with a built-in spa (both for under \$100 a night!).

What to Do

Of course there's skiing, the whole town is built around skiing. Vail is home to 5,200 acres of prime skiing ground, and there are 195 different trails in the area. But there's so much more to do!

In the winter, you can go fat tire biking, dog sledding, snowmobiling, and more on the mountain. My favorite activity was actually snowshoeing on Uneva Trail at Vail Pass. Unlike the hectic ski slopes, trekking through the snow here was like walking through a winter wonderland: quiet and pristine. Fun fact: The Sonnenalp is the only hotel with its own permit from the U.S. Forest Service to take guests snowshoeing directly from the property (otherwise, you can go through a specialized tour group, like [Vail Nordic School](#) or the [Nature Discovery Center](#)), and our three-mile hike took us snowdrifts and fir tree-lined paths up to a spectacular view of Vail Valley.

Make time to stop into the Colorado Ski & Snowboard Museum and Hall of Fame for a crash course in what makes Vail such a hot spot for winter sports. You'll learn about the evolution of skiing, plus get schooled in the 10th Mountain Division, a group of World War II ski troopers, which many spots in Vail are named after.

When you're not on the slopes, Vail is home to prime shopping with over 150 shops. There are winter-weather staples, including Burton's flagship store, Oakley, Patagonia, The North Face, and Marmot. Stop in classic Vail spots like Gorsuch's, a luxury retailer, jewelry shop The Golden Bear, and gear store Buzz's Boards. And pop by Fuzziwigs candy shop and the Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory for a mid-afternoon snack. (P.S. The cobblestone streets are heated, which is really just top-notch.)

Where to Eat

Vail is such an active destination, you're going to *earn* your food.

Take a break from skiing Vail Mountain or just take Gondola One up from the village to [The 10th Restaurant](#) for a meal with breathtaking views of Gore Range. The menu is a modern take on French, Swiss, Italian, and Rocky Mountain alpine cooking—I loved the Funghi Flatbread with roasted mushrooms, truffle cheese, parmesan, and arugula, and the Pot Pie, filled with roasted chicken, pheasant, and vegetables, was a huge hit with my friends.

Get your farm-to-table fix at Harvest, just twenty minutes from Vail in the neighboring town of Edwards. Their seasonal dishes are all locally sourced—the pumpkin soup, made with madras curry, almond milk, and dark chocolate shavings, was a standout starter, and the truffle mac 'n' cheese and pan-seared salmon were cooked to perfection.

Warm up at Bully Ranch, a Southwestern restaurant inside the Sonnenalp. They're famous for their Mudslides, and locals say no meal is complete without a side of candied bacon. But be warned: The portions are huge. Not even a day of downhill skiing can prepare your body for these mains, so I'd suggest splitting with a friend.

Helpful Tips

1. Vail is situated 8,000 feet above sea level, and Vail Mountain rises to 11,570 ft— that can make the elevation a little tough to get used to. Before you go HAM on the winter sports, make sure to give your body a minute to acclimated to the altitude, and keep drinking a ton of water throughout your stay to avoid headaches and fatigue.
2. If you're a skiing newb, shell out for a lesson at Vail Ski & Snowboard School in Lionshead Village. Vail Mountain has 63 acres of designated slow zones and was just named the ski area with the best overall safety program, making it perfect for adults who are more than a little scared to strap skis on for the first time—or the first time in awhile (ahem, that would be me). Ask for Mindy, who has the patience of a saint when it comes to schooling new skiers.
3. A ski weekend wouldn't be complete without après-ski, amiright? Warm up after a day out in the cold at [10th Mountain Whiskey & Spirits](#)' tasting room. You choose your whiskey (or spirits—they have vodka, bourbon, rye, cordial, and moonshine), then decide if you want it straight or infused. Our ski instructor also recommended [The Red Lion](#) for live music and beer, [Root & Flower](#) for wine, and [Altitude Bar & Grill](#) for sports-watching.