

REEL LIFE

Fishing guide Boots
Allen demonstrates
how to hook a trout in
the chilly Snake River





THREE PERFECT DAYS: JACKSON HOLE

In this former cattle ranching capital, the West is still as wild as ever, but that doesn't mean every meal needs to be prepared over a campfire

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAM POLCER

“WHY DON’T WYOMING DRIVERS USE turn signals?” quipped Wyoming Senate President Jim Anderson a while back. “Because it’s nobody’s darn business where they’re going.”

People in Wyoming, the least populous and 10th largest state in the Union, need their space. Always have. The independent streak Anderson referred to is what drove 19th-century trappers, ranchers and homesteaders through perilous mountain passes to settle Jackson Hole—the name given to a 48-mile-long valley that straddles the Snake River, south of Yellowstone National Park. That fierce determination to go it alone has defined the area ever since.

Ironically, it’s the elements that have kept this place isolated for so long—the rugged terrain, the remote location—that have made Jackson Hole such a draw for

outsiders. The area is, quite simply, an adventure wonderland waiting to be discovered. Think dogsled teams padding toward hidden hot springs; rivers full of trout wending past snowdrifts; the majestic Teton Range looming, well, majestically.

But there is an array of less rugged attractions, too. In the town of Jackson, a slew of swanky restaurants and retailers have set up shop in recent years, while the Teton Village ski base has also seen a proliferation of luxury accommodation, dining and shopping options, along with a significant upgrade of nearby skiing facilities.

Tying it all together is an authentic cowboy aesthetic and head-in-the-clouds topography—all of which gives visitors the feeling that they, like the pioneers before them, have happened across something special. Who wouldn’t want it all to themselves?



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**ROAM WITH
A VIEW**

The National
Elk Refuge, with
the Teton Range
in the distance

JACKSON HOLE BY THE NUMBERS

POPULATION OF JACKSON TOWNSHIP:
9,710

YEAR IT WAS NAMED AFTER FUR
TRAPPER DAVID E. JACKSON:
1829

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF ELK THAT
WINTER AT THE NATIONAL ELK REFUGE:
7,000

ELEVATION OF GRAND TETON,
IN FEET:
13,770

YEAR JACKSON ELECTED THE
COUNTRY'S FIRST ALL-FEMALE CITY
COUNCIL:
1920

ACRES OF IN-BOUNDS TERRAIN AT
JACKSON HOLE MOUNTAIN RESORT:
2,500

ACRES OF GATE-ACCESSIBLE
BACKCOUNTRY TERRAIN:
3,000+



SADDLE UP
Jeff Warburton,
who offers horse-
drawn sleigh rides
in the National
Elk Refuge

DAY ONE | In its early years, the recently spruced-up **Wort Hotel**, a downtown Jackson mainstay from the 1940s, might have been the kind of place a gambler would have splurged on after a good night at the tables. A moose head watches over the rustic lobby, while cowhide ottomans, wooden detailing and western art continue the hardy-traveler theme throughout the hotel.

After leaving your “Cowboy Suite” on the second floor, you descend the grand central staircase and are slightly disappointed to find that there aren’t saloon doors to push through when you exit the building. You’re pleased that nearly every sidewalk in Jackson is of the wood-plank variety, though.

It’s the kind of brisk, sunny morning that calls for a steaming mug of coffee, so you mosey down a block to the decidedly non-Western-sounding **Lotus Café**, where you find yourself wondering what the cowboys and hustlers of old would have made of the gluten-free menu options. You order

blueberry-orange-ginger sauce and organic maple syrup, and dig in, spying a mix of skiers, students and dog walkers strolling outside.

103

DAY ONE

Gluten-free griddlecakes; a dogsled ride to a hot spring; shopping in Jackson

104

DAY TWO

Four Seasons luxury; not-so-extreme skiing; an authentic Thai dinner

108

DAY THREE

Fly fishing the Snake; an elk hotspot; banjo pickin’ by a ski legend

eat a lunch prepared by your guides at a nearby picnic table: piping hot beef stew paired with hot chocolate and cider.

WARMING UP AND CHILLING OUT

The laid-back lobby at the Jackson Hole Four Seasons, which put the town on the luxury map



Back in town, it's time for some shopping. Predictably, Jackson has plenty of stores selling cowboy hats, elk antlers, wolf paintings and dreamcatchers, but among these you find a clutch of home goods and clothing shops that'd make any Brooklyn hipster feel at home. **Stio**, a sleek and functional outdoor apparel label from local designer Steve Sullivan, opened its minimalist flagship store here late last year. You pick up a few items of clothing that require five trademark symbols to fully describe their various weatherproofing capabilities, confident that you're now prepared for whatever mushing or whooshing might lie ahead.

Dinner is nearby at **The Kitchen**, whose interior looks like a bunker built by a postmodern Scandinavian designer and

whose menu involves such neo-traditional cuisine as lobster sliders and caribou sausage. A restaurateur and 18-year Jackson Hole resident named Gavin Fine runs the place, along with just about every other high-end eatery in town. After demolishing the hoisin-glazed spare ribs in short order, you make a mental note to see what else the guy's got to offer. He has a gift.

The sledding, dipping, shopping and gorging have taken it out of you, so you hop in your rental car and head toward your new digs in Teton Village: the **Four Seasons Resort and Residences Jackson Hole**. After glancing around the lobby, which strikes the perfect balance between glitzy and cozy, you nod to the cowboy hat-clad bellman, check in and hit the hay.

DAY TWO | When the Four Seasons opened here in 2003, it put Jackson Hole on the luxury-travel map and helped change the perception of the area from a rugged outpost to the kind of place where a person might decide to rent a helmet cam from an on-site ski concierge while his boots warmed in a locker. Which is precisely what you do before heading outside and breezing past powderhounds cramming themselves into the tram for first tracks.

It's not long before you arrive at **Terra Café**, a buzzing eatery on the ground floor of the LEED-certified Hotel Terra. The poached eggs with potato bread, roasted tomatoes, chopped bacon, chives and smoked paprika hollandaise require some recovery time, but they're worth it.



BOMBING THE BORDERS

Sidecountry skiing's secret origins

In the 1980s, the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort—or, specifically, the steep cliffs, narrow chutes and airy powder beyond its roped boundaries—was the stomping ground of a secret fraternity of high-flying ski daredevils known as the Jackson Hole Air Force. Membership patches were offered to those who pushed limits not for show but for the thrill—whether anyone was there to witness a gnarly run didn't matter. Their motto was "Swift, Silent, Deep," and these hotdogs are often cited as a major influence on today's extreme skiers.

Nowadays, of course, accessible out-of-bounds terrain ("sidecountry") is a mandatory feature of quality resorts around the globe, including at Jackson Hole, where skiers are given suggested entry points.

Hats and T-shirts emblazoned with the JHAF logo can be picked up at shops around town. The patches, meanwhile, are still extremely difficult to get your hands on.



MUSH HOUR

An eager team awaits instructions at Jackson Hole Iditarod Sled Dog Tours

BEST WESTERN

Clockwise from top left: Terra Café's Terra Eggs Blackstone; the Wort Hotel; fried Brussels sprouts at Il Villaggio Osteria; swinging at the Stagecoach Bar



You consider a sensible start to your day on the mountain—say, by heading to the intermediate area served by a new high-speed Casper quad chair, or some other part of the mountain appropriate for people without rubber knees. Instead, you're seduced by the prospect of the 10,927-foot Rendezvous Mountain—and are transported to a swirling, disorienting snowscape straight out of "Game of Thrones."

Deciding that no one needs to see what happens next, you find the off button on your helmet cam and prepare to make your way down by any means necessary. But then your skis find their edges and you begin carving the most graceful turns of your life, descending into Laramie Bowl on groomers so smooth you might as well be flying.

The rest of the day goes like this. From time to time, the mountain bares its teeth—presenting you with vertigo-inducing panoramas, narrow chutes and the occasional whiteout—but for the most part it cooperates and doesn't leave you in an unmanageable situation. Every now and then, the bizarre feeling that you might be the only person there adds to the drama, and you hoot and holler accordingly.

An epic morning has earned you a hearty lunch. You hand your skis to the valet and tromp over to **Il Villaggio Osteria**, another one of Fine's eateries, where you order wood-oven pizza with mascarpone, mushrooms, sausage, caramelized onion, Swiss chard and wild arugula, with a side



BAR LIFT
The Mangy Moose, Teton Village's most popular après hangout

order of fried Brussels sprouts topped with pomegranate. It is magnificent. Fortified, you head up to the edge of Jackson Hole's most infamous drop, Corbet's Couloir, and ... back away slowly. The aforementioned Casper quad chair it is.

You've been longing for a hot tub soak since you first hit the slopes, so by the time you join a small group of fellow lightweights in the outdoor tub back at the hotel, a barrel filled with hot water would have sufficed. But this is the Four Seasons. Heated locker for your bathrobe? Check. Bar serving local

microbrews? Of course. When light flakes start making a lazy descent, rendering the mountainside impossibly picturesque, you wonder for a moment if someone at the concierge desk pushed a button.

You've skipped the traditional après base party, but you more than make up for the lapse at dinner. What appears to be an all-snowboarder waitstaff lends an extremely convivial atmosphere to the small dining room at **Teton Thai**. Husband-and-wife owners Sam and Suchada Johnson swing by your table to make a

HOT SHOTS

Wyoming makes room on the shelf for one of its own

Wyoming has long held all of the key elements for a successful bourbon business: land that can grow corn, wheat and barley; a massive limestone aquifer providing fresh water; residents with an appreciation for handlebar mustaches.

While it may come as a surprise that it took until last year for the state's first locally produced bourbon to hit shelves, it's no surprise how quickly Wyoming Whiskey flew off them. Last winter, when the first batches went up for sale at a launch party with local distributors in attendance, it took just minutes for all 3,000 cases to be snatched up. More batches were released in February, June and October, and in December shipments will go to a few markets outside Wyoming.

The bourbon, which is distilled in Kirby, a town of 92 residents along the Bighorn River, is the work of three attorneys from Jackson who lured Steve Nally, a veteran Kentucky bourbon distiller, out of retirement. Their efforts appear to be paying off: At the launch, Mark Gillespie, an editor at *Whisky Magazine*, rated it 95 out of a possible 100. "It is one of the best bourbons I've ever tasted," he said.





PICKIN' WINNERS
Bill Briggs, right,
onstage at the
Stagecoach Bar

few recommendations, sparking a chain reaction from nearby diners: "Definitely try the pad gar pow duck" ... "Oh, and the pad woon sen" ... "Do you like short ribs?" ... "Oh, man, the taro root!"

Concerned that you may be about to explode, you head to après HQ and live music venue the **Mangy Moose**, where party-hearty local outfit Whiskey Mornin' are just starting their second set. After an indeterminate amount of time drinking Snake River Pale Ale and bragging about your day's exploits to everyone within

earshot, you notice that the band has broken into a rendition of Led Zeppelin's "Ramble On." You take that as a cue. Outside, the moonlight reflects off the slopes, lighting your way back to the hotel.

DAY THREE | Though it's a few miles down the road in a tiny community called Wilson, your James Beard Award-winning breakfast destination isn't hard to find. "Just look for the 20-foot trout on the roof," your concierge tells you. Giant fish notwithstanding, **Nora's Fish Creek Inn**

is a no-nonsense cabin serving up trout with eggs or corned beef hash to devoted locals. You opt for the "world famous" huevos rancheros, which barely fit on your plate—and eat the lot.

The coziness of the joint—its stone fireplace and bottomless cups of coffee—makes you consider staying awhile, but it's time to hit the road back to Jackson, where you've booked a horse-drawn sleigh ride into the 24,700-acre **National Elk Refuge**, home to the largest elk herd on the planet. As you bounce across the

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

THE INSIDE SCOOP FROM THOSE IN THE KNOW ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETER JAMES FIELD



Tommy Moe,

SKI GUIDE AND OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST

"Start your day on Apres Vous, which has some really nice, long cruiser runs with really fun terrain—a little bit of everything. Plus there's a high-speed quad, so you can get a couple of runs in before everybody else."



Tenley Thompson

FOUR SEASONS RESORT BIOLOGIST

"About 1.5 miles into the National Elk Refuge there's a hill covered in bighorn sheep. In winter they're in their breeding season, so they're bashing heads. They might even give you a 'Jackson car wash'—licking the salt from the road that's on your car."



Gavin Fine

OWNER, FINE DINING RESTAURANT GROUP

"Go to Couloir, on the mountain, for lunch. It's the same menu as dinner but costs less. They have rotating local beers on tap: Snake River, Roadhouse, Teton ... and if you drink too much you can always head back down on the gondola."



DAY ONE

Wort Hotel 50 N. Glenwood St., Jackson; Tel. 307-733-2190

Lotus Café 145 N. Glenwood St., Jackson; Tel. 307-734-0882

Jackson Hole Iditarod Sled Dog Tours 11 Granite Creek Rd., Jackson; Tel. 307-733-7388

Stio Mountain Studio 10 E. Broadway, Jackson; Tel. 307-201-1890

The Kitchen 155 N. Glenwood St., Jackson; Tel. 307-734-1633

DAY TWO

Four Seasons Resort and Residences Jackson Hole 7680 Granite Loop Rd., Teton Village; Tel. 307-732-5000

Terra Café 3335 W. Village Dr., Teton Village; Tel. 307-739-4000

Il Villaggio Osteria 3335 W. Village Dr., Teton Village; Tel. 307-739-4100

Teton Thai 7342 Granite Loop Rd., Teton Village; Tel. 307-733-0022

Mangy Moose 3295 Village Dr., Teton Village; Tel. 307-733-4913

DAY THREE

Nora's Fish Creek Inn 5600 Hwy. 22, Wilson; Tel. 307-733-8288

National Elk Refuge Jackson Hole and Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center, 532 N. Cache St., Jackson; Tel. 307-733-0277

Snake River Angler 185 Center St., Jackson; Tel. 307-733-3699

Q Roadhouse and Brewing Co. 2550 Moose Wilson Rd., Wilson; Tel. 307-739-0700

Stagecoach Bar 5755 Wyoming 22, Wilson; Tel. 307-733-4407



GOING TO EXTREMES

The Granite Hot Springs; one of Jackson Hole's high-speed chair lifts

plain toward thousands of grazing, dozing and braying animals, you spot three regal bucks strolling away from the group, the Tetons rising behind them. It makes for one heckuva panorama.

Lunch is at the Wort Hotel's **Silver Dollar Bar & Grill**, named for the 2,000 or so 1921 Morgan Silver Dollars inlaid on the bar. A guy on the sleigh ride earlier had recommended you try the hickory-smoked pheasant soup, so you do, and spend the next few minutes contemplating how you might go about finding him to express your gratitude. It's that good.

A short while later, you're standing waist-deep with **Snake River Angler** guide Boots Allen, holding a fly rod. After a short introduction, you're casting like, well, someone who just learned to cast. The Snake River is home to the most robust population of native cutthroat trout (so named for the linear red, pink and orange marks under the fish's chin) in the Rocky

Mountain West; the waters are teeming with them—except, apparently, the spot where you're standing. But then the line goes taut and you reel in an intricately spotted specimen. Allen's tallied four, but no matter. Success!

Feeling rugged and outdoorsy, you head to the town of Wilson, where you celebrate your first fly-fishing expedition with a glass of Veil of Composure pale ale at **Q Roadhouse** (another Fine-owned eatery). You're powerfully hungry after wading through that river all afternoon, so when the buffalo burger you order from the eclectic, Southern-influenced menu arrives, it doesn't stand a chance.

Next it's off to the **Stagecoach Bar**, where country and bluegrass outfit The Stagecoach Band is playing for appreciative two-steppers. The bartender points out the banjo player, whose leg appears to be permanently bent. The guy's name is Bill Briggs. "He was born without a hip joint,"

you are told. "His hip is fused into that position." As local lore has it, Briggs was the first person to ski from the top of the Grand Teton. "They say he's the father of extreme skiing." Only in Wyoming.

There's time for one more back at the hotel, so you belly up at the **Handle Bar**, a new après pub facing Rendezvous Peak. Though you're tempted by another array of local microbrews, you decide to give your own defiant attitude a whirl and order a dainty cachaça fizz from the bar's inventive cocktail list. *So what if I'm drinking a frothy cocktail*, you think as a sugary mustache begins to form on your upper lip. *What I drink is nobody's business but my own.*

Hemispheres photo editor **SAM POLCER** would be much more excited to go to work every day if there were a team of Alaskan sled dogs to take him there.

BOARDING PASS ➔ When you're ready to try for your own Jackson Hole Air Force patch at the place *Ski* magazine just voted #1 Overall Resort, you can grab a flight to Jackson Hole year-round through our hub in Denver, and also seasonally through our hubs in New York/Newark, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston and Chicago. Through the month of November, you have a shot at a unique experience when you bid on two great Jackson Hole auctions on mileageplusawards.com/auctions. **For detailed schedule information or to book your flight, go to united.com.**