

Boulder's Winter Bug

By Laurel Kallenbach

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Pearl Street Mall

If you crave outdoor adventure, cultural attractions and a dose of weirdness, a trip to Boulder is just what the doctor ordered.

As you crest Davidson Mesa driving west on Highway 36 toward Boulder, the snow-custed, iconic Flatirons rock formations glisten in the sun. Massive mountains and 40,000 acres of open space encircle the city's low-rise skyline, which is punctuated by the University of Colorado's Italian red-tile roofs. Presiding over Boulder from a hilltop is a pink sandstone "palace"—the National Center for Atmospheric Research's Mesa Lab.

Italy? Pink palace? Is this a hallucination?

Yep, you've got the 72-hour Boulder bug. The symptoms: delirious enjoyment of the town's almost surreal beauty; the itch to play outdoors, snow or shine; and a sense of fitting in with tofu-eating yogis, bohemian artists, aging hippies and lycra-clad cyclists.

There's only one remedy—relax and have fun. Luckily, you can pick and choose between Boulder's three alter-egos: its outdoor thrills, its cultural treasures and its funky local color.

Athletic, outdoorsy Boulder

Known for its high concentration of avid athletes—professional or wannabes—Boulder was once dubbed "The Town That Can't Sit Still" by the *New York Times*. The best way to experience this outdoor mecca is to put on your ski boots or climbing shoes and join Boulderites who train in this high-altitude nirvana.

Chautauqua Park, home to the Flatirons, is the quintessential spot for cross-country skiing or snowshoeing after a big storm. Many days you can winter

hike (assisted by a pair of Yaktrax, traction devices strapped to your boots). At Chautauqua's Ranger Cottage, choose one of several easy to moderate trails, including the Mesa Trail, which winds south along the base of the Flatirons and opens to glorious panoramas of peaks and plains.

You can also join free, naturalist-guided hikes. Winter programs include night-sky telescope treks and kid-friendly wildlife walks. (303-441-3440, www.naturehikes.org).

On one of Boulder's famously clear, warm days, why not try rock climbing? World-class local destinations include the First Flatiron and, just south of the city, Eldorado Canyon's cliffs. The Colorado Mountain School leads expeditions—including ice climbing on Boulder Canyon's frozen waterfalls—for beginners or experienced climbers. On bitter days, harness up at Boulder Rock Club to scale the gym's rock handholds (800-836-4008, www.totalclimbing.com). And for skiing and snowboarding, laid-back Eldora Mountain Resort is just 30 minutes uphill from downtown.

Artsy, cultural Boulder

Boulder champions the visual and performing arts, but you needn't pack a cocktail dress. In true Boulder fashion, anything from jeans to tuxedos is welcome at a gallery opening or a night at the Boulder Philharmonic.

The Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art (BMoCA) adds a modern twist to its setting in a historic warehouse at 1750 13th Street. Its galleries display the creative genius of Colorado and national artists. Thought-provoking, entertaining and sometimes educational exhibits change every few months. (303-443-2122, www.bmoca.org).

Next door to BMoCA is the Boulder Dushanbe Teahouse, where you can savor a pot of hot tea, cucumber sandwiches and pastries as you bask in the ornately carved and

Green scene

Did you know the Boulder Creek bike/pedestrian path is snowplowed before the streets—and the free Wi-Fi on Pearl Street is solar-powered?

painted décor. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are also served. The Teahouse was handcrafted by artists in Boulder's sister city, Dushanbe, in Tajikistan, a country north of Afghanistan (303-442-4993, www.boulderteahouse.com).

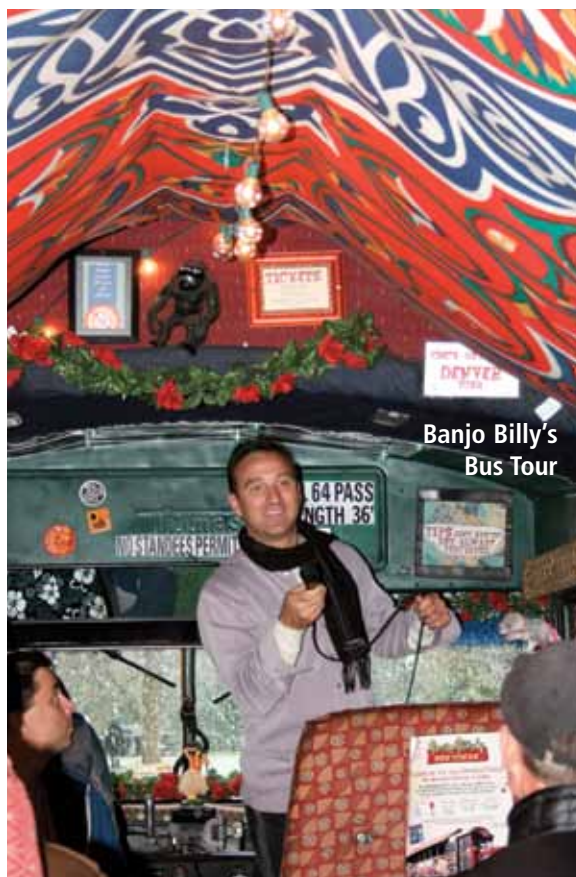
Looking for celebrities on red carpets? The Boulder International Film Festival (BIFF), February 11–14, 2010,

screens cutting-edge indie films at the landmark art-deco Boulder Theater. Voted one of the "25 Coolest Film Festivals" by *MovieMaker* magazine, BIFF focuses on hip, original flicks from Colorado and around the world. "We're fresh, young—just six years old—and we involve the community," says cofounder Kathy Beeck. "BIFF attendees are passionate about local and global issues, and our films often inspire people to action." (303-449-2283, www.biff1.com).

Boulder's local color: fun and funky

Scratch below its cultural surface, and you'll discover Boulder's wacky roots. For the real (and historical) dirt, hop on Banjo Billy's Bus Tour for a 90-minute, side-splitting ride in an old school bus turned hillbilly shack. Owner John Georgis (aka Banjo Billy) tells tales of history, ghosts or "gruesome crime" as guests bounce on old sofas or saddles under a psychedelic canopy. "On the left, a statue of Chief Niwot. On the right ... well, there *is* no right in Boulder," quips Georgis, referring to the town's political leanings. (Winter tours: Saturdays at 2 p.m. and by request. 720-938-8885, www.banjobilly.com).

For a glimpse of how hippies shaped Boulder, visit the Celestial Seasonings tea company. During the free factory tour—which is pleasingly pungent—you'll hear how long-bearded Mo Siegel and friends handpicked fresh herbs in 1968. Now the company makes 10 million teabags a day, including flavors such as Sleepytime and Red Zinger. You can't imagine



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Dushanbe Teahouse

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Hot eats

Boulder's sophisticated restaurant scene emphasizes sustainable dining that reflects the farm-to-table food movement. Here are just a few to try.

- **Chautauqua Dining Hall:** After snowshoeing in Chautauqua Park, warm up with cocoa or a hot meal at the historic dining hall in a mountain setting. 303-440-3776, www.dininghall.net.
- **Jill's:** Located in the St. Julien Hotel & Spa, this delightful modern bistro highlights sophisticated, locally inspired American cuisine. 720-406-7399, www.jillsdining.com.
- **Lucile's:** Sit on the enclosed porch of this downtown Creole café and watch the snow while you enjoy New Orleans beignets, chicory coffee and omelettes. Many ingredients come from the restaurant's own organic farm. 303-442-4743, www.luciles.com.
- **Mountain Sun and Southern Sun Pubs:** Check the beer board for winter ale specials at these microbreweries—one on Pearl Street, the other in south Boulder. Hearty soups and sandwiches satisfy an après ski appetite. While you're there, challenge a local to a game of checkers. www.mountainsunpub.com.
- **Salt:** Request a fire bar seat in this eco-renovated historic building at Pearl and Eleventh Street—and order a wood-fired entrée served in a clay *cazuela* dish, which keeps food simmering hot. Chef Bradford Heap focuses on seasonal, sustainable food influenced by Tuscan and French traditions. 303-444-7258, www.saltthebistro.com.
- **The Kitchen:** Committed to the environment, this wind-powered community bistro serves up a fresh, organic, innovative menu. Read about local farmers and ranchers on the chalkboard. 303-544-5973, www.thekitchencafe.com.

mint's eye-watering strength until you've braved the Mint Room. (303-581-1202, www.celestialseasonings.com).

To really soak up Boulder's color, stroll the Pearl Street Mall, a four-block pedestrian-only area flanked by another 10 blocks at its west and east ends. All of historic downtown is lined with shops, restaurants and art galleries. On warmer days, you'll encounter didgeridoo players, magicians, jugglers and Bongo the Balloon Man, who's twisted colorful inflatables into funny hats or animals in front of The Peppercorn (a kitchen/home furnishings shop) for 25 years. "I'm on my second generation of clients," says the red-bearded, ponytailed Bongo, presenting a toddler with a purple puppy.

The Pearl Street Mall embodies Boulder's diversity, mixing brew pubs with sophisticated bistros, and high-end boutiques with incense-filled Tibetan stores. At Ninth and Pearl, the Tesla showroom sells an electric sports car for \$109,000. Across the street at Trident Booksellers and Café, \$3.50 will get you a frothy latte and a window table next to bohemian writers who come to sip and scribble. At the Prana store (Broadway and Pearl) you can purchase a pair of yoga pants for \$75 and then take a yoga class.

There's really only one word of caution for visitors: Once Boulder is in your blood, recurring symptoms may compel you to return—again and again. ■

Freelance writer Laurel Kallenbach was bitten by the Boulder bug 20 years ago and has lived there ever since.



Chautauqua Park

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