



*A low and lovely* African melody weaves its way through heaps of greens and carefully stacked tomatoes at the Boulder County Farmers' Market, making adults sway and children twirl. The sheer abundance of fresh, locally grown produce, flowers and artisan foods here catches me by surprise. However, the melody of a live Zimbabwean marimba band resonating amid chatter between farmers and their devoted locavore fans does not. I have come to expect such high-caliber and often exotic performances when I'm in town.

The people of Boulder, Colorado, have nurtured a rich array of cultural offerings, food and outdoor amusements for 151 years in this cozy refuge at the base of the Rocky Mountains. The town, which is about 30 miles northwest of Denver, began as a supply town for gold-mining settlements, but by the turn of the 20th century, Boulder's natural loveliness had already started attracting tourists. The community even sold shares to construct the luxurious Hotel Boulderado downtown among late-Victorian-era cottages lining leafy streets named "Pearl," "Maple" and "Walnut" at the foot of red-rock mountains accented by pine forests.

The University of Colorado at Boulder, the state's flagship uni-

versity, was founded in 1877 and boasts outstanding academics, four Nobel laureates, a strong sports program and loyal alumni. Last fall more than 30,000 students pursued their academic careers on the scenic mountain campus.

Since 1898, people have also been drawn to the area to savor the clean air and unparalleled cultural and educational experiences at the Colorado Chautauqua, a park and National Historic Landmark that was created by Boulder civic leaders and Texas educators as a summer retreat. Concerts and silent films still draw sold-out crowds, and enjoying Sunday brunch on the Chautauqua Dining Hall porch and hiking the park's looped trails are Boulder traditions. Having been focused on healthful living, Boulder's early residents even managed to pipe in pure, cold water directly from the Arapaho Glacier to ceramic drinking fountains all over town—you can sip from the last remaining one inside the lobby of the Hotel Boulderado.

Boulder's spirit of cultural and environmental enrichment has remained strong throughout the years. In 1967, Boulder became America's first city to tax itself for the acquisition and management of open space. More than 45,000 acres have since been preserved





with copious public hiking and biking trails that wind along riparian greenways, through a greenbelt surrounding the city and up into the iconic Flatiron Mountains—craggy background peaks with flat faces reminiscent of the antique irons for which they are named. Preserving open space also curtailed sprawl and inspired an adventure-inclined population to climb, hike and mountain bike. Boulder’s 1,400-foot Third Flatiron has been climbed hands-free and even on roller skates.

Ultimately, the utter beauty of this charming town beneath the dramatic Flatirons delights the senses and encourages visitors to savor the good life.

At the Boulder County Farmers’ Market on 13th Street, which runs from April to November, families sample organic goodies and load up on groceries. Chefs from acclaimed farm-to-table restaurants ponder their week’s menus. Spontaneous picnics take shape for locals, university students on the fly and tourists passing through. Many shoppers revel in the sport of sizing up Rocky Mountain–raised crawfish (aka Cowboy Crawfish), handcrafted goat cheeses, cabbage-size peonies, indigenous mushrooms and every imaginable leafy green.

I bite into an “Amazing Corn Tamale” from one of a handful of prepared-food stands and happily report to my friend that it is, indeed, amazing. In fact, almost everything I encounter in this hip little city strikes me that way. The town is even brimming with eco-friendly ideas: an initiative for Zero Waste by 2025, which led to a model curbside recycling program; county vehicles running on biodiesel; and the nation’s first mandatory residential green building code.

After a stop at University Bicycles, Boulder’s oldest bike shop, on the corner of Ninth and Pearl streets, I’m off with a cruiser and a crisp new map. Boulder’s estimated bicycle count is 93,000, equal to the city’s population. The bike gurus could have sent me on single-track mountain-bike trails or a 100-mile road ride directly from their door, but I opt for a cruise along the meandering seven-mile Boulder Creek Path. More than 300 miles of bike paths and lanes traverse the city, which means one can easily pedal almost anywhere. Cruiser bikes are so ingrained in Boulder culture that a crowd of spontaneous cheer-spreading bicyclers takes to the streets for Happy Thursday rides on most Thursday evenings in spring and summer. (Anyone is welcome, so feel free to join in if you see them.)

I follow the creek with its cold mountain water, big boulders and patches of white water, where in summer swimmers and tubers play in the current. I pass several city parks, a kayak course, the University of Colorado and an underwater trout observatory built into a dip in the trail behind the Millennium Harvest House Boulder hotel. At the east end of the trail, I take a detour to the Redstone Meadery, where owner David Myers offers tours, and tastings of his award-winning honey wine. The mantra here is “Good enough for Zeus, good enough for you,” and sipping a style of fermented beverage



LARRY HARWOOD / UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT BOULDER

age that predates wine made from grapes convinces me I have a lot to learn about mead and all its subtle flavors. I taste scrumptious Nectars that sparkle with black raspberries and Mountain Honey Wines that evoke juniper, vanilla and plum. I am instantly a fan.

I enjoy a sandwich and rest by the creek before riding back downtown through Scott Carpenter Park to the Boulder Dushanbe Teahouse. Eclectic tea shops and coffeehouses thrive in Boulder’s nooks and crannies. But this experience is exceptional.

The traditional hand-carved-wood and ceramic-tile teahouse, which was a gift from Boulder’s sister city in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, is lavishly decorated with hand-painted scenes. It arrived in 200 crates and Tajik artists reassembled it here with the help of a local architect. Boulder returned the favor with a solar-powered Internet cafe that opened late last year in the capital city. I take respite under the elegant carved ceiling and settle in with one of more than 100 varieties of tea.

It’s worth noting that Boulder hosts another illustrious tea stop: Celestial Seasonings, a homegrown tea company that started in the 1960s by offering brews from wild herbs gathered in Rocky Mountain meadows. The company is global now, but all the teas are still blended in Boulder. Take the free factory tour, where

you can enjoy the aromas of dried hibiscus, nutmeg and peppermint—then linger and sample some of the blends.

Refreshed from my stop at the Dushanbe Teahouse, I go next door

◀ Hikers explore a stunning high-country trail in Rocky Mountain National Park. ▲ The Flatirons provide a dramatic backdrop for the University of Colorado at Boulder campus. ▼ The Boulder County Farmers’ Market is a popular place to find fresh flowers and produce from April through November.



PAUL BOUSQUET, COURTESY BOULDER CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

to the recently renovated Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, or BMOCA. It's free on Saturdays, and the rotating visual-art exhibits always intrigue me. BMOCA and Boulder Outdoor Cinema also partner for open-air films on Saturdays in summer, where all you need is a lawn chair. Feature films start when the sun goes down, and you can relax with a \$2 bag of popcorn, live music and award-winning short films before the show.

Back along Pearl Street, cozy historical buildings brim with enticing specialty shops and galleries while a parade of beautiful people along the streets emanate the glow of après yoga or a morning on the trails. If you too want to delve into Boulder's vibrant yoga scene, choose from nearly a dozen drop-in yoga studios within walking distance of Pearl Street. Two studios I heartily recommend are om time on Broadway and Richard Freeman's The Yoga Workshop on 21st Street.

**St Julien Hotel & Spa's** 201 spacious rooms feature oversize bathrooms with slate tiles and glass showers, lavish linens, complimentary high-speed Internet access, terraces and spectacular views of the Flatirons. Guests also enjoy a 10,000-square-foot spa, an infinity pool, fresh cuisine at Jill's Restaurant, and happy hour with live music at the T-Zero Martini Bar. Cruiser bikes are available for guests to borrow on a first come-first served basis. Double rooms start at \$229/night; 900 Walnut St.; 877-303-0900; www.stjulien.com.

**Hotel Boulderado**, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, turns 101 this year. Its exquisite lobby has a stained-glass ceiling and a five-story cantilevered cherrywood staircase. The 160 guest rooms and suites are decorated in period Victorian elegance. Q's Restaurant is in the hotel's original dining room, and the casual, student-friendly Catacombs Bar is downstairs. Be sure to ask the front desk for a history tour of the hotel—including a ride in the original 1908 Otis elevator. Double rooms start at \$234/night; 2115 13th St.; 800-433-4344; www.boulderado.com.

**Briar Rose Bed and Breakfast** has 10 rooms with amenities such as hardwood floors, skylights, writing desks, sofa sleepers and fireplaces. The eco hotel offers a full organic breakfast on the sunporch, a garden retreat and a meditation room. Double rooms start at \$164/night; 2151 Arapahoe Ave.; 888-786-8440; www.briarrosebb.com.

I also recommend perusing the independently owned Boulder Book Store, where famous authors regularly stop in for a signing and a chat. A few more top suggestions: Have a caffe latte among the intellectual set at Trident Café. Sample divine cupcakes at Tee & Cakes on 14th Street. (Don't miss the "Chocolate Bacon," with maple cake, chocolate ganache and applewood-smoked bacon.) Explore the 32-year-old Peppercorn kitchen shop's abundant gadgets, which make gourmets swoon. Stock up on extraordinary handmade papers and letterpress cards at Two Hands Paperie. And just try to walk away from Savory Spice Shop on Broadway without some exotic ingredients.

Boulder is also where the popular television character Mork from Ork settled (Mork and Mindy's house was at 1619 Pine St.), which is why you shouldn't be surprised by the wacky array of street performers who are at home along the Pearl Street Mall—a four-block stretch of Pearl Street, which is specially designed for pedestrians, with playgrounds, fountains, benches, flower beds and trees between two sides lined with retail shops. Within a single block I enjoy a bluegrass band, a pair of deep-throated didgeridoo players, the drumbeat of an African djembe, a Tarot card reader and a hilarious fire juggler.

As afternoon ebbs, people mingle on rooftop patios overlooking the majestic Flatirons, enjoying a variety of beverages. Coors comes from down the road in Golden—where you can take a tour—but when I'm out for a beer in Boulder, I seek one of the hometown microbrews from Avery Brewing Company, Boulder Beer, Mountain Sun Pub, Twisted Pine Brewing Company or the Walnut Brewery.

Step into the bar at the St Julien Hotel & Spa on Walnut Street for the happy hour live-music scene, then saunter down Pearl Street for a leisurely dinner at Frasca Food and Wine, Black Cat: Farm-Table-Bistro or The Kitchen—three of Boulder's most exceptional restaurants, featuring creative chefs who maximize their use of local ingredients. The Black Cat's owner and head chef, Eric Skokan, even does some of his own farming.

Boulder Theater on 14th Street is a center for nightlife. The

CONTINUED ON PAGE 86

352600  
high-altitude drive along the 55-mile Peak to Peak Scenic and Historic Byway to see some of Colorado's most dramatic vistas. The Peak to Peak extends from Central City, a Victorian-era, small-stakes gambling town, to the gates of Rocky Mountain National Park at the town of Estes Park. This is the spine of the Rockies, and the views of the Continental Divide are thrilling. Hiking trails abound, plus there's the Shoshoni Yoga Retreat near Nederland, one of the most highly acclaimed rustic yoga retreats in the nation. Enjoy an afternoon there with relaxing guided meditation, a yoga class, a delicious vegetarian lunch and a forest hike to an outcropping emblazoned with paintings of blue Buddhas.

When you head back to Boulder, venture through Lyons. If you're lucky, you may be able to catch a concert in the Wildflower Pavilion at the Planet Bluegrass Ranch along the St. Vrain River. Music fans call this "the cathedral of bluegrass," and it's one of Colorado's most beautiful spots in which to kick back and listen to good music. The venue will host the 2010 Folks Festival August 13-15, with a lineup of artists including David Wilcox, Greg Brown, John Prine and The Waifs.

If a festival or concert doesn't fit into your plans, another great way to end the day is with a short, steep drive up Flagstaff Mountain, where you'll be treated with one of the best views overlooking Boulder and Colorado's Front Range.

Don't forget your picnic fixings from the farmers market, and if you listen carefully, you might even hear the tinkle of a marimba or the growl of a didgeridoo rise from the valley floor. More likely, you'll witness the huff and puff of a local bicyclist training for her next big race. Take off your shoes and enjoy the sunset. ▲

*Jennie Lay writes from Colorado.*