

303

fashion | culture | style

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COLORADOS HIDDEN GEMS

ONLY A DRIVE AWAY

By Lindsay M. Maynard

Ski bunnies (un)wanted. Shimmy out of those Gore-tex pants and slip on a summer dress or a pair of shorts. Grab your camera, and be prepared to remember why spring is the best time to discover some of Colorado's best-kept, secret resorts.

GATEWAY: GATEWAY CANYONS

What good is a vacation if you aren't able to leave your day-to-day life behind? Well worth the five-hour drive, Gateway Canyons is sure to get your mind away from the daily grind. Located just southwest of Grand Junction, this spectacular resort is surrounded by cliffs and walls of red rocks waiting to be explored. The venue itself, although far from any major skyline, is a city of its own. For dining and cocktails, there are three eateries on the property from which to choose: the Entrada Restaurant, the Paradox Grille and the Kiva Café. The Entrada is open for dinner and dessert, and they serve a killer Long Island iced tea. The Paradox is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Need a java buzz in the morning? Head over to The Kiva for your caffeine fix and a pastry before hitting the outdoors.

After you've fueled up on delicious food, the Adventure Center awaits to offer you an array of activities. The ATV excursion is a guest favorite, as is the Air Tour that takes visitors on an adventure in the sky. See the tip-top of Moab's mountains and get an impromptu history lesson on some of Colorado's resort towns. You can also see the mountain where some of CHASE Bank's famous commercials were filmed.

Really in the mood for something special? John Hendricks, (founder of the Discovery Channel) has a private collection of automobiles at the Gateway Colorado Auto Museum that guests can visit. With around 45 vehicles, including a \$3.2 million 1954 Oldsmobile F-88 concept car, auto enthusiasts are in for a treat.

Other activities include fly-fishing, hiking, biking to the Utah state line and horseback riding. For a little rejuvenation, take a dip in the resort pool or indulge in the spa's hot stone massage.

ASPEN: ASPEN MEADOWS RESORT

Aspen is known for being a high-class ski town, but Aspen Meadows Resort is 40-acres of lodging that's plenty luxurious without being arrogant. The Bauhaus-inspired décor and designs are absolutely breathtaking. Nestled in Aspen's historic west end, the resort manages to be chic and sophisticated without the stuffiness that can often accompany such a prime location.



The resort's mission is "to unite the mind, body and spirit in a truly inspiring locale." To that end, Aspen Meadows offers yoga retreats (great for a girls' getaway, a moms' weekend away or even as a couples' retreat) that will leave you feeling cleansed and refreshed.

The health club offers tennis, bike and snowshoes rentals, as well as a lap pool and spa. For a really peaceful afternoon, take the resort's footpath to the Roaring Fork Trail, which runs all the way from Aspen to Glenwood Springs.

DEBEQUE: KESSLER CANYON

Sometimes when you want an adventurous trip away from the city, you want to literally head out to the middle of nowhere and not be bothered. If this is the case, Kessler Canyon is the perfect getaway, especially for families with older children. Four of beautiful driving will take you to 23,000 acres of majestic countryside.

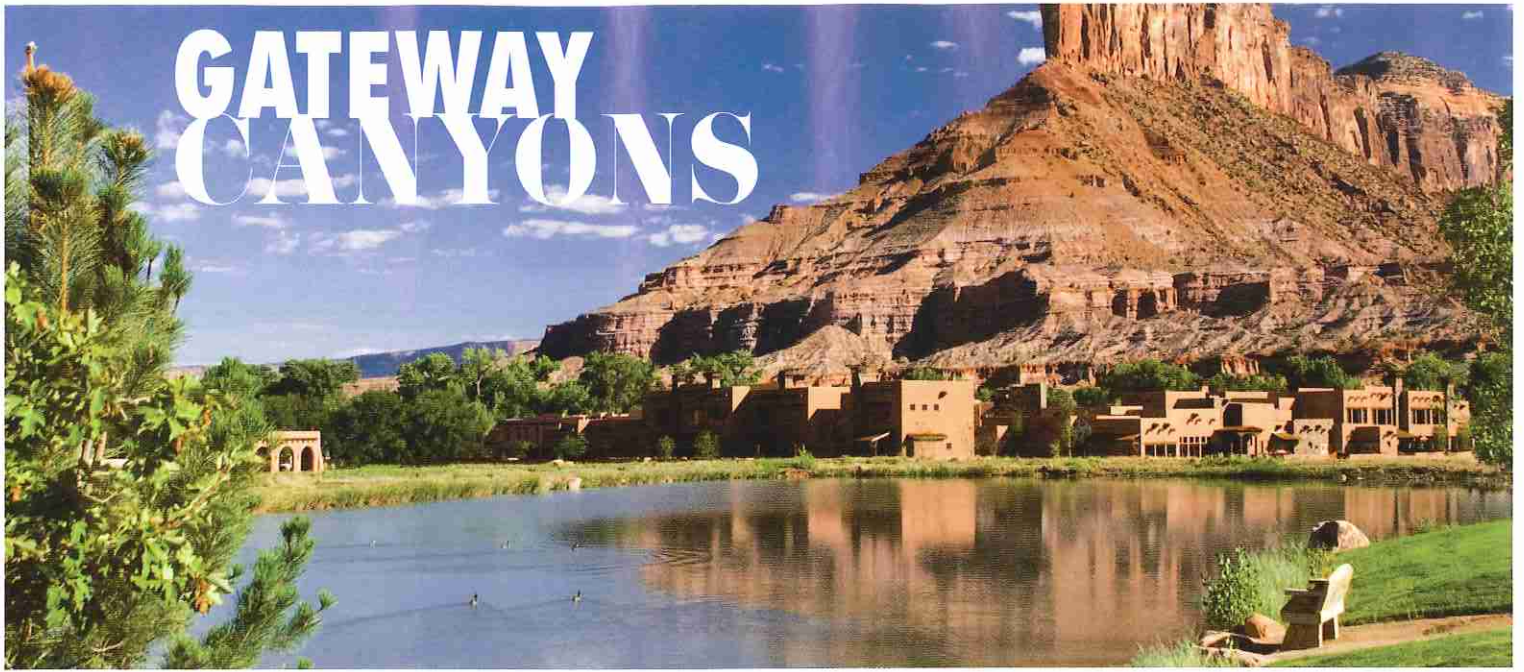
With only 13 guestrooms and two suites, feeling right at home isn't a problem at this western resort. On warm days, hammocks are hung in the orchard for guests. If you're up for some adventure, drive switchback roads to the top of the highest mountain, or mesa, in the area. Explore the wilderness in Jeeps or test your ATV skills, all while keeping your eyes peeled for elk and deer. Want to test your marksmen skills? Kessler Canyon offers big game hunts and upland bird hunting.

If hunting your own meal doesn't seem relaxing, Chef Lenny McNab whip up some veggies from his garden in his state-of-the-art kitchen. Try the trout mousse or the big bad bacon ice cream. McNab's alter ego, the Black Mamba, will even serenade you during your meal with his guitar and superb singing skills. Want a late-night snack? The kitchen is always stocked with cookies and drinks for guests who have the midnight munchies.

Finding Colorado's hidden gems can be tricky, but this list uncovers some of the best. So what will it be? A breezy, mountain day in Aspen, a family-style experience in DeBeque, or a top-of-the-line retreat at Gateway?

It looks like spring really is the best time of year for adventure.

GATEWAY CANYONS



ASPEN MEADOWS RESORT



DEBEQUE: KESSLER CANYON

