

Pack & go

Great last-minute deals to suit your pocket

Head to the Caribbean in the new year with Azamara Club Cruises onboard Azamara Journey for a 13-night Caribbean fly/cruise from just £1,692 per person (based on two people sharing an inside cabin).

Price includes return flights from London Heathrow, a 12-night cruise departing Miami (Florida) and calling at St. Croix (U.S.V.I.), Marigot (Saint Martin), Gustavia (St. Barts), Roseau (Dominica), Castries (St. Lucia), Falmouth (Antigua) and Virgin Gorda (British Virgin Islands) before returning to Miami and includes meals, entertainment onboard and all relevant cruise taxes / fees.

Price is based on 30 January 2010 departure.

For more information or to book see azamaracruises.com or call 0844 493 2025 or talk to your travel agent.

Fourteen nights at 3-star hotel in Orlando costs from only £465 per person

Fourteen nights at the three star Champions World Resort, Orlando costs from £465 per person. The price is based on two adults and two children (aged two-11 years) sharing a room on a room only basis and includes return non-stop flights with British Airways from London Gatwick departing on the January 18, 2010. The offer is valid for bookings before 28 December 2009. To book visit CompleteOrlando.com or call 0800 294 8844.

Seven Nights at 4-star Private Apartment in Orlando from only £9 per person per night

Seven nights at the 4-star Terrace Ridge in Orlando costs from £9 per person per night. The price is based on two adults and two children (aged two-11 years) sharing a self-catering two bedroom apartment. Return non-stop flights with Virgin Atlantic from London Gatwick cost from £447 departing on the 16th January 2010. Car hire costs from as little as £19 per car, per day. The offer is valid for bookings before 28 December 2009. To book visit CompleteOrlando.com or call 0800 294 8844.

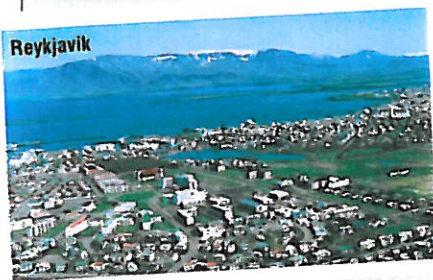
Save up to £100 per person on an Iceland four day short break from £399.

Departing February 12, take a four day break to Iceland from £399 per person. Perfect for a weekend break, with Friday departures from London Heathrow, Glasgow and Manchester and still in time to catch the magnificent Northern Lights. The itinerary offers a three night stay in the recently renovated 4-star Hotel Plaza on a bed and breakfast basis plus a full day excursion to geysers, Gullfoss and Thingvellir and entrance to the Blue Lagoon

The hotel is situated on Reykjavik's main town square, among plenty of restaurants, shops and lively nightlife. There is also an opportunity to take advantage of a great value dining out option, where arrangements can be made to dine at an excellent restaurant adjacent to the hotel. The restaurant offers a three-course meal for £30 per person per night.

Later departures include 26 February and 26 March 12 and 26.

The Classic Traveller 0800 988 5843 or visit theclassictraveller.co.uk.



Reykjavik

The State of Play?

Want to explore the great outdoors but do it in style? Colorado offers the best of both worlds, as SARAH JONES discovers

WAIT a minute. So you call trash, rubbish... diapers, nappies... and cigarettes, fags?!"

Our American host was struggling as we attempted to explain the subtle differences between our respective countries' takes on the English language. But she wasn't the only one feeling confused.

I had always associated Colorado with snow, skiing and cosy log fires. But here we were in the baking sun under a brilliant blue sky, spoilt for choice over what to do next.

While the state will always be a mecca for snow fans – its resorts are world-class – there are plenty of reasons to go when there isn't a hint of the white stuff in sight.

We visited in early-ish September, over two months before the ski season starts.

For first-timers to Colorado, Denver, the state's capital, is the perfect place to begin a trip. Located at the base of the majestic Rocky Mountains, 5,280 feet above sea level – it's exactly one mile high.

Young and vibrant, Denver has been voted the city Americans would most like to relocate to. And it's not hard to see why – it's beautiful, with the perfect combination of urban culture and mountain scenery.

From the heart of Denver you can drive to the outskirts of the mountains in just 20 minutes.

The city itself is clean and compact, with restaurants, shopping, and a thriving arts and cultural scene (don't miss



Dig This! © Anthony Love

the Denver Art Museum).

It also has fantastic hotels. We stayed at the luxurious Hotel Teatro, which embraces its theatre district location.

Elaborate costumes are framed in the lobby and black and white photographs from past theatrical productions of the Denver Center Theatre Company adorn the walls throughout.

Boasting the comfiest bed you'll ever sleep in, the rooms here are ultra modern and chic.

Denver's mild climate is another huge plus. Don't forget your sun cream, as America's highest city, Denver's elevation means it's easy to burn.

Denver is also a sports fan's dream. There are three downtown sports stadiums, including the 50,000-seater Coors Field. Home to the Colorado Rockies baseball team it's a great place to get an insight into true America.

Grab a hotdog and a beer, and soak up the atmosphere at one of the most good-natured sports events you'll ever witness.

But Denver has another crucial selling point.

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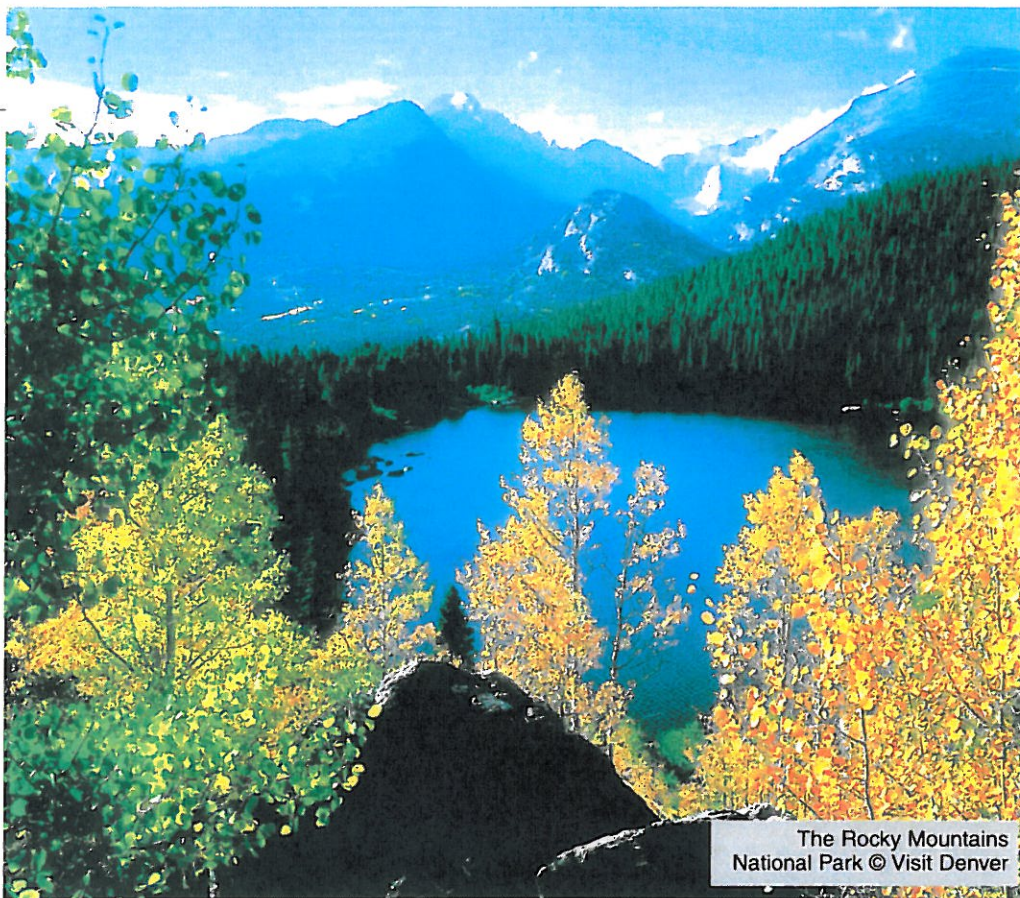
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The Rocky Mountains National Park © Visit Denver

No trip to Colorado is complete without a trip to the Rocky Mountains, but it is important to acclimatise to the altitude first. The 'Mile High City' is the perfect place to do it before climbing even higher.

After two nights in the city, we were ready to head into the mountains. Our destination was Steamboat Springs, 157 miles west of Denver.

Offering the warmest of Western welcomes, this is one laid-back town. With a strong ranching heritage, cowboy boots are a staple part of people's wardrobes here.

Boasting pristine wilderness and rolling wide-open spaces, one of the best ways to soak up the amazing vista is on horseback, so we took a trip out to the Dutch Creek Guest Ranch.

The family-owned business offers horses for all abilities and a variety of trails through aspen glades and evergreen forests.

Another top Steamboat attraction is Dig This! America's first heavy equipment play park, it provides a rare chance for grown-ups to play in the dirt by getting behind the controls of a genuine bulldozer, excavator or skid steer. Sitting high up in the cab and operating one of these powerful machines (under careful instruction) is surprisingly empowering.



Colorado Rockies baseball team © Visit Denver

Our next activity was mountain biking around beautiful Stagecoach Lake. Led by Tailwind Tours, the company creates tailor-made itineraries depending on your goals.

We took it easy enough to enjoy the view, spotting chipmunks, herons and puffins as we pedalled.

After all that hard work, it was time to relax. Sampling one of Steamboat's 150 natural springs was a must.

We drove to Strawberry Park Hot Springs after dark – an interesting experience given it's located up a steep two-mile mountain gravel track.

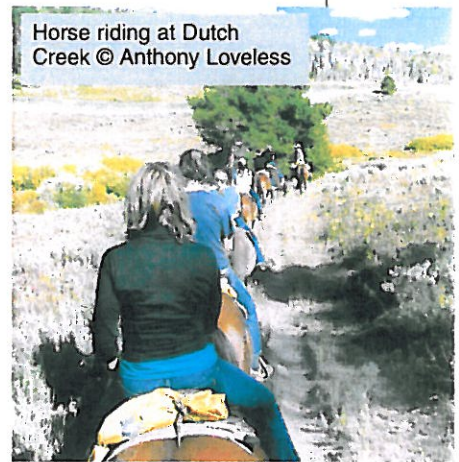
With no artificial lights – they want to keep it as rustic as possible – visiting the spring at night is a truly sensory

experience. Anyway, it's probably a blessing that you can't see what you're doing as clothing is optional!

As the steam rises off the hot water, looking skywards we were treated to fantastic clear views of the Milky Way.

Refreshed, we headed back to our base for two nights, the Steamboat Grand Resort Hotel where we were staying in the fabulously grand penthouse suite. When we stayed the suite cost \$550, not bad considering you can fit 13 people in there! The cost can rise to as much as \$3,000 at other times though.

The next day brought the most memorable part of the trip – driving through the Rocky Mountain National Park.



Horse riding at Dutch Creek © Anthony Loveless

A more awe-inspiring drive would be hard to find. Our journey included Trail Ridge Road, the highest paved highway in North America (topping out at 12,183 feet above sea level), we weaved our way through the vast wilderness, filled with lakes, waterfalls and meadows.

Beneath the soaring snow capped peaks, the weather changes in minutes and glaciers remain frozen all year round.

Our final destination was the college town of Fort Collins. We stayed at the historic Armstrong Hotel, in the Old Town.

Famed for the wild and scenic Cache La Poudre river, Fort Collins' fantastic whitewater rafting and fly fishing opportunities draw visitors from across the world.

With 40 parks and 23 miles of trails, there is also a huge cycling culture, but Fort Collins also has a new claim to fame. It's home to the family whose recent hoax hit the headlines when they claimed their six-year-old had blown away in a helium balloon.

For us, it really was time to head skywards and fly home, with a new understanding of Colorado amongst our souvenirs. Whether its adventure or relaxation you're after, this state has it all.

For further information on Colorado, see colorado.com or call 08456 020 574 for a free destination guide.

For specific information on Visit Denver, visit denver.org.

Details on Steamboat Springs can be found at steamboat-chamber.com. For more on Fort Collins, see visitfortcollins.com