

# JOURNEYS

JACKSON HOLE, WYOMING

## HOWDY, POWDER

THE WORLD'S BEST SKIING IS IN REAL COWBOY COUNTRY

BY RICKY FRENCH

Meet Lance in Corbet's Cabin, a knockabout shack teetering on the 3185m summit of Rendezvous Mountain, half buried by snow and clad in vintage skis, like a model fort assembled from popsicle sticks. A big yellow and black sign plastered on the side says "Waffles". There's no running water inside the cabin, and barely space for a kitchen, so the batter for the most celebrated (and elevated) waffles in Wyoming is mixed each morning in Teton Village, more than 1200m below, then carted up in an aerial tram nicknamed "Big Red", amid throngs of skiers seeking an early morning hit of both powder and powdered sugar.

Lance looks around 70, and is in possession of both an impressive beard and a helmet adorned with a fetching woollen covering. "Knitted by my loving wife," he says, pulling up a timber-sawn chair for a chinwag. Lance's loving wife is back home in Utah, while he fulfils a lifelong dream to ski Jackson Hole, one of North America's most revered big mountain ski resorts. "Life doesn't get better than this," he says, peeling back the aluminium foil from his peanut butter and bacon waffle. "Just look at where we are."

It's hard to do anything but look, thunderstruck, at the rabid teeth of the Teton Range snarling at us out the window. The largest elk reserve in North America lies



under a lake of cloud in the valley far below. Yellowstone National Park gushes and steams over yonder. We're in the least populated pocket of the least populated state in the US, a vast expanse of wilderness and wildlife in the middle of the Wild West... and did I mention the skiing?

Serious skiers talk about Jackson Hole in almost hushed tones, as though you'll be lucky to come back alive. And sure, there's enough extreme terrain to put your orthopaedic surgeon's kids through university – but the steepness somehow coaxes out courage in average schmuck skiers like us, until we're confidently skiing slopes we'd normally balk at.

"We have a saying, 'Ski here, ski anywhere'," says our instructor Derek, without realising the

**Skiing heaven:**  
Jackson Hole

inherent contradiction, because once you've skied here you might not want to ski anywhere else. The snow is sensational, the terrain electrifying, the views off the charts. You might spot a moose in the forest, or even barrelling down a ski run alongside skiers, as happened just after our visit (again, Google it). Chairlifts are unusually quick for American standards, and there are two gondolas departing from the village, not to mention Big Red,



which deposits you at the top of the longest continuous vertical descent of any ski area in the US: 1261m back down to where you started. What are you afraid of?

We divide our time between Teton Village and Jackson, a former ranching town that presents an attractive Western façade, although these days you're more likely to spot a celebrity A-lister under a Stetson hat than a genuine cowboy. We stroll along wooden sidewalks, take photos



## CHECKLIST

**Getting there:** Flights to Jackson Hole connect through Los Angeles, San Francisco and Dallas. From Jackson Hole it's a 20-minute drive to Teton Village.

**Stay:** In town, Hotel Jackson ([hoteljackson.com](http://hoteljackson.com)) is an art-filled boutique hotel with 51 bright and contemporary guest rooms, four luxe suites, and the best (possibly only) Lebanese restaurant in Wyoming. The modern mountain design makes inventive use of timber reclaimed from derelict barns in Idaho (nail holes confirm the authenticity), while the Sacajawea Library is an immaculate retreat replete with museum-grade Native American artifacts. A complementary ski shuttle whisks you to and from the slopes. From AUD\$710 per night.

The Four Seasons Resort and Residences (pictured below, [fourseasons.com/jacksonhole](http://fourseasons.com/jacksonhole)) offers the ultimate ski-in, ski-out convenience in Teton Village, with a full service ski concierge, a pumping après ski bar, a slope-side heated pool and hot tubs. The 155 rooms include a range of suites, plus 2-5 bedroom fully self-contained residences. From AUD\$700 per night.

**Do:** Where to start? Maybe with a sleigh ride to visit the 9000 residents of the National Elk Refuge, or a dog sledding adventure to Granite Hot Springs. Add to that Nordic skiing, heli-skiing, tubing, fat tire snow biking and horseback riding. The National Museum of Wildlife Art is fabulous, and a day trip to Yellowstone National Park is a must – snowmobile or coach tours cost around USD\$400, or for high rollers Four Seasons offers a “Day with the Wolves” experience that involves a private jet and the parting with USD\$16,750 (for up to eight guests). In summer there's hiking, canoeing, mountain biking, fly fishing, paragliding... the list is endless.

**Eat:** We loved The Bistro at the Cloudveil Hotel ([thebistrojacksonhole.com](http://thebistrojacksonhole.com)), a bustling, Parisian-style brasserie that's great for families. Bin 22 ([bin22jacksonhole.com](http://bin22jacksonhole.com)) is surely the best wine bar in the West, with bottles sold at retail prices if you consume there – which you should, along with a plate of Spanish tapas. Grab an Aussie-approved coffee at Persephone Bakery, a steak tartare pizza at Snake River Grill (you must), and bookmark Osteria ([jhosteria.com](http://jhosteria.com)) in Teton Village for classy Italian. And of course a top-of-the-world waffle at Corbet's Cabin.

under the famous elk antler arches in the town square, poke our heads in innumerable outlets selling high-end Western wear, and have an obligatory drink at the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar, straddling the saddle bar stools and admiring the taxidermied grizzly bear (killed by a hunting guide who shoved his arm down the bear's throat, bit its jugular then beat it over the head with a stick – or so the legend goes).

The cosplay cowboy schtick is harmless fun, and probably helps the billionaires blend in, because there's some serious wealth walking down these wooden sidewalks. You can tell by the disproportionate number of fine art galleries, some of which are very fine indeed (although a



**Top of the world:** Corbet's Cabin; elk; Jackson Hole

drinking game involving taking a swig every time you see a bison head committed to canvas would leave you in no state to ski the next day). Wildlife photographer Thomas D. Mangelson's Images of Nature gallery is particularly poignant, especially the photos of “Grizzly 399”, a female bear he's been photographing in and around Grand Teton National Park – usually with cubs in tow – for 17 years. Grizzly 399 clearly doesn't mind the attention, going by the 40,000 followers she's amassed on her Instagram page. In this outdoor playground for the rich and famous, even the wildlife are celebrities.

