

# Rocky mountain high



**SMILES** Fiona and Gordon enjoy the powdery snow



**CONDO** Trailhead Lodge is close to all the action

**There is snow – and then there is Colorado snow. Once you have skied in the snow in this picturesque American state, you'll be spoiled for life.**

For Colorado snow is drier, lighter and fluffier than any snow I've encountered.

It is also the smoothest and easiest snow to ride on a snowboard.

In fact, a laboratory has measured Steamboat snow as having only six per cent water content, which makes it the driest in the US.

This snow is so amazing it even has a trademarked name, Champagne Powder.

On many occasions during my trip to this Rocky Mountains resort, I toasted the fresh powder with a metaphorical glass of the bubbly stuff.

I also whooped with delight as I rode my snowboard on many miles of snowy pistes.

And I giggled when I fell into cotton wool-soft, feet-deep piles of powder as I explored gladed off-piste areas.

Yet it's not only the snow that makes Steamboat a dream destination for skiers.

The resort – located around a three-hour drive west from Colorado's capital Denver – is a purpose-built destination. It's neatly packaged and boasts all you could require for a week or two of skiing or snowboarding.

From our one-bedroom studio condo in the new Trailhead Lodge hotel, it was only a short private gondola ride to the main resort base at Gondola Square.

Ski shops, equipment hire outlets, cafes, restaurants and further accommodation are situated close to the square.

If you crave more entertainment –

## FIONA RUSSELL

including supermarkets and even a shop, F M Lights & Sons, selling cowboy hats and wear – there's a free bus to the nearby original mountain town of Steamboat Springs.

A few miles to the north of Steamboat is a hot springs centre, Strawberry Park, which offers a relaxing diversion.

Visiting the rock pools, filled with naturally hot water, with my partner Gordon at sunset, made for a wonderfully romantic occasion.

There is also horse riding at Triangle 3 Ranch and a new Nordic skiing centre at Haymaker golf course.

In summer, when the snow melts, a network of superb mountain biking trails is revealed, crisscrossing lush grassy slopes.

And then there are the people who work in Steamboat.

They are the friendliest staff I have ever had the pleasure of meeting.

They wanted us to have a good time and rarely could they do more to make our holiday the best it could be.

So it's no wonder Steamboat is a popular choice for skiers from across the US.

Increasingly, it is catching the attention of Europeans looking for good value alternative to the Alps.

The resort is also ideal for families, especially those with a variety of skiing abilities to cater for.

The skiable area extends 2965 acres across a mountain range of six peaks and includes 165 named pistes.

Between base level of 6900ft and the highest summit of 10,568ft, there's a range of

runs from easy to intermediate and very challenging. The longest run is a superb three-mile descent called Why Not.

Steamboat also boasts two terrain parks, Maverick's Superpipe for fun-loving experts and Mini-Mav for novice tricksters.

Many off-piste fans head to Steamboat for what is claimed to be the world's best tree skiing.

The easily accessible glades provide a magical playground for skiers and snowboarders.

As Gordon and I discovered, there is little to beat the heady sensation of whizzing down fresh snow while weaving around pretty evergreen and aspen trees.

We had Steamboat's expert instructor Neill Redfern to thank for our new powder riding skills.

With Neill's guidance and tips, we learned how to surf the snowy glades, make quick and efficient turns to avoid the trees – and fall over less often.

The improvement in our off-piste skills transferred to the groomed slopes.

We easily cruised blue-black intermediate runs and rode more stylishly on tough black pistes.

We even carved confident routes down mogul (bumpy) runs, when previously we would have avoided them.

Neill told us that he first visited Steamboat two decades ago for the skiing.

A few years later he moved to the town – and now he is raising a family in this outdoors heaven on Earth.

With guaranteed snow all winter, frequent dumps of Champagne Powder and such friendly people, Gordon and I wish we could live in Steamboat, too.



**WHITE STUFF** Steamboat is snow heaven

## Travel info

■ **Getting there:** British Airways flies from London Heathrow direct to Denver. A BA flight from Glasgow to Heathrow offers through passage of luggage, too. The return cost from Glasgow to Denver is around £725. See [www.britishairways.com](http://www.britishairways.com). To reach Steamboat from Denver, book a Go Alpine shuttle bus, priced £110 return. See [www.goalpine.com](http://www.goalpine.com)

■ **Where to stay:** Trailhead Lodge is operated by Wyndham Vacation Rentals.

A one-bedroom condo with shared swimming pool and gym costs £1500 for a week. See [www.wyndhamvacationrentals.com](http://www.wyndhamvacationrentals.com)

For alternative options and package deals, contact the helpful advisors at [www.steamboat.com](http://www.steamboat.com)

■ **Where to eat:** Plentiful cafes and restaurants make it hard to choose but two to recommend are the Ore House in Steamboat Springs ([www.orehouse.com](http://www.orehouse.com)) and Hazie's at the top of the main gondola ([www.steamboat.com](http://www.steamboat.com)).

■ **Lift pass:** A six-day adult lift pass is £400.

■ **Ski a sister resort:** Combine Steamboat resort with another family favourite, Winter Park. Book a transfer with Home James ([www.homejamestransportation.com](http://www.homejamestransportation.com)) for the two-hour drive. See [www.winterparkresort.com](http://www.winterparkresort.com)