



VEGAS Airfare & Hotel specials

Home Inquirer Daily News News Business Sports Entertainment Living Restaurants & Food Travel

Jobs Cars Real Estate Rentals Marketplace

Subscriber Services / Get a Subscription | Join Our Team

Web Search powered by YAHOO! SEARCH

Site search

TRAVEL RSS MY YAHOO!

Welcome Guest | Register | Sign In

email this print this

TEXT SIZE: A A A A

Posted on Sun, May. 4, 2008

### Senior Traveler: Authenticity, wild-west style

By John J. Hilferty For The Inquirer

While visiting a museum containing artifacts of the the Rocky Mountains a few years back, I saw a rocking chair made with pieces of rifles and shotguns.

I can describe something like a moose-head hat rack, but don't ask me to lay out the details of a 20-gauge chair. Simply, the thing was old, ingenious and well cared for, but something you don't sit in for long unless you're heavily padded.

That kind of eccentricity explains the Old West as much as does a landscape of rugged mountains or canyon rivers. Hail to those who keep the artifacts and architecture alive for us visitors, such as the Historic Hotels of the Rockies - 18 hotels in Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, Colorado and New Mexico that put tourists in close touch with gold fever, gunfights, narrow-gauge railroads, dusty cattle drives, and native cultures up and down the Continental Divide.

The authenticity of these hostleries, which range from large resort hotels to bed and breakfasts, can't be denied. All are on the National Register of Historic Places, which means older than 50 years. All of them have antique furnishings and fixtures in a wide range of architectural styles, including Victorian, Western, Southwestern, Native American, Arts and Crafts, Bungalow, Pueblo Revival and Territorial.

For example, in Durango, Colo., the Strater Hotel (800-247-4431, www.strater.com) is a four-story gem built in 1887 of native red brick and hand-carved sandstone filigree. It offers fine dining, Victorian-style jacuzzis, and data ports with high-speed wireless access.

Restoring your comforts in the Strater's Diamond Belle Saloon would seem a natural way to end a day of visiting some of the 600 cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde National Park (970-529-4465, www.nps.gov/meve) or riding the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad (877-872-4607, www.durangotrain.com) perilously high up in the San Juan Mountains and crisscrossing the Animas River Canyon far below. The hotel offers Mesa Verde and railroad packages.

In some of these old Rocky Mountain hotels, the "authenticity" is stretched to an Old West pageantry, with actors portraying honky-tonk piano players, bordello queens, and two-gun desperadoes. But the Web site www.historic-hotels.com provides enough details to decide whether to take it or leave it. A warning: the popularity of the hotels, particularly because of their nearness to national parks and other attractions, demands early booking for July and August. Senior discounts, including those through AARP and AAA, are available.

Some other samplings:

**Hotel Colorado** (800-544-3998, www.hotelcolorado.com), in Glenwood Springs, Colo., opened in 1893. Its Italian Renaissance style and the area's famed mineral hot springs lured famous repeat visitors, including Teddy Roosevelt and Al Capone. It attracted me and my wife a few years back because the 131-room hotel is within a five-minute walk of the Hot Springs Pool, which is advertised as the world's largest of its kind, and about an hour's drive on Interstate 70, through beautiful red-rock canyons, from Vail Ski Resort. Southeast are the villages of Aspen and Snowmass. The hotel, which is near the confluence of the Colorado and Roaring Fork rivers, features exquisite summer gardens.

**Irma Hotel** (800-745-4762, www.irmahotel.com) in Cody, Wyo., built in 1902 by Buffalo Bill and named for his daughter, is about a one-hour drive from the east entrance of Yellowstone National Park (307-344-7381, www.nps.gov/yell). You can stay overnight in Bill's private suite, one of the 15 original suites, for \$153 plus tax. Some of the original building's walls are river rock and locally quarried sandstone. For 30 years, Buffalo Bill staged a famous Wild West Show throughout America and Europe, and the town of Cody replicates it each summer, including nightly shoot-outs in the street, and rodeos and Indian dances, many of them at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center (307-587-4771, www.bbhc.org). Other events include the 27th annual Plains Indian Museum Powwow, June 21-22;



The Diamond Belle Saloon in the Strater Hotel, built in 1887 in Durango, Colo. It's like this every night in the old saloon.

SAVE AND SHARE icons for various social media and sharing options, including Yahoo! Buzz.

VEGAS Airfare & Hotel specials advertisement featuring a woman and Creative Travel Inc. logo.

#### Today's Most Viewed

#### Most Emailed

- Phila. police officer shot to death
NFL star's gun linked to N. Philly shooting
Burrell's blast bails out the Phils' bullpen
Eagles Notes: Draftee Jackson says he's passionate, not a problem
Phila. officer shot to death

#### More Most Viewed

- Walkabout set tomorrow to aid Sjogren's sufferers
Phila. police officer shot to death
NFL star's gun linked to N. Philly shooting
Economy great - for pawnshops
Misso

#### More Most Emailed

the annual Wild West Balloon Fest, Aug. 1-3; and the annual visit to Kirwin Ghost Town, a four-wheel drive excursion, on Aug. 16 (Meeteetse Museums, 307-868-2423).

**Plaza Hotel** (800-328-1882, www.plazahotel-nm.com) in "the other Las Vegas," in New Mexico, is the centerpiece of 900 buildings in the colorful, authentic town's Historic District. Built in 1882, its character is Victorian throughout. Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders had their first reunion in the hotel in 1899. Kit Carson, Billy the Kid, Doc Holliday and his girlfriend, Big Nose Kate Elder, visited the town.

Senior Traveler: On This Page

Next week: Online Traveler

May 18: Game Traveler

May 25: Travel Deals

John Hilferty can be reached at hilf@johnhiferty.com.

**Sponsored Links**

**Discount Travel Club**

\$49.95 Includes 2 night /3 day free hotel, Carnival cruise & more. www.prestigettravelclub.com

**Book Your Room in Cortona**

nice Hotel, warme hospitality, rooms with view. www.hotelvillamarsili.net

**Low Airfares All Airlines**

Compare Airfares From 140+ Sites w/ 1 Search. Great Deals Fly Cheaply. www.flights.kayak.com

**TODAY ON PHILLY.COM**



**Fighting back against Phila.'s dropout crisis**



**Will track run over Lehigh Valley nature?**



**Yant Kinney: Poetry honors slain friend**



**Eagletarian: What McNabb said, meant**

**MOST VIEWED IN THIS SECTION**

- Vacating close to home: Your favorite places
- A Steel City blast
- Readers' Favorite Nearby Vacation
- New attractions pop up as some landmarks bow out
- The cheesesteak project

**LATEST STORIES IN THIS SECTION**

- Braving the rapids 05/02/2008  
By Theresa Gawlas Medoff
- 10 for the Road 05/02/2008
- Foreign Exchange 05/02/2008
- Now it's boys' week out 05/02/2008  
By Greg Morago
- A Steel City blast 04/25/2008  
By Robert Strauss

Top Jobs

Top Homes

Top Cars

SEARCH JOBS

find »

**Southwark**



\$379,900  
243 Montrose St

**Fairmount/Spring Garden**



\$300,000  
863 N 22nd St

FOR SALE

find »

**Jeep Wrangler X 2005**



\$19,825  
Desimone Auto Group  
(888) 648-3890

**Pontiac G6 GT 2006**



\$13,590  
Pacifco Auto Group  
(866) 415-8854

SEARCH CARS

find »