

The Escape Artist {LINDSEY CANANT}

THE HIGH POINTS

Jackson Hole is a sophisticated section of the Wild West.



RANCH DRESSING Views of the Teton Range are just one of Jackson Hole's draws.

IN THE RARE EVENT THAT A friend plans a Wyoming vacation, Bostonians usually respond with a clueless question about bolo ties or cattle wrastlin'. Maybe a Dick Cheney joke. But despite its position in a rectangular flyover state, Jackson Hole is more than just the gateway to Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks. Renowned for outdoor glories, the valley town (population: less than 10,000) is surrounded by no less than five mountain ranges, but from cuisine to music to performance, there's an overlooked cultural landscape that matches up to the sublime setting.

Between the riches of its land (it ranks among the most expensive real estate in the country) and its residents (Harrison Ford and the Walton family both call it home), Jackson Hole has glamour galore. Thankfully, cash doesn't equate to flash. "People go to Sun

Valley to be seen, but people come to Jackson to get away," says one local concierge. Unlike other haughty mountain towns, there's nary a Hummer in sight, and furs are more likely found on moose wandering the town square than on strolling socialites.

First-time guests sometimes book tony slopeside resorts in Teton Village, but it's better to opt for the centrally located Rustic Inn. If this isn't a ski vacation (the town boasts some of the world's premier downhill runs), enjoy a day in the charming village. A ride to the top of Jackson Hole Mountain Resort's tram is a can't-miss for spectacular views.

Of course, Wild West kitsch runs amok. Chuckwagon dinners are still the rage, some bars sport saddles instead of stools and no amount of pride or better judgment can withstand the wave of hokey, back-in-time saloon photos. On the

other hand, developments like the Jackson Hole Center for the Arts bring touring productions to the valley and host talks by serious

Traveler's Checks

* Jackson Hole Airport is small, and many airlines fly there only during peak seasons. Nearby airports in Salt Lake City, Denver and Idaho Falls require a drive but offer significantly lower fares.

* If you're not a skier, plan visits around the arts and film festival (fall), elk-antler auction and Old West Days (spring) or the music festival and wine auction (summer).

More than the T will be moving underground this October.

DESCENT



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SLOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL The town isn't just for skiing.

speakers like Jane Goodall. The National Museum of Wildlife Art showcases works by Warhol, O'Keeffe, Picasso and Rodin in its permanent collection. Jackson Hole naturally has its share of Native American and cowboy art, but the town's treasury is supplemented by the 30-plus galleries featuring artists like Troy Collins, Lance Letscher and Dale Chihuly.

At night, locals flock to restaurants like Rendezvous Bistro and Trio for modern fare in hip settings. Try mountain specialties like elk Bolognese or pan-seared Idaho trout amandine. Spots like these thrive on the energy of young ski bums or well-traveled families, who also frequent the Atelier Ortega where chocolatier Oscar Ortega dishes up hand-painted chocolates and chipotle chocolate pudding to warm up the cold evenings.

Whether visitors are outdoorsy or artsy, a trip with Jackson Hole Wildlife Safaris offers the best of both. Guide Jason Williams sniffs out the locations of bears, wolves, bison and other photogenic fauna. He even offers tips for transforming your pics from postcard snapshots to artistic keepsakes.

When it comes to souvenirs, skip the tourist shops where the same huckleberry bonbons, bison jerky and "moose dropping" candies abound. Instead, search for something more distinctive, like the notebooks, housewares and jewelry from Made and Workshop, two independent boutiques just off the town square. Though your friends may be disappointed by your lasso-less return, these spots offer chic alternatives for bringing the range back home. ***

Rustic Inn at Jackson Hole Creekside Resort & Spa 475 N. Cache St., Jackson (307-733-2357) rusticinnatjh.com **Jackson Hole Center for the Arts** 265 Cache St., Jackson (307-733-4900) jhcenterforthearts.org **National Museum of Wildlife Art** 2820 Rungius Road, Jackson (800-313-9553) wildlifeart.org **Rendezvous Bistro** 380 S. Broadway, Jackson (307-739-1100) rendezvousbistro.net **Trio an American Bistro** 45 S. Glenwood, Jackson (307-734-8038) bistrotrio.com **Atelier Ortega** 150 Scott Lane, Jackson (307-734-6400) atelierortega.com **Jackson Hole Wildlife Safaris** (307-690-6402) jacksonholewildlifesafaris.com **Made** 125 N. Cache St., Jackson (307-690-7957) madejacksonhole.homestead.com **Workshop** 180 E. Deloney St., Jackson (307-733-5520) workshopjh.com.

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