

A Tour of Colorado's Central City

Written by Melinda Couzens

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Escaping the heat of Arizona this summer and heading to the cool mountains of Colorado? Looking for a cultural or historical activity a bit off the “beaten path”? Consider Central City.



Central City, an old mining town, has a refreshing altitude of 8,150 feet and is located 60 miles east of Silverthorn/Breckenridge/Keystone on I-70. From 1859, when gold was discovered, through the 1880's this was a thriving and cosmopolitan mining community before it fell on hard times. Many vestiges of this wealth are still to be found. Located on Eureka Street is The Central City Opera House built in 1878 by Welsh and Cornish miners which still hosts a dynamic opera season that runs during the summer months. The Opening Night Gala is like stepping back in time with a Black Tie dinner at the historic Teller House Hotel next door and the opening of the season with a dynamite blast from a nearby mine. Thankfully, the opera association replaced the original wooden chairs with plush updated seating a few years ago.



Dotted throughout Central City are many Victorian houses – some are a bit tattered but nevertheless charming with gingerbread trim and quaint porches. No visit to Central City is complete without a stop in the Teller House bar where the mysterious painting of a young woman decorates a part of the floor. If strolling along the narrow steep streets, and looking at the Victorian architecture is not your thing, there is always the vintage Main Street which is now dotted with casinos and arcades—even here you cannot avoid the “tourist factor” entirely. Gambling was legalized in 1991 which helped to revitalize the area. A word of caution if hiking in this area: There are hundreds of aged mine shafts so always stay on the trail and away from mine entrances and tailings.

Two miles down from Central City is the old mining town of Black Hawk which also boasts several casinos and is dominated by the 33-story Ameristar Casino, Resort and Spa. If further exploration is wanted, why not take Colorado State Road 119 out of Black Hawk and drive the Peak to Peak Byway which will take you through Nederland to Boulder? A 36-mile journey but an hour-plus drive, it is considered a beauty by many locals and motorcycle enthusiasts.



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The 2014 Central City Opera season opens June 28 with Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*. The operas, *Dead Man Walking* and *Trouble in Tahiti* will also be presented this summer with evening and matinee performances. Tickets and information can be found at www.centralcityopera.org.