

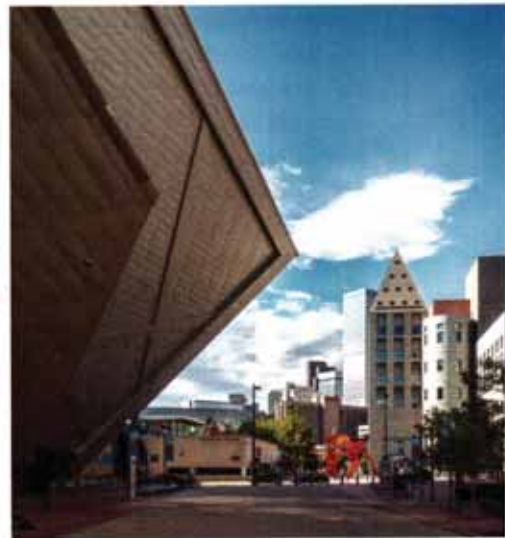
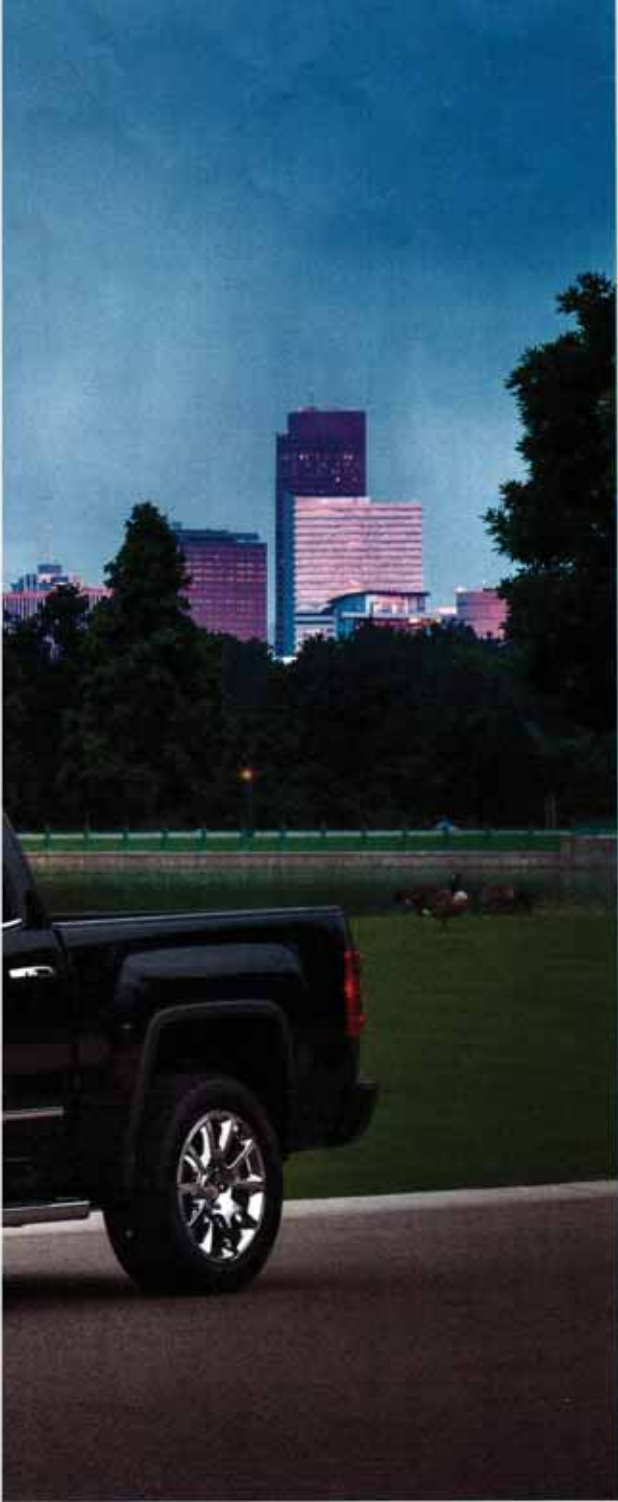
DESTINATION | DENVER, COLORADO



MILE HIGH GMC

All-new 2014 Sierra
Denali visits Denver

WRITTEN BY KARA WILLIAMS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN RAMSEY



DIVERSE DENVER (clockwise, from left) : Sierra Denali greets the sunrise in City Park. The mile marker on the Capitol steps. The pizza is photo-worthy at downtown's Pizza Republica. Denver Art Museum's geometric architecture. The B-cycle program has bike-rental stands throughout the city.



A MILD, DRY CLIMATE, PLUS 300 DAYS OF SUNSHINE A YEAR, draws year-round visitors to the high-altitude metropolis of Denver at the foot of Colorado's Rocky Mountains. Dubbed the Mile High City because it sits 5,280 feet above sea level (see the official marker on the steps of the State Capitol), Denver brims with opportunities to learn about its Old West beginnings as a 19th-century gold-mining camp, explore the arts with world-class museums, indulge in farm-fresh meals at top-notch restaurants, and enjoy its glorious weather through outdoor adventures – both within the city and in neighboring communities.

OUTDOOR FUN

It's no surprise Denver is consistently named to lists of "America's Fittest Cities," since it's so easy to be active in the crisp, clean air with Denver's network of paved and off-road recreation trails: 850 miles in the metro area. You'll find Denver residents jogging, biking and walking all year long, since Denver typically doesn't have the winter snowfall that towns in the nearby mountains do.

Pack a picnic to spend the afternoon at one of Denver's 200 city parks. Truly, it's hard to turn a corner in Denver without stumbling upon some sort of spot for outdoor play – from urban kids' playgrounds to skateboard parks to slivers of green grass on the banks of Cherry Creek or the Platte Rivers. One must-visit is City Park, with more than 300 acres of rolling green lawns, lakes, flower gardens, a public golf course and picnic sites.

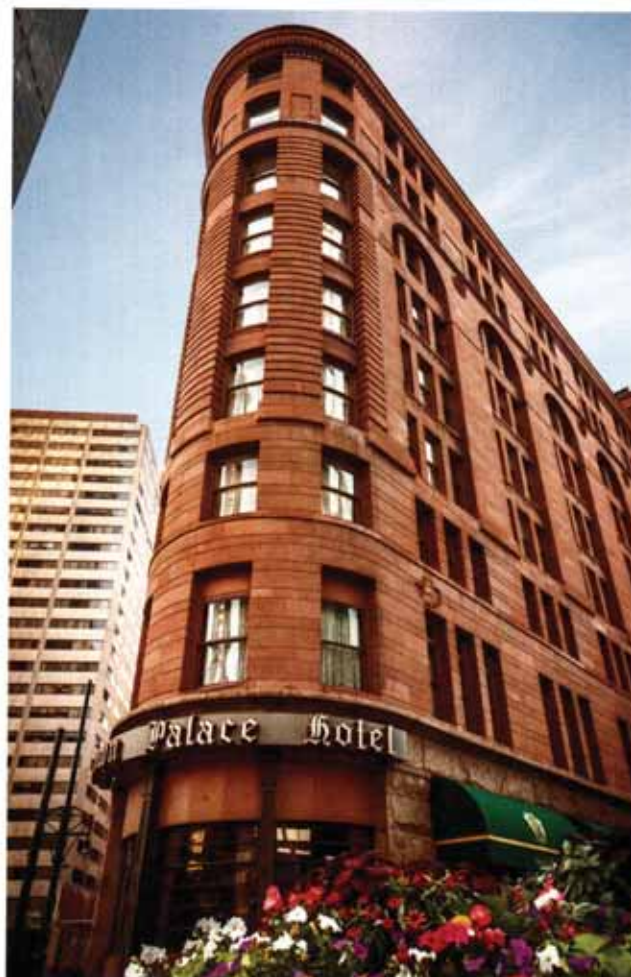
City Park is also home to two of the city's popular attractions, especially for families. First, the Denver Zoo is the place to go to watch zookeepers care for Asian elephants, giggle at acrobatic gibbons swinging overhead, and meet penguins up close. Second, the Denver Museum of Nature & Science has so many fabulous exhibits it's hard to see them all in one visit. Permanent exhibitions include the fascinating Expedition Health, Egyptian Mummies and Space Odyssey; then there's an IMAX Theatre, planetarium shows and visiting exhibitions.

Just west of Denver proper you'll find Red Rocks Amphitheatre and Park (shown on the cover of this magazine). It's worth a visit if only to marvel at the incredible 9,450-seat natural rock amphitheatre, which has hosted numerous well-known musical acts over the years. Also recommended is the moderate, 1.4-mile Trading Post Trail, which winds its way through awesome, otherworldly sandstone formations – don't forget your camera!

Finally, if you're a sports fan, finding a game to watch is easy to do in Denver, since the city is home to seven professional sports teams and five stadiums.

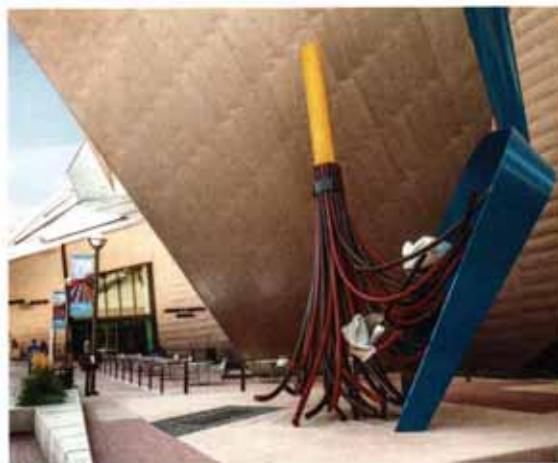
ENJOY THE ARTS

One of the best ways to get acquainted with Denver's "rough and tumble" past as a hardscrabble mining town is at the History Colorado Center. The Denver A to Z exhibit offers a whimsical look





THINGS TO SEE & DO (clockwise, starting at left): The Sierra Denali joins the dance at the Denver Performing Arts Complex. Blue Bear peeks into the Colorado Convention Center. Denver's Golden Triangle Museum District offers art inside and out. The Millennium Bridge is a functional work of art. Relive the past at the History Colorado Center. Relax at the luxurious Brown Palace Hotel.



at its colorful history, and there are also interactive opportunities to "ride" in a mine-shaft elevator, "soar" off a ski jump or "drive" the plains.

A few blocks away, and also part of Denver's Golden Triangle Museum District, is the Denver Art Museum, with more than 68,000 works of art. Inside, you'll find not only a newly revamped American Indian gallery, but also an extensive collection of iconic Western art. The exterior of the museum itself is a work of art featuring the castle-like original building, as well as the newer, shimmering geometric addition. Bright, irreverent sculptures outside – including a giant dustpan and broom – are worthy of a gander too.

Also nearby is the downtown Denver Performing Arts Complex, which hosts touring Broadway musicals, symphony orchestras, ballet performances, comedy shows and more. If you're in town for a show, several nearby hotels make an ideal home base, including the upscale Four Seasons Hotel Denver, or the contemporary Curtis Hotel.

Slightly further afield, but still close to the DPAC, is the historic Brown Palace Hotel. Dating back to 1892, this gem of a property is a wonderful nod to Denver's Victorian past, with its charming rooms, vintage brass escalator, jauntily dressed bellmen and authentically English afternoon tea service, complete with scones and imported Devonshire cream.

EXPLORE DENVER'S NEIGHBORHOODS

The hub of downtown Denver, with its office skyscrapers and plethora of hotels, shopping and dining options, lies along the 16th Street Mall with free, frequent shuttles that stop on every block along the tree-lined, pedestrian-friendly area. Find the visitor information center, staffed with friendly folks who offer sightseeing suggestions and maps, at the corner of 16th and California Streets.

Larimer Square, just a block from the 16th Street Mall, is downtown's hippest nook, with trendy boutiques and restaurants. This short street is part of Denver's Lower Downtown (aka "LoDo"). Formerly abandoned brick warehouses are now art galleries, rooftop cafes, sports bars and brewpubs.

Across the Platte River, and accessed via a series of pedestrian footbridges, is the Riverfront area and Confluence Park, where Cherry Creek

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and the Platte River meet. Here, kayakers paddle the rapids in front of the flagship REI store, a must-visit for any gear-loving outdoor enthusiast. Nearby attractions include the Downtown Aquarium and the Children's Museum of Denver.

Cross the I-25 highway and you'll find yourself in what is currently Denver's hottest neighborhood: Lower Highlands (aka "LoHi"). Popular restaurants here include Lola, a Mexican bistro with a ceviche bar and guacamole prepared tableside; and Linger, housed in a former mortuary with great views of downtown from its rooftop patio and a farm-to-table menu with worldly influences: Braised Goat Tacos, Pad Thai, Red Beet Hummus Plate and Seared Diver Scallops. For an al fresco dessert, stop by Little Man Ice Cream, whose take-out window is in a huge 28-foot-tall "milk can."

Serious shoppers will want to drive a few minutes south of downtown to the Cherry Creek Shopping Center, with more than 160 shops, as well as Cherry Creek North, 16 blocks of retail goodies: independently owned art galleries, clothing boutiques, jewelry stores and day spas. The luxury JW Marriott Denver Cherry Creek makes an excellent spot to rest your head after a day of shopping.

Part of the fun of exploring Denver is simply hopping in your GMC to discover its eclectic neighborhoods. There's South Pearl Street, with the Izakaya Den, a Japanese gastro pub serving global cuisine, a bookstore specializing in mysteries and an eco-friendly clothing shop, as well as tree-lined Old South Gaylord, a stone's throw from Washington Park. The Art District on Santa Fe has the largest concentration of art galleries in Colorado; and South Broadway is well known for its strip of antique stores.

Learn more about Denver at visitdenver.com. ■

Freelance writer Kara Williams makes her home in the mountains of Colorado, but she heads to the Mile High City for her "urban fix" several times a year. She writes about her home state for her blog TheVacationGals.com, as well as [The Denver Post](http://TheDenverPost), [American Eagle Latitudes](http://AmericanEagleLatitudes), Fodors and Expedia.com.

DESTINATION: Have a favorite spot you'd like us to feature? Write to us: editor@myGMCmagazine.com. Or connect with GMC and share your stories on Facebook or Twitter.

DINING DELIGHTS: Try the Mexican bistro, Lola (below), or enjoy a treat at Little Man Ice Cream and the views at Linger (in the background). The Izakaya Den and Sierra Denali look great together.

