

Top bars in Colorado ski towns

A view from [Kara Williams](#)

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Quench your thirst with craft cocktails, spirits, and beers in the mountains

When I first moved to [Aspen](#) 20 years ago, my (poor) friends and I would hit the dive bars to find the cheapest après-ski deals in town. Usually, this entailed drinking US\$2 pints of cheap beer and free fried appetizers we scarfed down every time a server replenished the buffet chafing dishes.

(Repeat: We had little money. Free food, even greasy, was a godsend.)

With age and a regular paycheck, I now seek more refined places to enjoy a cocktail or beer after a day on the slopes. And these days, with the explosion of craft distilleries and microbreweries in mountain towns, there are plenty of upscale places to quench a thirst, see and be seen, and get to know like-minded locals.

Here I've summarized some of the spots worth visiting. The list is by no means an exhaustive guide to top bars in some of my favorite Colorado ski towns; instead, I'm sharing some upbeat spots I've enjoyed on recent forays to these mountain resorts, as well as some others I hope to get to this ski season!

Crested Butte

The fun **Montanya Distillers** creates its high-altitude rum in downtown Crested Butte, and the friendly crew here can accommodate a tour of its small facility just about any time. When I took the tour, I admired the giant copper kettles while hearing about the distilling process, and then sampled complimentary light (Platino) and dark (Oro) rum shots. The real highlight was ordering some yummy hand-crafted cocktails afterward. I visited in the summer, so my top choice involved fruity muddled watermelon and mint. I imagine the clever staff will come up with heartier, spicier options in the cold winter months.

In a cozy, dark former miner's cabin in downtown [Crested Butte](#), **The Dogwood Cocktail Cabin** is a great spot for hand-crafted drinks. That is, the food menu is minimal; you'll find small plates such as a cheese board, edamame, and a soft pretzel. But the drink menu is vast with unusual martinis (one made with butternut squash!), margaritas, and vodka and champagne cocktails. I like to think of this as a romantic spot for couples or just a few friends; seating for a large group would be difficult.

Aspen

Located in a former bank in the 1889 Wheeler Opera House building, **Justice Snow's** is named for a justice of the peace who served in Aspen during that era. The cocktail list is vast, and many of the drinks are made with house-infused spirits and served in vintage glassware. This spot is also home to Aspen's only absinthe fountain.

The poolside scene is definitely swanky at **39 Degrees** at the hip and modern [Sky Hotel](#), one of town's most popular winter afternoon hangouts. Rest assured, you don't have to don a bathing suit to fit in with the crowd here; there are plenty of spots for socializing inside the dimly lit lounge, where specialty cocktails—fruity, spicy, or savory—take center stage.

The huge, sunny patio at **Ajax Tavern** is right at the base of Aspen Mountain next to the Silver Queen Gondola. Its après-ski raw bar (oysters!) is wildly popular, and the by-the-glass wine list is generous. You'll find lots of Colorado microbrews on the menu here, too.

Winter Park

If you're in a playful mood after skiing [Winter Park](#), the major Colorado ski resort closest to the big city of [Denver](#), head over to **The Foundry Cinema and Bowl**, a combination movie theater, bowling alley, and full bar. Yep, you *can* take your adult beverage into the theater, and in the winter months that warm drink might be Glühwein or spiked hot chocolate. The wood-fired pizzas are excellent, especially when washed down with a Colorado beer or glass of red wine.

Breckenridge

Breckenridge Distillery claims to be the world's highest distillery at 9,600 feet, and distillers use water from area snowmelt to make the brand's whiskey and vodka. I've been to neither its distilling operation on Airport Road nor its Main Street Tasting Room, but the Breckenridge Distillery is on my list after checking out this clever list of [signature cocktails](#) (love the "Breckenridge Burro" twist on the Moscow Mule).

I think any visitor to [Breckenridge](#) needs to stop in Main Street's Breckenridge Brewery, founded in 1990. It has a laid-back vibe and welcomes families with casual pub fare. In terms of what to drink, I'm partial to the lighter Agave Wheat and Avalanche Ale, while my husband favors the dark Oatmeal Stout and Vanilla Porter. Really, I don't think you can go wrong with any of the beers here!