

JOURNEYS

JACKSON HOLE, WYOMING

HOWDY, POWDER

THE WORLD'S BEST SKIING IS IN REAL COWBOY COUNTRY

BY RICKY FRENCH

I meet Lance in Corbet's Cabin, a knockabout shack hovering on the 385m summit of Rendezvous Mountain, half buried by snow and clad in vintage ski, like a model fort assembled from popcicle sticks. A big yellow and black sign plastered on the side says "Waffle". There's no running water inside the cabin, and barely space for a kitchen, so the batter for the most celebrated (and elevated) waffles in Wyoming is mixed each morning in Teton Village, more than 1200m below, then carted up in an aerial tram nicknamed "Big Red", amid throngs of skiers seeking an early morning hit of both powder and powdered sugar.

Lance looks around 70, and is in possession of both an impressive beard and a helmet adorned with a fetching woollen covering. "Knitted by my loving wife," he says, pulling up a timber-sawn chair for a chinwag. Lance's loving wife is back home in Utah, while he fulfils a lifelong dream to ski Jackson Hole, one of North America's most covered big mountain ski resorts. "Life doesn't get better than this," he says, peeling back the aluminium foil from his peanut butter and bacon waffle. "Just look at where we are."

It's hard to do anything but look, thunderstruck at the rabid teeth of the Teton Range snarling at us out the window. The largest elk reserve in North America lies

under a lake of cloud in the valley far below. Yellowstone National Park gushes and steams over yonder. We're in the least populated pocket of the least populated state in the US, a vast expanse of wilderness and wildlife in the middle of the Wild West... and did I mention the skiing?

Serious skiers talk about Jackson Hole in almost hushed tones, as though you'll be lucky to come back alive. And sure, there's enough extreme terrain to put your orthopaedic surgeon's kids through university – but the steepness somehow courses out courage in average schmuck skiers like us, until we're confidently skiing slopes we'd normally balk at.

"We have a saying, 'Ski here, ski anywhere,'" says our instructor Derek, without realising the

Skiing heaven
JACKSON HOLE

inherent contradiction, because once you've skied here you might not want to ski anywhere else. The snow is sensational, the terrain electrifying, the views off the charts. You might spot a moose in the forest, or even barreling down a ski run alongside skiers, as happened just after our visit (again, Google it). Chairlifts are unusually quick for American standards, and there are two gondolas departing from the village, not to mention Big Red,



Eat: We loved The Bistro at the Cloudveil Hotel (thebistrojacksonhole.com), a bustling, Parisian-style brasserie that's great for families. Bin 22 (bin22jacksonhole.com) is surely the best wine bar in the West, with bottles sold at retail prices if you consume there – which you should, along with a plate of Spanish tapas. Grab an Aussie-approved coffee at Persephone Bakery, a steak tartare pizza at Snake River Grill (you must), and bookmark Osteria (jhosteria.com) in Teton Village for classy Italian. And of course a top-of-the-world waffle at Corbet's Cabin.