

Destination of the Year

TRAVEL+LEISURE

Ski & See Jackson Hole

The Essentials

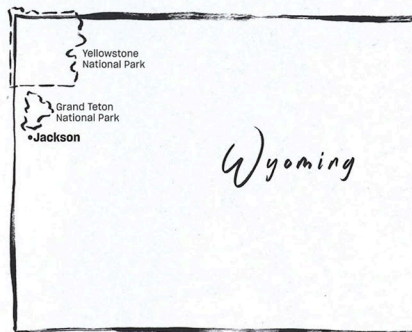
Jackson Hole encompasses both Teton Village, home to the ski resort, and the town of Jackson, just across the valley. The resort opens in late November. Rent gear from delivery service **JH Mountain Direct** (jhmountaindirect.com) or **Jackson Hole Sports** (jacksonhole.com).

In Teton Village

The two- to four-bedroom suites at superchic **Caldera House** (calderahouse.com; suites from \$4,500) are ideal for groups. The delightful **Teton Thai** (tetonthai.com; entrées \$16–\$28) offers takeout if you don't want to wait for a table. Don't miss out on a pint—and an irrepressible toe-tap—at the **Mangy Moose** (mangymoose.com), the quintessential Western honky-tonk.

In & Around Jackson

Anvil Hotel (anvilhotel.com; doubles from \$120), which just unveiled an upscale hostel, Cache House, is the place to stay. Its restaurant, **Glorietta Trattoria** (gloriettajackson.com; entrées \$16–\$48), does fantastic Italian classics. You'd be hard-pressed to find a better croissant than at **Persephone** (persephonebakery.com). Stock up on wine at **Bin22** (bin22jacksonhole.com), or linger there over salumi. If you can score a spot at the 24-seat **King Sushi** (kingsushijh.com; entrées \$18–\$24), you're in for a treat—as much for the cocktails as for the inventive rolls. **Million Dollar Cowboy Bar** (milliondollarcowboybar.com) is an Instagram must. A short drive from downtown at the luxe **Amangani** (aman.com; doubles from \$800), the **Amangani Grill** (entrées \$29–\$60) offers elegant fare with prime views of the Teton Range.



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And while other ski resorts have welcomed slick luxury-brand outposts that inevitably erode local distinction, Jackson's restaurants and shops remain fiercely independent. Star restaurateur Gavin Fine, whose Jackson Hole empire started with Rendezvous Bistro and now includes the Kitchen, Enoteca, Bin 22, and Bovine & Swine, has all but bypassed an entire generation of squeeze-bottle-dotted, chef-y food in favor of a simpler farm-to-table—or, more accurately, greenhouse-to-table—approach.

Bin 22, the always-crowded wine store and tapas bar, serves salumi and seasonal vegetable-forward small plates (like the perfectly dressed Spanish salad of arugula, Manchego, and Marcona almonds and salmon rillettes I had one night) that are on par with big-city stalwarts.

Those who succeed here learn to

navigate the perennial tension between evolution and tradition. As Ali Cohane, who owns the wildly popular Persephone Bakery and the Picnic café with her husband, Kevin, who trained as a pastry chef at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris, can attest, “It really means something to become a local, which is difficult to explain to an outsider.” When Chicago-born Cohane wanted to paint her tiny storefront white, she had to go through an exhaustive permitting process to break with downtown Jackson's brown and green palette. The result is the kind of modest, Shingle Style cottage—white clapboard, slab Carrara marble, and reclaimed-wood shelves packed with linens, house-made jams and granola, Scandinavian- and Japanese-style ceramics, and, of course, French pastries—that wouldn't be out of place in London's Notting Hill or L.A.'s Abbott Kinney. And yet, with a growing number of artisanal, one-of-a-kind shops and cafés in the area, Persephone feels especially appropriate to Jackson and its discerning, if unflashy, clientele.

It's easy for the travel purist in search of cultural immersion to fetishize a place and imagine that one should only be eating, say, bison steaks in Wyoming. (At one point my 15-year-old, well-trained local food seeker that he is, asked me if it was okay for him to order tacos because “it doesn't seem authentic.”) And even easier to forget that the frontier, and this place in particular, is the sum of those brave outsiders and their improbable pursuits—whether narrowly surviving the harsh winters and grizzly attacks 100 years ago, or today mastering Parisian-grade croissants and the perfect baguette crunch-to-chew ratio at 6,311 feet.

Or, in the case of Teton Thai, which has a cult following among the food cognoscenti, turning out totally authentic green curry and *laab* in a place with a four-month growing season. “It's a lot like being in Alaska

and cooking out of a glorified food tent,” said Sam Johnson, who owns the Teton Village institution with his Thai wife, chef Suchada Johnson. “Everything we make has to be shipped in. Nothing is easy.” Now in their 18th year, the couple, with the help of Suchada's mother, Boonlua, serve up to 550 people a night from a tiny kitchen and make what is possibly the best version of *tom kha gai* I've ever eaten outside of Thailand.

The Johnsons, who live across the street with their two kids while Boonlua lives in a studio above the restaurant, have created a commute-less family compound that maximizes ski and snowboarding time. I was reminded of something John Koenig, who was then the food and beverage manager at Caldera House, had told me earlier: “There's a ‘whatever it takes to stay here’ mentality to live in one of the world's greatest playgrounds that is the common thread and great equalizer.”

By the end of our trip, everything Paul had told us about steep and icy conditions—flattening our uphill skis, our heads and upper bodies always facing downhill—made sense. “I feel like I know what I'm doing again,” Henry said to me on the gondola. As we finished lunch, the morning fog layer seemed to lift in an instant, like a theater backdrop swapped out at intermission. Chubby clouds looked comically airbrushed with silver shadows and parted at time-lapse-video speed, revealing impossibly blue skies. With a view of the valley below too vast for a single pair of eyes, it was one of those make-sure-you-don't-blink moments you have on the very best trips. We made our way back up to the chute I'd avoided that first day without much discussion. “Remember, don't make any turns and don't stop,” Henry said, parroting Paul's instruction as I rolled my ankles and pointed my skis downhill. “Let the mountain do the work.” And, finally, I did. ♣