

## A Historic Getaway in Durango Colorado

The largest town in the southwestern part of the Rocky Mountains, with a population of over 18,000, Durango is most famous for the historic narrow-gauge railroad that connects Durango and Silverton. But there's so much more to see and do in Durango, Colorado. Take a look.

### The Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad

Since 1881, the [Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad](#) (D&SNGR) has been famous for its spectacular scenery along the Anamas River through the rugged San Juan Mountains. The D&SNGR manages seven coal-fired steam locomotives, the largest operational fleet in the country. The company owns the last of the three K-28 locomotives in existence: #473 has never been out of service for longer than routine maintenance; #476 underwent a major rebuild in 2017 after sitting in the museum for decades; #478 currently resides in the museum.

The Railroad employs four K-36 engines, built in 1925 and are all operational today. The Harper family has owned and operated this train line for more than 20 years. They strive to ensure the preservation of history and to expand and reinvest in their company. The D&SNGR is all about maintaining 19<sup>th</sup>-century technology today. These powerful locomotives pull eight or more cars from Durango to Silverton at elevations varying from 6,520 to 9,300 feet.

### The D&SNGR: A Hollywood Star

Hollywood helped save the D&SNG with classics from yesteryear like "Around the World in 80 Days" (1956) and "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" (1969). There were more than twenty movies filmed in the area, including the "Godless" mini-series in 2017. Experience the real American West history complete with gunfights and outlaw gangs, vigilante justice, gamblers, saloons, miners, and Native Americans. Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid were real outlaws, and Wyatt Earp had a home in Durango.

### Making the Trip

We made our train reservations online at least four weeks before our planned Thursday train ride. Even then, the Presidential and most first-class cars were sold out. We managed to reserve seats #5 and #6 on the Alamosa Parlor Car, the last car on the train, pulled by the famous #473 locomotive. The Alamosa car was a charming ride, which provided access to beautiful photos of the tracks, the Anamas River and snow-covered mountains from the back deck. Our hostess Allie provided delightful humor, history, and facts while serving drinks and snacks. There's a certain art of bending your knees while carrying a tray of drinks on a moving train and keeping them all upright

– she made it look easy.

We made the return trip via the motor coach along the 52 miles of magnificent snow-filled mountain terrain on the San Juan Skyway after allowing two hours in Silverton for lunch and brief exploring. You also have the option to return to Durango on the train in your same seat, learning more about the history of the area. The purchase is a round trip package.

One couple disembarked at Silverton with their carry-on luggage. They had plans to explore Silverton, spend the night at the Victorian-era Grand Imperial Hotel, the crown jewel of Silverton, and return to Durango the next day on the train. What a fun idea; wish I'd thought of that!

How fast does the train go? Eighteen mph top speed; five mph in the steepest climb.

How many miles does the train travel in one day? Forty-five miles to Silverton; 95-100 miles per day.

What is the oldest part of the train? The Concession Car #212 constructed in 1879.

### **Strater Hotel in Durango, Colorado**

The [Strater Hotel](#) was originally built in 1887 by the Strater Brothers. Conveniently located two blocks from the Historic Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad Station, The Strater is well known as “The Jewel of the Rockies.” The Strater Hotel, included in the Historic Hotels of America, A National Trust for Historic Preservation, has been owned by three generations of the Barker Family since 1926.

At the Corner of Main Avenue and 7<sup>th</sup> Street, the traditional iconic brick building has 93 beautifully appointed traditional Victorian guest rooms where the mission of every Strater team member is to deliver a historically unique guest experience. With no two rooms alike, the hotel has the largest collection of American Victorian walnut furniture in the world. When you visit, ask about the secret hiding places that mystified owner Rod Barker when he was a young boy.

### **Dining at the Strater Hotel**



Enjoy a hearty breakfast at the Mahogany Grill with a mimosa, a cup of bottomless fresh brewed coffee and seared trout finished with spinach and tomatoes in a lemon-butter sauce and two eggs any style. Sub a side of fresh fruit for the hash browns and toast. Or choose the Strater Exclusive Chicken Fried Ribeye Steak topped with classic house gravy and two eggs any style, skillet potatoes or BBQ baked beans, and sourdough toast.

Just let the waitress know when you are seated if you have a train to catch. You can also order a grab and go sandwich or breakfast burrito if you're in a hurry. Saturday and Sunday morning Brunch is available in the Mahogany Grille or the Diamond Belle Saloon.

For dinner at the Mahogany Grille, the culinary staff sources locally and family-owned ranch and farm products from small plates to the traditional award winning Pepper Steak Herbert, a delectable 7 oz black peppered beef tenderloin, pan-seared with brandy and Major Grey Chutney served over mashed potatoes and grilled asparagus. Or indulge in the New York Oscar, a 12 oz New York strip loin topped with crab, asparagus, and Bearnaise sauce.

Can't resist dessert? Don't pass up the Bananas Foster, flamed table-side in a hot buttered rum sauce, served over vanilla ice cream with a sprinkle of cinnamon and orange. Or share the Avalanche-Chocolate Brownie piled high with chocolate ice cream, whipped cream, chocolate sauce, white chocolate mousse, and a white and dark chocolate lattice.

### **The Diamond Belle Saloon in Durango, Colorado**

The Diamond Belle Saloon, Durango's only true old West Saloon, flaunts saloon girls and

bartenders dressed in costume. Earl Jr. converted the old corner drug store to the Diamond Belle Saloon in 1957, and it's been ragtime ever since. Read about the historic bar, authentic stained glass, original wallpaper and two portraits which was an artist in residence method of paying his hotel bill back in the day.

Tap your foot to Scott Joplin style ragtime piano or country and western songs. Enjoy Happy Hour with special pricing on drinks and appetizers like Nailed-It Nachos or the Charcuterie Platter. For dinner, order the Petite Filet Mignon, the Belle Burger or Rocky Mountain Rainbow Trout. Belly Up to the Belle for a good time!

### **The Office Spiritorium**

The Office Spiritorium, also in the Strater Hotel, is not your usual social establishment. Take yourself back in history to a Victorian upscale men's social club setting in San Francisco. Find the clock in the entrance area set to 5 pm – it's 5 o'clock somewhere, here always. Choose a creatively crafted cocktail like Whisky Business made with double espresso vodka and bourbon cream; Once Upon a Time in Durango with Cimarron Blanco, red *chile*, triple sec, lime, agave with ancho rub; or Barkertini, with vodka, a touch of sherry and an olive.

Get a Telluride Brewing Co. Belgium Blonde Ale or white, red, or bubbly by the glass. Order a small plate: chilled shrimp cocktail, served with spicy Bloody Mary cocktail sauce; Thai chicken lettuce wraps; or the Wine Taster's Plate, assorted specialty meats, cheeses, antipasto, fresh fruits, and fig jam, served with grilled baguette slices. On the menu, I read about the historical collection of antiques and custom-made stained-glass windows and the \$2 bill joke.

### **Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad & Museum**

With your hunger and thirst abated, delve into the history at the D&SNGR and Museum, free and open to the public every day the train operates. Established in 1998, the Museum represents how railroads played a vital part in the development of local communities. They do a great job showing how the railroad affected life in the San Juan Mountains.

Not only will you find locomotives like the #42 and #478, but you will also find vintage automobiles, a vintage fire truck, historical memorabilia, wildlife exhibits of elk, moose and deer, and even a bearskin rug. There is a 1900 Mobile Steam Car, a 1919 Hupmobile, a 1925 Buick Roadmaster, a 1923 Nash and more, all brought to the Durango area by rail.

See the 800 square foot railroad model, and a vintage railroad car built for the movie "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid." The rare Coach 460 Sleeper Car is still in its original (un-

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restored) condition. A six-hundred-gallon custom aquarium full of rainbow trout represents the Anamas River display. The 12,000 square foot museum, a fascinating history of railroading transportation and mining, is located across the tracks at the train station.



## Visit Honeyville

Take a short drive straight out Main street and head north a few miles to [Honeyville](#), celebrating 100 years of honey specialties, and family-owned since 1918. Shop an extensive selection of jams, like the jalapeno and apricot habanero, whipped honey, wildflower honey, raw honey, syrups, sauces, mixes, body care, and other gift items.

Step up to the Honey House Distillery bar and sample handcrafted, small-batch honey spirits like Cinnamon Honey Whiskey, The Colorado Honey Whiskey, Hex Vodka and Red Cliffs Spiced Rum, all made with Honeyville Wildflower Honey. Try the small-batch, premium spirit Colorado Honey Cold Brew Coffee Liqueur powered by Durango Joe's coffee.

## More to Do Around Durango, Colorado

There are or many more things to do around Durango, Colorado. Hike along the Colorado Trail, raft the Anamas River, swim at Lake Nighthorse, or take a jeep tour. You can arrange a custom guided fly-fishing trip. Visit a Dude Ranch and ride horses. Try the zip line adventures. Explore Mesa Verde National Park. Drive the San Juan Scenic Byway and the Million Dollar Highway from Silverton to Ouray. Pan for gold at the mine in Silverton. In the wintertime, ski at Purgatory Ski Resort.

Join Horsefly History Tours with a bite; learn about Durango's Wild West History – the madams, outlaws, gunfights, ghosts, murder, mayhem and the town's infamous hanging.

Enjoy some fun in Old Town Durango. Catch a Show at the Henry Strater Theater. Have a drink at the Rochester before attending the summer concert series. Shop the Durango Art Center. Have a late lunch and a glass of wine on the patio at the Palace Restaurant. The Palace Restaurant is next to the Durango train station and a great place to watch the trains come in.

There is an adventure with a touch of history for everyone in Durango, Colorado.

## For More:

- Visit Durango tourism, <https://www.durango.org/>
- Colorado Tourism, <https://www.colorado.com/>
- Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, <https://www.durangotrain.com/>
- Strater Hotel, <https://strater.com/>
- Horsefly History tours, <https://www.horseflyhistory.com/>

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- On our site: [Breckenridge Colorado: So much More Than Skiing](#)
- On our site: [Visiting Top Denver Farmer Markets](#)

*- All photos by Janie Houston Pace.*