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I'm a professional online and print freelance writer, with over 3 years of experience in producing well-researched copy and articles. In this portfolio you will find writing samples that span a variety of topics, including Real Estate, SEO, travel, and lifestyle.

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Search Engine Optimization



Local SEO: Be at the Top

Author: Julie Howsmon for Imagine That, Inc.
October 2, 2018



In the world of small business, it requires more than just hanging a sign outside to bring new customers in the door. The same goes for your website. It is paramount to market your site, make it easy to find, and convince people to click-through and visit.

The most trusted way to get qualified visitors on your site is through search engine optimization, or SEO. An ongoing process, both onsite and offsite, that continues well after your website is published. As a small or medium-sized local business owner, you have probably spent time, money and energy on building a great website. To get the most out of your investment, you will need to edge out the competition for first page rankings in search engine results.

SEO Strategies: Content is King

Four out of five Summit County visitors will search for information on Google, and we want your business to show up on top! Our team of SEO experts can help you navigate the intricacies of getting the content of your website indexed in a way helps your business rank higher.

Data shows that people have a higher level of "buyer intent" when they click on websites that rank organically versus paid advertising. Top organic positions are awarded by Google (and other search engines) because their algorithms have deemed their content highly relevant to their users' queries, and thus, delivering the best user experience possible.

Every piece of content you publish is an opportunity to draw traffic to your website. In order to compete for top search rankings, it is important to publish regular blogs with

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frequent articles related to the products and services your company offers, relevant news, and local events. It is an effective, onsite way to build authority within your market. When you post relevant content, you establish your business as a trusted expert and help Google's search engine recognize your business as a leader in your niche.

SEO Strategies: Business Directories

There are literally thousands of business directories online. Many of these directories will add the name, address, and phone number (NAP) of local businesses, even without their knowledge. That's why it is critical to ensure your NAP information is accurate on your website and Google My Business page.

Unfortunately, the information on these directories isn't automatically updated when changes are made the NAP on your website. Over time, you may change your phone number or move your business to a new location. This leads to erroneous information about your business on some directories and could potentially lead to lost customers.

Because of this, it is important to periodically audit your business information online to identify instances of old information that may exist and take measures to make corrections.

Once you have completed an audit of your citations, it is a good practice to take control of the directory listing process. This can be achieved by identifying business directories and manually creating your own profiles on them on a regular basis. By creating a number of these listings every month, you expand your business's digital footprint. This ultimately leads to more traffic on your website and reaches more potential customers.

SEO Strategies: Geo-Tagged Images



Have you ever searched for something on Google and then click on the images tab? This is becoming one of the more popular features on Google's interface as it allows people to browse images related to their search queries.

Optimizing your images to appear in search results can be a very strong way of capturing more qualified traffic on your website. Most searches in our mountain communities are performed on mobile devices by visitors who are searching for products or services "near me". By adding geotags to your images, Google can include them in location-based image search results.

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Your business exists in a resort community that draws millions of visitors to the area on an annual basis. A majority of these visitors are going to google restaurants, shops, and activities in the destination to get familiar with the area, find things to do, to eat, and to see.

If you want these people to find your business, it is important to let Google know *where* you exist.

The process of adding geotags to your site and images can be tricky. It is a good idea to hire someone who knows how so that it is done properly.

SEO Strategies: Let's Get Social

Anyone familiar with digital marketing will recommend the most popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. We do too. The big guys in the social media race are essential, but did you know smaller platforms are abundant and your business can use them to expand your digital reach?

Of course, some sites are more prevalent than others. But when it comes to social media, you will want to take advantage of as many as you can. Although many of them don't have huge user bases, you still want to expose your brand to potential customers regardless of where it might be spending time online. Adding new profiles to social sites each month amplifies the "social signals" being sent to your site, which significantly improves the position of your website in search results.

This strategy is frequently overlooked. For small and medium-sized businesses operating in highly competitive resort communities, it can make a huge difference in growing your business by showing up where new customers are looking.

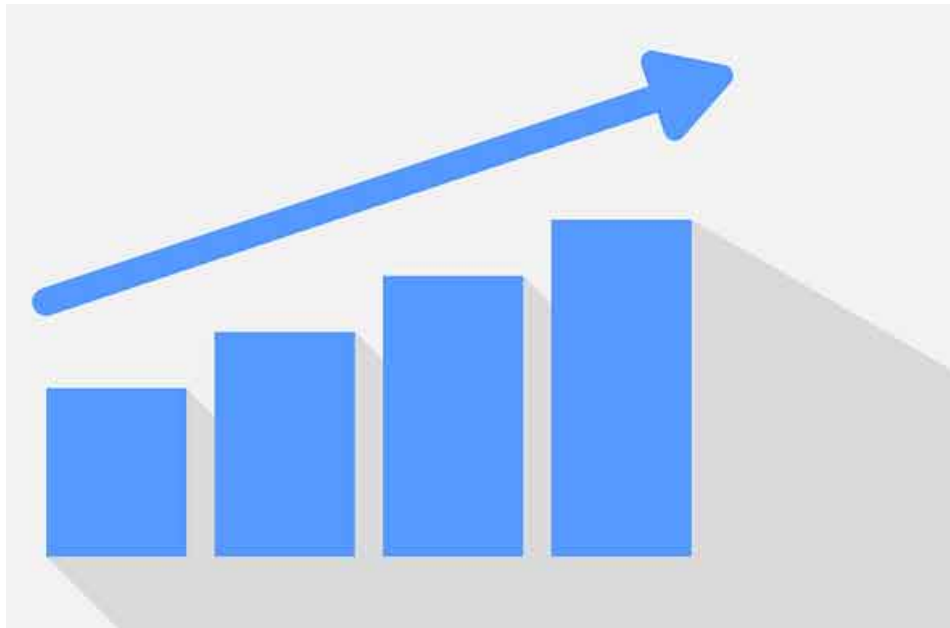
Local SEO Plans

If you would like to discuss how Imagine That can implement an effective local SEO plan for your business, [contact us today](#) for a free consultation.

SEO for Local Businesses in Mountain Resort Communities

Author: Julie Howsmon for Imagine That, Inc.

August 30, 2018



You've heard the three letters but what do they really mean and how important are they to your business?

SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, is the practice of increasing the quantity and quality of traffic to your website using techniques to ensure the search engines understand what your website is all about through organic (natural or non paid) search results.

If you own a business in a resort or mountain community, odds are you've relied on a good location, word of mouth, your personal network, and local reputation over the years to drive business. The digital age we live in today has turned up the heat of the competitive landscape as more and more potential customers turn to search engines and voice searches to find businesses they seek. Your competitors are stepping up their SEO efforts. And you should too if you want to stay competitive!

You have a website that you have invested time and energy to build, but now are you frustrated because your site doesn't show up on the first or second page of Google search results? It might seem scary to attempt to navigate the SEO environment on your own, but don't fret, we've broken down the basics to get you started.

Common issues businesses run into trying to rank higher in search results:

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1. Your website isn't mobile friendly.
2. You haven't told Google your business exists.
3. You aren't publishing enough quality content, consistently.
4. You are relying only on paid search results to drive business.
5. You aren't expanding your reach with backlinks.

You might think, "I'm completely guilty of one or all of these" - or "I don't know what that means!" Don't worry, you're not the only one. If you have a business in a resort or mountain town, it's common that you aren't skilled in optimizing websites. But our business is. Imagine That identifies website pain-points and works to get you first page Google search results. Read on for the five most common search issues small businesses face.

1. Your Website isn't Mobile Friendly

If your website isn't mobile friendly, we have tough news for you. In 2016, mobile internet usage surpassed desktop usage. It's time to catch up! Traffic from mobile searches represent more than 60% of all searches globally. This statistic is exaggerated in mountain resort communities as most visitors are looking for information on local businesses from their mobile devices because they don't travel with their laptop or desktop computers, and certainly don't walk around with them.

A small investment in a responsive website design will help Google recognize your site as mobile friendly, quickly resulting in higher search rankings. This [handy tool](#) will let you know if your site is considered mobile friendly by Google. Imagine That has an extensive portfolio of responsive, mobile friendly, websites.

2. You haven't Told Google Your Business Exists

There are many free "starter kit" SEO tools at the tips of your fingers. It is essential for local businesses to list their business with [Google My Business](#). This is a crucial step for ranking high in Google search results. If you don't provide Google with accurate business information, the right information (or any information) will not be delivered to your potential customers.

Not sure where to start, or having issues claiming your business listing? We'll guide you through the process to take control of it. As Certified Google Partners we understand their process and regularly help clients claim and manage their Google My Business pages.

Google delivers a "three-pack" display in the SERP (Search Engine Results Page). This means that when a person Googles, "type of business" in Summit County, Google will

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now display the first three results in a boxed-in area at the top of the search results page. Users can click on the "more places" button, but the top three results most often catch users attention first!

Take a look at the below example of when we Googled "Children's Store Summit County." Telling Google about your business is the first step, but search engine optimization doesn't end with simply filling out Google My Business. [Talk to us](#) about the ins-and-outs to supercharge your presence within Google's various types of search results.

3. You aren't Consistently Publishing Enough Quality Content

A blog post (article or news story) here and there won't boost your rankings if you don't support them using best practices like keyword research, page architecture, content length, and engaging information in posts such as videos, vlogs (video blogs), and great photos.

By regularly publishing relevant, well researched, content on your blog, you provide Google substance for it's automated crawlers to index. This gives you the opportunity to establish what is known as "domain authority" in your market. Doing so on a regular basis sends the signal that your business is actively engaged in developing a leadership position and staying on top of industry trends. As your businesses "domain authority" grows, it will be ranked higher in search results and able to capture more high quality traffic.

4. You Rely on Paid Search Results to Drive Business

Statistics show that internet users find organic (non paid) search results more trustworthy when it comes to local searches. Over 70% of users click on links from organic search results. So why are you spending (or thinking about spending) so much money on paid advertisements? Listen to the data, it doesn't lie. Organic traffic results from conquering the three issues covered above.

Some businesses decide to invest in both paid and organic search efforts, which can be a great strategy. Over time, paid search (pay-per-click campaigns) can be reduced in favor of improving search placement organically. Imagine that specializes in maximizing your

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investment and getting quality traffic to your business website and ultimately to your business.

Local SEO is Always Changing

Google is constantly updating its core algorithms and console environment. One of the more recent shifts to the search engine landscape is the HTTP to HTTPS transition. As of July 2018, users on Google Chrome using the Google search engine, will get a warning message about the potential security risk of websites that don't have a current secure socket layer or SSL certificate. If your website doesn't have an SSL certificate in place, you are likely losing potential customers. Even worse, an unsecured website leaves you vulnerable to malicious attacks, and software vulnerabilities that can put your business and your customers at risk.

These threats don't need to be scary. We can help you decide what type of security certificate to install based on the functionality and purpose of your website which will signify to Google that your site is a "good apple."

5. Off-site SEO

There are many components to a successful SEO strategy. In addition to the strategies outlined above, there are a number of activities that will lead to higher ranking in Google's search results. A strong "off-site" strategy builds your credibility and visibility in order to become more competitive and drive more business your way.

One of the more common issues faced by local businesses is having inconsistent or incorrect information on business listings around the web. There are thousands of directory sites that populate their databases with information scraped from the internet using robot crawlers. When your business has changes of name, address/location, phone number, or website domain, it is easy for this information to be erroneous on hundreds of directories. Even if the information is only slightly off, it makes a massive difference in the automated system's ability to match each listing with your business, therefor reducing your business's domain authority. SEO is boosted dramatically when these citations are cleaned up with accurate and consistent data. Additionally, it is good

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practice to continually add your business to online directories to increase your digital footprint and number of links that point back to your site.

This leads us to outline one of the most powerful SEO tactics --backlink building. Hundreds of links pointing to your site from high domain authority websites increases your visibility and the quality of traffic to your site. We use the analogy of "SEO juice" flowing through websites to each other, which produces gains in search result rankings and creates a web of online mentions and links that builds your website's credibility.

This strategy involves adding links by request or by producing guest blog posts that add quality content to complimentary but non-competing websites, and thus creates strong networks of interlinking websites and content. By participating in the flow of "SEO juice", websites establish an authoritative voice with an extensive reach to build higher rankings and quality traffic to build business growth.

"The best place to hide a dead body is on page two of Google." -Unknown

Your business doesn't need to continue suffering from page two blues. We are here to help. Imagine That is your local expert helping mountain resort businesses leverage the power of SEO to grow their revenue by capturing valuable search traffic from first-page Google search results. [Contact us](#) today for a free consultation on how we can help your business thrive.

Real Estate



Breckenridge Real Estate Trends for Winter 2018

Author: Julie Howsmon for Coldwell Banker Mountain Properties
March 20, 2018

The gamble of high risk, high reward is the norm of the Real Estate industry. 2017 was a strong year for residential real estate in Breckenridge. Average sales prices increased and days on the market decreased. Amid an obscure year of political and economic matters, the market stood fast. 2017 paved the way for two surefire winter real estate trends we'll see in 2018:

Homeowners will continue to capitalize on consumer travel preferences. Many will cash in on Breckenridge vacation homes via peer-to-peer rental platforms. Think: Airbnb, Homeaway, Flipkey, etc. High property demand coupled with sparse inventory will leave minimal wiggle room for buyer negotiation.

Homeowners, renters, vacationers, sellers, listen up! This year's Breckenridge real estate trends apply to us all!

Vacation Rentals will (continue to) Thrive

Reflect on your last Airbnb, VRBO, FlipKey or vacation rental escape. Why did you opt for a local property? What happened to the hotel chain your parents and grandparents so firmly stood by?

Truth is, short-term rental services cater to the unique needs of travelers:

- Location
- Cost efficiency
- Pet friendly options
- Household amenities
- Intimate, localized travel experiences

Consumers across America brought swift change to the traditional hotel portion of the travel industry. Vacasa, a vacation rental website released an intensive 2017 Mountain Markets Vacation Rental Report. Numbers show the private lodging sector has grown twice as fast as the U.S. travel industry.

Peer to peer exchange vacation rentals thrive in high-growth markets. Breckenridge falls in to this high-growth category. The historic mining town has seen a 17% increase in average residential real estate list price, year over year.

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Growth of vacation rental inventory has skyrocketed. This upsurge has paralleled the exponential trajectory of Summit County's listed and sold prices. Year over year, Breckenridge has seen a 6% growth in the number of private rentals.

Rental properties in Breckenridge do require business licenses. Owners must also pay sales and lodging taxes. However, an abundance of private rentals shows these fees haven't deterred home homeowners from the short-term rental market. This leads us to believe that in spite of mounting annual fees and taxes, many believe income benefits outweigh any rental overhead and the short-term rental trend will continue to flourish.

And the numbers support this popular trend. Breckenridge boasts an impressive 3,526 short-term units to rent. 1,802 properties in Breckenridge are second homes. Data reveals locals have also taken advantage of renting out detached studios, spare rooms, or basements. Thanks to platforms like Airbnb, Breckenridge residents can afford mortgages and contribute to retirement funds.

Why will Breckenridge vacation homeowners continue to capitalize on this trend as we trail blaze in to 2018?

For starters, passive rental income streams are attractive. Peer to peer exchange platforms have simplified the rental process for vacation homeowners. Online sites help individuals rake in 5% - 10% gross income of property value. In Breckenridge, the average single-family home price is nearly \$1.3 million. A little property management action suddenly doesn't sound too bad.

The miners who founded Breckenridge in 1859 may have thought the town dried up decades ago. Winter real estate trends prove a new gold mine in vacation rentals will steal the show.

Home ownership in order to capitalize on short-term rentals is a trend that we will continue to see throughout 2018 and beyond. Check out our discussion, [10 Reasons Why a Second Home is a Great Investment](#), for more info and facts!

Sellers will have the Upper Hand

2017 saw an inventory crisis and this trend will carry on full-force into 2018. A Colorado statewide population surge has created tremendously high demand for housing. Yet available properties remain at a record low.

Colorado continues to welcome an influx of tech talent to Denver. Work life balance is a main priority in today's environment. Breckenridge is the ideal arms-length distance to

Breckenridge Real Estate Trends for Winter 2018

have the best of both worlds. Sellers see the demand and can hold firm to their list price as buyers snap up their homes.

People move to Colorado for a plethora of activities the mountain region provides. It's hard to blame them. Front Range residents now account for 40% of real estate sales in Breckenridge and Summit County.

The Colorado Association of Realtors tracks real estate trends across the state. Analysts release a detailed monthly local market update. We filtered the report as a real-time tool to identify specific trends. January's numbers confirm the residential real estate landscape in Breckenridge is indeed a "seller's market."

Summit County had an inventory of 696 single-family homes and condos for sale in January 2017. One year later, this number has fallen to a measly 468 properties; a noteworthy inventory decrease of 33%.

In the state of Colorado, inventory is down 27%. Yes, Breckenridge will sell more deed-restricted homes this year, and this new construction designed for workforce residents might ...might alleviate the local housing crisis. But what about new construction for the Front Range 40%?

A lack of new construction guarantees a continued shortage for buyers. Dearth development promises sellers a pretty penny for Breckenridge properties.

Comparison of January 2017 versus 2018 reveals sellers received 96.8% of list price, up an entire 1% from last year at this time. As the seller-power trend continues, we can expect this number to approach 100% in 2018.

These factors will further bolster seller power this year:

Demand in Breckenridge remains high despite record low supply.

Spikes in sales price shows that buyers will pay near list price, if not full.

Projected increase in mortgage interest rates will kick buyers into action.

Breckenridge temperatures have cooled, but the seller market is white-hot. Adamant buyers have no option but to pay top price if they want to enjoy the benefits of owning a mountain home.

And more buyers look to purchase in this magical mountain destination. Swells in population support the popular quote, "The mountains are calling, and I must go." Recent media exposure endows Breckenridge as the #1 Best Small Town In Colorado.

Buy or Sell a Home Today!

Breckenridge Real Estate Trends for Winter 2018

We have a positive outlook for the year ahead and our agents are here to help navigate these trends. If you're ready to buy or sell, contact us today, and we'll work together to satisfy your wants and needs!

Real Estate & Tax Changes

Do They Affect Me?

Author: Julie Howsmon for Coldwell Banker Mountain Properties

March 25, 2018

Truth told, the new tax reform laws affect most Americans. One might read this and think, "I'm not an investor in real estate, how could that be?" On December 22, 2017, President Trump signed the *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act* (TCJA) into law. Investors, homeowners and renters alike will feel an impact.

The purpose of this article is not to break down the tax bill piece by piece. By the end, the reader should have a better idea of how changes to tax breaks and deductions will have a direct or trickle down effect.

This blog ends on a high note and saves the best news for last. To start, here is an overview of how tax changes might have a negative effect on real estate investments.

Property Tax Ceiling

Prior years saw an uncapped property tax deduction. In addition, property owners could file an unlimited income tax or sales tax deduction (but not both).

The 2017 tax reform bill brought big changes to these deductions. State and local income taxes (SALT) or state and local sales taxes, plus real property taxes were capped. Between income, sales and property taxes, filers may only deduct up to a combined amount of \$10,000 (single or married). Married filing individuals may only deduct up to \$5,000. This would make it seem married couples are being penalized since unmarried "singles" can deduct up to \$10,000, or \$20,000 combined.

A recent report from [CNN Money](#) revealed that 4.1 million Americans pay more than \$10,000 in property taxes. High income tax states (New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Illinois, California) will feel the biggest hit from this change. For many residents of these states, a cap on a combined deduction of income, sales and property taxes will have a pronounced negative affect.

To sum it up: The ability to deduct large sums has dwindled for individuals in high income and high property tax states. Fortunately, Colorado residents will feel less of an impact. Reports show that [Colorado homes are taxed at some of the lowest rates in the country](#)(0.52 in CO vs. 1.15 Nationwide).

What are possible repercussions?

For home investors in a high-income and property tax state, the SALT limitation will make home ownership unaffordable for a handful of people. We may see a trend toward renting versus owning.

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For current renters, this means a more competitive rental landscape. In mountain areas including Vail, Breckenridge, Frisco, and Winter Park where long-term rentals are already limited, this could create a greater housing strain for locals.

For many landlords this is a positive pendulum swing. Higher rental demand will ensue. Greater need combined with the new 20% business deduction (covered later) will result in deeper pockets for most landlords.

This chain of events leads analysts to predict an uptick of homes on the market. Many houses will go up for sale by those who can no longer afford the tax increase. Residential real estate investors will see an increase in business - more homes on the market and more people with a hope to rent, not own. As a real estate investor, this tax reform topic could be seen in a positive or negative light.

Limitations on Mortgage Deductions

Prior to December 22, 2017, when President Trump signed the TCJA into law, home mortgage interest rates were fully deductible up to \$1,000,000 ([IRS Publication 936](#)). Now, mortgage interest is deductible on the first \$750,000 (or \$375,000 if married filing separately) for primary and secondary residences. In order to deduct mortgage interest, your residence must be a “qualified home.” The IRS defines qualified homes as; “a main or second home” (houses, condominiums, cooperatives, mobile homes, house trailers, boats, or similar property that has sleeping, cooking and toilet facilities) are covered by this definition.

For investors with more than two homes, mortgage interest past the second home is not deductible as this property is considered personal interest.

Caveat

Tax filers with a mortgage prior to December 15, 2017, are grandfathered in to the previous interest tax law. Individuals that fall into this category can continue to deduct home mortgage interest on up to \$1,000,000 (or \$500,000 if married filing separately).

Lastly

Interest on a home equity loan is no longer deductible...

Now for the good news. Real estate investors, listen up!

20% Pass-Through Deduction

Qualified income from a pass-through business is now eligible for a 20% deduction. To refresh, legal institutions define pass-through business taxation as follows: “How

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owners of a business pay tax on income derived from that business on their personal income tax returns. Pass through taxation applies to sole proprietorships, partnerships, and S-Corporations.”

How does that work?

For example, a real estate investor generated \$30,000 in net taxable income from a rental property this year. Under the TCJA, that individual can deduct 20% of his or her net taxable income. $\$30,000 \times 20\% = \$6,000$ deduction eligible income on one's personal tax filing if this real estate income emanates through a pass-through business (LLC, S-Corps, etc.).

It is possible that this deduction could be limited. For those that make more than \$207,500 single or \$315,000 married filing jointly the full 20% deduction may not apply.

Increase in Bonus Depreciation

Home improvement gurus, HGTV fans and DIY-ers rejoice! Under the TCJA, bonus depreciation increased. Originally 50%, people can now write off 100% of costs for land improvements or personal property with a useful life less than 20 years. This includes new and used assets.

Certain expenses such as landscape, parking space, fences and irrigation systems qualify as land improvement costs. A few examples of qualified personal property expenses include equipment, carpet, tools and appliances. Check out the Coldwell Banker blog for a few tips and tricks on landscaping and roofing improvements.

It is important to remember that assets might incur a depreciation recapture tax upon sale.

Tell Me About The Future

It is possible to see these tax cuts and breaks overturned. How? In the event the party of political opposition takes control of office. If this happens, we may see changes or a reversal. Until then, expect these new tax laws to affect real estate investments from 2017-2025.

When you choose to sell or buy with Coldwell Banker Mountain Properties, you can do so with confidence. Market changes and tax laws are confusing. Our extensive knowledge and expertise will put you at ease with the process. Together, we can navigate real estate trends to maximize your investment.

Contact us with questions or for more information!

Summit County, Colorado



Nine Activities Not to Miss this Mud Season

Author: Julie Howsmon for Coldwell Banker Mountain Properties

April 8, 2018

Ah, springtime in the Rocky Mountains. Winter's snowfall recedes and paves the way for bountiful blossoms, blue skies and beer festival season. March's spring breakers have headed back home to wrap up the school year and locals trickle out of hibernation. Melting piles of snow and ice begin to trickle too, creating infamous "mud season" in Breckenridge.

No doubt, spring is a variable time of year in the mountains. On a day-to-day basis, many wonder "should I grab my cross country skis today or hit the trails with my mountain bike?" "Is it puffy coat or tank top weather?" With 300 days of sunshine, Colorado is not a bad place to be any given time of year.

The springtime mud season, despite popular belief, is a well-kept secret in Summit County. Smaller crowds on main streets really allow the charm of our mountain towns to shine. Smaller lines at popular spots like the one and only Crepes A La Cart is a prime reason why people love mud season in Breckenridge. Ample options of activities are available. Here are nine things not to miss out on this spring!

Dining, Arts, & Culture

1. *Breckenridge Dining Passport*

As the seasons change, so do restaurant menus and offerings. Options to dine and drink in Breckenridge are bountiful; 78 to choose from, to be exact. In an effort to drive business and encourage visitors and locals to experience new cuisine, Breckenridge Dining Guide created the Dining Passport. With offers valid from April 16th until June 7th, the passport is only \$10 and offers hundreds of dollars in savings. Without a doubt, people don't stay hungry for long in the spring! It should be mentioned, proceeds fund scholarships for local students - eat good and feel good about it!



Nine Activities Not to Miss this Mud Season

2. *Backstage Theater*

For a healthy dose of kick back and relax entertainment, head to a show at the Breckenridge Backstage Theater. This spring's main event is the Mary Poppins Jr. production at the Riverwalk Center. This venue consistently hosts a plethora of events and functions for all ages. With a convenient location adjacent to the Blue River and within walking distance of all restaurants and bars, make it a show and Dining Passport dinner kind of evening!

3. *Wine Taste*

In a state renowned in the craft beer industry, wine tasting might not be top of mind. Visitors and locals will be surprised to learn there are over 150 wineries in Colorado! A pastime traditionally reserved for the 21-and-over crowd, Summit County's Continental Divide Winery welcomes all with open arms. This includes children and even dogs. The winery has two tasting rooms -- Main Street in Breckenridge and the second in Fairplay, just 20 miles down the road. Learn how climate, elevation and weather affect the taste and aroma of wines during a wine blending experience. Visitors to the winery can boast they visited the world's highest altitude winery!

4. *Ready, Paint, Fire!*

For those looking to tap into their artistic side, there is an activity for that. As mentioned, spring weather in Colorado can be finicky. Sunny mornings, followed by afternoon showers leave everyone a bit confused. At Ready, Paint, Fire, participants can create mosaic decorative pieces, learn how to fuse glass and as the name would suggest, paint. The studio is the perfect hideout for days when spring weather does not want to cooperate with outdoor endeavors. Try to go between 6pm and 9pm to catch daily art and happy hour!

5. *Shop*

One hundred eighty shops and boutiques await. Breckenridge proffers small and large businesses for the fashion-forward or gear enthusiasts. Capitalize on end of season sales for the best deals. In spring, most shops will liquidate winter inventory to make way for the new stuff. Take advantage of these discounts to stock up on equipment for next season or a refreshed wardrobe!



Nine Activities Not to Miss this Mud Season

Alpine Adventure

6. *Fat Tire Bike*

Ever heard of a fat bike? This outdoor activity is all the new rage. A type of bike created out of necessity, fat tire bikes are ideal for less than ideal biking conditions. Think, snow, sand, mud season, etc. Miles of trails network around Breckenridge within an arm's length distance from downtown. It's important to research what trails align with one's ability level. A few beginner trails include the rec path from Breck to Frisco and the Gold Run Nordic Center. An assortment of local tours are offered, including a Fat Bike Beer & Distillery Tour! Mud season isn't for hiding inside, head out on a mountain, road or bike as well!

7. *Kayak on Lake Dillon*

When there's mud on the ground, jump in the water! Well, hop on a floating device that is. Kayaking on Lake Dillon doesn't need to be restricted to a Summer only activity. Try a hand at paddling around the lake with an Adventure Tour. Kayaking is a great way to get exercise and take in the views of the snow-tipped mountain ranges. Relax in the tranquility that surrounds!

8. *Fly Fish*

Fly fishing in the Rocky Mountains is a year-round pastime. Mud season is a great time to head out to the river and cast a line. Snowmelt and runoff fill the streams in and around Breckenridge. For Spring fly fishing, Cutthroat Anglers recommends the Upper Blue River and the Eagle River near Vail, Colorado. These two spots are home to Rocky Mountain trout - thickly skinned creatures with the ability to survive harsh winters at high altitude. For beginners, check out our Fly Fishing Lessons post to learn the basics.

9. *Snow Shoe*

Snowshoeing is another ski town activity not solely reserved for Winter. Depending on the conditions of Spring, mud season can be a great time of year to hike among the trees! Late April or May are typically perfect months to head out when it's a bit warmer but still a good layer of snow on the ground, especially in shaded areas. Options abound when it comes to self-guided adventures, groomed trails and even night snowshoeing. Talk about an exhilarating type of nightlife!

Not Just A Ski Town

Breckenridge is classically considered an epic ski town, reserved for winter activities like skiing, snowboarding, tubing and dog sledding. Truth is, Breckenridge provides entertainment all year round. Don't miss out on dining and shopping deals this mud season. Take advantage of fewer crowds mud season to peruse available listings or put

Nine Activities Not to Miss this Mud Season

your home on the market. In-between any of these activities, take a break and contact us to discuss your next real estate venture.

The Best Photo Spots for Your Breckenridge Vacation

Author: Julie Howsmon of Mountain Chic Musings



Breckenridge is truly a winter wonderland during ski season. The chill in the fresh mountain air, twinkling lights that line historic Main Street, the light powder that dusts the pine trees on the ski hill, the bush-tailed fox that dashes across the street in front of you – it’s the little things in Breckenridge you’ll remember after you’re back home reminiscing on your vacation.

It goes without saying on the mountain in your gear is a great spot to snap a classic “Breckenridge” picture. But as a seasoned local, I’ve put together some of the best “secret spots” to get that perfect holiday card-worthy photo from your time here in our little mountain town. Grab a pen and take notes on the The Best Photo Spots for Your Breckenridge Vacation!

The Mines Up French Gulch Road

If you want to get a first-hand taste of Breckenridge’s history, find one of the dozens of mines that are scattered throughout Breckenridge and its surrounding mountainous areas. Once home to miners and trailblazers, Breckenridge has a deep history rooted in the mining industry, and dilapidated mines are around nearly every corner if you keep your eyes open on the trails! There are a few close to town that have been restored, creating a picture-perfect backdrop for your memorable photos from Breck. Take Wellington Road east from Main Street and turn right on Reiling Road when you reach a fork. Continue up Reiling and it will turn into French Gulch Road. Continue up the road

The Best Photo Spots for Your Breckenridge Vacation

until you see a mine on the left. There is a small trail to get closer to the mine, or, take a photo in front of the fence with the mine in the background. Hey, if you get lucky, you just might find some gold!



The Riverwalk Center

Imagine a picturesque sunset with a vibrant pink alpenglow dusting the mountains behind you. In the corner of your picture is a twinkling Christmas tree and there are small snowflakes fluttering to the ground. The Riverwalk Center in the middle of Main Street Breckenridge is a hub for a plethora of town events, an epicenter for small children climbing on the playground, and your perfect picture spot. Hop in front of the tree to get that glistening lights shot or head over to the bridge and catch a Kodak Moment with the ski area proudly beaming behind. You can't miss the Riverwalk Center, and this is the easiest spot to hit when you're already downtown window shopping or heading out to dinner!

The Best Photo Spots for Your Breckenridge Vacation



Historical Breckenridge Railroad Park

Did you know that Breckenridge has a rich history deeply rooted in mining and, of course, developing the area you know today as Breckenridge? Well, with mining comes the need for a railroad so that miners and residents could transfer the goods and supplies to and from town. The railroad was active in the late 1800's and early 1900's but has since been retired. From June – September, visitors can visit the museum adjacent to the railroad remnants to learn more about the history. Although the museum is closed for the winter, it still makes for a great photo opportunity! Especially the building that says “BRECKENRIDGE” in big, bold letters – talk about making a statement! To get there from town, head south towards Fairplay and turn left on Boreas Pass Road, just past The Residence Inn. The railroad and your picture-perfect spot is just a couple hundred yards up the road on your right!

The Best Photo Spots for Your Breckenridge Vacation



Mt. Baldy Road

After a pit stop at the Railroad Park, continue up Boreas Pass Road to your destiny of glorious, panoramic ski area views! Most people think the best picture spot is on the ski mountain, but we think nothing screams Breckenridge more than a photo with the entire mountain range *behind* you! About 1.5 miles from the Railroad Park, look for Mt. Baldy Road on your left. Switch on the blinker, swoop a left, drive about 300 yards and find a place to pull over. Step out of your car, turn around, and, voilà!. Try not to lose your breath as you gaze at the Tenmile range in its sheer beauty. Odds are there will be a good amount of snow on the ground, so be sure to bring your snow boots to walk out into the sprawling open field and snap that perfect pic!

The Best Photo Spots for Your Breckenridge Vacation



Breckenridge and Beyond!

Breckenridge is home to many more great photo spots than just these four, but these should be at the top of your list! There are some gorgeous spots out in Blue River towards Quandary Peak and back in the direction of I-70, up Swan Mountain and around Lake Dillon.

Did I miss one of your favorite Kodak Moment spots? Let me know in the comments below and I'll add it to the list!

Ranches



Freshwater Fish Stocking

Author: Julie Howsmon for ranchsellers.com

July 24, 2017

A flapping fish frenzy ensues as an industrial truck carefully backs up to the pond's edge and empties the stainless steel tank. A cascade of trout come flying out and within seconds your pond is teeming with the industry's best freshwater fish. Riveting rainbows, beautiful browns, bold brooks, tantalizing tigers and yellowstone trout varieties are now your new neighbors.

These fish have just traveled hours from the local hatchery in an aluminum or stainless steel tank. In ideal conditions, with bottled oxygen and an aeration stone, the fish can survive up to 24 hours. Nevertheless, best practice is to transfer from the hatchery to your property in less than three hours, while the water temperature is cool and oxygen abundant.

Fish stocking is a practice dating back almost 150 years. In the past, non-native fish were commonly introduced to environments for sport and consumption. Today, over-fishing or inability to breed are common reasons that require stocking. Professionals employ two techniques for placement – direct from the truck into ponds and net transfer into rivers.

A few factors affect stocking cost: species, weight, and nurture

conditions. For example, fish cultivated in a natural pond cost approximately 30% more than their aquatic counterparts raised in concrete raceway hatcheries. Nurture environment will not affect the size and most fish range between six and twenty-two inches at time of stocking. One thing to note is, concrete raceway fish may have damaged fins, a result of close quarters at the hatchery.



Catching fish in your backyard is a fun and entertaining activity for your family and friends. However, merely stocking does not guarantee trophy fish for generations to come. Pond and river maintenance is crucial to sustain the aquaculture ecosystem you have created.

Fish will acclimate to their new environment at varying rates, depending on the hatchery habitat. Experts

Freshwater Fish Stocking

recommend supplemental pellet feeding for the first couple weeks. Feeding should be kept at 2-3 times per week so the fish are encouraged to forage naturally as well.

In addition to stocking main varieties of fish, providing a complimentary forage base creates a robust river or pond habitat. Freshwater shrimp, multiple varieties of minnows, and crayfish are pondmate staples of a healthy forage foundation. Flathead minnows are known to prolong the life span of trout, which on average is approximately 5 years.



Looking to the future, specialists suggest re-stocking once a year for the first three years. Replenishing the aquatic population is essential in pond environments where most fish cannot reproduce, with the exception of brook trout.

With this knowledge in-hand, your fish will thrive! Whatever your stocking intentions might be, we hope you enjoy your outdoor sanctuary.

Contact us for any recreational ranch or real estate questions.

Irrigation: Ranch Water Management

Author: Julie Howsmon for ranchsellers.realestate
July 28, 2017

The journey of a single water droplet, funneled to your field, pond, or reservoir begins right around closing day of your local ski area. As temperature increases and winter secedes to make way for spring, snowmelt trickles downhill, navigating to your property. A nearly prehistoric tradition dating back to the Egyptians, irrigation proves to be a prolific practice thousands of years later.

In the United States, irrigation developed out of necessity. Farmers needed a way to capture water for cash crops. Similarly, ranchers of the Rocky Mountains needed a way to supply and store water for livestock.



Pond Storage for Ranch Irrigation

Depending on the intent of your irrigation initiatives, take crucial considerations before digging ditches. One mistake many ranch owners make, is not properly researching a property's water rights. With any parcel of land, the Appropriation Doctrine outlines

parameters of water rights. For example, how much water usage is allotted or if water can be stored in mass quantities on the property.



If entitlements are limited, ranch owners can opt to purchase water rights from someone else. While it is possible to excavate wells for irrigation purposes, in Colorado it is uncommon to drill a well deep enough to

Irrigation: Ranch Water Management

reach the aquifer. For this reason, flood irrigation is the most common practice in the Rocky Mountains.

The process of flood irrigation begins with diverting snow melt from natural creeks or rivers with man made ditches. If your main water source is far away, a trench (deeper and less wide) is used to funnel the flow to your desired endpoint. Once the water reaches it's destination, i.e. field, lateral ditches are used to disperse the water from a high to low area. Ideally, you catch the superfluous water in a low dammed area. Typically, an irrigation reservoir or pond.

Restricted water usage may call for the installation of flow sensors and water meters. These tools can help you maintain proper water usage and reduce water waste in the event of a leak or blockage from a beaver dam.

While beavers and their dams are a nuisance we'd rather do without, plastic and nylon dams strategically placed will improve your entire irrigation system. By harnessing water flow, you can proactively catch and store snowmelt to ensure a continuous supply of irrigation water.

Typically placed at the start of a culvert, headgates help control where water flows and are essential to your water management system. Today we see efficient, modernized models, welded together with strong metals. Whether winged, pull-handle or drop-in, there is a headgate option for your needs.

Irrigation encourages rich plant growth crucial for a well-rounded ranch property. However, if water management is ignored, sagebrush and other wasteland plant material would take over, turning the Rocky Mountain region into a high planes desert.

Irrigation attracts a diverse array of wildlife species, indirectly improving certain habitats – including your own.



For more information on irrigation practices or to inquire about available properties, please contact Ranch Sellers.

Pond-ering Property Improvements?

Author: Julie Howsmon for ranchsellers.com

July 12, 2017

Beaches to cast from, docks to secure your row boat and stand up paddle boarding are among a plethora of action-packed activities awaiting the completion of your pond restoration or creation. Ponds provide a stimulating environment, for you, your family and an array of biological organisms.

Fluvial restoration is a simple 5-step sequence: drain, dry, cut and install a dam, change interior contour, and re-vegetation. Ponds almost never exist where you can just dig a hole without a dam. The State Engineer's Office of Colorado caps dam size at 10 feet, though even this height is excessive for your every day Rocky Mountain ranch pond. For small to mid-size projects, Earth dams of cobble, dirt, clay and sand suffice for water control needs.



For post-ski season snowmelt or excessive rainfall, an agricultural drain or, AGRIdrain, will compliment the pond dam to protect your property from flooding. As a precautionary backup plan, constructing a man-made spillway provides surefire confidence your pond will not

Pond-ering Property Improvements?

rise above the maximum desired water surface level.

To prepare your pond for beautiful browns, riveting rainbows, and striking cutthroats, the bottom must be properly contoured. Experts recommend the base of a successful stillwater fishery should range between 4 and 12 feet, dependent on elevation and water source, such as proximity to mountain runoff. At these depths, water temperature will most always self-regulate to a fluctuating range of 33-70 degrees Fahrenheit. A little chilly for summer swim races, but optimal to provide a happy habitat for your fish!

Pond management requires crucial re-stocking and awareness of biodiversity. Flathead minnows and brook trout will reproduce in a pond environment. However, owners should beware that browns, rainbows and cutthroats cannot. The last fundamental step to ensuring biological success and esthetic enjoyment of your pond is the planting of vital vegetation in the embankment riparian zone.

Ideally, ponds should be built in a natural occurring wetland; yet doing so is not always feasible. Planting cottonwoods, pine trees, willows and other native flora will help cultivate your newly created ecosystem. Aside from providing trunks to hang your hammock from, trees along the riparian zone will cast necessary shade to regulate pond temperatures.

Consequently, with a lack of shade, pond temperatures will increase and thereby deplete oxygen levels in the water. To avoid this crisis of “floating fish,” oxygen diffusers can be installed to regulate the composition for all pond components; from fish, to plants, macro invertebrates, microbes and more.

Pond-ering Property Improvements?



Has this pond talk peaked your interest in finding out more? Trout Unlimited, American Rivers and Ducks Unlimited are your surefire subject matter experts on habitat restoration. And when you are ready to buy land for your new pond, Ranch Sellers is here to help!