

DENVER, COLORADO, USA



Denver has been known as the 'Mile High City' since its inception due to its elevation, yet it's really just a plateau fronting the glorious Rocky Mountains and seems quite flat rather than mountainous. Still, it's just a short hop to some of the world's great skiing and it's known more now for the Rocky Mountain High (not the John Denver song, he's actually from Arizona) - that's the result of Colorado legalising recreational marijuana use and public sales to those over 21 from January 1 this year.

But if you're expecting a circus of hippies and trails of smoke from the airport to the city, Denver remains comfortably normal since it introduced this revolutionary concept and the lack of advertising, marketing, bans on public consumption outdoors and in public venues means that tourists are not confronted with a carnival of cannabis like in Amsterdam. Hotels don't generally allow the smoking of pot in the rooms and even the tourism authority doesn't promote this New Weed Order to the lucrative markets of baby boomers and spring breakers alike.

Because of its large college population, being the hub for ski tourism and a youthful city, Denver is filled with classic live

venues, innovative restaurants and trendy bars as well as a microbrew tradition. Denver is a folk stronghold with a smattering of metal, though it's not really known for local artists that have hit it nationally. They're a mixed bag but not indicative of a scene or style—Kip Winger, Philip Bailey, India Arie, The Lumineers and Jill Sobule top the list. Perhaps the most famous export is Duane 'Dog' Chapman, the bounty hunter.

Denver has always been a young city with refined cowboys and gentle oil field roughnecks. It's never been the Wild West but more a wealthy resources centre and cattle processing town that took pride in its modern progressiveness. Being in the centre of the West, it's also in the touring crossroads for bands and as a result has had a rich history of just the right venues and mix of genres.

Be prepared for bright neon and flashing lights though as most of the top venues are converted movie theatres with their gaudy marquees intact on the outside and plush, acoustically gorgeous performance spaces inside.

TRAVEL

BY PHIL TRIPP



The Paramount Theatre www.paramountdenver.com 1621 Glenarm Place is a grand zig zag art deco-style movie house that opened in 1930 and holds 1700 people in a cushy interior with red velvet drapes and a huge Wurlitzer organ of 1600 pipes, originally built for silent movies. Gorgeous murals, a vaulted ceiling, faux-gold leafing, cut glass chandeliers and ornamental architecture makes this a national treasure and acoustically perfect.

In the '20s and '30s, theatres were the gathering places for the common man and **Gothic Theatre** www.gothictheatre.com 3263 S Broadway was the predecessor of the Paramount, also art deco with a wide floor, tiered balcony and great sightlines. The first of the 'talkies' film venues, it also hosted dances, musicals and cabaret, was renovated in 1998 and opened in 1999 with The Rebirth Brass Band to sanctify the thousand seat venue.

The neon saturated front of the **Bluebird Theatre** www.bluebirdtheater.net 930 W. 7th Ave lights up the hip Colfax Avenue and is a 500 seater that hosts over 200 shows a year. Originally a movie house and former porn theatre, it's been rehabbed with modern production and more than a facelift. Built in 1913, it is stacked with tiered general admission areas overlooked by a wide balcony. Heavy metal, indie or singer-songwriters, The Bluebird works with all genres.

For the folksy, bluesy sides, there is a set of three venues within **Swallow Hill Music** swallowhillmusic.org 71 East Yale Ave which has been serving Denver's music community since 1979 as a large non-profit, promoting roots, folk and acoustic music. It stages more than 200 concerts annually in that facility as well as producing free music festivals and street fairs throughout Denver and also houses a superb music school.