

**Telluride: Land of no Heineken.
Thank you for not participating!**

by Dmitriy Shoutov (unedited)

This place presented me with an unusual feeling whereas luxurious pretentiousness coexists with many unfinished ideas. It was friendly, isolated and expensive.

If you care to look close enough you can see some interesting paradoxes. Prices for food in local restaurants will easily bit many New York establishments. Like you were steered to consume local produce – take beer, for example - local brewery beers were just five bucks and good quality.

The first week of March it was – the peak of the season and yet there were no waiting lines to the lifts. If you from New York or some other metropolis and a kind of missing crowds you can satisfy your crowd- nostalgia by trying to get a seat in a restaurant on Main Street during dinner hours. You will be waiting for an hour. I witnessed how food was proudly served to a loud group of retirees from North Carolina who probably never come close to slopes.

Locals will not forget to show you Oprah’s enormously large house close to the trail, but nobody will claim that ever saw her ski-snow-boarding down Sundance.

For whatever reason the developers choose to send “free gondola” from Mountain Village to Telluride town not to the top of the Mountain...

It is mid-March evening. No wind. Temperature is very pleasant, ideal for skiing. The air is fresh and tasty. It seems like you can drink and eat it. “Free gondola” station in Telluride, about 9 PM. Tranquil and empty place - the only older lady was standing in a single line waiting for an approaching gondola. The regular line – for couples, groups etc – were empty, we stepped in along that line. The lady was hesitant to take the arrived gondola most probably not willing to share the ride with us. We made a slight gesture competing with a local lady in politeness showing our respect to “women first” doctrine. A uniformed assistant invites us to take the car. The lady gets in. Her unexpressed desire to sit in the cabin alone did not materialize. We set in front of her. Blankest were on our hips and gondola was smoothly claiming up. Something coming from the lady’s excessive politeness started to ferment on local beers inside me.

I asked: “Do you like it here?” Why did I asked – I knew the answer!

A standard combination of words came from the lady’s lips: “The nature is so beautiful here and the people are so nice”.

Me again: “The place does look vibrant due to the lack of competition”.

The lady: “This place is very popular. Oprah and Tom Cruise come here”.

The stand of two opposites finished in 13 minutes when the gondola dispatched the lady into the darkness of the architecturally attractive Alpine village.

Glossy magazine "Dining in Telluride" had been catching my attention for a while. I could not rest from thinking about something undetectable that made this place so much different from others. Then I stepped closer to resolving the mystery. The key was that "free gondola" which was built to serve drinking and dining purpose but not the skiers. Soft ride takes you to the middle station called "St. Sophia" (3211 m) where you become a guest of Mr. and Mrs. Allred's establishment featuring gauzy expensive restaurant with prices of legendary Waldorf-Astoria.

The dizziness from the altitude is neutralized with the steepness of the bill. Some bold skiers of our group took the challenge to tasting Mr. and Mrs. Allred's hospitality. Next evening we met them dining in the pizzeria. As up to me I entered the "Allred's" prepared, after seeing stories of local rich and famous.

A highly attentive host asked: "A table for two?"

"No, just to enjoy the view". To see mountains through apres ski crowd was impossible. In a bar section of less than 200 square feet nosy crowd was busy consuming local beers while a formal dining area with white cloth tables were all empty waiting rich clients for later dinners. The menu offers exotic dishes including the Chief's tasting plate at \$85 per person.

I said in a baritone note: "By the way, are Ron and Joys (Mr. and Mrs. Allred) coming tonight?"

Surprise came from highly attentive: "They hardly appear here".

On our way back we went through long elaborated corridors observing posh shinny elevators, wood doors and furniture given to real estate solders but looking untouched by market battles.

Our ski group did something right. The Heaven the Nature presented us with three days of strong snow and three days with cloudless sky, pleasant spring skiing.

The night before about 2-3 foot of snow fell. This time I am on the lift with the master-skier, Massimo.

I heard stories about his professional skiing skills. Once I got a chance I asked to hear from the first hand: "Is it true that you have been an officer with the Italian army ski platoon in Alps?"

"Yes, but I was a solder not an officer".

Already I felt a room for a joke: "The rank was solder but the skiing skill was like general".

He smiles back to me.

If somebody asks Massimo “is this slop difficult”, he would reply like: “It’s OK!”. The slop could be doubly black diamond or worse.

After disembarking from “Prospect Express” we have to carry our skies up higher towards fresh-powder — double-black-diamond “Genevieve”. It’s 11,815’ (3601m). You sack in the air with full lungs, still not enough. Massimo and Martin are tens feet ahead. I decided to cheat starting from a lower point with diagonal sliding. I knew that more than 100 feet of most difficult terrain will be cut off making the whole decent easier.

Says Patty with her trade-mark charming smile: “I never understand the concept of carrying the skies up to the peak”. My hobby is abstract thinking. And I say: “The balance of universe requires that once in a while you carry the skies like they carry you in all other times”.

Dino observes: “This way of thinking about the skies never occurred to me”.

If you ski recklessly down groomed trail you can end up deep ... in the history. One of the lift is called “Ute Park” to remind skiers that in 1870s mineral hungry industrialists pushed unfairly native Utes away from San Juan Mountains for small fee. Here the real Avatar happened. For twelve-hour backbreaking labor miners were getting almost nothing while mine owners were dancing at galas in Denver. Instead of dancing balls miners got many cheap saloons, killings in drunken fights and gambling. Men to women ratio was 16 to 1. “To Hell You Ride” was how they called this place.

Whoops! I – a dream liner – flew into crystal white snow after mismanaging a large mogul hidden under the snow. When I stood up I saw the snow up to my waist. Both skies unlocked dived into deep snow. I could not see neither of two. Luckily for me Massimo stood higher on the slop saying: “Good dive. Look to the left for the ski”. For sure I would have to wait till the spring melts the snow to find my ski.

One day two beautiful Spanish ladies, decided to join our stunt group. It was a difficult “black diamond” trail where they demonstrated boldness and skills. I watched the ladies making their way down and felt unexplained something were emitted from the heart of the San Juan peak. Only later I realized that this “something” was the ladies’ roots with the man who discovered this place, the Spanish Priest Francisco Atanasio Dominguez. His spirit helped Maria and Laura to manage run for masters. At least for this time.

I did not care of the motivation which pushed the pioneers to discover new frontiers. I was dead tired. I was skiing down into our luxury resort “The Peaks” to rest. “The Peaks” was a story in itself. Forget about hanging in the elevator between the floors - the management covered your discomfort with a free drink offer. Besides they said nothing seeing me in the cafeteria putting a bagel into the pocket for a later snack. Less shy people even asked waiters for warp up their take outs. More impressive however was the ski valet service. Young, full of energy guys from Latin American countries were attentive and with good smiles. And yet, the pride of the owners was the largest SPA in Colorado where I saw not so many attendees. And yet close-to-Olympic-size swimming pool took the first place in “fewer attendees’ pageant”.

In “The Peaks” I met two young tiny Russian girls, one in the sport store, and another in the restaurant. How could anyone miss them – tiny with wide open smile and softly moving! The sport store girl, Irina, was married and her American hubby worked on the Mountain. She wanted to get out of the Telluride place going to see other Mountains. Julia, the one in the restaurant, was not married and was happily living with her boy friend who also worked on the Mountain. Julia told me that she wanted to take her boyfriend to Russia where there could be even more fun. I just listened.

The whole Telluride concept seemed interesting but not fully completed. They are getting there but not there yet. If anyone wants to argue about the Telluride character one thing is for sure – “Nothing Day Festival” is one of a kind here! People praise non-similarity, non-ordinarity and originality. They praise their "slow" town Telluride without fast food giants and transnational beer producers - thank you for not participating! A historian in the Telluride Museum told us that during the festival a young couple appeared naked on the bicycles and police let them go because they were busy doing nothing during “do nothing day”. I liked the festival idea for one should respect the motion to do nothing, dress nothing, ask for nothing and thank nobody.

Now it was time to go back to reality. Our buses making soft turns took us down to the valley where we have been greeted by non-skiers: Wall Marks, Targets and others. I felt sad and fold in après ski philosophical depression trying to speak to the crowd, but my ski bodies were at the moment more interested on how no avoid paying for excess luggage:

“All our life is a painting. The artists are us. We finish the picture when we die. Each moment we lived through represents a stroke on the canvas. Telluride made me to put a bright stroke on my canvas. The more strokes like that the more chances we have to have a sunny-light pastel picture by the end of our days”.

Sparkling white peaks!

They let us go down to sea level valley captured by the spring.

Those are the peaks that we have just concurred.

Sill our hearts beat on the heights.

Please stop before me pointless arguments!

I proved it to myself long ago:

More beautiful than peaks we just lived through,

Are those only whose challenge lies ahead.

*(Russian unconformable actor, poet and singer
Vladimir Vysotskiy)*

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