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Money & Business

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Salida, Colorado

Skiers may want to schuss into this Rockies retreat

By *Emily Brandon*

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Salida, Colo., is home to the famous First in Boating kayak race on the Arkansas River, which, at 26 miles, is the longest whitewater downriver race in the United States. But when November hits, Salida's Chaffee County, in a valley bordered on all sides by the snow-capped Rocky Mountains, turns into a ski lovers' paradise. It boasts more 14,000-foot mountain peaks-"fourteeners" in local parlance-than any other county in Colorado.

The mountain peaks typically get about 400 inches of snow each season, while Salida itself is sprinkled with a manageable 50 inches of powder. The Monarch ski area is just 20 miles from town, and Vail, Copper, and Breckenridge are also within driving distance-and all offer free or discounted ski passes to senior citizens.

This winter wonderland is no superpricey Aspen. It remains much

more affordable than many other ski areas in Colorado. "When I bought the house in 1990, this area was economically depressed, and I got a really good deal and bought more property," says Stewart Brown, 73, a Salida retiree. "I've been able to expand my financial resources from practically nothing to almost half a million dollars." Brown attributes part of his financial success to Salida's low-key lifestyle. "If I lived in the [Rockies'] Front Range, then you'd have to keep up with the neighbors a little bit more," says Brown, who was an executive with the YMCA in Milwaukee before retiring. "Taxes are cheaper; the cost of living is lower; clothing is cheaper; food is about average," he says.

Salida is 145 miles from Denver and 100 miles from Colorado Springs.

"We're away from the traffic and other problems with big cities, yet we can access them easily for special events," Brown says.

Inexpensive recreational opportunities for seniors abound. When the cold gets to be too much, folks can enjoy a dip in naturally hot mineral waters at the Salida Hot Springs Aquatic Center or take a low-impact aquatic exercise class taught by Arthritis Foundation-certified instructors. The cost? Only \$2.

Population: 5,348

Median home value: \$185,500

Age 65 or over: 21 percent

Cost of living: 4.2 percent below the U.S. average

Maximum state income tax: 4.63 percent flat rate

State sales tax: 2.9 percent

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