

# DEPARTURES



THE HOTELS ISSUE

## A Summer Catch

Colorado's Taylor River Lodge combines top-notch trout fishing with a sleepaway-camp feel that's way more luxe than you remember. *by Peter Heller*



The main lodge, which houses the dining room, bar, and lounge, looks out over a casting pond stocked with rainbow trout.

cabin? I said yes to the coffee and was then led to a back deck, where a waiter served me a sandwich of grass-fed beef on house-made sourdough.

Not exactly my typical pre-fishing lunch, but then this was the Taylor River Lodge, set on eight magnificent acres in Almont, outside Crested Butte, Colorado. Open from May through mid-October and run by luxury adventure company Eleven Experience, Taylor River is one of the world's top fishing camps. Eleven has properties around the world, including a rustic-luxe farm in Iceland and a 19th-century mansion in the Bahamas. The common thread? All are intimate in size and focus on guided activities.

Normally, I would have lingered over my sandwich and iced tea. But not today, because just off the deck was some of the prettiest trout water I had ever seen. The river ran stony and clear, and it spilled through shallow riffles and slowed in deep-green pools. I couldn't wait to cast a line.

My guide for the afternoon was Matt Galvez, a compact young man with an infectious smile who lives for one thing. We geared up and trotted downriver. I had never fished with a guide, preferring

**I PULLED UP** to a low, rambling log house in a wooded canyon, where the aspen slashed the ridges with gold. I got out of my truck, stretched, and dropped my fishing pack on the ground, thinking that there is no place more beautiful than the Rocky Mountains in early fall.

A young woman emerged from the

house and said, "Hi, I'm your Experience Manager. We've been expecting you." I'd never really had an Experience Manager before, but I was game for something new. She then asked if I would like to have coffee on the front porch. And could she have someone park my truck? Tuck my bag into my



From left: The soaking tub in the master bedroom of the Green Drake, one of the property's two single-family homes; the lounge at the main lodge.

*I really liked that I started catching trout. That rush of the first tug, the heavy rainbow leaping into sunlight.*

the solitude, but I liked that Matt had strung my rod while I was eating lunch and tied on two flies for me. And I really liked that I started catching trout. That rush of the first tug, the jerking rod, the heavy rainbow leaping into sunlight.

I slipped the barbless hook out of the sleek fish and watched it dart away. Matt and I were knee-deep in the icy current. Yellow aspen leaves blew down into the stream. It was warm in the sun, and I could smell the sachet fragrance of spruce and fir.

It was one of my best afternoons of fishing. I'd learned more from Matt than I'd taught myself in years. How to roll cast across the river with willow brush at

my back; how to mend the line upstream in successive loops to keep the top fly from dragging.

I went back to my log cabin, which had a porch facing the river and a cruiser bike waiting out front. Taylor River has eight cabins strung along the river, and two are ideal for families. Guests often get nostalgic because the lodge reminds them of a favorite summer camp or family compound they went to as kids. And children love it because the activities include rock climbing, kayaking, and mountain biking. Pretty much paradise.

I put on swim trunks, shrugged into a plush terry-cloth robe, and hopped on the bike. I felt like the Big Lebowski as

I pedaled down a dirt track to the bathhouse, which has a saltwater pool and a steam room. I studied the rows of trophy antlers (moose, elk, mule deer) lining the walls while I soaked in the hot tub. Then I wandered across the grass to the spa for an hour-long massage. And I tried to remind myself that all of this was real.

That night, I gathered with other guests in the main lodge and had a meal of tender roast duck followed by white chocolate mousse. After dinner, a few of us went out into the night. The temperature was dropping fast, and the autumn wind portended snow. A fire was already blazing beside the casting pond. The staff handed out long forks, homemade marshmallows, gourmet chocolate, and cookies. I flamed the marshmallow and blew it out. It stuck all over my face. It was a good time to swap bear stories with the others, and feel like a kid again. *Rooms from \$1,670, all-inclusive; elevenexperience.com.*