

Bike, Blues, Brews in Fort Collins, Colorado

By Peggy Newland

“This is a cycling nirvana,” I say to Brian as we zip along interconnected routes of paved and gravel pathways in and around the “happening” Fort Collins, Colorado. We’ve already meandered past Poudre River and Spring Creek trails in this bicycle friendly city, and we haven’t even been downtown or checked into our hotel yet because the trails beckoned to us, whispering cycle, cycle, cycle. A 70-degree day with abundant sunshine tempts these “mud-season spring weary” New Englanders.

“New Belgium Brewing is close by,” Brian suggests so off we go for refreshment.

We grab Fat Tire Amber Ales and take a tour of this “born on a bike” brewery.

“We even deliver beer by bicycle in town,” the guide suggests, when we tell him we’re staying in Old Town.

After the tour, we cycle one mile over the Elizabeth Hotel and are greeted like we are celebrated athletes in our cycling shorts, and helmets. “Cool, you made it,” the concierge says.

“You heading to FoCoMX?”

“What’s that?” I ask.

He tells us all about the city-wide music festival we just “happened upon” this weekend—meaning local bands in multiple locations, including most breweries, clubs, parks, neighborhoods, and alleyways. With bluegrass, blues, folk, punk, rock, symphony, new wave, old wave, from afternoon through evening, and “all bicycle friendly,” we are good company for fun and streetside dancing between bicycle rides.

The Elizabeth Hotel is prime-central to everything in Fort Collins, and it focuses on bringing eclectic jazz, country, and blues to the relaxation of a weekend getaway. In combination with a speak-easy vibe, there’s an Instrument Lending Library (Brian checks out a guitar for the room), in-room turntables, piles of vinyl records lining hallways for borrowing, and themed interiors full of bicycling, bebop and bespoke artwork...like a pastel cow strumming a guitar while cycling. Lobby-side bars adjacent to pedestrian-only Firehouse Alley and views of the Rockies? A perfect location for a musical weekend on two wheels.

Our room is comfy-casual, and we immediately put on a vintage Fleetwood Mac album for unpacking music.

We meet up with some Colorado cousins, get weekend FoCoMx passes, and then head to The Regional for shared small plates of red pozole, sunchoke elote, hummus soppressata, and short rib ragu. We watch the street fill up and hear a band just starting with drums and trumpets.

Every corner, porch, garden and nook has a new arrangement of jazz ensembles, blues singers, folk soloists, and jam bands. We dance under the stars and then move into the funky club at the Elizabeth— Magic Rat. Our FoCoMx pass gets us into all clubs and bars. We two-step away.

That night, Brian plays his borrowed guitar along to a Steely Dan album to lull me to sleep.

The next morning, we cycle over to Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area for pop-up prairie dogs squeaking out hellos, farmlands with galloping horses, and extensive views of Longs Peak and Pikes Peak.

“A true Western experience,” my cousin says.

After this four-hour cycling tour, we head back to town for homemade slabs of pie at Ginger and Baker before gliding from band to band, making stops on local breweries for well-deserved pilsners. Dinner that night is at Rare Italian for arancini, antipasti, shrimp bruschetta, and plates of wild mushroom tagliatelle, duck ragu gnocchi. Dessert is shared cannoli and Italian cheesecake. Then it is back, walking the town, finding folk singalongs, Americana, and bluegrass, until my cousin takes us “off-site” to the coolest club ever—The Lyric. Think Willie Wonka themed playgrounds and stages lit up by flashing lights and honky tonk wall art and this is the place to end the night dancing.

Stay downtown, grab a microbrew, cycle the paths. Find your fun in Fort Collins, discovering historic neighborhoods, fine dining, and an extensive music scene. Mountain views included.



if you go

The Elizabeth Hotel. www.TheElizabethColorado.com. 970-490-2600. 111 Chestnut Street. Happening spot downtown, close to bicycle trails and walkable to all restaurants, clubs, and galleries. Don’t miss the Sunset Lounge and find your two-step at the Magic Rat.

New Belgium Brewing. www.newbelgium.com. 500 Linden Street. Don’t miss their tours. FoCoMX. www.focoma.org/focomx.

A full weekend of local music every spring in Fort Collins.

Dining:

Social. 1920’s speakeasy style lounge with curated cocktail menu.

The Regional. 130 S Mason Street. Local farm, ranch, and Colorado focused fare.

Rare Italian. 101 S College Ave. Extensive wine list, house aged steaks, and Italian charm.

Ginger and Baker. 359 Linden Street. Colorado cuisine with heart. 130 wines.

Lunch spots:

Little Bird Bakeshop. 613 South College. Homemade pastries, not to miss!

Snack Attack. 120 W Stuart Street, St. Classic burgers and fries, plus vegan specialties. The Exchange. 234 N College Unit D. Creative outdoor snacking with multiple venues.

Breakfast:

The Emporium. Located in The Elizabeth Hotel. Try the Colorado Hatch Green Chili Burrito. Silver Grill. 218 Walnut Street.

Since 1912, this is old Colorado. One word: cinnamon buns. Fox Den. 1680 Laporte Ave. Previous laundromat, coffee hotspot.

Unique Shopping:

Akinz. 15 Old Town Square. Women-owned clothing store. Trimble Court Artisans. 118 Trimble Ct. Art and craft co-op. Old Firehouse Books. 232 Walnut Street. New and used books.

Breweries:

Odell Brewing. 800 E. Lincoln. New Belgium Brewing. 500 Linden. Gilded Goat Brewing. 132 W. Mountain. Salt Road Brewing. 321 Old Firehouse Alley.