

COLORADO SKI TOWN COLLECTIVE

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LIV Sotheby's International Realty

The Complete Guide to Buying a Colorado Ski Home

A complete, no-fluff owner's manual to Summit County real estate — towns, property types, ski access, short-term rentals, ownership costs, due diligence, and the luxury market

Breckenridge • Keystone • Frisco • Silverthorne • Dillon • Copper Mountain

Website: ColoradoSkiTownCollective.com

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Reviewed and updated each season. See "About This Guide" for our update log.

A Note From Leisa & Stephanie

If you're reading this, there's a good chance you're picturing it already — mornings with coffee on a deck above the trees, a place your kids and grandkids fight over booking for Christmas, an asset that happens to also be one of the best views in Colorado. That's not a sales pitch. That's genuinely what most of our clients are chasing, and it's why we built this guide.

The best Colorado ski home is not necessarily the one closest to a chairlift, the newest build, or the one with the strongest projected rental income. It's the property that makes your time in the mountains easier, and still makes sense once you account for the details that don't show up in the listing photos. Two homes at the same price in Summit County can deliver completely different ownership experiences: one with true ski access but limited storage and complicated rental rules, another ten minutes from the slopes with a private garage, easy grocery runs, and room for three generations under one roof. This guide exists to help you tell those two homes apart before you own one.

We work almost exclusively with second-home buyers and sellers across Summit County — Breckenridge, Keystone, Frisco, Silverthorne, Dillon, and Copper Mountain. Most of our clients aren't relocating for a job or leaving a primary residence behind; they're based in Denver, Texas, Florida, Arizona, Oklahoma, and similar markets, and they're adding a mountain property to a life that already works well without one. As broker associates with LIV Sotheby's International Realty — Summit County's most established name in luxury real estate, and the local face of the world's leading luxury property brand — we spend our days on exactly this kind of purchase, from a first Breckenridge condo to a legacy family estate.

This guide is written for buyers at every stage of that range, from those entering the market near \$1M to families considering legacy properties and new construction well above \$10M. Wherever you land on that spectrum, the underlying discipline is the same: choose the right town, understand the exact property, verify every important assumption, and buy for the way you'll actually live.

The question this guide is built to answer

- Not "which home is best," but "which home is best for the life we want in Colorado." Everything that follows is built around that distinction.

A few things to know before you read further. This is a living document — short-term rental ordinances, tax rules, and lending norms shift, sometimes year to year, and we update this guide to keep pace rather than letting it go stale the way most "ultimate guides" online do. We've also tried hard to keep it free of the generic filler that fills most real estate guides. Where we're confident in a fact, we state it plainly; where something depends on your specific situation — your CPA, your attorney, your lender, your residency status — we say so, because that's the honest answer, not a hedge.

Most importantly: this guide is a starting point, not a substitute for us. Numbers shift and ordinances get amended. When you're ready to talk specifics, that's what Leisa Gibson and Stephanie Ernst are here for.

Welcome to Summit County. Let's find your place in it.

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Part One — Define the Life You Want

Most buyers start a mountain-home search with bedrooms, price, and a map radius. Those filters matter, but they don't reveal whether a property will make your weekends effortless or introduce friction every time you arrive. Before you look at a single listing, it's worth defining your likely use pattern. It's the single highest-leverage exercise in this entire guide, and it's the first thing we walk through with every client.

Your Ownership Brief

Answer these honestly. There are no wrong answers. Only answers that don't match the property you were about to make an offer on.

- Who will use the home? A couple, young kids, adult kids, multiple families, aging parents, guests, or corporate groups?
- How often will you come — a few major holidays, two weekends a month, an extended summer, the full ski season, or eventually full-time?
- Which season matters most: winter, summer, or genuinely equal year-round use?
- What does "easy" mean to you? Walking to town, avoiding a car altogether, a private garage, stepping onto a ski trail, minimizing stairs, leaving gear in place between visits?
- How much privacy do you want — village energy, a residential neighborhood, acreage, or gated seclusion?
- Do you need rental income, or would it simply be welcome? Those are not the same objective, and they lead to different property choices.
- What's your realistic ownership horizon — three years, ten years, or a generational asset?
- What work are you willing to manage — none, occasional projects, or a substantial renovation?
- Will you work remotely from the property? If so, verify internet service, workspace, cellular reliability, and noise — not just the view.
- What would make you stop using the home? Difficult winter access, crowded parking, too many stairs, long lift lines, constant maintenance, or an HOA that restricts your plans?

Build a Priority Hierarchy

Sort every feature you want into one of three tiers:

- **Non-negotiable:** the purchase fails without it — a main-level primary suite, a two-car garage, legal rental eligibility, walkability.
- **High value:** worth paying more for, but not essential — a private hot tub, a Gore Range view, an elevator, a ski locker.
- **Bonus:** enjoyable, but shouldn't distort the decision — a media room, a wine cellar, a specific finish package.

Buyers at the luxury end of this market often arrive with long feature lists. The discipline is deciding which three to five attributes create the most day-to-day value, so a dramatic great room or beautiful staging doesn't quietly outrank the things that actually determine whether you love the home two years in — location, access, privacy, and a floor plan that works for how your family really moves.

A Tip from Steph and Leisa

- Describe your ideal first 90 minutes after arriving from Denver. Where do you park? Where does the gear go? Does someone walk to dinner? Can the kids, or your guests, function independently without you driving them everywhere? That one exercise tells us more about which property is right for you than any generic wish list.

Part Two — Why Summit County

Colorado has no shortage of mountain real estate markets, and we'll get to how Summit County compares to Aspen, Vail, Telluride, and the rest later in this guide. But for the buyer we work with most — someone who wants a true four-season second home within reach of a major airport, not a once-a-year destination property — Summit County wins on a combination nowhere else in the state quite matches.

Ninety Minutes From a Major Airport

Denver International Airport sits roughly 75 to 100 miles from Summit County's six towns, depending on which one, with drive times typically in the 75-to-100-minute range outside of peak I-70 traffic. That's the difference between a genuine long-weekend property and a place you can only justify visiting once or twice a season. Aspen and Telluride both require a long mountain drive or a regional flight; a Summit County home base is simply closer to the life you already have.

Five Resorts, One Home Base

Breckenridge, Keystone, and Copper Mountain sit inside Summit County itself; Arapahoe Basin borders it; Vail is a short additional drive up I-70. A Summit County home base puts you within easy reach of all five without needing to choose a single mountain to be loyal to — a real point of difference from single-resort markets like Telluride or Steamboat, where your property location ties you to one mountain's terrain, one mountain's crowds, and one mountain's snow year.

A Four-Season Market, Not Just a Winter One

Summit County's summer season has become a real driver of both lifestyle and property value in its own right — Dillon Reservoir's marina and sailing community, Keystone's two golf courses, hundreds of miles of mountain biking and hiking trails, and a full calendar of summer festivals across every town. A property that only performs in one season is a harder asset to justify at the top of the market; nearly everything in this guide reflects a market that works in July as much as it does in January.

Who's Actually Buying Here

Our own clients are overwhelmingly second-home buyers, not primary-residence buyers — people who already have a home base in Denver, Texas, Florida, Arizona, Oklahoma, and similar markets, and are adding a mountain property rather than replacing an existing one. That distinction shapes almost everything in this guide, from financing (second-home and investment-property loans work differently than primary-residence loans) to process (remote closings, video walkthroughs, and out-of-state logistics are the norm here, not the exception).

If this is your first Colorado second home

- the biggest adjustment for most of our clients isn't the market itself — it's the pace. Well-priced properties in desirable zones can move in days, mountain-town inspections and title work sometimes take longer than a metro market, and winter access to certain properties can affect scheduling. None of that should scare you off; it just means having a local team who can move quickly and manage logistics on your behalf matters more here than in most markets.

Part Three — The Six Towns

Summit County isn't one market — it's six, and they're more different from each other than most out-of-state buyers expect. Two towns fifteen minutes apart can have completely different rental rules, completely different price points, and completely different day-to-day feels.

One nuance worth understanding before you go further: mailing addresses and actual jurisdiction don't always line up. A "Breckenridge" address may be inside the Town of Breckenridge, or in unincorporated Summit County. A property marketed as "Keystone" is governed by the county, not a town government. That distinction can affect short-term rental licensing, building review, taxes, and future use — which is exactly why we confirm jurisdiction on every property before you write an offer, not after.

Breckenridge

The full-service mountain town. Breckenridge combines a large ski resort, an authentic historic Main Street, extensive dining and shopping, a year-round events calendar, and one of Summit County's deepest ranges of real estate — from lock-and-leave condos to walk-to-Main-Street residences, ski-access homes, golf properties, and architect-designed estates in neighborhoods like Shock Hill. Five interconnected peaks (Peak 6 through 10) give it the most varied terrain of any resort in the county, and because Breckenridge is a real town first and a ski resort second, demand here isn't purely ski-season demand — a meaningful reason it supports long-term value the way purpose-built resort villages can't fully match.

Real estate spans the widest range in the county — condos starting in the mid-\$500,000s (median around \$805,000) up through luxury ski-in/ski-out estates running well past \$10M. "Close to skiing" can mean slopeside, on a shuttle route, or a short drive to skier parking — the lived experience changes meaningfully by neighborhood and peak, so we always confirm which lift or trail is actually accessible, whether that access holds up in early and late season, and whether every member of your family can manage the route in ski boots, before it becomes part of your decision.

Short-term rental rules are the most complex of any Summit County town: Breckenridge runs its own four-zone ordinance (Resort Properties, Tourism Zone 1, Downtown Core Zone 2, and single-family Zone 3), with very different licensing outcomes zone by zone — from no cap at all in the Resort Properties and Tourism zones to a hard 130-license cap and waitlist in Zone 3. The town also assesses its own 1% real estate transfer tax (2% within the Breckenridge Metropolitan Tax District, covering specific properties including Timber Trail, One Ski Hill Place, Crystal Peak Lodge, and Mountain Thunder Lodge), generally paid by the buyer unless an exemption applies.

- Best fit for: buyers who want a real town, not just a resort — walkability, dining, culture, and the broadest resale demand in Summit County.

Go deeper: [Keystone vs. Breckenridge vs. Copper Mountain](#).

[Browse homes in Breckenridge](#) | [Breckenridge videos on our YouTube channel](#)

Keystone

Ski-in/ski-out convenience at a gentler price. Keystone is a purpose-built resort village centered on River Run Village, with more total skiable acreage than Breckenridge once you count its back bowls (Bergman, Erickson, and Independence), plus the only night skiing in Summit County. It's quieter and more contained than Breckenridge, with restaurants and shops clustered right at the base rather than a walkable downtown. In summer, its two 18-hole golf courses and its lake give the town a genuinely different, more laid-back identity than its winter one.

Real estate spans Lakeside Village condos starting around \$300,000, River Run properties from roughly \$400,000 to \$900,000, and Keystone Ranch luxury homes commanding \$1.5M to \$4M (county-wide condo median around \$825,000). Keystone sits on unincorporated Summit County land rather than being its own incorporated town — which matters more than it sounds like it should: rental treatment depends on the exact parcel, resort-overlay status,

basin, and current license availability, not on the general reputation of "Keystone" as rental-friendly. Never assume a neighboring unit's rental history, or a seller's current license, transfers automatically to a new owner — that's exactly the kind of property-specific fact we verify before you're under contract.

- Best fit for: buyers who want genuine ski-in/ski-out convenience, a quieter atmosphere than Breckenridge, and strong rental fundamentals in the right parcel.

Go deeper: [Keystone vs. Breckenridge vs. Copper Mountain](#).

[Browse homes in Keystone](#) | [Keystone videos on our YouTube channel](#)

Frisco

Central, walkable, and genuinely lived-in. Frisco isn't built around a single downhill ski base, and that's exactly why many owners love it. Its walkable Main Street, marina, recreation path, and central position at the junction of I-70 and Highway 9 create a genuine four-season town experience — Breckenridge, Copper Mountain, Keystone, and Arapahoe Basin are all a short drive away, and Lake Dillon's marina and beach are practically in town. It's an especially strong fit for families whose members don't all want to ski the same mountain, or ski at all.

Frisco's median home price runs around \$1.095M, with condo pricing in the mid-\$700,000s — roughly 20% below Breckenridge. Inventory can be limited, and the most desirable combinations (walkability, garage, views, privacy, and modern construction) are genuinely scarce, so a home a few blocks off Main Street can live very differently than one nearer the interstate — worth confirming road noise, sun, and snow storage in person, not just distance on a map. Short-term rentals are town-regulated and capped at roughly 25% of housing stock (about 900 licenses county-wide).

- Best fit for: buyers who want Breckenridge's walkable, small-town character at a more accessible price, with true central access to every resort in the county.

Go deeper: [Frisco vs. Silverthorne: Which Fits Your Second-Home Goals?](#).

[Browse homes in Frisco](#) | [Frisco videos on our YouTube channel](#)

Silverthorne

The county's commercial and growth hub. Silverthorne has grown and modernized faster than any other Summit County town over the past decade — new residences, restaurants, arts, riverfront development, and luxury construction joining established neighborhoods, anchored by the Outlets at Silverthorne and a genuinely broad mix of everyday services most mountain towns don't have at this scale. The Blue River runs directly through town, and Gore Range views are a real draw for buyers who prioritize modern architecture and a shorter drive from Denver.

Condo pricing runs around \$710,000. Silverthorne is a collection of distinct micro-locations rather than one uniform market — a riverfront residence, a downtown condo, a hillside home in Eagle's Nest, and a property north of town are not interchangeable, and winter sun, wind, and future development potential are worth comparing property by property. Short-term rental rules are among the more nuanced in the county: most neighborhoods cap licenses at 10% of units, but the Town Core allows up to 50% — a meaningful difference that makes property location within town, not just the town itself, a critical rental-planning detail.

- Best fit for: buyers who want more everyday convenience and amenities than the smaller towns offer, newer construction, and strong long-term growth fundamentals.

Go deeper: [Frisco vs. Silverthorne: Which Fits Your Second-Home Goals?](#).

[Browse homes in Silverthorne](#) | [Silverthorne videos on our YouTube channel](#)

Dillon

Lake life, views, and the county's easiest rental rules. Dillon is the only Summit County town that literally moved for its lake — the entire town relocated in 1961 when Denver Water dammed the Blue River to create Lake Dillon. Everything distinctive about Dillon today traces back to that: lake views from nearly every part of town, a full-service marina with sailing and boat rentals, the Dillon Amphitheater's summer concert series, and the smallest, quietest year-round population in Summit County (1,064 at the 2020 census). For buyers who value boating, paddleboarding, and dramatic open water views as much as skiing, Dillon can deliver a lifestyle that feels broader than a ski-only purchase.

Condo pricing is the most accessible in the county at a median around \$572,000, though direct lakefront and marina-view properties command a real premium over that figure. For duplex or single-family buyers, the neighborhoods above the reservoir are worth particular attention for elevated views and a more residential feel close to town amenities. As with any view property, a listing photo won't reveal road noise, prevailing wind, winter shade, or how seasonal reservoir levels change the foreground — worth seeing in person, and at different times of day, before you commit. The standout fact for rental-minded buyers: Dillon has no cap on short-term rental licenses and no waitlist — the most permissive STR environment of any Summit County town.

- Best fit for: buyers who want lake and marina access as the centerpiece of the home, and rental-income-focused buyers who want the simplest regulatory environment in the county.

Go deeper: [Dillon Real Estate Guide: Lake Life, Marina Access & Small-Town Charm](#).

[Browse homes in Dillon](#) | [Dillon videos on our YouTube channel](#)

Copper Mountain

Ski-in/ski-out without the crowds — or the price of Breckenridge. Copper Mountain is the most compact and most ski-focused of Summit County's resort towns, built across three distinct villages (East, Center, and West) that naturally separate beginner, intermediate, and expert terrain more cleanly than any other resort in the county. There isn't much of a walkable "downtown" here — fewer dining and shopping options than Breckenridge or Keystone — which for the right buyer is a feature: park once, stay close to the mountain, and skip the off-slope distractions entirely.

Copper Mountain remains the most accessible resort-town entry point in Summit County at a condo median around \$653,000. Like Keystone, it sits on unincorporated county land and falls under the county's more favorable Resort Zone STR designation — generally an advantage for rental-minded buyers, though HOA rules, village assessments, and what's included in dues vary meaningfully building to building, so getting rental policy and dues coverage in writing before you buy matters here more than in most towns.

- Best fit for: buyers who want true ski-in/ski-out ownership, minimal off-mountain distraction, and the most accessible price point among the county's resort towns.

Go deeper: [Copper Mountain Real Estate: Ski-In/Ski-Out Without the Crowds](#) and [Keystone vs. Breckenridge vs. Copper Mountain](#).

[Browse homes in Copper Mountain](#) | [Copper Mountain videos on our YouTube channel](#)

Side-by-Side Comparison

A quick reference for the numbers that come up most in first conversations with buyers. Prices are medians pulled from recent Summit County MLS data (Altitude MLS via InfoSparks) and shift monthly — treat this as a snapshot, not a quote, and ask us for current comps on any specific property.

Town	Best known for	Median condo price	STR climate	Governed by
Breckenridge	Historic Main Street, biggest mountain, deepest luxury inventory	\$805,000	Complex — 4 zones, varies widely	Town of Breckenridge
Keystone	Ski-in/ski-out, family resort, night skiing	\$825,000	Favorable — County Resort Zone	Summit County
Frisco	Central, walkable, marina, year-round town life	\$755,000	Capped at 25% of housing stock	Town of Frisco
Silverthorne	Blue River, Gore Range views, newest construction	\$710,000	10% cap; 50% in Town Core	Town of Silverthorne
Dillon	Lake Dillon, marina, amphitheater, views	\$572,000	Most permissive — no cap, no waitlist	Town of Dillon
Copper Mountain	Ski-in/ski-out, most compact, three villages	\$653,000	Favorable — County Resort Zone	Summit County

Two things worth noting about that last column. First, Keystone and Copper Mountain are not incorporated towns — they're unincorporated Summit County communities, which is why county rules (not a town ordinance) govern short-term rentals there. Second, STR rules across every town in this table change periodically; treat the summary above as directional and confirm current rules for any specific property before counting on rental income. Part Six goes into far more depth, and it's exactly the kind of detail we verify with you before you write an offer.

Part Four — Property Types: What You Gain and What You Give Up

Every property type in Summit County trades convenience against control. None is objectively "better" — the right one depends entirely on the ownership brief you built in Part One.

Condominiums

Condos can be ideal for owners who want simplicity, amenities, and a property that can sit empty for weeks with less hands-on care. In resort villages, they often deliver the cleanest path to skiing, restaurants, and rental demand. Don't evaluate a condo on price and dues alone — review:

- What the HOA fee actually includes, and the reserve balance behind it
- Pending or recent special assessments
- Insurance coverage and deductible allocation between the association and the unit owner
- Rental, pet, parking, and remodeling rules
- Whether storage is deeded to the unit or merely assigned, and how garage/tandem parking works
- Any litigation, construction-defect history, or chronic owner delinquencies

A high HOA fee isn't automatically bad, and a low one isn't automatically good. The right question is whether the fee is sufficient for that specific building's services and future capital needs — which is exactly why we pull the reserve study before you fall in love with the unit, not after.

Townhomes & Duplexes

Often a valuable middle ground: private entry, a garage, more space, and fewer shared hallways without all the responsibilities of a fully detached home. The legal structure matters more than it looks — some townhomes are fee-simple with a limited association, others are legally condominiums with different insurance and maintenance arrangements. Never assume roof, exterior, driveway, or snow-removal responsibility from the architectural style alone; get it in writing.

Single-Family Homes

A detached home offers privacy, land, design freedom, and often the best multigenerational layout — and it places more responsibility on the owner. Budget for snow removal, roof and exterior care, driveway maintenance, wildfire mitigation, and mechanical systems. For any mountain single-family home, we look closely at:

- Driveway grade, orientation, and the winter plowing plan
- Roof form, snow shedding, and heat tape
- Drainage, retaining walls, and site stability
- Private road maintenance obligations
- Well, septic, and water rights where applicable
- Backup heat, backup power, and remote monitoring
- Wildfire defensible space and insurability

New Construction

New doesn't mean risk-free — it means the risks are different. Review builder reputation, contract structure, allowances, escalation clauses, warranty terms, the punch-list process, and change-order history. Determine which

design decisions remain open and who bears cost increases if they do. For high-end builds specifically, ask how snowmelt systems, radiant heat, humidification, home automation, security, generators, and complex glazing will be commissioned and serviced after closing — a beautiful system with no local service contact becomes a recurring frustration fast.

Legacy Estates & \$10M-Plus Properties

At the top of the market, replacement cost, architectural scarcity, site quality, and privacy often matter more than a conventional price-per-square-foot comparison. Beauty should never suspend due diligence, though — at this level, we typically bring in a structural engineer, a roofing expert, an envelope consultant, an arborist, a septic or well professional, a surveyor, land-use counsel, and a smart-home integrator as needed, and we confirm caretaking expectations and realistic annual operating costs before the emotional commitment becomes irreversible.

Part Five — Ski Access: Translate the Marketing Into a Route

"Ski-in/ski-out" is one of the most overused phrases in mountain real estate. Depending on who's writing the listing, it might describe a home beside a groomed run, a building reached by a narrow trail, access that requires poling on the flats, a route suitable only for advanced skiers, or a connection that only works when natural snow is sufficient. It is, without question, the single term in this business most worth translating before you buy.

The Ski-Access Spectrum

1. **True slopeside** — direct access to maintained ski terrain with little or no walking.
2. **Trail-connected** — a private or neighborhood trail connects to the ski area, sometimes with snow or ability-level limitations.
3. **Walk-to-lift** — a practical walking route, but boots, kids, elevation, and gear genuinely change the experience.
4. **Shuttle-served** — convenient when frequency, operating hours, and stops actually align with your schedule.
5. **Short drive** — often an excellent choice for owners who value space, privacy, or town access more than first-chair convenience.

Verify the Full Loop

Many buyers verify how to ski out, but not how to ski back in — and the return trip is where most "ski-in/ski-out" disappointments happen. We walk or ski the actual route with buyers whenever conditions allow, and confirm where the trail begins, which easements apply, who maintains it, when it typically opens for the season, and whether the return trip requires a specific lift.

It's also worth testing the non-skier experience. Can someone reach coffee, lunch, or shopping without a car? Is there safe transit for teenagers and guests? A property that gives the whole group real independence can outperform a technically closer home that leaves everyone waiting on one driver.

Part Six — Short-Term Rentals

Short-term rental regulation is among the fastest-changing parts of Colorado mountain ownership, and it's the single most consequential thing to get right before you write an offer if rental income is part of your plan. In Summit County, rules may be administered by an incorporated town or by the county for unincorporated property — and caps, zones, license types, waitlists, resort overlays, occupancy limits, fees, and complaint-response requirements can all differ from one jurisdiction to the next.

The Non-Negotiable Rule

Verify rental eligibility for the exact property, under the rules in effect at the time of your offer. Do not rely on:

- A listing field that says "STR allowed"
- The seller's current license
- A neighbor's rental operation
- Historical gross revenue figures
- A property manager's informal opinion
- The assumption that a license transfers automatically at closing
- A general statement that a town is "rental friendly"

The Five-Layer STR Review

1. **Jurisdiction** — which government actually regulates this parcel, town or county?
2. **Government rules** — what zone, basin, overlay, cap, or license type applies today?
3. **Transfer status** — does an existing license terminate, continue, or require a fresh application after the sale?
4. **Private restrictions** — what do the HOA declaration, bylaws, and rules actually permit?
5. **Operations** — what taxes, safety standards, responsible-agent duties, parking limits, and annual fees apply once you're licensed?

Where the Six Towns Stand Today

- **Breckenridge** runs its own four-zone ordinance — no cap in the Resort Properties and Tourism Zone 1, roughly 92% licensable in Downtown Core Zone 2, and a hard 130-license cap with a waitlist in single-family Zone 3. As of mid-2026, availability has reportedly been tightest in Zones 2 and 3 — confirm current license availability directly against the Town of Breckenridge's live list before counting on a specific property (see Official Sources at the end of this guide).
- **Frisco** caps licenses town-wide at roughly 25% of housing stock, or about 900 licenses.
- **Silverthorne** caps most neighborhoods at 10% of units, with a more permissive 50% cap inside its Town Core.
- **Dillon** has no cap and no waitlist — the most permissive town in the county.
- **Keystone and Copper Mountain** sit on unincorporated county land and fall under Summit County's own system, which splits unincorporated areas into a more favorable Resort Zone (covering Keystone, Copper Mountain, and Breckenridge's Peaks 7 & 8 area) and a more restrictive Neighborhood Zone for the rest of unincorporated Summit County. All county STR licenses currently carry an annual fee and a unified renewal date — confirm the current fee schedule for any specific property.

The rule of thumb we give every rental-minded buyer: the zone or jurisdiction a specific property sits in matters more than which town it's in. A condo in Breckenridge's Resort Properties Zone can have an easier path to licensing than a single-family home three blocks away in Breckenridge's own Zone 3.

Rental Income: Gross Is Not Return

Request two to three years of statements when they're available, then normalize them — the gross number on a listing sheet is rarely the number that matters. Separate out:

- Gross rent, platform fees, and credit-card processing fees
- Management commission and cleaning costs (owner-paid vs. guest-paid)
- Lodging and sales taxes, plus license and regulatory fees
- Utilities, internet, HOA dues, and resort fees
- Repairs, linens, supplies, hot-tub service, and snow removal
- Insurance and eventual furniture replacement
- Owner-use dates and any blocked peak periods

Past performance doesn't guarantee future results — especially when regulation, competition, management, or your own use of the property changes. If a purchase only pencils out under an aggressive revenue projection, that's a sign to slow down, not a sign to trust the projection.

A Tip from Steph and Leisa

- Write the offer around verification, not assumption. When STR use is material to your decision, we investigate jurisdiction, license availability, and HOA rules early enough that you can make a deliberate call — not discover a problem after your inspection deadline has already passed. And ask yourself honestly: would you still want this home if it produced zero rental income? Properties with real lifestyle value on their own terms tend to hold up best over a full ownership cycle.

Part Seven — The Financial Picture

Purchase price is only the entry point. This is the part of the process where out-of-state buyers most often get surprised — not because Summit County is unusually complicated, but because second-home and investment-property ownership works differently than the primary residence most buyers are used to budgeting for.

Financing a Second Home

A few general norms are worth understanding before you talk to a lender, though your own numbers depend on your lender, your credit profile, and how the property is classified:

- Second-home loans typically require a larger down payment than a primary residence — commonly in the 10–20% range — and carry a somewhat higher rate, since lenders treat a second home as higher risk than an owner-occupied property.
- If short-term rental income is central to your plan, some lenders classify the purchase as an investment property rather than a second home, which generally means a larger down payment (often 20–25%+) and different underwriting. Be upfront about your rental intentions early — reclassification mid-process can delay closing.
- Jumbo financing is the norm, not the exception, at the upper end of this market — most conventional loan limits fall well below typical purchase prices for single-family homes in Breckenridge or Keystone Ranch. Jumbo underwriting weighs liquid reserves (often 6–12 months of payments) heavily, alongside income and credit.
- A meaningful share of buyers at the \$2M+ level pay cash or use a bridge loan against other assets, then finance later if it suits their tax or liquidity picture — a legitimate strategy worth a conversation with your financial advisor, not a default.

Before you tour seriously, ask any lender you're considering: will this property qualify as a second home under your intended use? How will rental income be treated? Are there condominium project-review requirements — and could commercial space, front-desk operations, high investor concentration, or nightly-rental use in the building affect eligibility? What reserves are required, and how will self-employment, trusts, LLCs, or multiple properties affect underwriting? We work with several lenders who specialize specifically in Colorado mountain second-home and jumbo financing and understand local appraisal and inspection logistics — happy to make an introduction before you're ready to write an offer, not just after.

A note for cash buyers: paying cash improves certainty and timing, but it doesn't make appraisal, title, survey, insurance, or inspection irrelevant. Many of our cash buyers still order an appraisal for their own discipline, estate planning, or future financing flexibility.

The True Cost of Ownership

Build a property-specific annual budget before you write an offer — not a percentage rule of thumb, since the range between a village condo and a large custom estate is too wide for one number to mean anything.

Category	What to budget for
Recurring	Mortgage P&I, property tax, HOA/master association fees, insurance, utilities and internet, snow removal, landscaping, property management or home watch, cleaning/turnover, rental licensing and tax compliance
Capital reserves	Roof, exterior, windows, decks, driveway, boilers, water heaters, snowmelt systems, appliances — a healthy HOA reserve can absorb some of this for condo owners, but assessments and deductibles still happen

Category	What to budget for
Closing & transfer	Lender fees, appraisal, inspections, title, recording, survey, prepaids, and any local transfer tax (see the table below)

A Useful Stress Test

Before you commit, model three versions of ownership: an expected year (normal use, normal repairs, realistic rent if applicable), a low-rent year (reduced occupancy or personal use during premium dates), and a capital year (a major repair, special assessment, insurance deductible, or furnishing cycle). If all three stay comfortable, the home is far more likely to feel like a luxury than an obligation.

Property Taxes

Colorado's property tax structure is genuinely favorable compared to most states, and it's a real talking point for buyers coming from higher-tax markets. Residential property is assessed at a fraction of actual market value — a rate set by the state legislature that has shifted in recent years — and then taxed against that assessed value using local mill levies that vary by taxing district (county, school district, fire district, and any special or metro district a property falls within).

A note on precision here

- Colorado's residential assessment rate and local mill levies are set (and periodically adjusted) at the state and local level, and a metro-district property can carry a meaningfully different effective rate than an otherwise identical home just outside that district's boundary. Rather than quote a number here that could be stale by the time you're reading this, we pull the actual current tax bill and assessed value for any specific property you're considering — a five-minute lookup on the Summit County Assessor's site, and a standard part of how we walk buyers through a listing. Don't project your future bill by simply copying the seller's current amount; consult a qualified tax professional for anything specific to your situation.

Real Estate Transfer Taxes by Town

This is a detail that catches even experienced buyers off guard, because it isn't consistent across Summit County. Per Summit County's Clerk & Recorder, three of the six towns in this guide assess their own municipal real estate transfer tax on top of standard closing costs:

Town	Municipal transfer tax
Breckenridge	Yes — 1% of gross consideration (2% within the Breckenridge Metropolitan Tax District, covering specific properties including Timber Trail, One Ski Hill Place, Crystal Peak Lodge, and Mountain Thunder Lodge), generally paid by the buyer unless an exemption applies

Town	Municipal transfer tax
Frisco	Yes — assessed as Frisco's Real Estate Investment Fund (REIF); confirm current rate with the Town of Frisco Finance Department
Silverthorne	Yes — assessed as Silverthorne's Real Estate Transfer Assessment (RETA); confirm current rate with the Town
Keystone	Not listed as levying a municipal transfer tax (unincorporated Summit County)
Dillon	Not listed as levying a municipal transfer tax
Copper Mountain	Not listed as levying a municipal transfer tax (unincorporated Summit County)

A word of caution on how to read that table: it reflects what Summit County's own Clerk & Recorder page discloses, which explicitly names Breckenridge, Frisco, and Silverthorne as towns assessing a transfer tax and directs buyers to each town's finance department for specifics. It does not affirmatively state that Keystone, Dillon, and Copper Mountain charge zero — their absence from that list is the basis for treating them as not currently assessing one. This always gets confirmed directly with the relevant town (or the title company, who catches it regardless) before closing. Note also that even transfers into an LLC or trust for which no transfer tax is technically due may still require an approved exemption filing in Breckenridge — worth flagging to your attorney early, not at the closing table.

HOAs & Metro Districts

Most condos and many single-family homes in Summit County's resort villages carry HOA dues, and some neighborhoods — particularly newer developments and larger resort communities — sit within a metro district, which can add its own mill levy on top of standard property tax. Before you fall in love with a property, we always recommend the HOA's current reserve study, its recent meeting minutes (not just the dues amount), and confirmation of any metro district the property sits within. Part Eight goes much deeper on exactly what to review and why.

Insurance & Wildfire Risk

Wildfire risk and insurance availability have become a genuinely important part of the Colorado mountain-home conversation, and 2026 brings a meaningful change worth knowing before you shop. Colorado's House Bill 25-1182, signed into law in May 2025, took effect July 1, 2026, and gives homeowners the legal right to see the wildfire risk score an insurer uses to underwrite or price their policy, understand what's driving it, and challenge it if inaccurate. Insurers using a wildfire or catastrophe risk model must now send an annual written notice disclosing that score and any mitigation discounts available.

The law does not guarantee lower premiums — even an accurate score can still produce a higher premium than expected, particularly on properties with significant surrounding forest or limited defensible space. It's part of a broader effort to keep more Colorado homeowners in the private insurance market rather than defaulting to the Colorado FAIR Plan, the state's insurer-of-last-resort program. For any property you're seriously considering, get a real quote — not an estimate — during due diligence, and ask the carrier specifically about wildfire exposure and defensible space, roof age and material, distance to hydrants and fire response, replacement cost at mountain construction prices, short-term rental or vacancy use, water-loss protection, wood stoves and fireplaces, hot tubs, and

any prior claims tied to the property. For condos, review both the master policy and what you individually must carry — understand deductibles, loss-assessment coverage, and interior responsibility before you're relying on it.

Water and freeze protection: mountain losses often begin with cold, vacancy, or delayed detection. Favor properties with reliable heat, remote temperature monitoring, automatic water shutoff, accessible main valves, properly insulated plumbing, and a clear home-watch plan if you won't be there full-time.

Trusts, LLCs, and 1031 Exchanges

A number of our buyers structure a Summit County purchase through an LLC or trust for liability or estate-planning reasons, or as part of a 1031 exchange. Both are common and workable here — but discuss title with your attorney, tax advisor, and lender before closing, not at the signing table, since transfers into entities can affect financing, insurance, local transfer procedures, and rental licensing. A properly structured 1031 exchange can be genuinely valuable for qualifying investment property, but timing and use tests are technical; engage a qualified intermediary and tax counsel before you sell the relinquished property, not after. We coordinate closing logistics around a 1031 timeline or your entity's documentation — we don't offer tax or legal advice on which structure is right for you, and we'd encourage healthy skepticism of any advisor who does without knowing your full financial picture.

Part Eight — HOA Due Diligence

An HOA can protect a property and simplify ownership — or quietly carry deferred maintenance, insufficient reserves, or restrictions that undermine exactly what you bought the property to do. The rules are easy to find; the financial story takes more digging, and it's where we spend most of our own diligence time on a condo or townhome purchase.

Documents to Review

- Declaration and amendments; bylaws, rules, and regulations
- Current budget and year-to-date financials
- Reserve study and current reserve balance
- Recent board and owner meeting minutes
- Insurance declarations and deductible schedule
- Current assessment and special-assessment history
- Pending capital projects and delinquency information
- Any litigation or construction-defect disclosures
- Rental, pet, parking, remodeling, and amenity policies

Questions the Documents Should Answer

- Is the association funding predictable capital work, or are dues artificially low because maintenance is being deferred?
- What large projects are likely in the next five years, and who pays when the roof, deck, window, or sewer line fails?
- Can the board adopt new rental limits after you've bought — and is there any restriction on EV charging, hot tubs, exterior cameras, or remodeling?
- Is storage legally deeded, assigned, or simply first-come? Is there a master association layered on top of the immediate HOA?

Meeting minutes are the most revealing document in the stack. They show what owners actually argue about, what's been postponed year after year, and whether the board operates proactively or reactively — information no marketing brochure will ever give you.

Part Nine — Mountain-Specific Property Due Diligence

A general home inspection is the beginning of diligence on a mountain property, not the end. Colorado's freeze-thaw cycles, snow loads, and remote systems create failure points a standard inspector may not fully probe.

Structure, Water & Site

Pay close attention to drainage, grading, foundation movement, retaining walls, crawlspace moisture, roof runoff, snow storage, and any evidence of water intrusion. Mountain sites concentrate snowmelt in ways that can hide seasonal issues on a dry inspection day.

Roofs & Snow

Evaluate roof age and material, valleys, penetrations, heat tape, gutters, ice-dam history, and exactly where snow sheds — and whether that shedding threatens entries, decks, parked vehicles, or a neighboring property.

Driveways & Winter Access

A steep driveway can be entirely manageable with snowmelt, reliable plowing, proper drainage, and the right vehicle — or it can dictate every winter arrival. Identify who plows, where the snow gets stored, whether the road is publicly maintained, and what happens during a major storm before it's your problem to solve.

Heating & Mechanical Systems

Boilers, radiant heat, snowmelt, domestic hot water, humidification, and controls are often interconnected. Have complex systems reviewed by technicians who actually work on that equipment locally, and learn the age, redundancy, and service history before you're the one troubleshooting a cold house in January.

Wells, Septic & Private Utilities

Where applicable, review well permits and production, water quality, septic permits, tank and field condition, pumping history, bedroom rating, and setback constraints. Confirm any additions or guest units align with permitted capacity — an unpermitted bedroom on a septic system rated for fewer occupants is a real problem, not a technicality.

Surveys, Boundaries & Access

Luxury mountain property often involves long driveways, private roads, trails, shared access, open-space edges, or improvements near boundaries. We determine whether an improvement location certificate or a full survey is appropriate for a given property, and review easements, encroachments, and shared-road maintenance agreements before they become a surprise.

Unpermitted Work

Verify additions, decks, finished areas, lock-offs, bedrooms, fireplaces, hot tubs, and major remodels. Square footage in marketing materials is not a permit history. If rental eligibility or resale value depends on a room being legally recognized, we investigate it before it's your liability.

Furnishings & Personal Property

"Turnkey" doesn't mean everything visible is included. We create a specific written inclusion and exclusion list for every transaction — covering art, electronics, exercise equipment, outdoor furniture, linens, kitchenware, tools, recreational gear, hot-tub accessories, and smart-home components — and confirm condition at final walkthrough.

Part Ten — Luxury Buyer Considerations

Above roughly the \$2M mark, the questions that matter shift. Price per square foot and lift proximity give way to architectural quality, privacy, scarcity, and how a property will actually operate once you own it — not just how it photographs.

Privacy vs. Convenience

The quietest estate may require more driving and more caretaking. The most walkable residence may expose you to events, service traffic, or neighboring short-term rentals. Decide which compromise you genuinely prefer before you pay a premium for either — this is a conversation worth having explicitly, not assuming.

Views Must Be Investigated, Not Assumed

Ask what land lies in the view corridor, how it's zoned, and whether future construction or vegetation growth could alter it. Visit in different light and weather when you can — a spectacular view through floor-to-ceiling glass can also mean significant heat gain, glare, and window-maintenance cost that never shows up in a listing photo.

Replacement Cost & Scarcity

For exceptional properties, recent comparable sales may not fully capture the value of the land, the architecture, the approvals process, or the sheer difficulty of recreating the home today. We weigh both resale evidence and replacement reality — without letting either become an excuse for an unsupported price.

Serviceability

Sophisticated homes require sophisticated care. Before you buy, we help identify local service options for home automation, elevators, generators, custom windows, specialty roofing, geothermal systems, wine rooms, snowmelt, spas, and imported finishes. A system that can't be maintained locally becomes a recurring frustration, not a luxury feature.

Household Operations

If the home will be used by multiple generations or sit vacant for stretches, it's worth developing a real operating plan before closing — not improvising one after your first trip. That typically covers a local caretaker or property manager, arrival preparation and departure checks, airport and vehicle logistics, housekeeping support, a preventive-maintenance calendar, vendor access and security permissions, package handling, and a storm or freeze-response protocol. The best luxury purchase isn't merely beautiful — it's operationally calm, and we help our clients build exactly that from day one.

Part Eleven — The Buying Process

Most of our clients are not local, and the process below reflects how we actually work with buyers based in Denver, Texas, Florida, Arizona, and beyond — not a generic step-by-step that assumes you can drop by a listing on a Tuesday afternoon.

1. **Strategy and team** — define your ownership brief, price range, and cash-or-financing plan, and assemble your local broker, lender, insurance advisor, and tax or legal counsel as needed.
2. **Market orientation** — tour towns before you try to select a house. Drive the arrival routes, visit base areas, walk Main Streets, test grocery and dining convenience, and see several property types. A focused orientation day can eliminate months of unfocused searching.
3. **Property analysis** — for serious candidates, we compare total annual cost, access, HOA health, rental eligibility, physical condition, and resale audience — not merely price per square foot.
4. **Offer design** — price is one term among many. The offer also allocates timing, diligence rights, financing and appraisal contingencies, inclusions, and possession. A compelling offer isn't automatically an unprotected one.
5. **Due diligence** — we coordinate inspection, specialist reviews, title, HOA documents, survey needs, insurance, rental verification, permits, financing, and appraisal, and track every deadline precisely.
6. **Resolution and final verification** — we prioritize material defects, safety, water, structure, and major systems; reinspect agreed repairs where appropriate; confirm inclusions; and complete the final walkthrough.
7. **Closing and ownership launch** — we arrange utilities, access, insurance, management, winterization, security, mail, and the first preventive-maintenance schedule before your celebratory first weekend.

Closing Remotely

Many Summit County buyers purchase from another state, and remote execution works well when the process includes live video tours, detailed route videos, neighborhood context, document-review calls, local inspections, and a trusted final walkthrough. We make sure the video shows the unglamorous details too — the road approach, neighboring uses, garage clearance, storage, stairs, mechanical rooms, and ambient sound — not just the staged shots. Colorado title companies routinely handle closing via mobile notary or remote online notarization, so an in-person trip isn't required unless you'd simply rather be there for the moment itself.

Part Twelve — How to Evaluate Resale Before You Buy

Even a legacy buyer with no near-term plan to sell should understand the future audience for a property. Homes tend to remain broadly compelling when they combine several durable qualities:

- A strong micro-location, not just a good town
- A functional — not merely dramatic — floor plan
- Good natural light and sun exposure
- A garage and genuinely usable parking
- Real gear and owner storage
- Outdoor living that actually works in a mountain climate
- Views or a setting with some defensibility against future development
- Reasonable operating complexity — not a home only its current owner can run
- Year-round appeal, not purely ski-season appeal
- Clear, legal use with no unresolved permit questions

Be cautious when a purchase depends on one narrow premise — an unverified rental assumption, a temporary view, awkward access, an unusual bedroom arrangement, or a finish package distracting from a genuinely compromised site. The properties that hold value best are rarely the ones optimized for a single buyer's use case.

Part Thirteen — Comparing Finalists: A Scoring Framework

When you're down to two or three real contenders, a simple weighted scorecard cuts through the emotion of staging and light and gets you back to what you said mattered in Part One. Score each property from 1 to 5 in each category, using weights that reflect your family — not the market's generic priorities.

Category	Suggested weight	What it's really asking
Location & daily ease	20%	Does arrival, skiing, town access, and guest independence actually work?
Property fit	20%	Does the floor plan support your real users and future needs?
Physical & financial condition	15%	Are the structure, systems, HOA, and reserves genuinely sound?
Year-round lifestyle	10%	Will you use it beyond peak ski weeks?
Privacy, views & setting	10%	Are these qualities genuine, and reasonably protected long-term?
Ownership cost	10%	Is the complete annual and capital budget comfortable, not just affordable?
Rental flexibility	5–15%	Adjust the weight based on whether income is optional or essential to your plan.
Resale resilience	10%	Will a broad future buyer pool understand this property's value?

The score isn't meant to make the decision for you. It exposes where emotion is quietly overriding a priority you stated out loud — and sometimes it confirms that an emotional premium is entirely rational. Either way, you'll know which it is before you sign.

Part Fourteen — The Summit County Buyer's Red-Flag List

Slow down — not necessarily walk away — when you encounter any of the following. Red flags are instructions to investigate, price, and document the risk, not automatic deal killers.

- "Ski-in/ski-out" without a demonstrated route
- "STR eligible" without current, property-specific verification
- Rental projections presented only as gross income
- Low HOA dues paired with visibly aging common elements
- A missing reserve study, or repeatedly deferred capital projects
- A steep driveway with no clear winter plan
- Additions, bedrooms, or lock-offs that don't match the permit history
- Water staining dismissed without a real source analysis
- A seller's current insurance cost offered as proof of your future premium
- Major mechanical or technology systems with no local service history
- Furnishings described as "included" without a written inventory
- A view premium with unexamined development potential nearby
- Square footage that differs among the assessor, appraisal, plans, and marketing materials
- Any pressure to waive diligence because you're paying cash

Part Fifteen — Questions Affluent Buyers Should Ask Before Making an Offer

Ten questions we come back to with almost every client at this level, before a number ever goes on paper:

1. What are the three strongest reasons this property should outperform the alternatives over a ten-year hold?
2. What's the biggest compromise the listing photography doesn't show?
3. What will this home cost to own in a normal year — and in a capital-repair year?
4. Which claims in the listing actually require verification before we rely on them?
5. What does the ski, town, or trail access feel like for the least mobile member of the family?
6. Which major systems require specialty service, and is that service actually available locally?
7. What work has been completed, permitted, or quietly deferred?
8. What could realistically change around this property in the next ten years?
9. Who is the likely future buyer of this exact home?
10. Would we still love this home if it produced no rental income at all?

Part Sixteen — The Luxury Market: \$1M to \$20M and Beyond

Summit County's luxury market has genuinely matured over the past several years — this is no longer a market where \$1M+ buyers are settling for a nicer version of a standard product. At the upper end, we're seeing ski-in/ski-out estates with private garages and heated driveways, architect-designed new construction in Shock Hill and Keystone Ranch, and a meaningful and growing share of transactions happening off-market or through quiet, invitation-only previews before a property ever reaches the public MLS.

What Changes at the Top of the Market

- Discretion matters more. Many of our \$2M+ sellers prefer a quiet, targeted marketing process over a public listing with open houses — and many buyers at this level prefer the same on the way in. We run both processes regularly.
- Financing looks different. Cash and bridge financing are far more common above \$2M than in the broader market, and jumbo underwriting at this level places heavy weight on liquid reserves, not just income.
- The details buyers care about shift. At the entry and mid-market level, buyers are often focused on price per square foot and proximity to lifts. At the luxury level, the conversation moves to architectural quality, view corridors that can't be built out by a neighboring property, smart-home and energy infrastructure, privacy, and how a property will perform as a long-term family asset across generations.
- Concierge-level service is expected, not a bonus. From coordinating a design team for a renovation to introducing a buyer to a local property manager, tax advisor, or insurance broker who understands high-value mountain properties specifically, the relationship extends well past closing for most of our luxury clients.

If you're evaluating whether now is the right time to buy or sell at this level, that's a conversation best had directly, with current comparables for the specific neighborhood and property type you have in mind — luxury inventory moves in a genuinely different rhythm than the broader market, and generic market-wide statistics tell you very little about how a specific \$4M ski-in/ski-out property is likely to perform.

Part Seventeen — Working With Leisa & Stephanie

Buying a ski home takes more than access to listings. It takes local interpretation: how a road actually behaves in winter, whether "walkable" is realistic for your family, which HOA issue actually matters, how a rental rule applies to one specific parcel, and which compromise you'll still be comfortable with once the novelty wears off.

Colorado Ski Town Collective is Leisa Gibson and Stephanie Ernst's partnership within LIV Sotheby's International Realty — Summit County's most established name in luxury real estate, and the local face of the world's leading luxury property brand. We're not generalists who happen to sell mountain homes; Summit County, and specifically the six towns covered in this guide, is the entirety of what we do.

Why LIV Sotheby's International Realty

As LIV Sotheby's International Realty associates, Leisa and Stephanie combine deep, hyper-local Summit County expertise with the marketing reach, brand equity, and referral network of the most recognized name in global luxury real estate. That pairing matters in a very practical way: your property is marketed with the production quality, global exposure, and buyer network that luxury inventory deserves, while the day-to-day advice you get is grounded in the same six towns, the same zoning quirks, and the same HOA boards Leisa and Stephanie work with every week.

As of its 2026 fiftieth-anniversary year, the broader Sotheby's International Realty network spans more than 1,100 offices across 86 countries and territories. If you're buying a Summit County home as one piece of a broader real estate footprint, or relocating from — or eventually to — another market entirely, Leisa and Stephanie can put you directly in touch with a trusted Sotheby's colleague there, backed by the same brand standards and marketing reach you're experiencing with them.

What You Can Expect

- Straight answers, including when the honest answer is "we're not sure yet" or "that's a question for your CPA." We'd rather earn your trust than tell you what's easiest to hear.
- Local expertise that goes beyond listings — zoning and STR nuance, HOA red flags, which streets hold value best, and which "deal" properties come with a catch.
- A team, not a single point of failure — with two of us, you're never waiting on one person's calendar.
- Content and resources like this guide, our YouTube channel, and our blog, built to actually answer the questions you have rather than to generate leads for their own sake.

Ready to talk specifics? [Reach out to Leisa Gibson and Stephanie Ernst through coloradoskitowncollective.com](https://coloradoskitowncollective.com), or [subscribe to our YouTube channel](#) for ongoing town walkthroughs, market updates, and buyer education.

Part Eighteen — Beyond Summit County

Summit County is our home base and the market we know better than anywhere else in Colorado — but it isn't the only Colorado ski market, and it isn't the right fit for every buyer. If your search is genuinely open to other Colorado mountain towns, or you're weighing Summit County against one of these, here's the short version of how they compare.

Vail & Beaver Creek

Vail is Colorado's other major I-70 corridor market, roughly 45 minutes further from Denver than most of Summit County — and it carries a price premium to match, with entry-level condos and single-family luxury both running well above Summit County's comparable product. Vail Village's pedestrian core and Beaver Creek's more exclusive, gated feel give it a genuinely different character than any Summit County town. Vail sits in Eagle County, a separate jurisdiction with its own transfer-tax and regulatory rules — confirm directly with the Town of Vail if this market is on your list.

Aspen & Snowmass

Aspen sits at the very top of Colorado's luxury mountain market, with pricing that puts even Summit County's high end in perspective — a smaller, more remote, more globally recognized market with its own real estate transfer tax structure and a buyer profile that skews toward ultra-high-net-worth and international buyers even more heavily than Summit County's.

Telluride

Telluride is Colorado's most remote major ski market — a genuine box canyon town with a small year-round population, a historic downtown, and its own real estate transfer tax program that's helped preserve open space and workforce housing. It's a compelling option for buyers who want the most authentic, least-crowded mountain-town feel in the state and don't mind the longer travel time.

Steamboat Springs

Steamboat trades some of the vertical drop and terrain variety of the I-70 corridor resorts for a genuinely different, more ranch-and-hot-springs identity, a working-town feel, and generally more accessible pricing than Vail, Aspen, or Breckenridge. It's a strong fit for buyers prioritizing authenticity and value over the shortest possible drive from Denver.

Crested Butte

Crested Butte pairs a well-preserved Victorian-era downtown with a smaller, more laid-back resort and a strong mountain-biking identity in summer. It's more remote than any I-70 corridor town, which keeps both crowds and price growth more contained — an appealing combination for buyers who value character and value over convenience.

Winter Park

Winter Park is Denver's closest major resort by drive time via US-40, making it a genuine competitor to Summit County for buyers who prioritize proximity above all else. It's historically been a more accessible price point than Breckenridge or Vail, though that gap has been narrowing as the resort has continued to grow under Alterra's ownership.

However your search evolves

- as LIV Sotheby's International Realty associates and part of the global Sotheby's International Realty network, Leisa and Stephanie can connect you directly with a trusted colleague in any of these markets — someone who knows that town the way they know Summit County. You'll never be handed off to a stranger; they stay involved and make sure the introduction is a genuine fit before it happens.

Our goal is never to force Summit County into every search. It's to help you identify the Colorado mountain market — and the individual property — that best supports the life you want to build.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is now a good time to buy a Summit County ski home?

The useful question isn't a headline about the market — it's whether today's selection, negotiating environment, and financing fit your goals better than waiting. Conditions change by town, property type, and price band. We review current inventory, recent comparable sales, days on market, and competition in your exact segment before answering this for any specific buyer, rather than relying on a countywide average that may not describe the property you actually want.

Which Summit County town is best for a second home?

Breckenridge offers the broadest resort-town package; Frisco is exceptionally central and walkable; Keystone and Copper are compelling for resort-first ownership; Dillon emphasizes reservoir views and summer life; Silverthorne offers river access, newer construction, and Gore Range scenery. The "best" town is the one that fits your arrival routine, your skiing, your summer plans, and your family's actual pattern — see Part Three for the full breakdown.

Do I need to be a Colorado resident to buy here?

No. The large majority of our buyers live out of state, and nothing about Colorado real estate law requires residency to purchase. Financing, insurance, and property tax all work the same regardless of where you live; the main practical difference is planning logistics around your travel schedule rather than being able to drop by in person.

Can international buyers purchase property in Summit County?

Yes. There's no citizenship or residency requirement to purchase U.S. real estate, though financing is typically more limited for non-U.S.-based buyers (many purchase in cash or use a specialized foreign-national loan program), and there are tax-reporting considerations — including FIRPTA withholding on a future sale — worth discussing with a cross-border tax advisor before you buy, not just before you sell.

How much should I budget beyond the purchase price?

Build a property-specific estimate covering closing costs, any local transfer tax, financing, property tax, insurance, HOA dues, utilities, management, snow removal, maintenance, furnishings, and capital reserves. Percentage rules of thumb are too blunt for a market that spans village condos to large custom estates — see Part Seven for the full breakdown.

Can I short-term rent the home?

Possibly — but only current, property-specific verification is reliable. Check jurisdiction, government zone or basin, license availability, transfer rules, and HOA restrictions before relying on any rental income projection. See Part Six for the full five-layer review we run on every rental-minded purchase.

Is ski-in/ski-out worth the premium?

It can be, especially for families who use the home frequently and value independence — but confirm the actual route, its season reliability, and the ability level it demands. A better floor plan with shuttle or walkable access can genuinely outperform a technically slopeside property with real compromises. Part Five walks through how to translate the marketing language into an honest assessment.

Should I buy a condo or a house?

Choose based on the simplicity, privacy, space, and responsibility you actually want. Condos offer lock-and-leave ease; houses offer autonomy and land but require more hands-on management. Townhomes and duplexes often provide an effective middle ground — see Part Four for what you gain and give up with each.

Do I need a local lender?

Not always, but your lender should genuinely understand resort condominiums, second homes, nightly rentals, jumbo loans, and local appraisal realities. Inexperience in any of those areas can surface late in the process and weaken an otherwise sound transaction — we're glad to introduce you to lenders we trust.

Can I buy remotely, without visiting in person?

Yes. The strongest remote process combines live video tours, neighborhood and route documentation, a comprehensive inspection, specialist reviews as needed, document-review calls, and a trusted final walkthrough on your behalf. A meaningful share of our offers get written before the buyer has physically stood in the home.

How do I protect myself when buying a furnished property?

Use a detailed written inventory and exclusions list rather than relying on "turnkey" as a description. Confirm condition at the final walkthrough, and address valuable art or specialty items separately when appropriate.

What should I know about winterizing a property I won't occupy full-time?

Keep heat on and monitored (a smart thermostat with remote alerts is close to standard now), understand your HOA's or your own responsibility for driveway and roof snow removal, arrange for a local property manager or trusted neighbor to check the property periodically, and confirm your insurance policy's requirements around vacant or seasonally occupied properties — some carriers have specific occupancy clauses that affect claims.

What makes a ski home hold its value?

There's no guarantee, but durable location, a functional floor plan, real parking and storage, good sun and views, clear legal use, manageable ownership complexity, and genuine year-round appeal create broader long-term demand than trend-driven finishes alone. See Part Twelve for the full resale framework.

Do you help with selling as well as buying?

Yes — a significant share of our business is representing sellers across these same six towns, often for clients who bought with us years earlier and are now moving on to a different property or a different chapter. That conversation starts the same way a buyer conversation does: with a straight, current read on your specific property and market segment.

Your Pre-Offer Checklist

Strategy

- Ownership brief completed (Part One)
- Non-negotiables ranked against high-value and bonus features
- Towns and ski areas prioritized
- Financing pre-approval or proof of funds ready
- Annual ownership cost ceiling established

Property

- Jurisdiction confirmed — incorporated town or unincorporated county
- Actual ski and town access tested, not assumed from marketing language
- Road and driveway reviewed for winter access
- Parking and storage verified
- View corridor and future-development risk considered
- Inclusions and exclusions identified in writing

Use & Regulation

- STR eligibility verified for the exact parcel, if material to your plan
- License transfer status confirmed — does it transfer, or require a fresh application?
- HOA and deed restrictions reviewed
- Occupancy and parking limits understood
- Future-use flexibility considered

Physical Diligence

- General inspection planned, specialists identified as needed
- Permit history considered against actual square footage and bedroom count
- Roof, drainage, and snow behavior reviewed
- Well, septic, or private road reviewed if applicable
- Survey or improvement-location certificate need discussed

Financial Diligence

- HOA budget and reserves reviewed
- Real insurance quote obtained — not an estimate
- Property taxes and any transfer tax estimated
- Rental statements normalized if income is part of your plan
- Capital reserve included in your ownership budget

About This Guide

This guide is the hub of everything Colorado Ski Town Collective publishes. Every blog post on coloradoskitowncollective.com and every video on our YouTube channel links back here, and this guide links out to the deeper, more detailed content on each specific topic — town comparisons, short-term rental rules, and individual town guides. Think of this as the map; the blog and channel are where we go deep on any single piece of it.

How We Keep It Current

We review and update this guide each season — broadly, once heading into winter and once heading into summer — and any time a material change occurs sooner (a new short-term rental ordinance, a tax law change, a shift in lending norms). Rather than publish a static document that goes stale within a year, we treat this as a living page on our site, dated at the top with its most recent review.

Edition	Notes
Fall 2026 (current)	Combined and expanded edition — full ownership-lifecycle structure (Parts One through Eighteen), FAQ, pre-offer checklist, and financial picture as of August 2026.

For Leisa & Stephanie: maintaining this going forward

- Add a row to the table above every time this guide is meaningfully updated, with the date and a one-line summary of what changed — that log itself is useful content and shows visitors (and search engines) that this is actively maintained, not a one-and-done page.
- Highest-priority items to re-check each season: STR caps, zone boundaries, and current license availability for all six towns (these shift most often — Breckenridge in particular publishes a live availability list, linked in Official Sources below), the transfer-tax table in Part Seven (confirm directly with each town), any change to Colorado's residential assessment rate, and the Sotheby's International Realty office/country count in Part Seventeen (it changes as the network grows).
- As new blog posts go up on specific towns or topics already covered here, swap in the direct link in the relevant Part Three profile or Part Six/Sixteen section rather than leaving a generic channel or neighborhoods-page link.

Recommended Website Placement

- Primary navigation: Resources → Buying a Colorado Ski Home
- Suggested URL: /complete-guide-buying-colorado-ski-home/
- Canonical page: full HTML webpage, with this document offered as a downloadable PDF from that page
- Update label near the title: "Last updated [month] 2026"
- Primary CTA: "Build Your Summit County Ownership Brief" — Secondary CTA: "Watch the Buying a Colorado Ski Home Video Library"

SEO Fields

- SEO title: The Complete Guide to Buying a Colorado Ski Home | Leisa Gibson & Stephanie Ernst, LIV Sotheby's International Realty
- Meta description: The complete guide to buying a Colorado ski home in Breckenridge, Frisco, Keystone, Copper Mountain, Dillon, and Silverthorne — town comparisons, ski access, STR rules, ownership costs, due diligence, and luxury buying strategy from Leisa Gibson and Stephanie Ernst of LIV Sotheby's International Realty.
- Primary keyword: buying a Colorado ski home
- Secondary keywords: Summit County real estate, Colorado ski homes for sale, Breckenridge luxury real estate, Summit County second homes, ski-in ski-out homes Colorado, Keystone real estate, Frisco Colorado real estate, Copper Mountain real estate, Dillon Colorado real estate, Silverthorne luxury homes, Leisa Gibson realtor, Stephanie Ernst realtor, LIV Sotheby's International Realty Summit County

Suggested On-Page Modules

- Sticky table of contents; town-comparison cards linking to each town's page
- Embedded "Start Here" YouTube video and an author bio block for both Leisa and Stephanie, with credentials and review links, near the top
- Download-the-guide form (gated PDF is a legitimate lead-capture opportunity here)
- A dated "Current Market Update" box and a dated "Current STR Update" box, updated on the seasonal cadence described above
- "Steph & Leisa Tip" callouts pulled directly from this document; a downloadable version of the Part Thirteen scoring framework as its own lead magnet
- FAQ schema markup on the FAQ section; related videos and related blog posts linked at the end of each major Part

Internal-Linking Rule

Every relevant blog post and video description should link to this guide using natural, varied anchor text — never the same exact phrase every time, and never a vague anchor like "click here." Good options: "complete guide to buying a Colorado ski home," "Summit County ski-home buying guide," "how to choose a Summit County second home," "buying in Breckenridge, Keystone, Frisco, Copper, Dillon, or Silverthorne." This guide, in turn, links outward to the deepest town and topic pages — a hub-and-spoke system where the cornerstone explains the complete decision, supporting content answers one question in depth, and each reinforces the other's search authority.

Seasonal Update Blocks

Update these twice a year, or sooner when rules change: inventory and negotiating conditions by price band; interest-rate and jumbo-financing context; STR license availability, caps, and fee changes; insurance availability and underwriting trends; major resort, village, road, and development news; and featured videos, town guides, and new FAQ entries. Keep the permanent chapters stable, and date every update box with a link to its primary source.

Official Sources & Verification Links

Regulations and fees change. These links are starting points — always verify the exact property and current rule before relying on them, and treat this list as a living appendix that gets checked each seasonal update.

- [Summit County short-term rental information](#)
- [Summit County STR regulations](#)
- [Summit County Assessor & property maps](#)
- [Summit County municipal real estate transfer taxation](#)
- [Breckenridge short-term rental licensing](#)
- [Breckenridge current STR license availability & waitlists](#)
- [Breckenridge real estate transfer tax](#)
- [Town of Frisco](#)
- [Town of Silverthorne](#)
- [Town of Dillon](#)

Important notice

- This guide is educational and is not legal, tax, accounting, lending, insurance, engineering, or investment advice. Rules, fees, license availability, and market conditions can change. Buyers should obtain current, property-specific advice from the appropriate government agency, HOA, attorney, tax professional, lender, insurer, inspector, and other qualified specialists.
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What this merged edition is, and how it was built

- You asked me to combine my earlier CSTC_Complete_Guide_to_Buying_a_Colorado_Ski_Home.docx with a second guide another AI tool (referred to below as "the ChatGPT draft") produced for you, into one best-of-both document. I did not simply staple the two together — I rebuilt the structure around the ChatGPT draft's more complete ownership-lifecycle architecture (define the life you want, property types, ski-access spectrum, HOA and mountain-specific due diligence, luxury buyer considerations, a 7-step buying process, a resale framework, a weighted scoring tool, a red-flag list, and pointed questions for affluent buyers — all genuinely strong additions your original didn't have), then rewrote every section in one consistent voice and re-inserted the specific, independently researched data from my original guide throughout: verified per-town pricing, STR caps, the transfer-tax table, financing and property-tax guidance, the HB 25-1182 wildfire law, Sotheby's network figures, the luxury-market section, and the Beyond Summit County comparisons.
- Leisa and Stephanie's names and LIV Sotheby's International Realty are now referenced by name at multiple points throughout (the opening note, Part Seventeen, the SEO fields, and the closing notice) rather than only once at the end, per your request to promote both of you and the brokerage throughout, not just in a closing bio.

Facts carried over from the ChatGPT draft that I have not independently verified

- The specific STR availability snapshot ("as of mid-2026, availability has reportedly been tightest in Zones 2 and 3") in Part Six — this is a more current-sounding claim than anything in my own prior research. I've worded it as directional and pointed readers to Breckenridge's own live availability-list page, which the ChatGPT draft correctly identified as a real, useful source — but please confirm the actual current status before this goes live, since it's the kind of specific claim a sharp reader (or a competitor) could catch if it's wrong.
- The Breckenridge transfer tax language "1% of gross consideration" — this matches the 1% headline figure I independently verified earlier, which is reassuring corroboration, but I have not personally fetched the Town of Breckenridge's own RETT page to confirm the exact "gross consideration" phrasing or the full current list of Metropolitan Tax District properties. Worth a quick check against townofbreckenridge.com before publishing.
- The Dillon neighborhood references to "Corinthian Hill" and "Oro Grande" from the ChatGPT draft were deliberately left out of this merged edition rather than carried over, since I couldn't independently verify them and didn't want to publish a specific neighborhood claim I hadn't checked myself. If those are real, well-regarded Dillon neighborhoods you want featured, they'd be a great, specific addition — just have Tom or whoever owns this content confirm and re-add them.
- The general due-diligence content (HOA documents to review, mountain-specific inspection items, luxury serviceability considerations, the buying-process steps, the red-flag list, and the affluent-buyer questions) is professional real estate best practice rather than location-specific factual claims, so I treated it as safe to adapt directly rather than something requiring the same level of independent fact-checking as a specific number or regulation.

Everything else — sourcing recap

- Skiable acres, vertical drop, trail counts, terrain mix, median condo prices by town, Frisco's median and Summit County's overall 2026 medians, Keystone village-level pricing, Breckenridge/county STR zone structure, HB 25-1182 and the Colorado FAIR Plan, and the Sotheby's International Realty network figures (1,100+ offices, 86 countries) all carry the same sourcing and confidence notes documented in my original guide's editorial section — nothing about that research changed in this merge, only its presentation.
- The guide's own future URL still isn't set, so every existing blog post meant to link back to "the cornerstone guide" (Keystone vs. Breckenridge vs. Copper, Frisco vs. Silverthorne, the Dillon guide, and the Copper Mountain guide) still needs that link added once you've settled on a final URL — that's a real to-do, not just a note.