

The Art of Playing Tourist Guide Can Be Tricky

By Irv Sternberg

When my family moved to Denver in 1969, we had lots of relatives and friends visit us from the East Coast. They had never been to Denver before, so my wife and I could arrange any tourist trip we desired, knowing that all sites would be new to them.

At first it was a bit chaotic since we were learning the best tourist spots ourselves on a hit-and-miss basis. We learned, for example, that the neighborhood northeast of Downtown Denver with its abandoned warehouses, flop joints, sleazy saloons and a small army of winos sleeping it off on the sidewalks was not exactly a must-see destination, unless you were into that sort of thing. Few people actually lived there.

Today, thanks to the Colorado Rockies and Coors Field – and visionary developers – the LoDo area is definitely a stop on the tourist trail. On streets like Blake, Market, Larimer, Lawrence and Arapaho visitors will now find art galleries, fanciful restaurants and upscale drinking places, some on rooftop patios. And more people living there. Lots more. In high-rise condos and apartments. At the curb you'll discover luxury cars such as the Caddy, Lexus, Infinity and Mercedes Benz.

So, after living here a while, we narrowed our choices to a few unique places that our guests would enjoy seeing and would remain in their memory long after they departed. In no special order, these are the places we took them:

- Everybody likes to see where money is made and stored. So the Denver Mint was always a popular stop. And it was convenient – right there in the heart of downtown Denver.
- You couldn't beat the Cherry Creek Mall for high-end shopping. The women loved it! Their husbands found chairs where they imagined the charges on their credit cards.
- For a mountain feel, we took our guests to Red Rocks, where the kids loved running up and down the steep stairs and their parents enjoyed the panoramic views.
- Going out of town, we stopped first at the Air Force Academy. If our timing was right, we could watch the cadets march to chow, or view cadet training in gliders. The chapel always drew attention, too.
- And, finally, we took our guests to the Garden of the Gods near Colorado Springs, that amazing formation of sandstone rocks that once lay horizontally but now stand at eye-catching tilted angles. Ain't nothing like it in the New York metro area.

One summer, we hosted my cousins from Long Island. Their name was Monteleone. Before leaving they wanted to convey their thanks by taking us to a traditional Italian restaurant. You know the kind – checkered table cloths, home-made pasta, maybe a mustached violin player. My cousin dove into the yellow pages of the phone book and discovered a restaurant called Moneteleone's. He was ecstatic. You'd think he'd found a precious stone. "That's where we're going!" he insisted.

I was hesitant – and bit suspicious. By now I had learned where the good Italian restaurants were in town. Moneleone's was not one of them. To make sure, I took my cousin and drove to the location on W. Colfax Ave. What we found was a hole-in-the-wall place owned by a Mexican family and specializing in inexpensive tacos, burritos and enchiladas. While it once may have been owned by someone named Monteleone, they were no longer serving pasta. My cousins were a pair of disappointed New Yorkers.

We celebrated their last day in Colorado at a nice New York-style pizza joint.