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## The Great American Summer

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One of the many ways to create a splash at Dunton Hot Springs. *Opposite, top*, outdoor spring covered by a teepee, with a ladder leading down to the hot water. *Bottom*, a fur-lined bedroom in one of the resort's 12 cabins

# wilderness retreats

NOTHING COMES BETWEEN Dunton Hot Springs and the state of Colorado. To every resident of the local Dolores County, drunk or sober, the place is known simply as 'Dunton, Colorado'. It is the only thing that passes for a town within a 30-mile radius; and the hot springs are what has turned a ghost town, which began as a miners' camp in the 19th-century, into perhaps the ultimate American wilderness retreat.

To get to Dunton you drive, ideally in fine spring weather, for at least an hour and a half from any direction – the longer the drive the better. Wilderness plays an intrinsic part in the all-American hotel dream; as a nation, Americans have been obsessed with space since before Lincoln's mandate to build a transcontinental railroad, which in retrospect seems more daunting than JFK's decision to send a man to the moon. Dunton, at the end of a 22-mile dirt road lined with aspen groves and Ponderosa pines, is an isolated camp of hand-hewn log cabins in a rolling meadow. It stands at the headwaters of a river basin which falls away to the Four Corners, where Colorado, Arizona, Utah and New Mexico all intersect in a red desert that was once a battleground of the Ute and the Navajo tribes.

From Johnny Bull, one of the lower peaks above **Dunton Hot Springs** (details overleaf) you can see all the way to Ship Rock, a red sandstone hill rising from the desert in a part of the Navajo Reservation that extends into New Mexico. With two distinct climatic and geological zones in close proximity, visitors can go ice-climbing, snowshoeing or heli-skiing in the imposing, forested mountains before lunch, then strip down to shorts for an afternoon hike in a sandstone desert that seems as big as the ocean, where red-rock canyons strewn with Anasazi cliff dwellings radiate the heat of the day all night long.

Yet although Dunton is in 200-odd acres of private land surrounded by two national forests containing more than 1,000 miles of trails, some visitors wouldn't dream of doing anything except follow the old prospectors' dictum that there is only one thing in the mountains more valuable than gold: hot water.

Riddled with geothermal springs that feed both indoor and outdoor mineral pools, Dunton offers at least one activity that is decidedly anaerobic: contemplation. As you sit outside, naked in hot water at 8,700ft, there are sights that will go to your head. Three 'fourteeners' (Rocky Mountain parlance for peaks over 14,000ft) rise immediately above Dunton; watching the play of light – and sometimes lightning – at their icy summits is at least as hypnotic as the hardwood blaze in the saloon fireplace.

The challenge of creating an upmarket retreat of casual luxury and refinement in this environment must have been formidable: affectation becomes all the more preposterous before the dignity of the mountain wilderness. But the transformation of a ramshackle way-station for trappers, miners and outlaws has been shrewdly discreet. With its naturally weathered, antique structures, its subtle concealment of ostentation and modernity, and its pervasive generosity of spirit, Dunton succeeds because, for anyone with a soul, it provides a key to unlock an ancient sense of awe before nature.

DREW HAMMOND

Photographs: Todd Eberle

wilderness  
retreats



## THE 10 BEST HOTELS FOR GETTING LOST IN SPACE

### Ahwahnee

Yosemite Valley, Yosemite National Park, California (00 1 559 252 4848; fax: website: [www.yosemitepark.com](http://www.yosemitepark.com)). If you're hiking in Yosemite and prefer not to imitate Ansel Adams and sleep on the ground, try this old-fashioned wooden National Historic Landmark, full of Navajo rugs and 'enlightening and interpretative slide presentation' programmes. It has changed little since it opened in 1927. Doubles from \$350

### Amangani

1535 North East Butte Road, Jackson, Wyoming (00 1 307 734 7333; fax: 733 7332; e-mail: [amangani@rmisp.com](mailto:amangani@rmisp.com); website: [www.amanresorts.com](http://www.amanresorts.com)). A 60-minute drive from the Wyoming side of Yellowstone, the only US Amanresort bears the signature architectural style of Edward Tuttle. Every room has similar views of the Tetons. Suites from \$725

### Dunton Hot Springs

52068 West Fork Road, Dunton, Colorado (00 1 970 882 4800; fax: 882 7474; website: [www.duntonhotsprings.com](http://www.duntonhotsprings.com)). See previous page. For UK bookings and information, call Mason Rose on 020 7235 3245; e-mail: [susannah@masonrose.com](mailto:susannah@masonrose.com). Cabins from \$505 (12 cabins, best for groups of six to 24)

### El Tovar Hotel

PO Box 669, Grand Canyon, Arizona (00 1 303 297 2757; e-mail: [reservations@amfac.com](mailto:reservations@amfac.com)). The best hotel in Grand Canyon was built in 1905 of natural materials by the architect Charles Whittlesey, 'in imitation of European hunting lodges'. It is doing its utmost to prevent overcrowding at the south rim by ensuring no one wants to leave the hotel. Doubles from \$125

### Gallatin Gateway Inn

76405 Gallatin Road, Gallatin Gateway, Montana (tel/fax: 00 1 406 763 4672; e-mail: [gatewayinn@gallatingatewayinn.com](mailto:gatewayinn@gallatingatewayinn.com)). With its 1920s architectural grandeur and superior restaurant, Gallatin Gateway Inn is a blessed relief after the squalid motels at the northern 'gateway' to Yellowstone. Doubles from \$90

### Korakia Pensione

257 Patencio Road, Palm Springs, California (00 1 760 864 6411; fax: 760 864 4147; website: [www.korakia.com](http://www.korakia.com)). A hang-out for A-list European fashion photographers, with a Moroccan and a Mediterranean villa, plus sensational views of the San Jacinto range of the Mojave. Ask for the Artist Studio, which was Winston Churchill's favourite. Doubles from \$130

### Post Ranch Inn

Highway 1, PO Box 219, Big Sur, California (00 1 831 667 2200; fax: 667 2824; e-mail: [res@postranchinn.com](mailto:res@postranchinn.com); website: [www.postranchinn.com](http://www.postranchinn.com)). Discretion and environmental correctness are all-pervasive at the Post Ranch, and it seems there is an unspoken rule that its clientele uphold the same standards. The cliff-top views, 1,200ft above the Pacific, are among the finest in the US. Doubles from \$500

### Stone Canyon Inn

1220 West Stone Canyon Lane, Tropic, Utah (00 1 435 679 8611; fax: 435 679 8411; e-mail: [stonecanyon@color-county.net](mailto:stonecanyon@color-county.net); website: [www.stonecanyoninn.com](http://www.stonecanyoninn.com)). Sharing the eastern boundary of Bryce Canyon National Park, this has views of the canyon system that many experienced Westerners prefer to the Grand Canyon itself – and fewer visitors. Doubles from \$100

### Twin Farms

Stage Road, Barnard, Vermont (00 1 802 234 9999; fax: 234 9990; website: [www.twinfarms.com](http://www.twinfarms.com)). A deluxe colonial fantasy in New England. No doubt a lot more drinking went on when Sinclair Lewis lived here, but if your heart leaps at the sight of Green Mountain 'foliage', you will overlook the overly correct staff and steep prices. Doubles from \$1,100 (including all meals)

### Ventana Inn

Highway 1, Big Sur, California (00 1 831 667 2331; fax: 667 2419; e-mail: [reservations@ventana.com](mailto:reservations@ventana.com); website: [www.ventanainn.com](http://www.ventanainn.com)). At Ventana, you can indulge in a passion which, even if it were possible at the more chic and austere Post Ranch Inn – just up the road – would be frowned upon there as a vulgarity.