

Gourmet to Go

Private chefs do the shopping, chopping, serving and cleaning. You decide what's on the menu.



◆ STRATEGIES

A Moveable Feast

Hiring a private chef is the gourmand's ultimate après-ski treat. *By Julie Upton*

IMAGINE RETREATING TO YOUR MOUNTAIN DIGS AFTER A DAY ON THE slopes to be greeted by a crackling fire and a chef busily arranging a medley of appetizers, your wine already decanted. That's just the prelude: Dinner, plated and served, is Colorado striped bass over rock shrimp risotto, assorted baby vegetables and a chocolate soufflé with espresso crème. "It's the ultimate in luxury, and it used to be the best-kept secret of Alta," says Julie Matthews of Baltimore, Md., who has hired chef Dan Ketner of Alta Gourmet Services every year for the past decade.

Ketner is one of a growing number of chefs offering private dining services at condos and homes in resort towns. The benefits are obvious: You don't have to get dressed up or drive to dinner, you can request favorite foods and menus, and best of all, you don't have to cook—or clean up the kitchen. But at what cost? Expect to spend roughly the equivalent of going out for a fine dinner. Prices vary based on the chef's reputation and résumé, as well as the menu you choose. Per person rates can range from \$30 to \$100 or more for dinner (Ketner charges \$75 per person for breakfast and dinner). That said, there are

Hire Learning Find a Chef

- Log on to personalchef.com, which lists local chefs by state and county.
- Scour resort guides for restaurants, then check if the chef does solo work.
- Some ski towns have culinary-arts schools with students for hire. Try **Colorado Mountain College** (near Keystone and Vail, Colo.); coloradomtn.edu; 800-621-8559. **New England Culinary Institute** (near Stowe and Sugarbush, Vt.); neculinary.com; 802-223-6324. **White Mountain Cooking School** (near Cannon and Bretton Woods, N.H.); snowvillageinn.com; 800-447-4345.

ways to make private dining less costly. "The difference between a \$40 and \$100 dinner is in the number of courses and the type of food served," says Lisa Friedman, owner of the Wooden Spoon, a catering company in Vermont's Mad River Valley near Sugarbush and Jay Peak. If you're on a budget, opt for heartier foods such as stews. Also, prices are best when there's a larger group (10 or more), as

DETAILS

Alta Gourmet Services

Alta, Utah; altachalets.com; 801-424-2426

Bertrand's Catering

Telluride, Colo.; telluride-cater.com; 970-728-0573

Conundrum Catering

Aspen, Colo.; conundrumcatering.com; 970-948-6204

West End Bistro at the Lake

Truckee, Calif.; westendcatering.com; 530-550-7770

Wooden Spoon

Fayston, Vt.; woodenspoon-vt.com; 802-496-9713

Hemingway's Restaurant

Killington, Vt.; hemingways-restaurant.com; 802-422-3886

chefs have to do the same prep work for a party of five as they would for a sitting of 10.

As another option, some local caterers deliver fully prepared meals that just need to be "finished" in your kitchen. Friedman posts menus on her website, where customers can place orders for delivery. The price: \$15–\$35 per person. The service is popular on Fridays when weekenders arrive too bushed to run to the store.

Unfortunately, hiring a high-end chef is no guarantee of a high-class affair. A visitor from London secured a "celebrity" chef (at celebrity rates) in Telluride, Colo., last season and was disappointed with the food as well as what she considered the chef's condescending attitude toward her guests.

So do your research: Ask for references. Get an agreement in writing spelling out what the chef will provide (shopping, serving, clean-up, etc.). Then snag a spot in front of the fire, lift that glass of wine, and let someone else do the work. You're on vacation. ♦