1.39x Income Gap in High Country — ALEX Intelligence 2026

1.39x Income Gap in the High Country

Summit vs. San Miguel — A Hidden Divide in Mountain Real Estate

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THE DATA

1.39x

Ratio of Highest to Lowest County Median Household Income in the Market (2024)

The Colorado High Country’s internal income disparity is greater than in most U.S. metropolitan regions.

This 1.39x gap—between Summit County’s $109,773 and San Miguel County’s $79,024—reveals a stark economic bifurcation. Summit, home to Vail and Beaver Creek, commands a premium not just in real estate but in economic influence. San Miguel, encompassing Telluride and Ouray, despite its scenic appeal, remains under-resourced in income terms. This imbalance shapes where capital flows, where development is prioritized, and where political leverage lies.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2024 · ALEX Intelligence computation
https://alex-companies.com/data/2026-09-18-high-country-within-county-median-income

01

Wealth Concentrates Power

The High Country is not a single market—it's a hierarchy. Summit County's elevated income doesn't just reflect higher property values; it enables deeper political clout, faster infrastructure approval, and stronger lobbying power. When a county earns 39% more per household, it can attract better schools, faster broadband, and more responsive public services—creating a self-reinforcing cycle. San Miguel, despite its cultural and natural capital, remains on the outside of this loop, limiting its ability to shape regional policy or attract long-term investment.

02

The Cost of Being 'Too Rich'

High income in Summit and Pitkin doesn’t eliminate economic strain—it redistributes it. The Kansas City Fed reports that even in high-income resort towns, a significant portion of residents live near or below the poverty line. This paradox—extreme wealth alongside deep poverty—creates a fragile social contract. As housing prices soar, local workers (teachers, firefighters, service staff) are priced out, leading to workforce instability. The 1.39x gap isn’t just a number—it’s a warning sign that the region’s economic model is unsustainable without deliberate policy intervention to ensure inclusive growth.

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