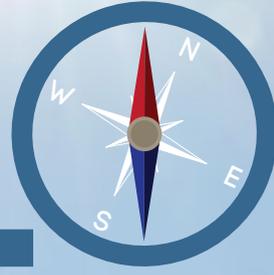


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On the Cover:

Situated in a remote area of the Rocky Mountains' Sawatch Range and Elk Mountains, along the Roaring Fork River at an elevation of just below 8,000 feet above sea level, Aspen is home to many outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy the winter months.

07



14



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THE BIG EMPTIES

Where powder meets uncrowded runs

By: Gordy Megroz

Even during the deepest powder days, these five hidden gems somehow remain blissfully uncrowded. Need we say more?

1. Powder Mountain and Snowbasin, Utah

In-the-know skiers and snowboarders have been raving about the awesome and empty slopes at these mountains for more than a decade. And yet both remain delightfully uncongested. That's because they're a little over an hour's drive from Salt Lake City, or about 30 minutes farther away than Utah's big-name resorts. When storms roll in, as they often do (the two hills, which are 30 minutes apart, average 500 inches of snow a year), untouched stashes stay fresh for days. At Powder, hit Lightning Ridge, which accesses 35-degree steeps. At Snowbasin, head straight for any of the 2,400-vertical-foot runs off the John Paul Express.



2. Schweitzer Mountain, Idaho

Arguably the Northwest's most desirable ski resort due to its large size (2,900 skiable acres) and big snowfall (300 inches annually), Schweitzer never gets tracked out, thanks to its location, a two-hour drive from Spokane, Washington, the closest major airport. When big British Columbia storms blow through the southern tip of the Selkirks, locals head straight for the snow-ghosted glades that the mountain has built a reputation around. The best runs are JR Trees, a mellow cruise through well-spaced aspens, and Kohli's Big Timber, 1,000 vertical feet of 40-degree steeps through tight glades.

3. Kirkwood, California

Kirkwood has always had a special status among Tahoe-area resorts: it's harder to get to (50 minutes from South Lake on a two-lane highway) but always worth the effort because of the K-Factor, a snowstorm funnel that drops an average of 600 inches a year here—240 more than nearby Heavenly gets. Industry giant Vail Resorts bought Kirkwood in 2011 and did some sprucing up, adding an umbrella bar in the village and renovations to the Kirkwood Inn, but the mountain's off-the-grid feeling and epic cat skiing remain intact.



4. Magic Mountain, Vermont

Stratton gets all the attention in the state, but Magic's steep and tree skiing are better. Start your day by heading up Red Chair, which was refurbished last winter, gaining a little more pep. Then ski the narrow, 25-degree slopes of Upper Wizard to Broomstick all the way down to Bail Out and through the thick trees in the Hallows.



5. Red Mountain, British Columbia

Just north of the Washington border, this funky, sleepy, and massive resort (five peaks spread over 2,800 acres) keeps getting bigger and better. Last year it grew by almost 25 percent with the addition of Grey Mountain, which features 40-degree chutes with names like Helter Smelter. This year Red Mountain expanded into Mount Kirkup, full of wide-open tree runs. What hasn't changed? The vibe. Although there are a few more condos, there are never any lift lines and everybody still meets up at Rafters, the bar above the day lodge, to drink and listen to live music.



6. Mount Baker, Washington

Mount Baker cannot promise the lightest and driest powder, but with an average snowfall of 16.5m a season, it is the snowiest resort in the world! It also boasts the highest annual snowfall ever recorded, with over 29m in 1999!



7. Revelstoke, British Columbia

Revelstoke has North America's biggest vertical drop and a big reputation for powder. Its relative isolation also means fewer crowds than some better known powder destinations.

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LIVE YOUR ADVENTURE

HOW TO SAVE ON WINTER SPORTS

Smart ways to cut costs on travel, lift tickets, and equipment

By: Susan Johnston

This Friday is the winter solstice, marking the official start of the season. In many places, skiing, snowboarding, and snowshoeing are already underway. According to SnowSports Industries America (SIA), consumers spent \$3.4 billion on apparel, equipment, and accessories during the 2011-2012 snow sports season. Kid-specific gear alone brought in \$312 million in retail sales, making these outdoor events a family affair.

Winter sports can be a costly pursuit, so we turned to the experts for tips on enjoying these activities on a budget:



TRAVEL

If you don't live in an area with nearby mountains, transportation costs can add up quickly. One way to defray those costs is by carpooling. In Colorado, for instance, SkiCarpool.org helps skiers find shared rides to resorts throughout the state. The website also organizes shared rides in other states as well as a few foreign countries.

If you're planning to fly, keep in mind that you'll typically need to pay extra to check your gear—unless you have elite status with the airline or choose an airline that offers free checked bags. “On most airlines, your skis will count as one piece of luggage towards your baggage allowance, so pack accordingly if you're flying with your gear,” says Coupons.com consumer savings ex-

pert Jeanette Pavini. “Depending on the length of your trip and your airline's baggage policy, it could be cheaper just to rent it.”

Finding budget-friendly meals and accommodations is also key. “The cheapest alternatives we usually find are to stay in a condo, off-mountain, with full kitchen facilities,” says Kathy Bechtel, a ski instructor in Sugarloaf, Maine, who also leads ski tours in Italy. “Eat a big breakfast, bring your lunch, and eat late. You'll find more room in the base lodge if you can wait until 1 p.m. or so to eat, and you'll have the slopes to yourselves during the busy lunch hour. Carry [snacks] in your inside jacket pocket to tide you over ... inside, so it doesn't freeze.”

Winter Travel Tips

Fly nonstop whenever possible. To find nonstop flights, do all your initial flight searches with the “Nonstop Flights Only” button checked. If you also use search options like “Show Nearby Airports” and “My Dates Are Flexible,” you'll have a very good sense of how best (and how much) to get from Point A to B without Point C for Connection.

Be prepared for a change in course. Before you depart, become confident in knowing your route. It's very important that you're ready for anything on the road that could change your plans, including construction, road closings and traffic hurdles. Remember to keep the directions as well as appropriate state map(s) handy, in case you need to reroute your trip.

Pack a winter safety kit for the car. Don't leave without the essentials for a safe road trip — a cell phone (don't forget the car charger); ice scraper; tow rope and jumper cables; sand or cat litter to aid with traction; blankets; flashlights, matches and emergency candles; first aid kit; portable radio; and a good book, in case you do get stuck.

Lift Tickets

The price for lift tickets can vary depending on where and when you go. “If you have flexibility, save with a midweek season pass or lift ticket,” suggests Pavini. The slopes will often be less crowded because most people work during the week and ski or snowboard on the weekends. Another way to save is to ski during weekends when others are distracted. “Hold off until Super Bowl Sunday, a popular day for lift-ticket discounts, because resorts know most people are glued to their big screens,” Pavini says. Warehouse clubs and websites such as Liftopia.com are also good places to find

discounted lift tickets.

Also consider hitting less-popular mountains. “Not only does that burger cost \$15 bucks at a mega-resort, you’re also looking at spending almost \$100 for a day of skiing,” says Jeff Howard, a public-relations account coordinator who, in his younger years, was a self-proclaimed “ski bum” in Jackson Hole, Wyo. “There are great smaller mountains all over the country that provide the same amount of service but at a fraction of the price—and half the wait in a lift line.” He recommends Arapahoe Basin in Colorado or Bear Valley in California.



Equipment

Your height, weight, and skill level all figure into how you interact with sports equipment, so Ryan Alford, editor-in-chief of Snowshoe Magazine, suggests renting equipment before buying. “It allows you to not only try out the sport but test different types of equipment and different brands,” he says.

Consumer and money-saving expert Andrea Woroch recommends looking for equipment rentals near your home instead of renting at a resort. “Any time you rent skis on the mountain, it’s going to be more expensive,” she explains.

Once you’re committed to a sport and a brand, consider buying last year’s skis or snowshoes, since the technology doesn’t change dramatically from year to year. Thanks to last winter’s less-than-ideal snow conditions, a lot of retailers have a surplus of last year’s models, which are likely to be marked down, according to Alford. Some flash-sale sites like The Clymb specialize in sports apparel and equipment, he adds.

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WORLD'S BEST HIDDEN SKI TOWNS

25 hidden ski towns that are sure to please

By: Aaron Teasdale

Just what makes a classic ski town? It starts, naturally, with skiing and snowboarding so good they attract people like youth-bestowing fountains. Then add an inviting mountain burg steeped in ski heritage, amenities, and culture. These are the 25 best. For insider tips, we asked local luminaries where to stay, play, and party, whether you're on a budget or indulging.

1. GIRDWOOD, ALASKA

BEST FOR: Off-the-beaten-path powder hounds with an aversion to glamour

A former gold-mining town carved out of the forest at the foot of the famed Chugach Mountains, Girdwood has re-fashioned itself into Alaska's premier ski town. Hippies and ski bums flocked here in the 1970s and, a luxury hotel at the ski area's base notwithstanding, its laid-back, frontier-style ambiance remains intact. Many roads are unpaved and Carhartt clothing is a popular fashion choice. Situated about 40 miles south of Anchorage (and its international airport), life in this humble hamlet of 2,000 revolves around skiing and snowboarding.

Rising up from the edge of town, Alyeska Resort is the largest ski area in Alaska. It has six lifts, two magic carpets, and a 60-person tram that climbs the mountain's steep north face with views to the ocean. Tree line is low this far north, so the upper half of the mountain is wide-open alpine, more like the open terrain of the Alps than a typical American resort. There are ample blue runs and a smattering of beginner runs near the base, but experts will get the most out of the mountain. If you're not afraid of a little in-bounds hiking, the ridges near Alyeska peak harbor an array of vertiginous chutes.

As you would expect in Alaska, crowds are nonexistent. There is also real-deal Chugach heli- and cat-skiing available right from Alyeska's base area. Best to visit in March, when there is an average of 12 hours of daylight, though lifts keep running through April and on weekends in May.

ASK A LOCAL

Girdwood native Elyse Saugstad is a professional skier and the 2008 freeride world



champion. Here are her recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: The Alyeska Hostel is close to the resort. What it lacks in frills, it makes up for in flavor. It's been around since 1980 and has a lot of history.

Swank: The Hotel Alyeska is the resort-owned hotel. It's really nice, has great dining, and they'll even do a wake-up call for the northern lights. Step right out your door and onto the tram.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Coast Pizza, at the entrance of Girdwood, has quick slices of pie and one of the best grilled sandwiches around.

Gourmet: The Double Musky Inn is a Cajun-cuisine restaurant for people who like

to eat meat. Not only are the fillets the size of your head, they are cooked perfectly. And the gumbo is to die for. Really.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

The Sitzmark, at the bottom of the mountain, is the classic ski bar that's survived all the changes of the resort through the years. It has the perfect mix of food, booze, live music, a constant rotation of ski movies playing on TV screens, and a killer sun deck for the springtime when it warms up.

GIRDWOOD'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

Try the north face from Christmas Chute to the bottom. It's the leg burner of the century when it's a deep powder day, which is quite often with the amount of snowfall Alyeska receives.



2. FERNIE, BC

BEST FOR: Adventurous skiers with a hunger for the steep and deep

Though it serves up some of the most spectacular terrain and best snow in all of Canada, this historic mining hamlet of 4,217 people tucked into the far southeastern corner of British Columbia still somehow flies below the greater ski-scene radar. Which isn't a bad thing—its wide-open alpine bowls, knife ridges, and daredevil chutes are rarely crowded, and fresh tracks can still be found in afternoons on powder days. For many skiers and snowboarders it hits the Canadian sweet spot, with more consistent powder than Whistler and warmer temperatures than Banff.

Similar to its American cousin, Whitefish, a hundred miles to the south, Fernie is a small, funky town with a tiny yet charming downtown. Restaurants are eclectic and unpretentious, the old train station has been converted to an arts center, and ski bums abound. It's the kind of town where old skis are turned into fences, benches, and coat racks. Thanks to new developments at the base of the hill and in town, lodging options at all price points abound, from hostels to luxury lodges.

Fernie Alpine Resort overlooks the Elk River Valley from 4.5 miles outside town, clinging to the sculpted faces of the Lizard Range. Its five distinct bowls will keep

advanced skiers and snowboarders drunk on adrenaline all day, while the new chairlift to the summit of Polar Peak opens up hundred-mile mountain views and 3,497 feet of vertical drop. Diehard powder addicts can head up to the Bear Lodge of Island Lake Catskiing, a few miles past the ski area, for world-class cat skiing.

ASK A LOCAL

Brian Bell came to Fernie in 1993, living in his van, to ski for a winter and never left. He's been running the Mountain Adventure Skills Training Program at the Fernie Campus of the College of the Rockies for 15 years. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: The Raging Elk Hostel in downtown Fernie

Swank: The Lizard Creek Lodge on the mountain is ski-in, ski-out.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Big Bang Bagels—get the “Mr. Fernie” on a whole wheat salty top.

Gourmet: Picnic Restaurant + Social has beautiful ambiance and the slow-braised buffalo ribs are fantastic.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

The Griz Bar right at the hill has the best nachos in town and great acoustic après-ski bands. Be sure to ask about the naked table sliding.

FERNIE'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

“Sky Dive nonstop, top to bottom. By far the best fall line on the hill,” says Bell.



3. ZERMATT, SWITZERLAND

BEST FOR: Photographers with a taste for old-world culture and never-ending descents

Switzerland is a country of classic ski towns, but Zermatt is its crown jewel. To many, it is the world's ultimate ski resort. Though surrounded by several glacier-clad peaks, everything here—the town, the skiing, the sky—is dominated by the spiking pyramid of the mighty Matterhorn, one of the most distinctive mountains on Earth. The village itself allows only electric cars (you arrive by rail), and luxury hotels sit side by side with centuries-old wooden barns. Streets are narrow and cobbled; restaurants are abundant and expensive. It's everything you imagine a Swiss ski village to be.

Zermatt offers three interconnected Swiss skiing zones, each with its own cluster of lifts and all skiable with a single ticket and accessible directly from town. There are also two ski zones just across the Italian border. The scenery is unrelentingly stunning but the skiing and snowboarding is even more so, with vertical drops of up to 7,152 feet on terrain that varies from never-ending cruisers to north-facing powder runs. The more than 50 on-mountain restaurants are among the finest anywhere, and taking time for a

relaxed lunch is de rigueur.

Don't miss the ride on the Matterhorn Glacier Paradise cable car—the highest in the Alps—on which you can descend 12 miles into the Italian area of Cervinia (joint lift tickets available), where a mid-day meal costs half the price you'd pay in Switzerland.

ASK A LOCAL

Longtime Zermatt resident Amadé Perrig is a former ski racer and instructor and the retired CEO of Zermatt Resort. He has climbed the Matterhorn more than 20 times. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: Hotel Bahnhof is a simple, low-budget hotel that is well known by climbers.

Swank: The Mont Cervin Palace is an old, classic, five-star hotel.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Walliserkanne has a really good low-budget menu.

Gourmet: Try Chez Heini for high-quality lamb in the company of celebrities.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOTS

Unique Hotel Post Zermatt has five bars, including one with live music.

ZERMATT'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

"National, it's very steep and you can carve," says Perrig.



4. BOZEMAN, MONTANA

BEST FOR: Diehard skiers who wear their duct tape with pride (and beginners who look forward to doing the same someday)

The adventure capital of the Northern Rockies, Bozeman is an old Montana university town of cowboys and ski bums, pickups and unleashed dogs, and two of the premier ski hills in America. More of a working town than a tradi-

tional "ski town," here overpriced lodges and fine dining are the exception, though there are a few high-end options and classically trained chefs. But being Bozeman, there's nowhere you can't wear blue jeans. You don't come here for the restaurants, you come to ski the two wild Montana mountains. Bridger Bowl is the storied, scruffy little brother, a condo-free, non-profit ski area 20 minutes out of town and where some of America's original extreme skiers—Scot Schmidt, Tom Jungst, and Doug Coombs—cut their teeth and began preaching the steep skiing gospel. Hardcore skiers flock here for The Ridge, in-bounds hiking terrain with a murderer's row of hairball chutes, and the new Schlasman's Lift accessing expert-only, backcountry-style terrain (avalanche transceivers required for both).

An hour's drive south of town in the majestic Madison Range, Big Sky Resort is the brash, lusty big brother, a gigantic ski area that offers joint lift tickets with the adjacent Moonlight Basin to create one of the largest ski areas in America. The tram to the vaulting, exposed 11,166-foot summit of Lone Peak opens up a Euro-style world of high-alpine, big-mountain skiing. Beginners and intermediates will find plenty of terrain at both, with Big Sky the deluxe option and the smaller Bridger a no-frills, low-cost choice. Yellowstone National Park, a 60-minute drive away, features back-of-beyond cross-country skiing and wildlife watching.

ASK A LOCAL

Tom Jungst moved to Bozeman in 1977 to join the Montana State University ski racing team and soon began pioneering extreme terrain in the area and appearing in classic ski films by Warren Miller and Greg Stump. Today he is an educator, machinist, and product designer. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: Blue Sky Motel, which has \$40 rooms and allows dogs for a small fee

Swank: The Gateway Inn isn't that expensive, but it's nice, and from the inn it's easy to head to either Big Sky or Bridger before or afterwards.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Watanabe, across from the high school on Main Street, has no liquor license, but the authentic noodle dishes warm you after a cold day of skiing.

Gourmet: Starky's

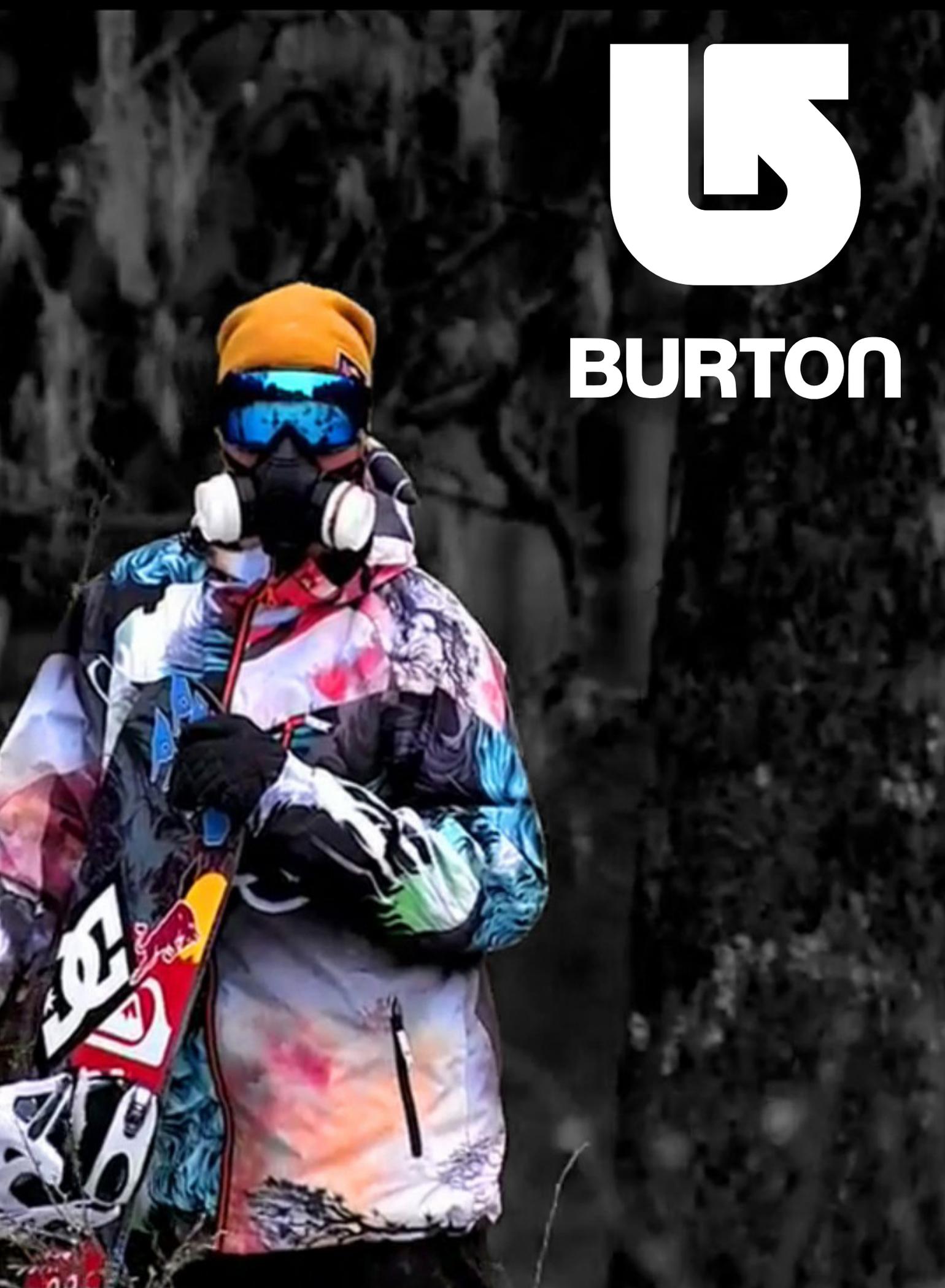
BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOTS

Montana Ale Works is great, but the newly rebuilt Rocking R Bar is a lot of fun too. Main Street is all fun!

BOZEMAN'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

"For me a classic is an old-fashioned hike up the Bridger Ridge and out to the Apron—preferably from the top—and Hidden Gully," says Jungst. "At Big Sky, any tram lap is awesome depending on the conditions, but nothing beats a ripper down Lenin or Marx."





BURTON

5. CHAMONIX, FRANCE

BEST FOR: Adrenaline junkies who like their mountains big

Globally renowned as the birthplace of extreme skiing (often defined as “you fall, you die”), Chamonix has some of the world’s premier lift-accessed steep skiing and snowboarding—including plenty of terrain that won’t leave you dead on a glacier if you catch an edge wrong. Located in a deeply cleaved valley near the trisection of France, Italy, and Switzerland, the town sits in the shadow of the highest peak in the Alps, Mont Blanc, and a tangle of other glacier-clad mountains. Chamonix’s cobblestone streets and car-free pedestrian center make for a classic mountain village environment typically bustling with leathery mountaineers and gawking tourists. This is France, so the nightlife is predictably spirited, and diverse accommodations range from grimy climbers’ hostels to luxury lodgings.

But it’s the mountains that rule here. The many lifts and trams access terrain so steep and rugged that many skiers will be wishing for a ride down, as well. One ticket gains access to the 11 different ski zones scattered discontinuously across the valley. If the snow is good, vertical drops of over 9,000 feet are possible. With more glaciers than any ski area in Europe, skiers



and snowboarders who enjoy staying alive should hire a local guide before heading out of bounds.

ASK A LOCAL

Former France Ski Team member and current freeride world champion Aurélien Ducroz has lived his entire life in Chamonix. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: The recently renovated Hotel du Louvre is in the center of town.

Swank: Le Hameau Albert 1er in downtown Chamonix is the only five-star hotel.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Maison Moustache et Filles, a new restaurant downtown, is run by Charles

“the Moustache” and his two daughters, Maxime and Camille. It’s decorated with an extraordinary collection of old skis.

Gourmet: Le Cap Blanc, one of Le Cap Horn’s three venues, serves delicious sushi.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOTS

Chambre Neuf, a Scandinavian-influenced bar, has live music and is host to the best after-ski vibe the town has had in years.

CHAMONIX’S CLASSIC SKI RUN

La Vallée Blanche starts from the top of the Aiguille du Midi and goes for 16 kilometers on top of a glacier in the middle of incredible mountains!



6. CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, ITALY

BEST FOR: Aesthetically minded skiers who appreciate fine wine

With the dramatic peaks of the Dolomites rising like ruddy cathedrals in every direction, the ski areas around Cortina have been called the most beautiful in the world. Many of the bejeweled visitors here seem to be vying for the same title. The most upscale resort in Italy, Cortina's car-free Corso Italia is packed with furriers, designer boutiques, and Italians with sunglasses that cost more than most skis. It's a slice of classic Italy and loads of fun if you want to sample la dolce vita.

The good news is that most people here are more interested in socializing than actually skiing and snowboarding, so the slopes aren't crowded—at least by European standards. It's also possible to stay and eat here inexpensively, as long as you steer clear of establishments that require second mortgages to afford. Though mind-meltingly scenic, the skiing itself is inconveniently spread out, making taxi services or a car useful if you want to maximize the area's potential. There is a free shuttle bus that connects the ski areas with continuous service during the operating hours of the lifts. Beginners and intermediates will have the most fun on the many gorgeous, groomed runs (Socrepes and Mietres are dedicated to children and beginners). If you don't mind the bus or taxi rides, Dolomiti Superski tickets give



access to a network of resorts that reach far beyond Cortina and offer more terrain for advanced skiers.

ASK A LOCAL

Ski instructor and guide Paolo D'Amico was born and raised in Cortina d'Ampezzo and personally guided Sylvester Stallone when he visited to film *Cliffhanger*. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: Hotel Montana is cheap, in the center of town, and next to the church steeple so you can "hear the bells singing."
Swank: Hotel de la Poste is where you can really experience the Italian atmosphere.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Twenty Euro will get you a meal at Birreria Vienna, Pizzeria-Restorante—

about as cheap as it gets in Cortina.

Gourmet: You can see the entire valley from the terrace of Il Meloncino al Camineto.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

Ernest Hemingway's favorite was the Enoteca Cortina wine bar, where he once got so drunk with an instructor at midday that he was unable to get back in his skis after the break.

CORTINA'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

The Canalone Staunies is only open in warm weather when the snow conditions are good. It's so steep and prone to ice that several people have died skiing there. Of course, it's a major draw because of its beauty and challenge. Many people come to Cortina just to ski this high, steep slope cupped between dozens of thorny Dolomite peaks.

7. WHITEFISH, MONTANA

BEST FOR: Families and groups with disparate skiing abilities

Whitefish, a former logging and railroad town of more than 6,000 near the entrance to Glacier National Park, has been quietly delivering glitz-free Montana skiing for over half a century. Despite a recent influx of Mercedes and fur coats, the town has managed to maintain its appealingly rough-hewn character. The newly rechristened Whitefish Mountain Resort, the resort formerly known as Big Moun-

tain, looms invitingly above the bars and restaurants of the Western-style downtown, which is anchored by Whitefish's historic train station. About 15 percent of Whitefish's winter visitors arrive via daily train service, which, combined with the free skier shuttle that connects town to mountain, makes car-free trips here easy.

Whitefish the ski area lives up to its family-friendly billing with good first-timer terrain and an abundance of long, wide-open, roller coaster groomers where skiers and snowboarders of all abilities can get their superhero on. A high-speed quad speeds to the mountain's summit, which is often engulfed in clouds and studded with thickly rimmed, white trees known as "snow ghosts." The ghosts make for atmospheric glade skiing. Experts will find ample pockets of steep and deep terrain, including an abundance of backwoods tree skiing on the mountain's less visited north side. Crowds are rarely a problem anywhere on the mountain. On clear days, views from the Summit House cafeteria into Glacier are stunning.

ASK A LOCAL

Ski patroller and fly-fishing guide Ryan Friel is a 17-year resident of Whitefish and one of the founding editors of the Whitefish Review literary journal. Here are his

recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: Hibernation House, on the mountain, is dirt cheap, with breakfast included.
Swank: The Lodge at Whitefish Lake has ice-skating on the lake and a hot tub near shore with views of the mountain.

BEST EATS

Cheap: At the Buffalo Cafe, you can split any of the buffalo pies, a breakfast delight of hashbrowns, ham, cheese, and eggs (with no buffalo meat), and still feel like you had a meal.

Gourmet: Tupelo Grille has a great dinner menu: chicken and dumplings, a phenomenal wine selection, and a bread pudding that's not to be overlooked.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOTS

Don't miss the local flair at the on-mountain Bierstube: good bar food, cheap drinks, and the vibe that says *après*.

WHITEFISH'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

The world-class groomers always make Inspiration and Big Ravine cruising delights. Advanced skiers should head for the East Rim and the Picture Chutes.





Photo: Bryn Hughes

Austin Ross riding the S5 in Baldface, BC

With the new Girl BC, Lynsey has the confidence to attack every line no matter the snow conditions. Backcountry airs, bottomless pow or an in-bounds cirque session, the Scratch Girl BC is the ultimate women's backcountry tool.

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8. CRESTED BUTTE, COLORADO

BEST FOR: Families hoping to raise the next freeskiing world champion

Like its Colorado siblings Aspen and Telluride, Crested Butte is a remote, high-elevation former mining town of historic buildings surrounded by spectacular scenery. Crested Butte, though, has a different, more counterculture character than its glossy counterparts—it's funkier, saltier, more altimeter watch than Rolex. There are restaurants in back-alley log cabins and buildings sided with old license plates, and the free shuttle buses to the ski area are wildly painted by local artists. There are currently no chain stores, and with a population of only 1,487, shopping options may be limited. But that's the point. You don't come here to shop or be seen, you come here to ski and to revel in the surrounding Elk Mountains and one of the most eclectic, adventurous playgrounds in the Rockies.

Crested Butte Mountain Resort is three miles up the road, and the base village, part of the town of Mt. Crested Butte, offers conveniently located hotels and condo blocks. There are plenty of dedicated beginner and kid-friendly terrain on the lower mountain, as well as a reasonable collection of blue groomers mid-mountain, but it's the expert skiing and hiking terrain on the North Face, Teocalli Bowl, and around the peak of Crested Butte

mountain itself that give the mountain its cult-like following. Crested Butte pioneered adventure skiing, or running lifts specifically for access to ungroomed, advanced terrain, and the steep, cliff- and couloir-riddled, in-bounds terrain it serves up is as hairy as any in the country. There's a reason countless extreme skiing and snowboarding competitions have been held here. The ski school also offers powder and steep skiing instruction for intermediates looking to become experts.

ASK A LOCAL

One of the original female extreme skiers, Wendy Fisher is a former Olympian, seven-year member of the U.S. Ski Team, and two-time World Extreme Skiing champion. A resident of Crested Butte since 1996, she's currently a ski ambassador for Crested Butte Mountain Resort, where she teaches ski clinics and private lessons. Here are her recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: Crested Butte International Lodge & Hostel

Swank: The Lodge at Mountaineer Square

BEST EATS

Cheap: Teocalli Tamale

Gourmet: Soupçon Bistro

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

On the mountain it would be Avalanche Bar & Grill; in town, it's Talk of the Town

CRESTED BUTTE'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

"For ungroomed runs I would consider Spellbound to Phoenix off the North Face lift," says Fisher. "For groomed trails, hands down it's International."



9. ASPEN, COLORADO

BEST FOR: Well-heeled scenesters and celebrity-stalkers with a love for top-quality skiing

Hype aside, Aspen is still the ski town all North American ski towns compare themselves to—and one of the few places that manages to be both hip and classic at the same time. Riddled with galleries and boutiques and coffeehouses and gourmet

restaurants, this is where movie stars mingle with Olympic athletes and where full-length fur coats never go out of style. It's undeniably ostentatious—and enough to make a dirtbag ski bum barf on his duck-taped Gore-Tex—but it may also be the world's most sophisticated mountain town outside of Europe.

The skiing and snowboarding's not bad either. In fact, it's as good as anywhere in Colorado, with four separate ski areas within a ten-mile radius catering to all abilities and tastes. Aspen Mountain is an expert's playground—it literally has zero green runs—and one of the most consistently steep areas in Colorado. Its runs spill right into downtown. Snowmass is the mega-mountain with the second most vertical in the U.S. (though not skiable continuously) and terrain for everyone. Aspen Highlands is the local favorite and features the steepest terrain of the four. Buttermilk, with its ample greens and innovative ski school, is perfect for beginners. Lift tickets are good for all four mountains, which are easily reached from Aspen and each other by free shuttle buses.

ASK A LOCAL

Longtime Aspenite Christy Mahon is the first woman to ski all of Colorado's

14,000-foot peaks and serves as the Development Director for the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies. Here are her recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: The Tyrolean Lodge on Main Street was built by a legendary Aspen family and has remodeled rooms with vintage ski decor and the best rates in town.

Swank: The Hotel Jerome embodies Aspen's history.

BEST EATS

Cheap: At 520 Grill, two local skiers and chefs quickly serve up healthy burgers, creative sandwiches, and salads.

Gourmet: For 24 years, Cache Cache has been the place to go for the most sophisticated, French-inspired cuisine in Aspen, with an incredible, high-energy atmosphere.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOTS

Just steps from the gondola, Ajax Tavern lures you in with the smell of truffle fries and a stylish patio scene.

ASPEN'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

The long face of Bell Mountain on Aspen catches the late afternoon sun and is the best way to end the perfect ski day.



10. NISEKO, JAPAN

BEST FOR: Powder worshippers with plenty of frequent flyer miles and a taste for hot springs and sushi

Thanks to the near-constant storm cycles pumping out of neighboring Siberia, the mountains on the Japanese island of Hokkaido are globally renowned for having some of the most consistent, lightest powder on Earth. Niseko is the preeminent spot here, an amalgam of four independently owned, interconnected resorts that girdle 4,291-foot Mount Niseko Annupuri (skiable with one lift ticket). Averaging a jaw-dropping 590 inches of snow a year, there's fresh powder more days than not on Niseko Annupuri and its abundant, lightly skied off-piste terrain (the Japanese have been inexplicably slow to embrace powder's addictiveness). The town of Niseko, population 4,685, is an easy drive from the four separate base areas and features a laid-back, surfing-town vibe and dozens of onsen, or hot springs, for settling into after-ski comas.

Night skiing is huge here, and enormous stadium-style lights brighten 2,560 vertical feet of skiing. Deep-powder runs through illuminated nighttime forest are a Niseko specialty. Given the windstorms that periodically lash the mountain, the mountain's perfectly spaced birch forests

are often the best, most sheltered places to ski and snowboard.

ASK A LOCAL

Canadian Clayton Kernaghan visited Niseko 13 years ago and never left. He now operates Black Diamond Lodge and Tours, which offers mountainside lodging and guided powder skiing in the area. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: Powder Lodge is the cheapest place to stay in town. It's very basic.

Swank: The Vale Niseko has one of the best locations in town, ski-in and ski-out.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Seico Mart, the convenience store. It might sound crazy, but the food in convenience stores here is really, really good. It's fresh food and it's cheap.

Gourmet: A-Bu-Cha is really good, traditional Japanese. Try the miso salmon.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

Gyu+Bar, aka the "Fridge Door" bar, spins vinyl and serves single malts. The entrance is literally a refrigerator door.

NISEKO'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

Ride the chairlift to the top of Hanazono and go through gate four or five and drop

through Rob Roy, then through Jackson, and then end up at the bottom of the mountain. It's a powder run.



11. KITZUBHEL, AUSTRIA

BEST FOR: Intermediate skiing couples with a taste for the cosmopolitan

A classic medieval village turned internationally famous ski destination, the glitzy town of Kitzbühel in Austria's Tyrol region looks more like a chocolate-box illustration than an actual place. Not only is it real, it hosts some of the most scenic and extensive skiing in the Alps—particularly for the non-extreme set. The romantic town center features narrow cobbled streets and horse-drawn sleighs, but things turn decidedly more spirited by evening,

when the many chic bars and clubs turn up the volume.

A gondola for the main mountain leaves directly from town, and a sprawling network of lifts, gondolas, and runs thread up the mountains in all directions, offering the ability to drop into neighboring villages and areas without taking off your skis or board. The posh personality of the town extends onto the slopes as well, where tasty restaurants in mountain huts pepper the slopes. Though Kitzbühel is famed for its Hahnenkamm racecourse, the most spectacular and perilous on the World Cup circuit, this is no Chamonix.

Intermediates looking for long cruisers will be most satisfied. Just check conditions before you go—the area's low elevation makes lower slopes increasingly susceptible to poor coverage in lean snow years.

ASK A LOCAL

Pepi Treichl, a ski instructor and hiking guide, is a lifelong resident of Kitzbühel. Here are her recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: Hof Unterleiten is a farm with traditional accommodations.

Swank: Grand Tirolia Kitzbühel is a luxury hotel with a huge spa.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Huber Bräu Stüberl offers home cooking with large portions of Austrian classics.

Swank: Schwarzer Adler in Jochberg, with celebrated chef Andreas Wahrstätter's refined farm-to-table sensibility, makes for delicious fare in a historic guesthouse setting.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

The Hahnenkamm Pavillon

KITZBUHEL'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

The Streif on the Hahnenkamm, where one of the World Cup races is held every January



12. BEND, OREGON

BEST FOR: Multisport junkies with a taste for microbrews

The biggest town on this list, Bend is a fast-growing, adventure paradise of more than 76,000 people in central Oregon that happens to have the region's premier ski area, Mount Bachelor, 22 miles west up the road. If you ever dream of skiing in the Pacific Northwest, Bachelor is the kind of mountain you dream about. A 9,000-foot stratovolcano lined with high-speed quads and skiable down every side, it's a huge, diverse area which, being on the drier, east side of the Cascades, has lighter snow than the Pacific cement that coats most mountains in the region. Beginner and intermediate runs are scattered throughout Bachelor, and some of the groomers are world-class. But with fully 60 percent of the alpine terrain rated black or double-black, experts will get the most from the mountain. From the summit, adventuresome skiers and boarders can jump cornices into the blasted-open summit crater or head for the mountain's backside of wide-open, backcountry-style double-blacks. Freestyle terrain is excellent, with two halfpipes (18 and 12 feet tall), and a nearly mile-long terrain park.

While Bend itself may lack the cozy, world-onto-itself feel of small ski towns, it makes up for it with lodging options for any budget, a stupendous selection of

hip restaurants, and nine microbreweries within walking distance of each other in the city's downtown (there's a reason it's called "Beervana"). Bachelor keeps the lifts running through Memorial Day, so if you come anytime after mid-winter you can ski up on the mountain in the morning and hike or mountain bike in the lowlands in the afternoon.

ASK A LOCAL

Twenty-year Bend local Gerry Lopez, formerly of Hawaii, is one of the most famous surfers in the world and a surfboard manufacturer, writer, and motivational speaker. A dedicated snowboarder, Lopez moved here because of Bachelor's snowboarding terrain.

BEST DIGS

Budget: Rainbow Motel

Swank: The Mountain Suites at the Oxford Hotel

BEST EATS

Cheap: Parilla Grill

Gourmet: The Blacksmith Restaurant

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOTS

Deschutes Brewery

BEND'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

Thunderbird under the Pine Marten Express chairlift





13. Mont Tremblant, Quebec

BEST FOR: Croissant-loving skiers and snowboarders looking for European ambiance without the overseas flight

Tremblant offers some of the best skiing in eastern Canada, with a master-planned village that feels cut from Europe—or at least the old quarter of Quebec City. With the first lift opening here in 1939, Tremblant was one of the first ski areas in North America, though the 18th-century French Alps-styled village

at the base of its lifts wasn't built until the 1990s. Fortunately, Tremblant did it right, with hotels, patisseries, and bistros packed into colorful multistory buildings that overlook narrow cobbled streets and squares. Underground parking means the entire village is car-free, making for an inviting, old-world environment.

The original hamlet of Mont-Tremblant, only three miles from the mountain, makes for a mellower experience. Its smattering of hotels, hostels, and restaurants are a good option for people looking to get away from the bustling, slightly Disney-fied ambience of the resort.

The mountain itself offers a respectable 2,116 feet of skiable vertical, with 95 runs unfurling down four separate faces, providing the ability to follow the sunshine across different aspects throughout the day. Which is good, because mid-winter temps this far north can be savagely cold. The mountain's two enclosed gondolas also help. Powder skiing may not be a regular occurrence, but assiduous grooming ensures there are no terrifying sheets of eastern ice.

ASK A LOCAL

Twenty-five-year Tremblant local Donald Lacasse has been a ski instructor for 24 years and the director of Tremblant's snow school since 2007.

BEST DIGS

Budget: HI-Mont-Tremblant Youth Hostel in the old village

Swank: Fairmount Hotel for ski-in, ski-out

BEST EATS

Cheap: Chez Lorraine in the old village

Gourmet: Aux Truffes at the resort

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOTS

Le P'tit Caribou

TREMBLANT'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

The Expo, 1,148 vertical feet of pure pleasure



14. TAOS, NEW MEXICO

BEST FOR: Off-the-beaten-path powder hounds with an aversion to glamour

A former gold-mining town carved out of the forest at the foot of the famed Chugach Mountains, Girdwood has re-fashioned itself into Alaska's premier ski town. Hippies and ski bums flocked here in the 1970s and, a luxury hotel at the ski area's base notwithstanding, its laid-back, frontier-style ambience remains intact. Many roads are unpaved and Carhartt clothing is a popular fashion choice. Situated about 40 miles south of Anchorage (and its international airport), life in this humble hamlet of 2,000 revolves around skiing and snowboarding.

Rising up from the edge of town, Alyeska Resort is the largest ski area in Alaska. It has six lifts, two magic carpets, and a 60-person tram that climbs the mountain's steep north face with views to the ocean. Tree line is low this far north, so the upper half of the mountain is wide-open alpine, more like the open terrain of the Alps than a typical American resort. There are ample blue runs and a smattering of beginner runs near the base, but experts will get the most out of the mountain. If you're not afraid of a little in-bounds hiking, the ridges near Alyeska peak harbor an array of vertiginous chutes.

As you would expect in Alaska, crowds are nonexistent. There is also real-deal Chugach heli- and cat-skiing available right from Alyeska's base area. Best to visit in March, when there is an average of 12 hours of daylight, though lifts keep



running through April and on weekends in May.

ASK A LOCAL

Girdwood native Elyse Saugstad is a professional skier and the 2008 freeride world champion. Here are her recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: The Alyeska Hostel is close to the resort. What it lacks in frills, it makes up for in flavor. It's been around since 1980 and has a lot of history.

Swank: The Hotel Alyeska is the resort-owned hotel. It's really nice, has great dining, and they'll even do a wake-up call for the northern lights. Step right out your door and onto the tram.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Coast Pizza, at the entrance of Girdwood, has quick slices of pie and one

of the best grilled sandwiches around.

Gourmet: The Double Musky Inn is a Cajun-cuisine restaurant for people who like to eat meat. Not only are the fillets the size of your head, they are cooked perfectly. And the gumbo is to die for. Really.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

The Sitzmark, at the bottom of the mountain, is the classic ski bar that's survived all the changes of the resort through the years. It has the perfect mix of food, booze, live music, a constant rotation of ski movies playing on TV screens, and a killer sundeck for the springtime when it warms up.

TAOS' CLASSIC SKI RUN

Try the north face from Christmas Chute to the bottom. It's the leg burner of the century when it's a deep powder day, which is quite often with the amount of snowfall Alyeska receives.

15. PARK CITY, UTAH

BEST FOR: Cinephile families with a range of abilities

Home to the U.S. Ski Team, three sprawling ski resorts, and Utah's feathery, desert-dry powder, Park City has established itself as one of the premier ski towns in America. A 19th-century mining outpost turned glossy tourism boomtown, its chairlifts launch directly from downtown, where a skier's bridge delivers you

to the city's historic Main Street and its lineup of high-end restaurants, boutiques, and art galleries.

More than anywhere in the state, Park City has a vibrant, sophisticated bar scene. Think jazz and martinis. The Sundance Film Festival arrives every January, when movie stars abound and the town becomes known as "No Parking City." Fortunately, shuttle service from the Salt Lake City airport (45 minutes away) and free buses to the ski hills make car-free trips here possible.

Park City Mountain Resort is the "right there" option, with access from town, four terrain parks for snowboarders and freestylers, night skiing, a cutting-edge ski school, and remarkably well-rounded terrain, from gentle beginner runs to powder-filled bowls that rival fellow Wasatch Mountain areas Alta and Snowbird. Deer Valley, only one mile away, is unapologetically upmarket. Its skier numbers are capped, grooming is scrupulous, on-mountain restaurants are gourmet, and snowboards are not allowed (no word on baggy pants, but suffice it to say, there is no terrain park). The Canyons, four miles from town, is the ever-expanding upstart that has quickly grown to become the largest ski area in Utah. Impressively, each of Park City's areas offer a hundred

or more runs, bevies of high-speed lifts, and around 3,000 feet of base-to-summit vertical.

ASK A LOCAL

Artist and painter Dori Pratt grew up skiing in Park City and has been a ski instructor at either Deer Valley or Park City Mountain Resort since 1980. Here are her recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: Chateau Apres in Park City has private rooms and dorm-style lodging.

Swank: Montage Deer Valley, located mid-mountain

BEST EATS

Cheap: El Chubasco in Park City

Gourmet: The Mariposa on the mountain at Deer Valley

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOTS

Try Legends Bar in Park City Mountain Resort's Legacy Lodge for après, then the No Name Saloon & Grill on Main Street for nighttime.

PARK CITY'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

Park City Mountain Resort: PayDay; Deer Valley: Perseverance



16. TRUCKEE, CALIFORNIA

BEST FOR: Families with aspiring ski or rider rock star kids; also, ski and rider rock stars

In the Sierra Nevada north of Lake Tahoe, between Reno and South Lake Tahoe, the old logging and railway town of Truckee has bloomed into a ski mecca, with no less than eight different ski areas within 15 miles. The first recorded ski lift in the U.S. was a Truckee steam-powered toboggan lift in 1910, and the burg still maintains much of its Old West character, with wooden walkways in its historic downtown and a still active, clapboard train station (Amtrak service twice daily). Its population of 16,180 is growing fast, but the relaxed town has managed to eschew the glitz of the larger Tahoe resort scene. This is where the locals live.

With many of its ski areas receiving some of the highest average snowfall totals in the country—more than one ski area ran lifts on the Fourth of July this past year—it's easy to understand why the locals choose to live here. Famed for its extreme terrain and appearances in countless ski movies, Squaw Valley is Truckee's alpha mountain, with six distinct peaks, a superpipe, and plenty of bleached hair and mirrored goggles. It's called "Squallywood" for a reason. A recent merger with

neighboring Alpine Meadows, a family favorite, will, when connected, create the one of the country's largest ski areas. Northstar, six miles southeast of town, is an intermediate's paradise; Sugar Bowl has steepes that rival Squaw but with fewer crowds; Tahoe Donner, right in town, and nearby Soda Springs are perfect for beginners.

ASK A LOCAL

Daron Rahlves—four-time Olympian, 15-year member of the U.S. Ski Team, and current Sugar Bowl ski ambassador—moved to Truckee with his family when he was 19 and is now raising his own children there. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: The historic Truckee Hotel
Swank: Resort at Squaw Creek is ski-in, ski-out at Squaw

BEST EATS

Cheap: Tacos Jalisco, a classic taqueria
Gourmet: Cottonwood Restaurant and Bar, in a former ski lodge overlooking downtown

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

Pastime Club is a happening dive bar.



TRUCKEE'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

Rahlves' Run at Sugar Bowl



17. WHISTLER, BC

BEST FOR: Skiers and snowboarders who want the biggest of everything

Whistler Blackcomb is North America's mega-mountain. A gargantuan ski resort in British Columbia's Coast Mountains, and a two-hour drive from Vancouver's international airport, it hosts two conjoined areas—Whistler and Blackcomb. It gets the most snow, has some of the longest vertical drops, the largest terrain parks, the steepest steepes, the most runs, and the greatest acreage of any ski area on the continent. In other words, it's large. Ski magazines routinely anoint it the finest ski area in North America.

Which is why it makes this list, even

if the "town" at its base was only developed in the decades following the ski area's opening in 1966 (Blackcomb opened in 1980). It has since mushroomed into a sprawling resort village that may lack the charm of a historic mountain town, but with over 20,000 beds, 3,000 hard-partying ski bums, er, "seasonal workers," and untold thousands of visiting skiers from all over the world, it doesn't lack excitement. There are several quieter sub-villages, but Whistler Village is the area's epicenter. Wisely developed with car-free streets and plazas, it's a buzzing hive of condos, restaurants, and nightclubs, with gondolas leaving directly from the village up either mountain. Whistler Blackcomb's popularity does come at a price—every-

thing here is expensive, lift lines can be long, and you'll need reservations for dinner—but with 8,171 acres of skiing and around 5,000 feet of vertical (on each of two separate mountains) most people are too busy swimming in endorphins to complain.

ASK A LOCAL

Leslie Anthony is one of the world's top ski writers and author of *White Planet: A Mad Dash Through Modern Global Ski Culture*. He was drawn to Whistler in 1999 by its "glaciated alpine terrain, relentless powder, big-city feel, and the fact that it was the center of the big-mountain freeski universe." Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: If you don't want to stay at a hotel (of which there are several), the Aava Whistler Hotel is the best.
Swank: Fairmont Chateau Whistler

BEST EATS

Cheap: Pasta Lupino
Gourmet: Umberto's Trattoria

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOTS

There are three separate base areas, so here's one for each: Dusty's Bar & BBQ in Creekside, GLC in Whistler Village, and Merlin's Bar & Grill at Blackcomb Base.

WHISTLER'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

Blackcomb Glacier on Blackcomb Mountain or Peak to Creek on Whistler Mountain

ABC-OF- SKIING.COM

Anything and Everything Skiing



Maxlifestyle
NET

18. NORTH CONWAY, NEW HAMPSHIRE

BEST FOR: History-buff families in the northeastern U.S.

North Conway may be less well known than many of the towns on this list, but only a few towns in North America can rival its skiing heritage. Tucked into Mount Washington Valley in the White Mountains, some of the first purpose-cut ski runs on the continent and a host of other innovations in grooming, lifts, and ski schools were developed here in the 1930s. North Conway was one of the leading lights in American skiing for decades before Western resorts rose to prominence. Much of that old New England character lives on today in the town of 2,349, where skiing is still tightly woven into the small community's social fabric.

This may have something to do with the fact that there are no less than seven different downhill areas with an easy drive of town (and six Nordic ones). Visitors here will likely focus on three. Cranmore sits two miles from the main village. It's an excellent starting point for families, with its revered ski school and abundant non-skiing activities, including indoor tennis, climbing walls, on-mountain tubing, and a plummeting rail-coaster ride. Attitash, seven miles up the valley, is the

biggest of the bunch, with 73 runs and the region's best terrain park. No-frills, expert-friendly Wildcat, a half-hour drive, is the wildest, tallest mountain of the three, with the most vertical and spectacular views of nearby Mount Washington, the highest peak in the Northeast. Wildcat and Attitash now share the same owners and feature interchangeable lift tickets, so if the weather is belligerent at Wildcat, which is not uncommon, you can skip 16 miles over to the more sheltered Attitash.

ASK A LOCAL

Tom Eastman, a ski historian and reporter for Conway Daily Sun, has lived and skied in North Conway for the last 30 years. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: The Yankee Clipper Inn
Swank: White Mountain Hotel & Resort

BEST EATS

Cheap: Horsefeathers is great for families, with good pizza, pasta, and seafood.
Gourmet: Maestro's has incredible Italian dishes.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

Red Parka Steakhouse & Pub is a skiers' hangout, with live music on Fridays and Saturdays, and an open mic on Mondays.



CONWAY'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

The Lynx Trail at Wildcat runs top to bottom and snakes its way across the fall line while enjoying sweeping views of Tuckerman Ravine and Mount Washington.

19. BANFF, CANADA

BEST FOR: Hardy skiers and snowboarders of all abilities who love big views, wild panoramas, and bighorn sheep on the front lawn

The only town on this list located inside a national park, Banff also happens to be one of the most cosmopolitan. Typically teeming with visitors from many continents, downtown is a warren of international eateries, tourist shops, and museums, all surrounded by pristine mountain peaks stabbing thousands of feet into the sky. It's one of the few places on Earth where you can walk out of a hip nightclub and two blocks later bump into a grazing bull elk (seriously, keep an eye out, they're all over the place). Historic hotels and mountain hot springs add to the ambiance

of frontier luxury.

There are three ski areas here within a 50-minute drive, all skiable on a single ticket. The runs of small but steep Mount Norquay, home of the one of the oldest chairlifts in North America, are visible from town. A larger and more well-rounded area, Sunshine Village—which is neither a village nor particularly sunny—sits on the Continental Divide and features the most reliable snow in the area. It also has the freeride area Delirium Dive, which harbors the kind of dizzyingly steep and rugged terrain you rarely find in-bounds in ski areas (transceivers, shovels, partners required). Lake Louise is second in size to only Whistler among Canadian ski areas and features some of the world's most scenic skiing and snowboarding. Shuttle

buses are available from town to all three areas. Be prepared for cold temperatures in mid-winter.

ASK A LOCAL

David Spence is a lifetime Banff local, former ski racing coach, and self-described "professional ski bum." Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: The Banff Aspen Lodge has great rates and a free skiers breakfast.
Swank: Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel: Winter is actually Banff's low season, so you can access this five-star hotel with three-star prices.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Tommy's Neighbourhood Pub is the best spot in town for a burger and beer.
Gourmet: Castello's Ristorante at the Fairmont Banff Springs has the best lamb in town.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

Downtown Banff. With over 30 bars and restaurants, Banff is the type of town where you barhop. Every place is different, and they're all within three blocks.

BANFF'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

The Bye Bye Bowl at Sunshine Village is wide open, and you can't beat the view.



20. STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, COLORADO

BEST FOR: Families hoping to groom the next Bode Miller

Though it hosts one of Colorado's largest and most well-known ski resorts, the town of Steamboat Springs has a character that is unique in the state. Northern Colorado is ranching country, and Steamboat is still an authentic, working cowboy town that has evolved into one of the most important ski towns in America. You won't find cutesy false-front stores here, but you will find the city-owned Howelsen Hill, the longest continuously operating ski area in Colorado, where the town's Winter Sports Club practices on seven wooden ski jumps contoured out of the mountain. There's also a Winter Carnival every February, when truckloads of snow are dumped on the town's broad main street for ski-joring competitions and a high school band that comes through on skis.

Three miles away, rising high above the Yampa River Valley, is the Steamboat Ski Resort, spreading white ribbons across a forested massif of six rounded peaks. Though offering less puckering expert terrain than some areas in the state, what Steamboat does deliver is its signature light powder, world-class tree skiing, and snowboarding through endless groves of aspen. The ski school is considered one of the best in the country, and Steamboat claims to have produced 79 Olympic



skiers and snowboarders, more than any town in America.

ASK A LOCAL

Ski-racing legend Billy Kidd, Steamboat's longtime director of skiing, was the first American ski racer to medal at the Olympics, netting a silver medal in 1964. He's 68 but claims he skis like a 67-year-old. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: The Rabbit Ears motel is right downtown and directly across the street from hot springs.

Swank: The Sheraton is literally about a hundred feet from the bottom of the gondolas.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Slopeside Grill at the bottom of the mountain is good for burgers and beer or pizza.

Gourmet: Harwigs L'Apogée in town has a great wine list.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOTS

Tugboat is the old locals place where the ski patrol goes to hang out after the end of the day. There's live music.

STEAMBOATS'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

"When we get powder, my favorite area to go to is the Shadows, which is up on top in the trees, so when you start down you're above tree line, then you go into pine trees, then into aspen trees," says Kidd. "Beginners and intermediates don't go there, so it really holds the powder."







smithOptics





21. TELLURIDE, COLORADO

BEST FOR: Big-lunged skiers and boarders with a taste for fine wine and the mountain high life

22. JACKSON, WYOMING

BEST FOR: Advanced skiers and riders looking for test pieces and line dancing

The giant of American skiing—if your dreams are filled with big mountains and steep, powder-smothered slopes, Jackson Hole is the promised land. The town of Jackson, a 12-mile drive from the ski area, sits in a remote, high valley in northwestern Wyoming in the shadow of the mighty Teton Range and just south of Yellowstone National Park. From its wooden sidewalks and cowboy bars to its restaurants that sling unnecessarily large slabs of red meat, the town of just over 9,500 embraces its Wild West heritage. Much like Banff, Alberta, winter is actually the off-season in this town, so good ski-season deals on lodging abound.

One of the birthplaces of extreme skiing in the U.S., mighty Jackson Hole Resort does offer a few beginner runs, and intermediates will find a smattering of scenic groomed cruisers, but experts are the ones who'll find their happy place. Advanced skiers and snowboarders will want to jump directly on the 100-person winter tram to the top of Rendezvous Mountain, at which point you're looking at a leg-melting 4,139 feet of vertical drop to the base area, which is not only skiable in one sustained gulp, but offers a dizzying variety of chutes, bowls, glades, and cliff drops to get there. Even beginners should take a round-trip on the tram—from which you may spot experts plummeting into the leg-

Remote and unrelentingly beautiful, Telluride may be the most picturesque ski town in North America, a Victorian-era silver-mining hamlet set deep in a box canyon in the San Juan Mountains of southwest Colorado. The steep runs of Telluride Ski Resort spill right into the edge of the town's National Historic District, where a gondola whisks skiers back up into the area's almost 4,000 vertical feet of absurdly scenic skiing. Only 12 blocks long and with no stoplights, neon signs, or billboards, this charming town of 2,325 people combines fine wine lists and funky bars with a spirited culture of diehard mountain lovers. The town sits at a gasping 8,793 feet above sea level, and lifts reach to over 12,500 feet, so come prepared to acclimatize.

For a mountain with a well-earned reputation for steep and bumps, Telluride in fact offers excellent cruisers and beginner terrain—in the kind of high-alpine setting that makes even first-timers feel like heroes—on the slopes around its modern, luxurious Mountain Village. Experts will find bumps, bowls, and chutes in every corner of the resort, and those willing to hike can access some of the most extreme in-bounds terrain in the country in Black Iron Bowl and 13,251-foot Palmyra Peak. Heli-skiing can be hired in the Mountain Village, and the San Juan Hut System of-

fers shelters and multiday routes for backcountry adventurers.

ASK A LOCAL

Travel and adventure writer Rob Story has skied in 13 countries on six continents and at 75 North American resorts. When he left his longtime post as senior editor at Powder magazine in 1998, he knew exactly where he wanted to move—Telluride. He is the author of *Telluride Stories*. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: There's not much to Mountain-side Inn, but it's ski-in, ski-out.

Swank: The Peaks Resort has a great après deck and spa.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Oak, the barbecue place in town at the base of the gondola

Gourmet: La Marmotte is a great French restaurant in the town's old icehouse.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

The Historic Bar at the Sheridan is the oldest in town.

TELLURIDE'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

"Plunge, because on the steep parts you can look through your tips at our tidy, cute, historic town," notes Story.



endary Corbet's Couloir—for the top-of-the-world views from the summit.

If the 2,500 acres of intense in-bounds terrain doesn't sate you, you can pass through the resort's gates into another 3,000 acres of sidecountry powder (the resort's Mountain Sports School offers excellent guides for backcountry neophytes).

ASK A LOCAL

Jess McMillan grew up ski racing at Jackson Hole and is now a professional skier and the 2007 IFSA World Tour Champion. Here are her recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: The Hostel in Teton Village

Swank: Teton Mountain Lodge & Spa

BEST EATS

Cheap: The cheapest good food is the Village Cafe in Teton Village

Gourmet: Couloir is a must do while you're in Jackson. It's really cool to ride the gondola to dinner, and the food is incredible.

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOTS

Mangy Moose Restaurant and Saloon

JACKSON'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

"My favorite ski run is Alta 1. It is the quintessential steep chute in Jackson," says McMillan. "For something a little less demanding, the classic run is Rendezvous Bowl to the Hobacks. It doesn't get much better than the 2,500 vert of wide open pow fields of the Hobacks."

23. WANAKA, NEW ZEALAND

BEST FOR: Skiing and snowboarding addicts from the Northern Hemisphere who just can't let go when winter slips away

Quickly developing a reputation as one of the world's premier adventure towns, Wanaka sits on the shores of sprawling Lake Wanaka amid New Zealand's Southern Alps. Surrounded by rugged, Lord of the Rings-style alpine scenery, the tranquil town of 5,000 is peppered with hostels, cafes, pubs, and small, luxury eco-lodges. As is customary in New Zealand ski towns, there's no skiing right there, but four ski areas are within a 40-minute drive, including one, Snow Park NZ—teenage boys with pants that need to be pulled up, take note—that is essentially one big world-class terrain park.

Treble Cone, 35 minutes from town, is the best and closest, with more snow and skiable terrain than any other South Island resort. In typical New Zealand style, the entire ski area is above tree line. It's also steep, offering intermediates an array of plummeting, groomed runs but limiting the options for beginners. Almost half of the runs are rated expert, and the in-bounds, backcountry-style terrain—a collection of wide-open bowls, chutes, and ridges—is what makes the area sing.

Cardrona Alpine Resort, a 40-minute drive south, has more beginner terrain, a quality ski school, and on-mountain lodging.

Though New Zealand isn't blessed by the powder gods the way, say, Japan and the American Rockies are, Wanaka gets the most snow in the country, with just over 200 inches in an average year. Seasons are reversed here in the Southern Hemisphere—Wanaka's ski season runs from June through October—making it an excellent choice for “summer” skiing and snowboarding.

ASK A LOCAL

Jossi Wells is a 21-year-old professional freeskiier who was born and raised in Wanaka. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: YHA Wanaka Purple Cow
Swank: Lakeside Apartments

BEST EATS

Cheap: Redstar
Gourmet: Botswana Butchery

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

Ruby's Cinema & Bar

WANAKA'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

Arcadia Chutes at Cardrona Alpine Resort



24. STOWE, VERMONT

BEST FOR: Patrician eastern U.S. skiers with a taste for fine dining

The archetypal New England ski village, Stowe is an impossibly quaint town of clapboard houses and steepled churches set in wooded hills at the foot of Vermont's Green Mountains. Main Street and Mountain Road are alive with boutiques and eateries. The larger community harbors more three- and four-star restaurants than any ski town in the Northeast. Partiers take note: Luxury lodging abounds, late-night revelry does not. You come to Stowe to live in a postcard, not a Harold

and Kumar movie.

The skiing takes place a 15-minute drive up the road at Stowe Mountain Resort, where high-speed quads and gondolas whisk you up two separate mountains. Mount Mansfield, the highest peak in Vermont, has plenty to offer adventurous skiers and snowboarders, including the famed "front four"—four double-black diamond runs that are among the most challenging in the East. Spruce Peak, newly connected by a short gondola ride to Mansfield, is the place for beginners, with its ski school and gently arcing blue and green runs. Side- and backcountry skiing from the area is some of the best in the

East, including Mount Mansfield's original run, the Bruce Trail, a narrow, twisting, 2,400-foot drop cut by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the early 1930s.

ASK A LOCAL

Sam von Trapp, from the family made famous by *The Sound of Music*, is a ski instructor and helps to manage the Trapp Family Lodge, a world-class Nordic lodge and the first commercial cross-country ski resort in the United States. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: Town and Country Resort at Stowe offers great bang for the buck.

Swank: Stowe Mountain Lodge is ski-in, ski-out and five stars.

BEST EATS

Cheap: Pie in the Sky Pizza

Swank: The Blue Moon Cafe, right in the center of town

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

The Mattherhorn bar is a Stowe institution

STOWE'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

There are tons of great lines off-piste, but try the Goat. It's narrow, steep, and challenging.



25. KETCHUM, IDAHO

BEST FOR: Hard-carving skiers and boarders who like playing "spot the movie star"

The original Rocky Mountain ski resort, Ketchum's Sun Valley featured the world's first chairlift when it opened in 1936 and was long the stomping ground for classic-era Hollywood. The upscale mountain and its opulent lodges still carry the grandeur of their pre-war days while the old mining and sheep town of Ketchum, population 2,689, maintains a rustic elegance, with gourmet restaurants and steak-and-microbrew saloons in century-old brick buildings. The resort village of Sun Valley borders Ketchum at the base of Dollar Mountain, the original ski hill and now an ideal learner's area with a ski school, terrain park, and separate, inexpensive lift tickets.

The main action for serious skiers and boarders is over at Bald Mountain, on the other side of town (free shuttle buses available), which features 3,400 vertical feet of some of the finest groomed plunges in the world. If you like never-ending, perfectly pitched corduroy, this is your mountain. Snowboarders will appreciate the mountain's complete lack of flat areas, and abundant high-speed lifts means no one waits long in line. The resort's proximity to exactly zero major population centers means the slopes are perpetually free of crowds, and top-to-bottom snow-

making means you'll always have smooth groomers to carve. Don't miss the luxurious Seattle Ridge Lodge atop Bald Mountain's Seattle Ridge, where mesmerizing views span the wild Pioneer and Sawtooth Mountains and the Woody River Valley below.

ASK A LOCAL

Professional skier Reggie Crist has spent most of his life in Sun Valley. The former U.S. Ski Team member regularly appears in ski movies and is currently a consultant/athlete for Eddie Bauer/First Ascent and K2 Sports. Here are his recommendations.

BEST DIGS

Budget: Lift Tower Lodge

Swank: Sun Valley Lodge (this is where Hemingway worked on *For Whom the Bell Tolls*)

BEST EATS

Cheap: Pioneer Saloon

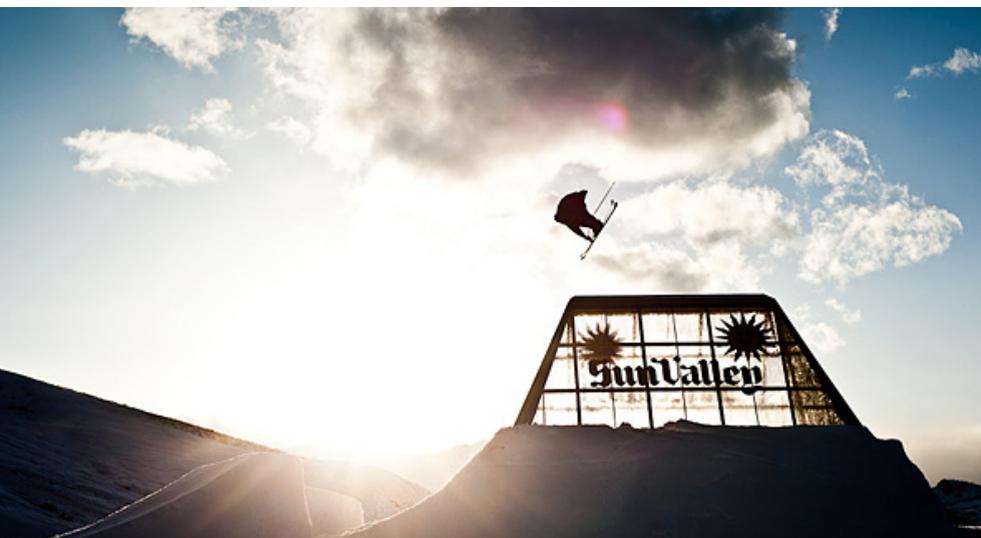
Gourmet: Michel's Christiania

BEST AFTER-SKI PARTY SPOT

Apples Bar and Grill

SUN VALLEY'S CLASSIC SKI RUN

Warm Springs—3,100 vertical feet of leg burn





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