

NORTHERN exposure

BY HELEN HAYES

For lovers of snow, North America delivers some of the best skiing and snowboarding resorts in the world. Here are our top ten.



The USA and Canada know their stuff when it comes to snow sports with resorts that are set up to please everyone from absolute beginners to hard core chute junkies. Most resorts also have excellent ski and snowboard schools, advanced programs and race training as well as plenty of other activities to add to the Instagram account – from dog sledding and snowmobiling to snowshoeing and ice climbing.

The accommodation on offer ranges from private homes to five-star hotels and from condos to lodges, both on and off snow. As for dining, most resorts have a plethora of restaurants to dine in and lively bars for après ski drinks and nibbles.

Another benefit of skiing in North America is the lack of queues at the lifts – especially if you go after the first week of January, when US schools have gone back. Prices are also favourable – check with a reputable wholesaler who can package up accommodation, lift tickets, lessons and ski gear hire ensuring worthwhile savings. Also look into early bird packages, another way to save.

ASPEN/SNOWMASS, COLORADO, USA

Aspen/Snowmass has long been spoken about in revered tones by everyone who has visited this mountain oasis in the Roaring Fork Valley, and once you have been there, it's easy to see why. Apart from the town, with its glamorous boutiques selling everything from outrageously priced furs to designer dog collars, the main attractions are the four mountains. Aspen Mountain, Aspen Highlands, Buttermilk and Snowmass are all different, yet all spectacular. See how many shrines you can find on Aspen Mountain, hike the bowl on Highlands, go big on the terrain park on Buttermilk and on Snowmass, enjoy the massive amount of terrain on offer.

Things to do: Do a snowshoe tour on Aspen Mountain and enjoy incredible views over the Maroon Bells, hit the shops and maybe spot a celebrity or three, just going about their business.

Dine at: Matsuhisa for sublime Japanese accompanied by sophisticated sake, and for a party lunch, book into Cloud Nine on Aspen Highlands. Don't plan on skiing much afterwards!

Après ski: The J Bar at the Hotel Jerome has it all going on, as does Ajax Tavern at The Little Nell.

Stay at: The Little Nell has pole position at the base of Aspen Mountain and is exceptional in every way. At Snowmass, the Viceroy is top of the pops.

BIG WHITE, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Big White is perfectly named with an abundance of snow and mountain tops dotted with snow ghosts – frozen trees in weird and wacky shapes. With 1147 hectares of terrain, 16 lifts and 118 trails, Big White is known for reliable snow cover, plenty of powder and great tree skiing. The charming and colourful village has a lovely vibe and with plenty of ski-in, ski-out accommodation options, there's no time wasted strapping on skis or boards and hitting the lifts. Whether you are tackling the black runs of Cliff chair, the many blue runs all over the mountain, the glades off Gem Lake or you are learning on the greens off Plaza, you'll be in snow heaven – but be warned; visit once and you might just keep on going back again and again.

Things to do: Head for Happy Valley and test your skills on the ice climbing tower, the ice skating rink or the tube park, or go animal with the dog sledding and horse-drawn sleigh rides.

Dine at: The Kettle Valley Steakhouse is the place to go with a fabulous range of local Okanagan wines.

Après ski: Slide into Snowshoe Sam's – it's party central - and have a Gunbarrel Coffee at Gunbarrel Grill – a coffee liqueur that will heat things up.

Stay at: An executive suite at Stonebridge Lodge – fabulous location and the hot tubs are divine.

CANYONS RESORT, UTAH, USA

Canyons Resort adds fun to a ski and snowboard holiday and is a must for anyone wanting to experience some of the many world-class resorts around Park City. With 1618 skiable hectares, 19 lifts and 182 trails, plus an impressive range of terrain from steep and deep to glades and groomers, there is something for everyone from beginners to experts. Explore around the Saddleback or if you like it double black, the Super Condor Express or the Ninety Nine Ninety. Take the Orange Bubble Chair just for the ride – its heated seats and protective 'bubble' thaw you out between runs.

Things to do: Strap on for the Zip Tour Adventure and soar over the valley for amazing views – if you can open your eyes - or for a real speed ride, head to the Olympic park nearby and do the bobsleigh run.

Dine at: The Farm for fabulous farm to plate cuisine, and Lookout Cabin for divine food and views combined.

Après ski: Ski beach is hard to leave or head into the Waldorf Astoria.

Stay at: Hyatt Escala Lodge is well located with the apartments impressive, while the Waldorf Astoria is stunning, and boasts the Golden Door Spa.

DEER VALLEY, UTAH, USA

Deer Valley was the first five-star ski resort and continues to lead the way in service, style and skiing. It is a ski-only resort, and the long, corduroy groomers are absolutely perfect, not to mention the tree runs between the aspens. With 21 lifts and 102 trails on 809 hectares of skiable terrain, all levels are catered for, and for a bit of fun, race your friend or partner down the Nastar race track. There is a reason Deer Valley was named the number one ski resort on North America five years in a row – it delivers the perfect ski vacation.

Things to do: Stroll down historic Main Street in Park City, go outlet shopping at Tanger Mall and take your pick of the usual snow activities from snowmobiling to dog sledding.

Dine at: Book ahead for the Seafood Buffet at Snow Park Lodge – it is a blue ribbon dining experience and for something more casual, try Fireside Dining at Empire Lodge.

Après ski: Daly's Pub at the Montage is amazing and Stein Erikson is known for its lively evening sessions.

Stay at: Montage Deer Valley is exquisite in every way with a laid back elegance, or book into the St Regis – the head butler there used to work for the Queen!

JACKSON HOLE, WYOMING, USA

This resort is revered by expert skiers and is known for its steep terrain, but never fear – it is incredible for beginners and intermediates as well – I can vouch for that. Everything about it is impressive, with 1011 hectares of terrain, two mountains – Après Vous and Rendezvous – 116 trails accessed by 13 lifts and a summit of 3185 meters. Teton Village sits cosily at the base and at night it is fairytale pretty, the towering peaks glowing in the moonlight with the lights of the groomers like spotlights in heaven. Head up the Tram for drop dead gorgeous views over the resort, the valley – or Hole – and the village.

Things to do: Do a wildlife tour with Jackson Hole Wildlife Safaris to see moose, bison, big horn sheep, mule deer and elk in stunning vistas. Check out the town of Jackson for a dose of western cool and if you want some geyser action, there are tours into Yellowstone National Park.

Dine at: The Mangy Moose Saloon for a casual night out or L'Osteria at the Hotel Terra or Westbank Grill at the Four Seasons for something special. On the mountain, lunch at Couloir Restaurant is a must.

Après ski: The Handle Bar at the Four Seasons is perfect for post-ski relaxing or if you stay in Jackson, drink up at the Silver Dollar Bar or the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar.

Stay at: The Four Seasons is it for location and has everything you could wish for onsite. Or for a bit of history, try The Wort in Jackson.

MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN, CALIFORNIA, USA

Mammoth by name and by nature – Mammoth Mountain is the big daddy of California ski resorts with 1416 hectares, 28 lifts and 150 trails. It has a very long season – from November to June – and 300 days of sunshine a year, creating a combination of dreamy terrain and blue skies. Stay in the town of Mammoth Lakes at the base of the Mountain, enabling easy access to the slopes by day and to the string of great restaurants and shops in the pedestrian mall by night. Ski from the top of the Panorama Gondola for top-of-the-world views and some challenging black runs, and for cruisy blues, ride



RIDE AND SLIDE

Above from top: Mammoth Mountain; Sun Peaks Resort

Opposite page: Snowmass

Opening spread: The peaks of Jackson Hole stand sentinel over Teton Village

Roller Coaster, Eagle Express or Chair 12. For a great lunch with a cool vibe, stop off the Mill Café. The benefit of a ski trip to Mammoth is that you can tie it in with a few days in Los Angeles or better still, Las Vegas.

Things to do: Reignite your inner child at Woolly's Adventure Summit Tube Park – it's fast, furious and fun. Also visit the natural hot springs dotted around the valley floor out of town – Wild Willy's is the pick.

Dine at: Whitebark at the Westin Mammoth has a diverse menu. Try the Mexican at Gomez's or great barbecue at the Smokeyard. For something different, book in for a snowcat tour followed by a Chef's Table dinner up the mountain at Parallax Restaurant.

Après ski: Yodler is always jumping as is Underground with its craft beers and party feel. Campo is also a great choice.

Stay at: Westin Monache Resort has excellent apartments, a great restaurant and large, welcoming Jacuzzis. A smart choice.

SUN PEAKS RESORT, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Some ski resorts are so big they can be a little confronting, but that is not the case with Sun Peaks Resort, which has a relaxed, intimate feel but still offers 1488 hectares (1700 hectares next season) on three mountains, with 125 trails and 11 lifts. The snow is light and dry, and there are more than enough groomed runs, moguls, glades and terrain parks to please everyone. Head up Mt Todd for snow ghosts, bowls and steeps, and never tire of the beautiful groomed blues and blacks on Sundance. Mt Morrisey has a mixture of terrain including sensational tree runs. Sun Peaks also has a real gem in Nancy Greene – who is to Canada what Dawn Fraser is to Australia – except on skis. She was, and still is an amazing skier, and runs free guided tours whenever she is not busy being a senator.

Things to do: Go for puppy power on a dog sled tour with Mountain Man Dog Sled Adventures – you can even mush yourselves. Or you can go ice skating, tubing or snowmobiling.

Dine at: The Steakhouse at Sun Peaks Lodge is a firm favourite as is Morrisey's Public Lodge.

Après ski: Bottoms up at Bottoms Bar and Grill and you can't beat the Irish pub scene at Morrisey's. After dark head for The Club at Delta Sun Peaks Resort, which will be known as Sun Peaks Grand Hotel from May 1.

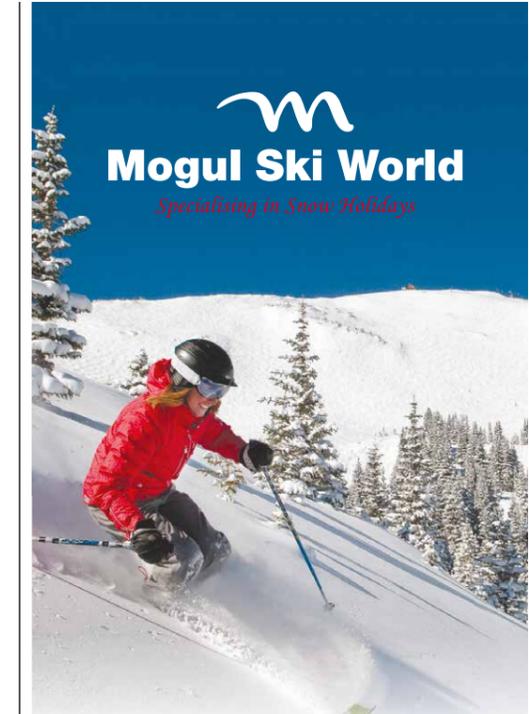
Stay at: Kookaburra Lodge is perfect for a luxurious week or two and is Australian owned, while Delta Sun Peaks Resort (Sun Peaks Grand) has the best location in town.

TELLURIDE, COLORADO, USA

For pure majesty, Telluride wins out, with views that knock your socks off every single time you get off the chairlifts and turn around. Everything about this resort is ridiculously pretty. The town of Telluride is located in a box canyon, with its Victorian houses designated an Historic District. Butch Cassidy robbed his first bank here – you can even see the vault from which he stole the loot. A quick ride up the free gondola takes you to Mountain Village with its condos, shops and restaurants dotted around European style plazas. You can ski-in, ski-out from accommodation in both towns, and the skiing and boarding is heavenly. Every single centimetre of the 809 hectares of terrain is spectacular, with 18 lifts and 127 trails – not to mention the death defying hike-to chutes. Take The Plunge, tackle Revelation Bowl, cruise around Polar Queen and Prospect Bowl and get your camera out when you go down See Forever. If there is a more scenic trail in the world, I haven't seen it.

Things to do: Take an evening snowmobile tour to the ghost town of Alta with Telluride Snowmobile Adventures and see scenery that is pinch-yourself pretty. Do spend time exploring the main street in Telluride and see who's playing at the historic Sheridan Opera House.

Dine at: Alpino Vino and Bon Vivant on mountain are out of this world while Gorrone Ranch is the spot for a casual lunch in a deckchair. Book into Siam's Talay in Mountain Village for the best Thai you will ever taste.



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Après ski: It's a toss-up between Tomboy Tavern and Smak Bar in Mountain Village, Allred's, or the New Sheridan Hotel in town.

Stay at: Hotel Madeline in Mountain Village or Hotel Columbia in Telluride, or book a condo through Telluride Alpine Lodging. The Cimarron Lodge has excellent condos and the location is perfect – right by the Coonskin lift.

VAIL, COLORADO, USA

Size sometimes does count and Vail has bragging rights as the biggest ski resort in the USA – it has a staggering 2140 hectares of terrain with 31 lifts and 193 runs. Ask Aussie fans why Vail is so good and they'll tell you about the seven snow-filled back bowls and beautiful wide, groomed runs. Another big plus is the pedestrian-only, European-style village. Vail has three base areas – Vail, Lionshead and Golden Peak, with Vail and Lionshead the main areas. Vail's catchcry is "Like Nothing on Earth" and many would agree.

Things to do: Go ski biking, zipriding or tubing at the Adventure Ridge snow stadium up Eagle Bahn Gondola, or for something indoors, go ten pin bowling at Bøl.

Dine at: Try the CinéBistro experience – new release movies combined with divine cuisine, ride a snowcat up to Game Creek Restaurant or to The 10th for a wonderful meal with views. In Vail village, book for Kelly Liken or Larkspur.

Après ski: Celebrate another great day on the decks at Garfinkels or the Chophouse, or join the fun at Bart and Yeti's.

Stay at: The Sebastian is style central with accommodation ranging from hotels rooms to four-bedroom suites, while The Arrabelle at Vail Square in Lionshead is beautiful.

WHISTLER BLACKCOMB, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Whistler Blackcomb is the biggest ski resort in North America with two mountains. Whistler has over 100 runs serviced by 19 lifts while Blackcomb has another 100 or so runs with 17 lifts – a combined area of 3306 hectares. To get between the two mountains you can take the Peak2Peak gondola across – take a silver car which has glass floors – or ski down to Whistler Village and take the gondola to the other mountain. While you're there, tackle the Peak to Creek; an 11km run that extends from the top of the Peak Express all the way down to Creekside. The thigh burn is worth it. There is plenty of ski-in, ski-out accommodation with a regular shuttle connecting the various areas to Whistler village, which is the heart and soul of the destination.

Things to do: Swing through the trees like Tarzan on a ZipTrek ecotour – do the Eagle tour which is longer, and better. Visit the Squamish Lil'Wat Cultural Center for a touch of culture and be wowed by the Fire and Ice show on Sunday nights.

Dine at: The Bearfoot Bistro is legendary for its fine cuisine or try Rimrock Café at Creekside. For something more casual, the Old Spaghetti Factory is an institution.

Après ski: Dusty's Bar at Creekside is spectacular while Black's Pub and Merlins in Whistler village are very lively.

Stay at: The Fairmont Chateau Whistler is palatial inside and out, delivering the sort of Fairmont experience one would expect. The Four Seasons Resort Whistler is another luxurious option, located in Upper Village. •

Photography by the respected resorts

CORDUROY

Below: On a groomer at Vail



travel facts

WHERE TO SKI

- Aspen Snowmass: aspensnowmass.com
- Big White: bigwhite.com
- Canyons Resort: canyonsresort.com
- Deer Valley Resort: deervalley.com
- Jackson Hole Mountain Resort: jacksonhole.com; realamerica.com.au
- Mammoth Mountain: mammothmountain.com
- Sun Peaks Resort: sunpeaksresort.com
- Telluride Ski Resort: tellurideskiresort.com
- Vail Mountain Resort: vail.com
- Whistler Blackcomb: whistlerblackcomb.com

TIPS

All the resorts offer free guided mountain tours for skiers and boarders of intermediate level and above.

Altitude can be a problem. If you are going to a high resort, consider stopping off somewhere half the height for a day or two to acclimatise. Don't push it on the first day, drink plenty of water and hold off on the alcohol.

Insurance is a must. Check what your cover includes and doesn't include, before you go.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Mogul Ski World, 1800-335-724; mogulski.com.au

Ski Max, 1300-136-997; skimax.com.au



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