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Ski resorts expand offerings beyond slopes

Activities keep adults, children busy and happy

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STEVE HAGGERTY PH

Ice skaters enjoy a beautiful backdrop for spins and speed at Lakeside Village, Keystone Resort.

By **Anne Z. Cooke**

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PARK CITY, Utah — The Porter clan, 14 strong, was assembled at Park City Ski Resort for the last ski run of the family’s annual winter reunion. But Nick, 14, and Andrew, 12, oldest of the cousins, had other ideas.

“Aw, Mom, this is our last chance to do the Alpine Coaster,” begged Nick, putting on a woeful face. “We’ll meet you later, I promise.”

“Yeah, Mom,” echoed Andrew.

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If you listened to the boys — or looked at ski resort numbers, flat for the past couple of years — you might wonder whether skiing is in trouble. That would be a mistake. Die-hard alpine skiers and snowboarders will always be the core mission.

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But with more families traveling with kids, even the smallest ski hills are rebranding themselves as family-style playgrounds.

And as ski resorts have discovered, the newest high-speed chairlifts have changed the way you can plan your day.

“You used to spend more time riding uphill than you did skiing down,” said Jeff Hanle at Snowmass Resort in Colorado. “Now you can ski more and quit earlier, leaving plenty of time for something else. Ice-skating, the tubing hill or dog-sledding.”

Visitors can expect to find the usual: snowshoeing, ice-skating, snow bikes, cross-country skiing and tubing.

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But how about fly-fishing, ice-climbing, paragliding, snowmobiling, hot springs, Olympic-style bobsledding and extreme winter driving classes? You have only to ask.

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Park City Resort, Park City, Utah

Park City Ski Resort’s 3,300 skiable acres boast some of Utah’s friendliest, best-designed ski trails. It’s almost impossible to blunder onto an expert-only trail or to miss the signs that name the trails to the next chairlift.

And, yes, the Alpine Coaster is a hoot, but so are the Gorgoza tubing park, dog mushing, snowmobiling and sleigh-ride dinners.

But it’s the restored mining town at the resort’s base that gets my vote as North America’s most authentic ski village. You won’t find a more inviting place to shop, dine, sample local brews or people-watch.

As for my favorite thrill, it’s the bobsled rides on the official bobsled track built for the 2002 Olympics. With an experienced pilot at the helm, you climb in and hold your breath. The sled hits 80 mph and drops the equivalent 40 stories in one minute.

For more information, call 435-649-8111 or visit www.parkcityresort.com.



the day: The original Aunt Viv hates Will Smit

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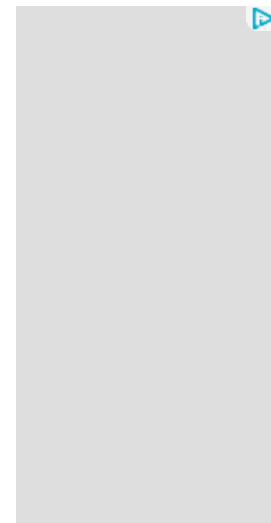
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Telluride Ski Resort,

Telluride, Colo.

At this remote mountain hideaway in southwestern Colorado, it doesn't get any better. And scenic snow-capped peaks, 2,000 acres of dry powder, groomed cruising runs and plenty of expert-only glade skiing are just the beginning.

But for an out-of-the-box experience, drive to neighboring Ouray and the natural hot springs that made this mining town such a hit with 19th-century fortune hunters.

The 150-degree water flows into three pools where it cools to 106, 96 and 82 degrees, for intensive heat therapy, luxury soaking or swimming. The pools are open daily from noon to 9 p.m.

Alternately, sign up — and layer up — for the guided half-day snowmobile tour to the ghost town and historic mining sites in Alta Lakes, in the Alta and Turkey Creek basin.

After you've explored the area, that cozy condo with the fireplace you've rented will look twice as nice.

Call 1-800-778-8581 or visit www.tellurideskiresort.com.

Big White Resort, Kelowna,

British Columbia

Big White is a 2,000-acre ski resort in the southeastern corner of British Columbia, specifically designed for multigenerational recreation. When the resort's family-friendly ski trails pale, there's dog-sledding, a tubing hill and an ice-skating rink to try.

For kids, the apres-ski starts with bonfires and marshmallows and ends with fireworks.

For adults, there's a choice of pubs. But the newest thrill here is a bona fide extreme sport.

Test your mettle on the Ice Tower, a 60-foot ice-climbing feature created from cross-braced telephone poles encased in a 3-foot-thick layer of blue ice.

The Tower, ice-clad in such a way as to create routes designed for beginning, intermediate and expert climbers, is managed and operated by ice climbers who are also members of the American Mountain Guides Association. It's fun, safe and a hoot.

Call 1-800-663-2772 or visit www.bigwhite.com.

Stratton Mountain,

LIFE & ENTERTAINMENT VIDEO

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Stratton, Vt.

Skiing has always headlined winter at Stratton Mountain in Vermont. One of the East's larger ski areas, the resort has 2,500 skiable acres and 600 acres of marked trails, plus another 1,500 acres (the golf course) where they've laid down groomed tracks for cross-country skiers.

But for more than a few visitors, at least some of the attraction is actually indoors: the Sport Center's two indoor tennis courts, 25-yard swimming pool, basketball court and a steam room.

If a storm keeps you off the mountain, check out the Land Rover Driving School's "off-road winter driving class," an offer unique to this resort. Its slogan, "the worse the weather the better," says it all.

My favorite was the guided snowshoe trek that meets at the top of the Gondola. From here the trail winds across the summit to the far side and the site of a fire-lookout tower. On a blue-sky day, climb to the top for an aerial view of four mountain ranges: the Green Mountains stretching away beneath your feet, and in the distance, the White Mountains, Adirondacks and Alleghenies.

Call 1-800-787-2886 or visit www.stratton.com.

Keystone Resort,

Dillon, Colo.

Your spouse, it seems, would rather paint the peaks than ski on them. No problem, I get that. So while he or she is capturing Keystone's silver shadows and snow-flecked pines in watercolors, head outdoors with snowshoes, or take the kids to the lakeside ice skating rink or the tubing hill, at Adventure Point.

But a more interesting option is fishing for trout in the Elk River, as good in winter as it is in summer. Hire a guide; they provide rods, reels and waders, and will provide the required out-of-state license.

Afterward, pamper yourself at Keystone Lodge's Rock Resorts Spa, a 10,000-square-foot full-service facility, with massage rooms, relaxation therapy, an indoor swimming pool, a sauna and hot tubs. Powered entirely by solar panels and wind turbines, the green spa uses only natural products.

Call 1-800-468-5004 or visit www.keystoneresort.com.

Aspen mountain,

Aspen, Colo.

Aspen is the sort of ski town where people come for the mountain and stay for the lifestyle. By day three you'll notice that the gung-ho skiers that rode up with you on the Silver Queen Gondola to the summit of Ajax are now sunbathing in rows of deck chairs facing the mighty snow-capped peaks of the Maroon Bells.

Or start your ski day by joining one of the residents who don shorts for the daily hike from the resort base to the summit.

At the top, join a naturalist-led snowshoe hike, scheduled twice a day. Or explore the valley below on a guided snowmobile tour; check starting times with local outfitters. Once again, layer up for a two-man paraglide launch off the top of Ajax; the pilot controls the glide — you are the passenger.

Window-shopping is a must in this town. At sunset, find a tapas bar then stay for dinner.

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