

8 great ski resorts top Colorado's most wanted

By ANNE Z. COOKE and STEVE HAGGERTY
McClatchy-Tribune News Service

FRASER, Colo. — Colorado, naturally, world famous for sunny days and intermittent dumps of deep dry powder.

Which one of the following Eight Great Colorado ski areas works for you? Read on:

Steamboat Resort: For every adult who buys a multiday lift pass, one child under 13 gets the same pass free. And they can stay free, too, as long as they're bunking with you. That means a family of four can ski for the price of two.

Invite another adult — dad or your brother — and three kids can ski for free. It's a one-to-one offer good for every run on Steamboat's 2,965 acres.

Then spend the money you've saved on lessons at the resort's top-rated Kids' Ski School. While the kids learn to carve turns, you can be skiing that trademarked "champagne powder" snow yourself.

www.steamboat.com, 877-237-2628

Winter Park Resort: If you ski just once a year, or mostly on long weekends, make the most of every precious hour at Winter Park Resort, only 67 miles west of Denver. Treat yourself to the iconic "Ski Train," departing Union Station at 7:15 a.m. and delivering you to the base of the ski lifts at 9:30 a.m. Catch the return to Denver at 4:15 p.m. For Ski Train reservations, call 303-296-4754.

www.skiwinterpark.com, 800-979-0322

Snowmass Resort: It's oh-so-luxe to step out your door, click into your bindings and glide away to the nearest lift line. At Snowmass Resort, you'll be livin' large when you stay in one of the resort's 2,400 rental units (with beds for 8,750 skiers) clustered around the two main base villages.



Groomed blue runs and sunny skies make great skiing at Keystone Resort in Colorado.



Deep powder drifts in a forest glade after a snowstorm at Aspen Ski Area in Colorado.

the base, die-hard skiers feel like pigs in clover.

Crested Butte still feels that way despite a new resort owner and a recent multi-million-dollar upgrade to trails, chair lifts, terrain parks, restaurants and base area hotels. The mission is to keep the resort and the town afloat by providing up-to-date ski-services and lodging, and filling those empty week days with a new kind of recreational skier.

One caveat is worth noting: this resort is very high. Even the town, where most lodging is located, is at or above 8,800 feet. If you don't do well in high places, Crested Butte may not be your best choice.

www.skicb.com, 800-841-2481

If you go

Most Colorado ski resorts start to make snow as soon as nighttime temperatures drop below freezing. The resorts open by mid-to-late November. Prices for single-day tickets are set when the resort opens. Multiday lift ticket prices are listed by September.

Lodging packages and discounts are priced lower if purchased before the resort opens. It pays to call early.

Hotels, inns, condominiums, town homes, Snowmass has them all. Two on a budget can find a double room in a hotel; families and friends should check the two, three or four-bedroom condos and the four-to-five-bedroom luxury homes.

Sure, you could stay two miles away, carry your skis to the shuttle bus stop, ride to the resort and lug the skis uphill to the nearest chair lift. But why? Stay on the snow and be there to carve "first tracks" on Snowmass' four big mountains.

www.aspensnowmass.com, 877-682-7736

Arapaho Basin: Looking for wild and woolly slopes, those deep powder glades and 55-degree steep? Go for it at Arapahoe Basin, six miles from Keystone Resort. Sporting North America's highest marked ski trails (the summit is at

13,050 feet), 63-year-old A-Basin belongs to the locals, powder hounds who'll tell you that skiing isn't a sport; it's all about being out there, getting spiritual in the elements, pushing your limits.

A-Basin is surprisingly small — 900 skiable acres straddling the Continental Divide — but size doesn't matter to real ski mavericks. Neither does the fact that there are only two places to eat. Lunch on this mountain is just an intermission between downhill runs.

As the website boasts, "there's no lodges, no condos and no hotels" at this ski area's base. Most people stay at Keystone Resort; most, in fact, ski both resorts on the same trip.

www.arapahoebasin.com, 888-272-7246

Aspen: Tempted by bright lights and good eats? How about jazz clubs, celeb-

rity bars and inspired cuisine? If après-ski nightlife puts the wax on your skis, chill out at Aspen, where ski vacations are multidimensional.

The West's most iconic ski area, Aspen is more than a 673-acre mountain where half the trails are rated for experts and half for intermediates. Aspen is where on-mountain dining caters to the rich and famous, and the top-of-the-gondola concierge serves hot cider.

The town is a cultural Mecca with art galleries, one-off fashion salons, antique shops, classical music venues and hotels like the five-star Little Nell, at the base of the Silver Queen Gondola.

Dine at Montagna in the Little Nell, where Chef Ryan Hardy makes magic with organic, home-grown ingredients. Or order Japanese fusion entrees at Nobu Matsuhisa's restaurant. Touted for this season is Buenos Aires Fusion, serving grilled meats and seafood.

www.aspensnowmass.com, 800-525-6200

Keystone Resort: Treat yourself to an all-around winter vacation at this 3,148-acre resort, and you

can do it all. If you're athletic, cross-country ski (or snowshoe) on groomed trails through the national forest, ice skate, ride a snow bike on the slopes or join the kids at the tubing hill. Or sign up for a snow cat ride into the high back country, take fly-fishing lessons (trout bite in winter, too) or go for a sleigh ride.

If you'd rather stick to indoor activities, spend an afternoon at the solar-powered spa at Keystone Lodge, where treatments include massages, mud wraps, aromatherapy, facials and long soaks in the sauna or hot tub. Or ride up the River Run Gondola for lunch and a beer at the top. Another option is shopping and lunch in River Run Village where a dozen shops carry winter fashions, souvenirs, gifts and sportswear.

www.kestoneresort.com, 800-468-5004

Crested Butte: If you're looking for a natural-born high, ski at Crested Butte, 9,375 feet elevation at the base and 12,162 feet at the summit. This 1,167-acre ski area has been a weekend destination, crowded on Saturdays and Sundays and wide open on weekdays. With big views, uncrowded trails and Colorado's funkiest old-time ranch town at

Vail, the behemoth, the big daddy, the largest of Colorado's ski areas. Spread over seven miles of mountains, Vail's 5,289 skiable acres actually encompass three distinct areas, the Front Side, the Back Bowls, and Blue Sky Basin.

Most recreational skiers stay on the Front Side, where beginner and intermediate trails predominate and skier services and on-mountain restaurants are located at regular intervals. Even here, the lift lines and many trails are rarely crowded.

Even so, good skiers — and some confident but not so skilled skiers — make a bee-line for the Back Bowls and Blue Sky Basin, where on a busy day, each acre averages only four skiers. In these secluded back-country valleys, most trails are rated more or most difficult, with an occasional intermediate trail offered as a sort of lifeline.

If the weather's good and some runs are groomed, test your mettle on these slopes. Skiing here reminds you that the best skiing isn't really a social activity but the meeting of elemental forces: you and your skis in the mountains in winter.

www.vail.snow.com, 800-404-3535, 970-845-5745



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homemade soups, salads, appetizers, sandwiches, slow roasted Prime Rib, hand cut steaks, fresh homemade sauces, seafood, buffalo hamburgers and more. Catch a trout out of the Big Horn River and we'll cook it for you! Also available is a children's menu and wine menu with wines from South Africa. The Safari Club Lounge offers a variety of beers, draft beers, wines, blended drinks & spirits. For entertainment there is a free pool table, foosball table & dart machine, a 72 inch TV, jukebox, dance floor and more. For a quiet atmosphere, enjoy your cocktails in the balcony area. Along with great spirits, we serve appetizers and sandwiches during restaurant hours. Pizzas are available during lounge hours.

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