



At Smaller (and Affordable) Ski Resorts, New Lodges, Lifts and Runs

In the United States and Canada, ski destinations have added acres, restaurants, bars — and golf.

By Elaine Glusac Dec. 11, 2017



Gore Mountain in New York. Adirondacks, USA

With the size and variety to engage skiers for weeks, the ski industry's big players like Aspen and Vail resorts dominate the imaginations of winter sports fans across the country. A total of 479 ski resorts operated last winter in the United States, according to the National Ski Areas Association, tallying 54.7 million skier and snowboarder visits, up 3.7 percent from the previous year.

However, it's the many the underdogs — smaller operators ranging from city neighbors like [Mountain Creek](#) in Vernon, N.J., to remote snow-blessed areas like [Wolf Creek Ski Area](#) in Southern Colorado — that play an important role in the ski universe, often as teaching hills and budget alternatives.

“The substantial percentage of the most die-hard skiers started somewhere small,” said Evan Reece, the chief executive and co-founder of [Liftopia](#), an online service offering discounts on lift tickets, equipment rentals and more. When it comes to beginner lessons, small ski areas are “lower cost, higher touch and require less commitment,” he added.

While single-day lift passes can cost more than \$150 at major resorts, access tends to be cheaper at lesser-known areas. And resorts within driving distance spare skiers airline tickets, expenses that particularly add up when it comes to family ski trips.

The following off-the-beaten-piste ski areas in North America offer new incentives to visit, including winter golf, extreme sledding and terrain expansions.

Eastern United States



Whiteface Mountain in New York. Dave Schmidt

In West Virginia, just over two hours from Washington, D.C., [Canaan Valley Resort](#) dangles the proposition of a two-season vacation. It will keep its [golf course](#) open this winter, weather permitting, for the first time, potentially offering visitors the chance to ski and tee up on the same day. The resort also increased its snow-making capacity by 140 percent over the past two years. The runs, with an 850-foot vertical drop, overlook the valley floor, home to the 18-hole golf course.

Seek more novelty at [Montage Mountain Resorts](#) in Scranton, Pa. The ski area claims to have the largest [airboarding](#) program in the country. By airboarding, similar to sledding on an inflatable raft, riders can reach up to 60 miles per hour on downhill runs. The resort also offers “First Timer Fridays,” which include a free lift ticket, rental equipment and lesson to first-time skiers and snowboarders.

In New Hampshire’s central White Mountains, [Waterville Valley Resort](#) added a peak in 2016. This year, \$3 million went into snow-making upgrades, three new lifts, base lodge renovations and a new radio-frequency system for lift tickets.

In the Adirondacks region, two New York state-run ski areas are getting upgrades designed to make them more competitive with world-class ski resorts in the east, such as [Killington](#) in Vermont. [Gore Mountain](#) in North Creek is rebuilding and expanding its lodges at the base, mid-mountain and summit. In 2016, it began using energy from more than 14,000 solar panels. [Whiteface Mountain](#) at Lake Placid is expanding its ski school, renovating two lodges at the base of the mountain and adding a warming hut on the mountain top.

Western United States



Big Sky Resort in Montana. Jeff Engerbretson

Colorado is home to more than two dozen ski resorts including international draws like [Snowmass](#) and [Breckenridge](#). But thanks to the Rocky Mountains, even beloved locals' resorts like [Eldora Mountain Resort](#) near Boulder have long runs and elevations over 10,000 feet. Reachable via public bus, the 680-acre Eldora plans to add a high-speed, six-passenger chairlift this winter, with a ride time of less than five minutes. Mindful of its entrepreneurial clientele, the resort is adding free Wi-Fi in its two base lodges.

Mountain-mad Coloradans appreciate [Arapahoe Basin](#), just over 60 miles west of Denver, for its extremely long season, running October to June. This year it is introducing 468 skiable acres, bringing the resort to 1,400 acres. Most of the new terrain can be reached via ski lift, with its most challenging area accessible by hiking in.

In Northern California, [Sugar Bowl Resort](#) has plenty of competition from nearby Lake Tahoe resorts. Over the past two years the Donner Summit area has invested \$6 million in snow grooming and removal and a new children's ski and snowboard school. The San Francisco chef Traci Des Jardins is newly overseeing the food and developing new menus for three restaurants. The 1939 vintage Sugar Bowl acquired the cross-country-ski resort [Royal Gorge](#) in 2013 and has upgraded its trails and plans to add an interactive trail map on its website with conditions and marked routes.

For skiers seeking to do some uphill or skinning, as the practice of walking up a mountain in skis outfitted with no-slip skins and special bindings is called, [Mt. Shasta Ski Park](#), about 65 miles north of Redding, will newly allow it beginning in January. The resort also offers a combined Nordic and Alpine skiing ticket.

For those seeking space on the slopes, [Powder Mountain](#), about 55 miles north of Salt Lake City, Utah, has promised to cap the maximum number of day passes sold to 1,500 and season passes to 3,000. That's low density in a ski area with 8,464 acres. Powder Mountain records an average snowfall of 500 inches, and the addition of two lifts last year helps expedite transit to it.

It's worth the trip to Bozeman, Mont., to reach [Big Sky Resort](#) for its uncrowded runs spread across 5,800 acres. It may not remain that way long. Its new 10-year, \$150-million plan aims to raise its profile by modernizing all of its lifts. Last year two chairlifts were replaced, and this year its four surface lifts used to transport beginners uphill were also replaced.

Try Alaska for après ski. Not strictly, of course. [Alyeska Resort](#), a 40-minute drive south of Anchorage, gets 650 inches of snowfall on average each year. Post-run, take in views of the Chugach Mountains and the Turnagain Arm from the new mountaintop bar.

Canada



Panorama Mountain Resort in British Columbia. Destination BC/Kari Medig

In the Canadian Rockies, you might be tempted to stop at the ski areas around Banff National Park, but press on west of Calgary nearly 200 miles to [Panorama Mountain Resort](#) in British Columbia, especially if you're an expert skier. This season it will add 128 acres to its backcountry Taynton Bowl, creating four double-black-diamond trails and the resort's longest run at four miles.

Along the so-called Powder Highway of southern British Columbia, [Whitewater Ski Resort](#) in the Selkirk Mountains near Nelson is expanding this year with a new quad chairlift, a new base lodge to house its ski school and a renovation of its existing lodge.

In Jasper National Park in Alberta, [Marmot Basin](#) is adding an area called Tres Hombres, a north-facing, treeless and very steep slope of about 54 acres. Its five new runs are designed for expert skiers and snowboarders.

In eastern Canada's Charlevoix region, about 90 miles east of Quebec City, Mont Grand-Fonds is often overshadowed by the larger [Le Massif de Charlevoix](#), but it doesn't lack variety. Its new off-trail area known as the Lynx can be reached by lift or by skinning up an appointed trail.
