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Sunday, Nov. 20, 2011 ★ Section N

Special
Ski Issue



PLAYGROUNDS IN SNOW

As more skiers bring their kids, resorts are turning into winter wonderlands of family fun.

STEVE HAGGERTY

Swiss holiday with tot goes like clockwork

By Alan Behr

McCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

PONTRESINA, Switzerland — I had not realized how many helpful hands await a man traveling alone with a small child. At JFK Airport, an Australian woman and her grown son volunteered to roll my caravan of luggage to the check-in counter, freeing me to push my 21-month-

old son, Ryan, in his stroller. My biggest concern was that I not lose Ryan's security blanket, which he named Meeno, in the measured confusion of boarding an international flight.

The woman at the Swiss International counter efficiently worked through my check-in with toddler.

See **SWISS** on N4



ALAN BEHR / McClatchy-Tribune

A marching band plays during the annual Fasching parade in Zurich, Switzerland. Fasching is the Swiss version of Mardi Gras — but not as raunchy.



STEVE HAGGERTY

Dog mushing is just one of the many non-skiing activities increasingly provided at ski resorts. Another is tubing, top, offered on Dercum Mountain by Keystone Resort in Dillon, Colo.

By Anne Z. Cooke
and Steve Haggerty
FOR THE INQUIRER

PARK CITY, Utah — The Porter clan, 14 strong, were 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, wanted to beg off.

"Aw, Mom, this is our last chance to do the Alpine Coaster again," said Nick, trying to look woeful. "We'll meet you later, I promise."

"Yeah, Mom," echoed Andrew.

If you listened to Nick — or looked at ski-resort numbers, flat over the last couple of years — you might wonder whether skiing was in trouble. That would be a mistake. Die-hard alpine skiers and snowboarders will always be a ski resort's core constituency. But with more families traveling with children, even the littlest ski hills are rebranding themselves as family-style winter playgrounds.

If the Porter kids are like mine, they'll grow up to beg off.
See **SKI RESORTS** on N5

There's more to the Poconos than downhill skiing

By Jeff Lewis
FOR THE INQUIRER

The Pocono Mountains and their 2,400 square miles of pristine landscapes have been many things to many people. For GIs returning to New York City's harbor from World War II, this was the honeymoon capital of the world, where amorous couples found the nation's

first heart-shaped tub. Hoards of skiers on wooden boards cut their teeth at Big Boulder Ski Area during the early days of the sport, and the growth of whitewater rafting and golfing further broadened the four-season appeal of the Pocono Mountains.

In winter, the Poconos offer more than just downhill skiing, though it wasn't easy to convince me. After all,

we Alpine skiers can be a stubborn bunch. But I'm game to try new experiences. Here are two I found in the Pennsylvania mountains.

Dog sledding

You can only imagine my apprehension when a friend suggested we stay
See **POCONOS** on N5

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Resorts offering a flurry of new activities

SKI RESORTS from N1

to be skiers. Right now, though, the Alpine Coaster, a high-speed bobsled ride on a roller-coaster track, promises bigger kicks. And as ski resort managers who have installed high-speed chairlifts have discovered, technology has changed the way patrons spend their 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 of the mountain and still quit early enough to try something else. Ice skating, or the tubing hill, or dogsledding."

You'd expect the usual snow sports: snowshoeing, ice skating, snow bikes, cross-country skiing, and the like. But you'd be surprised what they think of: How about snowmobiling, fly fishing, ice climbing, paragliding, hot springs, real bobsledding, and, of all things, extreme winter driving classes? You have only to ask.

Park City Resort

Park City, Utah; 435-649-8111; www.parkcityresort.com.

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.

The restored mining town itself, at the resort's base, gets our vote as North America's most authentic ski village. You'll never find a more inviting place to shop, dine casually or well, sample local brews, or people-watch.

As for my favorite thrill, it's the real bobsled ride on the official bobsled track built for the 2002 Winter Olympic Games. With an experienced pilot at the helm, you dial up your courage, climb into one of these tin-cans-on-steroids, and hold your breath. The thing goes at speeds up to 80 miles per hour, reaches 5G's acceleration, and drops the equivalent of a 40-story fall in one minute. Holy moly!



STEVE HAGGERTY

A heated pool can offer a welcome respite after a day on the ski slopes. As more people travel with children, even smaller resorts are rebranding themselves as family-style destinations offering a variety of fun things to do.

Telluride Ski Resort

Telluride, Colo.; 1-800-778-8581; www.tellurideskiresort.com.

It doesn't get any better than this remote mountain hideaway in southwestern Colorado. Scenic snowcapped peaks, 2,000 acres of dry powder, groomed cruising runs, and plenty of expert-only glade skiing are just the beginning.

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 connected pools, cooling to 106, 96, and 82 degrees, for intensive heat therapy, luxury soaking, or swimming.

Pick a gray, snowy day and wallow while the flakes drift down and the steam rises. It's an out-of-body experience. Changing rooms, lockers, and showers are available; 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. Your cozy condo with fireplace will look twice as good after you've explored the skewed timbers of what's left of these drafty cabins.

Big White Resort

Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada; 1-800-663-2772; www.bigwhite.com.

You've never heard of Big White? It's a 2,000-acre ski resort in the southeast corner of British Columbia, specifically designed for multigenerational recreation, from dogsledding and snowmobiling to the tubing hill and skating rink. Kids' après-ski starts with bonfires and marshmallows and ends with fireworks. Adults' après-ski would be in the pub. But the newest thrill here is a bona fide extreme sport.

Test your mettle — and bone up for your *Survivors* try-out — 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, with climbs adapted for beginning, intermediate, and expert, is managed and operated by members of the American Mountain Guides Association who are also experienced ice climbers. You'll be outfitted with boots, crampons, and safety gear, and will learn how to use ice climbing's specialized gripping tools. It's fun, safe, and a hoot.

Stratton Mountain

Stratton, Vt.; 1-800-787-2886; www.stratton.com.

Skiing has always headlined winter at Stratton Mountain. One of the East's larger ski areas, the resort has 2,500 skiable acres and 600 acres of marked trails, plus 1,500 acres (the golf course) where groomed tracks for cross-country skiers have been set up. 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 snowstorm 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.

Our favorite was the guided snowshoe trek that meets at the top of the gondola. From there 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.

Keystone Resort

Dillon, Colo.; 1-800-468-5004; www.keystoneresort.com.

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.

Another 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. Most important, they know just where to find those special trout pools and riffles. 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 and wind turbines, and partly illuminated by natural light, this officially "green" spa uses only natural products.

Aspen Mountain

Aspen, Colo.; 1-800-525-6200; www.aspen-snowmass.com.

Aspen is the sort of ski town where people come for the mountain and stay for the lifestyle. By day, you'll notice that the gung-ho skiers who 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 snowcapped peaks of the Maroon Bells.

Or start your ski day by joining one of the residents (who don shorts for the daily grueling) hike from the resort base to the summit; they wear hiking boots and walk on the edge of a groomed run.

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 least if you expect to say you've been here. At sunset, find a tapas bar, then stay for dinner.

Dog sledding and spa vegging in the Poconos

POCONOS from N1

off the slopes on a weekend and instead try, of all things, dog sledding. Somehow I couldn't envision myself spending a precious Saturday morning yelling "mush" behind a team of huskies. Frankly, I'm not even that fond of dogs. It turned out to be one of the best decisions our little ski group ever made.

Throughout the Poconos' evolution, Skytop Lodge has remained one of the region's most stately resorts. Located on a high plateau in the central Poconos, three miles north of the village of Canadensis, Skytop oozes luxury. It was there that our dogsledding experience unfolded.

Immediately upon arrival, we were greeted by 20 dogs, each of them personally introduced by their affable guide. Actually, the dogs seemed so smart I thought they'd introduce themselves. Although the majority were huskies, a few were bred with greyhounds. While huskies are known to be strong and tireless workers, they don't have the speed of other dogs.

Thus, the cross-breeding. Dog sledding involves a seated rider and standing musher, the person responsible for braking and leaning to turn. Mushers are warned not to leave both feet off the brake lest the hyperactive dogs run past the guide who directs the group from his snowmobile.

Six skilled dogs pulled guests across the resort's snow-covered golf course on the 40-minute ride, stopping halfway to allow the rider to switch with the musher. The dogs run at a brisk pace, and there were three separate groups going out when we were there, all being led by one guide. Mushing was the most fun because you actually control the speed by applying varying pressure on the

Ski and Snowboard Areas in Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Resort	Location	Phone	Website	Vertical	Trails	Lifts	Day Ticket	Night Skiing
Alpine Mountain	Analomink	570-595-2150	www.alpinemountain.com	500 ft.	21	3 quads/1 double	\$37/46	Yes
Bear Creek	Macungie	866-754-2822	www.skibearcreek.com	510 ft.	21	2 quads/1 triple/1 double	\$46/61	Yes
Big Boulder	Blakeslee	570-443-8425	www.jfbb.com	475 ft.	15	2 triples/5 doubles	\$44/50	Yes
Blue Knob	Claysburg	800-458-3403	www.blueknob.com	1,072 ft.	34	2 triples/2 doubles	\$38/55	Yes
Blue Mountain	Palmerton	610-826-7700	www.skibluemt.com	1,082 ft.	37	1 high-spd. 6P/1 HSQ/1 T/3 D	\$49/57	Yes
Camelback	Tannersville	570-629-1661	www.skicamelback.com	800 ft.	34	2 high-speed quads/3 T/7 D	\$48/58	Yes
Eagle Rock	Hazleton	570-384-6616	www.eaglerockresort.com	550 ft.	14	3 doubles	\$38/42	Yes
Elk Mountain	Union Dale	570-679-4400	www.elkskier.com	1,000 ft.	27	1 quad/5 doubles	\$48/58	Yes
Hidden Valley	Hidden Valley	814-443-8000	www.hiddenvalleysresort.com	470 ft.	28	2 quad/2 triples/3 doubles	\$28/53	Yes
Jack Frost	Blakeslee	570-443-8425	www.jfbb.com	600 ft.	30	1 quad/2 triples/6 doubles	\$44/50	No
Liberty	Carroll Valley	717-642-8282	www.skiliberty.com	600 ft.	16	5 quads	\$49/60	Yes
Mount Pleasant	Edinboro	814-734-1641	www.skimountpleasant.com	320 ft.	8	2 doubles/2 singles	\$20/28	Yes
Seven Springs	Champion	800-452-2223	www.7springs.com	750 ft.	32	2 high-spd. 6P/5 triples/3 Q	\$47/63	Yes
Shawnee	Shawnee	800-233-4218	www.shawneemt.com	700 ft.	23	1 quad/1 triple/4 doubles	\$43/50	Yes
Ski Big Bear	Lackawaxen	570-685-1400	www.ski-bigbear.com	650 ft.	18	3 doubles	\$32/28	Yes
Ski Denton	Coudersport	814-435-2115	www.skidenton.com	650 ft.	22	1 triple, 1 double	\$25/39	Yes
Ski Roundtop	Lewisburg	717-432-9631	www.skiroundtop.com	600 ft.	16	2 quads/1 triple/1 double	\$49/58	Yes
Ski Sawmill	Morris	570-353-7521	www.skisawmill.com	515 ft.	13	1 double	\$26/37	Yes
Sno Mountain	Scranton	800-468-7669	www.snomtn.com	1,000 ft.	28	1 quad/3 triples/1 double	\$44/53	Yes
Spring Mountain	Spring Mount	610-287-7900	www.springmtn-fun.com	420 ft.	9	1 triple/3 doubles	\$29/39	Yes
Tanglwood	Tafton	570-226-9780	www.skitanglwood.com	415 ft.	9	2 doubles	\$30/40	Yes
Tussey Mountain	Boalsburg	814-466-7976	www.tusseymountain.com	520 ft.	8	1 quad/1 double	\$29/35	Yes
Whitetail Resort	Mercersburg	717-328-9400	www.skiwhitetail.com	935 ft.	21	1 high-spd. quad/3 quads/1 D	\$51/62	Yes
Campgaw	Mahwah, N.J.	202-327-7800	www.skicampgaw.com	270 ft.	5	2 doubles	\$15/34	Yes
Hidden Valley	Vernon, N.J.	973-764-4200	www.hiddenvalleynj.com	620 ft.	15	1 triple/2 doubles	\$28/50	Yes
High Point	Sussex, N.J.	973-702-1222	www.xcskihighpoint.com	1,600 ft.	NA	Cross-country skiing only	\$19/22	Yes
Mountain Creek	Vernon, N.J.	973-827-2000	www.mountaincreek.com	1,040 ft.	46	8P gondola, 2HSQ, 1 T, 1D	\$50/62	Yes

SOURCES: Pennsylvania Ski Area Association; individual resorts

The Philadelphia Inquirer

brake, and you must lean for the dogs to turn. The ride was very smooth.

After sledding, we headed to the resort's weekly winter cookout at the base of the gentle 295-foot ski slope where hot dogs, grilled chicken, and chili were in high demand. There's something special about gathering around a slopeside fireplace sipping hot chocolate and chatting with other winter enthusiasts. In addition to dog sledding and skiing, Skytop offers ice skating on an indoor rink, cross-country skiing, sledding, and snowshoeing, which I hope will be my next winter adventure.

Skytop, which opened in 1928, has long been popular for family gatherings and weddings. Guests can take advantage of the resort's many

seasonal amenities, including archery, fly fishing, and golfing on a majestic course. Couples who prefer a romantic getaway indulge in a Couples Warm Stone Massage. On our particular visit, which lasted only the day, the women in our party enjoyed a European Facial and hinted that it beat a day on the slopes, a remark that resulted in a passionate debate. And while a Warm Moroccan Oil Scalp Massage may not regrow hair — sorry, fellas — it does leave one thoroughly relaxed.

Not to be missed is the Skytop culinary experience. The resort, in a throwback to the days when vacationers dressed for dinner, asks men to wear jackets. Among the entrees are pan-seared red snapper with roasted plum tomato and stuffed boneless

chicken ballotine wrapped with bacon and garnished with pistachio nuts and asparagus. An extensive wine list has won the Wine Spectator Magazine Award of Excellence for 10 consecutive years.

Destination Spa

The Lodge at Woodloch is a 30-minute drive north of Skytop near the artistic town of Hawley. It is the Poconos' first luxury destination spa.

There are 58 guest rooms, each with private veranda and swivel rockers — everything designed for ultimate comfort. From the plush rooms for customized face and body treatments to the coed Whisper Lounge with a crackling fireplace and outdoor porch, guests are pam-

pered from the moment they arrive.

The 40,000-square-foot spa offers three Mind and Body Studios for aerobics, yoga, and meditation, and a Pilates training area. An indoor pool and waterfall, saunas, and several Jacuzzis ensure that guests have options to soothe their aches and pains. A cardio and weight room is available for workouts.

Covered porches and sunny terraces beckon guests to lounge and relax. With a color palette inspired chiefly by the sun, the lake, and the surrounding 75 acres of woodlands, the spa, with its soaring walls of windows, invites the outdoors in.

Food is serious business at the Lodge. The chefs base their menu on the freshest foods available from area

farms. Herbs come from a garden on the property; meats and poultry are purchased from the Lancaster area. We enjoyed our tender filet mignon and devoured a gluten-free flourless cake that was so rich it deserved its own tax bracket.

In pleasing its guests, the spa leaves no stone unturned, literally, by offering a Delaware River Stone Massage.

Other activities include watercolor painting, wine tasting, yoga, nature walks, kayaking, and a variety of mind/body classes. The neighboring sister property, Woodloch Resort, has been one of the most popular family resorts in the Poconos since 1958, and provides such winter activities as ice skating, snowshoeing, a snow tube run, and snowmobile paths.