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Colorado's most wanted: Eight great ski resorts

By Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty, McClatchy-Tribune News Service

9:40 a.m. EST, October 29, 2012



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FRASER, Colo. - The trees are bare, the snow is falling, it's time to ski. But where?

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:

1. STEAMBOAT RESORT, Steamboat Springs; <http://www.steamboat.com>. (877) 237-2628,

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How about a ski-free family vacation at Steamboat Resort, in Steamboat Springs? You're not eligible, but your kids might be. For every adult who buys a multi-day 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. Steamboat's offer is a tremendous deal, the best in the west, one 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. Fly to Denver and on to the Yampa Valley Airport. Or drive 2.5-3 hours west of Denver.

2. WINTER PARK RESORT, Winter Park; <http://www.skiwinterpark.com>. (800) 979-0322.

In a hurry? 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. You'll be on Winter Park's 3,060 skiable acres by noon and hucking Parsenn Bowl's fresh powder by 2 o'clock. Here's how: Reserve your rental skis in advance, book a dawn flight to Denver International Airport, board the [shuttle](#) bus at baggage claim (departing every hour), and you'll be there in 90 minutes, door to door.

If you rent a [car](#), take I-70 west, turn north at Exit 232 and follow Route 40 north over Berthoud Pass into Winter Park. Or fly into Denver the night before and 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 reservations call (303)296-4754.

3. SNOWMASS RESORT, near Aspen; <http://www.aspensnowmass.com>. (877) 682-7736.

Does ski-in ski-out lodging make your day? It should. 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. .

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's four big mountains. Fly to Denver and on to Eagle; or fly non-stop to Aspen (in bad weather, planes are rerouted to Montrose).

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Ski Lake Tahoe

7 World Class Resorts. It's Not A Place To Ski. The Place To Ski!

www.SkiLakeTahoe.com

4. ARAPAHOE BASIN, near Dillon. <http://www.arapahoebasin.com>. (888) 272-7246.

Looking for wild and woolly slopes, those deep powder glades and 55-degree steepes? 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. Fly to Denver and take a ski shuttle or drive 95 minutes to Arapahoe.

5. Aspen, at Aspen. <http://www.aspensnowmass.com>. (800) 525-6200.

Tempted by bright lights and good eats? How about jazz clubs, celebrity bars and inspired cuisine? If après-ski nightlife puts the wax on your skis, chill out at Aspen, where ski vacations are multi-dimensional.

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, too, 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.

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