

ADVENTURE

# Making most of slopes

**Advice for skiers who want to get the most bang for their buck.**

**Experts offer 6 slick tips for vacationers.**

**By Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty**  
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WHISTLER, CANADA — “A little tip to remember,” said John at Whistler Ski Resort, in British Columbia’s Coastal Mountains, gathering our group together and trotting out the bit of wisdom I’ve come to think of as the law of Inverse Timing.

“In early season start late, and in late season start early,” he tells people who join his Mountain Host tours, two-hour guided introductions to Whistler’s best snow, least-crowded slopes and favorite restaurants. “You’ll ski and feel better if you set your clock to match the calendar.”

What he means is that if you’re skiing in December when the days are shortest and coldest, stay in bed longer, hit the slopes later in the morning (after the icy patches melt) and ski until the lifts close. If you’re skiing in spring, however, say mid-to-late-March and into April, rise early and be the first one riding the chairlift. When the sun turns the snow to slush, usually after lunch, quit early.

That’s good advice if, as John does, you live in a ski town like Whistler, or Colorado’s Snowmass, or Stowe, in Vermont. Any place, in fact, where the slopes are a mile from your house and you’re skiing on a bargain-priced locals-only lift pass. When dark clouds roil overhead, you can stay home or run errands.

But show me a typical recreational skier, somebody who lives hundreds of miles from a mountain and has just spent three hours in an airplane, and I’ll show you a go-getter determined to cram a year’s worth of skiing into a single week, no matter what falls from the sky. Here’s how the experts make the most of every day.

## Read the daily grooming map

Most ski resorts can’t groom every slope, every night. With most resorts continuing to add more skiable acreage, there’s often just too much terrain to cover. So the snow cat drivers groom selectively, often leaving baby bumps runs to develop giant moguls before they plow them flat again.

To find out which runs are freshly groomed (or not, if you’re crazy for thrills), get a copy of the daily grooming map, usually a list available by early morning at ticket windows or at on-slope information kiosks. If you’re an



March skiing can mean there’s snow on the peaks and none in town, such as in Park City, Utah. STEVE HAGGERTY PHOTOS / MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

intermediate, ski the groomed runs in the morning and try the bump runs later, after the snow’s softened up.

## Don’t quit when it snows

OK, quit if you want to. Skip the blizzard, head back to the lodge and relax with a cup of cocoa. But if you refuse to miss a single minute of skiing, swap those poster-boy fashions — lightweight bomber jackets, rad sunglasses and baseball caps — for warmer clothes. Layering with fleece, adding a neck-gaiter with a pull-up face mask and ditching sunglasses for goggles will make you as impervious as a snowman in a storm. Most experts like amber lenses not just because they keep the snow out of your eyes, but because they work in a white-out, sharpening the shadows.

## Follow the sun

Most ski slopes, at most North American ski resorts, face north, northeast, northwest or a combination thereof. And for a reason. These are the slopes where the sun shines the least and the snow, when it falls, lasts longest. If it’s a warm day, you might want to ski in the shady places, staying ahead of the sun. Sometimes, though, in spots where the sun never shines, the snow turns to ice. If it’s very cold out, follow the sun as it moves across the resort, skiing each run as the sun hits it, then moving on to the next. Do it right and you’ll catch peak conditions.

## Ski the top

When spring breezes blow and crocuses push up next

to the gondola, head for the clouds where temperatures stay low and the snow lasts longest. Back in the day, resorts put the easy runs on the lower slopes and the double-black-diamond mind-benders above timberline. Never-ever skiers took lessons on the bunny slopes beside the lodge and the hot shots pumped air off the cornice. But all that’s changed. To accommodate today’s recreational skiers, resorts are creating easy-to-navigate intermediate runs (marked with blue lines) that begin at the summit and track all the way back down to the base area. And what a treat they are.

## Mix it up

If you can’t change the weather, change your plans. Skiing isn’t the only winter sport offered at today’s ski resorts, most of them weather-proof. Tubing hills, snowmobile tours, snowshoe treks, cross country skiing, alpine slides, the Alpine Coaster (an over-snow roller coaster, like the one installed at Utah’s Park City Resort), ice skating, bobsledding, sleigh rides and dog mushing are just the more popular possibilities. Others run from fly fishing and ice fishing to historic walking tours and horseback rides (yes, even in the snow).

## Go indoors

At your wit’s end? Ride up the lifts and eat at the summit. Find a sports bar and watch a ball game. Shop on Main Street. Tour the local micro-brewery. Visit the history museum. Go to a movie. And wait for the sun to shine.



Snowmass Village from under the Coney Glade lift is seen at Snowmass Resort, Colo.

## MORE INFORMATION

**Park City Resort:** parkcitymountain.com  
**Snowmass Ski Area:** aspensnowmass.com  
**Steamboat Ski Area:** steamboat.com  
**Stowe Resort:** stowe.com  
**Whistler Ski Resort:** whistlerblackcomb.com