

## SKI SENSE

# Make the most of every minute on the slopes

How to maximize your skiing experience, no matter your skill level or interests

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Special Contributor

WHISTLER, Canada — Never adverse to a tip from an expert, I like to think of this one as the Law of Inverse Timing, one of those light-bulb moments that can make your day.

"In the early season, start skiing late, and in the late season, start early," said John, the mountain host and our guide for the morning, as we assembled at the base of chairlift at Whistler Ski Resort, in British Columbia. "You'll ski better and feel better if you set your clock to match the calendar."

What he means is that if you're skiing in December or January, when the days are shortest and coldest, stay in bed longer, hit the slopes after the sun has softened the icy patches, and ski until the ski lifts close. But if you're skiing in spring, say middle to late March and into April, rise early and be the first one riding the chairlift. When the sun turns the snow to slush, find the best restaurant on the mountain and linger over a late lunch.

That's good advice if, as John does, you live in a ski town like Whistler, or near Colorado's Snowmass, Stowe in Vermont or New Mexico's Taos. Any place, in fact, where the slopes are within an hour's drive and you're skiing on a locals-only, bargain-price 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. When time is short, smart skiers know how to maximize every day.

#### Read the daily grooming map.

Most ski resorts can't groom every slope, every night. There's often just too much terrain to cover. So the snowcat 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, get a copy of the daily grooming map, usually available by early morning at ticket windows or at on-slope information kiosks. If you're an intermediate, ski the groomed runs in the morning and try the bump runs later,

after the snow's softened.

#### 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, dress the part and go. Layer with fleece, add a neck gaiter with a pull-up face mask and ditch sunglasses for goggles. You'll be 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 in North America face north, northeast, northwest or a combination thereof. And for a reason. These are the slopes where the sun shines the least and where the snow piles up and lasts longest. If it's a warm day, ski the shadiest slopes, 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. Rookie skiers took lessons on the bunny slopes beside the lodge and the hotshots 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. Tubing hills, snowmobile tours, snowshoe treks, cross-country skiing, alpine slides, the Alpine Coaster (an over-snow roller coaster, like the one at Utah's Park City Resort), ice skating, bobsledding, sleigh rides and dog sledding are among the most popular possibilities.

#### Go indoors.

At your wits' end? Ride up the lifts and eat at the summit. Find a sports bar and watch a ballgame. Shop on Main Street. Tour the local micro-brewery. Go to a movie. And wait for the sun to shine.

Anne Z. Cooke is a freelance writer in California.



Photos by Steve Haggerty/ColorWorld

Find out which runs are freshly groomed from the resort's daily grooming map. Hit the groomed runs in the morning and the bump runs later in the day, when the snow has softened.

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Time your skiing for when the sun has softened the snow a little bit: later in the day when the days are shortest and coldest, earlier in the day when the weather is generally warmer.