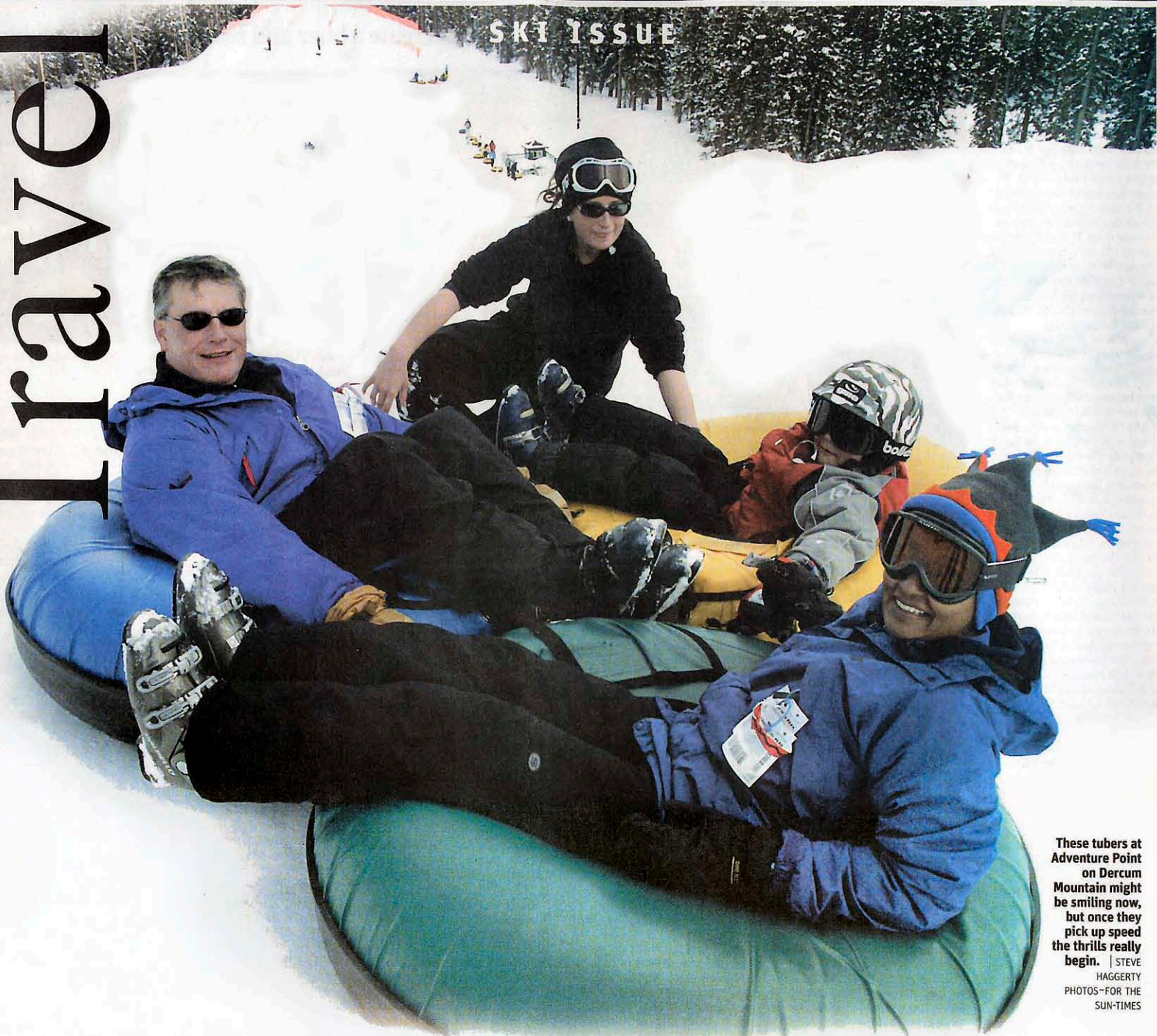


SKI ISSUE

CHICAGO  
Travel



These tubers at Adventure Point on Dercum Mountain might be smiling now, but once they pick up speed the thrills really begin. | STEVE HAGGERTY PHOTOS FOR THE SUN-TIMES

# A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY

**COLORADO** | Keystone is the family friendly option among Vail's ski resorts

BY ANNE Z. COOKE AND STEVE HAGGERTY

**KEYSTONE RESORT, Colo.** — As the clouds settled over 11,640-foot Dercum Mountain at Keystone Resort, some skiers already had quit for the day.

But at the tubing hill on Adventure Point, kids and adults were still lining up for another ride.

"C'mon Dad, it's light enough to go again," said Katie Kitay, 13, ignoring the storm that had started with a few drifting snowflakes but was now falling steadily.

Getting a thumbs up from her dad, Katie and her brother Will gleefully dragged their inner tubes back to the launch point.

Has skiing lost its luster, outshone by tubing and snowboarding?

Not for me, it hasn't. Here at one of Colorado's most popular family playgrounds, winter vacations still mean the freedom of swooping downhill on freshly groomed slopes, the thrill of carving new powder and the promise of big-sky scenery.

Now in its 38th year, Keystone seems to defy age, staying young with a popular and progressive kids' ski school, state-of-the-art grooming, 1,600 rental condos and annual tweaks to already ample skier fa-



Let's be careful out there! Ski lessons are about to begin.

cilities. One of the Vail group of ski resorts — the "product line" includes tony Vail, exclusive Beaver Creek, earthy Breckenridge and big-dog Heavenly (in California) — Keystone is the homey one, with lodging and lift tickets designed and priced for

friends and families.

New this year is a hardware hunk guaranteed to please skiers: a new, faster River Run Gondola, with spacious eight-passenger cabins and mid-mountain loading and unloading stations. Debuting last month, the gondola not only replaced the former six-seater, but it is longer, with the base loading station in the River Run Village. Hop aboard — with your skis or snowboard — for the 12-minute ride up Dercum Mountain.

This resort, on my Top 10 list, has 151 trails, 20 lifts, three peaks and five magnificent above-timberline bowls.

About those non-skiers in your family — your husband (or wife), your sister, my sister definitely. Not a problem. I joined our kids on the tubing hill for a lark. But it only took one wild ride to see what I'd been missing. Steep and long, the tubing hill is shaped into eight steep troughs formed by slick, hard-packed snow.

You sit on what looks like a mutant doughnut, grab two of the four handles and pray. Once the tube



**SNOW SALE | PAGE 3C**

Extra nights lodging, ski rental packages, cut-rate lift tickets, upgrades — all are part of the promotions ski resorts are using to lure people to the mountain in a slumping economy.



**TAKE FLIGHT**

United Airlines will begin daily flights from Chicago to Montrose/Telluride Regional Airport on Dec. 18. The Colorado ski town welcomes two new luxury resorts this winter: Capella Telluride, scheduled to open in February, and the boutique hotel Lumiere.

## FROM THE COVER

## COLORADO | Snow bikes? Yes, snow bikes!

operator shoves you over the edge, there's no stopping the thing until it finally slows down and bumps to a stop. Trust me, you need no skills other than an iron grip and the lung power to scream. When the Kitay family went, they formed a "train," grabbing each other's handles and roaring downhill together.

Another favorite are the snow bikes for rent at Adventure Point. These converted bicycle frames sit on short skis. You wear even shorter skis and use your feet and the handle bars to carve turns. It's fun, simple and, they say, improves your skiing.

The new RockResorts Spa in Keystone Lodge is a 10,000-square-foot "green" facility that relies on natural light and wind-generated power. The spa has 10 treatment rooms, offers a variety of massages and wraps, and uses organic products.

If shopping is your thing, River Run Village is a good place to check out. Wander through shops — or ride up the River Run Gondola and watch football at Killian's Bar in the Summit House.

Outdoor winter sports include ice skating at Lakeside Village and cross-country skiing at the Nordic Ski Center a mile from Lakeside Village. The center, which rents skis and snowshoes, groomes 10 miles of level trails and maintains more than 30 miles of marked, "packed" trails in the White River National Forest. For fly fishing, contact local outfitters.

To see where extreme skiers brave the steeps (without having to do it yourself), take a snow cat ride into one of Keystone's five above-timberline bowls, either on 11,660-foot North Peak or the 11,980-foot Outback. Sightseers get unbelievable views.

What some skiers miss at Keystone is that old-fashioned look of historic ski towns like Telluride, Aspen and Park City, all 19th-century mining camps. But purpose-built resorts like Keystone have other benefits. Designed for skiing, they're not hampered by historic restrictions or a lack of growing room. Keystone's current four-year redevelopment plan for the Mountain House base incorporates state-of-the-art design and technology.



**Snow bikes are bike frames that sit on short skis. The rider wears even shorter skis and turns with one's feet and the handle bars.**  
STEVE HAGGERTY—FOR THE SUN-TIMES

What the resort could really use are more of the free ski shuttle buses that loop between the River Run Base and the Mountain House Base. In theory, you don't need to rent a car. But our family found that the buses never seemed to be there when we needed them. Getting the kids ready for ski school and marched out to the bus stop a block away was bad enough. When the buses were late, so were the kids.

Then there was the problem of shopping for food. When you rent a condo, you need groceries. But Keystone's convenience store sold mostly snack items. The upside was that we ate out often, which was why we sampled Keystone's better restaurants. The headliners were the two award-winning restaurants at the top of North Peak (reservations required at 800-354-4386). The Alpenglow Stube, a superb restaurant with a top ten rating from Zagat, served continental cuisine on white tablecloths in an old world chalet atmosphere. It's not recommended for kids.

In contrast, Der Fondue Chessel, a colorful medieval banquet, was one of those rare restaurants that appeals equally to adults and kids alike. Diners sitting at long tables are entertained by a rollicking ompah band while waiters and waitresses in alpine costumes rush around taking drink orders and delivering huge trays of food.

## IF YOU GO

**GETTING THERE:** Keystone Resort is 90 miles west of Denver. By car, drive west on I-70 and take exit 205 (Silverthorne/Dillon). Cross to the south side of the interstate and continue east on Highway 6, about 6 miles to Keystone. Allow two to three hours, depending on traffic and weather. Accidents and snowstorms shut this freeway down to a crawl. For door-to-door shuttle service from Denver International Airport, call Colorado Mountain Express (800) 334-7433. The one-way fare is \$84; for three booking together, \$74 each; for five, \$65 each.

**LIFT TICKETS AND LODGING:** Single-day lift ticket prices are \$75 for adults until Dec. 14, when it goes up to \$92. Children pay \$45, or \$49 as of Dec. 14. Multiday passes come with an additional discount if purchased online, seven days in advance. A four-of-six-day pass is \$308 for adults, \$156 for kids 5-12, and \$268 for seniors 65 and up. Kids 5 and under are free.

Alternatively, purchase a lift ticket-and-lodging package; call Keystone Lodging at (877) 753-9786. Six nights in the most affordable two-bedroom, two-bath condo during the same period is \$1,121, or \$187 a night. For single hotel rooms, ask about the 103-room Inn at Keystone and the 180-room Keystone Lodge, a four-diamond Rock Resort.

**MORE INFORMATION:** Listed at [www.keystone.snow.com](http://www.keystone.snow.com) are prices, ski rentals, lessons, special clinics, recreation, events, dining and lodging. The trail map has everything, from trails, lifts, restaurants and ski school to roads, activities, restaurants and shuttle bus stops.

Heaping platters of thick grilled steaks, barbecued chicken, grilled fish and roasted vegetables filled our table, crowded next to pots of hot Swiss raclette and bubbling fondue, served with hunks of bread and sliced roast potatoes. The food was delicious, the dress casual and the atmosphere so boisterous that even howling babies could hardly be heard.

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