



STEVE HAGGERTY • McClatchy-Tribune News Service

Even if there's no snow in town, the peaks are great for March skiing in Park City, Utah. One tip for maximum slope time: Follow the sun.

Making the most of the slopes in any weather

• Use these tips – where and when to go – to maximize your ski vacation.

By ANNE Z. COOKE and STEVE HAGGERTY
McClatchy-Tribune News Service

WHISTLER, CANADA - "A little tip to remember," said John at Whistler Ski Resort in British Columbia's Coastal Mountains.

"In early season start late, and in late season start early," he said. "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 the slopes are a mile from your house and you're skiing on a bargain-priced locals-only lift pass.

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 Snowcat drivers groom selectively, often leaving baby bumps on 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 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 — light-weight bomber jackets, rad sun glasses 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 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 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. Today's ski resorts also offer other winter sports, most of them weatherproof. 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 ballgame. Shop on Main Street. Tour the local microbrewery. Visit the history museum. Go to a movie. And wait for the sun to shine.

FOR 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

know + go

Northern Ireland hopes 'Thrones' holds treasure

"Game of Thrones" has drawn in millions of viewers. Can it bring in tourists, too? Tourism officials in Northern Ireland say they are looking at ways to capitalize on the success of HBO's fantasy TV series. Much of the "Game of Thrones" is filmed in Northern Ireland, which provides a backdrop of castles and rugged coastlines for the series' fictional land of Westeros. In announcing the strategy, Northern Ireland's Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster said she wanted to attract more than 2 million visitors a year to Northern Ireland by 2016, compared to some 1.8 million people in 2013.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Site sorts out lodging options for you

Can't decide where to stay? You can compare hotel options against home and apartment rentals, B&Bs, hostels and more at AllTheRooms.com. When you type in your destination, a series of tabs appears across the top of your search results: All, Hotels, Homes & Apts., Rooms & Hostels, B&Bs and Amazing. The Amazing section shows you the markdown and has links so you can compare prices on other sites, such as Expedia, Jetsetter, Hotels.com and others.

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Travel insurance not such a deal, league says

The 114-year-old National Consumers League concluded recently that travel insurance is usually a bad deal because most policies are riddled with exceptions that allow insurance companies to reject claims for payoffs. Most insurance companies won't disclose their track record for paying out claims, making it nearly impossible to judge whether insurance is worth the money, the league points out. The most common exceptions used by insurance companies to reject your payout are illnesses involving a pre-existing medical condition. The U.S. Travel Insurance Association disagreed, saying policies that are rife with exceptions are usually cheaper.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

bank rates

This chart shows the worth of the U.S. dollar compared with other world currencies as of Wednesday. The information comes from Oanda (www.oanda.com), an online service that updates rates daily. Rates do not include fees, commissions and profit margins calculated by banks, exchanges or credit cards. The easiest and usually least expensive way to change money is by using an ATM to withdraw money at your destination.

	\$1 U.S. =
Australia	1.09 Aus. dols.
Canada	1.06 Can. dols.
China	6.11 yuan
E.U.*	0.73 euros
Great Britain	0.61 pounds
India	60.8 rupee
Japan	103.1 yen
Mexico	12.8 pesos
New Zealand	1.2 N.Z. dols.
Norway	6.13 krona
Russia	32.7 ruble
Sweden	6.53 krona
Switzerland	0.89 francs

* European Union countries using the euro currency are Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia and Spain.

« IN THE EARLY SEASON START LATE, AND IN THE LATE SEASON START EARLY. »

John at Whistler Ski Resort