

# For best ski trips, start with internet

But website quality varies; here are tips to help you search

BY ANNE Z. COOKE  
Tribune News Service

TABERNASH, Colo. — Ready or not, powder hounds, here comes the snow.

On Sept. 29, the first snowfall of the season dusted Colorado ski resorts, dropping just enough white flakes for impatient snowboarders to score a downhill run through the trees. But the storm was just an opener for the main event.

A couple of days later, another whiteout blew over the Rocky Mountains, leaving a foot of feathery-soft snow on most resorts, from 12 inches at Snowmass, in the Roaring Fork Valley, to 14 inches at Loveland and 18 inches at Steamboat, in the Yampa Valley. And within the week, 3 more inches.

Though the official ski season doesn't launch until Thanksgiving, when nighttime temperatures are cold enough to make and keep snow, an early winter could mean a long one.

Before the internet, preseason planning was simple. You skied at the same place you skied every year. Now, with millions of bits of data socked away in dozens of poorly organized resort websites, navigating from one screen to the next is headache fodder.

I started my search with one of last season's favorites, Snowmass Ski Resort, in Colorado, just to see what's new. Faster chairlifts, redesign of the trail system, new top-of-the-peak restaurants, that kind of thing.

Snowmass, one of the Aspen Ski Co.'s four resorts next door to one another, has runs rated for all skill levels fanning down from four high peaks: black diamond widow-makers plunging down vertical steeps, gentle beginners' green trails and miles of



Deep powder drifts in a forest glade after a snowstorm in Aspen, Colo. It's time to think about your next ski trip.

STEVE HAGGERTY/COLORWORLD

swooping intermediate blue runs.

The on-slope restaurants are as good as anything you'll find anywhere, and ski-in ski-out lodging tucked into the trees is a feature, one I'm too spoiled to give up.

The Aspen-Snowmass website didn't disappoint either. A single site with four divisions, the graphics were inviting and easy to

follow, with story-telling photos, charts, maps, lists of lessons, kids' ski school signups, apres-ski events, other winter activities and rates.

My other resort favorite, Park City Resorts, in Utah, is a big, newly renovated family-friendly ski mountain with a historic base area village. But Park City, now merged with the Canyon, is a Vail property, one

of 15 ski resorts owned or managed by the real estate investment giant, Vail Resorts.

The result is a single [vail.com](http://vail.com) website for all 15 ski areas, with a handy list of names, a quick click from one to the next. But forcing 15 geographically dispersed, different ski resorts into a single mold homogenizes — and commercializes — the ski experience.

Some of the best ski areas have created clubs, joining forces to compete.

The first is the Mountain Collective, whose shadowy green home page charms like velvet.

An association of independent ski areas, the Collective is a club of 16 charismatic, sometimes wild and woolly resorts promoting unforgettable adventures.

Some of the members you'll know — Aspen-Snowmass and Squaw Valley/Alpine Meadows, in California's Sierra Nevadas. Others you may not, including Coronet Peak, in New Zealand, and Revelstoke, in Canada, known for the continent's longest vertical drop: a wowie 5,620 feet.

Colorado Ski Country's eye-catching site represents 21 large and small ski and snowboard resorts. As a hub, Colorado Ski posts each site's latest news, weather reports and special offers. Links to each individual site lead to the nitty-gritty. Ever skied at Eldora, or Monarch, Wolf Creek or Powderhorn? Ever taken the kids to Howelsen or Sunlight? Colorado has no shortage of skiable mountains.

If you're planning to ski more than two weeks in advance, advises former Olympic snowboarder Erica Mueller, at Crested Butte Resort, near Gunnison, Colo., "look for a science-based website, like [www.opensnow.com](http://www.opensnow.com)." Founded by skier Joel Gratz, a Colorado-based meteorologist, the site has been monitoring weather forecasts and future storms for the last six years.

"That's where most of the ski resorts I know go to look ahead," says Mueller. Like most skiers, Gratz's search for the best powder snow began as a hobby.

Then it evolved into a full-time occupation. "What separates us from other sites is that we know what powder skiers like," says Gratz. "So we focus on which resorts are likely to get the next powder storm."

For more information on all things ski, from weather forecasts to package deals and late-season discounts, I go to [www.onthesnow.com](http://www.onthesnow.com). When it comes to planning the best ski vacation ever, you can never know enough.

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IAN MCLAREN/LONACH HIGHLAND & FRIENDLY SOCIETY

A competitor gets ready to toss the caber at the Highland games in Lonach, Scotland.

## TIPS, TRIPS & DEALS

### Get your game on in Scotland

BY PHIL MARTY | Chicago Tribune

The Highland games are a Scottish tradition that dates to the 11th century. In modern times, on weekends from May to September, kilt-wearing contestants compete in unusual sports such as the caber toss, in which contestants throw a nearly 20-foot-long, 175-pound wooden pole. Peregrine Adventures is offering a 14-day/13-night tour that begins Aug. 22 and includes a day at the games and the chance to try your hand at some of the tests of strength. The tour, which begins in Glasgow and ends in Edinburgh, also samples a broad swath of Scottish culture, starting with a walking food tour in Glasgow. There's also a chance to watch a game of shinty, a rugged sport that originated in the sixth century as training for warriors. A scenic trip on the Jacobite Steam Train and a ferry ride will lead to explorations of the Isle of Skye. Also on tap: visits to the Glen Ord Whisky Distillery, a kilt shop and a ceilidh gathering for some traditional Scottish dancing. The small-group trip is priced from \$4,895 per person, double occupancy, which doesn't include international airfare. Info: 855-832-4859, [tinyurl.com/ycf0evfw](http://tinyurl.com/ycf0evfw)

## Thanksgiving travel

Want to hit the road for Thanksgiving rather than stuff yourself with turkey at home? The folks at DK Eyewitness Travel, known for their lovely guidebooks, have put together a list of nine destinations they think would be perfect for the holiday. Santa Fe, N.M., tops the roster, and they say its unique Southwest cuisine can have you trading your traditional Thanksgiving turkey for basted turkey with green chile pinon stuffing, pumpkin pasta and jalapeno chorizo dressing. Also making the list are Reykjavik, Iceland; Manuel Antonio National Park, Costa Rica; Munich; Toronto; Hawaii; Seattle; San Diego; and Vail, Colo. Read about why you should consider them for Thanksgiving at [tinyurl.com/y9czrxol](http://tinyurl.com/y9czrxol).

## Romance in the Rockies

If you've been dreaming of a Colorado Rocky Mountain high, the state's tourism folks have you covered with a new list of 10 High Altitude Honeymoons and Romantic Colorado Getaways. The selection includes lodgings at high altitudes that come with lofty views — and price tags to match. Sitting at the highest elevation — 12,000 feet — is the Tempter House at Telluride Ski Resort. It sleeps just two and will set you back \$7,500 for an overnight package. For large groups, the Game Creek Chalet sits at 10,500 feet overlooking Vail Village. It sleeps 10, and can be had for \$1,800 a night. For an additional charge you can also have a private chef do the cooking. Check out all 10 lodgings at [tinyurl.com/yctp3up](http://tinyurl.com/yctp3up).

Phil Marty is a freelance reporter.



TILE

## GEAR BOX

BY JUDI DASH  
Los Angeles Times

Misplaced stuff is a vacation hazard. Enter the Tile Style Pro Series tracker.

The small device can hook onto a key ring or luggage clip, and it's also slim enough to stash in a wallet or a pouch affixed to the back of a cellphone

case.

At 1.5 inches square, it's slightly heavier than some competitors, but its 200-foot range and alarm up to 98 decibels (can be turned down using app controls) make the trade-off acceptable.

The "style" version is primarily satin white, while the "sport" model is dark slate.

The waterproof device uses Bluetooth to communicate with its companion app on your smartphone or tablet and is compatible with newer iOS and Android devices.

Info: Tile Style Pro costs \$35 for one, \$60 for a pack of two; [www.thetileapp.com](http://www.thetileapp.com).

Judi Dash is a freelancer.

## NEED TO KNOW

### 'Breaking Bad' house gets fence to foil fans

Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — The real Albuquerque house made famous by the methamphetamine-making character Walter White in the AMC hit TV series "Breaking Bad" is getting a fence.

The owners are installing a 6-foot wrought iron fence on the front of the house used in the series, starring Bryan Cranston. The move comes after the owners have complained of countless



RUSSELL CONTRERAS/AP

Fence poles are set up outside the house seen in "Breaking Bad." Fans of the show flock to the house for selfies.

fans wanting snapshots and selfies of the house.

"Breaking Bad" follows White, played by Cranston, producing and selling methamphetamine with a former student, Jesse Pinkman, played by Aaron Paul.

The show ended in 2013, but tourism companies in Albuquerque still embrace the drug-addled series and give "Breaking Bad" tours

showcasing spots made popular in the show.

The Albuquerque Convention & Visitors Bureau created a website of the show's most popular places around town to help tourists navigate. The Walter White house is not listed, however. Still, a number of fan sites give the address and photos of the house are posted on Instagram almost every day.