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Waiting for snowflakes

[Travel](#) | Anne Cooke 25 Oct 2017





Ready or not, powder hounds, here comes the snow. On September 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 white-out blew over the Rocky Mountains, leaving feathery-soft snow on most resorts.

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

And for recreational skiers - like me - it was a reminder: time again for the annual online marathon in search of resort news, weather forecasts, family discounts, new bumps clinics and affordable lodging.

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Tender Details:

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17-026	A	Level 6, Departures, South Concourse, Terminal 1 (Restricted Area)	24
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Ms. Dorothy Tan
Assistant General Manager
Retail & Advertising
Airport Authority Hong Kong
5/F, HKIA Tower, 1 Sky Plaza Road
Hong Kong International Airport
Lantau, Hong Kong

Enquiries: (852) 2183 3140 (Ms. Lee) /
(852) 2183 3266 (Ms. Tong)
Email: retail2@hkiairport.com
Fax: (852) 2182 3105
Website: www.hongkongairport.com
(Tenders & Notices section)

HONG KONG INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

1. 2014 Consumers Shopping and Dining Behavior Tracking Survey May 2017 by Omnia Limited

Before the internet, preseason planning was simple. You skied at the same place you skied every year. Now it's a bite-your-fingernails chore guaranteed to turn anyone's hair a lighter shade of gray.

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.

Just for fun, type "ski resorts" into your favorite search engine. I did and produced a formidable 3,410,000 hits. "Lake Tahoe skiing" scored 60,600 hits, but that included ski lodges and restaurants. Vail Resorts found 472,000 results, including resorts, hotels and real estate. That's a lot of choices to winnow to one.

Do you know what you want? That's step one. Trail maps and advanced bumps clinics? Popular kids' stay-and-ski-free programs? Or maybe you'd like to earn some points at an independently owned and managed ski mountain, one of those much-loved outliers known for its special ambience and home-grown culture?

When I started looking, I decided that if a website didn't have a home page that popped up with an easy-to-read, color-saturated photo of skiers schussing down snowy mountain trails, it was probably doomed. Visuals count. And if it didn't include an in-your-face list of subtopics, I stopped looking.

Then I took the easy way out. I started with last season's two best favorites, Snowmass Ski Resort in Colorado and Park City Resort in Utah just to see what's new. Faster chairlifts, redesign of the trail system, new top-of-the-peak restaurants, that kind of thing.

Snowmass (www.aspensnowmass.com), one of the Aspen Ski Company's four resorts, is big and broad, a fresh-air destination at any time of year. The runs here, rated for all skill levels, fan down from four high peaks: black diamond widow-makers plunging down vertical steps, gentle

beginners' green trails, and kilometers of 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.

When I first started to ski, the parking lot was 1.2 kilometers from the snow, walking in stiff, plastic boots and humping skis, poles and a day pack. That was then. Nowadays I want to step out the door and glide away.

As for the Aspen-Snowmass website, it 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 daily and weekly rates. Once you'd navigated through Snowmass, the others were easy.

My other favorite, Park City Resorts (www.parkcitymountain.com), is an authentic destination on two fronts. It's not just a big, newly renovated family- friendly ski mountain but a historic base area village, a restored mining town with great restaurants and hip shops. But Park City, now merged with the Canyon, is a Vail property, one of 17 ski resorts owned or managed by the real estate investment giant, Vail Resorts.

The result is a single website (www.vail.com) for all 17 ski areas. This is an advantage for Vail, of course, facilitating resortwide promotions. For skiers there's a handy list of names, a quick click from one to the next. But forcing 17 geographically dispersed, very 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 (www.mountaincollective.com), whose shadowy green home page charms like velvet. An association of independent ski areas, the Collective is a club of 16 charismatic, unique and sometimes wild and wooly resorts dedicated to promote adventures.

Some 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: 13,380 meters.

Buy the Collective's 33 ski-day adult pass for US\$489 (HK\$3.814) and you can ski two days each at six of the 16 - say, Sugar Bush, Taos Ski Valley, Mammoth Mountain, Sun Valley, Jackson Hole and Banff Sunshine - and still have 21 ski days left.

The other essential website is Colorado Ski Country (www.coloradoski.com), a bright and eye-catching site representing Colorado's 21 large and small ski and snowboard resorts. It posts each site's latest news, weather reports and special offers, along with photos, a slide show and general information.

But without snow, no website helps. With weather patterns changing, snowfall is an increasingly dodgy topic. Depending on long-range forecasts, maybe it's better to wait a little longer before booking.

Ski resorts aren't weather forecasters, but do post ski conditions online, with current temperatures, past and recent snow levels, and sometimes even charts showing annual snowfall for the past decade.

If you're planning to ski more than two weeks in advance, advises former Olympic snowboarder Erica Mueller, "look for a science-based website, like www.opensnow.com." Founded by meteorologist Joel Gratz, the site has been monitoring weather forecasts and future storms for the last six years.

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," he says. "So we focus on which resorts are likely to get the next powder storm. After a year of testing, the site went online in November 2011, and so far, it's a success."

For more information on all things ski, from weather forecasts to package deals and late-season discounts, I go to www.onthesnow.com.

When it comes to planning the best ski vacation ever, you can never know enough.

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