

Night Skiing – North America and Europe

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Skiing Under the Lights

By Claire Walter

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In the Middle Atlantic states, the upper Midwest and the Pacific Northwest, where ski facilities cluster near metro areas, night skiing is big. Winter enthusiasts from shift workers to energetic students take to the slopes after dark. The main appeals include shorter liftlines, more moderate ticket prices and the chance to get together with (and often ski-race against) friends. Sometimes, it seems the smaller the ski hill, the bigger the night skiing aspect. Business travelers to many snowbelt cities who seek evening diversion can join locals for a few hours on the hill. No need to bring skis and boots, because rental equipment is readily available. In North America, ski areas in some regions compete for the night skiing market, and some actually attract their biggest crowds after dark. Abroad, where it is still more of a novelty, fewer slopes are floodlit in most places.

Whenever the lights go on, skiers become more intense, more focused as they move from circle of constant light to circle of constant light. Without visual distractions, skiing is a tactile, auditory and, yes, sensual. Skiers have a feel as if they are flying, rather than floating, over the snow. They feel nuances of terrain under their feet, especially when crossing a dim area between light pools, and they become aware of the sound of their ski edges slicing the surface of the snow. Because of this sensory uniqueness, night skiing puts a different spin on the sport for experienced skiers who might be bored with relatively easy runs by daylight. Yet night skiing carries no inherent dangers, because novice and intermediate, rather than expert, is groomed before the second shift. Sunset may drop temperatures, but the wind often dies down too.

Small ski areas often light everything but their steepest slopes, turning them into bright islands. Night skiing is catching on at destination resorts too, enabling vacationers to mingle with locals under the lights. Larger places usually illuminate just a few long runs, which appear as shining ribbons cascading down a dark mountainside. Whatever its shape and scale, night skiing takes place in its own concentrated realm of bright snow and surrealistic shadows. Its rhythm and ambiance are such a contrast to day skiing that it's virtually a different sport. There are no panoramic views, no sunny spots, no shady spots, no clouds obscuring the sun and flattening the light, but there is a surprising intimacy to night-lit slopes that are corridors of brilliance boring through the surrounding darkness.

There's more to night skiing than just skiing. Night skiers come in from the cold for coffee in front of a warm fire, a burger and a brew in a congenial pub, hot soup from the cafeteria or even a nice meal in a candlelit restaurant.

STOWE, VT. Thursdays through Sundays (nightly during holiday weeks), 4 to 10 p.m.. \$20 in regular season, \$22 during the holidays. Tel. 802-253-3000.

KEYSTONE, COLO. Thanksgiving and to early April, ongoing to 9 p.m. nightly. Any single- or multi-day ticket valid at Keystone, Breckenridge, Vail or Beaver Creek can be used. Tel: 970-468-4111.

PARK CITY, UTAH Christmas through March, 4 to 7 p.m.. nightly. Multi-day lift tickets are valid; otherwise, the cost is \$18. Tel. 801-647-8111.

ALYESKA, ALAS. December to March, weekends, from 4:30 to 9:30 p.m., \$16. Also \$39 twilight ticket good from 1:30 to 9:30 p.m.. Tel. 907-754-1111.

SAINT-SAUVEUR, QUE. Most of the season, 3 p.m. till closing (until 10:30 Monday through Saturday and 9 p.m. Sunday). CDN\$24 (1996-97); two-for-one Mondays.

Various multi-area, day- and night-skiing tickets also offered. Tel: 514-227-4671.

BIG WHITE, B.C. Mid-December to early April, 3:30 to 9 p.m. nightly, CDN\$16. Tel. 250-765-3101.

LICHTENBERG, AUSTRIA Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 6 to 9 p.m. Tel.: 07239/210-0.

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