

Ski Resort Roundup – USA and Canada

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EASY STREET SKIING

Easy runs are comfortable for beginners, but also offer a relaxed ride for experienced skiers

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For beginning skiers they are highways to the happiness that comes the excitement of a new sport. For intermediate and advanced skiers, they provide an opportunity to cruise a long, languorous downhill run. What are they? Beginner trails, of course, which are not just for new skiers to practice on, but are often the longest, prettiest, most beguiling runs on any mountain.

If you are taking learn-to-ski classes, your instructor will probably lead you from the learning slope right near the lodge to a long, easy run down the whole mountain. You'll find yourself returning there when you're skiing on your own. Skiing is a color-coded sport, so when you're on your own, head for the green. At every North American ski area, a green-circle trail marker means the run is one of the "easiest" on the mountain, a blue square means it is "more difficult" and a black diamond means it is one of the "most difficult." Each area rates its runs in comparison with each other not against an absolute standard.

Green-circle trails are different from green-circle slopes. Slopes are wide, barely tilted meadows—usually at the bottom of the mountain—that serve as learning hills. Wide, immaculately groomed and filled with ski school classes, they are fine for learning and refining rudimentary skiing skills—but they are a ski area's equivalent of the kiddie pool. Green-circle trails are part of a real mountain experience. They wind sinuously down, usually all the way from the summit to the base.

Such a trail is the first place you'll really feel as if you have become a skier. These trails, which might measure a mile on even a modest ski hill. When they metamorphose into winter ski trails, they are gentle giants that generally contain no tricky spots. Designed for novices, they also provide are ego-boosters for newly minted intermediates and a pleasurable interlude for experienced skiers. (Just don't speed, because most of these trails are designated slow-skiing zones.)

The first such run I ever skied was the Toll Road at Stowe, Vermont. It required a long ride on single chairlift that was old even when I was young—so long that skiers borrowed wool blankets to keep from freezing. When I unloaded from the lift and gazed at a summit warming hut called the Octagon caked in rime ice and then around at the Green Mountains, I literally and figuratively felt on top of the world. I had taken a couple of ski lessons by then, so I made slow, studied turns down the entire 3.7 miles

with no falls and just minor moments of terror. At the bottom, I still felt exhilarated. The single chair has been replaced by a super-fast four-seat lift, the Octagon is now a sizable cafeteria, and I ski pretty well. Yet whenever I ski Stowe, I take a run down the Toll Road. I also like to cruise a long green whenever I visit a new resort—or whenever I just want to ski on easy street. Here are ten of North America's best:

[Ed.: If you delete the anecdote, change the last sentence to: Here is a ten-pack of some of North America's best such runs.]

Killington, Vermont, is the biggest mountain in with the longest ski season in the East. It boasts the most lifts, trails, skiable acreage and snowmaking capacity--and, not surprisingly, the longest run in North America: the aptly named Juggernaut. This trail is a curiosity—and a lot of work. Some stretches are so flat that skiers need to shuffle and pole just to move, and snowboarders don't even bother with it. A better bet is Great Eastern, which at five miles still affords bragging rights. A few little dips and rolls spice the trail's steady pitch, as it threads through the woods from the top of Killington Peak to the base station of the Skyeship [stet], Killington's speedy and luxurious gondola. With top-to-bottom snowmaking, Great Eastern offers consistent snow. Call (800) 621-MTNS or (802) 422-3333.

Mont Ste.-Anne, Quebec's La Familiale looks down upon the town of Beaupré and ice-choked St. Lawrence River, arguably the finest views of any green-circle trail in the East. In addition, the run is on the mountain's south side, meaning that it snares as much sun and warmth as possible during a Canadian winter. *And* in addition to snowmaking, it is illuminated for night skiing for those who just can't get in enough sliding by day. Call (800) 463-1568 or (418) 827-4561.

Bear Claw at **Loon Mountain, New Hampshire**, rambles for two and a half miles. From the Summit Lodge it arcs around the mountain's western perimeter, affording views of forested hillsides and frozen lakes. This busy trail sweeps past a major trail intersection called Grand Junction, passes several lifts and ends up at the eastern end of the base area. Since several blue-square and black-diamond trails diverge from it, Bear Claw is ideal for sturdy novices who want to experiment with some challenge and for advanced skiers who find that cruising a green satisfies only for so long. Call (800) 227-4191 or (603) 745-6281.

Picking just one green-circle trail at **Beaver Creek, Colorado**, presents a dilemma, because several easy streets crown the summit. Unload from the Birds of Prey Express chairlift at 11,440 feet, gaze at breathtaking views and ponder the choice of runs arrayed before you. Red Buffalo, Booth Gardens or M.I., never crowded and designated as family skiing zones? Powell, Piney, Flat Tops or Sheephorn, wide and so well groomed that they seem manicured? If we had to pick one, it would be Upper Centennial, right beside the lift and ideal for showing off. And at quitting time, you can ski green-circle Cinch or ride the Centennial Express chairlift down to Beaver Creek Village. Call (800) 427-8308 or (970) 476-5601.

Telluride, Colorado, is famous for challenging skiing, but most of the trails on Sunshine Peak wear green. Blanketed with Colorado powder and groomed into a velvety surface, they are great to ski and also great for sightseeing. From the 10,880-foot summit, the jaw-dropping views are of the surrounding San Juan Mountains. The lower portions intertwine with the residential roads of Telluride Mountain Village's most prestigious neighborhood, so you'll ski past spectacular trailside homes. Double Cabin provides the best gawking. It even passes Oprah's mountain home. Call (800) 801-4832 or (970) 728-6900.

Sunset, Sunset West and Homeward Bound form a daisy chain of green-circle trails from the summit of **Deer Valley, Utah's** Bald Mountain. They merit a top ten listing because of lunch. This trio of trails begins at 9,400 feet, where the views range from snow-capped peaks to desert-like valleys, depending on where you look, and end at Silver Lake Lodge. This luxurious mid-mountain day lodge elevated ski area fare from fuel to cuisine. If the weather is mild, slather on sunscreen and relax at McHenry's Beach, the spacious outdoor seating area. If it is inclement, retreat indoors and allow yourself to be dazzled by the best lunch line in skidom. And when you've refueled, you can hop on the Sterling Chairlift and ski the threesome again. Call (800) 424-DEER (424-3337) or (435) 649-1000.

The name Teton Vista Traverse says it all. This long, loping run around the perimeter of **Grand Targhee, Wyoming**, presents a splendid mountain view of 13,770-foot Grand Teton, one of the most famous and formidable peaks in the Rocky Mountains, flanked by Mt. Owen, Middle Teton and South Teton, all cresting to more than 12,500 feet and lesser summits too. Yet Teton Vista Traverse is a pussycat. It follows the ridge and then drops gently down the mountain's sloping shoulder. While other ski areas may pride themselves on snowmaking might, Grand Targhee boasts of not needing any. "Snow from heaven, not from hoses," is the resort's slogan. Call (800) TARGHEE (827-4433) or (307) 353-2300.

Beginners at **Sun Valley, Idaho**, make their first turns on the gentle slopes of Dollar Mountain. When they are ready for Bald Mountain, the combination of Upper College and Lower College is the best place for a skis-on graduation ceremony. It's a big jump from delicate Dollar to big Baldy, which is big-time skiing by any measure. This complex mountain has two entry points, River Run and Warm Springs, with the two College trails following the ridgetop between these two sections. Even Baldy's green-circle runs not wimp skiing. All manner of terrain drops away from the College runs on both sides, which means newcomers are thrown in with the big boys and girls who use them to access blues and blacks. Call (800) 786-8259 or (208) 622-4111.

Ski Homewood, California, is a low-key, low-cost oasis in the high-pressure, high-price world of Tahoe skiing. Just a fraction of Homewood's 57 runs are visible from the highway, and among the hidden treasures is Homeward Bound. This green-circle boulevard links the two mountains that comprise the ski area, unfolding tantalizing views of Lake Tahoe's deep blue waters along the way. Call (916) 525-2992. [Note to ed.: no 800 number.]

Newly minted skiers rarely have the opportunity to taste the essence of high-mountain skiing—huge, tree-free bowls set against a panorama of soaring summits. **Whistler Mountain**, British Columbia, one of North America's true giants provides such an opportunity. The Burnt Stew Trail, marked with a green circle, is not a beginner run. Rather, it's a relatively easy access trail to the high-Alpine terrain that novice skiers with a little confidence can manage. Try it, and as you ski along and watch small figures riding the powder down distant slopes in Symphony Bowl, Sun Bowl or Harmony Bowl, you might well be motivated to sign up for another ski lesson or two so that you too can blast down those bowls. Call (800) 944-7853 or (604) 664-5625.

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