

Winter trip to Vermont packed with family fun

There's much more than snow sports at mountain resorts

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE NOVEMBER 13, 2013



A big powder day at Jay Peak resort in the woodsy Northeast Kingdom of Vermont

Photograph by: CREDIT Jay Peak Resort

Whatever your ride — boards, skis, tubes, sleds or sleighs — the wealth of snow sports in Vermont is a treasure for Montrealers.

But, besides precious powder days, major steeps, catching air and snow-bunny fun, Vermont's snow-sports areas have total tourism cred off-mountain, too. Visitors can get stoked for artisan-inspired gourmet cuisine, New England warmth and rockin' après-sports with dozens of local brews and maple martinis gently stirred with Vermont Spirits craft vodka.

Snow-making and snowboarding are trending at Stowe Mountain Resort, the most sophisticated vacation development in the northeast, during any season.

For me, winter rules. And I am not alone. About 20 per cent of Stowe's visitors come from Quebec during snow season, when they can make first tracks on the woodsy Goat Trail or master a bump run on the daunting National. Novices also have a new option: an extra-long, covered Magic Carpet surface lift on mellow Spruce Peak.

Stowe has recently invested \$8 million in snow-making — that's almost 10 times more than any other New England resort — to create a high-efficiency, eco-conscious system that makes more white stuff while using less energy.

Park sharks will love the rails and boxes of the new Jib Nation on Lower North Slope, plus the expanded freestyle features on Lower Standard, in addition to the biggest jumps on Tyro. Home of Burton Snowboards, Stowe has a Burton High Performance Demo Centre and a full complement of Burton programs.

Deals abound. You can sharpen your game with Stowe for Starters, which includes a lift ticket and two 90-minute snow-school sessions — that's almost all-day learning, for US\$162. Or stay overnight at a discount with the Countdown to Winter. If you book by Nov. 22, you get 20 per cent off at the swish Stowe Mountain Lodge (without lift tickets), which has handsome condos, a heated outdoor swimming pool, fine dining and a lavish spa. The Ski and Stay Package starts at about \$180 p.p., based on two people in a studio, or about \$136 p.p., based on four in a one-bedroom suite.

When you unbuckle, Stowe's essential experience includes contemporary American cuisine at Solstice in the Stowe Mountain Lodge, a visit to the Vermont Ski and Snowboard Museum and an evening at the Spruce Peak Performing Arts Center. Considering that Stowe is a vintage village with about 5,000 permanent residents, the lineup is jaw-dropping and includes: the Opéra de Paris' La Gioconda in Italian with English subtitles on Nov. 22; Warren Miller's dazzling downhill film, Ticket to Ride, capturing incredible snow thrills in Kazakhstan and Iceland, Dec. 29; the Rudolf Nureyev State Ballet Theatre of Russia staging Sleeping Beauty, Feb. 1.

Bolton Valley focuses on family-friendly and budget-conscious skiing and riding with the added perks of three terrain parks and Vermont's most extensive night skiing. The slopeside village has all you need — two restaurants, a sport shop and hotel and condo lodging, an arcade for teens, bouncy inflatable games for youngsters and an indoor pool, spa and sports centre.

Bolton's prices start at \$84 p.p., with two to a room, continental breakfast and a lift ticket. The Powder Pass offers five days of skiing for the price of three, and you can use it throughout the season, or treat family or friends all on the same day. It costs US\$199 for adults or \$149 for juniors, students and seniors, so that comes to about \$40 and \$30 per day, for each of five days (compared to full daily rates of \$69 and \$59). Bolton's neighbours are entertaining, too. Daycare services are available on weekends and holidays, so parents can hop over to Burlington for dining and shopping.

Across the border from Mansonville, Que., Jay Peak Resort invested US\$330 million over the past few years to create an all-American family destination in the woody Northeast Kingdom of Vermont and then added a dash of showy Dubai with its spectacular Pump House Indoor Water Park. Once your kids have splashed around these exciting slides and surfs, they won't want to go home.

On mountain, Jay has edge, in spades. Its chutes and cliffs are unique. Hard-core shredders and skiers barrel down churning steeps and bounce through the trees on 22 gladed runs. Jay is keeping its downhill day ticket at \$65, with Canadian funds taken at par, which is an advantage now that the

loonie has slipped below the U.S. greenback.

“Our aim is to make skiing and riding affordable again,” said Bill Stenger, Jay’s president.

A family of four can bunk down at the new-in-2012 Hotel Jay for about \$105 p.p., including lift tickets and access to the Pump House. The marquee attraction for 2013-2014 is the expansion of Stateside, with an 85-room hotel adjacent to a chairlift, a skiers’ lodge and a rental centre. The Grand Opening special, offered Dec. 20-22, will be \$89 p.p., double occ., with lift tickets and a sample of Long Trail beer.

IF YOU GO

Discounts might not apply during certain high-season holidays periods such as Christmas-New Years; Martin Luther King weekend, Jan 18-20; and Spring Break weeks. For children, most areas offer free skiing and riding, and some offer free accommodation.

Vermont Ski Areas Association: 802-223-2439, www.skivermont.com; information on approximately 20 Alpine and 30 Nordic ski areas.

Bolton Valley: 877-9BOLTON (877-926-5866), www.boltonvalley.com.

Jay Peak: 800-451-4449, www.jaypeakresort.com.

Stowe Mountain Resort: 800-253-4754, www.stowe.com; Stowe Mountain Lodge: 888-478-6938, www.stowemountainlodge.com.

© Copyright (c) The Montreal Gazette

Previous

Next



Bolton Valley Resort in Vermont has superb family-friendly night skiing and nearby nightlife in Burlington.

Photograph by: Justin Cash/Bolton Valley

