



The new Adventure Center is seen behind Stowe Mountain Lodge, dusted with the season's first snowfall last month. SCOTT BRAATEN/STOWE MOUNTAIN RESORT/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHECKING IN

Kids'-eye view of updated Stowe resort



ROCHELLE LASH

Kids rule at the newly expanded Stowe Mountain Resort.

The largest leisure development in the northeastern United States boasts a revolutionary array of entertainment and sports tailored for youth, from toddlers to teens.

The resort has expanded into a car-free community, the Spruce Peak Village, where juniors can shop, eat, swim, play and snowboard or ski on their own. To boot, guests who stay at the slopeside Stowe Mountain Lodge are privy to discounts of up to 49 per cent on lift tickets at certain times, particularly mid-week.

Among the activity highlights: the \$28-million Adventure Center opened this year with an indoor climbing gym; the Spruce Peak Performing Arts Center offers new Kids Free tickets; and skiers age five and under ski and ride for free.

"Awesome," said 10-year-old Jason Stein of Montreal, whose family vacations regularly at Stowe Mountain Lodge. I joined him for a day of play, junior-style.

"Let's start with indoor rock climbing," he proposed.

OK, you first, I thought.

Amazing activities: The grand, rustic-contemporary Adventure Center is the new action hub, steps from Spruce Peak lifts and Stowe Mountain Lodge.

It houses Stowe Cubs Child Care for children from three months old to three years old; the Ski and Ride School; and the Adventure Outfitters shop.

Stowe Rocks is a state-of-the-art facility in the Adventure Center that offers indoor climbing. It includes a bouldering area, a 13-metre climbing tower and a wall of eight climbing stations, including overhangs and ledges.

Jason took a lesson in beginner rope techniques with a certified guide and mastered a novice route up the wall, grabbing user-friendly handles to conquer cracks and crevices.

Still, snow sports are at the core of Stowe's winter. At the Burton Learn to Ride Center, snowboarders can practise on terrain parks, with jumps, rails and jibs.

For learning, the Pathfinders group starts at age three, and the Stowed Teen Camp covers bumpy terrain, glades and parks.

Stowe's new outdoor ice rink is a sweet spot at the heart of the Spruce Peak Village. It has become a teen hangout, and it's free. If you haven't got your own

blades, rentals are available.

Luxurious lodging: Stowe Mountain Lodge is a slopeside condo-hotel with grand alpine architecture of timber, stone and glass; it has 300 handsome suites and award-winning cuisine.

The lodge has a lofty four-star rating by Forbes Travel Guide and is ranked among the best in the United States by U.S. News & World Report.

But luxury is not part of a kid's lexicon. Let's talk fun — particularly weatherproof fun.

The lodge's huge outdoor heated pool (about 29 C) is a terrific off-slope option for swimming laps and water games.

The KidSpa, for age six and up, is a decadent delight, with Mini-Me facials and Princess pedicures. The Chillax de-stressing experience incorporates aromatherapy, hand and foot treatments and deep breathing.

Food: The Canteen in the Adventure Center is a sassy new supper stop. Open at 5 p.m. from Thursday to Sunday, it has pizza, subs, salads, soups — and movie screenings on some weekend nights.

Solstice, the Vermont-inspired dining room in Stowe Mountain Lodge, serves gourmet snacks such as garlic-Parmesan fries and maple-habanero wings, plus a children's menu of flatbreads, steak, salmon, hotdogs and strawberry-rhubarb sodas.

For on-slope lunches, the budget-conscious Mansfield and

Midway cafeterias dish out burgers, chili, panini and soup. Midway also offers barbecue options. Cliff House, perched atop Mount Mansfield, Vermont's highest peak, has sweeping views plus kid-friendly choices such as mac and cheese, and mini-pizzas.

On the plaza, the lavish skiers' chalet Spruce Base Camp takes it up a notch at the Great Room Grill, with food stations featuring farm-to-table entrées, tacos, soups, burgers and poutine. At Skinny Pancake, the specialty crêpe is stuffed with an energy booster of honey, bananas and peanut butter.

And if young guests of Stowe Mountain Lodge get hungry or lose a mitten, they can charge food and purchases to their hotel rooms or use the Stowe Evolution Card, a lift pass linked to a credit card. (Yes, grown-ups can set a limit.)

Kids' shows — free: The new Kids Free program at the Spruce Peak Performing Arts Center offers one under-18 ticket with each advance adult purchase. Kids Free shows include Cinderella by the State Ballet Theatre of Russia (Jan. 28), as well as music and movies.

The Family Four Pack also offers discounts on certain shows, such as Flip Fly Fun!, a new circus production (Dec. 28). Call 802-760-4634 or visit sprucepeakarts.org. rochelle@rochellelash.com twitter.com/rochellelash

IF YOU GO

Stowe Mountain Resort: 800-253-4754; stowe.com, sprucepeak.com. Snow Days discounts of up to 49 per cent on lift tickets apply at certain times, when booking at Stowe Mountain Lodge.

Stowe Mountain Lodge: 888-478-6938, 802-253-3560; stowemountainlodge.com; 7412 Mountain Rd., Stowe, Vt. Pet-friendly, US\$125 per visit.

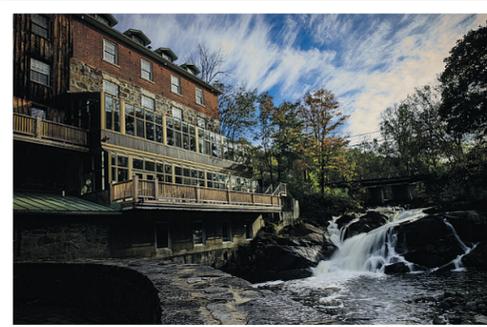
Price: Snow Days promotion offers 20 per cent off on select dates. Rates fluctuate: in early season, classic hotel rooms for four people start at about US\$183 Sunday to Thursday, or US\$239 Friday to Saturday; studios with kitchenettes for four start at about US\$239 Sunday to Thursday, or US\$279 Friday to Saturday. Rates include outdoor heated pool, outdoor hot tubs, ski valet, fitness centre, skating rink. Junior suites and one-, two- and three-bedroom suites available. Extra: spa treatments, fitness classes, spa baths, US\$25.

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