



Alaska
Beyond

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Horizon Edition

Ski Excellence

Peak experiences
on the slopes

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Ski Country

Corduroy cruisers, epic steeps and fresh tracks at
Sun Valley and Mammoth Mountain

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❄️ THE EXPANSIVE MOUNTAINS to the west of Sun Valley stretch before me as I slide off the Mayday lift at the 9,150-foot summit of Bald Mountain. I turn south along the ridge, toward the series of nicely steep bowls that crown the ski area. ❄️ A quick drop off the waist-high cornice at the entry leads me into black-diamond Mayday Bowl, painted with sunshine and a silky fresh 4 inches of snow over a soft base. Perfect for arcing a few long GS turns before dropping into the narrow valley in the center of the bowl. Soon I have the necessary speed to go over the ridge and into neighboring Lefty Bowl.

To the southeast, I can see Seattle Ridge Day Lodge below me, and beyond that the airport and the city of Hailey, and in every direction, blue sky, white snow on green mountains and ... oops, better pay attention as I reach the bumps that eventually funnel down to the Broadway groomer. Head and shoulders quiet; look ahead down the line; knees loose to absorb the terrain; check my speed on the back of the next bump; plant my poles on the tops; smile big.

Somewhere in the one small lobe of my brain not focused on getting down the hill, I realize that what makes skiing so enjoyable is the pure nondigital, multisensory reality of it all: the weather in my face, the freedom to choose my own path and feel its terrain beneath my poles and skis; the thrill of my eyes and my muscles and my balance working in sync—much of the time, anyway.

And, most of all, I enjoy the immediate results of



Above left: Sun Valley is known for its long, continuously pitched runs and perfectly groomed cruisers.

Above: Seattle Ridge Day Lodge is a great spot for lunch, snacks or an afternoon break.

my actions, from pure deep-breath joy at the end of a run to a collar full of Sun Valley powder midbowl if I happen to get behind my boots in the bumps.

Generations of skiers have found joy at this flawless ski area, which has entered its 80th year while sitting at the forefront of resort technology and amenities. Another longtime favorite, dating back to the early 1940s, is Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, which has also continued to modernize and add amenities. Both resorts are justly renowned for their big slices of high-country heaven and terrific Western skiing.

Superb Sun Valley

After managing the moguls and reaching Broadway, I make long turns until I'm back at the base of Mayday chair, which delivers me to the center of a row of eight connected bowls, stretching from Christmas to Sig's. I swing under the lift line and drop into Lookout Bowl. Halfway down, I dive into the woods that top each ridge between bowls. The pitch falls away nicely; the tree spacing is right; and I spend the next hour playing bowl games all along the line.

Eventually I'm ready for some luxury cruising, so I ski past the base of Mayday chair and jump on the Seattle Ridge high-speed quad that takes me up to wide boulevards of sun-splashed corduroy. Gretchen's

Gold, Muffy's Medals, Christin's Silver—all named for Sun Valley's Olympic medal winners.

Sun Valley is justly famous for long, continuously pitched (flat spots are rare) and superbly groomed cruisers, ranging from beginner-friendly forgiving to World Cup race-course steep. The U.S. Alpine Championships, in fact, were held here last spring and will return in 2018.

Graced by as much as 230 inches of annual natural snowfall, Bald and Dollar mountains, which make up the Sun Valley resort, are also served by hundreds of high-tech, water-efficient snowmaking jets, with so much capacity that expansive runs such as Upper College can be completely covered with human-crafted powder in just three days.

Sun Valley's 18 lifts and 121 runs, spanning 3,400 feet of vertical, are almost certainly beyond what railroad baron and skier William Averell Harriman imagined back in the Great Depression when he sought a new way to attract train passengers to the West. He sent an Austrian count named Felix Schaffgotsch to find the ideal place for a winter resort, and the sovereign snow chaser eventually came to Ketchum, Idaho—known at that time for some of the largest herds of sheep in the West. The combination of perfectly angled slopes, dependable snow and lots of sunshine sold Harriman, and by 1936 he had founded Sun Valley.



Soon the world's first chairlifts were hauling well-heeled movie stars, starlets and business tycoons. Eight decades later, Sun Valley is a skiers' and riders' mountain still rich with elevated Western panache. And some youthful edge, Dollar Mountain, just southeast of the nicely renovated Sun Valley Lodge, is home to a family cross course; a larger, more challenging cross course; and three terrain parks.

I like to keep my boards within at least shouting distance of the surface, so I zoom down Lower Broadway to the Cold Springs chair, which travels to the iconic Roundhouse restaurant—7,700 feet up Baldy,

Above: Dollar Mountain is home to three terrain parks as well as two cross courses.

Where to stay at Sun Valley



Luxuriating in Room 217, which seems just slightly smaller than my entire house, it's easy to appreciate the extraordinary, many-months-and-many-millions makeover of the **Sun Valley Lodge**. The lodge's history and casual elegance are unchanged, but everything else is brand-new, more spacious, more comfortable and more family friendly. The rooms and their bathrooms are much bigger, beautifully designed and furnished, and 65 of them feature fireplaces. There is a gorgeous new 20,000-square-foot spa, a big new pool deck with a poolside café (never fear, the circular pool is still there) and an expanded lobby. Lodging at America's first destination ski resort is ready for its next eight decades. I'm ready for luscious crab tagliatelle and butternut squash bisque at the reimagined Gretchen's restaurant.

There are also many lodging options in and around Ketchum, from terrific small hotels such as the Knob Hill Inn, to condos, to luxury homes. Ketchum's newest hotel, Limelight, offers approachable luxury and is taking reservations for arrivals starting January 13, 2017. Call 855-272-5021.

When dinner calls, there are many answers, including icons such as the European-style Ram in Sun Valley Village and the authentically Old West-themed Pioneer Saloon in Ketchum. I also like Vintage Restaurant, Enoteca, the Cornerstone Bar & Grill, and the up-and-coming Warfield Distillery & Brewery. In addition, a sleigh ride to dinner at Trail Creek Cabin is always frosty, cozy fun.

For those who don't downhill ski or ride or who want a day off the slopes, there's tubing on Dollar Mountain, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, and ample opportunities for retail therapy in both Sun Valley Village and Ketchum.



77 years young, and home to exceptional food and views. I stop in for a terrific lunch, as Gary Cooper and Ernest Hemingway did before me. They probably didn't eat creamy sweet potato bisque and a luscious lamb and grilled-eggplant sandwich, but I do.

Then it's five minutes on the high-speed Christmas chair to the top, and an amazing afternoon of laps in acres of perfectly gladed terrain off the Frenchman's chair, some keep-calm-and-charge-on-style rippers down wide-open Greyhawk and Hemingway, and great drops down Limelight and Picabo's Street.

At day's end, most everyone has headed for *après*, and it's just me carving down Upper College and Flying Squirrel with the lowering sun behind me. Chasing shadows in golden light, I open it up, stand hard on the downhill ski and revel in the reality. Nothing to swipe or click, no passwords, no Game Over. Just skis and snow and slicing through crystalline Idaho air.

Sierra Superstar

A few days later I'm stepping off the Panorama Gondola at the 11,053-foot summit of California's Mammoth Mountain. This is the highest lift-served terrain west of the Rockies, and I take in 360 degrees of pretty serious skiing, and 19 degrees Fahrenheit of

slightly thin mountain air.

I could also take in a nice lunch and a geology lesson, since Mammoth's Eleven53 Cafe and Interpretive Center is right beside me, but it's still early, and there's too much to see and to ski.

California's High Sierra is spread out around me. The spires of the Minaret Range rise to the northwest. The massive granite Balloon Dome monolith hunkers to the southwest. To the east, past the town of Mammoth Lakes, a huge volcanic explosion 760,000 years ago created the bowl of the Long Valley Caldera, one of earth's largest volcanic craters. Above the caldera, a plane is on final approach to the Mammoth Yosemite Airport, about 10 minutes from town.

Also arrayed around me are 28 lifts and 3,500 skiable acres, from mellow cruisers to steep, narrow chutes. I take off down the long summit ridge, where the world falls away at a 40-degree pitch, and drop cautiously into Climax. It's a double-black-diamond bowl with an attention-getting entry of huge irregular bumps. Plan the first three turns, don't hesitate, stay out over the skis, breathe. After that, it's all fluffy white happiness.

Exiting Climax, I carve GS turns down the groomed runs in Saddle Bowl to the Panorama midstation.