



Park City, Utah Guide

For their first family ski trip, two parents decide they don't need frills—they just need a mountain. So with their 3-year-old in tow, they head to the powdery slopes of Park City, Utah, a place that's as easy on the wallet as it is on newbies.

By Heidi Julavits

Early in our marriage, my husband and I made a vow: Our future offspring would not suffer from "slope shame." Let me explain: I didn't learn to ski until I was a timid, self-conscious teenager, so I suffer acutely (still) from slope shame, the fear that I will wipe out dramatically in front of total strangers, even though I've become a quasi-competent skier. Our future offspring would not be so afflicted; our future offspring would be one of those miraculous mini experiments in gravity, bulleting down black diamonds unencumbered by poles and fear. But the only way to create a fearless creature is to expose her to high-altitude terrors at an early age. So when our daughter, Dee, turned 3, we figured it was time to go skiing.

We wanted to go somewhere with reliably good snow but didn't want to invest a lot of money in a vacation that could very well be a bust. (Dee, with her odd and abiding fear of socks, might refuse to even put on the boots.) So we decided on Park City, Utah, as our base camp. It's just 45 minutes from Salt Lake City, to which one can fly direct—and cheaply—from pretty much any large U.S. airport; we got there from New York City for about \$300 each. Once in Park City, you don't need a car but can get around via an efficient public-transportation system that connects the three resorts: Park City Mountain Resort (PCMR), Deer Valley Resort, and the Canyons.

We committed Dee to three days of ski school at PCMR, because we had been told the resort was "right outside the door" from the hotel we'd booked on Main Street. The biggest possible challenge was selling our daughter on our vision of her future fearlessness. The propaganda machine kicked into gear weeks before our trip: Skiing would be *funfunfun!* But the first morning at ski school, she didn't have so much fun. She wept. Walking in ski boots made her miserable. So the teachers, a bunch of seasoned kid wranglers, suggested we give her an incentive to get on the slope and its "magic carpet" lift (an outdoor conveyor belt). We promised Dee a ride on the Alpine Coaster—a mini roller coaster located near one of the lifts—if she cooperated. She was on her skis by the afternoon. By day two, she was skiing down the slope alone, and by day three practicing her pizza stop and proselytizing to snuffling newcomers about the wonders of the magic carpet.

The pleasantly scruffy PCMR exuded an inclusive, low-key family vibe. Families, or portions of families, milled around the lodge; it was not uncommon to see one parent in unlatched ski boots minding a baby in a stroller while, presumably, the other parent skied the trails. Additionally, PCMR permits snowboarding, and what modern-day family can't boast at least one snowboarder among its ranks? This being the West—i.e., the land of intrepid, sporty people—a number of tiny children were already free-ranging down the mountain (PCMR features long beginner-level trails, so you can take your "ski wee" pretty far uphill), while others were attached to a set of reins controlled by a parent. I clung to my city-bound, haven't-been-skiing-in-a-decade lameness like a badge of honor—but it was also heartening to realize that our daughter might escape such lameness.

Each day, my husband and I skied from 9 a.m., when we dropped off Dee, until her pickup at 3 p.m. (though we did pop by occasionally to praise her extraordinary bravery for wearing socks *and* boots). At lunchtime, we sunbathed on the porch of the Summit House, enjoying its vertiginous airplane-window views. The Steely Dan–Elvis Costello–Led Zeppelin lift soundtrack made me feel like I was a teen again—but in a happy way. Also, the spiritual benefits of exercising in the midst of such shocking gorgeousness cannot be overestimated; I'd wager that after a long winter, the Utahans who ski every few days are far less gloomy than the most diligent yoga practitioner in New York. I experienced exaltation withdrawal after I got home.

During the late afternoons, after picking up Dee, we rode the Alpine Coaster and walked around Main Street. (Many ski towns are built-from-the-ground-up fakes: fake western, fake Alpine. Atypically, Park City was a real town—most of Main Street's buildings are from the early 1900s—before it became a tourist-centric one.) We also stumbled upon a lively opening party with lots of young kids and a band at the Kimball Art Center, for the exhibit "Bravo! The Tortilla Paintings of Joe Bravo"—literally, these were paintings on tortillas.

My one nagging worry was that, as much as we had liked PCMR, we'd failed on some basic tourist level by sticking to just one resort when the others were within such easy reach. Shouldn't we have skied Deer Valley (more of a country club, by all accounts, with ski valets and astonishingly good lodge food) or the Canyons (for badder-ass skiing) for a day, just for comparison's sake? But a sage fellow I met on the PCMR lift calmed my anxieties. Asked which Park City resort he preferred, he said, as we glided uphill under the cloudless sky with the mountain gleaming below us, "Wherever there's snow under my skis is the perfect place to be."

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A big part of Park City's appeal lies in its convenience: Since it's so close to Salt Lake City's airport, you can get there and get skiing quickly, and you don't need a car. Details below, along with more easy, affordable, family-friendly ski resorts around the country.

When to Go

Park City Mountain Resort, Deer Valley Resort, and the Canyons are open from December through early April. In December and January, you'll find the most fresh snow but also the coldest temperatures (in the 20s). When we went in March, the skiing was still excellent and the weather very pleasant (in the 30s and 40s).

Where to Stay

Treasure Mountain Inn (<http://www.treasuremountaininn.com>)

Minimally staffed (but with excellent housekeeping service), it feels more like a condo complex than an inn. The studio-to-three-bedroom suites aren't exactly swanky, but they are spacious, extremely comfortable (think plump leather couches), and outfitted with full kitchens. Laundry is available in the basement. The Morning Ray Cafe off the lobby serves organic breakfasts with lots of eggy options. *255 Main Street, from \$116 a night for a studio that sleeps three.*

Marriott's Summit Watch (<http://www.marriott.com/>)

These one- and two-bedroom villas are as "on the mountain" as it gets in downtown Park City. If you already have your gear, you can just cross the street and jump on the lift to PCMR. *780 Main Street, from \$99 a night for a one-bedroom villa that sleeps three.*

Getting Around

Between 8 and 10 a.m., the Main Street bus stops just outside Treasure Mountain Inn and runs directly to PCMR (it's about a 15-minute ride; Deer Valley and the Canyons are about 15 and 20 minutes away, respectively). To get to the resorts at other times, you take a trolley car down Main Street and transfer to a bus at the Old Town Transit Center. Some buses also make stops at nearby shopping centers. All public transit is free.

Skiing

Park City Mountain Resort (<http://www.parkcitymountain.com/>)

The 3,300-acre resort has an impressive 107 trails blanketed with dry powder (no nasty slush). *Lift passes: \$83 a day for ages 13 and up, \$52 a day for ages 7 to 12, free for kids under 7 with a paying adult.*

PCMR Kids Program

Ski lessons are offered for kids ages 3 1/2 to 14 (class sizes range from three to five children). Our daughter's class, which lasted from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., included two 75-minute lessons; in between, she did art projects and climbed on indoor gym equipment. Lunch is provided in all classes, as well as gear for ages 5 and under. *Six-hour classes: \$165 each for ages 3 1/2 to 5, \$225 each for ages 6 to 14.*

Gear Rentals (<http://www.alohaskirentals.com/>)

My husband and I rented our equipment from Aloha Ski & Snowboard, located right across from PCMR's magic carpet. Best of all, you can store your equipment overnight for free there.

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Where to Eat

For the most part, locals stay away from Main Street because of the touristy prices. But if you don't have a car and don't want to ride the bus to get to the grocery stores (which are on the edge of town), these are your best options.

Davanza's (<http://www.davanzas.com/>)

This pizza-and-burger joint was our favorite place to eat by far, primarily because of the fun beer-can decor and the fact that you can feed a family of three here for less than \$30. Go with the thin-crust pizza. *690 Park Ave.*

Zona Rosa

We liked this midrange Mexican restaurant because (a) the food came very quickly, (b) the staff was friendly, and (c) the staff gave us a sippy cup and crayons without our needing to ask. 501 Main Street, (435) 645-0700.

Java Cow Café & Bakery

Homemade ice cream provides the perfect dessert bribe to get a tired kid out of the hotel room so everyone can go have dinner. 402 Main Street, (435) 647-7711.

Chimayo (<http://www.chimayorestaurant.com>)

At this famed southwestern joint, two appetizers and two margaritas cost us around \$50. The atmosphere is a little too upscale to be small kid-appropriate, so we ate our goat-cheese chiles rellenos in haste. Still, the food is delicious, and the place feels like the "real" Park City—you should go if you can get a sitter and want a date night. 368 Main Street

Other Activities

Alpine Coaster (http://www.parkcitymountain.com/winter/activities/alpine_coaster)

For those who don't—or won't—ski, this roller coaster, which weaves through the trees, provides downhill thrills. \$20 a ride for riders 54 inches tall and up, \$7 for riders under 54 inches.

Gorgoza Park (http://www.parkcitymountain.com/winter/activities/tubing_at_gorgoza)

About 10 minutes from Park City (via shuttle service from town), it has seven lanes of excellent snow tubing, plus a not-too-scary "tubing carousel" for younger children. *Snow tubing: \$3 a ride for ages 3 to 6, \$8 for ages 7 and up.*

You Might Also Like

Steamboat Ski Town, U.S.A. (<http://www.steamboat.com>)

Steamboat Springs, Colorado

The light, dry powder that makes this area a popular training ground for Olympians also makes it ideal for far-from-Olympic-level skiers. Based in a charming former ranching town, the resort offers classes for kids as young as 2 1/2, five children-only lifts, dogsledding, and a log-cabin-and-teepee play area. Stay less than 400 yards from the slope at the Bear Claw condominiums (from \$215 a night for a studio). *Thirty minutes from Yampa Valley Regional Airport.*

Mountain Washington Resort (<http://www.mountwashingtonresort.com>)

Bretton Woods, New Hampshire

Nearly 800,000 acres of national forest surround it, making for spectacular views, even from the beginners' slopes. Kids will go wild for the carousel at the new play area; parents will enjoy the grand slopeside Mount Washington Hotel, built in 1902 (visit the lounge even if you're not staying at the hotel, which is on the pricey side). For space and value, reserve a Townhomes condo (from \$259 a night for a two-bedroom). *Two and a half hours from Boston's Logan International Airport.*

Northstar-at-Tahoe Resort (<http://www.northstarattahoe.com>)**Lake Tahoe, California**

Of Lake Tahoe's seven major ski resorts, Northstar has best captured the family niche. Along with dozens of highly specialized classes, including one that teaches parents how to teach their children to ski, Northstar has 10 children's parks and an enormous ice-skating rink surrounded by fire pits for s'mores-making. All activities are within walking distance of one another; stay at the Aspen Grove condos by the slope (from \$216 a night for a studio) and you won't need to rent a car. *Forty minutes from the Reno-Tahoe International Airport (shuttle service available).*