

American express

North America's slopes offer fun for all abilities, finds Aby Dunsby

@AbraDunsby

Compared with a quick hop over to the Alps, skiing in North America requires a bit more effort. Yet those who take that transatlantic route are quick to go back, proving it's well worth the extra time and money.

Perks include guaranteed snow, thanks to frequent dumps of the glorious white stuff,

English-speaking instructors, immaculately groomed pistes, efficient lifts and a range of impressive accommodation.

For serious skiers and snowboarders, the other huge attraction is being able to play safe without having to pay for a guide or carry avalanche safety equipment: unlike in Europe, ➔



PICTURES: RICK LEWIS/MIKE CRANE PHOTOGRAPHY; LIAM DORAN/ TRAVEL ALBERTA

PICTURE: BANFF LAKE LOUISE TOURISM AND PAUL ZIZKA PHOTOGRAPHY

- ➡ every resort in North America has a marked ski boundary that's patrolled, and all terrain within it is avalanche controlled.

That's not to say the terrain is tame, though; North American resorts have marked trails classified as double-black diamond runs that are steeper than any marked runs in the Alps. Intermediate skiers are well looked after too, with wide slopes and some less tricky off-piste areas for them to practise on. For newbie skiers and snowboarders, there are many resorts to choose from, and quieter pistes make learning here less intimidating.

▶ **BEST FOR BEGINNERS**

STOWE, US: “The Vermont town of Stowe offers much more than picturesque vistas over pristine clapboard houses, white-steeped churches and covered bridges, it’s the ideal destination for beginner skiers,” says Carrier’s ski



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product manager, Liz Edwards. While advanced skiers make for Mount Mansfield, the highest peak in Vermont, beginners can catch the short gondola ride to Spruce Park. "This is a superb place to learn to ski, plus it offers lovely long tree-lined green runs to progress to with plenty of space to practise techniques, and wonderful views to reward your efforts," says Edwards.

Once they've tired of skiing for the day, there are lots more activities beginners can enjoy

from ice skating and sleigh rides to snowmobiling and ice fishing. The excellent food here is also a big draw – Stowe has more three and four-star restaurants than any ski town in Northeast America.

Book it: Carrier offers seven nights' room only at Stowe Mountain Lodge from £1,385 based on two sharing a Classic Room, including flights from Heathrow to Montreal with Air Canada and free carriage of skis/board and boots.

carrier.co.uk

TREMBLANT, CANADA:

"Tremblant is excellent for beginners, boasting empty runs, good snow and gentler slopes than the knee-deep snow of the west," says Michael Brabin, Crystal Ski Holidays' North America purchasing manager. Logistically, it's easier for clients to get there too, relaxing in the Scandinave Spa. **Book it:** Crystal Ski Holidays offers a week's bed and breakfast at the Marriott Residence Inn in Tremblant, Canada, from £805 based on two sharing, including flights from Heathrow to Montreal and transfers, departing January 11, 2017.

flight to the west coast and benefit from a short transfer. "All accommodation is ski-in/ski-out, so when the legs are starting to ache from their first days on the slopes, it's not far to get home," Brabin adds.

Clients used to the quaint villages of the Alps will feel at home here: Tremblant, in French-speaking Quebec, has a distinctly European feel, and buzzes with cafes, patisseries and bistros huddled into narrow cobbled streets. Off the slopes there's lots to keep everyone occupied, from dog-sledding to snow tubing, or relaxing in the Scandinave Spa.

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crystalski.co.uk

BEST FOR INTERMEDIATES

VAIL, US: Often dubbed the king of American ski resorts, Vail remains the most popular ski resort in the US, and that's got a lot to do with the impressive amount of snow it offers. Vail is one of America's biggest single ski areas at 5,289 acres, nearly 200 trails and 30 fast, efficient lifts – and that was before it announced the takeover of high-profile ski resort Whistler Blackcomb.

For intermediate skiers, Vail offers endless opportunities to discover fresh powder, and for when they're starting to feel a bit braver, there's Vail's Back Bowls, a skiers' playground that offers a vast terrain in which to charge through fresh powder.

"I would recommend intermediate skiers start on the North Star, Blue Oxor and Riva - the mountain's longest run,"

says George Biffen, marketing executive at Powder White.

"If they want to practise some lumps and bumps then Wildcard, Kangaroo Cornice or Baccarat are ideal, and if they want to explore some powder, then Yonder, Shangri-La and Resolution are my favourites."

Skiing aside, Vail draws in visitors thanks to its vast array of luxury hotels, restaurants and spas.

Book it: Powder White offers a week's accommodation at the Four Seasons Resort Vail from £4,574 based on two sharing, including flights from Heathrow to Denver and transfers, departing January 14, 2017.

powderwhite.com

WHISTLER, CANADA: Covering more than 8,000 acres, the largest resort in North America has a huge amount of terrain spread across both Whistler



ABOVE: Four Seasons Resort, Vail

and Blackcomb mountains for intermediates to plough into. At Whistler, there's also the opportunity for intermediates to sample some less challenging off-piste slopes, tree runs and powder without venturing outside the ski area boundary.

"The Whistler ski school is

also among the best in the world with an incredibly high standard of teaching, and lessons there should allow intermediates to take the next step towards an advanced standard,” says Michael Bennett, managing director at Ski Independence.

Whistler announced in April 



LEFT: Stowe Mountain Lodge
BELOW: Tremblant



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LEFT: Whistler

RIGHT: Breckenridge

BELOW: Cross country in Alberta



→ this year that it was developing a hefty investment plan to include an indoor adventure centre and action sports complex. Now that Vail is set to acquire Whistler, there are also plans for extra hotels and more indoor activities too.

Book it: Ski Independence offers seven nights at the Aava Whistler Hotel from £949, based on two sharing a Deluxe Room, including Heathrow-Vancouver flights and shared transfers. Book by November 15.

ski-i.com

► BEST FOR EXPERTS

BRECKENRIDGE, US: Zuber Sameja, North America product manager for Inghams, recommends Colorado's Breckenridge, which has seen a 2% increase in bookings for Inghams in the past year.

"I believe its popularity is thanks to the long seasons,



Lake Louise comes with jaw-dropping views of the Rockies that'll have clients snapping away

guaranteed snow coverage and snow-making facilities, and lively festivals," says Sameja. As the US is an early-booking market, he suggests clients book as early as possible to take advantage of discounts. Lift pass prices, including the Epic pass, which allows clients unlimited access to resorts including Vail, Whistler and Breckenridge, also become more expensive as the season gets closer. Breckenridge boasts a vast number of challenging slopes, with 36% of the terrain

labelled as 'for experts'. Peak 10 is the go-to area for those seeking black and double black trails, while The Imperial Express Super Chair will drop clients off at giddy, zig-zag heights that advanced skiers will love.

Book it: Inghams offers seven nights at The Village Hotel in Breckenridge on a room-only basis from £1,419, departing January 2017, including flights from Heathrow to Denver and resort transfers.

agents.inghams.co.uk

BANFF, CANADA: Located in Banff National Park, Banff's three ski areas are within a 50-minute drive of each other, making up 8,000 acres of skiable terrain that can all be explored using one tri-area lift ticket.

"For double black diamond runs and back-country skiing, experienced skiers should head for Lake Louise Ski Resort, where

30% of the terrain is ranked as advanced," says Amanda Newby de Saulles, Travel Alberta UK business development director.

Lake Louise, which is second in size to Whistler when it comes to Canadian ski resorts, also comes with jaw-dropping views of the Rockies that'll have clients snapping away at the landscape. To experience one of world's best off-piste destinations, de Saulles recommends Delirium Dive, a free ride zone at Sunshine Village, where skiers can feel the thrill of rugged and vertiginous slopes. A free shuttle bus connects all three areas.

Book it: 1st Class Holidays offers an 11-day Banff Ski Package from £1,499, including flights from Heathrow to Calgary, 10 nights' three-star accommodation in Banff, and an eight-day ski lift pass plus transfers, in January or February 2017.

1stclassholidays.com 

