



Utah **SNOW**SIMPLE

FEW CITIES IN THE WORLD CAN MATCH **SALT LAKE CITY'S** EASY ACCESS TO TOP CLASS SKIING, AND EVEN FEWER CAN TEAM THAT WITH EASY ACCESS FROM DOWNUNDER.

CARMEN & OWAIN PRICE HIT 7 RESORTS IN 6 DAYS TO SEE JUST HOW MUCH YOU CAN PACK INTO A **SKI UTAH** WEEK.



A delay at our car pick up meant we went from a big to a massive SUV, on free upgrade for the duration, and Siri soon had us hammering along the freeway to Park City, arriving just 45 minutes later for a dinner catch up with old friends doing the season there. You could actually do it car free, Salt Lake's impressive light rail system runs frequently from the airport into town for \$USD 2.50, with plenty of space for luggage, and shuttles run to the resorts.

But with so much sheet metal for so little money, and never paying more than \$USD 25 to fill the tank, self drive is better. Driving round Salt Lake downtown is a bit like driving in Canberra, without all the confusing circles. The streets were originally laid out at 132 feet wide because city founder Brigham Young wanted people to be able to turn their ox-wagons around in one go. Well, it worked back then for the pioneers and it worked for us, easily navigating around even when Siri failed us due to wi-fi drop outs. Staying downtown of course you also benefit from regular prices for eating out and going out, with plenty of options for both, and plenty of shopping. The mormon percentage is down to 38% of Utah's population, and millennials are flocking to Utah for the economy, year round outdoor active lifestyle and affordable housing. Basketball fans can catch a Utah Jazz game too.

Three main routes access the 6 close major resorts — the I-80 freeway toward Park City and neighbouring Deer Valley; or the Big and Little Cottonwood Canyon roads, to Solitude and Brighton or Snowbird and Alta respectively. Despite their proximity, all the areas are distinctly different, with accommodation and style from laid back rustic at Brighton to upmarket full service at Deer Valley.

PARK CITY

According to Vail Resorts CEO Rob Katz, Park City has been the biggest improver for them with the Australian market, as the buzz around the incorporation of the former Canyons resort into Park City with a new gondola hook up obviously made an impact. For people looking to drive their Epic Pass/Epic Australia Pass further basing yourself at Park City is obviously a great idea.

So great in fact that our love of real estate investment has already seen an upswing in Aussie interest in buying property there too. One of the leading Real Estate Agents in town, Scott Maizlich, from www.scottmaizlich.com, reports "A lot of investors have come to town and said, "I have skied Vail for years, and I know what kind of operator they are, find me the least expensive property as close to the resort as possible, because I know it will only appreciate in value."

Doing the math on spending around \$AUD 2,000 for your airfare to Salt Lake and Epic Pass combo, having a property of your own here would be handy. Park City is super popular now, so the rental returns are good, and if you time it to do your skiing outside the peaks like Sundance Film Festival and President's Week it would likely add up quite well.

We didn't have time, never mind the loose readies (you can still get a small condo around town for under \$USD 300k) to buy, but we had the next best thing, slopeside lodging at Snowflower Condos at the Park City base and just a couple of blocks from town. The new mega resort is so big, and popular, you want to be as close to the action as possible.

Scooting out early on a Friday morning we were glad our passes were already in our jacket sleeves, avoiding the ticket window lines which, despite the ease of online purchase now, were long. Get on the lifts and you're riding a mass transit system that shifts huge amounts of people, so apart from the odd bottleneck you can soon spread out and ski your legs to jelly in a few hours, either on the endless groomers, or the equally endless ridgeline and gully combos that go for miles along the back of the resort. Short hikes from some of the top lifts on these can get you totally away from people in minutes.

"I get fresh lines up here all the time" says my snowboarding mate and guide for the day Craig Tansley, who was doing the season at Park City. "On powder days it takes a while for people to get over, and if you know where to go and keep moving you can get fresh lines all day."

It was handy to have someone who knew their way round, 7,000 acres is beyond big. We didn't have any recent fresh snow, but still found some fun shots off the ridgelines and in north facing gully tree lines.

For a change of pace go for a bang down the long groomers that wind through *The Colony*, a gated community of slopeside mansions that house the likes of Will Smith and others who can afford the \$USD 20 million plus price tags. Should have snapped one up when our dollar was \$1.10 and their economy was tanked back in 2011..

After hitting so many mega American resorts on our two month roadie we were starting to run out of superlatives in the size description department. How about plain old biggest? In two days skiing here we never even got all the way over to the Canyons base, distracted by the ridgeline hikes one day and lunch at Miner's Camp, the new mountain restaurant next to the new inter-connect gondola, the next. As Craig found, you can spend a season here and still only be scratching the surface.



Downtown Park City is right up there among America's best ski towns. It pumps, and despite 110 and counting restaurants and bars to choose from you better book for dinner weekend nights or you'll never get in.

The shopping is equally diverse, with plenty of stylish and different boutique outlets, and more affordable than more winter only destinations if you nose around the side streets and little mini malls. After all, a girl always needs more boots, never mind furs..

more at www.visitparkcity.com
resort www.parkcitymountain.com



DEER VALLEY

If dealing with the Epic Pass holding masses (there are 600,000 or so and counting) is a bit much, never mind snowboarders, then Deer Valley remains the ultimate up-market cruising resort on the planet. Yet their day pass is \$USD 30 or so cheaper than at Vail or Aspen, so you don't have to break the bank to check it out. Just no discounting on the season pass either; according to our insider on the real estate front, "If locals want the Deer Valley experience, and plenty do, they pay full freight" he explained.

Deer Valley runs flow around peninsulas of mansions creeping up the slopes the way Sydney Harbour flows around peninsulas of mansions creeping down to the water.

But if you don't own one, staying at the various top end hotels will more than compensate.

As humble day visitors we got the big cruisy ski around (there are some nice steeper runs, but with my #1 boarder buddy not allowed to share them in solidarity I stuck to the cruisers), plus a nice lunch at the Empire Lodge slopeside mid-mountain.

Then, the highlight, an amazing dinner at the same venue which transforms into *Fireside Dining* for a full-on feast of raclette, fondue and other delights all cooked in front of you over several big open fires. You can drive right up to it in the evening, but have to book - it's very popular, with good reason, it's unique, one of those above and beyond type guest experiences Deer Valley provides. These help it rack up the awards for service, and it offers a kind of all first-class cruise ship type holiday cut off from outside influences.

more at www.deervalley.com

CRAIG TANSLEY
IS A PRO WRITER,
NOT A PRO
BOARDER, BUT A
SEASON AT PARK
CITY HAD HIM
LOOKING GOOD;
GROOMING THIS
VAST RESORT MUST
BE LIKE PAINTING
THE HARBOUR
BRIDGE, NEVER
ENDING;
DEER VALLEY IS
CRUISER HEAVEN;
SHOP TILL
YOU DROP
DOWNTOWN IN
PARK CITY;
DON'T MISS
FIRESIDE DINING AT
DEER VALLEY
© OWAIN &
CARMEN PRICE
© VAIL RESORTS
GROOMER SHOT

ALTA

Do you ever get that feeling arriving anywhere you could just drop anchor and ski there for the rest of your life and know you would never get bored with the terrain?

That's how I felt pulling up at Alta. The further we drove up Little Cottonwood Canyon the wilder it got, as we entered true alpine territory ringed by spectacular skiable peaks. The mountains close in at Alta to form an amphitheatre of true alpine peaks, with not even a summer road out. This is the end of the road, but just the beginning of the lines available, which look tasty in all directions. Tracks off many of them indicate the hike-to, or "uphilling" as they call it in America these days, possibilities are huge. Skiing around with a former freeski competitor helped us find some great runs, despite limited time, and get a glimpse of what's available if you stay longer.

Despite the surfeit of top end terrain, from massive off piste to steep winch cat groomers, there's no shortage of cruising either, with plenty of space, and no need to worry about snowboarders cleaning you up as Alta still has a no boarder policy.

The lifts are good, the terrain they access superb, and the snow quality legendary when those famous Utah storms roll in. They get 551 inches, or 14m, average snow a season, and the high base at 8,500' and heart of the Wasatch location makes it arguably the best of all the close to Salt Lake areas for consistent snow quality. We didn't get lucky in that department, but still found some fresh tracks with a short hike.

It's not huge, the lift-accessed vertical is only 2020'/607m, but you don't waste time on runouts back to base - you can ski virtually all that vertical on steep and fast pitches. Hike East Castle, Devil's Castle or the Baldy Chutes for more vert and more thrills.

There's not much of a village, but the Alta Lodge makes up in ambience what it lacks in size or luxury modern facilities. This is old school ski hotel style, with more of a club lodge feel than that of a typical modern resort hotel, and the chance to meet fellow guests and characters. Staying here too you would get first shot when it snows.

The inter-connect to Snowbird is easy, and the terrain available just as tasty, though it's busier and you have to share with boarders.

Alta & Snowbird are part of the Mountain Collective group.

more at www.alta.com



Utah



BRIGHTON

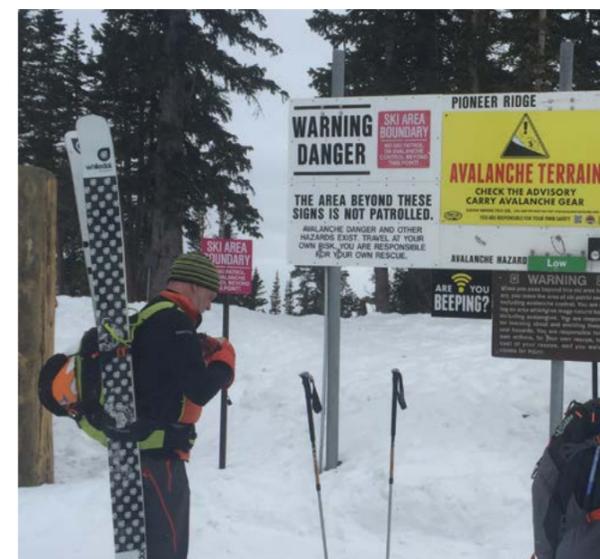
Big Cottonwood Canyon is (funny that) bigger than its neighbour, opening out half way up to a high alpine meadows zone that looks like the set for a Clint Eastwood western.

But the resorts are smaller. Brighton, at the head of the canyon, is even more old school than Alta, offering a basic base lodge, some super cheap on snow accommodation, and in the same building as the restaurant a brown bag room for people who bring their own lunch — no \$USD 1,200 bottles of wine here, you could stay 2 weeks on snow for that!

It's a fun mountain, with some great glade skiing and cliff terrain to negotiate, lots of natural hits, and all accessed by 4 fast quad chairs so you get plenty of mileage in. It's a hiker heaven too, short hikes bringing big rewards for the gnarly local dudes who were lapping them while we stuck to the lifts on our mission to ski it and neighbouring Solitude in the same day. When the pow day hordes head to Park City or Snowbird Brighton benefits, with fresh lines easier to find for longer. Of course the hikes, if you are prepared and know what you are doing, extend that even further.

They have always allowed snowboarding here, and lining the stairs of the day lodge is a cool little mini-museum of boards. It's a great mountain for boarders, with hardly any flat spots or long green run run-outs to lifts to worry about.

more at www.brightonresort.com



SOLITUDE

Skiing down the inter-connect trail from Brighton into Solitude it soon became apparent the name is apt, it was deserted! On the ballsy upper mountain lines a lone hiker was silhouetted against the skyline as he hit the summit ridge, while lower down Mrs Snow Action was the only skier on a 200m wide blue run. Even the small cluster of condos at the base village were almost empty.

Yet the terrain is great, with a lot more open groomers than Brighton, and perfect learning areas, but still plenty of wilder off trail opportunities without any hiking.

Deer Valley took it over last year, and promptly replaced the old slow chair to the peak with an express quad, which presumably gets a work out on busy weekends and such, but the new lift was total overkill when we were there, servicing a handful of skiers.

For a quiet on-snow holiday if you're not into après it would be good, but for most people doing the day trip will work fine. It's certainly the best option to escape crowds among the close to Salt Lake City areas.

more at www.skisolitude.com

Salt Lake City info www.visitsaltlake.com www.skicity.com

Utah info www.visitutah.com

Utah



POWDER MOUNTAIN

Why limit yourself to the immediate Salt Lake City areas? Drive 40 freeway minutes north to Ogden, a historic railroad junction small city, and you have more very different areas to choose from, like Powder Mountain.

Ogden is a lively town with some pumping bars, good restaurants, and an incredible collection of mint condition prohibition-era vintage cars in a little museum in the old Union Pacific Railroad station.

It's an easy 50 minutes or so drive up to Powder Mountain, depending on conditions, where there's a car park on top of the hill and you can ski down, or stop part way up at the little base lodge.

You get a great view over the actual Great Salt Lake from here, and an ingeniously expandable ski hill — sure, the main mountain off the lifts is not huge, but there's a choice of road runner runs with a bus pick up through glades, or a free snow cat that hauls you up a few more hundred feet vertical to access some steeper back and side country bowls and glades.

In fact they way they add it up they are the #1 biggest in America, with over 7,000 acres of accessible terrain, of which 2,800 are off the lifts. They claim 500 inches/12.7m season snowfall, so it was a shame we struck in a late winter warm patch. But even with corn snow it was fun. With some of that Utah special Greatest Snow on Earth™ it would be sensational indeed, and worth doing just to meet the cat driver. He didn't seem to mind us sneaking in another lap just after the official buzzer time.

There's a day lodge with a pumping bar and pub food downstairs or cafe upstairs, and limited on mountain lodging, or stay in Ogden just 20 miles down the road. Check out the Shooting Star Saloon on the way down, which claims to be the oldest continually operating saloon in the west.

more at www.powdermountain.com

Ogden area info at www.visitogden.com



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