

The Family Friendly Slopes of Utah



I am as sentimental as the next mom, but have never been much of a crybaby. When Breanna headed onto the bus the first day of Kindergarten there was not a tear to be felt on either of my cheeks. All the other parents seemed choked up but me. However, when she headed onto the bus the first day of ski school, that was a whole different story. I actually found it difficult to stop crying throughout the entire day!

On that frigid cold November morning Breanna, suited up in her new winter outfit, boarded the bus filled with young ski school students. Her heavy gear was sliding off her shoulders, but the look of excitement in her big brown eyes should have eased my anxiety, but truth be told, it didn't. Though I worried, I knew in my heart of hearts that starting her at age seven was not too young, because it was just one more thing Breanna wanted to try that I tried as a kid at roughly the same age. I loved the sport and have continued to stay active in it throughout my life. As it has turned out, my daughter not only embraced the sport, but also excelled in it at an unusually rapid pace. Breanna was mastering black diamonds in no time and couldn't wait to add snowboarding to her repertoire.

Her initial trip west to the mountains was with her dad for a fun filled daddy/daughter weekend to Utah. Never having been, I could only advise her to stick to the "blues" and wait to ski "blacks" with me! (I had skied all my life and her Dad was a late bloomer in the sport.) Breanna was so smitten with the experience, that for years she boasted about Deer Valley this and Deer Valley that. Not one restaurant could be compared to the "Sensational Seafood Buffet" in, you guessed it—Deer Valley. Not surprisingly, our Minnesota hills were never quite the same—mountains ruled!

Years later and countless lessons behind her, I surprised Breanna with a trip back to Utah, this time with dear old Mom. This would be a challenging trip for her because the mountains were now filled with boarders and while she was hooked on that way to get down the mountain, it was just her first season as a self-described "Boarder Chick." Lessons would definitely be in order.

For me it was exciting to have the chance to visit not only a state to which I have never been, but to have the opportunity to experience not one, but a series of four resorts within five days! As it turned out, just like Breanna, I too fell in love with the amazing Utah ski experience and made a vow to get back before the season ended to try spring skiing. As the Utah license plate proclaims, it just might be "The Greatest Snow on Earth!"

Our first stop was at Solitude, a stunning start to our Utah experience. Tucked away in the Big Cottonwood Canyon is just that—solitude. Even at full capacity, the way Solitude is mapped out for its skiers and boarders it seems as if it is just you and the mountain. No lift lines, no crowds. The village is a charming European-styled community where you feel you are no longer in the US of A. (www.skisolitude.com)

Our second stop was Park City. What a thrill it was to be on the identical terrain that the Olympians were experiencing in the 2002 winter games. This bustling city is summed up in one word—FUN! Whether you choose to ski, board or shop on Main Street the energy of Park City is indescribable. The key to great snow is great grooming and Park City prides itself on the meticulously groomed runs that they offer to their guests. (www.parkcityinfo.com)

Pulling into Powder Mountain was quite surreal. Just like Solitude, the name

speaks for itself. Powder lovers beware! Nestled in the scenic Ogden Canyon, Powder Mountain is 3 different mountains spanning over 5,500 acres. This is the perfect pick for families that are obsessed with skiing and don't need much else but their gear and the day's conditions. It was a snowboarder's dream come true! No lines and plenty of elbowroom for Breanna to practice her finesse. (www.powdermountain.com)

Last but not least, the fourth day of our Mother/Daughter ski excursion was Wolf Mountain. This small, yet charming mountain was an ideal place to plant our aching legs on our final day on the slopes together. And together we were. After three days in the magnificent mountains of Utah, there was no more scolding from my daughter that I got her up on a black diamond and she couldn't handle it. She handled all the runs like a pro and we were an unstoppable team. (www.wolfmountain-den.com)

Mom, however, was not quite done for the season! Utah will do that to a person. Once you ski Utah snow you truly are hooked. I took a kid-less trip back the very next month to two more (note – boarder-free) resorts before the mountains dried up and turned into perfect hiking terrain.

Finally, it was my turn to experience the "posh" Deer Valley and add one last resort town I had been hearing about since

I was a child—the one and only Alta.

Curiously, I found that Deer Valley somehow manages to not only be posh and decadent, but also very homey and unpretentious. There are no words to describe the care and little extras that make up the big picture at this resort celebrating its 25th year in the bliss business!

Food is a key element at Deer Valley. The famous Mariposa restaurant and the Seafood Buffet that Breanna bragged about for 5 years are two perfect excuses to eat endlessly after a days worth of burning calories on the mountains. (www.deervalley.com)

My final Utah destination for skiing was the absolutely amazing Alta. The place to stay in this 67-year-old town is the Alta Lodge. This family owned resort has been passed down from generation to generation since opening in 1939. This is one place where families come to really be with their family members! There is only one communal TV in the lodge; however, there is Internet access for the true worker bees. You go back in time when you visit a place like Alta. (www.skialta.com)

As my vacation was coming to an end, I couldn't resist calling Breanna on my cell phone from the ski lift to tell her that Dear Old Mom was cutting up the mountains in a foot of fresh powder up to my knees! She was as proud of my deep powder mastery as I was of her fearlessly conquering mountain snowboarding. We agreed that Utah will forever be etched in both of our minds as The BEST SNOW ON EARTH experience!! (www.skiutah.com)

A Destination for All Seasons

As magical as the Utah Mountains are in the wintertime, they are equally as mesmerizing in the summer. The perfect place to park your family is in Park City. Founded in 1818, this bustling town with a population just over 7,000 best describes why Utah's motto is the "Beehive State". For fun I looked up the word in Webster's Dictionary and it was the perfect selection of words to portray this historically charming city in the summertime – "A place of great activity." Your family will have endless choices of how to plan your days and evenings out. Strolling along Main Street, hiking, biking or horseback riding through the vast



miles of terrain through the mountains, taking in an outdoor concert or movie with the magnificent mountains as your back drop...the list is as high as the altitude in Park City! Plus, many of the resorts offer terrific children's programs, designed to keep kids busy and having fun in full or half day shifts – giving parents the guilt-free opportunity to be kid-less for a bit.

If you go, don't miss the nearby Utah Olympic Park - a mandatory day stay. There is not a minute to waste in this area. From aerial freestyle shows with future Olympians training their jumps, zip line rides down the mountains to bobsled rides that will make you never say no to another Fair ride again! I not only had the bravery to push the sled but I jumped in to experience the 1 minute 26 second ride down the canal just like the US Olympians did back in 2002 Winter Games!

