

Travel: Off the Beaten Slope



Courtesy Grand Targhee Resort

Dashing through the snow: Wyoming's Grand Targhee

By Paul Tolme

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Jan. 24, 2005 issue - When Kevin Holmgren takes a ski trip, the last thing he wants is a megaresort with long lift lines and a base village crammed with expensive boutiques. "I like to chill out on vacation, get away from urban life," says the Minneapolis antiques dealer. That's why he heads for Wyoming's Grand Targhee (www.grandtarghee.com), a quiet, family-owned ski area tucked along the Idaho border. There, longtime employees, including potato farmers from the valley below, know him by name and welcome him back each year. Best of all, "you don't have to break the bank to ski here," he says.

While Jackson Hole, on the other side of the Tetons, charges \$1,900 per person for a season pass, Holmgren pays just \$950 for his family of five.

Sure, big resorts offer celebrity sightings and fancy ski-in restaurants, but smaller areas come with thrills of their own. For Bruce McQuistan, it's all about the adventure. "Discovering little, hard-to-find gems is one of the joys of skiing," says the Seattle programmer, who has driven thousands of miles in search of unique places. One of his favorites: Schweitzer Ski Resort (\$44 for adults, \$30 under 12, \$5 under the age of 7; www.schweitzer.com) in the Idaho Panhandle. About 100 miles from Spokane, it offers 2,500 acres of terrain and an average of only 1,100 visitors on weekends. Fewer people means fresher snow.

Tom Gaukel, a Boulder, Colo., native, heads for Wolf Creek (www.wolfcreekski.com) in the San Juan Mountains, along the New Mexico border, each winter. On a recent trip, he skied off a main lift into two feet of untracked powder. "I couldn't believe how good the snow was two days after a storm," he says.

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- **Grand Targhee, Wyo.** Fly into Jackson or Idaho Falls and pick up a shuttle to the slopes.
- **Schweitzer Mountain, Idaho** Fly into Spokane and drive 90 minutes to Sandpoint.
- **Silverton, Colo.** A seven-hour drive from Denver. Take a deep breath before driving over Red Mountain Pass, with few guardrails but plenty of plunging ravines.

Smaller, lesser-known resorts can require a bit more travel, but they're worth it. Small-town charm is another draw of off-the-map resorts. Silverton, Colo. (\$119 per day lift pass; www.silvertonmountain.com), is one of the best-preserved mining towns in the Rockies. Visitors bed down at the Grand Imperial (from \$40; www.grandimperialhotel.com), a Victorian hotel with 14-foot ceilings and a ballroom with Saturday-night dances, and dine on \$11.95 grill-your-own steaks at the Explorer's Club Southwest (www.explorersclubsw.com). Morning brings 2,000 vertical feet of ungroomed bowls and glades filled with deep powder.

While Silverton targets expert skiers, most smaller resorts come with a variety of slopes, as well as lessons for students of all levels. For maximum variety, book a "ski safari" (www.skisafari.com)—itineraries that include multiple out-of-the-way destinations. Or visit www.coloradoski.com/gems for a list of smaller areas with free parking, local flavor—and no Starbucks.