

Crossing boarders

What changes when you don't let snowboards down the mountain? Does it really become a skier's nirvana?
Catherine Dawson March explores Deer Valley, Utah



The Montage at Utah's Deer Valley resort sits 2,530 metres uphill, making it the highest of the resort's five-star stays and granting its guests faster and easier access to the black-diamond runs of Empire Canyon's bowls. **BETTER GOLF'S JENNY**

It was a face shot of dirty snow that set me thinking. I spat out the mess sent by an (admittedly) skillful turn of a too-close snowboarder, wiped my goggles and wondered, "Does it really have to be like this? Can I ever ski in peace?"

I love watching snowboarders swoop down runs, their twists and turns like a modern dance with the mountain. But what I admire from the chairlift drives me crazy on a busy slope when all that fancy carving shaves a little too close to my bones. I knew that three ski resorts in North America forbid snowboards – Utah has two: Deer Valley and Alta; Vermont has Mad River Glen. It was time to try one. What changes, I wondered, when you don't let snowboards down the mountain? Would it really be a skier's nirvana?

I packed my goggles and flew to Utah – home to famously light, dry powder, where even license plates crow about the "greatest snow on Earth" – to ski at Deer Valley. Unlike the hard-core, no frills Alta, Deer Valley is a swanky, all-frills affair, with stellar snowmaking. It's a place where ski valets come with your lift ticket; where lift tickets are limited to the number of restaurant seats; and where five-star restaurants and high-end hotels are de rigueur.

I arrived in a snowstorm, always a blessing (powder day!) and a curse (white-out mountain drives!). Deer Valley, a 45-minute highway drive from Salt Lake City airport, passes through red rock canyons and winds up the Wasatch range. You'll see turnoffs to eight other nearby resorts, four of them surprisingly easy to reach on a public-transit ski bus.

The stress of the drive was nearly forgotten once we passed through the daz-zling fairy-light-wrapped pines that lined the driveway to Montage Deer Valley. It was a stunning introduction to the porte cochère of this boutique hotel brand that wows guests with the details: high-quality furnishings, gas fireplaces, balconies with lovely views, large marble bathrooms, single-origin Valrhona chocolates at turn-down ... I could go on.

In the morning, I discovered that the ski-in/ski-out Montage sits at 2,530 metres (8,300 feet), the highest of the 820-hectare resort's five-star sleeps (The St. Regis is at the resort's base, with local legend Stein Eriksen's namesake Lodge found mid-mountain). The views of the Wasatch Range are incredible, and guests are easily first up the lifts on Empire and Flagstaff mountains, which meant we were first to sweep down freshly groomed runs and first to pound through the black-diamond powder stashes of Empire Canyon's bowls – all without paying extra for first-tracks access. I spent about 90 minutes looping up and down the mountains under radiant bluebird skies before I started capturing other skiers in my selfies.

But when I did encounter more people, I enjoyed that, too. Despite my city-dweller reserve, I never sat in silence on a chairlift during my two-day visit. At Deer Valley, strangers are just fellow skiers you haven't met yet. After all, here, you're one of us (skiers), not them (snowboarders). "Just listen," I was told (more than once), "it even sounds different here."

At first, I didn't understand. The skier-only experience was still so new. "There's no scraping sound," my lift-mate patient-

ly explained, referring to the noisier, abrasive articulations a snowboard makes on its way down the mountain. She pointed her ski pole at the mogul runs we were passing. "And look, see? They're still in good shape, no snowboards can carve them to pieces."

After a few more runs of sweet, near-silent shushing, I slid into my mid-mountain lunch stop at Silver Lake Lodge for what would be one of many impressive meals on the resort. Deer Valley is rightfully famous for its food, a delightful change of scene from many ski resorts. So instead of trying only the much-talked about Tex-Mex turkey chili, I also ordered a tower of Dungeness crab, avocado and tomato surrounded by a moat of wasabi, soy and sweet chili sauce bridged with crispy wontons. Now that's a ski lunch.

Later, the fireside buffet at Empire Canyon Lodge would turn me into a true glutton – yes, those are wheels of raclette melting, and legs of lamb sizzling, and four pots of chocolate warming by crackling wood fires. Yes, I'll try them all. Yes, I will also add salad and grilled vegetables just for good measure. No, I don't know when to stop.

Throughout my stay – as much as I loved quietly shushing down scenic runs and was happy not to have hot-shot snowboarders blazing through my line – I did notice that the resort was, perhaps, maybe, a little too quiet? I was having fun but it was ever so genteel, so polite and refined – dare I say, a little... dull? No beats blasted at the lift bases. Was it because so many lifters were older? Was I missing the energy and joie de vivre that snowboarders – often younger and care-free – can bring to a mountain?

That lingering thought may have been why the music pounding out of the bright orange tent beside the Montage ski room drew me in. The après-scene inside this yurt-turned-Veuve Clicquot-branded bar was rocking, thanks to a clique of middle-aged women in \$300 cashmere tuques sipping bottles of \$200 Champagne. Some shared plates of American-bred caviar (\$375 an ounce) and – once they got really drunk – might even have ordered a shot of 35-year Glenmorangie for \$1,495. The vibe here might be pricey, but it's also priceless.

But as much fun as I was having in my skier-only bubble, a colleague (and closet snowboarder) persuaded me to spend a day in Park City, exploring the town and the ski resort that is still basking in the glow of its 2014 Vail Resorts buyout.

The Park City Mountain Resort is so close, you can see its hoi polloi from the top of Deer Valley's Empire mountain. But don't even think of slipping under the rope for an off-piste resort hop. I was told ski patrollers regularly confiscate lift passes. Instead, I piled my skis into the free Montage shuttle and headed down the mountain to lower Main Street in the historic mining town. I hopped out near the Town Lift, carried my skis up to the ticket window and secured a new pass. The 10-minute chairlift would carry my colleague, happily strapping on his snowboard, and me up and over the wooden homes of Park City's Old Town and into the ski area.

After two days without snowboards, was I ready to reintegrate? The sunny

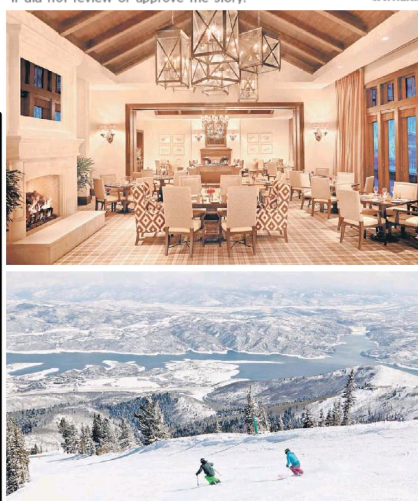
weather put me in the right frame of mind and this new view of the Wasatch mountains was just as exhilarating. We ripped up and down the runs, heading over to look at the silver-mining buildings and machinery left standing amongst the runs. (The entire area, including Deer Valley, was once a silver-mining camp.) Abandoned mines, I was told more than once, run through the mountains "like Swiss cheese." I noticed a snowboarder's daredevil tracks all over a mini-mountain of snow-covered mine tailings.

Since Park City is bigger than Deer Valley – 3,000 hectares – there's lots of room for both skiers and snowboarders, and even new disciplines: At the terrain park, we stopped to watch a group of teens in sneakers sliding around on a skateboard with sleigh runners. There was a lot of falling, but also a lot of laughing.

Turning back to finish our long, sunny run, I slowed down as – not 20 metres ahead – a skier and a snowboarder slid into each other's blind spot. No one was truly at fault, but it still ended badly. Sharp words were thrown, a ski pole was pointed. And later that day, I would overhear another snowboarder complain bitterly about the skier who cut him off. 'Twas ever thus. It's just another day on the mountain.

When the sun lowered in the sky, we headed down Park City's perfectly named Quit'N Time run. High West Saloon, the slide-in distillery, is at the bottom. I carefully, prayerfully, navigated the moguls trimmed by snowboards in this tight, treed run. By the time I snapped off my skis, the distillery was packed with locals and visitors already well into their après. The crowd was lively – definitely younger – and the whiskey cocktails paired with bacon-caramel popcorn and honey-glazed shishito peppers were well worth the tense descent. At High West, both skis and snowboards leaned against the historic wooden building. And no one gave a damn.

The writer was a guest of Visit Park City. It did not review or approve the story.



Offerings at the Montage, top, include high-quality furnishings, gas fireplaces, balconies with lovely views and large marble bathrooms. The hotel also provides an especially exhilarating outlook on Utah's Wasatch mountains. ABOVE: ERIC SCHRAMM PHOTOGRAPHY

YOUR TURN

At Deer Valley, the ski valet service is free, and so are intermediate and expert mountain-host tours to help get oriented. Deer Valley Resort is part of the Ikon Pass program, which includes Quebec's Tremblant; Ontario's Blue Mountain; Alberta's Banff Sunshine, Lake Louise and Mt. Norquay; and B.C.'s Revelstoke and Cypress Mountains. deervalley.com

The Montage Deer Valley is high up the mountain (guests will have runs to themselves first thing in the morning) and it's one of the most luxe hotels in Deer Valley. The pool and fitness centre are spectacular – 35,000 square feet, with lap pool, hot tubs, saunas and a pristine room full of treadmills and stairclimbers that overlooks the valley. And make time for the early après-scene at the hotel's Veuve yurt. Free shuttles run into the town of Park City (look for several Banksy pieces on Main Street). Rooms from US\$325. montagehotels.com/deer-valley

If you're spending a day skiing at the nearby Park City Mountain Resort, take advantage of the free Silver to Slopes historic mining tour, which runs twice daily. parkcitymountain.com

Here's an idea: Instead of lining up for your rentals, preorder your powder planks and anything else you need with Ski Butlers. Staff bring everything right to your hotel, with more gear in the truck to make changes as necessary. skibutlers.com – CATHERINE DAWSON MARCH

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