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## UTAH

## Utah: Happy (ski) trails to you

This former mining city offers a trio of resorts, each with its own character.

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BY ANNE Z. COOKE AND STEVE HAGGERTY  
Cox News Service

PARK CITY, Utah -- For Dillon Cook, sitting across from us in the gondola, The Canyons was a whole new world peopled with kids who came from everywhere just to be in ski class with him.

"I liked the Tunnel of Fun," said the 9-year-old from Houston, describing the bumpy trail through the trees where the instructors take their classes to cut loose. "We had five boys and one girl. . . . The girl was Ally, and she was better than any of the boys."

Sherri Williams from Atlanta, on the last day of her vacation, noticed The Canyons' people-friendly design, a terraced layout that separates cars on the lower level from the Resort Village at midlevel, a pedestrian zone with the ticket office, rental shops, restaurants and the Grand Summit Hotel.

"The cabriolet saves a lot of walking," she said, meaning the canlike baskets (nicknamed "the teacups") that carry skiers from the parking lot up to the village. And Red Pine Lodge, tucked into the forest at midmountain, well, that was brilliant. "No traffic, no cars, no noise -- just us and the snow," she said.

Then there was Brian Price, wiry and tan. Taking advantage of two inches of new snow, the Salt Lake City resident was steering out-of-town friends around the first of this former mining town's ski trio: The Canyons, Deer Valley and Park City Mountain Resort. With 8,925 acres to cover, he was in a hurry.

"I stick to the highlights," he said -- the new terrain parks, the best-groomed cruisers and the photogenic vistas. The speedy new "six-pack" chairlifts, too. "But The Canyons' my favorite."

Strung in a ragged crescent above Park City, the three ski resorts are part of the same range and even the same ridge, called the Wasatch Back. Yet we'd forgotten how different they are, one from another.

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We fell for The Canyons.

The Canyons, its 3,700 acres open and uncrowded, is a bona fide best-kept secret. Spread over adjacent ridges, the resort's 152 trails flow and turn, challenging and entertaining in turn.

The heart of the resort is Red Pine Lodge, where the gondola unloads and ski school meets. A half-dozen lifts climb from here to near and distant peaks, each one connecting skiers with a new set of slopes.

Plenty of expert-only chutes, most rated double-black-diamond, plunge into Murdock Bowl and off Apex Ridge. But The Canyons really seems to be a bonanza for intermediate recreational skiers, people who are happiest carving turns on groomed trails.

On the lower slopes, look for a tangle of woodland trails providing ski-in, ski-out access to a cluster of multimillion-dollar homes. Some of these places, big enough to sleep 20 of your closest friends, are actually in the rental pool.

Mainly, The Canyons is so spacious and spread out that you need a trail map just to find a restaurant. Chili and hot dogs are staples at some of the mountain's five chow lines. Pass them up for Lookout Cabin, where you'll dine on gourmet cuisine, with tablecloths, wine and 30-mile views. Or get down and jitterbug on Saturdays at Western Barbecue at Red Pine Lodge. Beef, chicken and the trimmings come with a live country band.

**PARK CITY**

We rented a cottage in Park City, so we skied its eponymous resort first; it seemed like the thing to do. The base area -- bustling with skiers coming and going, window shoppers, kids waiting for their parents and newcomers renting skis -- felt like a block party in progress.

The adult and kids' ski schools meet on the snow across the square, and beyond is the Alpine Coaster, where we bumped into George, a 14-year-old local boy with a buzz-cut and an opinion.

"Park City's a nine on a scale of 10," he said, digging out money for a third ride on the over-snow roller coaster that opened last season.

The coaster, Park City resort's newest family diversion, is so hot that the ride was forced to take reservations. We showed up at 2 p.m. to risk the nine-minute ride in the bobsled-shaped car, which climbs slowly up a 6,000-foot-long track and rockets down around hairpin curves at avalanche speed.

With Park City's 3,300 skiable acres, you can keep moving all day and never ski the same run twice. But if you want to ski with the little nippers, head for the slopes under the King Con and Motherlode chairlifts. Parallel runs, most intermediate but a few rated for experts, make it easy for parents and kids to split up and still meet at the bottom of the chairlift.

You can design a route to suit everyone, using the resort's newest and smartest service, the Personal Mountain Planner. This computer program creates custom routes depending on your skill level, desired terrain and a



DEER VALLEY RESORT

A view of Silver Lake Village from the Sterling Express chairlift at Deer Valley.

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challenge quotient. The information desk in the Legacy Lodge will do it for you on site or you can do it yourself at home, at [www.mymountainplanner.com](http://www.mymountainplanner.com). For example: ``Exit right off Bonanza lift. Take Homerun to Claimjumper. Board Silverlode lift."`

Park City resort's real claim to fame -- its link to Park City's early history -- lends a genuine sense of authenticity. Century-old structures, restored or stabilized, have been left in place on the mountain, many next to the ski runs. More than 1,200 miles of abandoned mining shafts are still there, too, a reminder that skiing's a late arrival.

#### DEER VALLEY RESORT

Luxury is Deer Valley's middle name, but courtesy comes closer. The resort upgrades its chairlifts regularly, improves grooming and restyles its restaurants. But it's the people that lift skiing from a sport to a culture.

At the entrance, valets took our skis and carried them up the steps. Every lift attendant made sure we sat together and safely, and handed us dropped gloves and poles. Mountain hosts offered assistance at the top. The trails were well-marked and the signs were easy to read from a distance.

Deer Valley, with 1,825 acres, is half the size of The Canyons. But the mix of beginner, intermediate and expert trails off Bald and Flagstaff mountains meant we could ski together or separately, and still meet for lunch at the Royal Street Cafe, at midmountain. With a limit of 6,500 lift tickets sold daily, there were few crowds. But the cap has nothing to do with skiing, it seems: It is the total number of seats available at noon in the resort's on-mountain restaurants.

By chance, former Olympic gold medalist Stein Eriksen, a legend at Deer Valley, happened to be at the next table. Typically gracious, he leaned over to offer a few words of welcome. Eriksen, who will be 80 this year, likes to get out and meet people, even skiing along for a few runs. Who knows? You could be lucky.

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