

# Splurging on the slopes



## Keystone says family

Colorado ski area has great slopes, but there's plenty of attractions for nonskiers, too.

By ANNE Z. COOKE  
SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

**K**EYSTONE RESORT, Colorado — “Pleeease, Dad, one more time,” begged Will, age 10, oblivious to the storm that had begun with a few drifting snowflakes and was now falling steadily. Getting a thumbs-up from his dad — who seemed to have found his inner child — Will and his sister gleefully dragged their snow tubes back to the starting point.

Some skiers, seeing the clouds settle over Dercum Mountain, at Keystone Ski area, in Summit County, had already quit for the day. But on the tubing hill at Adventure Point, kids and adults were still waiting for another turn.

Has skiing lost its luster? Not for me it hasn't. Here at one of Colorado's most popular family playgrounds, winter vacations still mean the joy of gliding down freshly groomed slopes, the challenge of carving new powder and the promise of big-sky scenery.

Now in its 37th year, Keystone has earned an enviable reputation as an affordable family resort, with a popular ski school and an enormous stock of lodging, mostly condominiums. With the recent addition of more backcountry terrain, the resort has 3,148 skiable acres and 121 trails on three mountains, terrain rated for all levels of skiers, from the never-evers to powder hounds willing to hike to the Independence Bowl ridge.

But for the nonskiers in your group — your husband, your sister, MY sister definitely — Keystone's got a grab bag of other winter activities, geared for all ages and interests. I tried the tubing hill, mostly to keep the kids company. But it only took one wild ride down one of the tubing hill's six deep, half-pipe-shaped runs and I was hooked.

The doughnut-shaped tubes, made of heavy-duty vinyl with reinforced seams, have oversized handles. You need no skills other than the strength to hold onto the handles, the lung power to scream as the tube drops over the edge and the nerve to stick it out until you bump to a stop at the bottom of the run.

When Will, his sister and his dad's turn came up, the tube operator — there's one at the top of each run — showed them how to link handles to make a “train.” Then with a running start she launched the three tubes over the edge. As they roared down the slope, the kids' happy howls wafted up to the top.

Once you've overdosed on tubing? Rent a snow bike or a slope cycle, also available at

See KEYSTONE/6L



STEVE HAGGERTY/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Snow bikes are cool at Adventure Point on Dercum Mountain.

# Keystone offers slopes, shops, food and ski school

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Adventure Point. Snow bikes are converted bicycle frames mounted on short skis. Instead of pedals, you wear short-short skis and use your feet and the handlebars to carve turns. It's fun and easy and, according to people who've tried it, it actually improves your skiing. Slope cycles are more like scooters. You wear ordinary boots and stand up to ride.

If shopping's your thing, you can spend a morning in the village at the River Run Base area, starting at the Starbucks and bakery. The shops range from dressy winter clothes and sports gear to craft stores and souvenir outlets. You can also ride up the River Run Gondola to the Summit House to watch a football game in Killian's bar. We spent one snowy afternoon in front of the fireplace in our condo, munching popcorn and watching the snow drift into the aspen grove on the hill.

For outdoor winter sports, there's ice skating at the rink at Lakeside Village and the Nordic Ski Center, a mile from Lakeside Village, where you can take lessons. The Center grooms 16 kilometers of level trails and maintains 57 more kilometers of marked, "packed" trails through the White River National Forest. You can also snowshoe here; the Center rents equipment for both sports.

To see where extreme powder hounds like to go (without having to do it yourself), take one of the snowcat rides that climb into



PHOTOS BY STEVE HAGGERTY/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Skaters enjoy a bright sunny day at Keystone, in Summit County, Colo.

Keystone's above-timberline bowls on 11,660-foot North Peak and 11,980-foot The Outback, to drop skiers off and show riders the scenery.

If watching the skiers disappear downhill sparks your interest, think about taking a lesson or two; it's easier than it looks. And Keystone's ski school, for kids and adults, makes it easy, speeding beginners past the awkward first stage and up to the easy "green" runs near the summit of 11,640-foot Dercum Mountain.

If Keystone's missing anything, it's the rough-and-ready charm of the ski resorts in Colorado's restored 19th century mining towns — Breckenridge, Aspen and Tellu-

ride, for example. But the tradeoff for Keystone, a purpose-built resort, is space to expand. As a result, the resort has a spread-out feel, with several base area villages, connecting roads and sidewalks and dozens of condominium complexes.

In theory, the free ski shuttle buses that loop between the River Run Base and the Mountain House Base are the easiest way to get from one place to another. And in theory, you don't need to rent a car. But for us, traveling with family, the buses never seemed to be there when we needed them.

Getting the kids going to ski school into their parkas and boots, and out the door to the bus stop on time was as bad as getting them out to school! And we needed a car to shop for groceries — a must if you're staying in a condo. Keystone's small market sells canned goods and basics only.

So we ate out often, which was how we discovered Keystone's many good restaurants, including 10 restaurants, cafés and snack bars at the River Run base, and another four restaurants at Lakeside Village.

The undisputed headliners



Tubers push off for a wild ride on Adventure Point on Dercum Mountain.

were the two nights we dined at 11,660 feet, at the top of North Peak. The first was the elegant Alpenglow Stube, a superb four-diamond restaurant with a top-10 rating from Zagat. The cuisine, with a variety of continental favorites, was perfectly prepared and the setting — white tablecloths with gleaming stemware and an "old-world" chalet atmosphere — was festive. I wouldn't recommend it for children, however.

But the Der Fondue Chessel, a gala medieval banquet, was one of those rare restaurants that work for adults and kids. Diners sitting at long tables are entertained by a rollicking oom-pah band while waiters in alpine costumes rush around bearing huge trays and taking special orders for drinks.

## IF YOU GO

### GETTING THERE

■ By car: From Denver, drive west on I-70, exiting at Silverthorne/Dillon (Exit 205). Turn east on U.S. 6 and continue 6.2 miles to Keystone. Allow two to three hours depending on weather and traffic.

■ For door-to-door shuttle service from Denver International Airport, call Colorado Mountain Express at (800) 525-6363. Round-trip rides run \$69 per person; groups sharing a van pay \$58 per person.

### LIFT TICKETS AND LODGING

■ Ask about Keystone's Stay-Free Ski-Free packages, with lift tickets and lodging. Multi-day passes may be good as some sister resorts, including Breckenridge, Vail, Beaver Creek

and Arapahoe Basin.

■ For condominium rentals, lift tickets or the snow report, call (877) 753-9786, (800) 404-3535, or (800) 427-8308. Hotel rooms are available at the 103-room Inn at Keystone, at the Mountain House base village; and the 180-room Keystone Lodge, a four-diamond Rock Resort hotel at Lakeside Village. Prices vary by date and availability.

### INFORMATION ONLINE

See [www.keystoneressort.com](http://www.keystoneressort.com) for prices, rentals, ski lessons, activities, events and lodging. At check-in, get the trail map, a concise guide to the lifts, slopes, ski school, roads, activities, restaurants, services and phone numbers. Shuttle bus schedules are also available. Or visit [www.vailresorts.com](http://www.vailresorts.com).



At Keystone's River Run base area, skiers stroll through the village on their way to and from the slopes.

Heaping platters of thick grilled steaks, barbecued chicken, grilled fish and roasted vegetables crowded together with pots of hot raclette (melted cheese) and fondue, served with hunks of bread and sliced roasted potatoes.

The food was delicious, the dress casual and the atmosphere so boisterous that even howling babies could hardly be heard.

Both restaurants serve wine, beer and spirits.

The cuisine at two other

restaurants, Ski Tip and Keystone Ranch, both associated with Keystone's early days, are also award winners. We didn't eat either one, but the skiers in the next condo gave both a glowing recommendation. If you get to Keystone before we do, give them a try.

*When they're not at their desks in Venice, Calif., Anne Z. Cook and Steve Haggerty are off exploring parts unknown.*



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