



Ski the West

A perfect snow day

Think skiing's too cold, too crowded, too expensive? These ingenious solutions will have you itching to hit the slopes this season **BY RACHEL LEVIN**

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THE EXCUSE “Lessons are too pricey!”

SOLUTION How does free sound?

Look for midweek clinics, like the women-only ones at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. every Thursday at **Mt. Rose–Ski Tahoe in Nevada.** From Dec 8; free with Thu lift ticket or \$10 for season-pass holders; skirose.com

THE EXCUSE “I can’t stand the cold.”

SOLUTION Heated chairlifts.

We’ve been waiting for this: a warm, cushy seat, complete with a windshield, thereby eliminating the number-one complaint about skiing. No more cold cheeks! At least not at **Canyons Resort in Park City, Utah,** home of North America’s first heated chairlift: the Jetsons-esque Orange Bubble. Hop onto the cushion, which gets an electric burst of hot air as the chair rounds the turnstile, and pull down the shield, which gives the snow a happy orange hue. Take off your mittens. Make a phone call if you like. And dream of the day when every chair is just like this. thecanyons.com



THE EXCUSE “I hate group lessons.”

SOLUTION Book a private instructor to the stars.

Whom you’re assigned as a ski instructor is often the luck of the draw, but you can pick them too. Ultimately, you want someone you can get along with for a couple of hours and who really knows her stuff. A U.S. Ski Team development program pedigree doesn’t hurt either. And if she’s good enough for, say, Jodie

Foster, even better. A member of an all-star ski clan that includes a former Olympian, **Danielle Carruth** is on the exceptionally good ski staff at **Sun Valley Resort in Idaho** and receives rave reviews from her students, who, by the way, include noncelebs too. From \$350/half-day plus lift ticket; sunvalley.com



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THE EXCUSE “Nachos and beer just don’t cut it.”
SOLUTION Sushi and sake. After a while, every après-ski snack in a wood-beamed lodge tastes the same. But pull into the Nest at the Viceroy Snowmass, at the base of Snowmass Mountain in Colorado, and you can sit at the sleek modern sushi bar sipping sake, slurping steamy bowls of miso-udon soup, and dipping especially good sashimi into freshly grated wasabi. Nest open Dec 10–Apr 15, \$\$\$; rooms from \$495; viceroyssnowmass.com

THE EXCUSE “Too crowded.”
SOLUTION Hop the first chair of the day.

We’re talking before the mountain opens. At resorts like **Lake Tahoe’s Squaw Valley USA** in **California**, you can pay extra to have the slopes to yourself. Squaw’s new Dawn Patrol lets you on the tram at 7:40. Admire the rising sun as you schuss down just-groomed runs, then head to High Camp for breakfast. By the time the masses arrive, you’ll almost be ready to call it a day. Select dates; \$39 plus lift ticket; squaw.com/dawn-patrol

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THE EXCUSE "Ski boots suck."

SOLUTION Find a ski-boot whisperer.

Insiders tout family-run **BootDoctors** (bootdoctors.com), in **Telluride, Colorado**, and **Taos, New Mexico**, as one of the best. There's also **Cosmo's Footwerks** (cosmos-footwerks.com) in **Truckee, California**, and Larry Houchen at **Larry's Boot Fitting** (larrybootfitting.com) in **Boulder, Colorado**. These guys will make custom foot beds or tweak a liner till it fits just right. *From about \$30 for a fitting.*



THE EXCUSE "Lift tickets are too expensive."

SOLUTION Ski for free.

Late sleepers and beginners: At **Alta Ski Area**, in **Little Cottonwood Canyon, Utah**, no lift tickets are needed on the Sunnyside Lift at the Albion Base after 3 p.m. So anyone with sticks (Alta is one of the last holdouts—no snowboards) can schuss or pizza-plow down the packed powder until closing at 4:30. And at **Mt. Bachelor in Bend, Oregon**, kids under 18 ski or board for free if Mom or Dad buys a multiday ticket. You can tell the kids, No, we don't have to ski together. alta.com; mtbachelor.com



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: HANK DE VREÉ, VADIM PONOMARENKO/ALAMY, BROWN CANNON III

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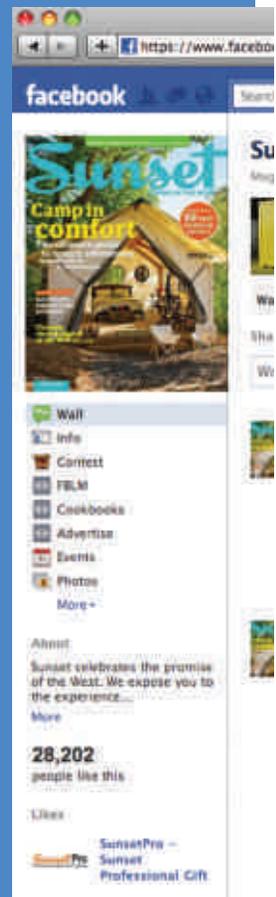
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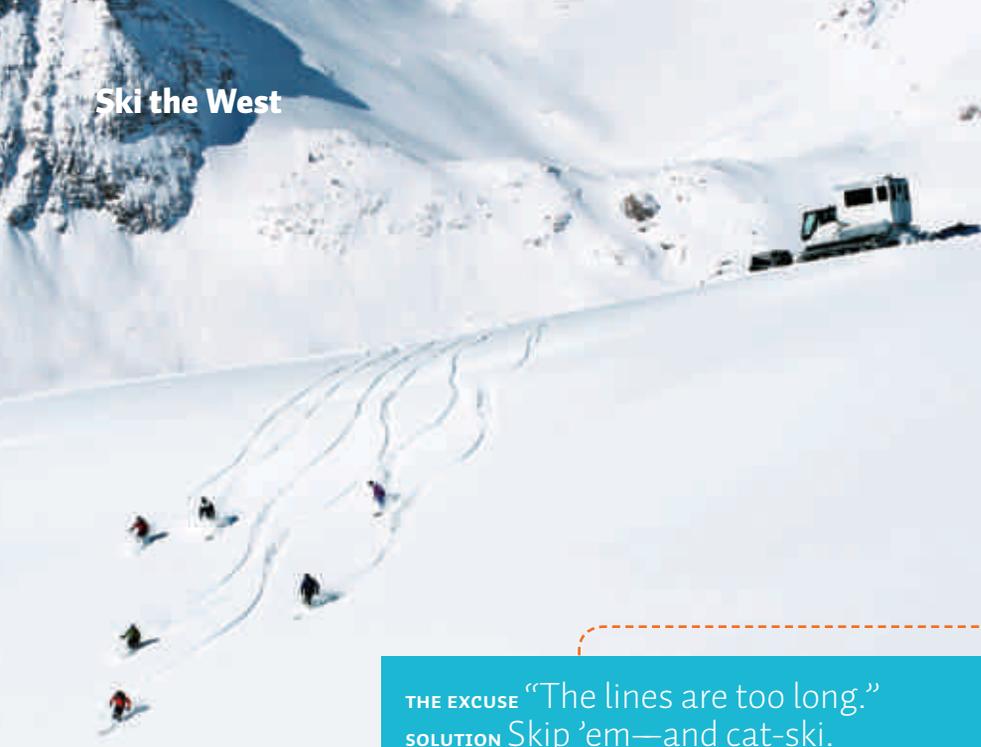
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THE EXCUSE “The lines are too long.”

SOLUTION Skip 'em—and cat-ski.

Long considered the poor man's heli-trip, cat-skiing has come into its own. Few realize it's not just for double-black-diamond rippers; blue-square skiers can do it too. (You could even say it's safer than the congested beginner and intermediate runs at some resorts, which boast names like Times Square for a reason.) New outfitter **CS Irwin** in **Crested Butte, Colorado**, is a luxe version of the typically bare-bones cat-skiing experience. You kick off with fresh pastries in town, then pile into plush snow buses with leather seats and flat-screens playing ski movies as you chug up the mountain. They'll groom runs for anyone who prefers corduroy to waist-deep powder, and cook up lunch in their cozy backcountry log cabin. *Dec 15–Apr 30; \$500/person or \$4,500/group of 10 including equipment; csirwin.com*



THE EXCUSE “I don't have \$600 a night for a slopeside room.”

SOLUTION **The Hostel in Teton Village.**

If you want to take the hassle out of ski trips—loading the car every morning, finding parking, battling après-ski traffic—it helps to stay on the mountain. But slopeside accommodations, as lovely as they are, will cost you. Especially in **Jackson Hole, Wyoming**, which boasts about as many five-star resorts as moose. You may not do hostels anymore, but the **Hostel**, within a few ski-boot

steps of Jackson Hole's gondola and tram, just might change your mind. With recently renovated rooms that come with one king or four twins (and private baths), it's more hotel-motel than college dorm. There's daily maid service, a roaring fireplace, TV, table tennis, plus 25-cent coffee and cocoa. And it's just \$59 to \$89 a night (from \$28 for the bunk-room). *thehostel.us* ■



Still not convinced?

2 spots where even die-hard bunnies will beg to tag along

A SLOPESIDE SPLURGE IN PARK CITY, UTAH

If you have no intention of leaving the hotel, you might as well book at one of the best: **Montage** opened midmountain at **Deer Valley Resort** last year, wooing luxury-seeking schussers and dragged-along spouses alike. After your skier glides out the door, you can curl up on the fire-warmed terrace, take in the sweeping Wasatch Front views, and snack on s'mores with homemade marshmallows. There's a heated pool if you do want to be outside; otherwise the spa, whirlpools, and indoor lap pool with piped-in classical music and staffers passing out cups of raspberry sorbet will do just fine. *From \$845 (from \$595 Dec 3–15 for Sunset's first-time skiers); montagedeervalley.com*

A SPECIAL SPA IN WHISTLER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Last year, **Scandinave Spa** opened a few minutes from **Whistler Blackcomb**, ideal for après-ski—or in lieu of skiing. Picture an indoor-outdoor theme park for serious soakers, with steamy hot baths, Finnish sauna and Norwegian steam room, waterfalls, cold plunges, masseuses, and plenty of cozy nooks for cuddling up. At \$56 U.S., it costs less than a lift ticket. *scandinavewhistler.com*



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