

It's All Downhill From Here

*Plan a winter getaway for the skiing enthusiast
on your gift list*

By Rose Davidson



During the holiday season, most gifts are found under a tree. But if you've got a friend or loved one whose interests line up, he or she might better appreciate a gift found out on the slopes.

A weekend ski vacation can provide the perfect combination of adventure and serenity, but a lengthy trip out west may not always be the right fit. For those who don't want to travel across the country, there are some wonderful resorts just a few hours away from central Ohio.

Fun for the Family

A vacation to a ski resort can present a great opportunity for families to bond. If the getaway recipient is going to be taking a spouse and children along, many resorts offer more spacious accommodations for larger parties. Certain resorts may even cater their overnight arrangements to specific groups, the way Wintergreen Resort – located in central Virginia, about seven hours from Columbus – does for large families.

“One of the things that’s nice about our (resort) is that we don’t have a hotel – we’re a condo- and home-based property,” says Betsy Dunkerton, director of marketing at Wintergreen. “We’re a great place for family get-togethers.”

When choosing overnight accommodations, one thing to consider is how the recipient will utilize the space. All of Wintergreen’s units come furnished and fully equipped with functioning kitchens, which include cookware and dishes for family meals. Some units are even situated directly on the slopes, offering easy access for skiers along with breathtaking views of Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains.

The resort also boasts a popular children’s area: Ridgely’s Fun Park. On weekends and holidays, kids can dabble in a variety of winter activities, and they may

even get a chance to meet the park’s mascot, Ridgely the Bear.

For adults looking for some off-slope entertainment, Wintergreen offers a unique golf course.

“We’re 3,000 feet higher than the valley below us, so our golf course in the valley is open year-round,” says Dunkerton.

And, of course, the skiing at Wintergreen is impressive. The resort boasts a total of 26 slopes, ranging from beginner hills to expert hills – including one double black diamond – as well as Virginia’s largest tubing park and five chairlifts, two of them six-passenger chairs designed to be super-fast.





Daredevil's Delight

For those with a thirst for adventure, Seven Springs Mountain Resort – southwestern Pennsylvania, about four hours from Columbus – has an extensive list of activities that are sure to thrill.

Snow tubing, snowmobile tours and skeet shooting are all big hits at the resort during the winter months, and all can be reserved in advance for recipients of a weekend trip.

Of course, the resort also has some exceptional experiences for skiers. But while most resorts provide standard ski lessons for beginners, Seven Springs goes further, offering classes for a variety of group sizes and skill levels.

“We have one of the top-rated snow-sports schools on the East Coast,” says Anna Weltz, communications manager for Seven Springs. “We offer everything from private, individual lessons to group lessons in snowboarding and skiing, and we do some more targeted classes for the experienced skiers.”

Skiing is plentiful across 40 slopes and trails, ranging from short trips with easy inclines to the harrowing, 3,360-foot Gunnar Slope with its 750-foot vertical drop.

With a plethora of exciting options in skiing and beyond, it's easy to map out an entire weekend for a guest. Just be careful not to over-plan; the gift is in the vacation, after all.

“Sometimes down time can really be an added benefit to a vacation,” says Weltz. “A lot of us spend our every day with appointments left and right, and sometimes it's okay to just not have that.”



Pampered Paradise

After a full day on the slopes, a visit to the spa can be a welcome relief for the body and mind. If you're planning a getaway for someone who rejoices in relaxation, spa services make excellent additions to any resort weekend.

Once you know what dates your getaway recipient may be available, take a look at resorts' special deals and packages. On certain weekends, resorts may offer exclusive packages or discounted rates. The majority of resorts also offer deluxe packages, often featuring weekends stay bundled with spa services.

Caren Knoyer, marketing director at Oglebay Resort and Conference Center – in northern West Virginia, about two hours from Columbus – recommends the resort's Ultimate Oglebay Experience. This romantic overnight package comes with an in-room dinner for two and a luxurious couples massage at the resort's new West Spa.

Winter sports – including a terrain park for snowboarding and the ski slope – are enjoyable, but there's more to Oglebay.

The spa, which can be found in the recently renovated Wilson Lodge, also provides services including manicures, facials and therapeutic reiki sessions. Outside of the spa, the lodge features dining options, a fitness center and a variety of suite options, all under one roof.

While spa services are sure to please, purchasing a packaged retreat may not be the best choice if you're unsure of the recipient's schedule. It's important to look into the resort's cancellation policy, as some resorts are more flexible than others.

"The best thing to do if you're not sure of the dates is to just purchase a gift card," says Knoyer. **CS**

Rose Davidson is a contributing writer. Feedback welcome at gbishop@cityscenemediagroup.com.



In-State Slopes

If you're looking to do a little skiing of your own, you don't have to go too far. Ohio offers some impressive ski destinations that are right in Columbus' backyard.

These in-state terrain parks are some of the best in the Midwest, and serve as perfect day trips for all ages and experience levels.

For aspiring skiers, look no further than Mansfield's Snow Trails. With a newly developed Beginners Area, the resort is striving to provide an ideal environment that will foster interest in winter sports.

"We're supporting that family atmosphere here, to build that kind of lifelong passion for skiing and snowboarding," says Nate Wolleson, marketing manager for Snow Trails. "The great thing is you can develop your skills here ... and be ready to go out west if you would want to."

Ohio's ski parks also offer plenty of opportunities for live entertainment and special events, including ski tournaments and a variety of weekly musical acts.

"Just about every weekend, we have some sort of event going on," says Greg Fisher, general manager of Mad River Mountain in Zanesfield.

For this season, the park will be hosting two new family festivals, both of which will feature animal visitors from the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium.

To get the best deals on in-state skiing, consider purchasing a winter package, such as Snow Trails' Let's Get Started package or Mad River Mountain's Pick A Day Pass.



Photos this page: Snow Trails



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