

## 8 affordable ski resorts in the US worth the trip

(Courtesy of Terry Ward, The Points Guy)

Schussing down a mountain, fresh air filling your lungs and sunlight dappling through silvery aspen groves, should not be a cost-prohibitive experience.

However, at many resorts across the U.S. — where lift tickets tend to land well north of the \$100-per-day mark (and sometimes far, far, more) — skiing is hardly a sport for the masses. This rings especially true once you add in the cost of a hotel, ski lessons, meals and some [apres-ski](#) entertainment.

However, with a little advanced planning (and as long as you don't demand the most extreme vertical drop, back bowl action or thousands of acres of lift-serviced terrain), there are still many stellar places across the country where an affordable ski vacation is within reach.

From Utah's Wasatch Mountains to the ponderosa pine-covered peaks of Northern Arizona, here are some of the best and most affordable ski resorts worth traveling to around the U.S.

### Nordic Valley, Utah

Head to the casually cool and utterly underrated little mountain town of Ogden, Utah, just a 40-mile drive north of Salt Lake City International Airport (SLC). It's the ideal base for an affordable family ski vacation with plenty of downhill options in the Wasatch Mountains.

In addition to points hotels galore (including [Tru by Hilton Ogden](#), [Courtyard by Marriott Ogden](#) and [Home2Suites by Hilton Ogden](#), among others), there are great restaurants and breweries to check out along historic 25th Street after a day in the surrounding snowy peaks.

Staying here puts you within a roughly 30-minute drive of three epic Utah ski resorts, including [Snowbasin](#), [Powder Mountain](#) and, the most affordable and delightfully old-school among them, [Nordic Valley](#); the latter served as one of the downhill training ski areas during the 2002 Winter Olympics.

Kids 12 and under [ski free](#) at Nordic Valley all season, with no blackout dates. General lift tickets start as low as \$12 per day at Nordic Valley — not to mention, there are discounts of 60% off when you purchase passes online at least 48 hours before you plan to ski. There's night skiing, too.

Children's group lessons (with up to six students) are available for kids between 8 and 17 years old, and they cost just \$67 for two hours. Something else that's hard to beat in Nordic Valley (besides the rustic, barn-style feel of its cozy base lodge) is the fact that you'll almost never have to wait in a line to access the 450 acres of skiing and snowboarding terrain.

### Granite Peak, Wisconsin

Downhill skiing and snowboarding in Wisconsin? You betcha. Drive less than two hours west of Green Bay to reach the hamlet of Wausau, where you can cash in points for a winter ski stay at the [Hilton Garden Inn Wausau](#) or [Hampton Inn Wausau](#), both within just a 10-minute drive of [Granite Peak](#) ski resort at Rib Mountain State Park.

Kids 5 and under ski free (as well as seniors 80 and up) at Wisconsin's top ski mountain. It boasts 60 trails spread across 200 acres of terrain, all serviced by the speediest lift system in the Midwest (including Wisconsin's only six-pack chairlift).

What we really love about this place, however, is the friendly vibe. There is a historic wooden chalet at the mountain's base and fire pits outside, where locals and out-of-towners mingle over craft beers.

For great views of the mountain lit up for night skiing, excellent Italian fare and the requisite state cocktail (the Wisconsin Old Fashioned), snag a table at [Carmelo's Italian Restaurant](#). Don't miss the chance to browse Wisconsin's oldest book store, [Janke Book Store](#), along Wausau's historic main drag back in town for a great selection of local history and Midwest travel books.

### **Canaan Valley Resort, West Virginia**

Set your sights on the highest valley east of the Mississippi River for affordable family skiing in the Allegheny Mountains, where you can get the adrenaline going without breaking the bank. Roughly three hours from Washington, D.C., and Pittsburgh, [Canaan Valley Resort](#) is located within Canaan Valley Resort State Park and offers a budget-friendly way to make the most of West Virginia's winter.

You can opt to stay on-site at the park's [main lodge](#) or in one of 23 cozy cabins with wood-burning fireplaces and gas grills, located just a half-mile away. The summit sits 4,280 feet above sea level, so altitude sickness shouldn't be a problem. There are 91 skiable acres serviced by four lifts that access 47 runs covering beginner, intermediate and advanced terrain. There's also an on-site terrain park and ski school.

Guests ages 5 and under and 70 or older ski for free. Walk-up lift tickets are usually priced around \$65 for adults mid-week and \$80 over the weekend, with discounts for multiple days.

### **Snowbowl, Arizona**

Gliding through a winter wonderland might not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the Grand Canyon State. However, families looking to save money on a wintry getaway in the Southwest know to hightail it to the mountains around Flagstaff for a ski vacation on a budget.

With 2,300 feet of vertical drop, 777 skiable acres and the largest beginner terrain in the southwestern U.S., [Snowbowl](#) offers the same [Power Kids FREE Season Pass](#) as Nordic Valley; this means kids 12 and under ski free, with no blackout dates all season long. (Other ski resorts around the U.S. offering the same deal include Purgatory Resort and Hesperus Ski Area in Durango, Colorado; Sipapu Ski & Summer Resort in Taos, New Mexico; Pajarito Mountain Ski Area in Los Alamos, New Mexico; and Brian Head Resort in Utah.)

Lift tickets at the Arizona resort run around \$60 per day for adults. Kids between the ages of 6 and 12 can ski for just \$27, so you can save some serious money on the mountain. There are several Marriott properties to put on your radar in Flagstaff for a points stay, including the [Residence Inn by Marriott Flagstaff](#), [Courtyard by Marriott](#) and [SpringHill Suites by Marriott Flagstaff](#). When you want a break from the mountain, [Grand Canyon National Park](#) is just 80 miles away.

## **Donner Ski Ranch, California**

Less than three hours from San Francisco and less than an hour from Reno, [Donner Ski Ranch](#) makes a ski vacation in the Sierras an affordable reality. Adult lift tickets cost around \$89 per day (or just \$49 on “[old school days](#)”).

Located in eastern California’s Nevada County, right near Lake Tahoe and the Nevada border, the family-friendly resort is one of the oldest ski areas in the U.S. It offers beginner and intermediate skiers some excellent terrain, including 1,000 feet of vertical drop and 500 skiable acres

Settle in on the deck of the old lodge at the mountain’s base for nachos and a beer while watching skiers make their way down the slopes at day’s end. Or, muster the energy for tube runs with the kids at the on-site snow-tubing hill. There are [rustic cottages](#) to rent nearby on the north shore of Lake Tahoe, as well as a few points hotel options like the [Best Western Plus Truckee-Tahoe Hotel](#), just 12 miles east of the mountain.

## **Cochran's Ski Area, Vermont**

Ask anyone in Burlington, Vermont, where their kids first strapped on skis to go downhill the first time and they’ll likely tell you it was at [Cochran’s Ski Area](#). Cochran is a super-friendly, postage-stamp-size resort located in the community of Richmond, just 15 miles from the college town of Burlington.

One of the only nonprofit ski areas in the U.S., the resort’s entire mission is to provide affordable skiing and snowboarding (as well as lessons and race training) to young people and their families.

Kids 5 and under as well as seniors 72 and older ski for free at Cochran’s, and adults pay just under \$20 on the weekends and just \$10 on weekdays. This puts the spot easily among the most affordable ski mountains in the Northern Hemisphere. (Night skiing is only \$5.)

The summit here maxes out at less than 1,000 feet and there are only eight trails to ski. Still, if you’re looking to introduce the family to the sport at a very friendly price point, Cochran’s is hard to beat. Stay in Burlington for excellent restaurants and breweries (apres ski in Vermont means great local beers) plus a slew of Marriott and Hilton properties for a points stay.

## **Sunlight Mountain Resort, Colorado**

With powder stashes that tend to last longer than those at Colorado’s mega ski resorts (thanks to fewer crowds) and 72 trails that all lead back to the lodge, this resort just south of Glenwood Springs is a budget-friendly alternative to Aspen-Snowmass Ski Resort, also in the area.

Kids 12 and under ski free with a paying adult at [Sunlight Mountain Resort](#) through the [Ski, Swim & Stay](#) program; the program applies to those who stay at hotel partners including Glenwood Hot Springs Resort, The Hotel Colorado and The Hotel Denver, among a few other nearby hotels.

Kids 5 and under and adults 80 and older ski free here, and lift tickets for adults are well under \$100 per day (and around \$50 for kids ages 6 to 14). This scenic part of Colorado is a hot spot for hot springs, too, which is about the best apres ski activity you can ask for. In addition to the famous Glenwood Hot Springs Pool in town, set your sights on other area favorites like [Iron Mountain Hot Springs](#) and the hot springs vapor caves at [Yampah Spa](#).

## **Ski Apache, New Mexico**

Head to the Sierra Blanca Mountains of southern New Mexico and save money on family ski fun at [Ski Apache](#). This resort is owned and operated by the Mescalero Apache Tribe, and it's located roughly 190 miles southeast of Albuquerque.

With nine lifts and 55 trails as well as the only eight-person gondola in the state, the resort tends to wow first-timers who never expected to find such good skiing in New Mexico. Walk-up lift tickets cost \$75 for adults and \$55 for kids, and you can save on group ski lessons, too, which are similarly affordable.

Settle into a [cabin rental](#) in nearby Ruidoso during your trip. Or, book a room at the luxury casino and golf resort, [Inn of the Mountain Gods](#), located on the Mescalero Apache Reservation and less than an hour's drive from Ski Apache.