

MONTANA

Winter Defined

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Superlative

[adjective]

Among the best skiing in the world, which has confoundingly remained undiscovered by the masses. Powdery bowls, long groomers and more double-black-diamonds than a bag full of Crown Jewels, this resort has it all.

Big Sky Resort

With 5,850 skiable acres, 4,350 vertical feet and more than 400 inches of annual snowfall, Big Sky Resort is big everywhere—with the exception of crowds. Big Sky Resort's iconic Lone Peak is a massive white tooth with trails spilling down all sides. It's so spectacular, and only an hour from both Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport and Yellowstone National Park. The left turn into the Ikon Pass resort is marked, as turns in Montana often are, by a log-cabin general store that sells everything from breakfast sandwiches to cowboy hats. Restaurants, lodging and bars are plentiful too—try local favorites Lone Peak Brewery and Lotus Pad in Meadow Village, where most of the folks around these parts live. From the double-black-diamond buffet of the hike to A-Z Chutes and Headwaters, to the mellow, sun-drenched corduroy off Andesite, there is so much terrain here that it would take a lifetime to explore it all. That would be a life well-lived, indeed.

ESSENTIALS

Sleep

Check in to The Wilson Hotel in Big Sky Town Center, a Marriott Residence Inn with 129 suites decorated with a bit of Western swagger.

Eat

Horn & Cattle opened at the expansive Lone Mountain Ranch in 2017. The ambience alone is worth the reservation—but the cuisine never disappoints.

Après

Keep it simple at the Carabiner Lounge, at the base of the lifts, where live music and a lively crowd remind you of everything that's right about Big Sky.

Signature Experience

Yellowstone National Park's secret season is winter, when visitors board snowcoaches to enjoy a private audience with the majestic bison that abound.

Must Do

Big Sky Resort's new headlamp-equipped night skiing is not to be missed. Join a group of seven and see the slopes in a whole new light—literally.

Family

[noun]

A group of people bonded by love and, of course, skiing. Highly likely to be found on the slopes of Blacktail Mountain Ski Area.

Blacktail Mountain Ski Area

This mom-and-pop area is exactly that: a family destination overlooking Flathead Lake. Blacktail remains untracked and unspoiled all winter long. It's unique in these parts because the parking lot is at the top (the local refrain is, "The first run's free, but it's a long walk to the top!"), where the unparalleled views of Flathead Lake and Glacier National Park will prompt your kids to take selfies that are actually worthwhile. Three chairlifts and a surface lift access 1,000 acres of powdery tree skiing, along with beginner and intermediate terrain. The thoughtful layout, which sections off terrain according to difficulty, was designed by the former mountain manager at Whitefish Mountain Resort, an hour and a half away. The biggest perk of all, though, is Muley's Pub, where parents can watch the kids lap the beginner zone while soaking in the views over a local brew.



Soul

[noun]

An immaterial quality that makes a place special; a unique vibe or feeling that resonates in your heart. Often comes with duct-tape patches and face shots.

Montana Snowbowl

Two things stand out at Montana Snowbowl: its terrain is the real deal—rocky chutes, steep pitches, rowdy tree shots, 2,600-foot vert—and its base lodge bar—cozy and warm, with a wood-fired pizza oven and friendly crowd—is one of the best in skidom. Plus, the bloody mary might be the best in the world. Just a half hour from Missoula, a cool college town teeming with craft breweries and art galleries, Montana Snowbowl has both a laid-back and cultured vibe. Its locals are understandably loyal, but so much so that they'll take you right to their favorite stash, eager to share how good this place really is.

Explore

[verb]

The act of finding something you didn't know existed—a phenomenon that happens often in Montana, as you duck into the trees and find an untouched, sparkling powder stash begging to be skied.

Red Lodge Mountain

It's not an uncommon story: those who stumble upon Red Lodge en route to Yellowstone National Park fall in love with the place and return year after year. The town is charming, and just hip enough to boast great coffee shops (Coffee Factory Roasters), lively bars (Snow Creek Saloon) and foodie-friendly eateries (The Ox Pasture) without losing its country roots. When it comes to the mountain, riders get untracked lines for days on its 1,635 skiable acres with an impressive 2,400 vert, not to mention views from the top of the Grizzly chair that stretch all the way from the Beartooth Mountains into Wyoming. Hit the Palisades lift to see the famed Palisades rocks—giant limestone plates that jut out from the ridge like a Stegosaurus' spine. And the fun doesn't end when winter does: skiers pack the campgrounds around nearby Beartooth Basin—North America's only summertime ski area—as soon as the pass opens in the spring.

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Thrill

[noun]

The feeling of standing above a steep chute without a single track inscribed in its glittering coat of fresh powder.

Discovery Ski Area

Aptly named, Discovery Ski Area is the most expansive hometown gem you'll ever ski. With 2,200 skiable acres, it has nearly as much swagger as the big guns, but this family-owned operation doesn't fuss with slopeside lodging or a base village. The shortbread chocolate chip cookies at the base lodge are the only frills you'll need. Easily reached from Missoula, Butte and Helena, it's a real skier's mountain: with 55 percent expert terrain, double-black-diamonds pepper the entire north-facing slopes, where the snow stays chalky and the moguls are made by people who know how to make 'em right. Its sunny south side is friendly for the green-circle set, while the Granite area is rife with blues and black diamonds. The word "liftline" is not in the local lexicon, which means, well, more time for discovering.

Solitude

[noun]

Located at a great distance from everything that causes stress or annoyance. Wild, beautiful and unspoiled, this is where happiness happens.

Great Divide

This local, family-owned area skis like a huge private powder playground. It boasts 1,600 acres across three peaks, with more than 100 runs that are mostly expert. It serves Helena and the surrounding communities, but because it has so much terrain and so few skier days, the outer valleys feel like backcountry skiing with the convenience of a chairlift. Lift tickets cost a mere \$10, and when the Friday night lights turn on—along with music, grills and kegs—the six terrain parks this place is known for transform into a dance party on snow.



Treasure

[noun]

A gem that is both rare and affordable, unique and precious. A special place that brings bottomless enjoyment to the people lucky enough to unearth it.

Lookout Pass Ski & Recreation Area

Straddling (literally) the Idaho/Montana border, Lookout Pass boasts the single distinction of being one of the snowiest resorts in both states. The steep, cone-shaped mountain offers skiing on three sides: the Idaho side, Montana side and North side. It's also one of the easiest resorts to access—a snowball's throw away from I-90—and within a two hour drive of Missoula, Coeur d'Alene and Spokane. An expansion into the St. Regis Basin that will double the existing 550 skiable acres is in the works, and a new quad to replace the double Chair 1 went in this past summer. Pack up your kids (ski school is free for kids under 17) and your best Estonian carrying technique (Lookout Pass hosts the Pacific National Wife Carrying Contest every January), and discover this unique gem.



Singular

[noun]

The extremely rare resort that integrates top-of-the-line infrastructure and stellar customer service while retaining its laid-back vibe and old-school traditions.

Whitefish Mountain Resort

Whitefish locals are real skiers who don't care what the weather's like—because when the clouds roll in and you come down with the “powder flu,” your boss (who's likely suffering the same ailment) can't see you on the slopes anyway. Let's talk about that powder: it's smooth, creamy goodness that bonds to layers underneath, making four inches feel like eight, and transforms the trees into the snow ghosts for which this place is known. When the views of Whitefish Lake and Glacier National Park appear, it's downright magical. Add in a genuinely welcoming town easily accessed by the S.N.O.W. Bus—a free shuttle that runs between downtown and the resort—and Whitefish becomes a seamless vacation destination. Since 2006, Whitefish Mountain Resort has steadily invested its way up to becoming a world-class resort, with improvements in lifts, infrastructure and overall customer experience. Yet, because it's Whitefish—on the edge of Glacier National Park, not far from the border of Canada—its laid-back vibe and longstanding traditions remain untouched. Take the Frabert Clod of the Week awards at the Bierstube, in which ski patrol roasts the employee who made the week's biggest blunder. Be sure to belly up at Hellroaring Saloon, where the memorabilia will help you understand this place—and the people who keep it real.

ESSENTIALS

Sleep

Hang your ski helmet at the Firebrand Hotel in downtown Whitefish, right in the heart of downtown's many shops, restaurants and bars.

Eat

Beloved Fleur Bake Shop moved to bigger digs and expanded its menu. Stop by for Montana Coffee Traders brew and house-baked pastries.

Après

Montana Tap House is the place to go for Montana-made beers in a chill setting downtown. Bonus: order a pie from the new pizza kitchen.

Signature Experience

Hop on a fat bike and pedal to your heart's content along one of the winter-friendly, multi-use paths—a new way to take in the town.

Must Do

Whether you're skiing or not, grab lunch at the Summit House atop Chair 1 for tasty eats and expansive Glacier National Park vistas.

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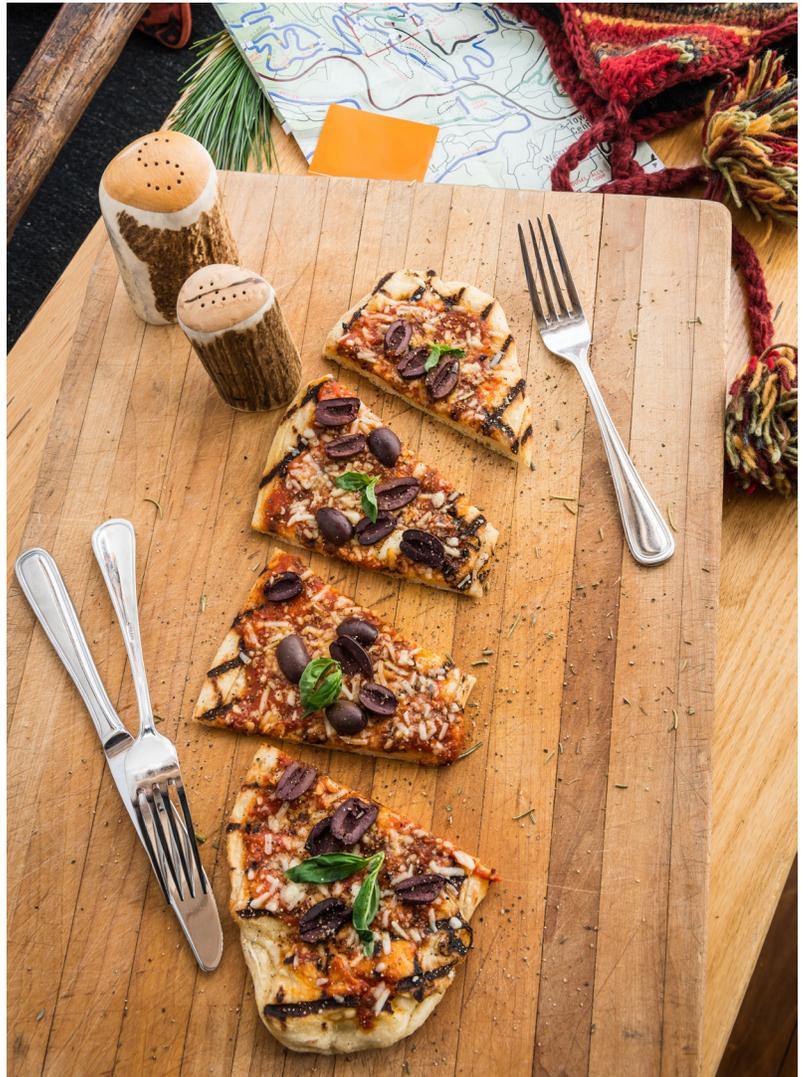
History

[noun]

A long-standing tradition or institution around which a community is built. The indelible feeling of nostalgia and belonging you get when you visit one of the oldest continually operating ski areas in Montana.

Showdown Montana

Deep in the woods of the Little Belt Mountains, Showdown Montana has been spinning lifts for the Great Falls region since 1936 and is now owned and operated by three generations of one local family—nearly all of whom work on the slopes. There's no artificial snow here—the real stuff is one of Showdown's hallmarks, along with affordable prices (\$30 lift tickets on Thursdays), the hot cocoa at King's Hill Grille up top and the cheese fries at the base lodge. The skiers who frequent here come in all kinds, from cowboys in Carhartts to terrain park kids in Pit Vipers and baggy pants. Come New Year's Eve, the locals all gather together to watch the torchlight parade and celebrate their own history in this pristine and wild corner of the world.



Authentic

[adjective]

Of undisputed origin; pure. At Bridger Bowl Ski Area, the mustaches are unironic, bartenders are not “mixologists” and a handshake is as legally binding of an agreement as you'll ever need.

Bridger Bowl Ski Area

Bridger Bowl, a community-owned nonprofit, is the biggest little resort in the West. It's as if you put Big Sky's raucous chutes, Whitefish's powdery trees and Blacktail's purring groomers together in a snowglobe, shook it until it was choked with huge flakes and planted it 25 miles from the world's easiest airport. Bridger Bowl's unique storms (the arrivals of which are announced by the flashing blue beacon atop the Baxter Hotel in Bozeman) come from the Bridger Bowl Cloud—an upslope-precipitation phenomenon (aka “sneaky pow”) that hovers mysteriously over The Ridge, a 600-foot hike to zone that requires both avy gear and a solid jump turn. Despite its radical terrain, Bridger Bowl's vibe is all about duct tape and high-fives. Authentic, indeed.



Unspoiled

[adjective]

Untrammeled, untracked; pristine.

A place whose natural beauty brings pure joy—and the burning desire to visit again and again.

Lost Trail Powder Mountain

Straddling the Bitterroot Mountains on the border of Montana and Idaho, about 90 miles from Missoula, Lost Trail Powder Mountain is truly a place you go to unplug, unwind and reconnect with your favorite people. It's a family place through and through, but don't let that mislead you: there are plenty of cliffy huckables in Hollywood Bowl, as well as open aprons to purr through the untouched powder off of South Face and Thunder. It's also only open Thursday to Sunday—not quite long enough for the pow that's stacked up all week to get tracked out. As for après, nearby Jackson Hot Springs will soak out all your spurs and give you a front-row seat to the undiluted sky, so full of glittering stars you've never seen that you'll have difficulty finding the Big Dipper. The spirit of skiing is alive and well here. And when you come here, yours will be too.

Identity

[noun]

The tangible and intangible aspects that make a place unique. Best experienced when you have no cellphone service.

Maverick Mountain

In Southwest Montana, 40 miles from Dillon, Maverick Mountain is skiing as it used to be: people from all walks of life come to the slopes for the sheer thrill of sliding downhill—not for granite bathrooms or faux Bavarian villages. The base lodge at Maverick Mountain rocks the same shag carpet it's had since the '70s, when it was cool to nail it to the walls and ceiling, too. A double chair accesses 2,020 vertical feet of all kinds of terrain, most of which is still powdery a week after the last storm. The Elkhorn Hot Springs, a few miles away, offers ski-and-stay packages, so you can enjoy being in the middle of nowhere without having to drive to somewhere at the end of the day. But the best thing about this place is the smiles you'll see on everyone's faces—this might be the friendliest place you'll ever ski.

Undiscovered

[adjective]

A way to describe a place so under the radar, there are fewer than six people per square mile. Incredibly unusual and unique in these digital times. Welcome to Bear Paw Ski Bowl.

Bear Paw Ski Bowl

Bear Paw Ski Bowl harkens back to skiing's heyday: one double lift, one rope tow, 900 feet of vert, 20-some runs and more community stoke than anywhere else in skidom. A visit here truly is like stepping back in time to what skiing was 50 years ago. That's a good thing. Bear Paw is also one of two U.S. ski areas that operate on tribal land, located inside Rocky Boy's Reservation, home of the Chippewa Cree. The mountains themselves, which jut up suddenly in the middle of Montana's plains, are also remarkable—with Bear Paw in the shadow of the region's pinnacle peak, 6,900-foot Baldy Mountain.

Hometown

[noun]

The place where you feel like you truly belong. The overwhelming vibe that community-owned Turner Mountain emanates.

Turner Mountain

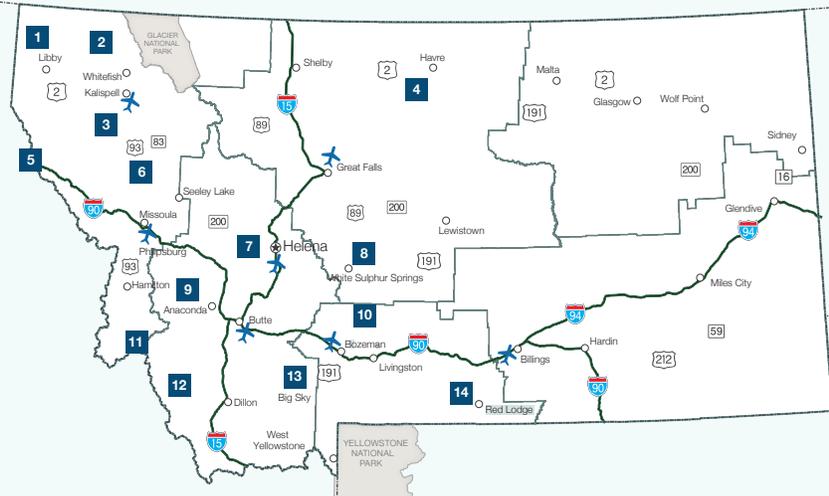
Turner Mountain was made for a chairlift—the mountain is a perfectly symmetrical 2,110-vertical-foot mound with a double chair running right up the center and gorgeous matching glades on either side. The nonprofit area is 85 miles away from Kalispell and mostly serves the local Libby, Montana population: everybody knows everybody, which is all part of its charm. A big day at Turner Mountain is roughly 125 skiers, which means the skier density remains lower than the density of the Montana coldsmoke pow that billows in all week, stacking the slopes with fresh snow until the lifts start spinning Friday. Its sole lift serves 22 runs, most of which are expert and intermediate. If you go, be sure to order a burger and hand-cut fries at the Day Lodge—they're rumored to be the best in Libby.

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Endless Opportunities



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|------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Turner Mountain | 6. Montana Snowbowl | 11. Lost Trail Powder Mountain |
| 2. Whitefish Mountain Resort | 7. Great Divide | 12. Maverick Mountain |
| 3. Blacktail Mountain | 8. Showdown Montana | 13. Big Sky Resort |
| 4. Bear Paw Ski Bowl | 9. Discovery Ski Area | 14. Red Lodge Mountain |
| 5. Lookout Pass | 10. Bridger Bowl | |

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