

7 Tips for The Ultimate Utah Snowboarding/Ski Trip

A Road Trippers Guide to Hiking the Mighty (Five)

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Mountain Hopping in Utah

There's something about five guys, a carload of snowboards and loose, powdery snow to bring a group of friends together. This year's Utah snowboarding trip came and went in a blur of downhills, hot tubs and blue-bird days when we all somehow managed to recapture what it was like to be back in our fraternity - if only for a short while. Determined to hit as many runs as possible in our short five-day vacation, we headed west in search of snow and stories that would eventually become as big as our egos. If you're planning your own guys' boardfest, here's a sample of the fun we had, the things we learned and what to do when you find yourself in some of the most concentrated powder in the nation.

Sundance Mountain Resort — Day One

Everything begins at the airport. If you time your trip right, plan it correctly and allow for eventualities, you're sure to make it to the slopes without a hitch. Sadly, that was not us.

Jim missed his connection into Salt Lake City, Mike's board didn't arrive and not a single one of us remembered to reserve a rental car. Fortunately, being in a ski mecca meant rentals were plentiful and we were able to score a Chevy Suburban with a ski rack from EZ Rent-A-Car, even at the last minute. Our late arrival leads me to my first tip - half days.

Tip #1 - Go For Half

Thanks to the close proximity of the mountains to the airport, many resorts offer half day, afternoon and nighttime passes. You can ski Sundance Mountain's Twilight Pass (2:30-9 p.m.) for less than \$50, so it's a good option for boarders like us who like to hit the snow as soon as the flight touches down. Many other resorts also offer partial-day tickets, so make sure to ask.

After a few awesome runs to tune our boards and some steep, wide-open bowls late in the day, we headed into town, blissfully tired and hungry. The obvious choice for these

powderhounds was the locals' favorite, The Owl Bar. Legend has it the original 1890s bar was hauled to its current location from Wyoming where Butch Cassidy and his gang used to throw back a few. The bar menu was filled with microbrews, wine and shooters, but we opted to hold off until we were settled for the night. Instead, we grabbed some dinner (try the fried pickles and Owl Bar nachos). It's an absolute must-see (or must-eat) if you're planning a Utah ski trip!

Here's a tip to keep in mind when just arriving in a high-altitude destination:

Tip #2 — High Time For Fun

As a flatlander from Florida, I admit that high altitudes aren't always my friend. To prevent dehydration, which only worsens altitude sickness, gulp water before, during and after you fly and take it easy the first day.

Solitude Mountain Resort — Day Two

A bit smaller and less crowded than other mountains, Solitude has a laid-back feel and much shorter lift lines. The resort is best known for some pretty epic off-piste terrain like Honeycomb Canyon, a long, narrow canyon on the back side with a series of tight trees, chutes and bowls. Depending on the chute, the short descents range from 600 to 1,000 feet before flattening out onto the cat track — hard as hell, crazy as all get out and definitely only for the more advanced riders. Our group tended to hug the runs on the far side of the canyon, which featured open bowls with rock outcroppings that led off into a series of wider chutes. They were much easier than the runs on the near side. At the end of a day we were beat. After a soothing, but somewhat awkward, five-guy soak in the hot tub, we decided to have dinner in a yurt. No, I didn't know what it was either. Turns out a yurt is a type of Mongolian tent. Which brings me to my next two tips:

Tip #3 — Have At Least One Over-the-Top Experience

To get to The Yurt at Solitude, we snowshoed about a mile through a lantern-lit forest until coming to a clearing where the yurt sat hidden in the woods. A four-course meal, including a seafood course, venison and short ribs, was prepared right before our eyes. While it was, admittedly, a bit of a foodie event, the grub was amazing and the experience was unique.

TIP #4 — STAY OFF MOUNTAIN

Since rooms on a ski hill can get pricey, we decided to stay off mountain and drive to the resorts. With our rental car from SLC International Airport we were able to save a whole lot of money that we would have spent on ski-in, ski-out accommodations. We didn't plan on spending that much time inside any way.



Park City Mountain - Days Three And Four

It's true, Park City has changed – a lot. I haven't been there since college so I was pumped to see the mountain had exploded thanks to the nine-minute Quicksilver Gondola. The lift connects the former Canyons and Park City resorts to create the country's largest ski area. What hasn't changed is the vibe. With the look of a 19th century mining town, Park City has maintained its wild-west feel and the laid back attitude that brought us here in the first place.

On our first day in the newly expanded Park City Mountain, we hit the slopes early, determined to cover as much ground as possible. With secret powder stashes aplenty and room to spread out, we all agreed it was a day of pure magic. But all that powder came at a price – expensive lift tickets. Our goal became figuring out how to recoup some of the cost. That brings me to the next tip:

Tip #5 — Backpack Lunches

Mountain food can be expensive. To keep from trashing our budgets, we decided to pack sandwiches, drinks and snacks. After cramming it all into backpacks, we found a ski rack outside the mid-mountain lodge where they would keep in the cold air and be easily accessible when we were ready for a bite to eat. That's a Utah travel tip that won't break the bank. By the end of the day our legs were twitching, but we were still looking for something else to do when we heard about the Alpine Coaster. It was a whole lot of fun, even for five grown guys who should have known better.

Tip #6 — Be A Kid

The Alpine Coaster is an elevated course that feels a bit like a luge. Running on a track that winds past hairpin curves at speeds of more than 30 miles per hour, it sounded like a good idea at the time. Needless to say, more than one of us was screaming like a little girl as we barreled down the mountain



On our final day on Park City Mountain, we made the most of the vast terrain by parking in the Canyons' base lot where spots are more plentiful than in town and then taking the bus to the Park City base. From there, we made our way back toward the Canyons as the day progressed, spending more time on the Canyons side of the mountain and finishing conveniently at our car. Admittedly, the comfort of having a rental car in Utah came in handy with all the traveling.

Powder Mountain Resort — Day Five

On our last day, we took a drive to Powder Mountain. PowMow, as the locals call it, is famous for one thing sick powder. Instead of packing more bodies into its massive acreage of in-bound terrain, the resort caps ticket sales at 2,000 per day, creating the lowest skier density of any major

resort in North America. We'd all heard the sales pitch but doubted if any peak could be that good. We were wrong.

The fluffy stuff cannot be over sold. Here's why: We've all gotten up early to catch fresh tracks at other ski resorts only to find them gone within a few hours. But at PowMow there are freshies for days after a good dump.

Tip #7 — Take A Drive

PowMow is a 90-minute drive from Salt Lake City, as much as twice the distance of some other spots, but worth the trip. Why? Not only is it one of the largest, softest and snowiest hills in the area, it's also fairly cheap.

The only drawbacks to our day on the powder were our sore muscles and achy quads. We all had our remedies. I took a hot bath with Epsom salts, Derek used Tiger Balm, Mike popped several ibuprofen and Jim and Ethan opted for stretching exercises.

That's A Wrap

After five days, four mountains, and countless wipeouts, it was time to call it; our epic guys' trip had officially come to an end. After the short ride to the airport to drop off the rental car and say goodbye, we headed our separate ways. Everyone vowed we would do this again next year, but with jobs, significant others, and even a baby on the way, who knows when all the stars will align. One thing was for sure: the powder was thick, the runs were incredible, and Utah most definitely did not disappoint.

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Driving Times: Salt Lake City to Sundance Mountain Resort — 53 Minutes
 Sundance Mountain Resort to Solitude Mountain Resort — 1 Hour, 10 Minutes
 Solitude Mountain Resort to Park City Mountain — 56 Minutes
 Park City Mountain to Powder Mountain Resort — 1 hour, 30 minutes
 Powder Mountain Resort to Salt Lake City — 1 hour, 11 minutes