

## TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE

# Surviving off-season Park City

By John Blanchette  
Copley News Service



PARK CITY FUN - Ziplining thousands of feet in seconds in Park City, Utah, is an exhilarating mountain rush. CNS Photo by John Blanchette.



HORSEBACK RIDE - Horseback riding is a popular activity at the ski resorts in summer. CNS Photo by John Blanchette.



MAIN STREET, PARK CITY - Park City is a beautiful mix of Victorian buildings and western Americana, with a thriving artistic community, galleries and museums and great restaurants, bars and clubs. CNS Photo by John Blanchette.



I'M FREE - Freestyle ski jumpers practice their spins high above a special training pool at the Park City resort. CNS Photo by John Blanchette.

You don't have to wait for the snow to fly to have a thrill-filled vacation in Wasatch Mountain's skiing mecca of Park City, Utah. During the months when skiing and snowboarding aren't options, the resorts adapt their winter venues for summer use. But don't think trail-hiking and scenic rides on a chairlift. Think risk and danger and seeing your life flash before your eyes.

My initiation began at 9,000 feet on a five-mile mountain bike course down (and alas, up) the ski slopes. Then it was on to the "World's Steepest

Zipline," where I hung on a wire and was pushed off from the top of the ski jump mountain on a 60-second, 2,300-foot screaming descent.

Next was the Alpine Slide, during which I maneuvered a sled along a 3,000-foot winding channel at roller-coaster speeds. And then came the adrenaline coup de grace when I careened down the concrete Olympic bobsled run at speeds over 70 miles an hour, mostly in awkward and unnatural positions. Yes, people actually pay \$65 to \$200 to take this sadistic plunge in summer on wheels and on ice in winter.

And to add a little excitement to an otherwise peaceful moment, I was riding on the all-metal chairlift above tree level for the luge run when it began to thunder and lightning.

I drew the line on flying face-down on the bobsled run atop a minuscule sled called the "Skeleton." I might have tried it, but I couldn't get past the name.

Utah Olympic Park was the site of most of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, and it's where the U. S. Ski Team trains. Ski-jumpers as young as 6 years old soar hundreds of feet in the air and land on manicured grass surfaces in summer. Also fun to watch are the freestyle jumpers who fly 50 feet up in the air, spinning like whirling dervishes into a bubbling pool of water. I also passed on these activities.

Park City itself is lucky to be alive. It was founded in 1868 by former Civil War soldiers assigned to monitor the Mormons and make sure they didn't establish a separate country in the unincorporated territory. They discovered silver in the hills and encouraged outside settlement to dilute the Mormon population.

Almost overnight thousands of people descended on Park City from all over the world in search of riches. This is where the Hearst family made millions, later funding William Randolph Hearst's

media empire. Twenty-three millionaires were created, and \$400 million in silver was mined from the hills in its heyday.

The booming town took on the nickname of "Sin City" because it supported two dozen saloons and a thriving red-light district. But that all came to an end fairly quickly after the fire of 1898 destroyed much of downtown. Silver prices had begun to fall, and mining was no longer a lucrative enterprise. Virtually uninhabited, it remained on the "Ghost Town Registry" until 1982. Legend has it that several ghosts still haunt the city, most notably in the Grappa Inn and the Egyptian Theater.

Then once again the mountains helped save the city. More than 340 ski runs were developed amid the three major valleys surrounding the town. Stein Eriksen built his Lodge in 1982, and shortly after that Robert Redford began the Sundance Film Festival, which brings prestige and more than 40,000 visitors to town each year.

The State Historical Commission decided to save the old structures and buildings, spending millions on the project. Many modern lodges are continuing to spring up outside of town to support the thriving year-round tourist industry.

Today Park City is a beautiful mix of Victorian buildings and Western Americana, with a thriving artistic community, galleries and museums, and great restaurants, bars and clubs. A blue oasis in a red state, it has a liberal view on most issues.

Many still call it Sin City. In fact, Mayor Dana Williams is the lead guitarist in a rock 'n' roll band and was named to Outside Magazine's "Top 40 Cool Dudes" list.

Many celebrities visit the city, especially during Sundance, and some stay. Noted residents include film studio head Jeffrey Katzenberg and ABC newsman Charles Gibson. Gibson, who is fond of the bread pudding served at Cafe Terigo, ordered

50 servings flown to New York for his show's anniversary party this year.

## **IF YOU GO**

A number of major concerts and events are held in Park City all year. At the Wine & Food Festival in July, 65 vineyards from around the world offer sips and 30 of the city's best restaurants offer tastes. In the evening there is live entertainment, this year featuring Pink Martini, Lyle Lovett and k.d. lang.

For your own Rocky Mountain high, visit Charlie Sturgis at White Pine Touring for bike runs, hiking and rock-climbing and Utah Olympic Park for bobsledding, zipline rides, ski-jumping and other thrilling undertakings.

Excellent golf courses and spas are also available for the less adventurous. A gentler and more informative bike ride is the historical city tour conducted by White Pine, and the Historical Society Walking Tour, beginning at the Museum on Main Street, is a great way to experience the town's history. Horseback riding is popular in the summer and a free shuttle bus services the town and surrounding resorts.

More than 100 restaurants and a wide range of cuisines are available, including the spectacular French/Asian Wahso, which Fodor lists as one of the "10 Best in the World," 350 Main, Prime Steak House and the Royal Street Cafe for alfresco dining at Deer Valley Resort. The Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory is also a sweet diversion. Saloons and clubs include the Sidecar, O'Shucks, the Martini Bar, Bacchus Wine Bar and Wasatch Brew Pub.

I stayed at Sundial Lodge at The Canyons Resort. Summer rates are a quarter of winter's, but you don't get to ski from the slope to your door. One of the town slogans is "the greatest snow on Earth," and the locals say it is common to see people skiing down Main Street in winter.

For information on housing, restaurant options, art, music, food and wine festivals throughout the year, museum and gallery guidebooks, brochures and maps, contact the Park City Chamber of Commerce/Convention & Visitors Bureau at 800-453-1360 or [www.parkcityinfo.com](http://www.parkcityinfo.com). The Park Record newspaper also publishes a weekly guide to events around town.

This is an idyllic and beautiful part of the world where summers are cool, dry and mild. And life can be as quiet or exciting as you like in this friendly mountain community. Remember that you'll be at a much higher altitude than you're probably used to, so you may want to acclimate before you try any of the physically exerting activities.

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