

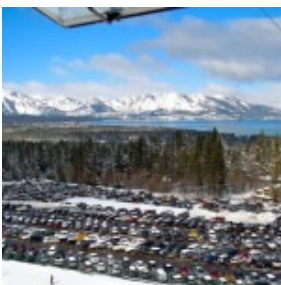
Ski industry trying to forget about 2011-12 season

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

SAN ANTONIO – In the worst ski season in 20 years, the winners stayed flat and the losers lost big.

“I think we dodged a bullet,” said Dave Riley , chief of Telluride ski area, where visitation remained steady through the 2011-12 season while nationally visits fell 16 percent to 51 million, a 20-year low.

Telluride joins a handful of Colorado ski areas – like Eldora, Wolf Creek, Echo Mountain, Durango Mountain Resort and Aspen Skiing Co.’s quiver of four hills – that saw visitation remain similar to the record season of 2010-11. Wyoming and New Mexico – home to the thriving Taos Ski Valley – were the only states to show annual increases in visitation. Overall, the Rocky Mountain region, which includes Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Idaho, Wyoming and Montana, bested the national 16-percent decline with a mere 7.2 percent drop to 19.4 million visits. Resorts in California were on the other end, with visits plummeting more than 20 percent in a season that saw a first-ever snowless December.



Heavenly's parking lot was full on the few powder

days Tahoe
witnessed.
Photo/LTN

The mood at the annual National Ski Areas Association convention – a typically celebratory confab of several hundred resort operators from all snowy corners – was not the same as recent gatherings, where resorts reveled in record showings despite economic turmoil.

Recovery and resiliency reigned at this year's rally of goggle-tanned optimists.

"We are eternally optimistic. We see an anomaly winter and we know it's going to get better next year," said Steve Rice , the managing director of Florida's CNL Lifestyle Co., a real estate investment trust with 16 ski resorts and seven ski-area villages . "Still, I don't think it's hyperbole to say that this year's silver lining is that it demonstrates a worst-case scenario. We know what the bottom looks like."

Indeed, it would be hard to get any worse.

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