

No reason to pay full price for lift tickets

By Janet Fullwood, San Jose Mercury News

Skiers and snowboarders are perpetual optimists who like to believe the coming season will bring more powder than ever before. While that's up to Mother Nature, one hard, cold fact is for sure: Peak-season rates at prominent resorts now top \$100 a day at the ticket window.

Snow-sports enthusiasts can just say "ouch" – or go online to save.

Taking their cues from airlines and hotels, mountain resorts are selling discounted lift tickets online and through smartphone apps, and pricing them according to anticipated demand. Many are also enlisting third-party resellers whose sophisticated platforms allow them to release a limited number of tickets at a given rate or otherwise change prices on the fly.

"Because resorts can control dates and volume, they can put out deals up to 80 percent off the walk-up rate," says Ron Schneidermann, co-founder and CEO of Liftopia, a San Francisco-based site that is to snow-sports enthusiasts what Expedia is to air travelers.

"The airline industry did a good job of conditioning people to book in advance," he adds, "and that's what the ski industry is doing now. The focus is on advance-purchase, online bookings, whether through the individual resort websites or us."

Season passes bought early in the year (the best deals dry up after Labor Day) offer the best value for those who plan to spend a lot of time on the slopes. But for those who can't

justify the cost or just want to try someplace new, advance purchase of a date-specific lift pass can bring significant savings of 10 to 60 percent.

And it's not just infrequent skiers who bite. According to Schneidermann, about one in five Liftopia customers holds a season pass to a resort other than the one for which they're buying tickets online.

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