

Demand for backcountry-like terrain prompts resorts to up the ante inbounds

By Avery Stonich, Outdoor

When the new Kachina Peak lift opens at Taos Ski Valley this season, inbound skiers and riders will gain access to prime terrain once reserved only for those willing to hike to the top. The triple chair will whisk people up to 12,450 feet, just shy of the Kachina Peak summit, increasing Taos' advanced and expert lift-serviced terrain by 50 percent.

"Kachina offers an adventure similar to backcountry skiing and riding, and we know many of our visitors are actively seeking more of that type of experience," says Jesse Keaveny, chief marketing officer for Taos Ski Valley. "By adding the lift, we provide snowsports enthusiasts that thrill of untamed expert terrain, but in a more accessible – and controlled – way."

Taos isn't the only resort trying to bring backcountry-like experiences to its customers. According to National Ski Areas Association data, inbound snowsports visits dropped almost 10 percent from 2010-11 to 2013-14. While back-to-back dismal snow years in some regions (looking at you, California) take some of the blame, the improved performance of backcountry gear has allowed more skiers and riders to feed their stoke beyond resort boundaries. Backcountry gear sales have jumped nearly eight percent since 2011-12 and sales of hybrid alpine/AT boots have quintupled during the last four years, according to Snowsports Industries America.

Read the whole story