

Park City much more than just a ski town



Trail connectivity in Park City is good for dogs and people.
Photo/Susan Wood

By Susan Wood

PARK CITY, Utah – When the kids go back to school, Park City goes to the dogs – or hikers, cyclists, foodies and thrill seekers searching for solace from the crowds.

At 7,000 feet, the Utah ski town is best known for its monumental winters. It's home to *Ski* magazine's No. 1 ski resort Deer Valley, now owned by KSL Partners, which also has Squaw Valley in its investment portfolio. It's also home to

Park City – which ski giant Vail Resorts has made the largest U.S resort by combining it with Canyons.

Park City is also considered a bedroom community for skiers and boarders venturing out to Little and Big Cottonwood canyons outside nearby Salt Lake City. Snow riding options abound in these two canyons – home of Snowbird, Alta, Solitude and Brighton mountain resorts.

More important, Park City was placed on the global map in 2002 by co-hosting the Winter Olympics with neighboring Salt Lake City. The big advantage here is the assortment of adventure-sports venues left for visitors and residents alike to use.



Outdoor entertainment comes in various forms. Photo/Susan Wood

In summer, visitors flock to Park City for the mild climate and outdoor adventure. But summer and winter aside – when fall

rolls around, visitation drops off when kids are in school.

This leaves miles of trails and empty seats on activity rides, restaurants and bars.

“The Park City Chamber/Bureau does do extensive work to attract guests to visit our destination year round. Since the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, we have seen the shoulder seasons (aka spring and fall) dwindle,” Park City Chamber/Convention & Visitors Bureau spokeswoman Rachel Buhler told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Park City was once known as a winter-only destination, but now it has earned a reputation for visitation at any time of year.”

Buhler listed the foliage as a mainstay for visitors to come out in the fall.

Park City and Canyons, the mountain operations with an alpine coaster and slide, zip line and mountain bike venue, closed at the end of September.

But the Utah Olympic Park remains open on the weekends for those seeking a thrill in three adventure courses, two zip lines at the tower and, better yet, the Comet bobsled that can transport a rider up to 3Gs (70mph) on a course that twists down the mountain. It's a thrill a minute. It closes Oct. 22.



Fall colors are low to the ground and high in the trees.
Photo/Susan Wood

To slow things down, a visitor can enjoy the solitude of utter beauty by hiking or sauntering on trails. The aspens turn a vivid yellow in some groves, with spots of red sprinkled in. Wide open, expansive views reveal mountainsides with shades of rust- or orange-colored trees against the green landscape marked with patches of white snow.

Park City is a lot like Lake Tahoe in the fall. One day may bring on 70-degree, pleasant temperatures. Another may portray an early winter, as it did leading into the last week of September as summer came to a cold end.

The scenery is exceptional at Park City this time of year.

Plus, there are more than enough places to take woman's best friend.

AJ became an Olympic dog-for-the-day when the sun came out and beamed down on the foothills atop the ridge overlooking Olympic Park.

Hikers can drive to the facility where the Alf Engen Ski Museum, training pool and adventure activities are located to pick up the Welcome Center Trail. From there, the scenery only improves as the switchbacks climb up the Nordic View Trail that leads to the ridge at Peak Plaza where the top of the ski jump comes into full view. The aptly named Legacy Ridge Trail veers off into a particularly quiet part of the mountain where it meets with the Iron Bill Trail for the descent leading back to the base at the Nordic Plaza. Not a soul was in sight.

The hike is a feast for the senses. The smell of autumn permeates the trails, with wet leaves scattered about.

If the approximately three miles doesn't fill up one's day, a hiker can just hop in the car and venture down the Olympic Park Road to pick up a system of trails in the Basin Recreation Area.

With a four-legged friend, there's a special place to stop right off the main road.

The 2-mile Run-A-Muk Trail is specifically designed for canines. It's fenced in, hence the name for dogs that love to go off leash. At the gated trailhead, poop bag dispensers have been installed. Cute signs along the way make the walk entertaining: "If your dog poops, you must scoop."

Across the road, a trailhead for a more ambitious trail awaits. Park City gets an A-plus for trail connections. A hiker can pick up the Overland Trail from the growing civilization at Kimball Junction outside of the historic town and climb up to a beautiful grove of aspens where the two trailheads intersect. The trail promises views and comes equipped with lights for night walking, along with a bench to take a break. AJ thoroughly enjoyed the endeavor.

From the main intersection at mid-mountain, hikers and riders such as the large Park City High School Mountain Bike Club may ambitiously climb up to the base of Olympic Park. It would be easy to spend the whole day in just this one section of Park City.

It's obvious based on the offerings and the activity out and about where people spend their time in Park City. Miles and miles of trails dot the landscape from the foothills to the high reaches of the mountaintops spanning more than 10,000 feet at the top of Guardsman Pass.

This massive recreational offering and change of scenery is what gets one Tahoe couple to return year after year with their mountain bikes, paddleboards, dirt bikes and tennis gear.

They enjoy starting at Stein Eriksen Lodge where they're sure to see wildlife. Sure, Lake Tahoe comes with that bonus. But when's the last time you've come up to a moose out on a hike or bike ride?

Park City has also captured the visitor seeking a unique experience indoors as well – jumping on the foodie tourism bandwagon.



Entrees like the steelhead trout at Twisted Fern rival big city restaurants. Photo/Kathryn Reed

A restaurant experience at a different level

The Twisted Fern offers a refreshing approach to dining in this recreational paradise.

This eatery on Snow Creek Drive provides that delicate balance between plentiful nourishment and an explosion of flavors at adequate prices with a lovely atmosphere.

“Park City has a significant food scene. There is a large variety of blends in town, but many people are focused on local, organic and sustainable sourcing,” Buhler, the town’s spokeswoman, said. “Many chefs in town are award-winning and bring in a heightened sense of creativity to offer foods that are new as well as old classics with a spin to the ingredients.”

She couldn’t be more right about chef-owner Adam Ross’s Twisted Fern.

For starters, the elote appetizer billed as gluten free gets the taste buds going as the combination of fried corn, fingerling potatoes, shishito peppers and cherry tomatoes to replace the off-season heirloom variety represents a perfect melding of flavors. (Warning: the corn on the small cob is a bit awkward to eat.)

To wash it down, the Delusional Donkey cocktail is a zesty vodka-ginger beer-mint concoction, while the Wasatch Smash named after the local mountain range is a smooth libation made up of spiced whiskey, lemon, rosemary and simple syrup.

Many choices fill the chef's entrée menu – without clogging it up. And these are no ordinary meal options. Highly recommended is the chicken fried portabello mushroom – a unique take on a common comfort meat dish.



Chef Adam Ross is happy to not be on Main Street in Park City. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Christy, the waitress, was more than happy to go over the ins and outs of the menu. She seemed genuinely excited to work for a restaurant and chef who care about sustainability and takes part in the farm-to-fork movement. It's a level of

understanding she said she didn't get in her home state of Pennsylvania.

The pan-seared steelhead trout, albeit from British Columbia, tasted like it jumped on the plate. The savory vanilla oats mixed alongside the arugula pesto, asparagus and pecan granola provided ideal complements to the main ingredient of the dish.

The décor in the restaurant that opened in June is as delightful as the food. There's a lighted bar off to the side of the open floor where 13 tables are adequately spaced. Outdoor seating doubles the occupancy. It's nice the restaurant has the corner space in the strip mall to provide a view of the hill outside the window. Some seating offers views of the Park City mountain itself to remind diners and even the chef himself why they are here.

Chef Ross came out 11 years ago to go snowboarding. He has never looked back.

He frequents the farmers market every week, scours the meat and mushroom channels from Idaho, Washington and Montana on a regular basis and can come up with creative ideas at any time.

"I wanted to fill a niche that no one else was doing," Ross told *Lake Tahoe News*.