

# HIT THE SLOPES!

The mountains are calling, fresh snow is falling, and with a little preparation, you can explore ski and snowboard resorts in the comfort of your RV

— by Lisa Ballard



**Starting in 2006**, Bode Miller, the charismatic bad boy of the U.S. Ski Team who won a remarkable six Olympic medals in alpine skiing, spent several years of his downhill-racing career traveling from ski area to ski area in an RV, despite the

fact that it was against the team's rules. Racers were supposed to stay in the team's designated hotels during the competition season, which spanned from early December through early April. Miller complained that moving from

hotel to hotel every few days adversely affected his sleep patterns, which was detrimental to his ability to perform on the slopes.

"It's completely counterproductive for me," Miller said in an Associated Press interview at the time. "I need that rest to maintain a level of training and conditioning."

Miller and his coaches remained at odds about his traveling in his luxurious Concorde motorhome, plastered on the outside with his many sponsors who helped underwrite the cost of it. He recruited a good friend from his

Traveling by RV to ski and snowboard destinations puts you where the action is. The author's son, Parker Densmore (top photo), takes to the air in a terrain park at Big Sky, Montana, while author Lisa Ballard (left) arcs turns on a corduroy-groomed slope.



Right: Steamboat Springs is known for its deep powder and cowboy atmosphere. Off the slopes, you can go winter fly-fishing, cross-country and backcountry skiing, snowshoeing or take a ride in a horse-drawn sleigh. Far right: The author and a friend ride the chairlift at Mount Spokane.

Steamboat Springs, Colorado



hometown of Franconia, New Hampshire, to drive and cook. Not only could Miller sleep in his own bed every night, but he could hang out with friends and family and manage his own meals and travel schedule.

When the Winter Olympics in Italy arrived that February, he opted out of the Olympic Village. Instead, he parked his RV near the slopes in Sestriere, where the men's alpine events took place. He used the same lot as the television-production trucks, which also provided him with plenty of security.

Miller was not the first person to use an RV for his lodging at a ski area, but he definitely started a trend among top athletes. His teammate Daron Rahlves, who won three world championship medals and the famous Hahnenkamm downhill in Kitzbühel, Austria, followed Miller's lead and began traveling in his own RV to ski races with his wife and dog.

Today, at many World Cup events, not just for alpine skiing but for all on-snow events, you'll find athletes in

their RVs for the same reasons as Miller and the rest of us, regardless of the time of year. It's our own place on wheels.

#### SNOW PLAN

Since then, camping at ski and snowboard resorts has become more and more popular. Mercedes Sprinters and similar small motorhomes are common sights in ski towns because they are nimble enough to maneuver

around town yet big enough to be comfortable on a multiday trip. A trailer is arguably even better than a motorhome because you can unhitch your vehicle and be free to drive around.

If you're thinking of an RV trip that incorporates skiing, snowboarding or other winter sports, here are some things to consider:

*CONSIDER THE ELEVATION WHERE YOU ARE PLANNING TO CAMP. TEMPERATURE DECREASES 3 TO 5 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT FOR EVERY THOUSAND FEET OF ELEVATION GAINED.*



#### TOWING TIPS IN SNOW

- Leave plenty of room between you and the vehicle ahead of you.
- Traction is crucial: Be sure your tow vehicle and trailer are outfitted with the right tires for the conditions and are properly inflated. Some jurisdictions (which should be marked) require tire chains on at least one axle of a trailer. If you'll be towing in snow a lot, consider mud and snow or all-terrain tires for the trailer.
- Limit travel to daytime, when there's less chance of freezing or black ice.
- Do not use cruise control.
- Use the brake control carefully. You'll need the trailer brakes, but don't set the control too aggressively.

A fall blizzard in Colorado's San Juan Mountains makes a beautiful backdrop while camping in an RV.

## SNOW-COUNTRY RVING TIPS

Traveling with your RV on a ski, snowboard, snowshoe or even a snowmobile trip is like other types of winter RV camping. Here are some key things to keep in mind for a cozy stay:

**1. Watch the weather.** It's important to know the travel conditions from home to the resort, and the weather once you get there. If deep snowfall or bitter temperatures, especially after rain, are in the forecast, consider different dates for your trip. There may be powder on the slopes, but driving conditions may be dangerous, and chances are higher that your RV will freeze up.

**2. Bring or find a source of extra LP-gas.** In cold weather, RVs use much more LP-gas than during warmer months, mostly to generate heat.

**3. Use a small dehumidifier.** Just breathing while you sleep causes more condensation than usual inside your RV. A small dehumidifier helps keep things drier.

**4. Keep your utilities warm.** Unlike your house, your RV's water and sewer lines are above ground and not well insulated. Take steps to keep them from freezing. Some people put insulating foam boards around their RV, between the bottom of the frame and the ground, to help insulate tanks and lines, and to keep the floor warmer. Skirts help but don't insulate as well.

**5. Use small heaters to keep water lines from freezing.** If you have an electric hookup at the campground, consider electric

pipe heaters, holding-tank heaters and small portable heaters. Keep all pipes and hoses off the ground and out of the snow.

**6. Empty the tanks when temperatures are above freezing** to prevent ice from forming inside them. Consider adding RV antifreeze to holding tanks in addition to toilet chemical to prevent freezing.

**7. Install insulated curtains and check the seals around the windows, skylights and doors** to reduce heat loss.

**8. Put a block of wood under the RV's stabilizing jacks** to prevent them from freezing to the pad.

**9. Bring a blow-dryer in case you need to thaw something.**

**10. Bring a plastic snow or grain shovel.** You may need it to clear snow around the RV and from its roof. Use a plastic shovel on an aluminum or fiberglass roof. If you have a membrane roof, use a broom (like a wide push broom), and sweep the roof continually as the snow falls, as the layer closest to the roof will melt and refreeze.

**11. Slideouts can freeze up and become jammed, especially if snow has fallen on them and frozen.** If you have to extend your slideouts, consider covering them with a tarp and adding a layer of foam-board insulation on top of the box for added comfort.

**12. Pack a windshield ice scraper.** Don't pour warm or hot water on a freezing windshield, since it could crack.

overnight in a designated lot, but only for a limited number of days and sometimes for a limited number of RVs. You probably won't find any hookups. What's more, you may have to move at some point during the night or very early in the morning so the plows can clear snow. On the bright side, you'll wake up virtually slope-side, ready for first tracks!

**Winter extras.** Snow may be your friend on the slopes, but it can be a foe in a campground. RVing for skiing and

Mount Spokane, Washington



**Camping at ski areas.** In addition to sleeping in your own bed and having the luxury of being lax about packing, one of the prime reasons for traveling to a ski resort in an RV is saving money on lodging, even more so than in the summer. While it may be prime time at the ski resort's hotels, it's off-season at local campgrounds. In fact, many are not open, and those that are may have limited amenities compared to the summer. It's important to plan ahead, not only to reserve a spot, but also to know what's available when you get there.

Consider the elevation where you are planning to camp, too. Temperature decreases 3 to 5 degrees Fahrenheit for every thousand feet of elevation gained. Camping 10 miles down-valley from the resort might not be as convenient to the slopes, but it can make a big difference warmth-wise.

**Ski area parking lots.** Many ski areas allow RVs to park

**Not an expert?** All ski resorts offer skiing and snowboarding lessons by certified instructors, and rental equipment. They can often store gear overnight, which lessens moisture inside your RV if you don't have a separate storage area.



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/PHOTOGRAPHY

snowboarding is similar to any winter RV camping. You need to be prepared to protect your RV against the cold and for snow removal.

Campgrounds typically plow their roads and common areas, but you may need to keep the area immediately surrounding your RV clear of snow, as well as the roof of your rig, which is not designed to bear heavy loads. Pack a snow shovel. Consider bringing a small snowblower, too, especially if your RV has a large toy box or storage area where you can easily transport it.

Keeping yourself and your RV warm is also a concern. Most RVs are not as well insulated as houses, so you will definitely go through a lot of LP-gas, even if you supplement with portable electric heaters. It's worth watching the weather before you leave. If temperatures where you're camping are going to be below 20 degrees, consider rescheduling, or at least bringing lots of extra blankets or sleeping bags rated for subzero temperatures, in case you run out of LP-gas during the night.

Even if you don't mind sleeping in such cold, it's tough on your RV. Unless you keep it moderately warm, moisture will accumulate on the inside from your breathing, cooking, use of the bathroom, and as your clothing and gear dries out overnight, which can ice up windows, doors, floors, walls and ceilings. Consider bringing a small dehumidifier to help control humidity inside. For ideas on how to prevent your

RV's utilities from freezing, see "Snow-Country RVing Tips" on the previous page.

**Skis and snowboards.**

One of the biggest challenges of skiing and RVing is moisture management inside your RV. What you do with skis, snowboards, boots and other gear can have a big impact. If you need to store your gear inside your trailer while traveling to a ski area, consider putting your skis and poles, or snowboard, inside a bag, which keeps them together and prevents them from dinging up the walls, furniture and floor. However, once they are snowy and wet from use, if you put them back in a



A gondola at Vail, Colorado, whisks skiers and snowboarders quickly up the slopes. Vail's back bowls are legendary for great snow.

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bag and zip it up, the edges will rust.

Ideally, you should store your skis and poles, or snowboard, at the ski area's ski-check or in a rented locker, which is secure and also allows them to dry overnight away from your RV. If this is not an option and you're driving an SUV, clear off the snow and water as much as possible from your gear, then store them in your tow vehicle rather than your trailer. Store them inside your RV only as a last resort.

Boots are a different story. They need to dry thoroughly overnight for your feet to be warm on the slopes the next day, so they need to be inside where it's warm. To help them dry out, consider an electric boot dryer. There are three types: the kind that slides inside your boots and emits a low heat, the kind that blows air into your boots, and a boot bag that emits a low heat and plugs into an outlet in your RV or the 12-volt lighter socket. All three types of boot dryers should be used only if you have an electric hookup, as they require an overnight cycle to work.

If the campground has laundry facilities, it's worth throwing your wet ski clothes in the dryer rather than trying to dry them inside your RV. They'll dry more quickly and thoroughly, and they won't contribute to the interior humidity level.

**Lift tickets.** Staying in your RV certainly makes skiing and snowboarding more affordable compared to staying in a hotel room and eating every meal in restaurants. You can

also reduce the cost of your lift ticket if you plan ahead. Many ski resorts belong to pass partnerships. Epic Pass (Vail Resorts) and Mountain Collective are the most well-known. If you buy one of these passes, you can ski or snowboard at a number of resorts around the United States and Canada. The majority of regional resorts also honor season passes from other designated mountains. If you plan to ski at only one place, you can often find discounts on lift tickets if you purchase them online ahead of time.

**Bottom line.** There's no need to leave your RV at home on your next ski and snowboard trip. You'll find the same convenience and camaraderie at campgrounds in the winter as in the summer, and you'll save money. And you'll double the feeling of freedom by both camping and gliding down a mountain!



#### TOASTY FEET

To dry your boots overnight, put them inside a heated Transpack boot bag (top) or insert portable boot dryers inside them (above). Both devices plug into a vehicle's lighter or a wall socket.

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## SNOW CAMPING: WHERE TO GO

Many ski towns are RV-friendly, including the iconic destinations around the country. Here are some of the more popular bucket-list mountains with a few insider's tips about camping and skiing, snowboarding and snowshoeing there.

### BRECKENRIDGE, COLORADO

Like many towns in the Rocky Mountains, Breckenridge was originally a mining camp. When the ski resort opened in 1961, it saved Breckenridge from becoming a ghost town. Today, Breckenridge is a huge ski resort, with 2,908 skiable acres and a vertical drop just shy of 3,400 feet. A third of its terrain is groomed daily, and 40 percent is open bowls. With 350 historic buildings,

it's not just a place to ski but also a charming place to visit, and it has one of the best sushi bars in Summit County.

**Pass:** Epic Pass

**Campground:** Tiger Run RV Resort. Free Wi-Fi. Free bus every 30 minutes into town and the ski slopes.

[www.tigerunresort.com](http://www.tigerunresort.com)

### GUNSTOCK, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Gunstock Mountain Resort is part of a county-owned



The coaster at New Hampshire's Gunstock Mountain takes thrill-seekers on a wild ride with 360-degree turns, rolling drops and banked corners.

recreation area. When it opened in 1937 with the first chairlift in the eastern United States, more people came to watch the top ski jumpers of the day, rather than to turn down its slopes. Though it is one of the oldest ski areas in America, today it's modern

and much bigger with 55 trails (not including glades), 90 percent of which have snowmaking and 24 are lit for night skiing. Not an alpine skier? You can walk out your door onto 50 kilometers of cross-country skiing and snowshoeing trails, go tubing

PHOTO: JENNIFER KARRMAN

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down a prepared track, ride the Mountain Coaster or watch a few jumpers fly through the air on the newly renovated ski jump.

**Pass:** Gunstock season pass or lift tickets only

**Campground:** Gunstock Mountain Resort. Full-hookup RV camping at the ski area!

[www.gunstock.com](http://www.gunstock.com)

### HEAVENLY VALLEY, CALIFORNIA/NEVADA

Heavenly Valley is, well, heavenly for skiing and snowboarding. Its 28 chairlifts take you to 4,630 skiable acres, the most of any ski resort in the Lake Tahoe area. It's also the highest, with a summit elevation of 10,067 feet. Its 3,500-foot vertical drop is the longest on the West Coast. The mountain has a variety

of trails, from wide-open cruisers to steep chutes. It's also uniquely located on the California-Nevada line. You can ski from one state to the other.

**Pass:** Epic Pass

**Campground:** Zephyr Cove RV Park and Campground. Near South Lake Tahoe's restaurants and casinos. Backcountry snowmobile tours from the campground.  
[www.zephyrcove.com](http://www.zephyrcove.com)

### PARK CITY, UTAH

Park City Ski Resort was host to several of the alpine events during the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. The beauty of visiting Park City is the chance to also ski Deer Valley and the Canyons, which share the same historic mining town, now an upscale resort,

with boutiques, interesting restaurants and numerous events. The Sundance Film Festival fills up the place, but hardly anyone skis, and you never know which of your favorite movie stars might walk by. You're also an hour's drive to Snowbird, Alta, Brighton and Solitude. There's so much skiing near Park City that you can't possibly experience it all in a week.

**Pass:** Epic Pass

**Campground:** Park City RV Resort. Minutes away from the slopes and festivities in town. Seasonal and nightly reservations available.  
[www.parkcityrvresort.com](http://www.parkcityrvresort.com)

### SUN VALLEY, IDAHO

Founded in 1936 by railroad tycoon Averell Harriman, Sun Valley was the first ski

area in the country to install a chairlift. Today, its "big" mountain, Baldy, offers some of the best fall-line groomed slopes in the world. Its state-of-the-art snowmaking system does a remarkable job of creating fantastic conditions when Mother Nature doesn't. Its "little" mountain, Dollar, is a treeless dome with a top-notch learning area. Free-riders can take their pick of three parks, two cross courses and 76 rails. The resort also has 25 miles of groomed Nordic ski and snowshoeing trails.

**Pass:** Mountain Collective

**Campground:** Meadows RV Park. Views of the ski runs on Baldy. Free Wi-Fi, 50-amp full-hookup sites and on-site laundry.  
[www.meadowsrvpark.com](http://www.meadowsrvpark.com) **TL**

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