

Be Our Guest

Get the introductions out of the way with a free mountain orientation tour. By Chris Hawkins

You've only got a week—maybe less—to make this year's ski trip a great one.

Do yourself a favor: Take the complimentary mountain tour offered at nearly every resort. The tours will help you get your bearings—and figure out where those trees, bumps or perfectly groomed cruisers you're looking for are hiding. Even if you're a return visitor, an orientation tour can show you what's new or what you might have been missing. What's worse than overlooking a patch of untracked glades? Finding one on your last day and realizing that you could have been skiing it all week. Here's a sampling of tours at six resorts.



	KILLINGTON, VT.	WHISTLER BLACKCOMB, B.C.	PARK CITY, UTAH	TAOS, N.M.	MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN, CALIF.	STEAMBOAT, COLO.
What	Meet the Mountain Tour	Mountain Hosts Orientation Tour	Historic Ski Tour	Ski with a Ranger	The Naturalist Tour	The Over the Hill Gang
When	Weekends and holidays 10 and 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.; weekdays 10 and 11:10 a.m. Tours last 90 minutes.	Daily, 11:30 a.m. Tours last 90 minutes.	Daily, 11 a.m. Tours last two hours.	Wednesdays, 1:30 p.m. Tours last two hours.	Every weekend (Fri.–Sun.), 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Tours last 90 minutes.	Sun.–Fri., 9 a.m. Full-day or half-day options are available.
Where	In front of Snowshed Base Lodge	Whistler: top of the gondola; Blackcomb: top of the Solar Coaster Express	Summit Demo Center	Base of Al's Run	Bottom of Stump Alley Express	Ski and Snowboard Ticket Office, in the mountain village
Who	Advanced beginners and above	Intermediates and above	Intermediates and above	Intermediates and above	Intermediates and above	Intermediates and above, 50 and over
The Skinny	John "Grizzly" Puchalski oversees 250 dedicated Mountain Ambassadors who have more than 1,000 combined years of on-mountain experience. You'll learn how Killington makes snow, how all 200 trails are interconnected, and how far it is from the summit to the borders of New York, New Hampshire and Canada. Be warned, tours can extend into après-ski.	Volunteer hosts can be anyone from firefighters to ferryboat captains. Get off the well-worn path and explore areas such as the Crystal Chair, on the far side of Blackcomb, with its shorter lift-lines and fresher snow. The tours are known to uncover nooks and crannies at this giant resort that would otherwise take years of living there to find.	This tour of Park City's mining past cruises down Claim-jumper to what remains of the Silver King Mine—a large ore bin. Next stop: the old Silver King Boarding House (now the Mid-Mountain Lodge), which has housed everyone from miners to the U.S. Ski Team. You'll also see where Mormon prospectors struck silver in 1868.	U.S. Forest Ranger Rob Deyerberg explores topics such as "Who was here before the skiers?" and "Avalanches and Explosives." Learn how to spot snowshoe hare tracks and about the diverse wildlife here. Bring binoculars: You might spy bighorn sheep on distant Wheeler Peak, New Mexico's highest at 13,161 feet.	Mammoth Mountain is an active volcano, but the last major eruption was more than 50,000 years ago. U.S. Forest Service volunteers point out glacial and volcanic formations and identify coyote and jackrabbit tracks. After, take the Panorama Gondola to the mountaintop Sierra Interpretive Center for views of Yosemite.	Gordon Jones and his volunteers escort senior skiers around Steamboat, going over history and pointing out hidden glades and where liftlines are shortest. Tours stop for lunch at Thunderhead at 11:45, where you can leave or join the group. For the rest of us, a two-hour tour starts daily at 10:30 a.m. at the top of the Vagabond trail.
Info	killington.com	whistlerblackcomb.com	pcmr.com	skitaos.org	mammoth-mountain.com	steamboat.com