

MEN'S JOURNAL

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GEAR OF THE YEAR

+
THE MUST-HAVE
GADGETS, TOYS &
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3. MAKE IT A TRIP TO REMEMBER

PICK THE RIGHT WEEKEND

Every resort has one weekend when the entire mountain goes off — epic parties and pro athletes putting it all on the line. There's no predicting what conditions will be like, but with so much going on, skiing is just a bonus.

Wintersköl, January 12–15

Aspen, Colorado

Like everywhere, New Year's Eve is Aspen's biggest rager. But any local will tell you that the most fun weekend of the year is Wintersköl, the town's annual "toast to winter." Now in its 66th year, the festival includes events like a canine fashion show, a soup cook-off pitting Aspen's top chefs against one another, and snow sculpting, as well as competitions such as a fat-tire bike race. This is what Aspen was like two decades ago.

Sundance Film Festival, January 19–29

Park City, Utah

It's the hottest week of the year in the most happening mountain town in the Rockies: A-list celebrities, million-dollar corporate bashes, TMZ-worthy scandals. And because everyone is hoping for a DiCaprio sighting, you'll have the slopes to yourselves (though nowhere to stay). And you might catch a few good movies, too.

Taos Freeride Championships, March 2–4

Taos Ski Valley, New Mexico

Taos has long been the country's hidden gem, with steep terrain and sugar-smooth powder. The season's highlight is when pros compete for spots on the Freeride World Tour. So when your legs turn to mush, you

can grab a beer and watch some of the best skiers in the world hucking giant backflips off 40-foot cliffs.

World Cup Ski Racing, March 9–12

Squaw Valley, California

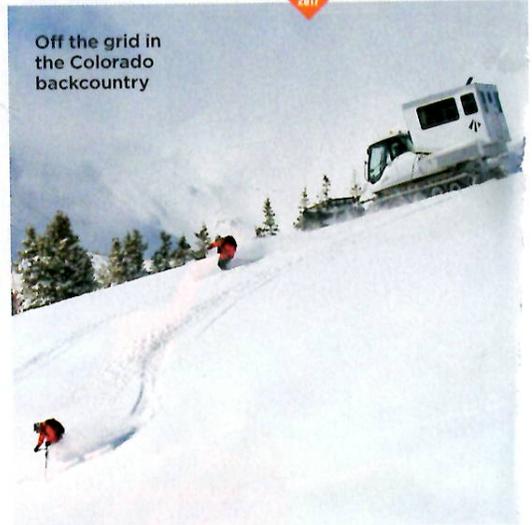
This winter, Squaw will host the first World Cup ski race in California since 1998 — and it will be on Red Dog, the same run where the 1960 Olympics were held. Racers will include Squaw Valley's own Julia Mancuso and Mikaela Shiffrin, the world's top slalom racer. In addition to the pros: a giant opening après-ski party with concerts and fireworks, a Pro-Am race, and an elaborate benefit auction. It will be Squaw's biggest weekend in years.

Closing Weekend, Mid-April

Sun Valley, Idaho

Sun Valley has the world's best spring skiing, with abundant sunshine, long runs, and wide-open bowls. Closing weekend brings the best party of the season, too. Live music is everywhere, and costumes are the norm — expect to see dancing dinosaurs, plenty of bikinis, and far less than that. Champagne corks can be heard popping on the chairlifts as the summit area turns into a huge dance party. Meanwhile, the skiing is usually going off, and it's not rare to log 40,000 vertical feet on the last day of the season.

Off the grid in the Colorado backcountry



4. PAY (A LOT) FOR AN EXCLUSIVE EXPERIENCE

There's no compromise on terrain or timetable with these adventures.

Alta Lakes Observatory, Telluride, Colorado

This luxurious, funky house sits at 11,300 feet, in an old mining claim tucked in an out-of-bounds bowl below Palmyra Peak. To get there, you ski in via a backcountry gate at the resort. Once you arrive, the owners take care of everything, from lugging in your gear and cooking meals to scheduling a backdoor pickup by Helitrax snowcat for a day of shredding virgin pow. (From \$750 per night for up to six guests.)

Eleven Experience, Crested Butte, Colorado

After crashing in the saloon-style Scarp Ridge Lodge, climb into one of Eleven Experience's custom BisonX snowcats — tricked out with leather seats, XM radio with surround-sound speakers, and gourmet snacks — for a day in its exclusive Elk Mountain skiing concession. It's full of alpine meadows and short, rocky couloirs, and there's even a fleet of Wagner Custom skis to suit any condition. (\$17,325 per night for up to 10)

Icelandic Mountain Guides, Greenland

East Greenland is one of the most isolated, pristine places on Earth, and the best way to experience it is by ski touring. Icelandic Mountain Guides take you from mountaintop to ocean, dropping you into powder-covered fjords with icebergs floating in the distance. You'll stay in mountain huts and eat home-cooked meals with local families, so no other ski trip will feel more like a real expedition. Book a private tour or sign up for a preset departure. (Starting at \$5,500)



Celebrating closing weekend in Sun Valley

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF ELEVEN EXPERIENCE; TRAVIS BARTLETT