


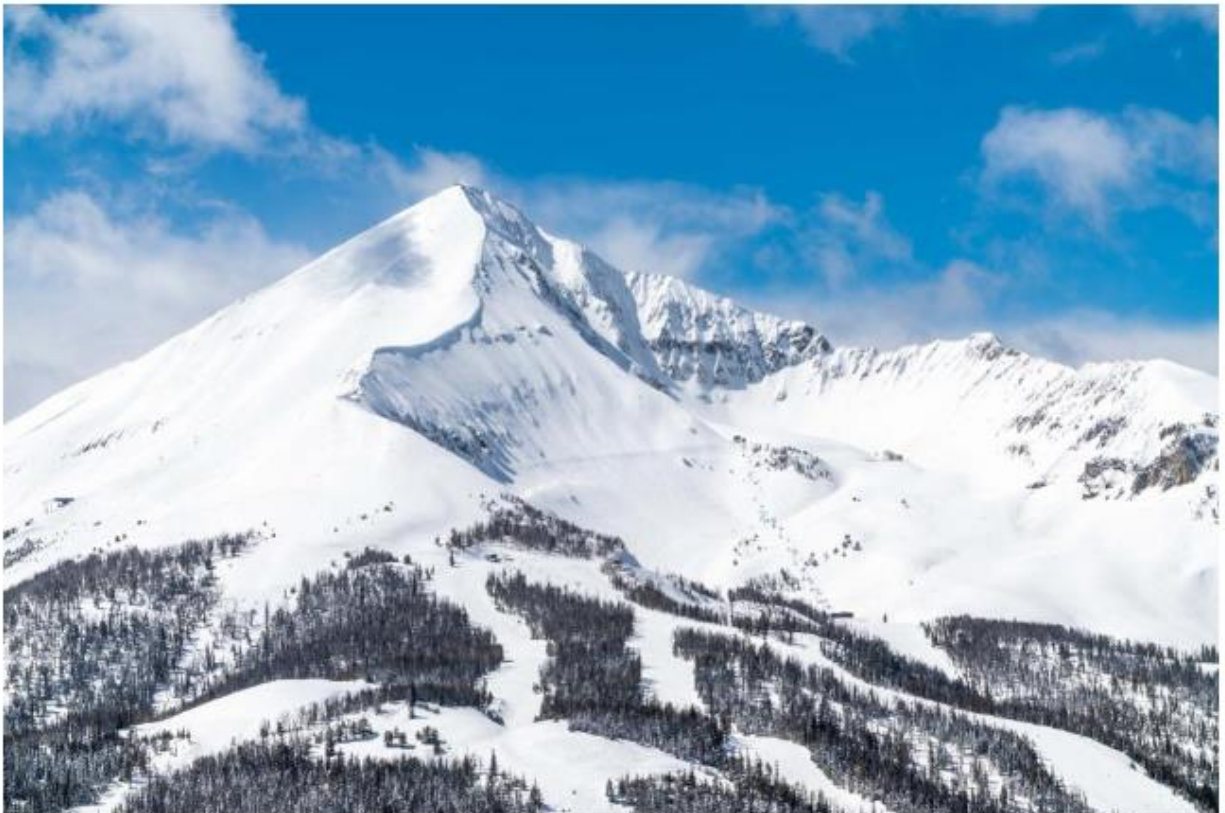
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Big Sky's Got Big Plans, So You Better Book It Now



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Lone Peak at Big Sky JON RESNICK

“I used to ride my dirt bike over there,” said our driver, Eddie Starz, pointing to the quaint row of shops, restaurants and condominiums making up Big Sky’s town center. “10 years ago, there were nothing but fields.”

We were driving from Bozeman to the base of [Big Sky Resort](#), the self-proclaimed “biggest” ski mountain in the U.S. encompassing nearly 6,000 acres of ski terrain. Think unfathomably skiable cliffs, cruise-happy groomers and sunny, expansive bowls. The highway we’d been winding down for the last hour went from fly fishing shops, wood suppliers and tractor yards to a single-lane valley road paralleling the Gallatin River - pine trees and mountain ridges towering over us in every direction.

Ours was the only car on the road for miles. We could’ve been the only people for miles. That’s how Montana makes you feel, or so I’ve been told, and that’s how Big Sky feels, too. With more skiable acres than actual skiers, you can surround yourself with fellow die-hard powder-seekers inside the lodge or sidled up at a bar, but once you’re on the hill dancing through your own stash of snow beneath Lone Peak’s glare, it’s all you. Though possibly not for long.



The relatively new town center at Big Sky BIG SKY

“I’ve been at Big Sky for 25 years and the growth we’re experiencing now has been a longtime coming,” said our waiter at Peaks chophouse inside the [Summit Hotel](#), the 221-room resort presiding over Big Sky’s base. “It’s had this incredible word-of-mouth effect, especially lately, because we’ve had the best snow in the country. People come here and they don’t go anywhere else. It’s the best of both worlds, you get a laid-back atmosphere with world class skiing.”

Word-of-mouth no longer, Big Sky is on the map and on the verge. To quote the parlance of our times, it has *arrived*, and so too have hordes of skiers and snowboarders lusting after its thrilling terrain, world class ski school and consistently snowy conditions. It's a town looking down the pike of rapid development, and it's stepping up, making room and embracing the hype. Boyne Resorts, which purchased Big Sky in 1976 is charting its growth with a \$150 million "Big Sky 2025 Vision" that will transform Big Sky into a premier year-round mountain destination, complete with new luxury hotels and residences, a reimagined mountain village, technologically-advanced lift system and increased daily air service in and out of Bozeman. The goal is to offer a new standard of amenities to a new tier of travelers that compliments the mountain itself.

Big Sky is not a cookie-cutter resort," said Troy Nedved, general manager at Big Sky Resort. "It's unique to Montana and unique to the ski industry. Lone Mountain has a presence – it's the beating heart of Big Sky. We're preserving that magic while enhancing the ski experience on every level. We have the ability to make something really special in Big Sky, and that vision is becoming a reality through our Big Sky 2025 plan."



Big Sky's new Vista Hall BIG SKY

Five years into the 2025 plan, and Big Sky's landscape is a mix of old and new. You've got locals only outposts like Scissorbills Saloon alongside the swanky new Vista Hall, an upscale food court with flat screen televisions, cozy club chairs, sleek fireplaces and stations serving everything from sushi to tacos. Just outside is the new Vista Deck, an enhanced outdoor space that sits up to 250 people, while below sits Westward Social, Big Sky's newest restaurant featuring high-end barbecue fare. These on-mountain eateries join Everett's 8800, a mountaintop chalet at the top of the heated Ramcharger 8 bubble lift. (More high-speed heated lifts are slated in the plan.) It serves breakfast, lunch and dinner with stunning views of Lone Peak in its backdrop. If you're not night skiing, you'll want to pop in for elk, bison, or a simple caesar salad and locally caught trout.

Big Sky's dining extends off the mountain, too. [Horn & Cantle](#) is a local gem located in the award-winning [Lone Mountain Ranch](#) that features elevated western fare courtesy of Executive Chef Eric Gruber. Should you still need to entertain your children after a day of skiing, [Buck's T-4 Lodge](#) offers wild game and hand-cut steaks by Chef Scott Mechura, in addition to a game room filled with skee-ball and classic arcade favorites.



The Wilson Hotel ZACHARY GROSFIELD

Beyond dining, Big Sky is building out hotel offerings to accommodate its sheer number of travelers. Both the Summit Hotel and Huntley Lodge will start renovations in 2020 to reflect the town's "mountain modern" aesthetic, and joining these properties is the [Wilson Hotel](#), a new Residence Inn By Marriott that opened last June in town center. The property represents the town's first major hotel brand and features 129 suites, a fitness center, outdoor heated pool, hot tub and game room. For the luxury client, the [Montage Big Sky](#) is going up at nearby Spanish Peaks, and the luxe One&Only hotel brand will be breaking ground at Moonlight Basin on the north side of Big Sky, at the base of the Madison Range.

While Big Sky is a far cry from luxury enclaves like Aspen and Vail, it claims to have top Colorado mountains beat in terms of pure acreage as well as in its educational offerings. The mountain may have a reputation of being extreme, but it has over 2,300 acres of beginner and intermediate terrain and a well-staffed ski school program that spans nearly every age and skill. My three-year-old daughter spent the first hour of her ski career in the Small Fry Try program, where she navigated a tiny hill ankle-deep in powder before retreating indoors. Meanwhile, my six-year-old son zoomed off for the day with the Mini Skier Camp. At the end of each day, both children were equal parts delirious, exhausted and ski-obsessed. There's also family friendly action off the mountain, like a thrilling dog-sled trip at Moonlight Basin with [Spirit of the North Sled Dog Adventures](#) or a snowmobile journey into Yellowstone National Park.

“People hear Big Sky and they think gnarly, crazy cliffs and rocks, but the lower mountain and beginner terrain is all great,” said Mike Merchant, a Mountain Sports guide and instructor. “We’ve got super easy teaching hills and our ski school is awesome. Most of our new hires and all of our returning instructors are all PSIA (Professional Ski Instructors of America) certified. The training available to us is out of this world. We’re all child specialists in that we learn how childrens’ brains develop, which inform how they think about skiing and how they learn best.”

Though Big Sky is getting the luxury treatment, it’s still a long way from becoming a bougie destination, where Bogner-clad skiers for whom “après” is a verb would rather shop in town than go skiing. Big Sky is a skier’s mountain, and there’s not a ski butler or champagne igloo in the world that can change that. “We’re all here to ski and that’s what drives us and keeps us all here,” said Merchant. “It’s all we care about. It’s not about what you look like or what you’re wearing or what you’re skiing on, as long as you’re sliding and gliding and having fun, that’s all that matters.”

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