

ESCAPES

# Get your head in the clouds at high-elevation W.Va. resort

BY LESLIE HSU OH

The powder is so light beneath my board that it feels as if I'm cutting through clouds. The terrain guides me faster, deeper, each S turn spraying snow diamonds into the trees at the edge of the trail. Negotiating the 1,500-foot vertical drop with grades as steep as nearly 60 percent, I let go of worries about the past or future. Something ignites within me, a sense of freedom that I haven't felt since before I had kids.

I'm snowboarding down the legendary Cupp Run at Snowshoe Mountain Resort's Western Territory, designed by Olympian Jean-Claude Killy. I've just ridden Lower Shay's Revenge, a double-black-diamond slope, loved by advanced skiers for having the best mogul runs on the East Coast.

The conditions feel as pristine as trails I've ridden in Alaska. But I'm a four-hour drive from the District on the second-highest peak in West Virginia. There's not much time left in what was already an unusually warm ski season, but Snowshoe — positioned where lake-effect snow meets nor'easter storms and equipped with a state-of-the-art snowmaking system — can make the most of a weekend or spring break.

The atmosphere is vast and fun. I have the trail to myself for long stretches, and then, just when I yearn for some company, there's hooting and cheering as a dozen snowboarders in pajamas and robes whip by with cups of coffee sloshing in their bare hands.

A mile and a half later, legs burning, I arrive at the restaurant called Arbuckle's Cabin. Its wood deck is overflowing. I chat with some college kids from the District who have come to the resort just for the day, something I used to do when I had the luxury to chase powder year-round. I buy a beer, get a suntan and immerse myself in a culture that I'm thrilled to see has remained intact over the 20 years since I first experienced it at Snowshoe.

**'Island in the sky'**

At the top of the mountain, I meet my husband for a romantic lunch at the new and swanky Corduroy Inn. This boutique hotel is part of Snowshoe's Brigham Collection, a range of luxurious lodging options that include studios, suites, townhouses and five-bedroom homes and has perks such as a personal vacation planner to help you take advantage of 11,000 acres of mountain wilderness.

After lunch, as I walk hand in hand with my husband (a rarity now that we are parents of three) through the cobblestoned village, I realize why Snowshoe calls itself an "island in the sky." At 4,848 feet, you feel as if you're standing on top of the world. The day before, I'd taken a photo of my family snowboarding together for the first time — above the clouds.

That included our 1-year-old, thanks to equipment provided by Snowshoe that allowed her to safely experience the sensation of riding. Meanwhile, my 6-year-old son and 9-year-old daughter were progressing exponentially at their two-day Burton Kids Snowboard Camp. The camp is coached by Chris Hargrave, president of Windells Academy, who teaches "the hard stuff that's really cool first."

"I want people to feel the sensations right away," he says. "I want them to feel pressure build up on their snowboards and then release, kind of like what people feel when they get air. . . . I want people to have so much fun snowboarding that it changes their lives forever."

Hargrave uses a system he perfected called terrain-based learning, or TBL. Students practice on features made of shaped snow (flats, banked turns, mini-pipes) carefully constructed to control their speed.

"In this contained environment, there's no fear of going down the hill and not knowing how to stop," says Jen Shannon, director of the resort's Ski & Snowboard School. "Instead of teaching defensive moves, we are going to teach you fun stuff that you are going to enjoy



TOP: Snowshoe Mountain Resort has a range of luxurious lodging options, including the swanky Corduroy Inn. LEFT: The resort also offers pedicures and other spa services. RIGHT: You can take a dip after a long day of skiing.

doing, then roll into skills." My son never would have switched from skiing to snowboarding if he hadn't had a day of TBL first.

**Relaxed and divine**

The kids' camp concludes with a mini-terrain park competition. Before it starts, I squeeze in a hot-stone massage at the 3,600-square-foot Spa, which offers facials, hair and nail services — even a prenatal massage! Feeling relaxed and divine, I pick up my toddler from Snowshoe's Pre-Ski School Play Center. Then, together with my husband, we cheer on Kyra and Ethan.

When Kyra pops a few feet into the air off a jump, my mouth drops. Hargrave chuckles and says to me: "Your daughter's hungry. She's not scared. For a little girl to walk up to me and say, 'I want to be an Olympic snowboarder' — kids don't say that. Kids don't say that with conviction. Not like that. Just call me, and I'll help you out."

The flame within me that was ignited on Cupp Run transforms into something new: Snowshoe, I realize, has evolved with me over the years. This resort can not only evoke the freedom I thought I had lost becoming a mom, but also channel that energy into new pursuits through my children.

That evening, we take the kids to the Split Rock Pools for a swim, and then pizza at the Big Top. Leaving the younger kids with Kids Night Out, we take Kyra to enjoy some of Snowshoe's off-road winter adventures.

My husband and I are each set up on a snowmobile. Kyra stands between us, trying to decide which parent to ride with. Internally, I'm at war: Part of me regrets not being able to race my husband unburdened with the weight of a child, but then there's this opportunity for a mother and daughter to share their love of speed. Kyra, chewing her lip, is struggling, too. She thinks her father would be faster, but she knows Dad is all about safety and Mom is crazier. She leaps onto my seat and wraps her arms around my waist. Even before she gets a good grip, I squeeze the throttle, and we're off down the same trails she and I snowboarded earlier today. All of the features seem grand and ethereal under the soft moonlight.

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If you go

**WHERE TO STAY**  
**The Brigham Collection**

877-441-4386  
snowshoemtn.com/plan-your-trip/lodging

Open year-round, these lavish lodging options range from studio units to six-bedroom homes. Prices start at \$119 a night for a studio and go up to \$1,424 for a five-bedroom home.

**WHERE TO EAT**  
**Sunset Cantina**

304-572-5710  
snowshoemtn.com/the-mountain/on-mountain-dining

Sunset Cantina serves a wide range of delicacies, including chili lime marinated fajitas (\$18) and traditional Filipino adobo chicken (\$19). Don't miss out on their sangrias and margaritas. Entrees start at \$7.

**WHAT TO DO**  
**Snowshoe Mountain Resort**

Snowshoe, W.Va.

877-441-4386  
snowshoemtn.com/events-and-activities/winter-activities.aspx

One of the few local ski destinations still open, Snowshoe will end its winter season March 26 and 27 with pond skim and games. West Virginia residents get free lift tickets, and the Easter bunny will be hitting the slopes. From now until closing, lift tickets can be purchased as low as \$10 a day. Before Snowshoe's winter season ends, you can enjoy its Coca-Cola Tube Park, snowmobile tours and RZR off-road tours with intimate sunset dinners at the Sunrise Backcountry Hut. Mountain biking, golf, sporting clays, stand-up paddle boarding, fly fishing, horseback riding, zip-lining, wine festivals and outdoor concerts begin Memorial Day weekend. Open daily 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

**INFORMATION**  
snowshoemtn.com

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