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Vermont's Deluxe Four Season Resort Is A Perfect Escape For Couples, Families And Dogs



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I travel to learn, eat, golf and ski, but mostly for travel's sake [FULL BIO](#) ✓

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A \$15 million face-lift a few years back changed the entire exterior of Stowe's venerable Topnotch resort. [+]

I've been living in Vermont for 25 years, and I can't think of a better town for a vacation escape than Stowe. And when I've visited Stowe, which I've done many times, I've stayed at Topnotch more than anywhere else, and in every season.

Stowe is the most famous ski town in the East, and justifiably so, with a rich history, excellent terrain, and in recent years, massive capital improvements at the mountain, including a new gondola connecting the two peaks, a new base village and more. It was thrust into the spotlight a few months ago when industry giant Vail Resorts, the top luxury operator in the ski resort business, made Stowe its first acquisition on the East Coast, putting it under proven management and making it part of Vail's nationwide Epic Pass season pass. So next winter promises to be better than ever for skiers at Stowe ([read more about the recent acquisition here at Forbes](#)).

But what makes Stowe really special is that it is one of the very few ski towns in America that's actually busier in the summertime, and with a wonderful spring and Vermont's world-famous fall foliage, peak season for the entire state, you have a true year-round vacation destination. Summer brings amazing hiking in the Green Mountains, golf, tennis, mountain and road biking, canoeing, stand up paddleboarding and every conceivable outdoor activity. Winter means not only Vermont's finest alpine skiing, but tons of cross-country - Stowe is home to the very first Nordic resort in the United States, and several others as well. There are sleigh rides, snowshoeing, snowmobile tours and more. The town is full of galleries, boutiques, great restaurants, breweries, and in summer, endless weekend festivals of every ilk and a large weekly farmers market.



Indoor and outdoor pools and one of New England's best spa facilities are just one appeal at Topnotch. [+]

There are several luxury resorts large and small in Stowe to choose from, and each has its merits, but for a full-service package it's tough to beat [Topnotch](#). The resort has been here forever, but following the mountain's lead, has done waves of major renovations and improvements in recent years, including a major \$15 million remodel in 2013, so if you have not visited in a while, you might be surprised the moment you arrive, and the entire entrance of the hotel was upgraded. The look is mountain contemporary, with lots of stone and glass and exposed wood. It also has a fantastic location: it's the last full-service independent property on the mountain access road linking the ski resort and Stowe village, meaning it's the closest to the slopes (and in summer, to the ski resort's mountain biking, scenic gondola rides and more). It sits right on the Stowe Recreation Path, a 5.3-mile continuous paved path that parallels the mountain road, spanning several nice bridges, and is a blissfully car free favorite of runners, walkers, stroller pushers, dog walkers, inline skaters, bikers, snowshoers and Nordic skiers. Topnotch even has a trailhead for the extensive local hiking trail system right off its parking lot, so you can go for real day hike without any transportation at all. But if you do need a lift, the unfailingly friendly and warm bell staff at Topnotch are happy to provide it. They've taken

me to and from dinner, and once we walked the Recreation Path all the way to the village, had lunch, and called for a return pick up. In winter they shuttle skiers to and from the base lodges.

For the number of rooms - just 68 - the facilities and amenities are hard to believe (additional accommodation options include a variety of freestanding “Resort Homes”). Topnotch sits on 120-acres and is home to a major tennis facility that has been ranked the best in the eastern US, with a mix of hard and har-tru outdoor courts, plus four indoor courts for year-round play, with acclaimed instruction for all ages and abilities, including video analysis. The resort also has its own equestrian center, with guided trail rides, lessons. corralled pony rides for the little ones, and winter sleigh rides, complete with warmed blankets and bells. An onsite adventure shop rents mountain bikes, fly fishing gear and Nordic skis, and Topnotch is very close to two cross-country ski centers. The state of the art 35,000-foot spa and fitness center has 30 treatment rooms, separate fitness, strength, and cardio studios, indoor and outdoor pools, steam, sauna, hot tub with waterfall, and is easily among the finest in New England.

The casual Roost restaurant and lobby bar is one of the liveliest in Stowe, with 20 beers on tap, local hard cider, bar shuffleboard and a menu featuring locally-inspired small plates. In summer, it has extensive outdoor seating with fire pits and games, including a bocce court. Flannel, the fine dining eatery, is a pleasant and well executed modern American spot with an open kitchen and heavy focus on Vermont artisanal cheeses and beer.

New programs for this summer include the Bed, Bike and Brew package, combining accommodations with a mountain bike rental, local trail map, water bottle, and a four pack of Heady Topper craft beer in room on arrival. Heady Topper has been rated the nation’s number one brew, and is a cult classic made in Stowe that is virtually impossible to buy, one that beer fans stand on long lines and use all sorts of



Summer in the Green Mountains of Vermont means lush [+]

machinations to get their hands on (from \$235 per night, double occupancy, two-night minimum). Topnotch has also partnered this season with Stowe's Four Points Mountain Bike School & Guide Service to offer guests a Bike and Brew Tour, beginning with a three-hour guided mountain bike excursion, followed by lunch and a tour of a local breweries such as Alchemist, Idletyme and Stowe Cider (\$189 per person). Private guiding and lessons are also offered.

As if the pampering and offerings for human guests were not enough, Topnotch is also extremely dog friendly - as is the entire Stowe area - and I have been there over the years with both my current golden retriever and my previous one. There are always several canine guests, plus chef-baked biscuits, dog beds and bowls in rooms, and easy access to wilderness trails just off the parking lot. Topnotch recently introduced a new "Serve, Fetch, Love" package that includes pet-friendly luxury accommodations, the choice of a one hour private tennis lesson or 1.5 hours of court time per adult/per stay, a 25-minute in-room canine spa treatment, a \$50 human spa credit and take-home tote bag with dog cookies and tennis balls for your best friend (from \$309 per night). There's something for everyone here.

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