

# **SWISH** **SWISH!** Our Guide to the Best Gay Ski Weeks

By Matthew Link





**T**he pioneering Aspen Gay Ski Week is not only going as strong as ever in its 37th year, it's spawned an LGBT family of winter events around the globe. Around 20 annual weeklong gay ski events now exist worldwide, from the Argentine Andes to the Norwegian fjords. Known for their camaraderie, let-your-hair-down atmosphere, and rockin' DJ-fueled après ski parties—not to mention their stunningly gorgeous gay-approved locales—it's no wonder there's been an avalanche of these LGBT wintertime events.

A handful of gay ski weeks have sadly ended up in permanent limbo (including

two now-defunct African-American gay ski weeks, Denver Meltdown and New York's Winter Explosion), but they are the exception to the rule. The international gay and lesbian snowboarding group OutBoard started in 1995 as a local gay Colorado snowboarding group. But soon their annual outing quickly attracted others snow lovers, and Outboard now claims over 30,000 members worldwide.

New York City's gay group **Ski Bums** launched in 2003 with a humble count of 78 members. A decade later, it proudly boasts over 1,300 members from 40 U.S. states and 20 foreign countries. Ski Bums currently hosts its signature Avalanche

cocktail/dance parties in eleven cities every year. In addition, the free-to-join group organizes about 20 regional ski weekend trips annually. According to Ski Bums' founder and president Chris French, if you factor in the ski trips of the now more than two dozen gay ski clubs, an LGBT ski and snowboard event happens somewhere in the world every weekend from January through April.

### Stand-Alone Gay Ski Weeks vs. Tour Group and Ski Club Events

More and more gay tour operators are getting in on the white-hot gay ski week trend by organizing their own special

group ski trips and events. In 2009, **Canadian Mountain Holidays** organized the first-ever gay helicopter ski week in British Columbia. Asian and South American tour operators are catching on too: The Latin continent's first-ever **Gay Lesbian & Friends Ski Week** launched in Chile in 2009, followed by **Argentina's Bariloche Gay Ski Week** in 2010. The Himalayas saw Asia's first gay ski week event when the tour operator **GoPink** Asia hosted a group week of homo skiing and DJs parties in Kashmir in 2012.

Be aware that a gay ski week may appear at first glance to be its own stand-alone

## WINTERPRIDE IN WHISTLER





event, but is actually a part of an LGBT group tour or a gay ski club trip. Traveling with a small group of gay and lesbian ski bunnies can be less daunting and more fun than showing up to a gay ski week on your own. But just know that if a group organizes its own ski event trip, it may not have the scale or resources of one of the large established gay ski weeks.

For instance, the gay tour company **Out & About Travel** hosts a great group trip called the Utah Gay Ski Week every January. But that's often mistaken for the much bigger weeklong gay ski event Elevation: Utah in February. To make matters even more confusing, both gay ski weeks use the Utah ski resort Park

City (a half-hour outside of Salt Lake City).

### **The Granddaddy of All Gay Ski Events: The Resilient Aspen Gay Ski Week**

Only in America would the world's very first organized gay ski week be linked to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

Like all great historical events, it started when a group of local gays decided, "Hey, let's put on a show!" In 1977, resident queers in the Rocky Mountain resort town of Aspen invited some gay ski clubs to join them one January weekend. As expected, things just suddenly turned all fabulous, and the world's very first annual LGBT ski event was born.

Liberal Aspen was a hive for counter-culture types since the early 1960s (genius druggie writer Hunter S. Thompson was a longtime resident), followed by leftist Hollywood celebrities in the 1970s. But when Jon Busch, one of the founders of the Aspen Gay Ski Week, got seriously harassed in a local bar for dancing with another man, he and his ski buddies got mad. In 1979, the group spearheaded an Aspen gay rights protection law that other Colorado cities began to adopt. An ugly right-wing backlash passed the infamous Amendment 2 in 1992, banning all LGBT rights laws in the state. Gays and

lesbians around the world soon boycotted Colorado, and the Aspen Gay Ski Week was dealt a near-deathblow.

Years passed before the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Amendment 2 and in the process decriminalized homosexual activity in every U.S. state. It laid the groundwork for the U.S. government's recognition of gay marriages in 2013.

So asking a dude to dance (or ski) with you can change the world after all!

next: [GUIDE GAY SKI WEEKS](#) →

ELEVATION: UTAH

*Prefer a  
Gay Ski Week  
in Europe?  
Head to the end of  
the article*



# GUIDE TO THE BEST GAY SKI WEEKS

## ASPEN GAY SKI WEEK

[Upcoming Dates]

January 12–19, 2014

[Established] 1977

[Aspen? Where's That?] A half-hour flight west of Denver in the Colorado Rockies

[The Setting] Historic and swanky mountain resort for the well-to-do, with an air of casually elegant mountain living

[The Crowd] Slightly older and well-off ski week couples who have been coming to Aspen for ages, but still know how to have a rip-roaring time

[Host Hotel] The Limelight Hotel, along with partner property Hotel Jerome—both upscale Auberge Resorts

[Ski? Let's Just Dance!] Late-night lounges, film screenings, a comedy gala, a downhill costume competition and parade, a group civil union ceremony, and a grand finale pool party  
[Tip] Keep track of all the festivities by downloading the free Aspen Gay Ski Week iPhone app from iTunes.

[Room Rates + Event Pass for the Week] Starting around \$2,750 per person

[Swoosh To]

[www.gayskiweek.com](http://www.gayskiweek.com)

## WINTERPRIDE IN WHISTLER

[Upcoming Dates]

January 26–February 2, 2014



TELLURIDE GAY SKI WEEK

[Established] 1993

[Whistler? Where's That?] Two hours' drive north of Vancouver in British Columbia's Coast Mountains

[The Setting] Pedestrian-friendly tourist village revamped to host the 2010 Winter Olympics, with two huge side-by-side mountains forming Canada's largest ski resort

[The Crowd] Slightly younger and more party-hearty, with a healthy dose of friendly Queeradians showing up from Vancouver, Toronto, and beyond

[Host Hotels] The lush Aava Whistler Hotel (aka "Pride House") and four other partner hotels

[Ski? Let's Just Dance] A cowboy/cowgirl party, a Mad Hatter party, the Furrociuous uniform party, Mr. Gay Canada Grand Finale, a 5K walk/run, cooking classes, speed dating, yoga, women's events, the Snowball Dance 'Til Dawn

[Tip] In 2013, there was talk of WinterPride moving to another Canadian locale, so go now if

you want to experience Olympic-style Whistler.

[Room Rates + Event Pass for the Week] Starting around \$1,050 per person

[Swoosh To]

[www.gaywhistler.com](http://www.gaywhistler.com)

## TELLURIDE GAY SKI WEEK

[Upcoming Dates]

February 21–March 2, 2014

[Established] 2003

[Telluride? Where's That?] In an isolated spot in Southwest Colorado, a 45-minute flight from Denver

[The Setting] Steep high-altitude mountainside resort with gondolas whisking you down to a quiet Victorian mining town made famous by Butch Cassidy and current Hollywood celebs

[The Crowd] You'd never know this is longest gay ski "week" in the world (expanded to 10 days in 2013)—its fairly low-key group of diehard skiers and boarders have quietly spread the word.



OUTBOARD SNOWBOARD & SKI WEEK

[Host Hotels] The Hotel Madeline (on *Travel + Leisure's* World's Best Hotels List), and Inn at Lost Creek (on *Condé Nast Traveler's* Gold List)

[Ski? Let's Just Dance] Drag comedians, starlit sleigh rides, gourmet food tastings, daily après ski events at the host hotel's Smak Bar, events down in town like Dick's Night Out, and the finale White Night Party

[Tip] Nearby Montrose Airport has cheaper flights but is a 90-minute drive from Telluride—opt instead for a nonstop 45-minute flight from Denver directly into the Telluride Airport (the highest airport in the U.S.).

[Room Rates + Event Pass for the Ten-Day "Week"] Starting around \$1,850 per person [Swoosh To]

[www.telluridegayskieek.com](http://www.telluridegayskieek.com)

## OUTBOARD SNOWBOARD & SKI WEEK

[Upcoming Dates] March 25–30, 2014

[Established] 1995

[Lake Tahoe? Where's That?] Three hours' drive northwest of Denver

[The Setting] A low-key family-friendly ski resort in northern Colorado, just west of the Continental Divide

[The Crowd] Leaning towards young snowboarders from Colorado, with more and more skiers and out-of-state attendees every year

[Host Hotel] The Steamboat Grand Hotel with 11 different room sizes, from studio to penthouse

[Ski? Let's Just Dance] Après ski hot tub parties, Polar Bear Pool Party at The Olde Town Hot Springs and Waterslides, starlight sleigh ride mountain top dinner, closing night DJ dance party

[Tip] Although this is Outboard's fifth time in Steamboat Springs, it's the only gay ski week that shifts location each year (but stays within Colorado). You can crack the event's cliques of in-state locals via the free social networking on Outboard's web site.

[Room Rates + Event Pass for the Week] Starting around \$950 per person

[Swoosh To] [www.outboard.org](http://www.outboard.org)

## WINTER RENDEZVOUS IN STOWE

[Upcoming Dates] January 22–26, 2014

[Established] 1984

[Stowe? Where's That?] In northeastern Vermont, about a three-and-a-half hour drive from Boston

[The Setting] This small rural American Colonial town is snuggled into a fertile valley between the Green Mountains and the Worcester Range, making it "The Ski Capital of the East."

[The Crowd] Loyal following of repeat skiers from East Coast Cities who enjoy the more downhome and tranquil vibe compared to other party-hearty gay ski weeks

[Host Hotels] Ultra-luxe Stowe-Flake Mountain Resort & Spa [Ski? Let's Just Dance] Wine tastings, mountain pizza party, giant indoor pool party, DJ disco dance party, live quartet performances, *Sound of Music* sing-alongs at the nearby Trapp Family Lodge

[Tip] Winter Rendezvous is the only weeklong gay ski event in the Eastern U.S., but regional LGBT ski clubs from Toronto to New York City host their own weekend trips and events you can easily join.

[Room Rates + Event Pass for the Week] Starting around \$750 per person

[Swoosh To]

[www.winterrendezvous.com](http://www.winterrendezvous.com)

## LAKE TAHOE WINTERFEST GAY AND LESBIAN SKI WEEK

[Upcoming Dates] March 2–9, 2014

[Established] 1995

**[Lake Tahoe? Where's That?]**

About three-and-a-half hours' drive east of San Francisco, along the California-Nevada border

**[The Setting]** Hidden in the pine-filled High Sierras, on the casino-lined South Shore of America's second deepest and most gorgeous lake

**[The Crowd]** The older attendees from the San Francisco Bay Area and nearby Reno keep things earthy and real, but still know how to rock a lake cruise.

**[Host Hotels]** The 19-acre Lake-land Village Beach & Mountain Resort right on the lake

**[Ski? Let's Just Dance]** Wine receptions, chocolate martini party, comedians, a "hump night" event at the Hard Rock Casino, lake cruise dinner-dance party aboard the Mississippi riverboat Tahoe Queen

**[Tip]** Lake Tahoe isn't just a snow resort, so your non-skiing partner won't feel abandoned with all the hiking, gambling, and shopping to do.

**[Room Rates + Event Pass for the Week]** Starting around \$1100 per person

**[Swoosh To]**

[www.laketahoewinterfest.com](http://www.laketahoewinterfest.com)

**ELEVATION: MAMMOTH**

**[Upcoming Dates]**

March 12–16, 2014

**[Established]** 2002

**[Mammoth? Where's That?]**

About five hours' drive north of Los Angeles, along California's backbone of Sierra Nevada Mountains

**[The Setting]** Family-friendly 1950s-era ski resort updated and expanded in recent years



**[The Crowd]** Leaning towards young and pretty and budget-minded queer Southern California boys and girls, with some of their straight pals in tow

**[Host Hotels]** The Village at Mammoth condominiums, the luxe The Westin Monache, and two budget options

**[Ski? Let's Just Dance]** Military uniform party, comedy night, beach party bingo, Sunday brunch, mountain-top tea dance, a two-venue Saturday night closing party called Avalanche

**[Tip]** Most attendees come just for the weekend events, and those passes sell out weeks ahead of time.

**[Room Rates + Event Pass for the Week]** Starting around \$950 per person

**[Swoosh To]**

[www.mammothgayski.com](http://www.mammothgayski.com)

**ELEVATION: UTAH**

**[Upcoming Dates]**

February 20–23, 2014

**[Established]** 2010

**[Park City? Where's That?]**

About a half-hour drive east of Salt Lake City, nestled in The Wasatch Range on the western edge of The Rocky Mountains

**[The Setting]** Host for the 2002 Winter Olympics' ski and snowboard events, Park City is

perhaps better known for its star-studded Sundance Film Festival (the largest independent film festival in the U.S.) and as the home base of the United States Ski Team.

**[The Crowd]** This younger sister of Elevation Mammoth may skew a bit older and more staid compared to her California sibling, but this queer winter party kicks Utah's upright reputation to the curb.

**[Host Hotels]** Elevation holds room blocks at five Park City properties, ranging from budget accommodations to the 5-star Stein Eriksen Lodge.

**[Ski? Let's Just Dance]** Après ski events with big-name DJs and pornstar go-go dancers, a mountain version of L.A.'s infamous Cherry Pop party, a weekend dance party in Salt Lake City flooded with cute locals

**[Tip]** Tickets for all the parties sell out quickly, and some events are only accessible with a weekend pass.

**[Room Rates + Event Pass for the Week]** Starting around \$950 per person

**[Swoosh To]**

[www.utahgayski.com](http://www.utahgayski.com)

next: **AROSA GAY SKI WEEK** ➔



# Arosa Gay Ski Week



**Of Europe's dozen** or so LGBT ski weeks, roughly half occur at the birthplace of downhill Alpine skiing—you guessed it, The Alps. Our favorite Alpine pick is Arosa Gay Ski Week, next happening January 12th to 18th, 2014. Established as a health resort in the 1880s, the mountain hideaway of Arosa was made famous by vacationing writers Thomas Mann (*Death in Venice*) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes' creator). Located in eastern Switzerland between Davos and St. Moritz, this village of 3,000 has a brand new cable system now linking it with the ski area of nearby Lenzerheide, creating 140 miles of slopes within two valleys.

Arosa Gay Ski Week whirls with an overflowing schedule of fondue nights,

drag queen races, après ski events, horse-drawn sleigh rides, gourmet dinners, cabaret shows, live concerts, pool parties, sauna nights, go-go boys, and DJ-fueled dance parties. Let's just say you won't get much sleep!

The event's organizers work with ten local gay-friendly partner hotels, and a week's room and event pass start at around \$650 a week for budget accommodations, working their way on up to 5-star hotels.

For more information and to reserve rooms, head to

[www.arosa-gayskiweek.com/en](http://www.arosa-gayskiweek.com/en).