



At Your Service

● Catered chalets offer the ultimate hassle-free ski vacation. By Samantha Berman

When the Fazio family takes a ski trip, they get something that's becoming a bit of a novelty these days: an actual vacation. "Everyone's always tired after a day of hard skiing," says patriarch Joe Fazio, from Santa Barbara, Calif., who's been a guest at Steamboat, Colo.'s Moving Mountains Chalet over the Christmas holidays for the past few years. "It's great to return to the smell of fresh-baked cookies as you collapse on the couch and wait for a gourmet dinner."

«As anyone who's ever booked a family ski vacation can attest, it can be a lot of

work—navigating the airport, picking up rental gear, buying lift tickets, planning and preparing breakfasts and dinners, arranging ski school and so on. The aim of the catered chalet concept—a popular way of vacationing in Europe—is to let someone else do your dirty work.

The chalet holiday originated as a British tradition—typically geared toward skiers looking to save money by sharing rooms and eating bowls of pasta at communal tables. Today's chalet holiday is worlds apart: Chic properties are staffed by professional chefs and waitstaff, guests

LOCATION, LOCATION Moving Mountains' See Me Lodge is just off Steamboat's slopes.

enjoy plasma TVs in their own en suite rooms, plus saunas, hot tubs, boot dryers and décor rivaling that of any top ski-town hotel. All meals are provided, as well as shuttles to and from the mountain and the airport.

But you needn't head to Europe. Chalet vacations may not yet be common in North America, but they do exist.

UPON ARRIVAL AT YOUR CHALET, LIFT TICKETS ARE WAITING ON THE COUNTER, THE WINE IS UNCORKED AND THE CHEF HAS PREPARED HORS D'OEUVRES.

One operator, Kokopelli Ski Holidays, manages two dedicated catered chalets in Breckenridge, Colo., but can offer the service at any property in many of the surrounding resorts. "We built Chalet Chloe last season," says James Shingles of his company's luxury six-bedroom chalet, 400 yards from the base of Breck's Peak 8. "But it's really advantageous to be able to rent out any house and provide the chalet program. After all, it's really the team who runs the property."

Personal service is key, agrees Robin Craigen, owner of Moving Mountains, which operates six chalets in Steamboat. "I was surprised at how much the American clientele appreciated the full-service concept," he says. "And even more surprised that it didn't exist in the States."

Craigen and his wife, Heather, welcomed their first guests at Moving Mountains chalet in 2003. After a successful couple of years, they took on a second Steamboat property, Mountain High, in 2005. Now, in addition to their six chalets, they also book guests into six luxury private homes around Steamboat.

Moving Mountains' clientele largely consists of families like the Fazios looking to whittle down the hassles of the ski vacation and up the relaxation factor. "Moving Mountains advertised that they would not only cook three meals a day for us," Fazio says, "they would also do



AS YOU LIKE IT A personal chef is part of the package during your catered chalet holiday.

everything else—chauffeur us around, clean up after us, arrange lift tickets and rentals, arrange babysitting. It sounded like a perfect way to spend a ski vacation.”

They weren't disappointed. “When we stayed there for the first time,” Fazio says,

THE STAFF WILL ARRANGE FOR A BABYSITTER, A DVD AND A PIZZA WHILE THE ADULTS HIT ONE OF THE RESTAURANTS IN TOWN. 'NO MORE DRAGGING TIRED KIDS OUT TO DINNER.'

“our expectations were truly exceeded. The food was unbelievably good, the staff was extremely friendly and they seemed to cater to our every whim.”

Here's how a typical Moving Mountains vacation goes: You fly into Hayden Regional Airport, 45 minutes from the ski resort, where a Moving Mountains driver is waiting with a Chevy Suburban. Upon arrival at your chalet, lift tickets are waiting on the counter, the wine is uncorked and the chef has prepared hors d'oeuvres. The kids eat dinner while the adults enjoy the appetizers, and after the children are tucked in, dinner is served. (A popular entrée last season was the Boursin-stuffed filet mignon with

steamed asparagus.) Afterward, you might sit by the fireplace with a digestif, try out the hot tub or sit outside and enjoy views of Routt National Forest. Then you'll retire to your bedroom suite and wake the next morning to omelets or pancakes before piling into the Suburban for the drive to the mountain. The staff will drop the kids at ski school, bring any non-skiers into town and pick you up for lunch. Everyone in the group gets a cell phone (if they don't have one) to liaise with the house staff.

The intention, agree both Craigen and Shingles, is to think of everything the guest might need before they realize they need it. Services extend outside the house as well. Shingles gives Kokopelli guests a mountain orientation tour on skis of 2,358-acre Breckenridge, and he makes a point of checking in with them at meals to make sure their vacation is going as they'd hoped.

“People are often surprised by the level of service,” he says, “and how helpful and friendly the staff is. That's a big part of the catered chalet program.”

Both Moving Mountains and Kokopelli Ski Holidays offer five-, six- or seven-night packages, each with two built-in nights out. Often, says Craigen, his staff will arrange for a babysitter, a DVD and pizza for the kids while the adults hit one of the restaurants in town. On the other

night, many families opt for a sleigh ride to dinner at Steamboat's midmountain Ragnar's. Both outfitters will stock the kitchen with snacks and beverages.

The goal, says Craigen, is to keep guests out of lines—ski-rental lines, grocery lines, lift-ticket lines, rental-car counter lines. “We're aiming for the ultimate hassle-free ski experience,” Craigen says. “No more dragging tired kids out to dinner and waiting for the city bus.”

So what's the cost of all this relaxation? It's not cheap. A weeklong Moving Mountains vacation can run as high as \$15,000 for up to 16 people at its top-of-the-line property, the new See Me Chalet. Seven nights at Kokopelli's Chalet Chloe will run you about \$16,000 for up to 14 people. (Roughly \$130–\$150 per person, per day.) And when you consider what's included—lodging, breakfasts and lunches, most dinners, airport transfers—it's very competitive with a luxury hotel. But the personal service sets it apart.

There's no denying the convenience quotient, Fazio agrees, but where Moving Mountains really shines is in the details. “Every year, we all look forward to New Year's Eve,” Fazio says. “The staff cooks a special dinner and plans games for the kids. Then we unveil the tubing run that the staff has been digging all week.”

Your very own tubing course—that's hard to beat. Which is exactly what Craigen is going for. “I tell my guests, ‘Just get to the airport,’” he says. “‘We'll do the rest.’” ●

CHALET LISTINGS

MOVING MOUNTAINS, STEAMBOAT
877-624-2538; movingmountains.com

Bear Chalets A half-mile from the lifts, the chalets have an elevator, hot tub and a game room with a pool table. They sleep up to 24 if rented together; 12 separately.

See Me Lodge A quarter-mile from the base, the seven-bedroom lodge has a heated gazebo with 360-degree views of the valley, a game room and a hot tub.

KOKOPELLI, BRECKENRIDGE
866-754-5656; ski-kokopelli.com

Chalet Chloe This six-bedroom chalet with exposed beams and three fireplaces sleeps 12–14. It's 400 yards from Peak 8.

Sunbeam Chalet A log home located in town, this four-bedroom chalet has a hot tub and game room.