

# Snowboarding in Colorado

A Day of Pain, Perseverance, and a Few Precious Moments

By Allison Bates

My eyes fluttered open, gently stirred awake by the smell of fresh coffee brewing. Goose bumps erupted across my skin as the frigid morning breeze swept through the open window. I climbed out of bed and slowly down the stairs, my bewildered lungs heaving under the strain of the thin mountain air.

"Toto," I thought to myself, "we are definitely not in Florida anymore."

We were, in fact, in the quaint Colorado town of Fraser, elevation 8,574 feet. Nine of us had come from all over the Sunshine State to celebrate a milestone birthday in a friend's life. But first, we would create a small milestone for ourselves.

"Snowboarding?! Oh man, good luck!"

I had heard this exasperated comment about a dozen times in the past few weeks. It was almost always followed with horror stories of bruised tailbones and broken necks. But the consensus was that it was worth the pain and effort.

I had attempted skiing twice as a child, and those memories mainly consist of being insanely cold. This time I came prepared. My suitcase was exploding with wooly hats, long scarves, and socks so thick they could double as pillows. It was me against the elements, and I was determined to win.

For a person who is used to wearing shorts and tank tops about 350 days a year, it was a very foreign feeling to cover myself head to toe in three inches of fleece and Gore-Tex. I felt like an astronaut preparing for a stroll on the moon. And once those gloves went on, forget it. I may as well have been wearing oven mitts.



Somehow I made it out the door and the adventure began.

It was standing room only on the shuttle to Winter Park resort, six miles south of Fraser. The old gray bus, which resembled something out of a prison movie, was bursting at the seams with multicolored sweaters, muddy ski boots, and smiling pink cheeks. They all looked like they had done this every weekend their entire lives. I wondered if we stood out as blatant southerners.

On this sunny day in the middle of high season the resort was buzzing with activity. We waddled through the crowd and found our snowboard instructor. Although he was from Kansas, a state almost as flat as Florida, his sun-worn face and confident swagger told of countless days spent on these slopes. We knew we were in good hands.

I strapped my feet onto the board and pondered what fate had in store for me. Would I be shredding powder like a natural, or would I finish out the afternoon in the emergency room?

The day went a little something like this: toe edge turn, heel edge stop, fall over. Link turn, ride ten feet, fall over. I was so busy falling over and trying not to fall over that I didn't even notice the cold. If I had owned an IPOD to put in the handy IPOD holder sewn into my jacket, the theme song of the day would have been Chumbawamba's Tub Thumping:

"I get knocked down, but I get up again, you're never gonna keep me down...."

It was every bit as hard but every bit as exhilarating as I'd been told. After four hours my wrists were swollen, my head pounded, and each one of my legs felt like a sack full of lead. But those few precious moments, when I was gliding upright across a sparkling snow-covered hill, are what really took my breath away. I was hooked.

Back at the rental house that evening, we engaged in one more daring mountain mission: hot tub in the snow.

I stared out the patio window in my bikini, clutching my towel for dear life. The thermometer on the railing read seven degrees. With one last hearty swig of liquid courage, also known as red wine, I burst through the door and made a beeline toward the hot tub. Ten steps of frozen hell led to pure, relaxing heaven.

As the searing bubbles massaged our aching muscles, we recounted our triumphant day. For me it was a day full of surprises. I was surprised I survived the cold. I was surprised I didn't tire out and give up. But most of all, I was surprised at how I could not wait to do it again.

We stewed in that hot tub for hours, watching the snow fall silently in the woods and planning our return trip to Colorado.

## If You Go

### Winter Park Resort

[www.winterparkresort.com](http://www.winterparkresort.com)  
+1 970-726-5514

### Getting there:

Winter Park Resort is located 89 miles west of Denver International Airport. You can rent a car and drive (roughly 2 hours, depending on traffic and weather), take a shuttle service, or ride Amtrak's Winter Park Express train from Downtown Denver's Union Station.

### Staying there:

There are a wide variety of accommodation options in Winter Park and nearby Fraser, from chain hotels to boutique inns to home and condo rentals. If you're not bringing a car, be sure to find a place near a bus stop for the free resort shuttle.

### Skiing and snowboarding there:

Lift tickets vary in cost from \$70 at the very beginning and end of the season, up to \$250 during peak-season weekends. If you're also interested in lessons and/or equipment rental, you can often bundle these options with your lift ticket to save a bit of cash.