



Wellness:

A New Marketing Mantra
for Mountain Resorts

BY LISA
DENSMORE
BALLARD

Being on a mountain surrounded by nature is good for the soul. You can feel it every time you make a few dozen turns or behold the view from a chairlift. It's good for the body, too: not only the exercise from skiing, snowboarding, hiking, mountain biking, and other mountain activities, but also an overall feeling of healing and well-being from breathing the fresh air or soaking in a hot tub under a starry sky.

And it's good for the mind. How many times have you grabbed your gear and rushed from your office under an oppressive time-crunch, taken a few runs, then returned to your desk with a clearer head and a more optimistic attitude?

We know intuitively our mountain resorts provide guests with more than a menu of outdoor activities. They rejuvenate. By coincidence, what rejuvenates has become a key criterion for the modern leisure traveler. North American ski resorts have a long history of marketing how to escape everyday life by visiting the mountains, but most could be a lot better at telling how being in a mountain environment helps visitors feel healthier, a strategic marketing error that could be costly in the long run.

"If I ask you what business you're in and you say, 'the ski business,' it's not something I would buy stock in. It should be the *lifestyle* business," says Daniel Fesenmaier, director of the National Laboratory for Tourism and Commerce and the Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute at the University of Florida. "Travelers today want to go to a beautiful place where they can be at peace with the world, feel healthy, and have a good quality of life."

According to Fesenmaier, there are four core reasons why people travel: 1) to learn, 2) to drop out from work for awhile, 3) to connect with family and friends, and 4) to be healthy. He believes European ski resorts are doing a better job of promising reason #4, partially out of need. As glaciers have receded and snowfall has lessened due to climate change, European resorts have looked for other ways to attract visitors, placing a particular emphasis on what Fesenmaier calls "health tourism."

"Tourism is about experiences," he says. "Today, there's spa tourism, medical tourism... all kinds of little pieces of tourism or specialized retreats. Much of the Alps has tapped into health tourism, which is about quality of living and peace of mind. People want to go to

Hosting wellness festivals such as Wanderlust is a great way to encourage women—key decision-makers when it comes to vacation planning—to develop a connection with the mountain environment.



NEIL GANDHI/WANDERLUST FESTIVALS

a special place that has meaning or makes them feel good.”

Other tourism experts agree. “St. Moritz used to focus its marketing only on skiing, but now its focus is on mind and body,” says Muzaffar Uysal, who is professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and has published numerous books and papers on tourism supply and demand, marketing, international tourism, and quality-of-life research in tourism.

“Use of leisure time has a goal of longevity and adding to quality of life rather than just the functional aspects of what you can do in a place,” Uysal says. “The noneconomic benefits of feeling good and having a sense of well-being are what differentiates destinations and are now valued by people more than ever.”

Health Benefits of the Outdoors

Over the last decade much research has come to light on the benefits of being outdoors for treating a myriad of mental and physical maladies. Among children, researchers cite decreased obesity, an easing of hyperactivity and attention disorders, and improved scholastic ability. Children who have

contact with nature tend to develop better cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. They are more creative and have more stable, normal social relationships.

Studies also show that adults who spend time in green spaces have more self-esteem and are less prone to mood swings and depression. They heal faster, perhaps because they receive more Vitamin D—which the body generates from sunshine—boosting the immune system. Epidemiologic studies suggest Vitamin D protects against osteoporosis, cancer, depression, and heart disease.

Getting outdoors also alleviates mental fatigue, improving one’s ability to think and remember clearly. A study conducted by researchers at the University of Essex in England found simply taking a nature walk reduced depression scores in 71 percent of participants compared to the 45 percent of the control group who walked indoors in a shopping center. Twenty-two percent of the shopping center walkers actually ended up *more* depressed.

Getting outdoors also relieves stress and promotes deeper sleep patterns. Bottom-line, when people

spend time in a natural setting they feel good, and ski areas, both large and small, are the perfect place to be in a natural setting. However, the general public tends to think of most ski areas in North America mainly as a place for recreation, and not necessarily where you can go to improve your overall well-being.

Projecting a Wellness Image

“Ski resorts need to come across as facilitators providing an environment conducive to wellness,” says Uysal, “Most resorts around the world offer activities, a nice bed, and good food. That’s not what attracts people anymore—they expect that everywhere. Visitors want to be engaged, involved. People will pay more for an experience that’s more meaningful to them. They’re not just purchasing pleasure or an activity. They want an experience that touches their inner, larger needs and appeals to their personal growth. The take-away needs to be ‘it was worth my time.’”

Ski areas have long exuded the benefits of coming to the mountains and participating in the sports they offer. Blue skies, the terrain, the quietness and beauty of the place, the stars

in the night sky, and the chance to engage in an experience with friends and family are long-time themes among mountain resort marketers.

The challenge is not just showing those aspects of a mountain vacation but also appealing to the senses. “Nowadays we ‘eat’ the landscape,” says Uysal, “We taste a place through its local flavor, its beauty, its history. This may be a metaphor, but it’s a factor now more than ever before, and it needs to come across in a resort’s marketing.”

Understanding the Demographics

Joe O’Leary, professor of Tourism at Colorado State University and an international tourism consultant, points to the changes among each demographic age group for clues toward using the wellness-in-the-mountains story to reach them.

Among teenagers and 20-somethings, the activities of skiing and

snowboarding are a focal point, but other activities are too. “People in their teens and 20s ask, ‘If I go there, what else is interesting?’” says O’Leary. “Marketing to families has always had that, but now it’s getting into younger groups. There’s a growing list of experiences this age group wants to take away.”

According to O’Leary, people in their 30s and 40s select their mountain destination in one of two ways: They may already be committed to a certain resort because it’s special to them through fond experiences in the past, or they look at the whole possible experience, then make a choice where to go though they may have never been there before.

“The space is important to them,” he says. “They expect it to be special whether it’s a family trip or a weekend with friends. Learning something new has growing appeal.”

For people ages 50 and over, an

activity like skiing is still a draw, but being gentler to the body plays an increasingly important role in their leisure time pursuits.

“You get a lot of ‘I can’t do it the same as before,’ though they never get away from being outdoors,” O’Leary says. “This age group is appreciative of their natural environment. They want the opportunity to relax and reduce stress. This group is the greatest at looking for other things in addition to a skiing experience.”

Appealing to Women

It’s also no secret that women are the primary decision-makers when it comes to selecting vacation locations. It’s also no secret that wellness sells to women. Eighty-five percent of the 60,000 attendees at Wanderlust Yoga Festivals are women, primarily ages 25 to 40. During 2015, six of the nine Wanderlust festivals—which include yoga classes, music, guest speakers, top chefs, and other performances—will take place at ski resorts during the summer months.

“Consistently in our surveys, the location itself is one of the most important reasons to go,” says Sean Hoess, who co-launched the Wanderlust Yoga Festivals in 2009 at Squaw Valley and has since added festivals at Snowshoe, Stratton, Aspen-Snowmass, Whistler, and Tremblant. Ski areas have the location, but they need to express wellness better, rather than as a second or third priority, Hoess says. “Market skiing, but combine it with a wellness-lifestyle message. Sell a more comprehensive experience.”

To attract Wanderlust-like programs, Hoess recommends ski resorts improve their representation at event and entertainment industry trade shows. Wanderlust dedicates 50 percent of its marketing budget to grass-roots outreach, particularly yoga teachers, yoga studios, and other yoga events and conferences. It also has an ambassador program to spread the word and drop off information at local places. ♦

SELLING WELLNESS THE ASPEN WAY

The Aspen Skiing Company is an example of how a ski resort can successfully embrace the wellness message. For the 2014-15 season it introduced its “Mind, Body, Spirit” campaign. The cornerstone of the campaign was an internet-based four-part video series targeted at potential visitors (<http://mindbodyspirit.aspensnowmass.com/>).

A trailer introduced the concept followed by three short episodes. The first, “Stir the Soul,” is targeted to people ages 25 to 35 and features Olympian Gretchen Bleiler, an Aspen native who embraces sustainability and healthy living. The second, “Feed the Flame,” features free-skier Torin Yater-Wallace and is targeted to people ages 18 to 25. The third, “Renew the Spirit,” features author Walter Isaacson, president of the Aspen Institute, and is targeted at people age 40 and older.

The videos, set to uplifting contemporary music, mix the action of skiing and snowboarding with the scenic beauty and nature that abounds in the Aspen area and the wholesome lifestyle it promises. The three spokespeople represent a cross-section of Aspenites, male and female, of various ages and backgrounds, but the common message is: Come to Aspen for renewal, to clear your head, and to get your body healthy, so you can be the best at what you do in your life.

“We haven’t abandoned skiing in our imagery,” says Christian Knapp, Aspen-Snowmass marketing director. “[That imagery] is very important, but mind-body-spirit is a philosophy and a commitment that sets us apart. How Walter Isaacson experiences Aspen is different than an X-Games visitor, but they’re intrinsically connected through green-ness and wellness.

“Aspen was founded as a place for recreation, culture, and to renew the spirit,” Knapp says. “That’s the Aspen promise. It’s our job to renew our guests.”—LDB



Email, ads on Facebook, and a limited print campaign make up the remainder of the marketing budget.

“We depend on word of mouth, too,” says Hoess. “The yoga community is educated and connected. Information spreads organically. It’s a community. People want to be with others who they like and trust. They come for the yoga but stay for the people. At Wanderlust, we create an inclusive event, and no one is on the outside. Ski areas have a broad audience, and they need to be better at letting people know there’s a place there for everyone.”

Hoess also advises paying closer attention to on-mountain food to project a wellness image. “The food can’t be burgers and beer, which caters mostly to young men who want to eat and get back outside fast,” he says. “Wellness means farm-to-table fare and fresh, healthy selections.”

Attracting Locals

Smaller ski areas with limited marketing budgets can capitalize on the wellness trend too. For local ski areas, Uysal recommends co-marketing with other local businesses, but not just any business. “Collaborate with a lodge, a restaurant, or a local craftsman that’s unique and indigenous to your location,” he says. “It might be as simple as a special tea or a pie.”

Uysal also encourages ski areas to invite local schools to come to the mountain—not only in the winter but also in the summer to take nature walks—and local businesses to have retreats there.

“Host special nature days for groups in your community,” Uysal says. “People like retreats, and they want fresh air in a beautiful spot. The cost is not high, and you’ll encourage them to identify with the mountain environment.”

Be Happy

There is one thing that ski areas have always done well that relates to mental and physical well-being: offering fun on the slopes.

“I saw a group of people biking to the top of Loveland Pass last summer, and it got my attention because they were all smiling even though they were in serious pain,” says O’Leary. “They were happy! Watching the sun come up makes people smile, too, for the beauty of it. In marketing, it’s more and more important to always show people smiling and happy.” ■

A former account executive at Grey Advertising in New York City, Lisa Densmore Ballard left Madison Avenue to pursue a career on the slopes. An Emmy-winning television producer and a freelance writer/photographer, she tunes her skis in Red Lodge, Montana.



PNP
SUPPLY LLC

PEOPLE NEED PIPE

give us a call
866.494.PIPE

(866.494.7473)

SALES + ENGINEERING

pnpsupplyllc.com

SIMPLICITY. STRENGTH. LONGEVITY. SUCCESS.

ONE HAPPY STORY

FROM ONE HAPPY CUSTOMER

“In our installation, the ability to deflect each joint of pipe every 16 feet allowed us to work around existing infrastructure in very tight confines, and to get each pipe to run to the same elevation within only 3 lengths of pipe ① — even though our starting point ② and ending point had 5 pipes with 5 different elevations. With steel pipe we would have needed to miter each joint and weld them together. In my opinion, and my crew’s, [Ductile Iron Pipe and Fittings from PNP Supply] is a great product, and we hope to use more in the future!”

WILLIAM R. TOYE
DIRECTOR OF MOUNTAIN OPERATIONS
CAMELBACK MOUNTAIN RESORT
TANNERSVILLE, PA

