

# Schuss for Christmas

## A snow-filled holiday at Snowshoe Mountain

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A Christmastime visit to a ski resort is a cliché, corny and cloying just like my family's Christmas-movie addiction, *White Christmas*. With two teenagers who missed their friends and two parents who were living in Christmas past, it wasn't exactly four-part harmony during our three days at Snowshoe Mountain (877-441-4386 or [www.snowshoemtn.com](http://www.snowshoemtn.com)) in West Virginia just before Christmas last year. But despite some holiday snafus, we got in plenty of schussing, hitting the almost mile-high slopes on skis, snowmobiles and snow tubes.

We stayed in the Village of Snowshoe, at the top of the mountain in Allegheny Springs, a centrally located lodge. Our excitement at arriving in a winter wonderland melted, however, as we waited an hour and a half to check in. It was the first big week of the season, and the staff was woefully overwhelmed. Little did we know, it was the beginning of a trend.

Once we made it to our comfortable two-bedroom condo with gas fireplace and kitchen, we headed out to pick up the rental skis my husband had reserved. All for naught. At the ski shop they had lost every reservation, so we and many others waited a while longer.

In need of stress relief, we decided to take the shuttle bus to Silver Creek for night skiing, which is when I remembered just how stressful skiing is. The last time I'd skied, I had broken my thumb, so I was more interested in the idea of skiing than the reality of it.

It was different for my children; the fact that they hadn't skied in years didn't matter. Their muscles remembered. My muscle memory, though, works differently. My muscles remembered fear, falling and cuss words, all of which came in handy right away.

I felt surprisingly balanced but was mentally unbalanced, gathering speed while going straight downhill. Moving a ski to turn or slow down terrified me more than going too fast. I was out of control, so all I could do was wipe out, which I did spectacularly, right under the ski lift for all to see.

"I'm all right! I'm all right!" I exclaimed 'la Uncle Billy in *It's a Wonderful Life*.

By the time we got back to the village for dinner at The Junction Restaurant and Saloon, we were in a festive mood. That is, until it was time to order. Unavailable entrées seemed to be the dishes du jour. At least we had chocolate waiting for us back in our rooms.

The next morning, my husband and I sneaked out to ski while the kids slept. It was a gorgeous day, and after the jampacked shuttles the night before, we appreciated the ease of getting to the slopes just outside our lodge. Snowboarders often got uncomfortably close, but after a few falls and a minor tantrum, I actually enjoyed skiing, especially when the four of us later found the nearly empty Yew Pine and Skidway trails.

Though Snowshoe was quite full, somehow the lift lines were never long, and the ski slopes weren't overly crowded. We did have long, cold waits the night we headed back to Silver Creek to check out the snow-tubing at Ruckus Ridge, five 600-foot snow-packed lanes that you can slide down singly or attached to another tube. Not enough thrills for the chills, in my book.

I had intended to cross-country ski or snowshoe during our trip, and the conditions were perfect for both, but whenever we tried to make arrangements, we were told those activities weren't available that week, which turned out not to be true. We weren't the only frustrated visitors, because Snowshoe's management later sent a letter to all guests apologizing for the poor service that week and extending an offer to book a 2006 vacation at 2005 prices.

The main benefit of going just before Christmas was watching ice sculptor Brian Floyd transform 300-pound ice blocks into a snowman, reindeer and other seasonal shapes with a chainsaw, a sander, a drill and ice-water glue. Snowshoe is such an artificial mountain village that the only time I remembered I was in real mountain country was when an onlooker, pointing to the cute reindeer, asked, "Can I shoot it?"