

BUSINESS

Ikon Pass could increase skier days in Park City and beyond



by Carolyn Webber Alder

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Since Vail Resorts purchased Park City Mountain Resort four years ago, Park City has experienced an increase in visitation. Now, another multi-resort entity has moved to the area, and the number of visitors is likely to keep rising.

Alterra Mountain Company, which acquired Deer Valley Resort last year, recently announced its much-anticipated season pass products. The company's Ikon Pass provides users with access to 26 resorts across North America, including Deer Valley Resort in Park City, along with nearby Snowbird and Alta Ski Area.

Nathan Rafferty, president of Ski Utah, said that having three local resorts included in the Ikon Pass will almost certainly bring more tourists to Park City, just as the Epic Pass brought more skiers and riders to the ski town when Park City Mountain Resort joined the list. Vail Resort's Epic Pass can be used at 61 resorts around the world.

"(With the Epic Pass), we're reaching a group of people who maybe had not been to Utah before," he said. "And I think we're going to see a lot more of those visits."

But a key difference between the two passes is that the Ikon Pass does not allow unlimited access to Deer Valley, Alta or Snowbird. Instead, pass holders are permitted only seven days at Deer Valley and a combined seven days at Alta and Snowbird.

Erik Forsell, chief marketing officer of Alterra Mountain Company, said that Alterra made the decision to limit access to Deer Valley because the company wanted to respect the resort's history of capping the amount of skiers each day.

"Our goal was to accentuate what made the resorts what they are today, and part of the Deer Valley experience is their attention to customer service and how many people are on the hill each day," he said. "We are very conscious about keeping what makes Deer Valley, Deer Valley."

He said that maintaining the uniqueness of each resort is one of the main values of Alterra. In addition to Deer Valley, Alta and Snowbird, 10 resorts have limited access with the Ikon Pass as well.

"The things that made them so special, don't mess with those, because that is why people go," he said.

But the company still hopes to increase the amount of skiers, particularly because



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the younger generation has proven less likely to spend money on the sport.

While Forsell said that Alterra was not specifically targeting millennials with the Ikon Pass, he thinks it will attract them because of the opportunity to experience several different resorts at a reasonable price point. The standard Ikon and the Epic passes for next ski season cost \$899.

Nick Sargent, president of the Park City-based trade organization Snowsports Industries America (SIA), agreed.

“It takes a very premium and luxury sport, and it brings it down to a true middle class space,” he said.

Many resorts that are included in the Ikon Pass, such as Deer Valley, normally cost more than \$2,000 for a season pass. The pass for the 2018-19 season costs \$2,365 if purchased before October 15. A standard day pass at Deer Valley during the 2017-2018 season cost \$135.

Sargent said that those who purchase an Ikon Pass can use the money they would have spent on a pass for one resort to travel to different resorts.

Rafferty said that the trend toward more affordable, multi-resort passes is helping raise visitation across the board at a time when the industry needs it the most.

“We’re seeing more people skiing and we’re seeing the value of a season pass for the consumer dramatically increase,” he said.

He and Forsell also said that the Ikon Pass will be a strong competitor to the Epic Pass, which has had a hold on the market since Vail Resorts introduced it 10 years ago. They predict the competition will keep the companies fighting to offer the best product. The competition has been on display as Alterra and Vail Resorts have snatched up independent resorts or struck agreements to include them in their respective passes at an increased rate the last few months.

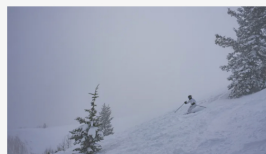
“The consumer is always the one that benefits when there is competition in the marketplace,” Forsell said.

He said that the independent resorts that remain will have to sharpen their game to keep up with the two behemoths, which ultimately is healthy for the industry.

Representatives from Vail Resorts declined to comment.

Rafferty is excited to see the change because of the prospect of growth. He is also glad to have the “extra marketing muscle” of Alterra Mountain Company behind Deer Valley, Alta and Snowbird to ensure that, as more people get on the mountain, they choose to come to Utah.

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After the company that purchased Deer Valley Resort announced its new name earlier this month, Alterra Mountain Company came out with another big announcement. It will be offering a January 25, 2018

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