



Janet Essman Franz
Janet Essman Franz is an award winning writer, television producer and fitness instructor in Vermont. She enjoys cross-country and alpine skiing with her husband and son at resorts throughout the East.

Take A Break From Your Vacation Planning

Let A Custom Tour Operator Do The Work

Planning a ski trip can be a lot of work. It takes time and patience to search the Internet for information about resorts, find overnight accommodations that suit your needs, download trail maps, call hotels, shop for the best deals on lift tickets and make all of your reservations for lodging, lessons, childcare, spa and off-mountain activities. When you arrive at the resort you spend a major part of the first day buying lift tickets, reserving child care, arranging rentals and lessons and figuring out where to eat your meals. It's physically and mentally exhausting, and it's tough on your wallet if you are paying for everything a la carte.

You can take the pressure off of yourself and shell out less for your next ski trip by letting a custom tour operator do the work for you.

A custom tour operator puts together individualized vacation packages for clients. For a ski vacation, that means helping with resort selection, getting information about facilities and services, reserving a hotel room or condominium, purchasing lift tickets, setting up child care, scheduling lessons and arranging for meals.

"People don't have to spend two or three hours tracking down the different lodging. They can see it all on our website and get price quotes in real time," said Cecil Carver, Direct of Sales for Tours de Sport, a custom tour operator specializing in east coast travel. Headquartered in Baltimore, Tours de Sport works with about 20 different ski areas throughout the Eastern U.S and Canada, from Snowshoe, West Virginia to Mont-Sainte-Anne, Quebec.

While some tour operators arrange group bus tours and all-inclusive pre-packaged trips, Tours de Sport tailors vacation packages to customers' needs. At each resort they offer a range of lodging options to suit different budgets, "from a simple pillow to put your head on to luxury slope-side accommodations." In addition to lodging,

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Take the pressure off and let a custom tour operator do the work for you



SNOWTIME!

WHATS HAPPENING IN THE EAST

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2006/2007 LIFT TICKET and SEASON PASS SPECIALS

NEW HAMPSHIRE - continued

Gunstock

Skier Saver Card - \$120. 50% off Prime Time (open to close) tickets and Night tickets. One discount per day per card. Not transferable. Value tickets, Tubing, Flex Time, Cross Country, Preseason & Post Season priced tickets not eligible.

MAGIC 2FER MONDAY - 2 tickets for Adult \$ 49, Teen \$ 39, Child & Senior \$ 29

6 Pack - Adult \$279, Teen/Senior - \$235, Children - \$189
Baker's Dozen - Adult \$559, Teen/Sen. - \$459, Child - \$369

Mount Sunapee

Mount Sunapee's Value Pass Plus offers the most skiing and riding in the East on one pass. Explore Mount Sunapee, Okemo Mountain Resort and Stratton Mountain in Vermont. Only \$739. Visit www.mountsunapee.com

Pats Peak

Unlimited Season Passes. Only \$349 adults and \$249 juniors/seniors until Nov. 4, 2007. \$389 adults and \$289 junior/seniors after Nov. 4. For more information on all options available, visit www.patspeak.com.

Ski New Hampshire

Anywhere, Anytime Ticket Packages; fully transferable lift tickets. Tickets are valid any day during the 2007-08 season, including holidays and weekends, no blackout dates. Customize a mix of lift tickets to favorite NH ski areas; tickets available in three pricing categories of \$20, \$35 and \$45 each. Minimum of 20 lift tickets, no more than 50% of the tickets from one ski area. Be sure to act soon. Details on SkiNH.com.

Waterville Valley

Snow-ember/December Ski & Stay: From \$77 per person, per night, double occ. Includes 2 nights lodging, 2 days of lift tickets, access White Mountain Athletic Club and shuttle bus. Also Tune-up, semi-private lesson for \$35 per person. 2 night minimum. Valid Nov. - Dec. 20, 2007. Visit waterville.com

Tree & Ski Family Holiday - Kids Ski Free! From \$84 per person wkd., quad occupancy Includes two nights lodging, Sat. or Sun. lift ticket, horse-drawn wagon ride to pick out a tree at a White Mountain Christmas Tree Farm. Lodges add special holiday remembrance too. Kids 12/under ski free (one free child ticket per adult ticket). Valid weekends of Nov. 30-Dec. 2, Dec. 7-9 and Dec. 14-16, 2007. Visit waterville.com

NEW JERSEY

Mountain Creek

The new My Mountain card is a great deal for anyone planning to visit Mountain Creek this winter. At just \$39, it includes one lift ticket plus \$10 off every visit, all season long, with no restrictions. The My Mountain card is such a good deal, it's only available through Dec. 24th. www.mountaincreek.com

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Tours de Sport sales representatives will arrange for lift tickets, lessons, rentals, childcare, meals at certain properties and off-mountain activities such as massages at the spa.

Clients can peruse the Tours de Sport web site to read resort descriptions, ski area statistics, weather information, ski reports, calendars of events, trail maps and entertainment. To get an online custom trip quote you simply click on a ski area name, enter your travel dates and the number of adults and children, then click on the quote button. You will get a list of lodging options that you can read about, and continue to follow links for more information. Contemplate the information at your leisure, and, when you're ready, make reservations through the Tours de Sport website or by telephone.

"People can create an unlimited number of trip quotes on their own, compare two or three lodging options, and save those quotes. They can then complete the booking process themselves or call us for more detailed information and to answer any questions," Carver said.

Because they are dealing in bulk volume, a tour operator can get these things for less. Cost savings can be substantial, as much as 15 to 40 percent on lodging and 20 to 30 percent on lift tickets.

"A family of four has the buying power of a family of four. We're booking up to 9,000 skier days at a resort. We get discounts through bulk volume and pass that on to our customers. The resorts give us some very attractive rates and discounts."

With a custom tour operator, "you get a better level of service with us than you would booking through Expedia or Travelocity," said Carver. If you book a hotel room on your own through an Internet travel agency, you may not be able to track down someone to answer specific questions about the accommodations. "If you book with us and there's a question or problem, you can call a real person who is readily available to offer assistance," said Carver. They stop short of making airline reservations, but they can tell you which airlines offer the best deals and which city is cheapest to fly into.

Tours de Sport sales representatives live in New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine and are hooked into the home office phone and email system. They are familiar with the ski areas and can offer knowledgeable advice on everything from driving directions to off-mountain activities to which trails to ski. "The people who work for us are avid skiers and have a history of working in the ski industry. They are specialists who know the product and know the lay of the land at the resorts. We're selling fun and we want to share the good times with fellow skiers."

Take a break from your vacation planning and save time and money with a custom tour operator. ❄

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