

Deer Valley ski resort, Stein Eriksen Lodge off the charts when it comes to guest services



Stein Eriksen Lodge is just above the Sterling lift at Deer Valley. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Publisher's note: *This is one in a series of stories about Park City, Utah.*

By Kathryn Reed

PARK CITY, Utah – Anticipating a guest's needs and fulfilling them are what sets Deer Valley ski resort and Stein Eriksen Lodge apart from their competitors.

They are the leaders in their respective industries when it comes to guest services. Employees provide the little touches with ease, as though it is normal. The attitude they bring makes it appear they really enjoy their jobs. The kindness

seems sincere, not forced or rehearsed. They may be acting, and if they are, then they should be receiving an Oscar tonight.

Deer Valley workers seem to do everything for skiers – except the actual skiing. And they are doing it just for skiers. Snowboarders still aren't allowed at this resort, which makes a fantastic difference.

A cadre of employees dressed in green and yellow are at the curb of Snow Park Lodge eagerly opening doors, getting equipment out for people.



Valet service at Deer Valley includes multiple people helping unload a vehicle. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Workers don't hole up in the liftie booth, they aren't chatting with co-workers and ignoring the guests, they don't act annoyed when asked a question from an out-of-towner. They seem to recognize a puzzled look and are quick to offer help. Employees were stationed on the mountain at most of the large maps, giving tips for where to go.

The mountain is known for its perfect corduroy. In some ways this makes it the ideal place to be on a powder day because

most people here want to stick to the groomers so the untouched stashes of that fluffy Utah powder lasts a while. At many of the nearby hotels the daily grooming report is available at the front desk in the form of a mini resort trail map.

Don't get the wrong idea about this mountain that has multi-million dollar houses slopeside. It's not for the faint of heart. There are plenty of steeps, some moguls and blue (intermediate) runs that would pass for black (advanced) in Lake Tahoe.

In 2002, Deer Valley was the host resort for the Alpine slalom, freestyle aerial and freestyle mogul Olympic events. More than 20,000 people attended each competition.

And in January the U.S. Ski Team was training for the Visa Freestyle International that was Feb. 4-6. This was the biggest stop on the World Cup tour. The events were staged at the same locations where the Olympians skied. This was the 14th time Deer Valley hosted a World Cup event. It also was home to the FIS Freestyle World Ski Championships in 2003 and 2011.

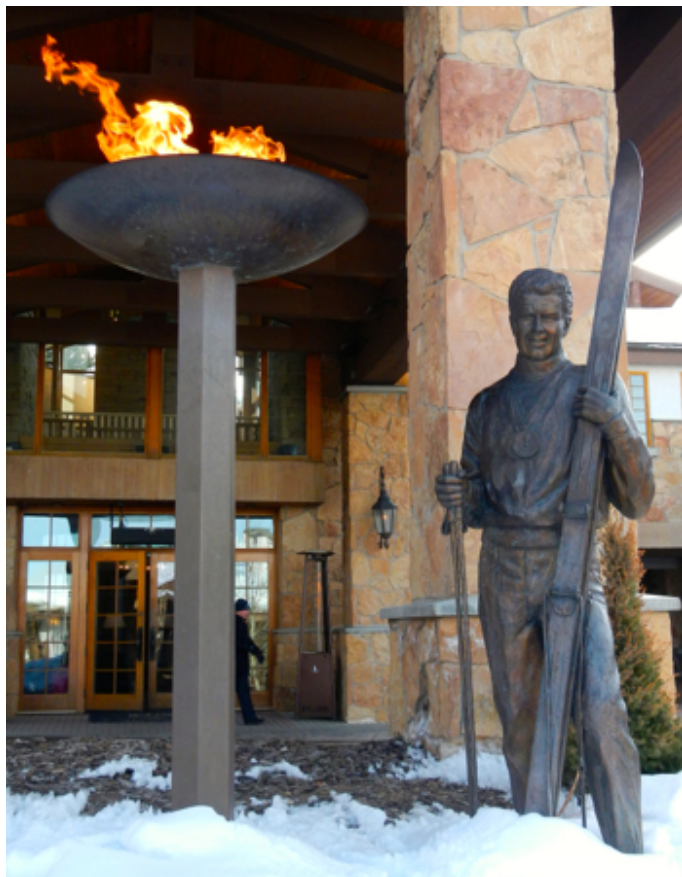


While the base area can get congested, the rest of the mountain isn't because the resort limits the number of skiers. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Inside the various lodges that are scattered about the ski hill the workers are courteous, answer questions about local beers and keep the venues spotless – or as close to it as possible. Food ranges from burgers to grilled venison to slices of cheesecake.

Even little things like the racks holding skis outside the restaurants look nicer than at most resorts. Instead of ordinary metal, they are aesthetically pleasing wood devices that fit in more with the natural environment.

Deer Valley limits the number of skiers to 7,500 a day on its 2,000-acre resort. Lift tickets are \$120 a day; comparable to Vail Resorts' properties.



Stein Eriksen's presence is scattered throughout the property. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Sitting above Silver Lake Lodge is a hotel named after Stein Eriksen, a 1952 Olympic gold and silver medalist from Norway who died in December at age 88. From 1956-58, he was director of Heavenly Mountain Resort's ski school.

While Stein Eriksen Lodge is named after the man known as the father of freestyle skiing, he didn't have an ownership stake in the lodge nor did he make any money off of the use of his name. A trophy case, though, shows off his hardware from his racing days. And there was a time he was like an ambassador for the hotel, mingling with guests and telling stories.

A hotel spokesman said owners are wrestling with how to stay relevant when multiple generations no longer recognize the Stein Eriksen name. They are working on how to keep the name meaningful. And while the service and location are outstanding, I was left with the feeling that the price of the

room had more to do with the name and history of the property than the overall experience.



Views from the deck of Stein Eriksen look out to the slopes of Deer Valley. Photo/Kathryn Reed

This Forbes five-star hotel definitely earned that rating when it came to guest services.

At the end of the day Stein employees are there to assist with the removal of ski boots. What a wonderful luxury that I didn't know I was missing until that moment. This was after a couple guys hustled down the hill to grab our skis as we were walking up from the ski lodge.

From the valet to the doormen to the restaurant staff – impeccable service, and only worthy of praise. Even the guy who had to come service the television was at the top of the chart for guest services.



Rooms at the Stein Eriksen are comfortable.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

What makes this property less than ideal is how it is laid out. The original lodge is where the restaurants are. Through the years it has expanded outward. We were staying about as far away as one could be from the outdoor heated pool, spa, weight room and restaurants. If there weren't a private hot tub on the balcony of our room (which is the exception, rather than the rule), the communal hot tub across the property would have been inconvenient to get to.

Evening temperatures were in the single digits. This made for a brisk walk to dinner as well as to breakfast.

Casual and more formal restaurants are on property. The scallops are outrageously good, the choices for vegetarians limited, the breakfast good and hearty. The window seats looking out onto all that corduroy are wonderful. A huge wrap-around deck looks like it would be inviting to sit on when the temps are above freezing.

To get to where our skis were stored the front desk staff said the fastest, most convenient route was to walk through the

garage. They were correct. But it seemed odd at a five-star hotel to be walking this way. It was another sign that the layout is lacking.



The trophy case belonging to the late Stein Eriksen. Photo/Kathryn Reed

For a luxury hotel that can fetch more than \$1,000 a night for a room in winter – four times the amount compared to summer – there is a relaxed, mountain vibe. The wood and rock décor, along with muted lighting in common spaces even makes it feel a bit rustic – in a good way.

The room itself is spacious and comfortable. But it, too, is laid out a bit odd. A long entranceway is wasted space. While overall the bathroom is almost sprawling, the toilet is tucked into what is like a closet that would seem hard to maneuver in for someone larger than I am. The towels are ordinary – not even as nice as the Park City Marriott, though the robes are the best hotel robes I've worn – beyond plush – like being wrapped in a cocoon.