

WINTER 2026

VAIL VALLEY

THRILLS
& chills


COLD PLUNGES

HOME & DESIGN

SOCIAL CLUBS

THROTTLE *Therapy*





Vail Backcountry Tours has access to more than 180 miles of freshly groomed trails and singletrack that weave through the White River National Forest.

Skip the slopes and hop on a snowmobile to discover Vail's quieter, wilder side

By Jennifer Weintraub

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRENT BINGHAM

Beyond the bustle of the ski slopes lies a side of Vail that most visitors never see — raw, open wilderness. There are no crowds, lift lines or trail maps. Instead, it's a world away from reality, surrounded by rugged peaks and quiet valleys.

This is the backcountry. And one way to get here? A snowmobile tour with Vail Backcountry Tours. Here, tours are intimate and designed to show guests the scale of the mountains and the untouched forest that surrounds the Vail Valley.

If you're looking for an alternative to skiing — or just need a day off for your quads — this is one of the valley's best-kept secrets.

ADVENTURE AWAITS

If location is everything, Vail Backcountry Tours hits the jackpot. It's the only snowmobiling operation based in the town of Vail, tucked up Red Sandstone Road, just opposite Vail Mountain. From there, riders gain access to over 180 miles of freshly groomed trails and singletrack that weave through the White River National Forest.

Waiting at the base operations is a fleet of new Ski-Doo Grand Touring snowmobiles. They're sleek, responsive and surprisingly simple to operate. Just a throttle and a brake. Plus, they come with creature comforts like plush seats and heated handlebars.

Never driven a snowmobile before? No problem.

The adventure starts slowly, easing you into the ride with a gentle stretch of groomed forest road. From their headquarters at 8,500 feet, you climb steadily over several miles, wandering higher until you reach a private yurt at 10,000 feet. From there, routes branch out in every direction, chosen daily by your guide based

on the weather and the group's ability and desires. Guests usually cover between 30 and 50 miles of trail, depending on the length of the tour.

"We're in the wilderness, surrounded by nothing but fantastic views," describes Carrie Morris, co-owner of Vail Backcountry Tours. "The tranquility of the single tracks throughout the property and on your way out to Piney Lake are some of the best moments — it feels like you are the only people out in the wilderness, and there are great chances for wildlife-spotting as well."

Riders carve their way through dense pine forests and open alpine meadows filled with fresh snow. Trails twist and climb until the forest parts like a curtain, topping out at 11,000 feet. Suddenly, you're staring at a panorama of snow-draped peaks: Vail Mountain, Beaver Creek, Holy Cross Mountain and the Gore Range, all laid out like a postcard.

It's time to get out the camera.

"The entire trail system has amazing views from sunup to sundown," Carrie says. "Buffehr is probably the most photographed, as you have the Gore Range and Vail Mountain in the background. There have been many proposals on this site!"

SWEET TREATS & SWEEPING PEAKS

Every adventure needs a pause button, a time to reenergize and regroup, and this one is at a private backcountry yurt. This cozy circular hut with a domed ceiling and wooden lattice frame is unexpectedly backcountry cozy and chic.

Inside, helmets come off, cheeks thaw and steaming cups of hot cocoa, coffee or tea make the rounds. Sweet treats, including cookies, brownies and lemon bars, are served on a tiered tray. Plush mid-century modern leather couches set on boho rugs beg you to sink in and take a sip of a warm drink. Others gather around a vintage wood-burning stove crackling in the corner, warming up their fingers and toes. On warmer days, Adirondack chairs outside line the deck and offer front-row seats overlooking the iconic Gore Range, with craggy peaks rising like a jagged crown.



Ski-Doo Grand Touring snowmobiles power through the snow. At several points on the tour, Vail Mountain's trails can be seen in the distance.



**“WE’RE IN THE WILDERNESS, SURROUNDED
BY NOTHING BUT *fantastic* VIEWS.”**



This isn't just a pit stop, it's part of the backcountry rhythm: a chance to slow down, swap stories and take in the sheer size and stillness of the wilderness.

Plus, if you are celebrating anything special — like a birthday, anniversary or proposal — this is the place where staff will break out the bubbles and celebratory snacks.

FROM LOCAL ROOTS TO BACKCOUNTRY ROUTES

Longtime Vail Valley locals Jeremy and Carrie Morris know

this mountainous region well. Jeremy began guiding here years ago under the company's previous ownership. When the chance came to take over the operation, he jumped at the opportunity. Ten years later and they're still going strong, with an operation built around a true reflection of care, knowledge and passion.

Guides are more than a snowmobile chauffeur. They're storytellers, naturalists and mountain insiders who share

tales of the valley's history, point out animal tracks and name the peaks that stretch endlessly in front of you. "Our staff is phenomenal," says Carrie. "They're certified professionals and longtime locals who create a special experience for everyone who visits us."

Every tour is guided, and for good reason. The trail system is extensive, but more importantly, they want guests to experience more than just a ride.

Riders can stop for a break mid-tour at a backcountry yurt, complete with snacks, cozy chairs and a wood-burning fireplace. If it's warm enough, some visitors prefer to sit outside in the sunshine.

"We offer a white-glove snowmobile experience. It's more like a concierge service, as we personally speak with every guest to book their tour. Before they even walk in our door, they know what to expect and that it will be a memory of a lifetime," Carrie says.

TAKE A RIDE ON THE WILD SIDE

Snowmobiles are designed for one or two riders. But the back seat isn't a bad gig: elevated, cushioned and perfect for soaking in the scenery while someone else steers. There are plenty of stops to snap photos, stretch your legs and swap places if you want a turn. Kids as young as six can join as a passenger on a double sled.

Prefer to ride solo? You'll love the independence of handling your own machine, leaning into turns and opening up the throttle on wide forest roads. If you want to ride alone, you have to be at least 15 with a valid driver's permit. Either way, snowmobile tours cover serious ground through miles and miles of backcountry terrain.

"When the snow is falling it can feel like you are in your own snow globe, bringing back childlike giddiness," describes Carrie.

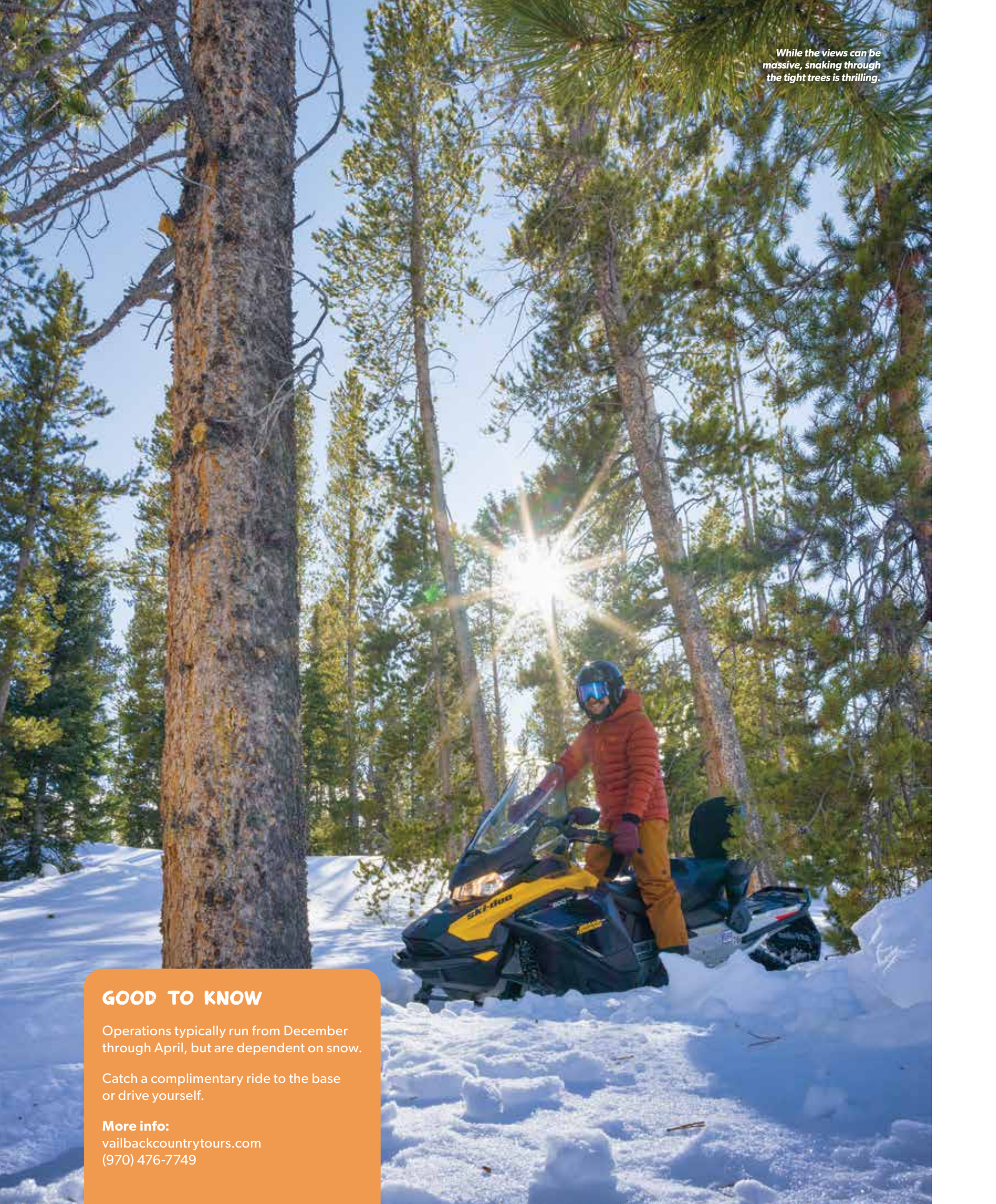
BEYOND THE SLOPES, INTO THE SILENCE

In a valley where skiing often steals the spotlight, snowmobiling with Vail Backcountry Tours offers a refreshing shift in perspective. It's fast, fun and adrenaline-inducing, but it's also quiet and surprisingly soulful.

Out in the backcountry, where the endless miles of snow and silence are broken only by the whir of a sled, you realize that Vail has more than one way to take your breath away. **VVM**

GUIDES ARE *more than* A SNOWMOBILE CHAUFFEUR. THEY'RE STORYTELLERS, NATURALISTS AND MOUNTAIN INSIDERS WHO SHARE TALES OF THE VALLEY'S HISTORY, POINT OUT ANIMAL TRACKS AND NAME THE PEAKS THAT STRETCH ENDLESSLY IN FRONT OF YOU.



A person wearing a red jacket, yellow pants, and a helmet with goggles is standing next to a yellow and black snowmobile in a snowy forest. The snowmobile is parked on a snow-covered ground. The forest is filled with tall, thin evergreen trees. The sun is shining through the trees, creating a bright starburst effect. The overall scene is a winter wonderland.

While the views can be massive, snaking through the tight trees is thrilling.

GOOD TO KNOW

Operations typically run from December through April, but are dependent on snow.

Catch a complimentary ride to the base or drive yourself.

More info:

vailbackcountrytours.com
(970) 476-7749