For the Sake of Winter, We Must Stay Vigilant

Open Letter from Vail Resorts CEO Rob Katz to Communities, Guests and Employees

What will the 2020-21 ski and snowboard season look like? We are still in the heat of July – still celebrating the successful opening of our resorts for summer – and that is the number one question we are getting across our 34 North American resorts. What lies ahead for winter? We remain optimistic that we'll have a great ski season. And we are actively preparing our resorts to ensure our employees and guests have a safe and enjoyable experience this winter amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. But we also know that without strong, healthy communities, none of that matters.

We often talk about how our mountain resorts and communities are joined at the hip. We operate in the same ecosystem, we need each other to succeed and survive. The importance of this partnership was evident in the collective effort it took to safely reopen for summer. But that was not the end of the race – it was the beginning. For the sake of winter, we must stay vigilant with safety as our number one priority – now and through the entire winter season. There are two things we collectively must keep top of mind:

1. We cannot get complacent. With the recent COVID-19 resurgence in the United States and around the world, we need to assume that we will still be dealing with the impacts of the virus throughout the winter season. Even if new COVID-19 cases decline – nationally or locally – we must assume the virus will reemerge. We cannot relax restrictions or protocols. We cannot get caught trying to play catch up to the virus during the ski season. We have to remain out front in our approach. Exacerbating that reality is the fact that each one of our communities is a destination for visitors from countless other cities. This is our greatest strength, but it can also be a weakness. We cannot only look at the COVID-19 data in our local communities. By welcoming people to our resorts from other locations we need to realize that we will be taking on their COVID-19 experience as well. Therefore, for us to be successful we need to enforce protocols and procedures now that can work all season.

2. Safety is not optional. At Vail Resorts, we are strong advocates for face coverings and believe that in public gathering spaces – indoors and outdoors – everyone needs to wear a face covering at all times. There should be limited exceptions in areas designated for eating and drinking, but just as other tourist destinations have required, we must ensure that face coverings are not optional if you are walking around with a drink or snack in your hand. We also believe that physical distancing between unrelated parties is a must – which means events or other public gatherings that don't allow for 6 feet of distancing should be restricted or limited. This goes for gatherings in town and on the mountain. We need to accept that this will likely be the reality for the full season. We are certainly not experts on infectious disease and cannot dictate the local regulations of our communities, but these are simple measures that will contribute to our collective success. And they need to be executed now, so they become ingrained well before the ski season begins.

To our guests, visitors, employees and residents: We need your support, compassion and understanding that staying vigilant in our communities now, and in the months ahead, will help us all have a successful winter. While we cannot completely control the behaviors of visitors, we are committed to enhancing our communications to our guests to ensure they at least understand our expectations of them when they come. We all know enforcement can be a challenge, but with repetition and local alignment, we can ensure people comply and respect this approach to safety.

COVID-19 has significantly impacted every one of our mountain resort communities. The closure of our resorts in March came with a heavy financial and human cost to our company, as well as to so many businesses and people throughout the towns, cities, counties, provinces and states where we operate. In the midst of these challenges, it has been inspiring to see how everyone has come together to support one another and help chart a course forward. We cannot lose that momentum.

All of us want to protect our local economies and our communities. All of us want a great ski and snowboard season. To make that a reality – all of us must remain vigilant. Together, let's set a tone and demonstrate that we are leaders in offering the safest and most enjoyable experience, anywhere in the world.

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