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7 US ski resorts that could benefit from El Niño this winter

Story by Jessica Chapel • 1d • ⌚ 10 min read

The El Niño climate pattern, which is caused by warmer-than-average ocean temperatures in the tropical Pacific, can shift the [winter storm track](#) across the US. That can determine which mountains get dumped on, and which will sound like an ice-skating rink.

This year is forecasted to be a “Super” El Niño winter—meaning NOAA put the odds of a [very strong El Niño](#) as of January 2027 at 90% or greater, along with a 69% chance that the event will be the [strongest on record](#) since at least 1950. Historically, [El Niño winters](#) lead to wetter conditions in the Southern US and warmer and drier conditions in the North.

I’ve been [snowboarding](#) for most of my life (and am now spending more time on skis), so I’ve learned that the timing of a ski trip matters almost as much as the mountain itself. And after a lackluster 2025–26 season in some of the most popular skiing parts of the western US, I’m especially eager to see what this winter will bring. The current outlook favors wetter conditions across the southwest, putting [California](#), [New Mexico](#), [Arizona](#), and southern [Colorado](#) in an interesting position (while [Utah](#) and the northern [Rockies](#) are less straightforward). In the northeast, an El Niño winter typically means that conditions will be warmer, and thus more dependent on individual coastal storms for snowfall. (It’s important to note that in any of these locations, unexpected storms can change conditions on a dime, so be sure to check your local mountain forecasts for timely updates.)

El Niño historically packs its biggest punch in mid-to-late winter, so it’s still too early to be completely certain about how the rest of the 2026–27 season will shake out. But the recently released winter forecasts from the experts at [Weather Channel](#), [SnowSure](#), and [NOAA](#) are a good place to start. With all that taken into consideration, these are the 7 US mountains and ski resorts that I’m keeping an eye on this season.

In this article:

- **Mammoth Mountain, California**
- **Palisades Tahoe, California**
- **Taos Ski Valley, New Mexico**
- **Telluride, Colorado**
- **Arizona Snowbowl, Arizona**
- **Park City, Utah**
- **Alta Ski Area, Utah**
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Alta Ski Area, Utah

El Niño generally nudges the jet stream and storm track south—and can leave Utah in a less reliably snowy position than California or the southern Rockies. But that doesn't make the Wasatch a write-off. In fact, after an especially tough 2025–26 season, Alta is a mountain where even a few well-timed storms could make a pretty dramatic difference.

Alta is famous for its light, dry powder, expansive bowls, and old-school ski culture, spread across 2,614 acres of terrain. And because Alta sits at a higher elevation in the Wasatch, a favorable shift in the storm track could quickly turn the season around. This isn't too much to ask for given its position given its Little Cottonwood Canyon position, which can enhance snowfall when Pacific moisture travels inland and reaches the Wasatch Mountains.

It's not the *obvious* El Niño bet, but that's part of the intrigue: If the pattern delivers a little farther north than expected, Alta could be a very fun surprise for skiers this winter.

When to (loosely) plan your trip: Early February through March 2027; according to [Deseret News](#), this is where skiers catch potentially catch peak snowpack during the forecasted El Niño pattern.

Where to stay on and around Alta Ski Area:

- Best for ski-to-door access and easy amenities: [The Snowpine Lodge](#)
- Best for a one-bedroom condo: [Ski-in/ski-out Airbnb on the mountain](#)
- Best for the mountain's first ski lodge: [Alta Lodge](#)