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Plenty of skiing & off-slope fun at NH ski resorts

Great ski conditions, events and non-skiing activities will take care of your February vacation needs

It's that time of year again for families to address the ever pressing question of what they are going to do over February school vacation. In New England the simple answer is to head to the ski resorts.

New Hampshire's ski areas have enjoyed a return to wintery weather over the last week, and a combination of fresh natural snow and snowmaking for many resorts over the last few days means that there will be abundant trails open for those looking to enjoy some mid-winter skiing and riding. Ideal snowmaking temps and additional snow showers expected over the coming days will help set up some great trail conditions for the February vacation week.

Traditionally a ski vacation was only a good option if everyone in the family was a skier or snowboarder. However, not only do ski areas make learning to ski or snowboard easier today than it ever has been, there are also now so many activities to choose from beyond skiing and snowboarding, making a trip to New Hampshire's ski resorts the perfect family getaway for any family.

For those who have never tried the sport or who perhaps feel that their skills could use some work, ski areas (both alpine and cross-country) offer cutting edge learn-to programs that truly put the fun in the learning process. Some ski areas, such as Cranmore Mountain Resort and Pats Peak, have learn-to-ski/ride programs in which a beginner will receive a complimentary pair of skis and other benefits after completing several introductory lessons. All New Hampshire ski areas also offer excellent program for children of all ages and abilities, as well as day care programs for the youngest future skiers and riders.

From snowshoeing and cross-country skiing to fat biking and zip lining, there's almost no need to even buy a lift ticket. Almost. Better still, most resorts offer a

wide variety of non-skiing or riding events all through the end of February, giving visitors even more off-piste options to enjoy.

If the thought of trying out some of the other offerings in the North Country strikes your fancy but you want to get in some skiing as well, Bretton Woods offers their Zip and Ski package for just \$99. In addition to their highly-acclaimed Canopy Tour adventure, you will get a lift ticket to Bretton Woods that may be used the day before, after or on the day of the tour.

For those that have never ventured out on snowshoes, Gunstock offers a perfect opportunity with their Saturday Night Snowshoe Ridge Tours where experienced guides will take you for a unique snowshoe tour crossing the ridge of Gunstock Mountain. Arrive by chairlift and traverse back down to the Nordic Center with headlamps for hot chocolate.

Loon Mountain offers their own take on snowshoeing adventures with their Snowshoe and S'mores Après Party. When the lifts shut down for the day, you'll ride up the Seven Brothers Double, and then take a guided snowshoe down to the Camp III lodge. After working up an appetite enjoy a spread of hors d'oeuvres, cheese, beer, wine, hot cocoa - and s'mores, of course.

The Jackson Ski Touring Center is holding a two-hour full moon guided snowshoe tour on Monday, Feb. 22 from 6-8 p.m. A Jackson XC guide will take guests on a tour of the trails lit by moonlight.

If you've watched the Olympics wondering how difficult the biathlon could be, now's your chance to find out. Waterville Valley will hold its very own Paintball Biathlon on Saturday, Feb. 20. Bring your snowshoes or XC skis and see if you have the speed on the loop course and accuracy to hit the cartoon character, bingo board, and traditional biathlon targets.

Mount Sunapee offers the chance to test your stamina and strength on Saturday, Feb. 27 with their 6th Annual Winter Wild Racing event. Race to the summit and back down. Grab your skis, snowshoes, favorite running shoes or whatever you think it will take to be the fastest. More information can be found at www.winterwild.com.

For more information on all the other great events and activities at ski areas around New Hampshire visit www.SkiNH.com.

Ski NH is the statewide association representing 34 alpine and cross country resorts in New Hampshire. For more information on ski areas, vacation planning, and updated winter events at Ski NH resorts, call Ski NH at 603.745.9396 or visit the Ski NH website at www.SkiNH.com. For statewide travel info, visit www.VisitNH.gov.

