

RALEIGH, N.C. — As the season's first skiers head down the slopes, the [N.C. Ski Areas Association](#) introduces "[Ski Well, Be Well](#)," a program to minimize spread of COVID-19 while highlighting the wellness benefits of winter sports.

"The association leadership is committed to significant measures to curtail exposure to COVID-19 in fresh-air settings that are ideal for meeting our need for physical activity," said Wit Tuttell, director of Visit North Carolina. "For travelers who are eager to hit the slopes, our six ski areas offer a solid base for planning a trip."

The protocols adopted by the association draw on scientific guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization. They cover staff training, enhanced cleaning, mask wearing, social distancing and other issues. Among the practices travelers can expect:

- A face-covering requirement in indoor and outdoor spaces whenever social distancing isn't possible, with the exception of eating and drinking. The requirement applies to lift lines, ticket queues, lessons, employee spaces, and food and beverage outlets.
- Grouping of members of the same travel party on chair lifts.
- Advanced cleaning and disinfection in all areas of the operation.
- Employee wellness checks.
- Compliance with state and local regulations and reporting of positive cases per CDC guidelines.

Some individual ski areas are undertaking additional measures. [Appalachian Ski Mtn.](#), [Beech Mountain Resort](#), [Sugar Mountain Resort](#) and [Wolf Ridge Ski Resort](#) are participants in the statewide [Count On Me NC](#) initiative, which offers free, evidence-based training for minimizing spread of COVID-19 while asking the public to wear masks, wash their hands frequently and wait at distance of 6 feet in public spaces. Appalachian Ski Mtn., which requires online reservations as part of its effort, has installed forearm door pulls, sensor faucets and touchless pay systems.

Trip planners can check ski area websites for details or ask for more information by phone or email. The [Travel Advisory](#) on Visit NC's website offers up-to-date statewide travel guidelines and includes links to destination-specific restrictions that might be in place. North Carolinians and out-of-state visitors are also encouraged to download [SlowCOVIDNC](#), an exposure notification app that alerts users when they may have had an unknown community exposure. The app does not collect any personally identifiable information.

Here's a quick look at North Carolina's ski areas.

APPALACHIAN SKI MTN.

Blowing Rock

The North Carolina High Country's first ski area, Appalachian Ski Mtn is known for teaching beginners, families and groups. It's home of the French Swiss Ski College, the South's largest independent ski school; Burton Learn to Ride; and SKIwee.

COVID-19 information: www.appskimtn.com/news/2020-21-season-update

Projected opening: Friday.

Peak elevation: 4,000 feet.

Vertical drop: 365 feet.

Lifts: 2 quads, 1 double, 1 surface, 2 conveyors.

Other activities: Ice skating.

Off the slopes: Lodge with restaurant, ski shop, gift shop and locker room.

Other: Jackets, bib pants gloves and goggles are available for rent.

BEECH MOUNTAIN RESORT

Beech Mountain

At 5,506 feet in elevation, Beech Mountain is the highest ski area in the East. A central alpine village, the 5506' Skybar and a resident brewery further distinguish the resort. It offers the Ski and Ride School; Burton Learn to Ride; and Traxx and Snow Kamp for children.

COVID-19 information: www.beechmountainresort.com/health-and-safety-practices

Projected opening: Saturday.

Slopes: 17.

Peak elevation: 5,506 feet.

Vertical drop: 830 feet.

Lifts: 3 quads, 3 doubles, 1 magic carpet, 1 rope tow.

Other activities: Ice skating and tubing.

Off the slopes: Four restaurants and two sport shops plus other businesses in the village.

Other: Bibs and coats are available for rent.

CATALOOCHEE SKI AREA

Maggie Valley

At the edge of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Cataloochee opened in 1961 to become North Carolina's first ski area. It features one of the region's longest seasons with help from its advanced snowmaking system. Cataloochee offers lessons at the Ski & Ride Center and CAT Trackers for kids.

COVID-19 information: cataloochee.com/2020-21-season-update

Projected opening: This week.

Slopes: 18.

Peak elevation: 5,400 feet.

Vertical drop: 740 feet. **Lifts:** 1 double, 1 triple, 1 quad, 3 conveyors.

Other activities: Tube World in Maggie Valley.

Off the slopes: Lodge with fireplace, restaurant, lounge and on-mountain shop. Cataloochee Ski & Sports Shop in Maggie Valley offers rentals and lift tickets plus everything you need for the slopes.

Other: Bibs and jackets are available for rent.

SAPPHIRE VALLEY SKI AREA

Sapphire

Sapphire Valley Ski Area is part of a 5,700-acre, four-season resort. It's especially attractive to families and beginning skiers who can take lessons and master the runs.

COVID-19 information: Pending (check the [homepage](#)).

Projected opening: Dec. 12.

Slopes: 2.

Peak elevation: 3,400 feet.

Vertical drop: 200 feet.

Lifts: 1 quad, 2 carpet conveyors.

Other activities: Frozen Falls Tube Park, The Vordach zip line.

Off the slopes: Base lodge park and fire pit and the Slopeside Tavern.

SUGAR MOUNTAIN RESORT

Sugar Mountain

With 125 skiable acres, Sugar Mountain is North Carolina's largest winter resort, distinguished by the state's only double black diamond slope and a high-speed, detachable, six-passenger chairlift. Lessons are available at the adult and children's Snowsports Schools.

COVID-19 information: www.skisugar.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COVID-Letter-v9.pdf

Projected opening: The slopes opened today.

Slopes: 21.

Peak elevation: 5,300 feet.

Vertical drop: 1,200 feet.

Lifts: 1 triple, 3 doubles, 1 high-speed six-pack, 1 high-speed quad, 1 surface and 1 carpet conveyor.

Other activities: Skating, tubing and snowshoeing.

Off the slopes: Base lodge with two cafeterias, the Last Run Lounge with full-service bar, locker

room and shop.

WOLF RIDGE SKI RESORT

Mars Hill

Thirty miles north of Asheville off scenic Interstate 26, Wolf Ridge sits just inside Pisgah National Forest. The Snow Sports School offers group and private lessons for beginning to intermediate skiers and snowboarders.

COVID-19 information: skiwolfridgenc.com/covid

Projected opening: Early December.

Slopes: 15.

Peak elevation: 4,700 feet.

Vertical drop: 700 feet.

Lifts: 1 quad, 1 double and 2 surface lifts.

Off the slopes: Base lodge with three large fireplaces, gift shop and food service.

Other activities: Tubing.

For more information to inspire a trip, stop by [VisitNC.com](https://www.visitnc.com).

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CONTACT:

Margo Metzger

919-413-8884

margo.metzger@VisitNC.com

Suzanne Brown

919-447-7766

suzanne.brown@VisitNC.com

<https://media.visitnc.com/NC-Ski-Areas-Address-Safety-Issues-in-Season-Plans>