

RALEIGH, N.C. — Skiers, snowboarders and other winter sports lovers have returned to the North Carolina mountains to find new equipment, amenities and services in a scenario that resembles pre-pandemic times on the slopes with indoor safety measures in force as warranted.

“While keeping concerns about COVID-19 in mind, we’re thrilled that the 2021-22 ski season arrives with improvements to the experience of a North Carolina winter sports getaway,” said Wit Tuttell director of [Visit North Carolina](#). “A speedy new lift at Sugar Mountain Resort and added appeal at Beech Mountain Resort’s alpine village make the wait for winter all the more rewarding.”

Under the N.C. Ski Areas Association’s updated “[Ski Well. Be Well.](#)” guidelines, masks are mostly optional outdoors, and last season’s chairlift restrictions have generally been eased except for gondolas and other enclosed carriers. With protocols for indoor operations reflecting local regulations and other considerations, the association urges travelers to request details from the ski area they’re visiting. While North Carolina currently has no statewide restrictions, Tuttell says travelers can link to Visit NC’s [travel advisory](#) to stay updated and connect with guidance from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Here’s a quick look at North Carolina’s winter sports venues.

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 the home of the French Swiss Ski College, the South’s largest independent ski school; Burton Learn to Ride; and SKIwee.

Be in the know: [Online reservations](#) are required.

Slopes: 12.

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: Along with equipment, jackets, bibs, gloves, goggles and helmets 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; Beech Mountain Academy; and Traxx and Snow Kamp for children. New lighting on Southern Star completes a three-year upgrade of lighting on slopes used at night.

Slopes: 17.

Peak elevation: 5,506 feet.

Vertical drop: 830 feet.

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

Other activities: Tubing.

Off the slopes: The resort’s alpine village is newly transformed into a parklike plaza with a pavilion and social area with fire pits. New outdoor seating areas are connected by walkways, and Play Yard Provisions joins the village shops and dining spots as a snack shack for food and drink.

Other: Along with equipment, pants, coats and helmets 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.

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: Along with equipment, jackets, pants and helmets 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.

Be in the know: Projected opening is Dec. 18.

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.

Other: Lift tickets include equipment rental; bibs and jackets are available for a separate fee.

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. Joining the lineup of lifts: Big Birch, a 2,000-foot-long, fixed-grip, four-seater Doppelmayr lift that's twice as fast as the triple it replaces. Lessons are available at the adult and children's Snowsports Schools.

Slopes: 21.

Peak elevation: 5,300 feet.

Vertical drop: 1,200 feet.

Lifts: 1 fixed-grip quad, 3 doubles, 1 high-speed six-pack, 1 high-speed quad, 1 surface, 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.

Other: In addition to equipment, jackets, bibs and helmets are available for rent.

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. Travelers will find updated lighting for night skiing, and on busy days, a new shuttle van will run from parking areas to the lodge.

Be in the know: See COVID-19 precautions at [skiwolfridgenc.com/covid](https://www.skiwolfridgenc.com/covid). Opening date is to be determined.

Slopes: 15.

Peak elevation: 4,700 feet.

Vertical drop: 700 feet.

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

Other activities: Tubing.

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

Other: In addition to equipment, bibs and helmets are available for rent.

More winter play

BEECH MOUNTAIN SLEDDING AND SNOWSHOEING

Beech Mountain

The town of Beech Mountain maintains a free sledding hill for children 12 and younger (parents can ride with smaller children) next to Town Hall. A combination of natural and man-made snow keeps the conditions right. Plastic sleds are required; they can be rented or bought nearby. The town also maintains an extensive trail system for snowshoeing as well as a ½-mile walking track at [Buckeye Recreation Center](#), which offers loaner snowshoes and guided excursions by advance arrangement.

HAWKSNEST TUBING PARK

Seven Devils

Hawksnest is home to one of the East Coast's largest snow tubing parks with more than 30 lanes. Travelers returning this season will find renovations to the lodge and the reopening of the café. Reservations are recommended; some sessions sell out quickly. Find useful information for the season [here](#).

HIGHLANDS OUTPOST

Scaly Mountain

The Highlands Outpost triples the thrills with tubing, ice skating and the Scaly Screamer, a gravity-powered mountain coaster. Food is available at the Outpost Café.

MOONSHINE MOUNTAIN SNOW TUBING PARK

Hendersonville

Moonshine Mountain, which features 500 feet of fun for solo runs and group trains, plans to open Dec. 17. Travelers can fuel up with onsite food truck fare.

JONAS RIDGE SNOW TUBING PARK

Jonas Ridge

With Dec. 20 as the expected opening date, Jonas Ridge offers five lanes for exhilarating runs. Note that the lodge is closed this season because of COVID-19.

ZIP N SLIP SNOW TUBING PARK

Mars Hill

Dec. 20 is the expected opening date for the park, which lights the slope for night tubing and has a solarium with fireplace at the top.

BLACK BEAR SNOW TUBING

Hendersonville

Featuring a 500-foot tubing slope, the park plans to open for the season on Dec. 18. It offers concessions plus a heated lodge for non-tubers.

For more information to inspire a trip, stop by [VisitNC.com](#).

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