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This ski season may look different, but the slopes are just as inviting—and exciting. Get the most out of your wintry passion with expert advice on the perfect runs, no matter your skill level, base-camping from your car, games to play with the kids, outdoor alternatives, and more.

BY ELIZABETH MILLER

ADDITIONAL STORIES BY ASHLEY M. BIGGERS,
DANIEL GIBSON, AND COURTNEY HOLDEN



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With 86 runs over 660 acres, Ski Santa Fe has something to offer everyone, from beginner to expert.



Champagne powder rewards an adventurer at Ski Santa Fe.

For as snowflakes had been falling over Ski Santa Fe for hours, speckling the pine trees and drifting to a boot-deep layer, before my first ski run in New Mexico. I dropped into a delightfully steep pitch that offered an open canvas of almost untracked powder. One turn floated into the next.

Months later, I capped that season by hiking up the ski area weeks after chairlifts had stopped running, enjoying a picnic on a spot of sunbaked grass, then skiing down on a patchwork of remnant snow, often in trees so thick the branches intertwined. Mud smeared the edges of my skis, and I had to hike the last quarter mile—but somehow, that day felt no less remarkable than the first.

When I mention to George Brooks, the director of Ski New Mexico, an industry nonprofit, that some of my best ski days have been in some of the worst conditions, he chuckles. “I think we’ve all had those days, and that’s why we keep coming back, trying to repeat those days, hoping lightning will strike twice,” he says. “There’s something magical about skiing.”

As ski season unfolds during this unprecedented time, skiers have more questions than what’s in the latest snow report. New Mexico’s ski areas worked with the state—led by a governor who is an avid skier—to craft COVID-safe operating plans.

Small mountain communities like Angel Fire, Red River, and Ruidoso depend on winter sports enthusiasts for a significant economic boost, with alpine skiing’s statewide impact estimated at more than \$142.3 million. But ski areas also offer outdoor recreation’s mental and physical health benefits, or “the respite of

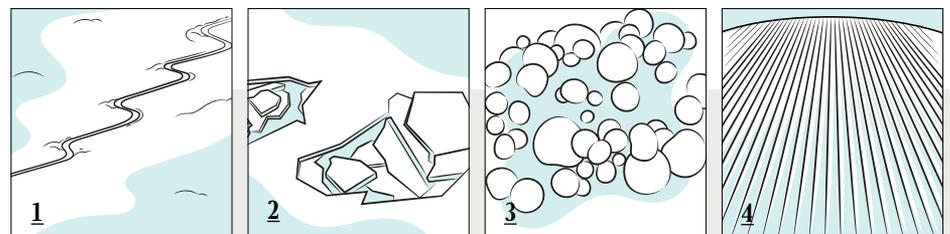
often—hands included.

Limits on capacity will affect food service, retail shops, rentals, lift loading, lessons, and lift-ticket purchases. “Know before you go,” says Adrienne Saia Isaac, communications director for the NSAA. “Do a little research. And have a little empathy this season, because we’re all going

the mountains,” says Taos Ski Valley CEO David Norden.

“All of our ski areas in the state believe that,” Brooks says. “And that, over profit, is going to be driving ski areas to operate this winter.”

In addition, the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) released *Ski Well, Be Well*, a guide to best practices for ski areas across the country that covers some familiar basics regarding face coverings, keeping distance, and cleaning



Know Your Snow FOR AN INSIDE EDGE ON CARVING UP THE MOUNTAIN.

Powder (1)
“What dreams are made of when it comes to skiing,” says Todd Walton, executive director

of Winter Wildlands Alliance. Freshly fallen snow—the lighter and drier, the better—with a “max fluff” factor that’s terrible for snowballs but unbelievably fun and light to float on, turn after turn.

Crud (also chowder, chunder)
After skiers chop up powder, the sun,

wind, and frigid nights take their toll. The snow freezes into chunks and lumps amid some partly soft snow that can make for difficult, more technical skiing.

Packed
Once heavily trafficked by skiers or compressed by snowcats, the snow

packs into a firmer and more uniform surface. Artificial snow lies down in granular layers that are more packed from the start.

Crust (2)
“Every skier’s nemesis,” says Julien Ross, New Mexico’s OpenSnow forecaster. “It’s deceiving.” Whorls that look

through these new procedures. At the end of the day, we all just want to ski and do it in a way that's safe."

Even if every aspect of this season has changed, one thing doesn't have to. "Once you're on the slope, that experience is the same," says Saia Isaac. "And it's going to feel awesome."

Paring back the trappings could recall the days of skiing before big base lodges, when we bundled up in our cars and hustled straight to the lifts. Back when Taos owner Ernie Blake ran the ski school and rental shop right out of his house. This could be a season to tap back into the roots of what draws us out on frigid mornings.

For those who stay at resorts, the scaled-back après-ski offerings may make for a quieter vacation spent curled up by the fire with a book or playing games with the kids.

"I think you're going to hear people say, 'This is what I love about skiing,' and maybe even, 'This is what I remember,'" Norden says. "It will be a season unlike any other, but for those who truly believe in and love the sport, it may shape up to be one of the great years—with uncrowded slopes and a real focus on the sport."

like they could be powder turn out to be a frozen layer over soft snow. Watch out for this if the sky has just clouded over or the temperature drops. Depending on its thickness, it can range from troubling to impossible. "Dust on crust" occurs when an inch or so of new snow covers firm, non-groomed trails. Skiing on it makes an awful scraping sound and provides little traction.

Corn (3)

A spring phenomenon that results from snow freezing overnight and softening under the sun.

It rides in fun, surfy, carving turns.

Graupel

Higher-moisture snow supercooled into pellets instead of flakes. Stings bare skin and skis like ball bearings. Sometimes contributes to avalanches.

Corduroy (4)

Snow so recently groomed that it's still marked with corduroy-like grooves from snowcats. Skis easily take an edge and allow for a little more ripping (speed). "Up there in the top five feelings in skiing is carving in some fresh corduroy," Ross says. —Elizabeth Miller



JULIEN ROSS

NEW MEXICO FORECASTER, OPENSNOW

Even amid drought and La Niña (a Pacific Ocean weather pattern that often delivers warmer, drier Southwestern winters), New Mexico saw record-setting snowfalls in September and October. In the latter storm, a late-season typhoon in the Pacific affected the jet stream, sending us a surprise dose of moisture. Predicting those storms requires watching big trends without losing sight of shifts in pressure systems, moisture levels, and other key ingredients for snow, says Julien Ross, a lifelong storm watcher who took meteorology courses in college. As New Mexico's forecaster for OpenSnow, an app and website that winter sports enthusiasts use to see powder days coming, Ross makes serious work out of writing ski-specific snowfall forecasts that predict the best times to go play.

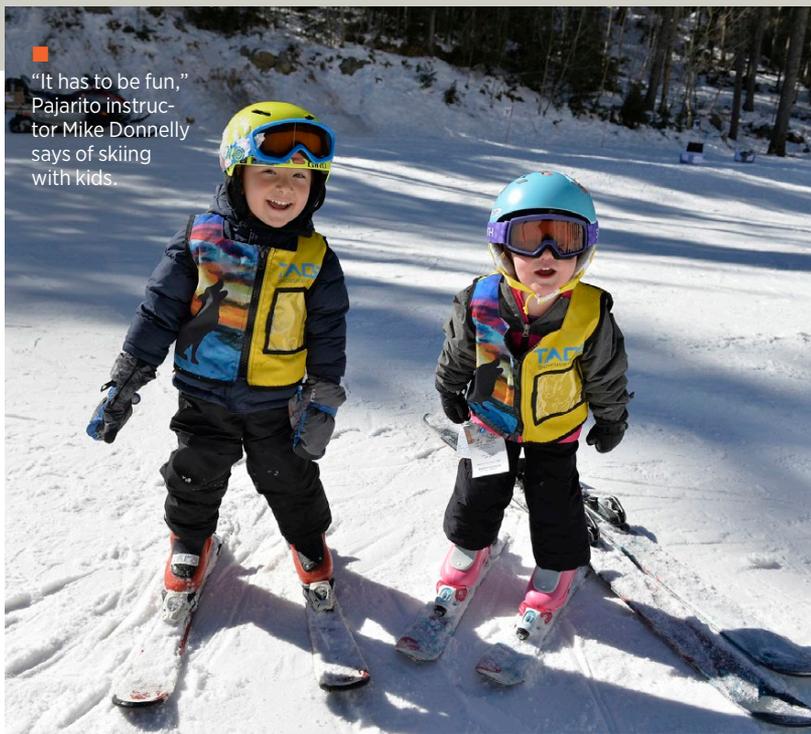
I was born and raised in Santa Fe, and now I get to write about the mountains I love so much. There's pressure to have a good track record of successfully predicting storms. I'm looking at seven or eight different forecast models. It's our job to not just rely on the models, but also add our own insights. It's a beautiful thing and a frustrating thing. We're constantly learning.

Last December, we had been tracking this storm with one to two feet of accumulation from Santa Fe to Taos. I had been stoked about this storm for days. I woke up at 5 a.m., expecting to see significant snow outside my house, and it was completely dry. It had totally busted. I was just devastated.

Then I was like, "There's something not quite right here. Let's stay positive, let's stay optimistic." I checked the webcam at 6:30 a.m., and it was puking at Ski Santa Fe—just whiteout. I threw my stuff in the car and booked it. Cars were already spinning out at Hyde Memorial State Park and getting stuck, but I was able to get through.

The storm just showed up a little late. Between 6 and 10 a.m., it snowed 16 inches of light, fluffy powder. It was one of *the* days of the last decade for me and a good reminder: Stay positive, stay optimistic, and go skiing. Even if the storm busts, are you ever really going to regret going up and getting some turns in? —As told to Elizabeth Miller

“It has to be fun,” Pajarito instructor Mike Donnelly says of skiing with kids.



Child's Play

Pro tricks for helping your kids love skiing as much as you do. By Courtney Holden

Mike Donnelly knows a thing or two about skiing. After all, he's been at it for 65 years. Now, in what he calls “one of the joys of my life,” the 83-year-old instructor at Pajarito Mountain Ski Area and Ski New Mexico's 2018 Ski Instructor of the Year passes on that love for the sport to the kids he teaches—and to us. More than anything else, he says, “it has to be fun.”

Here, Donnelly and his colleagues share a few ways to keep your kids engaged and learning while instilling a love of skiing that lasts a lifetime.

Play follow the leader. This childhood game can be adapted to any skill level. Start beginners on flat ground (even on grass!) and have them practice shuffling along after you in a line. When you stop, they stop.

For those who have mastered the basics (namely, starting and stopping), line up at the top of a run and follow one another, carving S shapes down the slope. Then try varying the size of the turns, with one lap of wide sweeps stretching across the full run and the next lap a series of tight back-and-forths. These fun exercises hone what Donnelly describes as “an integral building block of successful skiing”: control.

Take in your surroundings. “You don't just have skis in skiing,” says Robert Sutherland, a Pajarito instructor entering his 42nd year of teaching. “You have a whole environment to work with.” He recommends gamifying the lift ride by watching the empty chairs filing back down to the bottom and trying to find the first chair (labeled as “1”). Or try counting the individual lift towers to see how many there are in total.

Once you arrive at the top of the lift, be sure to enjoy the view. “Most people don't go to the top of a mountain,” Sutherland says. “Check out the geology and geography. What's the temperature of the air? Just take it in.”

Don't forget the snacks. Granola bars and hot chocolate may be more traditional slope-side bites, but John Paul Bradley, Sipapu Ski & Summer Resort's general manager, lets us in on his secret: “Gummy bears are how you keep a kid going,” he laughs. Now that's one sticky situation we can get behind.

Bunny Hops

WHAT TO WEAR, WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP, AND HOW TO KEEP A CLEAR HEAD WHEN YOU HIT THE SLOPES FOR THE FIRST TIME.

By Courtney Holden

Passionate skiers are eager to wax poetic about the grace of carving down an open run or the glory of conquering a series of moguls. But for many newbies, a day on the slopes can be frustrating at best, and painful at worst. We get it. This collection of tips, tricks, and attitude adjustments can help make your first time (or your first time in a long time) safe and enjoyable.

Get the right equipment.

Ski gear has come a long way in comfort and performance in just the past few years, so don't dust off your 20-year-old

planks or borrow a friend's ill-fitting gear to save a few bucks. Instead, seek out a cost-effective rental through one of New Mexico's many local outfitters. “Getting the right-fitting boots and the right-size equipment is just the starting line,” says Robert Sutherland, a longtime ski instructor at Pajarito Mountain Ski Area, in Los Alamos. And in the interest of shred cred and warmth, he adds, “Don't wear blue jeans.”

Ask for help.

There are numerous resources available for beginners, both on and off the slopes. Start out by watching a few vetted tutorials online from the Professional Ski Instructors of America. Better yet, sign up for an on-mountain lesson on your first day. Once you're ready to head a little farther up the hill, remember that “the lift operator is always there to help,”

ALAIN VETH

OWNER, LE SKI MASTERY

As a professional ski racer for more than 20 years and then a technician for the U.S. Ski Team, Alain Veth had skied all over the world by the time he visited Taos Ski Valley. But the France native was struck by the mountain and by a mentor he found there—legendary instructor Jean Mayer. In 1990, with the bonus earned by tuning skis for World Cup champion Tamara McKinney, he opened Le Ski Mastery, a ski shop that's one of the valley's last family-owned businesses. While he wanted less physically demanding work, Veth wasn't ready to abandon competition.

COURTESY OF TAOS SKI VALLEY



says George Brooks, a 36-year veteran Pajarito instructor (and not the George Brooks who directs Ski New Mexico). Let the liftie know you're a beginner and they'll be happy to slow the chair and help you board.

Reset your mindset.

Heading into your ski adventure with a positive attitude may well be the most valuable tool

in your arsenal. Set realistic expectations, don't worry about how many times you fall, and pat yourself on the back for taking a risk at all, says John Paul Bradley, general manager at Sipapu Ski & Summer Resort, in Vadito. "Maybe you didn't ride that one lift today, but you didn't stay home," he says. "You got out and tried something new."



For about a decade, Taos Ski Valley had a race called the Bump, Bolt and Bike, which you could do individually or as a relay. I was on a team with Bruce Gomez, the track coach at the local high school, and a New Zealand National Ski Team member and phenomenal cyclist, Jonell Mills.

The ski part of it was from the top of Al's Run. You run like a bat out of hell, and then you clip into your bindings, go down, and you give your bib to your runner. Then the cyclist rides to a finish at the stoplight at the bottom of the canyon.

I did it for 10 years. I was always under two minutes, no stops, top to bottom. The bumps were three feet, four feet deep. Every time, it was about nine turns. I went straight down. You've got about 1,700 vertical feet, so in the really steep first section, I was checking my speed. About

halfway through the middle of the pitch I'd say, *Okay, this is my time*, and start to go straight. All I could think of was *Not now... not now...* then *Now!* That first turn I'd take off in the air—20 feet, 30 feet. I bet I was going 70 or 75 miles per hour.

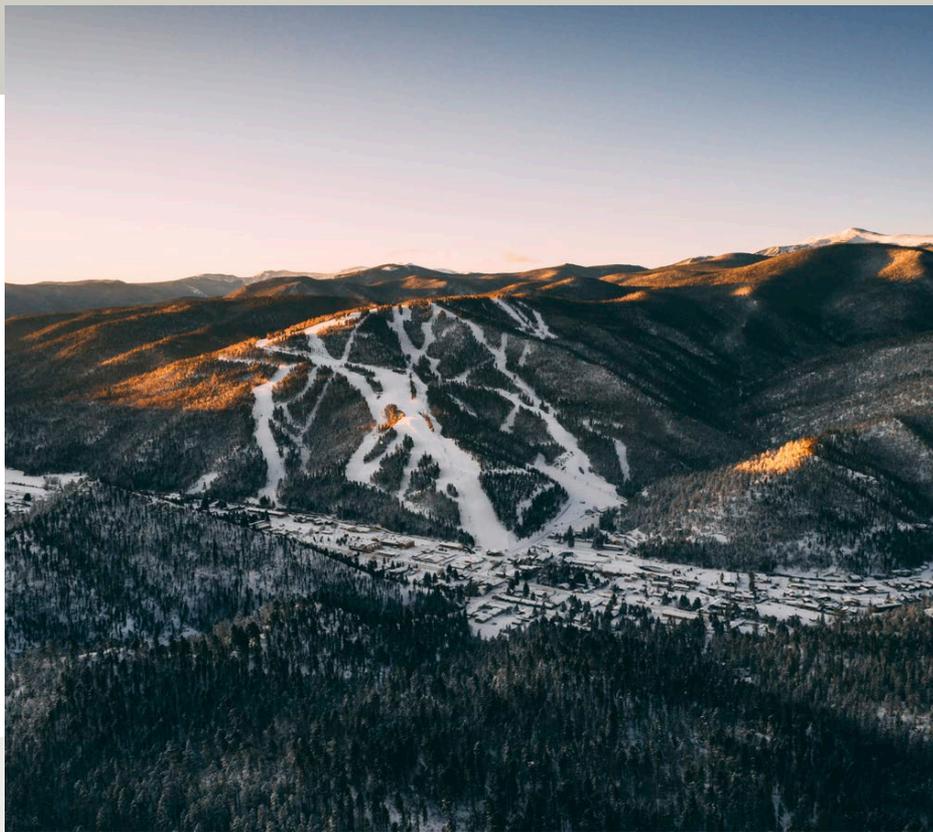
When I did Al's Run in 1 minute 25 seconds, I was strong, I was young. But it's real steep; then you've got to go through the cat track. The G-forces were so strong that my butt touched my bindings and my head touched the back of my skis. I did a

huge crunch and got back up on my skis. Then my skis came off the edge of the cat track, so now I'm flying 30 feet in the air. Bruce Gomez waves at me. I remember I said, "Dude, I'm in the air—let me land." Finally I stopped and gave him the bib.

After that I said, "I'm done." They had the race maybe another four or five years. People would ask, "Did I beat him?" even though I wasn't racing. But the closest anyone came was 1:45.

—As told to Elizabeth Miller

STEFAN WACHS



Chill Factors

WITH ITS SUPERLIGHT SNOW, ABUNDANT SUNSHINE, LACK OF CROWDS AND RELATIVE AFFORDABILITY, NEW MEXICO'S SKI SCENE OFFERS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE, NO MATTER YOUR SKILL LEVEL. **By Daniel Gibson**

Angel Fire Resort

This four-season resort in the beautiful and isolated Moreno Valley is both old-school and newfangled. With the state's first high-speed quad chair (the 10,000-foot Chile Express ranks as one of America's longest chairlifts), Angel Fire boasts New Mexico's only night-skiing operation and its best terrain parks for snowboarders and skiers. It's also relaxed and uncrowded. "We've been socially distanced since 1966, without the hustle and bustle you find at other resorts," says Vice President Christy Germscheid.

What's new: Angel Fire Lodge, the resort's premier on-slope accommodation, now offers

room service. The resort has also added new fire pits, patio heaters, fire features, and 50 picnic tables where guests can spread out to eat and drink. **Try this:** Liberation Terrain Park has its own chairlift, piped-in tunes, and graduated sets of features to allow safe and logical skill building. In the base area, Night Rider Park offers a chance to test your tricks in moonlight, or slip and slide on the Polar Express tubing hill. **VITALS:** Vertical drop: 2,077 feet / Annual snowfall: 210 inches / Skiable acres: 560 / Lifts: 7 / Terrain parks: 3 / angelfiresort.com

Enchanted Forest Cross Country Ski and Snowshoe Area

The extensive trail

network at the state's only dedicated commercial area for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing winds through pine and aspen forests, with rolling terrain and tremendous views of Wheeler Peak, Latir Peak, and the Red River Valley. "It is like backcountry touring, except for the expertly groomed trails," says owner Ellen Miller Goins. **What's new:** A 20-foot-diameter, eight-person yurt, the Latir, joins the 16-foot Little John and 20-foot Long John, which both received upgrades in the off-season. **Try this:** Stay in one of the yurts and opt for the food and gear delivery, or rent one of the sleds for your arrival and departure. There's even a dedicated trail system where you can bring your dogs. **VITALS:** Trails: 20.5 miles of groomed trails for skiing and 11 miles for snowshoeing / Annual snowfall: 200 inches / Skiable acres: 600 / enchantedforestxc.com

Pajarito Mountain Ski Area

In Los Alamos, Pajarito is the ski area that time forgot, where double chairlifts creak along at a leisurely pace, lines are rare, and moguls on the black-diamond Fab Four grow to monstrous size. At Pajarito, kids rule (10 and under receive a free season pass), and brown-bag lunches are encouraged. In an age of look-alike resorts with \$15 hamburgers and \$1,000 ski outfits, this throwback puts a premium on the skiing, with lovely views of nearby summits in the Jemez Mountains, the vast Valles Caldera National Preserve, and the Sangre de Cristos.



Clockwise from top left: Red River Ski & Summer Area spills onto Main Street. Enchanted Forest Cross Country Ski and Snowshoe Area has 20 miles of groomed cross-country trails. Reasonably priced grub can be found at the Pajarito Mountain Café. It's relaxed and uncrowded at Angel Fire Resort.

What's new: "Keep your eyes open for newly cleared tree skiing," suggests Garrett Altmann, a

world-class extreme skier and member of a volunteer chainsaw crew that has been thinning dead and down trees. He says there's "lots of new pockets" in the woods between runs, especially in the Fab Four area. **Try this:** Altmann suggests the chile cheese fries (small size, \$4.25) in the Pajarito Mountain Café. The food is "reasonably priced,





and something I actually look forward to," he says.

VITALS: Vertical drop: 1,440 feet / **Annual snowfall:** 137 inches / **Skiable acres:** 750 / **Lifts:** 6 / **Terrain parks:** 2 / *skipajarito.com*

Red River Ski & Summer Area

In Red River, the chairlifts meet Main Street, so getting around is a snap. "We don't have a lot of glitz and glam, but offer a family

vacation that won't break the bank," says April Ralph, the town's tourism and economic development director. "It's a friendly place with great community spirit." Red River attracts mostly beginners and intermediate skiers and is a surprisingly fine place for powder skiing, including the oft-overlooked yet terrific Cat Skinner expert run. **What's new:** When it's time for a warm-up, the town boasts two new coffee shops: Steam Coffee & Tea and Bearly Awake Coffee Co. **Try this:** Off the slopes, Red River is home to one of the state's largest snowmobile scenes. Red River Sled Shed offers do-it-yourself rentals and guided outings.

VITALS: Vertical drop: 1,600 feet / **Annual snowfall:** 214 inches / **Skiable acres:** 625 / **Lifts:** 7 / **Terrain parks:** 3 / *redriverskiarea.com*

Sandia Peak Ski Area

Among America's most easily accessed ski areas from a major urban center,

Sandia Peak Ski Area is just a 12-minute ride on the Sandia Peak Tramway, which lifts you from Albuquerque cactus gardens to a snow-draped forest. Here you'll find a substantial vertical drop and a nice mix of runs in a small footprint. On weekday powder mornings, you can cruise the glades and run edges in solitary splendor. On weekends, it's popular with families who make the hour drive from Albuquerque.

What's new: Draw inspiration from the Ventana Gallery artists featured in the Ten 3 restaurant and bar, then carve your own creative lines on a few of Sandia's 35 runs. **Try this:** Create a fun run covering many types of terrain by connecting the intermediate Sandia to the easier Cibola run, which includes some rare skiing among ponderosa pines near the bottom.

VITALS: Vertical drop: 1,700 feet / **Annual snowfall:** 125 inches / **Skiable acres:** 200 / **Lifts:** 5 / **Terrain parks:** 1 / *sandiapeak.com*

Sipapu Ski & Summer Resort

Thanks to its relatively cozy environs, abundance of intermediate terrain, and overall affordability (season passes for kids 10 and under are free), Sipapu has always been especially welcoming for families. Still, there are some short but excellent expert runs and tree skiing in a good to average snow year. The four terrain parks, with a dedicated design and maintenance crew, traditionally host a handful of competitive events with large youth participation. "We pride ourselves on introducing new skiers and snowboarders to the sport," says Bruce Bolander, whose family launched Sipapu in 1952. **What's new:** Following COVID-safe practices, parties must reserve lift tickets in advance to be allowed into the parking lot and on the slopes. **Try this:** Excellent cross-country skiing and snowshoeing alongside the picturesque Rio Pueblo are wonderful off-slope activities.

VITALS: Vertical drop: 1,055 feet / **Annual snowfall:** 190 inches / **Skiable acres:** 200 / **Lifts:** 6 / **Terrain parks:** 4 / *sipapunm.com*

Ski Apache

This warm-weather powder playground near Ruidoso, at the northern end of the Chihuahuan Desert, is among only a few U.S. ski areas owned and operated by a Native tribe, in this case the Mescalero Apache. Featuring the state's only enclosed gondola lift, it boasts a nice mix of mostly beginner and intermediate terrain with incredible scenic



beauty from the 12,000-foot Sierra Blanca Peak. **What's new:** A \$1 million refrigerated snow-making machine can produce snow even when the temperature is above freezing, which will ensure adequate snow on the lower slopes.

"This is crucial, being the southernmost major ski area in the nation," says Ken Marlatt, director of operations. **Try this:** For great skiing in a wide-open basin, head to Apache Bowl, where excellent powder skiing can be found with careful exploration of the forests between runs.

VITALS: Vertical drop: 1,900 feet / **Annual snowfall:** 180 inches / **Skiable acres:** 750 / **Lifts:** 10 / **Terrain Parks:** 2 / *skiapache.com*

Ski Cloudcroft

The state's southernmost ski area is tiny, with limited snowfall and vertical drop. "Many of our guests from Texas have never even seen snow," says Michael Adams, whose family bought the resort in 1997. "So we pride ourselves on being beginner-friendly and family-oriented."

What's new: The very popular sledding hill was doubled in size, and a conveyor lift installed. **Try this:** In a

Four terrain parks highlight Sipapu Ski & Summer Resort's family environment. **Below:** Sandia Peak Ski Area provides easy access from Albuquerque.



good winter, the area cranks up its double chair and you can wind your way down from the top on a mile-long run.

VITALS: Vertical drop: 700 feet / **Annual snowfall:** 70 inches / **Skiable acres:** 100 / **Lifts:** 3 / **Terrain parks:** 0 / *skicloudfrost.net*

Ski Santa Fe

Ski Santa Fe packs tremendous variety into a relatively small area, with arguably the best tree skiing in the state (Tequila), some challenging bump runs (Roadrunner), many wide-open cruisers (Gayway), fantastic powder runs (Cornice), and even some technical chutes (Big Rocks). Just 25 minutes from Santa Fe, it is among the best places in the country for mixed groups that include nonskiers.

What's new: This year the ski school maxes group instruction at four people. "This will provide a real



COURTESY OF SIPAPU SKI & SUMMER RESORT, COURTESY OF SANDIA PEAK SKI AREA

intimate experience and ideal learning conditions,” says Bill Gould, who has overseen the area’s teaching crew since 1995. **Try this:** If you missed the new glades and glens opened on South Burn last season, head that way this winter for some ear-to-ear grins. For some remarkable ski area views, slide over the top of Gayway or Parachute, where you will feel like you’re slipping over the edge of the earth.

VITALS: Vertical drop: 1,725 feet / **Annual snowfall:** 225 inches / **Skiable acres:** 660 / **Lifts:** 7 / **Terrain parks:** 1 / skisantafe.com

Taos Ski Valley

This world-class destination, ranked No. 4 in the West by the readers of *Ski Magazine*, earns points for its challenging terrain, massive vertical drop, light, deep powder, and excellent ski school. Established by a cadre of Europeans led by Ernie Blake, it has a distinctive Euro–New Mexican character and culture that encourages return visits over decades and even generations. Its large size also provides for an abundance of beginner and

intermediate terrain. **What’s new:** Taos will have all of its restaurants and day lodges open this winter, but with occupancy limits in place. It will not operate parking shuttles, but a new drop-off circle on Thunderbird Road will provide an easy access point. **Try this:** Tommy Murray—snow surface manager in charge of snowmaking, grooming, and terrain parks—loves the way the corduroy lies on Totemoff, on the mountain’s back side. “But we take pride in all our grooming efforts,” he says. He also suggests advanced skiers head to Two Bucks or Twin Trees for untouched powder in the hike-to zone off Highline Ridge.

VITALS: Vertical drop: 3,281 feet / **Annual snowfall:** 305 inches / **Skiable acres:** 1,294 / **Lifts:** 14 / **Terrain parks:** 2 / skitaos.com

■ Taos Ski Valley’s challenging terrain, huge vertical drop, and fantastic ski school make it a favorite. The sunsets also amaze.



SLOAN COVINGTON

OWNER, RED RIVER ANGLER & SPORT;
PARTICIPANT, SKI RANCH RODEO

A Texas transplant to Red River, Sloan Covington escaped a desk job to adopt the mountain town’s slow pace and big-fun attitude. The owner of Red River Angler & Sport operates a tackle shop and guides fly-fishing trips and other outdoor adventures. A skier since age three, the 34-year-old works on the ski patrol of Red River Ski & Summer Area. The family-owned ski area, which has operated for more than 60 years, keeps up a down-home atmosphere with events that get everyone hooting, hollering, and having a good time. Covington and two teammates placed third in the inaugural Ski Ranch Rodeo in February 2020. Though it was postponed for this season, the event may return in 2021–22.

Red River Ski & Summer Area is so closely tied with the town. The chairlifts go from Main Street to the top of the mountain. It’s really dang fun. There are some parts that will really pucker you up and some really mellow sections to learn on. If you show up midweek in January, you’re likely to have the whole mountain to yourself.

Red River’s an old mining town with plenty of grit and connection to horses and rodeoing. Our town attracts a lot of visitors from Texas, so the Ski Ranch Rodeo had some serious ranchers, ropers, and bronc riders who were competing like hell. There were also some families just having a good time.

I competed with some local buddies who are far better skiers and rodeo competitors than I am. In the event, the first of the three skiers pushed out of a ski gate, triggering a timer. They had to chase and rope a dummy steer made out of a metal barrel with horns on skis. Once he crossed the mark, the second skier had to ski to a mock calf, pick up a branding iron, brand the center circle of the calf, and put the iron back in the bucket.

I was the last skier, and it was up to me to make up as much time as possible. I had to go through ski gates to the dummy bronc—another barrel on skis—put my hands on its butt, bunny-hop onto it, grab it around the neck, and go like hell, all while keeping my skis up so they didn’t get tangled. It was the wildest, most bizarre thing I’ve ever done, but it was a hoot! This event was so in line with everything Red River is as a town. —As told to Ashley M. Biggers





Car Comforts

Turn your tailgate into a warm and comfy base camp with these expert tips. **By Elizabeth Miller**

With resorts cutting back on indoor occupancy this season, tucking into the lodge to warm up with a hot chocolate and slip off the ski boots for a few minutes may not be an option. Using your car instead takes some advance planning, but it can make for a cozy winter tailgating adventure.

Be prepared.

Look for expanded drop-off zones at ski areas and arrive prepared for passengers to unload before the driver parks for the day. For crossing icy parking lots in ski boots, consider investing in boot sole protectors that add traction. Plus: Take advantage of other adjustments this year, like Taos Ski Valley's no-contact guest storage baskets and outdoor benches alongside heaters that allow you to wear street shoes to the base lodge and switch out there.

Pack a picnic.

Ski area menus will boost grab-and-go options and outdoor seating, a familiar setup for skiers accustomed to spending

sunny spring days lunching on the deck. But on cold, snowy days, or if a cafeteria just doesn't fit in your COVID comfort zone, consider packing a picnic for the car. Focus on food that won't freeze, like trail mix over energy bars, or use a cooler and thermoses to keep soup, hot chocolate, and tea warm until lunchtime. "Anytime you're putting cold food into your body, that's going to cool you down," says Todd Walton, executive director of Winter Wildlands Alliance. "That's no good."

Consider packing a camp stove for reheating water or even making a hot meal, says Katie Oram, who leads winter expeditions for the National Outdoor Leadership School. Store water bottles where they won't freeze, or even pack a thermos of hot water.

Dress for success.

Big puffy coats and windproof layers should, at minimum, make it into the car in case the weather turns. A change of clothes for anything damp—socks, a helmet liner, even a base layer or midlayer—that might come off during a car-side

lunch break doesn't have to go back on wet and cold.

Plan for the drive home, too: "At the end of any ski day, the first thing I do when I get back to my car is take off my boots and socks and then put on a pair of thick, warm socks and some boots that I can walk around in," Walton says.

Take a seat.

A collapsible camp chair makes it easier to put on boots without sitting on inevitably muddy tailgates and trunks, says Adrienne Saia Isaac, who manages marketing for the National Ski Areas Association. A blanket or sleeping bag can offer additional warmth while seated. Invest in hand and toe warmers this year. Warm, dry feet and fingers can prolong your day.

"If your hands feel cold, try to be super proactive," Oram advises. "Hands are pretty easy. The fastest way to warm them up is skin-to-skin contact, maybe on the back of your neck or your belly, then put them back in your gloves. Exercise helps a ton if my feet are cold—try to keep moving."



Good Sports

Even if you can't hit the slopes, you can still get outdoors to snowshoe, cross-country ski, skate, or discover the backcountry. **By Elizabeth Miller**

Snow renders the forest in striking light and dark. Blue and lavender shadows stripe the white snow around gray pine trunks. Squirrel and rabbit footprints dimple the fresh powder. People who spend winter days outdoors comment on the quiet as often as the color.

"You can really hear and see the landscape on its terms," says Todd Walton, executive director of Winter Wildlands Alliance, which advocates for human-powered winter recreation. "The trail is where you make it."

This summer, the outdoors surged in popularity, providing space to escape and stay active. That interest is expected to endure through the winter.

Almost any trail hiked in summer can be snowshoed in winter. Snowshoes keep you

atop the snow if the trail isn't yet packed and give you better grip on slippery surfaces. Trails that translate readily include the 27-mile Sandia Crest Trails, near Albuquerque. Near Santa Fe, Aspen Vista, with its striking views, is a top pick, along with the Winsor—there are "endless possibilities there," says Jennifer Sublett, volunteer coordinator with the Santa Fe National Forest. From the Cañada Bonita trailhead, near Los Alamos, an out-and-back on Forest Trail 282 tours through a meadow and on to views into the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

"The lowest barrier to entry, costwise, is snowshoeing," Walton says. "That's a thing the whole family can do."

Cross-country skiers can build skills at the Norski Trail, a four-kilometer loop

near Ski Santa Fe, tackle the 12-kilometer Pajarito Nordic Ski Trail, near Los Alamos, or venture into the Jemez Mountains to trails from Los Griegos Peak Trailhead. Forest roads closed for the winter also make great cross-country skiing terrain, Sublett adds. Call the local ranger station to check conditions. Enchanted Forest Cross Country Ski Area trails tour the woods near Red River; Angel Fire Resort Nordic Center converts a golf course into 12 kilometers of cross-country skiing and snowshoeing terrain; and volunteers in Chama maintain trails in that deeply snowy corner of the state.

With ski resorts limiting capacity this season, skiers may look to the backcountry for alternatives. Equipment required includes skis with bindings that convert to an uphill mode and skins that, together, allow a skier to hike uphill, plus a beacon, shovel, and probe, as well as knowledge of how to use them.

"Just remember that there's no ski patrols," says Marc Beverly, a backcountry skiing guide and avalanche course instructor. "It's unmonitored. You're on your own."

Beverly says his avalanche education courses filled at an unprecedented pace this fall. Yet, given the existing strains on medical personnel and hospitals, it's a good year to curb ambitions and thus avoid needing rescue, he says. But if you go, ski away from crowds. "Try to pick a place that's a little more off the beaten path and enjoy yourself," he says.

Angel Fire will run its tubing and sledding hills this season. Sipapu's gift shop sells sleds and saucers and shares

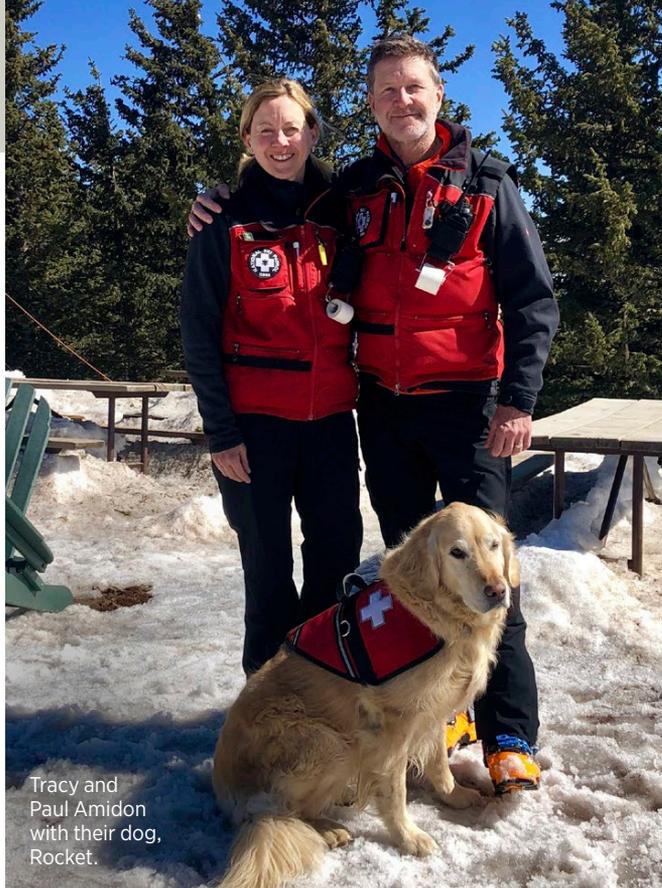
directions to hills suited for their use. For winter fun closer to home, check ice-skating rinks in Albuquerque, Los Alamos, and Santa Fe.

Prepping for a winter backcountry venture includes packing water in ways that ward off freezing, a thermos of hot drinks, and plenty of food; dressing in layers so you can peel some off during high-exertion moments that boost body heat; and not skipping sunscreen and sunglasses or goggles. Waterproof pants and gaiters also make for dry feet and warm legs.

"It's totally possible to keep getting out in winter," says Katie Oram, a National Outdoor Leadership School instructor. "You just need different tools."

From top: Los Alamos ice rink was built in 1936. Enchanted Forest has cross-country trails. Snowshoeing makes it easy to get outdoors.





Tracy and Paul Amidon with their dog, Rocket.

TRACY AMIDON

VOLUNTEER SKI PATROLLER, SKI APACHE

Injured skiers or snowboarders often catch a ride to the aid room on toboggans placed throughout the ski area. It's no fun for the passenger, but the task can be demanding for a patroller, too. Only about 25 percent of National Ski Patrol members are female; many are deterred by the physical demands of the work, says Tracy Amidon, who patrols at Ski Apache and serves as an outdoor emergency transportation supervisor for the National Ski Patrol's Rocky Mountain Division. As the number of female professionals grows, they're crafting strategies for guiding a toboggan downhill in ways that are easier—and may make passengers more comfortable.

My parents were patrollers at a small ski area in Ohio, so I grew up as a patrol rat. It really got into my blood. I wanted something that felt like I could be part of a community that was doing really good work. It was in an environment that I loved—outside, active, and challenging.

On a beautiful day, it's just great to be outside. Ski Apache has a lot of those days. The way the mountains look is just different. There's something about New Mexico that's definitely very different from Colorado and other places.

Pulling a sled with a 200-pound person in it is not easy work. One of the things I teach now, which really wasn't talked about when I started 20 years ago, is that women are going to use different techniques to bring a sled down a mountain. We're going to find ways to finesse it that don't involve brute strength. I'm not going to pull a person through the mogul field. I'm going to allow gravity to bring the sled down, maybe use its nose to ease up on a bump that'll be a natural brake, then I'll pivot off of that.

We've often found that a patient has a much smoother ride with a female patroller—but that's maybe more of an industry joke. What ski patrollers are finding is that females actually have really good skills and technique, but we still have to be strong. —As told to Elizabeth Miller

COURTESY OF TRACY AMIDON

Après the Right Way

Taos Ski Valley has many fine options for an adult beverage and munchies after a day on its often exhausting slopes, but a big favorite has always been the charming and lively **Rathskeller Bar** at Hotel St. Bernard (nmmag.us/stbernard). Snow surface manager Tommy Murray recommends the iconic **Bavarian Restaurant** (nmmag.us/bavarian), with its massive mugs of German brew and hearty eats, in the Kachina Basin.

Ski Santa Fe has limited on-slope options, but a slice of pizza, a cup of green chile stew, and a nice selection of draft beers can be had at **Totemoff's** (on Facebook @totemoffs). In town, there are many possibilities, from fine tequilas at **Inn of the Anasazi** (rosewoodhotels.com) to excellent craft suds at **Second Street Brewery** (secondstreetbrewery.com) or a glass of wine fireside at **La Posada Hotel** (laposada.org).

In Red River, head to **Red River Brewing**

Company & Distillery (redriverbrewing.com) for one of its 12 rotating beers or house-made root beer on tap. **El Jefe** (angelfireresort.com/dining) ranks as an overlooked gem in Angel Fire, with a fireplace, good drinks, and a delicious selection of tacos. Pajarito Mountain Ski Area rolls up the carpets at 4 p.m., so cruise into Los Alamos to hit up **Pajarito Brewpub and Grill** (pajaritobrewpubandgrill.com) or **Bathtub Row Brewing Co-op** (bathtubrowbrewing.coop).

For a wide selection of options that will put the down-mountain drive from Ski Apache behind you, head into Ruidoso to the **Rio Grande Grill and Taproom** (on Facebook @RioGrandeGrillandTapRoom) or the time-tested **Farley's Food, Fun and Pub** (on Facebook @farleys.ruidoso). Sandia Peak is now home to the excellent **Ten 3** (ten3tram.com), perched at an altitude of 10,300 feet and serving everything from fine seafood to bison hot dogs. —Daniel Gibson **NM**

