

AAA Magazines

7 cross-country skiing spots in Northern New England



Snowy, tree-lined trails and a postcard-perfect landscape mean cross-country skiing in New England is heavy on old-fashioned, winter charm. | Photo by Adobe Stock Images

By Gina DeCaprio Vercesi

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The snow squeaks beneath my skis as I slide along freshly set tracks in the woods surrounding Vermont's Trapp Family Lodge. All around me, snow-laden evergreens sparkle in the morning sunshine—the scene is so magical I almost expect woodland animals to scamper from their burrows and frolic around my poles like characters in a Disney movie.

With a bluebird sky overhead, I kick-glide down the trail, stopping every now and then to catch my breath in the crisp, clean air. Unlike downhill skiing, in which my goal is to log as many runs as possible, I find a day spent on cross-country skis far more meditational. Schussing alongside a frozen creek through a quiet forest makes it easy to slow down

and embrace the Nordic concept of *friluftsliv* (pronounced “free-loofts-lev”), which some translate to “open-air living.” The word means appreciating the beauty and simplicity of nature and enjoying outdoor living—even in the middle of winter.

Perhaps without even realizing it, New Englanders have long embodied the spirit of *friluftsliv*, and cross-country skiing is a favorite way to do just that. So bundle up, pack a lunch and a thermos of hot cocoa, and get ready to hit the trails. Here are some of Northern New England’s best Nordic ski areas.

1. Rangeley Lakes Trails Center

524 Saddleback Mountain Road, Dallas Plantation, Maine. (207) 864-4309; rangeleylakestrailscenter.org.

Rentals and lessons available; adult one-day ski pass, \$20; open daily 9 a.m.–4 p.m.



Nordic skiers from beginner to expert will delight in exploring the pristine trails at Rangeley Lakes Trail Center in Western Maine. | Photo courtesy Rangeley Lakes Trails Center

Deep in Maine's western lake and mountain region, Rangeley, Maine, has been a mecca for outdoors enthusiasts since the mid-19th century when anglers flocked to the area to fish for trout in its waters. Rangeley is an Appalachian Trail stopover, and its adventure offerings include some unparalleled cross-country skiing. The well-loved alpine ski area Saddleback Mountain is set to reopen this season after a five-year hiatus. Nordic fans should make a beeline for the Rangeley Lakes Trails Center. Tucked into lower Saddleback, 200 inches of annual snowfall and 55 scenic kilometers of pristinely groomed terrain cater to beginner and intermediate skiers, while its enviable single track beckons fat-tire bikers and snowshoers. Kids will love searching the woods for signs of wildlife; moose tracks are often spotted in the snow. On the ski area's Gnome Home Roam, they can also look for Rangeley's 20-plus resident gnomes, all crafted by students at Rangeley Lakes Regional School.

2. Woodstock Inn and Resort

14 The Green, Woodstock, Vermont. (844) 215-7111; woodstockinn.com.

Rentals and lessons available; adult one-day trail pass for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, \$25; open daily 9 a.m.–4 p.m. Inn rates begin at \$269/night for a midweek winter stay.



Guests at the plush Woodstock Inn and Resort will love taking a brisk, wintry hike on snowy trails that lead to Mount Peg's summit. | Photo by Corey Hendrickson

A roaring fire welcomes visitors to the historic AAA Four Diamond Woodstock Inn and Resort. The central Vermont town's bountiful winter adventures begin a half-mile down the road at the Woodstock Nordic Center. First opened in 1969, the center maintains a 45-kilometer trail network that offers terrain for skiers of all abilities. Beginners will enjoy gliding along Flatlander, a gentle trail in the network's Mount Peg section that starts right outside the Nordic center. Newbies can also try some of the easy green trails in the Mount Tom section of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park: The 6-kilometer Pogue Loop winds around a picturesque mountain pond and The Star offers beautiful views of Woodstock Village. Head back to the inn for some classic après-ski R&R—work on a puzzle in the library, relax with a glass of wine by the fire, or indulge in a treatment at the plush, on-site spa, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary with monthly special treatments through October 2021.

3. Jackson Ski Touring Foundation

153 Main Street, Jackson, New Hampshire. (603) 383-9355; jacksonxc.org.

Rentals and lessons available; adult one-day ski pass, \$21.



Even the youngest schussers will enjoy gliding through Jackson Ski Touring Foundation's woodland terrain. | Photo courtesy JacksonXC

Gliding through this classic New England village on skis feels a bit like being in a Norman Rockwell painting. A barn-red covered bridge marks the entrance to the town, where visitors find a truly immersive cross-country experience. The 100 kilometers of trails, of which 90 kilometers see weekly grooming, are split into five different networks that include a wide variety of terrain. Step out of your inn, click into your bindings, and swoosh! One crowd-pleaser is the Ellis River Trail, a gentle route that begins in the village center and treats skiers to never-ending scenery. At Prospect Farm, one of Jackson's two higher-elevation networks, skiers of all levels can enjoy a backcountry vibe on groomed trails like Hall's Ledge Overlook, which offers gorgeous views of the Ellis River Valley and Mount Washington. Experienced skiers who can climb with ease won't want to miss The Wave, Jackson's 2-kilometer roller coaster competition trail. Snowshoers will revel in the fact that Jackson also offers more than 30 kilometers of trails designated just for them.

4. Mountain Top Resort

195 Mountain Top Road, Chittenden, Vermont. (802) 483-2311;
mountaintopresort.com.

Rentals and lessons available; adult one-day ski pass, \$22; open Wednesday–Sunday 8 a.m.–4 p.m. for the 2020–21 season. Inn rates begin at \$275/night for a midweek winter stay.



Snowy mountains and bucolic farmland create an idyllic backdrop for skiers at Vermont's Mountain Top Resort. | Photo courtesy Mountain Top Resort

Nestled on 700 secluded acres overlooking the Chittenden Reservoir near the Green Mountain National Forest, this 19th-century turnip farm turned bucolic country resort is one of New England's oldest cross-country centers. Today, more than 60 kilometers of beautifully maintained trails at Mountain Top Resort invite Nordic skiers to glide through Vermont's magical winter landscape. Other on-site activities include ice skating, snowshoeing, and sleigh rides. For a short but sweet adventure, the 1-kilometer Morning Glory trail is great for some pre-breakfast exercise. Those looking to make a day of it can set out on Round Robin, a strenuous, 20-kilometer trip around the reservoir. Furry friends can join guests on trails that are marked with a little paw print, and dog-friendly

guestrooms include comfy-looking pet beds. In the evening, grab a burger and a beer in the Mountain Top Tavern, where von Trapp lagers are often on tap along with a selection of other Vermont craft brews.

5. Five Fields Farm

720 S. Bridgton Road, Bridgton, Maine. (207) 647-2425; fivefieldsski.com.

Rentals available; adult one-day ski pass, \$12; open daily 9 a.m.–5 p.m.



Rustic signs point skiers and snowshoers along trails that wind through orchards and forested public lands at Maine's Five Fields Farm. | Photo courtesy Five Fields Farm

When all the apples have been picked and the snow begins to fall, this family-owned orchard transforms into one of southern Maine's most charming cross-country ski destinations. About 25 kilometers of trails wind through the apple trees before heading up alongside the adjacent logging roads and into a forested swath of land protected by the Loon Echo Land Trust on Bald Pate Mountain. Perched at an elevation of 850 feet, the farm enjoys reliable snowfall and most of the terrain receives regular grooming. The

exception is the smattering of trails leading to the top of Bald Pate Mountain, although snowshoers and adventurous skiers relish the short-but-exhilarating backcountry trek to the summit. Trails are laid out in a way that allows skiers to access the whole network (beginners should use good judgment), making Five Fields a great spot for families.

6. Trapp Family Lodge

700 Trapp Hill Road, Stowe, Vermont. (802) 253-8511; trappfamily.com.

Rentals and lessons available; adult one-day ski pass, \$25; ski center open daily 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Lodge rates begin at \$200/night for a midweek winter stay.



Après-ski at Stowe's Trapp Family Lodge means tucking into traditional Austrian-inspired fare and crisp lagers at the von Trapp Brewery Bierhall. | Photo courtesy Trapp Family Lodge

The hills are very much alive at Trapp Family Lodge in Stowe, Vermont, where cross-country enthusiasts will find both a rich ski heritage and an extensive trail network. The lodge—a classic Austria-inspired chalet set on 2,600 bucolic acres—is home to the country's first Nordic ski center and is owned and operated by the von Trapp family

of *Sound of Music* fame. Skiers can explore 60 kilometers of groomed terrain winding through pastures and forests. One popular, albeit challenging, jaunt is the trip out to Slayton Pasture Cabin, where visitors can enjoy homemade soups and sandwiches by the fire. Or head out along Sleigh Road to Lager Lane to visit the von Trapp Bierhall for Austrian specialties like bratwurst with braised cabbage and chicken schnitzel with apple kraut washed down with one of the family's crisp lagers. Experienced schussers can explore 100 kilometers of backcountry terrain while folks looking to snowshoe have 16 kilometers of trail designated just for them.

7. Bear Notch

1573 Main Street (US 302), Bartlett, New Hampshire. (603) 374-2277;
bearnotchskitouring.com.

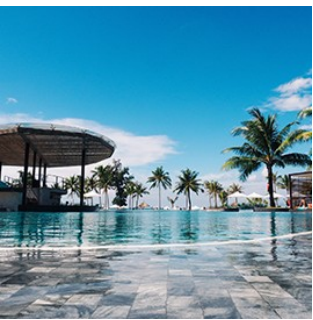
Rentals available; adult one-day ski pass, \$20; open daily 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

What started with a parking lot and a donation box has evolved into a cross-country wonderland complete with 55 kilometers of trails just a few miles down the road from Attitash Mountain near Bartlett, New Hampshire. Brothers Doug and John Garland—who like to say they'll “make a Bear Notch believer out of you!”—started the touring center on the grounds of their family's Mountain Home Cabins back in 1995. Today, the family-run ski area retains its original laid-back ambience while boasting well-groomed terrain that leads Nordic fans over undulating hills, through serene meadows and woodlands, along the Saco River, and past picturesque waterfalls. And if you've never tried skijoring—derived from *skikjøring*, the Norwegian sport that involves being pulled along by dog—Bear Notch, which welcomes well-behaved dogs on its entire network, is the place to do so.

New York–based contributor Gina DeCaprio Vercesi is a passionate proponent of friluftsliv, especially when it involves clicking into her skis.

AAA Travel Alert: Many travel destinations have implemented COVID-19–related restrictions. Before making travel plans, check to see if hotels, attractions, cruise lines, tour operators, restaurants, and local authorities have issued health and safety-related restrictions or entry requirements. The local tourism board is a good resource for updated information.

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