

Pristine winter playgrounds

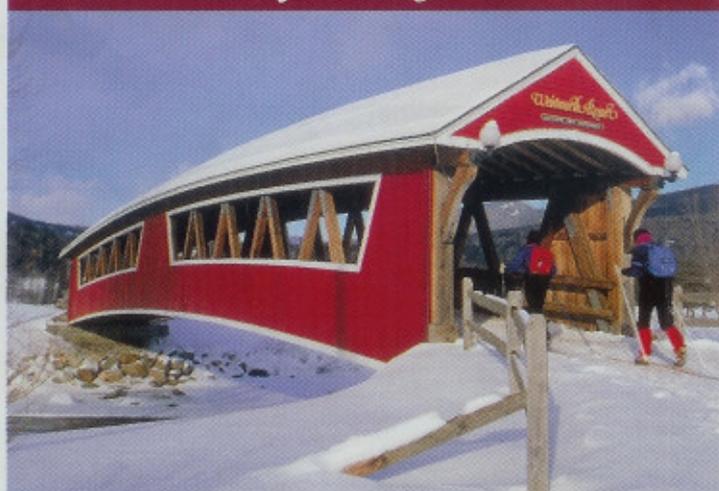
These uncrowded escapes offer crisp mountain air, brilliant blue skies, plenty of fresh snow, and much more besides skiing. By Susan Farewell



In Sandpoint, Idaho, you can ski in sight of deep and lovely Lake Pend Oreille.

While everyone else is flocking to the same big-name mountains this winter, consider a new snowy getaway. The following winter resorts are not only blessed with great outdoor sporting options but also offer unique shops, galleries, restaurants, and accommodations that compete with the outdoors for your attention. Best of all, each destination is within a couple hours' drive of major airports. Whether you have a long weekend or an entire week, here are three great reasons to venture off the beaten slopes.

cross-country skiing: JACKSON, NH



In this tiny northeastern New Hampshire village, 70 miles from Portland, Maine, cross-country skiing is a way of life. Nearly 100 miles of trails (most of which are impeccably groomed) weave through and around the classic New England village, where grammar school children ski as part of their curriculum.

The setting seems almost postcard-perfect. Jackson occupies a river valley on the edge of the White Mountains, which rise out of 800,000 acres of protected wilderness (including Mount Washington, the highest peak north of North Carolina's Mt. Mitchell and east of the Mississippi). You'll enter town via a historic covered bridge, one of six in the Mount Washington Valley area. Stop at the Jackson Ski Touring Foundation (800-927-6697, www.jacksonxc.org) on Main Street for equipment rentals, lessons, and trail maps.

Included in Jackson's meticulously preserved and renovated historic buildings are several outstanding restaurants and inns, such as the Thompson House Eatery (603-383-9341, www.thompsonhouseeatery.com), a red farmhouse built in the late 1700s. After spending the morning finding your "ski legs," regain your energy here with a serving of Lorenzo's Loaf, meat loaf made with Black Angus ground beef, spinach, mushrooms, onions, and herbs, and served open faced on rustic bread with roasted mushroom and rosemary gravy.

For dinner, The Inn at Thorn Hill (603-383-4242, www.innathornhill.com) offers monthly five-course prix fixe meals that pair foods with vintages of a particular region or winemaker. Call ahead for reservations; they book quickly.

Where to stay: Among Jackson's many historic inns and bed-and-breakfasts, the Christmas Farm Inn and Spa (rates from \$163; 603-383-4313, www.christmasfarminn.com) is a standout. The place owes its name to the fact that it was a gift from a previous owner to his daughter. Rooms and suites are located in several 18th-century buildings, including an original Cape Cod saltbox and an antique barn with hand-hewn beams. Another option: Eagle Mountain House (rates from \$98, includes full breakfast; 603-383-9111, www.eaglemt.com), a big, comfortable country inn located just outside of town. Its doors open onto the Yodel Trail, a moderately difficult run that twists and turns for less than a mile back to the village. If you set out early enough, it can be yours alone.

Jackson has been named one of the most romantic ski towns in the eastern United States.



For three more great snowy destinations to discover, be sure to visit CookingLight.com/features.

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