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New England ski areas will start running their lifts within the next week or two, so if you haven't already, it's time to sort through your gear closet and make sure you're ready to hit the slopes. We've highlighted some of the latest gear for Nordic and alpine skiers, and a few wearable and practical items for those who embrace winter in other ways.

A slick boot product

A Massachusetts man took a problem that vexes many skiers — getting ski boots on — and created a clever and simple solution. Last year, after years of designing and refining, David Sears started making Boot Sliders in the basement of his Cambridge home. This product makes it easier to put on ski boots — even for those with high arches and less flexible ankles, according to Sears — especially when boots are new and stiff. The Boot Slider is simply a flexible plastic tongue that's about 2 inches wide and 18 to 22 inches long with a 3.5-inch braided cord attached at one end — and that naturally wants to curl up on itself. To use, unravel the Boot Slider, slip it into a ski boot (with the cord end sticking out the top), and step into the boot so the Boot Slider — located against the sole of your foot — allows your foot to slip into the boot effortlessly. Then tug on the cord and remove the slider from your boot. Small fits those with feet up to Mondo 23.5 (women's 7/men's 6) and large works for Mondo 24 and bigger. \$24.95. www.bootsliders.com

This device keeps gear dry and fresh

These high-powered devices can dry out soggy ski and snowboard gear so you can hit the slopes within an hour feeling toasty again. Hedgehog Dryer makes three portable dryers that work great for winter adventurers: The Buddy Ionic i3, which has four removable arms that can hold ski gloves, hats, or socks, and two flexible and extendable hoses that slip into ski or snowboard boots; the aptly named Octopus Ionic i3, which has four hoses for drying two pairs of boots; and the portable Hedgehog DRIVE, which weighs 8.5 ounces, has one temperature setting of 105 degrees Fahrenheit, plugs into a wall outlet or 12-volt car socket, and can dry soggy boots, gloves, or other gear in less than 30 minutes — or use it to warm up boots on the way to the mountain. The Buddy and Octopus each have a hook on top so you can hang the dryer from a closet rod or coat hook, for instance, and built-in Ionic technology that essentially kills the foul smell of drying gear (and does a great job at that — even with soccer shoes, hiking boots, and other damp or stinky footwear). Both devices offer a variety of handy settings: Set the timer for 15 minutes up to 10 hours, the temperature to 98, 113, or 140 degrees Fahrenheit, and the power of the air flow from gentle to Tornado Mode if you're in a hurry. \$59 (Drive), \$159 (Octopus), \$199 (Buddy). <https://us.hedgehogdryer.com>

Gear that's good enough for an Olympian

Show your USA team spirit and support Olympic athletes by wearing hats, neck warmers, or headbands made by Vermont-based Skida in the new Star-gazer print, part of a co-branded collec-



Above: Hedgehog Dryer's Buddy Ionic i3. Far left (from top): Skida Alpine hat; Rossignol's Alltrack boot; Leki's PRC 650 lightweight carbon pole with Shark system for attaching gloves. Left: Head's new KORE 100 Ti skis. Right: Aeroguide 75 skate skis. Far right (from top): Hedgehog Dryer's Octopus Ionic i3; Fischer RC3 Skate boot.

Get winter-ready and hit the slopes with the latest gear

tion in partnership with US Ski and Snowboard. The performance gear — suggestive of Olympic athletes who will “shoot for the stars” — includes the Alpine hat, headband, and neck warmer (all fleece lined) and the longer and lighter-weight Snow Tour Neck Gaiter. Each Alpine piece is lined with a mid-weight fleece that wicks moisture and helps block the wind — perfect for colder days on downhill slopes or Nordic trails — while the lightweight and versatile Snow Tour Neck Gaiter serves as a thin barrier for cutting the chill and can be worn as a headband, neck gaiter, or head covering (works great under a helmet). For added coziness and warmth, consider the collection's High Pile Polartec Fleece neck warmer and hat, made from recycled fleece. Skida has also released custom prints for Olympic competitors in its Athlete Program, including alpine racers Paula Moltzan, a University of Vermont graduate, and Vermont-native Ryan Cochran-Siegle, and New Englander and Nordic champ Julia Kern. \$30-\$52. <https://skida.com>

Set up a private comms channel on the slopes

If you're into rocking out or keeping connected to your phone while skiing or snowboarding, check out POC's new Obex Connect Ski Helmet. It comes with a Bluetooth headset — with Harman Kardon audio — built into the removable earpads, so you can connect to your phone (or watch) for music and calls. The integrated Mesh technology lets you set up a private group communication network for up to eight people — within a .6-mile range — that doesn't require a phone connection (it works more like a built-in two-way radio). This lets you keep in touch with family and

friends on the slopes, and relay essential safety info while in the backcountry, for instance. You can operate the headset controls easily — even with gloves or mittens on — through the single push-button control on the side of each earpiece. The headset delivers amazing sound with crisp voices and impressive music audio. The helmet also comes with built-in MIPS (to protect your brain in case of a collision or fall); RECO technology (to help rescuers find you in an emergency); twiCeme NFC Medical ID feature (which stores important medical info on a chip that can be quickly scanned and read by emergency responders); and lots of vents so you can regulate your head temperature. If you already have a POC Obex helmet, you can purchase the Connect headset separately to work with your existing helmet. \$300 for headset only; \$600 for helmet with headset. <https://poc.com>

World Cup technology in an entry-level Nordic setup

Fischer released its new Speedmax series this year with high-end skis, boots, and bindings developed during the World Cup and geared to competitive athletes. They're worth a look if you fit this category. However, let's assume you're more of a recreational Nordic skier who's getting out for fun and fitness, someone looking for an upgrade to your old skate skis or a good entry-level pair that will make learning easier. Consider Fischer's new Aeroguide series. The Aeroguide 75 skate skis (which run shorter for better control and come in 165 to 185 centimeters) have two grooves running along the base of the skis and a 40mm (midsection) to 45mm (tip and tail) sidecut, all of which aid in stability and offer better gliding as you

learn. The skis come with the Control Skate Step-In Turnamic binding that's easy to adjust without tools. That setup pairs well with Fischer's RC Skate or the women's-specific RC Skate, lightweight boots that offer the right amount of stiffness for good control and come with Speed Lock lacing (basically, tug and tighten) and a zip-up protective waterproof membrane. Get the right boot fit with Fischer's proprietary foot scanning and measuring system (take two photos of your feet — following Fischer's specifications — and receive a sizing recommendation). \$389 skis and bindings, \$229 boots. www.fischer-sports.com

A top pole-glove combo for Nordic skiers

If you're a dedicated recreational Nordic skier, check out Leki's PRC 650 poles and women's-specific PRC Thermoplus Shark glove or men's PRC Premium Thermoplus Shark glove. Both pairs of gloves have Primaloft insulation for warmth, a Goretex lining for wind protection, and an adjustable Velcro strap on the back for a secure fit. Add to that “touch” technology so you can use your devices with gloves on and — the most important feature — a small circular Dyneema cord at the base of the thumb that lets you attach the glove directly to your pole. The lightweight carbon poles (6.4 ounces each) have a comfortable ergonomic handle with a partial cork grip and the built-in Leki Shark system, which includes a tooth-shaped hook with a locking mechanism and a quick-release button on top of the pole. Just slip the cord on your glove over the hook, and the glove locks into place on the ski pole — perfect for keeping a firm grip on your poles and for better power

transfer as you ski. Push the quick-release button with a forefinger and slip your glove off the hook. The poles also have carbide tips for traction on ice or packed snow and come with Leki's universal Trigger Straps so you can use the poles with your own gloves. \$89.95-\$119.95 gloves; \$129.95 poles. <https://lekiusa.com>

An easy-entry high-performance boot

You'll appreciate Rossignol's new alpine boot design when you're standing in the ski area parking lot balanced on one foot while trying to slip your sock foot into your boot (hint: no more snowflake-covered socks by the time you're in and buckled up). Rossignol's Alltrack boots come with new step-in technology that enables the cuff to open wide so you can easily slip into the boot without any struggles — just flip the lever on the back of the boot up to Hike/Entry mode to allow the cuff to release from ski mode and create a bigger opening for your foot. Easy entry doesn't mean a sacrifice in performance, though: Each boot in the Alltrack series comes with four buckles (the standard for high-performance alpine chargers) or two buckles and a BOA closure in the forefoot. The series includes boots with a wide flex range (93 to 130 flex for men and 93 to 110 flex for women) and widths that suit low- to high-volume feet (with 98, 100, or 102 lasts), but standout mid-range choices include the Women's Alltrack Pro 100 LT GW, which has a medium-volume 100mm last and stiff flex rating of 100, and the Men's Alltrack 110 Pro MV LT boots, a medium-volume boot with a 100mm last and 100 flex rating. Both are super comfortable out of the box and come with 3M Thinsulate for insulation, GripWalk soles for added non-slip protection on wet floors or icy parking lots, and tech toe inserts so they work with alpine or touring bindings. \$699.95 for men's and women's versions. www.rossignol.com/us-en

A do-it-all ski that's at home on any slope

Head's new KORE 100 Ti and KORE 99 Ti women's-specific skis can hold on tight on hard-pack, offer a playful ride on powder, and handle steep lines and variable conditions, making them perfect for New England slopes or wherever else you may take them. The new KORE Ti freeride collection — with skis ranging from 87 to 118mm wide — stands out for its two Titanal (“Ti”) layers that provide stiffness to help dampen chatter at high speeds and on hard-pack, and to help you hold an edge, initiate turns, and even plow through crud. Early rise in the tip makes it easier to stay afloat in powder, and the camber underfoot helps when carving. Both skis offer a longer turning radius and a playful feel. The KORE Ti 100 has a Karuba and beech core, adding a blend of lightweight and stiffness, while the KORE 99 Ti is made with a softer popular core that offers a bit more flex for skiers. A new hybrid topsheet material for both models helps reduce the amount of plastic used and creates a more durable surface that shouldn't get chewed up from your hard-charging adventures. The unisex KORE 100 Ti comes in 156-191cm lengths, while the women's KORE 99 Ti comes in 156-177cm. \$749-\$799. www.head.com

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This revitalized Swiss resort will soon be on everyone's radar

►CRANS-MONTANA Continued from Page N11

rants, and off-slope activities. Also in the news: Crans-Montana will host the World Ski Championships in 2027.

In summer, there are water sports on nearby mountain lakes, hiking, biking, and golf. In winter, there's world-class skiing, from the high plateau up to the soaring Plaine Morte Glacier, with some 87 miles of trails. The villages are fairy tale fodder, set in an alpine valley with shops and boutiques, cafes and restaurants. The views — and the sunshine — are year-round. It's one of the sunniest resorts in Europe.

We contacted the folks at the Crans Ambassador, a longstanding luxury hotel, to get some insider tips on visiting the Crans-Montana resort this winter. The Crans Ambassador has been around since 1972, renovated several times, and still commands center stage on the mountain. It's destined to draw back the A-listers with lush rooms, an elegant spa, and a south-facing terrace with in-your-face Swiss mountain views. In anticipation of a future visit (of course, we're going to check it out), we interviewed Marco Bana, a local resident and assistant head concierge at Crans Ambassador. Bana is also an avid snowboarder and hiker, and loves to show Crans-Montana to first-time guests.

How has the area changed in recent years?

There have been exciting changes — new restaurants and hotels that give visitors more variety and choice and diver-

sity. It's wonderful to see the town evolve while maintaining its authentic charm and welcoming atmosphere. We also have the pleasure to welcome more American guests thanks to the Epic Pass in winter.

What makes Crans-Montana unique?

Crans-Montana is one of the sunniest ski resorts in Switzerland, and the slopes are never too crowded. It has a wonderfully relaxed yet discreet ambience, offering a remarkable variety of restaurants and experiences for its size. In summer, the region is just as magical, with scenic hikes, bike trails, lakes, and world-class golf courses that make it a perfect destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

Crans-Montana is filled with great restaurants. What are some of your favorites?

I love Le Michelangelo for its warm Italian spirit and cuisine, Le Mayen for its cozy Alpine atmosphere and traditional dishes, and La Plage by Lake Moubra in summer for a relaxed lunch by the water. Each has its own personality depending on the season and mood.

How about your favorite après-ski spots?

Zerodix is a lively classic right at the bottom of the slopes, perfect for après-ski. For something quieter, Le Lounge Bar at the Crans Ambassador is ideal for a relaxed drink by the fireplace while watching the sunset over the mountains.



ANTHONY VUIGNIER FOR VISIT CRANS-MONTANA ABSOLUTELY

Crans-Montana, two villages that have joined together to create one resort, offers stunning views of some of the highest peaks in Switzerland.

What do you recommend for non-skiers?

There's plenty to enjoy off the slopes, including dog sledding, paragliding, walking on the Plaine Morte glacier, sledding at Snow Island, or exploring the magical Lantern Path near Lake Moubra.

Indoors, the sports center offers climbing, padel, and tennis, while our spa is perfect for relaxation on a cloudy day. The town's boutiques, cafes, and cinema offer lovely ways to spend the af-

ternoon.

In summer, I suggest hiking around alpine lakes, cycling, golfing, or taking the gondola for a picnic with breathtaking views.

Any hidden gems?

Fondation Opale, just outside town, is a beautiful art space celebrating Indigenous Australian art and culture. Locals love it, but many first-time visitors miss it. Both the gallery and its restaurant are worth discovering.

OK, we're coming ... can you recommend the perfect day on and off the mountain?

Start your morning on the slopes — enjoy the fresh morning snow from Cry d'Er to La Tsa, and if conditions allow,

If you go ...

The closest airport to Crans-Montana is Geneva, which is about two hours and 15 minutes away. From Geneva, take the train to Sierre and the funicular up to Crans-Montana. You can also take a taxi from Sierre. Crans-Montana resort is now included in the Vail Epic Pass. For more information, visit www.crans-montana.ch/en/.

go up to Plaine Morte for panoramic views. Stop for lunch at one of the mountain restaurants such as Merbé, Chetzeron, or Les Violettes.

In the afternoon, stroll along Prado Street for shopping and coffee at Tail-lens, then walk the Lantern Path before heading back to the hotel. Relax at the spa or enjoy an aperitif on our panoramic terrace as the sun sets over the Alps.

For dinner, choose between our three cozy restaurants or try one of the charming eateries near the Ycoor area, perfect for an evening walk before returning to the hotel for a good night's rest.

In summer, start with a hike to Lake Tseuzier or a morning round of golf, then enjoy a lakeside lunch at Lake Moubra. Spend the afternoon cycling or relaxing by the water and finish the day with dinner on a terrace overlooking the Rhône Valley — a perfect blend of nature, gastronomy, and serenity.

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