

Get Your Backcountry On

SUGARBUSH RESORT, VERMONT

Sugarbush offers something you won't find at most other Northeastern ski resorts: a true backcountry experience. Nestled between the resort's two highest mountains—Lincoln Peak and Mount Ellen—sits Slide Brook Basin, a 2,000-acre, lift-served wilderness area. Here, skiers and riders can make fresh, out-of-bounds turns that are the next best thing to off-piste touring in the West.

Sugarbush's new Adventure Learning Center (ALC) can teach you how to safely explore the mountains and improve your on-snow skills. Programs range from snowshoe tours and beginner tree-skiing to out-of-bounds snowboard adventures and extreme ski clinics, where you learn to avoid hazards like avalanches, moose and menacing brooks. And who better to run the ALC than extreme skier John Egan, who has led expeditions across the Arctic, made first descents in Siberia and Greenland and starred in at least a dozen Warren Miller flicks?

If you're up for an overnight experience, try Explore Sugarbush at Night, a ski-and-snowshoe trip to Allyn's Lodge on Lincoln Peak. Egan and his guides offer instruction on celestial navigation techniques, building snow shelters and more. Sleep in your snow shelter or bunk down in Allyn's Lodge, where there's a fireplace, electricity and good food. If you go: 888-651-4827; www.sugarbush.com.

AROUND THE CLOCK: SUGARBUSH



BRANCH OUT:
Hone your tree-skiing
skills at Sugarbush.

7 a.m.

Hit the Three Mountain Café (802-496-5470) on Mad River Green in Waitsfield for an egg sandwich and cup of Green Mountain coffee before you wind up the Sugarbush Access Road.

9 a.m.

Warm up on Birdland off the Super Bravo quad chair, and then tear it up in the trees or drop into Chute 2 off the Paradise Trail, accessed via the Heaven's Gate triple chair. On powder days, head straight for the legendary, ungroomed steeps of Castlerock.

12:30 p.m.

Refuel at The Mushroom, a restaurant in the Valley House Lodge at the base area of Lincoln Peak.

2 p.m.

Sign up for the Secrets of Sugarbush, a private, two-hour guided tour of the area's best inbounds terrain.

4 p.m.

Enjoy a Long Trail Ale and pub fare at the Local Folks Smokehouse in Waitsfield (802-496-2562).

6:30 p.m.

If it's Saturday, take a naturalist-guided evening snowshoe tour by moonlight or headlamp (\$25 per person, includes equipment).

Freestyle Paradise

LOON MOUNTAIN, NEW HAMPSHIRE

East Coast skiers who like a challenge often spend their time in terrain parks, and Loon Mountain has the most park features of any New England ski resort, not to mention the area's biggest wall ride (22 feet high) and best superpipe (400 feet long). It also maintains its parks well into April, longer than any other resort in the Northeast. But what Loon's most proud of are its five progression parks, where skiers and snowboarders of all levels learn to jump and do tricks on elements that range from less than a foot high to as tall as a two-story building. Best of all, Loon offers some of the area's best park-and-pipe lessons, so you don't need to go huck yourself off the steep end. 800-229-LOON (5666); www.loonmtn.com.

Olympic Endeavors

WHITEFACE MOUNTAIN, NEW YORK

Whiteface is the only place in the East where you can carve turns in the morning and go speed skating and luge come afternoon. Bring your blades to the Sheffield Speed Skating Oval, where Eric Heiden made Olympic history in 1980 by winning five gold medals. Then take a self-piloted luge sled down a three-quarter-mile track, reaching speeds of up to 45 mph. This winter, Whiteface and nearby Lake Placid will host World Cup events in bobsledding, luge, skeleton, freestyle skiing and snowboarding. Who knows, maybe you'll share a lift with a 2006 Olympic hopeful. 518-946-2223; www.whiteface.com.

— KARI J. BODNARCHUK