

Travel

Ski in Montana
on a budget. K3



CLEVELAND SKI GUIDE 2019

There's snow season like snow season

Inside: What's new for this winter at the region's ski resorts

Susan Glaser sglaser@plaind.com

Last month's early blast of cold and snow yielded cheers from the region's thousands of snow-sports enthusiasts, eager for an extra-long ski season.

Snow Trails, just south of Mansfield, opened Nov. 22 — the earliest in its 59-year history. Holiday Valley, in western New York, and Seven Springs in southwest Pennsylvania also opened last weekend, offering local skiers some pre-Thanksgiving fun on the slopes.

The early opening dates aren't the only thing that's new and noteworthy about the upcoming ski season. Several major developments in the offseason will impact skiers and snowboarders in Northeast Ohio and beyond.

- ▶ **Vail Resorts**, the largest ski resort operator in the world, bought Northeast Ohio's three ski areas — Brandywine, Boston Mills and Alpine Valley — as part of its purchase of Peak Resorts in September. The new owner is expected to make substantial investments in the parks in the coming years. (Read more: tinyurl.com/vallbuyspeak)
- ▶ **Cockaigne** ski resort, in New York's Chautauqua County, will reopen this year, after being closed since 2011. The resort is planning a Dec. 14 opening day. (See related story page K3).
- ▶ **Timberline**, a ski resort in West Virginia, filed for bankruptcy last spring and was sold at auction last month. It is not expected to open this season, but could

Which states have the most ski areas?

New York: 51

Michigan: 43

Wisconsin, Colorado: 31 each

California, New Hampshire: 30 each

Pennsylvania: 26

Vermont: 25

Maine, Minnesota: 20

Ohio has 5

Here's what's inside

- ▶ **What's new at the region's resorts. K2**
- ▶ **Cockaigne** to open in mid-December. **K3**

reopen in a year.

Meanwhile, regional ski areas continue to invest in their resorts, adding new terrain, energy-efficient snowmaking equipment and programs designed to encourage beginners.

Here's what local skiers and boarders can expect on the slopes this season:

- ▶ **New terrain** at Snow Trails, which has added two new black-diamond trails, the Chute and Outer Limits, to its lineup.
- ▶ **New retail options** at Boston Mills, Brandywine and Alpine Valley, which have taken over operation of their resort shops from Buckeye Sports Center. The new shops are filled with new branded merchandise.

- ▶ **A new family lesson special** at Peek'n Peak in western New York, for families who want to learn to ski together. These lessons are in contrast to most group lessons that are based on age. Each participant receives rental equipment, a beginner-area lift ticket and a 90-minute lesson for \$50 (weekdays) or \$55 (weekends).

Meanwhile, many resorts are adding to their arsenal of snowmaking equipment to help Mother Nature and smooth out the erratic weather patterns in recent winters.

Jane Eshbaugh, director of marketing for Holiday Valley, said western New York still gets a lot of natural snow — an average of 180 inches per year — but cold peri-

ods are increasingly interrupted by prolonged warmups.

This year, the resort added more than 100 new automated snow guns to its slopes, which can be turned on and off remotely, when the weather conditions are just right. "The result is a greater quantity and better quality of snow made using less energy," according to the resort.

Also new this year at Holiday Valley: a tiered ticket, which is priced cheaper if you buy a week or more ahead. Eshbaugh said the resort is trying to encourage skiers to plan ahead, and to not be dissuaded when conditions aren't perfect at home.

"Sometimes if people look out their back yard and there's no snow, they change their mind," she said.

Jake Campbell, the new general manager of Boston Mills, Brandywine and Alpine Valley, is also constantly countering the argument that no snow at home means no skiing.

"Just because you have grass at home and you're not shoveling your driveway doesn't mean you can't ski," he said. "I always say our biggest competition is Netflix."

Thomas Conti, director of marketing at Brandywine/Boston Mills, said that Northeast Ohio winters are meant to be enjoyed, not merely endured.

"It's all about perspective," he said. "Mother Nature is offering us a gift. We should enjoy it and embrace it."

SKI 2019



Snowshoe Mountain Resort in West Virginia. Chris McLennan



Alpine Valley in Geauga County. Alpine Valley



Peek'n Peak ski resort in Western New York. Plain Dealer

15 resorts in Ohio and nearby to visit

Alpine Valley
Munson Township
440-285-2211
alpinevalleyohio.com
20 miles from Cleveland



Slopes and trails	Lifts	Skiable acres	Longest run	Vertical drop	Average yearly snowfall	Terrain parks	Snow tubing	Cross Country	On-site lodging	Child care	Full-day weekend lift ticket*	Rentals**
7	4	35	2,000 feet	260 feet	120 inches	1	Yes	No	No	No	\$44 adult, \$39 children 5-12	\$32 adult, \$27 children

Alpine Valley, in the heart of Ohio's snowbelt, is one of the most economical places to practice your moves, with a \$29 Saturday late-night special and \$35 Sunday evening deal (includes rentals and four-hour pass). A small halfpipe was a popular addition last season and should return this year.

Boston Mills / Brandywine
Peninsula
1-800-875-4241
bmbw.com
20 miles from Cleveland



18	16	88	3,530 feet	264 feet	60 inches	4	Yes	No	No	No	\$44 adult, \$39 children 5-12	\$32 adult, \$27 children
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Big changes are coming to these northern Summit County sister resorts, but not until next season. These two parks, along with Alpine Valley and Mad River Mountain, were included in the September sale of Peak Resorts to Vail Resorts. This year, looked for enhanced snowmaking to keep the parks' slopes open longer. In addition, the parks now control their own retail shops, complete with new, branded merchandise.

Mad River Mountain
Zanesfield
1-800-231-7669
skimadriver.com
180 miles from Cleveland



20	10	144	3,000 feet	300 feet	36 inches	4	Yes	No	No	No	\$49 adult, \$39 children 5-12	\$32 adult and child
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Mad River Mountain, located about 50 miles northwest of Columbus, has invested in upgrades to its snowmaking system for the upcoming season; expect more changes next year, as new owner Vail Resorts begins capital projects at its new properties. Season passholders at Brandywine, Boston Mills and Alpine Valley can ski here for free.

Snow Trails
Mansfield
1-800-644-6754
snowtrails.com
75 miles from Cleveland



19	8	80	3,000 feet	300 feet	52 inches	4	Yes	No	No	No	\$52 adult, \$42 children 6-12	\$37 adult, \$27 children
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Snow Trails, Ohio's oldest ski resort, is adding two new trails this year, The Chute and Outer Limits, which will offer the park's steepest terrain. Also new: additional snowmaking capacity, lighting, lodge improvements and more. Also here: Vertical Descent snow tubing park, featuring Glow Tubing in the dark.

Bristol Mountain
Canadigua, N.Y.
585-374-6000
bristolmountain.com
280 miles from Cleveland



38	6	138	10,560 feet	1,200 feet	130 inches	2	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$79 adult, \$64 children 8-12	\$35 adult, \$25 children
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Bristol Mountain, in New York's Finger Lakes region, offers the highest vertical drop in western New York. In March, the resort will host the 2020 U.S. Aerials Freestyle Championships on Mikey's Jump, new last year. Also: new snowmaking, the widening of some trails and parking improvements.

Cockaigne
Cherry Creek, N.Y.
716-287-3223
cockaigne.com
150 miles from Cleveland



15	3	80		3,200 feet	275 inches	1	No	No	No	No	\$45 adult, \$35 children 5-17	NA
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Closed since 2011 when a fire destroyed Cockaigne's historic lodge, the ski area is reopening this year in the heart of western New York's snowbelt. In addition to 15 slopes and trails, the resort is opening a new Snowmobile Adventure Park, which circles the property. (Note: You must bring your own snowmobile.) Also here: the resort's new Base Lodge, with a pub menu and live music.

Holiday Valley
Ellicottville, N.Y.
1-800-323-0020
holidayvalley.com
186 miles from Cleveland



60	13	300	4,400 feet	750 feet	180 inches	5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$78-\$88 adult, \$62-\$70 children 7-11	\$38-\$42 adult, \$31-\$35 children
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Holiday Valley is the most-visited ski resort in New York, and it's no secret why: a variety of ski terrain, well-maintained, in one of the most fun ski towns you'll find anywhere. Readers of Ski magazine ranked Holiday Valley the 10th best resort in the East this year. New in 2019: expanded snowmaking, a new groomer, plus LED lighting on several slopes. The resort is also trying a new pricing structure this year, with cheaper rates if you buy in advance.

HollMont
Ellicottville, N.Y.
716-699-2320
hollmont.com
186 miles from Cleveland



55	8	135	4,000 feet	700 feet	180 inches	2	No	Yes	No	Yes	\$62 adult, \$50 children 6-11 (weekday rates)	\$28 adult, \$23 children
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Down the road from Holiday Valley is HollMont, the nation's largest private ski resort. It's open to the public during the week, when you'll find short lift lines and uncrowded slopes. New this year, the resort has made some improvements to its beginner area, making it more user-friendly.

Kissing Bridge
Glenwood, N.Y.
716-592-4963
kbski.com
190 miles from Cleveland



39	9	255	6,000 feet	550 feet	190 inches	2	Yes	No	No	No	\$65 adult, \$55 children 6-13	\$35 adult, \$25 children
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Just south of Buffalo, Kissing Bridge offers a variety of terrain, including a dozen black diamond and double-black diamond trails. This year, a family of four can learn to ski for \$265, including rentals, a 90-minute lesson and beginner slope lift ticket. Also here: guided snowshoe tours and Colden Tubing Co.

Peek'n Peak
Clymer, N.Y.
716-355-4141
pkpk.com
130 miles from Cleveland



26	9	130	4,100 feet	400 feet	180 inches	5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$64 adult, \$50 children 6-11	\$35 adult, \$29 children
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Peek'n Peak, the closest overnight ski resort to Cleveland, offers slope-side lodging, dining, a pool and spa. Returning this year: Lunar Lights Tubing After Dark and the popular Peak Five Pass (buy four lift tickets, get one free; must be purchased by Dec. 15). New this year at the Peak — and this is something every resort should emulate — a helmet is included in the price of all rental packages.

Hidden Valley
Hidden Valley, Pa.
814-443-8000
hiddenvalleyresort.com
190 miles from Cleveland



26	9	111	6,000 feet	470 feet	140 inches	2	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	\$71 adult, \$57 children 6-11	\$40 adults and children
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Hidden Valley is more family friendly and less crowded than sister resort Seven Springs, located about 7 miles south. New at Hidden Valley this season: additional snowmaking and grooming equipment. Again this year, visitors can buy a Highland Weekend Ticket, offering three days of skiing or boarding at Hidden Valley, Seven Springs and nearby Laurel Mountain.

Seven Springs
Champion, Pa.
1-800-4-52-2223
7springs.com
200 miles from Cleveland



33	10	285	6,950 feet	750 feet	135 inches	7	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	\$89 adult, \$70 children 6-11	\$52 adults and children
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Located about an hour south of Pittsburgh, Seven Springs offers something for every member of your group: indoor mini golf, bowling, roller skating, sleigh rides, snowmobile tours — plus plenty of varied terrain for skiing and snowboarding. Returning this year: a 12- to 14-gate giant slalom course, open to the public for a modest charge (\$6 for two runs or \$15 for the day). Skiers race each other and clock their time on a dual course. New this year: improvements to snowmaking, lighting and lifts.

Canaan Valley Resort
Davis, W.Va.
1-800-622-4121
canaanresort.com
280 miles from Cleveland



47	4	91	6,000 feet	850 feet	160 inches	1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$70 adult, \$44 children 6-12	\$38 adult, \$28 children
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The state park system operates the resort here, in eastern West Virginia, located just outside the fun town of Davis. Also nearby: Blackwater Falls State Park and the White Grass Ski Touring Center, with 40 miles of maintained cross country trails. In addition to skiing and snowboarding, there's an outdoor ice skating rink here, plus snowshoe rentals.

Snowshoe Mountain
Snowshoe, W.Va.
1-877-441-4386
snowshoemtn.com
330 miles from Cleveland



60	14	257	7,920 feet	1,500 feet	180 inches	5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$109 adult, \$98 children 13-22, \$93 children 5-12	\$54 adult, \$30-\$44 children
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About six hours from Cleveland, Snowshoe is a bit of a drive, but worth it — for its varied terrain and variety of activities on and off the slopes. In addition to 60 trails and more than 250 acres of skiable terrain, Snowshoe offers snowmobile tours, horseback riding, off-road adventure tours, a spa and more. Unlike most ski towns, the lodging and restaurants at Snowshoe are located at the top of the mountain.

Wisp
McHenry, Md.
1-844-482-3772
wispresort.com
230 miles from Cleveland



35	12	172	7,920 feet	700 feet	100 inches	3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$84 adult, \$59 children 6-12	\$39 all ages
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Located in the Deep Creek Lake region of far-western Maryland, Wisp offers a variety of fun, from tubing to snowshoeing to mountain coastering. Last year, the resort finished a three-year, \$3.7-million remodeling of the 169-room slope-side Lodge at Wisp.

* Prices shown are for an all-day Saturday ticket, except as noted; tickets may be cheaper if purchased in advance. ** Snowboard rentals may be higher. Sources: The resorts, onthesnow.com, iskny.com



WESTERN NEW YORK

Cockaigne plans mid-month opening

CHERRY CREEK, NEW YORK — Northeast Ohio skiers and boarders will have another area to test their turns this winter, with the expected reopening this month of Cockaigne resort in western New York.

Closed since 2011, the resort has a tentative opening date of Dec. 14. The ski area will feature 13-15 trails and slopes, three lifts, plus a brand new snowmobile adventure park.

Also new: The Base Lodge, which replaces the previous lodge, the former Austrian pavilion for the 1964 World's Fair in New York City. That lodge was destroyed in a fire in 2011, Cockaigne's last year of operation.

New owners purchased the complex in 2017, with the hope of reopening it in 2018. But updating the lifts, lighting and snowmaking equipment proved more costly and time-consuming than initially planned. Late last year, the reopening was pushed until 2019.

Cockaigne is nearly ready for its second act, says Nick Teresko, a Northeast Ohio resident who was hired recently as director of skiing and snowboarding. "It's going to be a great place to learn and inspire new skiers," said Teresko, who has tested out the slopes in recent weeks.

Among Cockaigne's claims to fame is its location in eastern Chautauqua County, 20 miles south of Lake Erie and along a ridge that gets pounded with lake effect snow.

The resort receives an average of 275 inches of

snow per winter, significantly higher than other western New York ski areas, including nearby Peek'n Peak and Holiday Valley.

Even with so much natural snow, the resort has invested in updated snowmaking equipment to ensure the slopes are covered all season.

Long-time Mentor skier Peter O'Keefe said he is looking forward to returning to Cockaigne's slopes. Though the hill is modest — just 430 feet of vertical drop — the abundant snowfall makes up for it. "I had a lot of fun there," said O'Keefe. "I think the first time I sat and talked to the woman who became my wife was at Cockaigne. So I have a sweet spot for Cockaigne."

Speaking of sweet spots — the new owners are retaining the trails' sweet-treat names, including Marzipan, Kandy Kaigene and Peppermint Twist.

Cracker Jack, the longest slope, will be part of the new snowmobile adventure park, which will also include bank turns, berms and other features. Snowmobilers can also connect with Chautauqua County's 400-mile network of trails at nearby Bountwell Hill State Forest.

Teresko said Cockaigne is starting small, but hoping to expand into a full four-season resort. On-site lodging may be added in the future. In the meantime, the closest hotels are in Jamestown, about 15 miles away.

For information: cockaigne.com.

B-14

trails and slopes

3

lifts

1

snowmobile adventure park

275

average snow fall per winter

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

A problem with Hertz lost and found: Where's my wallet?

Christopher Elliott

I accidentally left my wallet in a car at the Hertz location at Boston Logan International Airport. It likely fell out of my bag as I was packing up and collecting my belongings.

Hertz found it and agreed to overnight it to me at my expense. It has been nearly a week, and Hertz has still not sent the wallet.

I have tried emailing and calling the lost and found department on multiple occasions. I have started to reach out to the Hertz executives listed on your consumer advocacy site.

I can't get so much as a simple acknowledgment from Hertz. I just want my wallet shipped. In every situation where I have interacted with a live person at Hertz, the service has been great.

The people at the location tried to help me find the car when I discovered my wallet had fallen out of my bag. But they'd already moved the car to an offsite holding location.

However, since then, the customer service has been horrible. Frankly, my wallet should have been shipped by the next business day after I paid for the shipping. Can you help me?

Joseph Ziskovsky,
Cottage Grove, Minnesota

I'm glad Hertz found your wallet and quickly agreed to send it to you. I'm not so happy that it's been a week and the wallet seems to be missing again. Hertz should have sent your wallet to you right away.

Car rental companies like Hertz often have large lost and found departments. They'll catalog lost items and try to return them to their owners.

But the process takes time. If you look at the lost and found operations almost anywhere, you'll find that it isn't a high-priority department.

Companies would much rather put their resources into something that earns money rather than a department that returns missing items.

You did the best you could to solve this Hertz lost and found problem. You started a paper trail with Hertz, in addition to your phone calls.

You escalated your complaint to the right executives at Hertz. You kept your emails very polite and professional.

One minor problem: You didn't have anything in writing from Hertz that promised to return your wallet.

You said Hertz communicated through a system on its site that didn't allow you to make any copies.

Fortunately, you had screen captures of their promise — important evidence that the company had your wallet. Nice job with the recordkeeping!

Hertz should have at least acknowledged your messages. But it sounds as if the Hertz crew in Boston was helpful, so maybe this was just an oversight. Who knows?

I contacted Hertz on your behalf. A representative checked on your wallet. It turns out Hertz sent the wallet eight days after it said it would.

"Unfortunately, I wasn't able to determine the cause for the delay," a spokeswoman for the car rental company told me. "You've received your wallet."

Christopher Elliott is the ombudsman for National Geographic Traveler magazine and the author of "How to Be the World's Smartest Traveler." You can read more travel tips on his blog, elliott.org, or email him at chris@elliott.org.

OUT WEST

Ski spot in Montana offers a perfectly powdered mountain, minus a steep price

Justin Franz Washington Post

Long before they were covered in luxury condos, boutique outdoor clothing stores and latte-spinning coffee shops, good ski hills needed two things: a lift and a lodge.

While many of those simple ski areas have either grown up or closed down, Turner Mountain, a one-lift hill nestled into the northwest corner of Montana, continues to offer skiing the way it was 30 or 40 years ago, when a weekend ski trip for a family of four wouldn't break the bank.

"I hear it from people all the time," says Bruce Zwang, president of Kootenai Mountain Sports, the nonprofit that operates the ski area. "They tell me that this is just like the hill they skied on as a kid."

But Turner Mountain isn't just some ramshackle ski area off in the boondocks. The mountain has been featured in numerous magazines; Ski Magazine even declared it might have "the best lift-assisted powder skiing in the U.S." It also appeared in "Here, There & Everywhere," a movie by Warren Miller, the ski bum-turned-filmmaker whose features have helped skiers and snowboarders map out their dream vacations for a generation.

Getting to Turner isn't easy. The mountain is at least two hours from the closest airport and requires driving down an old snow-packed logging road deep in the Kootenai National Forest. However, those adventurous souls who do make the trek to Turner will undoubtedly be rewarded with some of the best skiing in their life — and so much more.

"I don't think there's another ski area quite like this in the world," says Jake Jerecek, who volunteers at the mountain.

Turner is located 22 miles north of Libby, Montana, a one-time mining and logging town trying to reinvent itself as an outdoor recreation destination. Libby has always worked hard and played harder. In the 1930s, local skiers set up a tow rope and started barreling down a slope at the edge of town. By the 1950s, they were ready for something a little steeper, so they set out to find an actual mountain. That search brought them to a recently burned peak in the heart of the Purcell Mountains. Since the wildfire had already cleared most of the slope, all the skiers needed to do was strike a deal with the local forest ranger. In 1960, skiers strung up a short tow rope and Turner Mountain was officially open for business. The summer after the inaugural season, the tow rope was replaced with a mile-long T-bar that had the distinction of being one of the longest such lifts in North America. Locals often joked that at Turner, the real workout was going up the mountain rather than skiing down it.

By the late 1990s, the T-bar had reached the end of its use-



The family-friendly Turner Mountain Ski Area offers sledding, and children 6 and younger ski free.
Greg Lindstrom, Washington Post

ful life, so the mountain's operator started raising money for a replacement with pint nights at the local bar and other fundraisers. In 2001, the group purchased an old chairlift and had it installed that summer.

In recent years, nonprofit ski areas have popped up across the country as changing economics and a changing climate make it harder to stay open.

According to the National Ski Areas Association, about 30% of its more than 300 resorts across the country are not-for-profit entities. Among them is Bogus Basin Recreation Area near Boise, Idaho. Brad Wilson, general manager of the mountain, says he believes independent ski areas that focus on keeping prices low are critical to the long-term survival of the sport.

"No one is going to pay \$200 for a lift ticket for something that they have never done before," he says. "It's up to the small, independent ski areas to create new skiers."

"So many people are getting priced out of this sport," Zwang says. "But we have the cheapest tickets in the state." A day pass at Turner is \$38 for an adult, \$26 for teens ages 13 to 18, and \$21 for kids (children 6 and under ski free).

For more, go to: libbymt.com/areatracks/turner.html

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