

A person wearing a helmet and winter gear is riding a yellow snowmobile down a snowy path in a forest. The path is flanked by tall, thin trees covered in snow. The scene is bright and wintry.

# GO & DO

## WINTER WONDERLAND

*YOUR GUIDE TO MICHIGAN THRILLS & CHILLS*

### ICE CLIMBING

Fascinating formations  
lead to endless thrills

PAGE 4

### COLD IS COOL

Fourth, fifth-graders  
can ski free in Michigan

PAGE 8

### SNOWMOBILING

Bring backcountry  
views to the forefront

PAGE 12





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## ABOUT THE WRITER



Jane Peterson has been a journalist for more than 20 years, working at newspapers such as The Oakland Press, The Holly Herald and The Berrien County Record.

A graduate of Western Michigan University, today she is an active freelance writer who continues to write articles and other materials for newspapers, online publications and private clients.



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## GO &amp; DO: ICE CLIMBING

## With fascinating formations, nothing compares to the thrill of ice climbing

By Jane Peterson  
For Digital First Media

With numerous waterfalls and forest areas, Michigan is an ice climber's dream. Tall, natural landscapes provide challenging terrain for those who like to push themselves to new heights.

"It's the perfect winter activity for Michigan because we have the perfect combination of moisture and cold temperature to produce excellent ice conditions," said Bill Thompson, Michigan Ice Fest organizer.

Ice climbing has grown immensely in recent years. It is popular because it is energizing and engages all the senses, said Garrett Peabody, a certified climbing instructor and owner of Peabody Ice Climbing Club.

Ice climbing is strenuous and it requires a lot of stamina and safety instruction. Thompson said it is not a sport where people can walk into a store and buy the gear and go climbing on their own immediately. It takes instruction and practice.

Michigan Ice Fest can help. It offers a guide service that takes folks out December through March. Interested people can also attend the Michigan Ice Fest Feb. 14-18 to learn more.

The hard work pays off when climbers are rewarded with breathtaking views of the world around them.

"The benefits for ice climbing are that they take a person out into a unique environment where they can enjoy the solitude and challenge that climbing offers. To be situated high above Lake Superior, surrounded by fascinating ice formations -there is nothing that compares," said Thompson.

Ice climbers from all over



PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHIGAN ICE FEST

Ice climbing is the perfect winter activity for Michigan because we have the perfect combination of moisture and cold temperature to produce excellent ice conditions.

the world descend on Munising each winter for the Michigan Ice Fest, where professional athletes teach courses and make evening presentations. It is all about learning, exploring and having fun.

"There is lots of good energy during the event," said Thompson. "Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore has

some of the highest concentrations of ice in the country. It is the mecca for ice climbers."

Peabody said ice climbers are a close-knit community. Fellow climbers encourage each other to push themselves and achieve personal goals.

Relying on your own skills to get you to your des-

tination is worth every bit of effort for dedicated ice climbers.

"I love being outside in the winter in places where there are no people. The sounds of ice climbing are very special and to enjoy these areas and challenges with friends is very special," said Thompson.



Join the ice climbing fun at Michigan Ice Fest.



Ice climbing classes are the center of Michigan Ice Fest.

### Michigan Ice Fest details

Ice climbing takes a lot of skill and knowledge. Learn from some of the best during Michigan Ice Fest, scheduled from Feb. 14-18 in Munising. Ice Fest headquarters are at the Munising Community Center.

Clinics, classes, workshops and demonstrations are the main focus during the festival. Education is key. Consider registering for an Intro to Ice, Intermediate Ice, Kids Class, Intro to Speed Climbing or Women's Intro to Ice class. Some last the full day; others are half-day classes.

New this year, according to the Michigan Ice Fest website, is a series of free

skill builder classes covering a broad range of topics, including equipment selection, lakeshore safety, top rope anchors, ice tool sharpening — even climber's yoga.

Of course, there are also social events and camaraderie to enjoy, too.

Climber's parties will close out evening activities on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. There will also be time to socialize with fellow ice climbers during book signings, slideshow presentations and poster signings.

For a complete schedule of events and details on lodging, rules, direction and more, visit MichiganIceFest.com.

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## GO &amp; DO: SNOWSHOEING

# Trek Michigan's snow-covered trails by foot

By Jane Peterson  
For Digital First Media

Every day we put on our shoes to go outdoors, but what about strapping on shoes when we are already outside?

We are talking about snowshoes, of course.

In recent years, snowshoeing has become popular because it is a way to enjoy the peace and quiet of a snowy landscape on your own terms — no path or trail required. This allows you to explore areas you may not be able to get to many other ways.

Plus, there is just something so special about hearing the snap of the snow as you trudge along on your journey. "Snowshoeing is a great activity to get out and enjoy the natural beauty of our state," said Joe Graham, marketing and sales manager for Latitude 45 Bicycles and Fitness in Petoskey. "It moves at a pace that allows you to really take in your surroundings. It's also one of the most social winter activities; having a conversation while snowshoeing is much easier than other winter favorites like skiing or snowmobiling."

Snowshoeing is a wonderful opportunity to get outside, agreed Independence Oaks County Parks Supervisor D.J. Coffey. He said snowshoes provide stable footing when exploring the parks in the winter months.

"Even familiar places can feel like new adventures once winter transforms them," said Graham.

All you need is a pair of snowshoes and some warm clothes. Graham also said a pair of poles is great to get a full body workout and they can make it easier to cover challenging terrain. Depending on your boots,

a pair of gaiters can be a great addition for trekking through deeper snow, he added, but overall the most important goal is quality winter clothing that will help you stay dry and warm. You'll also want to dress in layers because snowshoeing can be quite a workout.

If you don't have snowshoes, many facilities allow you to rent them. Independence Oaks County Park in Clarkston rents snowshoes from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. Those with their own snowshoeing equipment can enjoy a variety of ungroomed trails at several Oakland County Parks, including Orion Oaks, Addison Oaks, Highland Oaks, Waterford Oaks and Rose Oaks. If you have new equipment or are new to snowshoeing, before heading out, Graham suggests practicing putting on the snowshoes and getting comfortable with your bindings while you are warm at home instead of fumbling around at a cold trailhead.

Up North, there are countless parks and nature preserves to go explore.

"In Northern Michigan many of our best locations are nature preserves protected by the Little Traverse Conservancy. They protect over 60,000 acres in the region. Most of their preserves have marked trails and some are groomed for winter activities," he said.

However, those new to snowshoeing should consider going someplace they are familiar with at first, maybe even with a friend or a four-legged companion.

The best part about snowshoeing, he said, is that it is a family-oriented activity that doesn't cost much or require a lot of athletic ability. Even if lit-



PHOTO COURTESY OF OAKLAND COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

Snowshoes allow you to explore places you might not otherwise be able to access.

tle ones need to ride in a sled, everyone gets to enjoy a fabulous outdoor experience together.

"I am blessed enough to live in a spot where I can head out the back door and be in the forest in minutes. I love how easy it is to go, regardless of snow conditions. I love the quiet of the woods in winter and snowshoeing is the best way to get there. It's also an ideal winter activity for bringing my dog," said Graham.

## Tips for buying shoes

If you plan to snowshoe often or want to bring them along in the car for spur-of-the-moment adventures, you may want to invest in a quality pair.

Michigan craftspeople do manufacture snowshoes

and there are many places across the state to purchase them.

"There are lots of places to buy snowshoes online but I still believe the best way to purchase them is through a local store like us," said Joe Graham, marketing and sales manager for Latitude 45 Bicycles and Fitness in Petoskey. He said common mistakes with snowshoe purchases are:

- Wearing the wrong size
- Buying the wrong style for your needs
- Not properly adjusting bindings

"By going to a good shop you can avoid a lot of those mistakes," he said. "Additionally, your local shop can recommend great places to go enjoy your new snowshoes."



Grab some friends and head out to the park to go snowshoeing.





It's fun hearing the crunch of the snow as you trudge along on your journey.

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## GO &amp; DO: COLD IS COOL PASSPORT

# Fourth- and fifth-graders can ski free in Michigan

Ski areas and resorts across Michigan have teamed up to give children an opportunity to get out, have fun and get healthy this winter. That's why they have created the "Cold is Cool" Ski & Ride Passport. All fourth- and fifth-grade students who apply for a passport can ski for free, up to three times, at each of the 29 participating ski areas.

Steve Kershner, chairman of the Michigan Snowsports Industries Association (MSIA) and director of snow sports at Shanty Creek Resorts, said that when a child is in the fourth or fifth grade, they are at the perfect age to learn to ski or snowboard. "They have the coordination and enthusiasm to pick up the sport quickly."

In order for fourth- and fifth-graders to use the free lift or trail pass coupons, a paying adult must accompany them. "We feel that fourth- and fifth-graders should be supervised by an adult while on the slopes and trails."

Up to two children with passports can ski free with each paying adult. The passport is valid through April 30, or the end of the 2017/18 ski season.

Applications for the Cold is Cool Passport are available at ski shops across the state and online at goskimichigan.com. Although the skiing is free, MSIA charges a \$20 printing and shipping fee for each passport ordered.

In addition to the lift tickets donated by the participating ski areas, the Cold is Cool Passport also includes coupons for 20 percent off a helmet purchase and \$20 off the purchase of \$100 at participating ski shops.

Some ski areas have also included coupons for equipment rental and discounted lessons.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOYNE MOUNTAIN

Up to two children with passports can ski free with each paying adult.

## PARTICIPATING SKI AREAS

### Upper Peninsula

- Big Powderhorn, Bessemer (906) 932-4838
- Big Snow Resort (Blackjack and Indianhead), Wakefield, 1-800-346-3426
- Marquette Mountain, Marquette, 800-944-7669
- Mont Ripley, Hancock, (906) 487-2340
- Norway Mountain, Norway, (906) 282-9105
- Pine Mountain, Iron Mountain (906) 774-2747
- Porcupine Mountain, Ontonagon, (231) 885-5209

### Northwestern Lower Peninsula

- Boyne Highlands, Harbor Springs, 1-855-688-7022

- Boyne Mountain, Boyne Falls, 1-855-688-7024
- Caberfae Peaks, Cadillac, (231) 862-3000
- Cross Country Ski Headquarters, Roscommon, 1-800-832-2663
- Crystal Mountain, Thompsonville, 1-888-968-7686
- Hickory Hills, Traverse City, (231) 922-4900
- Bay Mountain at The Homestead, Glen Arbor, (231) 334-5000
- Mt. Holiday, Traverse City, (231) 938-2500
- Nubs Nob, Harbor Springs, 1-800-SKI-NUBS
- Shanty Creek Resorts, Bellaire, 1-800-678-4111

### North Central Lower Peninsula

- Garland Resort, Lewiston,



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHANTY CREEK RESORTS

Applications for the Cold is Cool Passport are available at ski shops across the state and online at goskimichigan.com.

(877) 442-7526

- Hanson Hills, Grayling, (989) 348-9266
- Otsego Club & Resort, Gaylord, 1-800-752-5510
- Snow Snake Ski & Golf, Harrison, (989) 539-6583
- Treetops Resort, Gaylord, 1-866-348-5249

### West Central Lower Peninsula

- Cannonsburg Ski Area, Belmont, (616) 874-6711
- Mulligan's Hollow, Grand Haven, (616) 842-0634

### Southwestern Lower Peninsula

- Swiss Valley Ski Area, Jones, (269) 244-5635
- Timber Ridge Ski Area, Gobles, 1-800-253-2928

### Southeastern Lower Peninsula

- Alpine Valley Ski Area, White Lake, (248) 887-2180
- Mt. Brighton, Brighton, (810) 229-9581
- Mt. Holly, Holly, (248) 634-8269

The "Cold is Cool" Fourth & Fifth Grade Ski & Ride Passport is one of the elements of MSIA's "Cold is Cool" program, which is dedicated to improving the health of the children in Michigan by offering winter outdoor activities for all kids and their families. The Cold is Cool activities are endorsed by the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports.

— Submitted by Mickey MacWilliams, president of the Michigan Snowsports Industries Association



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## GO &amp; DO: SLEDDING

# Fresh snow means it's time to head to the sledding hill

By Jane Peterson

For Digital First Media

A few inches of fresh snow and what is the first thing on everyone's mind: Sledding, of course.

"I love the rush you get when you take off down a good hill," said Courtney Sheffer, marketing director for West Michigan Tourist Association.

Whether the kids have a snow day or you head out for a weekend of family fun, there's just nothing like the feeling of zooming down a sledding hill. As you let out peals of laughter, you breathe in the crisp air and feel the winter chill hitting your face. It's a thrill unlike any other and all you need for an afternoon of sledding fun are layers of warm clothing and a sled, toboggan or snow tube.

"Sledding is fun for the entire family, creating special winter memories you can cherish for a lifetime. The thrill of zipping down the hill, racing your friends or going down the hill for the first time by yourself all make for a fun winter day sledding," said Hilary Simmet, marketing/media specialist.

No two sledding hills are the same. Each will have different features and their own unique characteristics.

"Many places have tow-ropes or 'magic carpets' that will bring both you and your sled/tube back to the top of the hill, so no more trudging up the hill after every run," said Sheffer.

The Metroparks offer sledding at six different parks. Kensington Metropark in Milford features a variety of hills, from beginner to advanced, including a short "bunny hill" designated for younger sled riders that has padded



PHOTO COURTESY OF HURON-CLINTON METROPARKS

The Metroparks offer sledding at six different parks.

trees for added safety. Willow Metropark in New Boston has a lighted sledding hill so the fun can continue into the evening hours.

Other opportunities for sledding are available at these Metroparks: Indian Springs Metropark in White Lake; Lake Erie Metropark in Brownstown; Lake St. Clair Metropark in Harrison Township; Stony Creek Metropark in Shelby Township.

Many communities have a sledding hill ready for winter enthusiasts. Waterford Oaks County Park in Waterford has a Fam-

ily Sledding Hill, for example, and it was named the 2017 MetroParent Best Sledding Hill for southeast Michigan.

The great thing about sledding is that it is a very affordable option for families, especially for those who may not be interested in a winter sport where they will need to take lessons and invest in equipment and gear. In addition, sledding appeals to a wide range of ages, from younger children who still need their parents nearby, to pre-teens and teens who seek a thrilling and com-

fortable trip down the hill, said Sheffer.

Simmet said to just remember to follow safe practices and dress for the weather.

Sheffer agreed that everyone needs to be bundled up.

"You'll want to stay warm so you can stay outside having fun for longer," she said. "Snow tubing, sledding and tobogganing are less strenuous than downhill/cross country skiing or snowshoeing, where you'll generate more of your own heat, so you'll need to bundle up well to

make sure you stay toasty while you're outdoors."

## More sledding adventures

When the lake effect snow kicks in, the western side of the state often benefits from additional inches (and sometime even feet!) of fluffy, fresh snow. Even if there is little or no snow on the ground in the southeast region, chances are there will be in the Lake Michigan communities.

If you are looking for a day trip or a weekend getaway, consider

these sledding spots suggested by the West Michigan Tourist Association:

### Snow Tubing

- Cannonsburg, Belmont
- Double JJ Resort, Rothbury
- Timber Ridge Ski Area, Gobles
- Cran-Hill Ranch, Rodney
- Shanty Creek Resorts, Bellaire

### Tobogganing

- Echo Valley, Kalamazoo

### Sledding

- Muskegon Winter Sports Complex, Muskegon





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**From Marlette:** On M-53 go approx. 8 miles South on M-53 to M-90 (North Branch Road), turn West (right) and go approx. 5 miles to Beech Street turn South (left) and go 1/4 mile to Yakes Yard across from the Lions Field and Harmon Oil Company.

Physical Address: 6693 Beech Street, North Branch, MI 48461 Watch for signs.

**AUCTIONEER NOTES:** This sale has an excellent selection of merchandise consigned throughout the thumb. Consignment items may start arriving on Tuesday, February 13th at 10:00a.m. and will end on Friday, February 16th at 5:00p.m. Due to consignments inspection of the equipment will be Thursday and Friday. February 15th- 16th from 10:30-5:00p.m. We will be running 2 rings so please be prepared, bring a friend. TRACTORS WILL BE SOLD THROUGHOUT THE DAY ALONG WITH THE OTHER FARM EQUIPMENT

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## GO &amp; DO: SNOWMOBILING

# Bring backcountry scenic views to the forefront

By Jane Peterson  
For Digital First Media

If you constantly wish for fresh snowfall, chances are you are a snowmobiler.

"What I find most enjoyable about snowmobiling is that it gives me something fun to do during the long winters we have up here," said Keweenaw resident John Dee, owner of Global Weather Monitoring and JohnDee.com. "Instead of cursing new snow, I am rejoicing because I get to go play in it."

There's just nothing like gliding along on a snow machine going to unique landmarks that can't be reached any other way, said Cori-Ann Cearley, president of the Munising Visitors Bureau.

"I personally enjoy how quiet and peaceful the woods are in the winter," she said.

For many Michigan residents, snowmobiling has become a way of life. For others, it's an exhilarating new experience that makes the best of a Michigan winter. Many head out on their sleds with a group of friends while others spend time with their family on the trails. The great thing is that all ages can enjoy snowmobiling as there is a size and style of snowmobile for everyone, said Dee.

Those new to snowmobiling will want to learn all they can about their riding area and machine before heading out for their initial ride.

According to Bill Manson, executive director for the Michigan Snowmobile Association, rookies should read manuals, watch videos and check websites from manufacturers, administrators and snowmobile associations.

"Know your abilities and



PHOTO COURTESY OF BILL MANSON

Winter comes to an end too soon for most avid snowmobilers.

don't go beyond them," he said. "Know your machine's capabilities and don't push beyond them. Know your riding area. Get a map. Talk to the locals."

First time snowmobilers should also make sure they carry a pack of emergency supplies and a GPS unit, added Cearley.

It may also be helpful to try and avoid the weekends, said Dee, as this is when trails are busiest and newcomers can become intimidated by those that have been riding for a while.

"If a weekend is the only time you can go, then try and choose a less popular place that has the snow to ride on," he said.

New riders may want to consider renting. Manson said many rental outfitters offer snowmobile clothing as well as machines. He said try going out for just a morning or afternoon at first to get a real feel for the

sport.

"The rides that I have participated in underscore for me the 'wow-factor' and the pure enjoyment that people have when they first ride a snowmobile," he said. "I have ridden a number of times with first-time snowmobilers and they couldn't quit talking about how much fun it was and how they couldn't wait to do it again."

Snowmobiling is provides a source of exercise and relaxation, especially at a time when many are hibernating for the winter, said Dee.

"Almost all trails are out of the cities and thus riders are able to enjoy the great outdoors and leave all their troubles behind while riding," he said.

Once the first snowflakes fall, or are even predicted, they are busy prepping their snowmobile and getting out their winter gear

for the season. Manson recommends a safety-certified helmet in good condition that fits properly and a snug chin strap. He added that a visor is essential for clear vision and protection from the harsh wind.

"Wear layers of clothing, so that you can add or remove a layer or two to match changing conditions. A windproof outer layer is especially important, as are warm gloves or mitts, boots and a helmet," he said.

Where to ride isn't a major problem, as Manson said most trails in northern lower Michigan and the U.P. are great, including Cadillac, Houghton Lake, Grayling, Gaylord, Traverse City, Cheboygan, Sault Ste. Marie, Grand Marais, Seney, Munising, Lake Gogebic and Houghton. Multiple trails in the southwest lower portion of the state also receive plenty of traffic, he added.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN DEE

There is solitude and the beauty of a landscape covered with a fresh layer of snow when snowmobiling.

Dee is partial to the Keweenaw Peninsula. He said it is one of the main pillars of snowmobiling for the state with an extensive trail network of 233 miles of groomed trails.

"These trails will take you across 100 foot deep ravines on trestles built specifically for the trail system, or to scenic vistas that give you a panoramic view of Lake Superior 500 feet below. We even have a trail that takes you to the very tip of the Keweenaw, where you are surrounded on all three sides by the big lake," he said.

While there is solitude and the beauty of a landscape covered with a fresh layer of snow, Manson said snowmobiling is definitely a social sport. He described time well spent with friends and family and camaraderie with fellow snowmobilers during stops.

Dee agreed, saying he enjoys the friendships he has made through snowmobiling.

"I still ride with these friends and it is always a treat to be out with good companions on the snow," he said. "I also enjoy the ex-

ploration aspect to snowmobiling. I do cross country ski and snow shoe as well, but snowmobiling allows me to travel much greater distances on an excursion and thus see much more of the beautiful outdoors."

Clearly, snowmobilers are passionate about their hobby.

"The winters are too short when you participate in this activity," said Manson.

## Snowmobiling by the numbers

With thousands of miles of undeveloped as well as marked, groomed trails and no shortage of cold temperatures and fresh snow, it comes as no surprise that snowmobiling is the second most popular sport in Michigan, coming in just behind golf, said Bill Manson, executive director for the Michigan Snowmobile Association.

"Through the efforts of organized clubs and the Michigan Snowmobile Association, snowmobiling has become the most popular of winter-time family sports and has been instrumental in energizing resi-





PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUNISING VISITORS BUREAU

Snowmobiling is the second most popular sport in Michigan. Only golf ranks higher.

dents who previously either left the state for a warmer climate or restricted their activities to the indoors and waited for spring," he said.

Here are some other interesting facts about snowmobiling in the Mitten State, courtesy of the Michigan Snowmobile Association:

- Michigan is ranked second in North America with 198,096 registered snowmobiles.

- Oakland County alone has more registered snowmobiles at 19,505 than most states, including Alaska and Washington. Macomb County ranks second with 14,771 registered snowmobiles.

- There are currently

68 grooming grant sponsors, mostly snowmobile clubs, chambers of commerce, visitor bureaus or a combination of non-profits that maintain the Michigan snowmobile trails system. These sponsors have over 170 grooming tractors working hard to make trails smooth.

- The snowmobile program is unique as it is fully funded by user pay fees. This revenue comes from registrations, trail permits and a portion of the gasoline tax. The snowmobile program in Michigan is a \$12 million program.

- The average snowmobiler spends more than \$150 per day with the average snowmobile trip being

greater than 100 miles from home and lasting 2.5-five days. Snowmobilers normally spend approximately \$55 each for lodging (double occupancy); \$95 each for fuel and oil; and \$50 each for meals.

- The most recent economic impact study shows more than \$600 million on average is generated within Michigan from snowmobile activities.

- The Michigan Snowmobile Association was the first association to request legislation to provide penalties for riding while intoxicated and implemented a zero tolerance policy while riding campaign, now a model for international zero tolerance programs.

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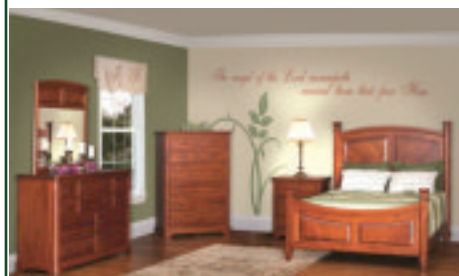
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## GO &amp; DO: SKIING

# Downhill skiing is one of winter's most exhilarating sports

By Jane Peterson

For Digital First Media

While some people hibernate inside during Michigan's frigid winter weather, others embrace the snow, ice and chilly temperatures by turning the Mitten State's parks, lakes and woods into their very own frosty playland.

The top winter attraction in northern Michigan is definitely the Great Outdoors, said Jennifer Jenness, PR manager, Traverse City Tourism.

"Once the snow begins to fall across this glacier-carved landscape, it becomes a sparkling white playground for outdoor winter sports — and that's where the fun is," she said.

Downhill skiing is the ultimate sport for those who enjoy bundling up and staying active outdoors all year long.

"I think it is about the thrill. It's great to be outside in Michigan's winter going fast down a hill. It's great exercise," said Mickey MacWilliams, president/executive director of the Michigan Snowsports Industries Association (MSIA).

Plus, she said it is a family-friendly sport.

"Downhill skiing in Michigan is something that a family can all do together, regardless of your age or ability. You can ride up the chair together and take different slopes down depending on ability," said MacWilliams.

In a news release, the MSIA said according to the National Weather Service, the Upper Peninsula Snowbelt is one of the snowiest places on earth, with an average snowfall of over 203 inches (almost 17 feet). This has created many amazing places to go downhill skiing in Michigan. Some, like Mt. Holly and Mt. Brighton,



PHOTO COURTESY OF NUB'S NOB

Downhill skiing is the ultimate sport for those who enjoy bundling up and staying active outdoors all season long.

are closer to home. Others are located Up North and make for a great weekend getaway with family members or a group of friends.

Voodoo Mountain, located just south of Copper Harbor, opened on a limited basis two years ago. According to the MSIA, it moves into its third season with a major expansion to a second peak and now offers over 200 acres of terrain. The ski area also features snow cat skiing.

Developed by Mount Bohemia, it is the only commercial snow cat ski oper-

ation east of the Rockies, states the MSIA news release. Skiers ride a snow cat (18 to a cab) to the top, ski down the mountain and get picked up by the snow cat for a return to the top.

Shanty Creek Resorts, located near Bellaire about 30 miles northeast of Traverse City, offers 43 trails with some of its most challenging runs located at its southeastern edge on Schuss Mountain, rated "Best Downhill Terrain in the Midwest" by readers of OnTheSnow.com.

"If you think Michigan

skiing is ho-hum, try making a run down Kingdom Come, a black diamond trail with a 450-foot vertical drop that starts steep and keeps on getting steeper," said Jenness.

The MSIA also announced that at Mt. Holly bulldozers and earthmovers have shaped, contoured and softened the area between the White Lightning and Mozart slopes to create a new slope, Aurora Pass. This trail is accessible from White Lightning and Mozart and will exit onto the Mozart run. Most



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAVERSE CITY TOURISM

Embrace the snow and head out to the slopes this winter.

## FYI

For more information and links to snow conditions and Webcams, visit [www.goskimichigan.com](http://www.goskimichigan.com).

of the new slope goes right under the White Lightning chairlift.

Check out other MSIA members at [www.GoSkiMichigan.com/michigan-ski-areas-snow-conditions/downhill-ski-areas](http://www.GoSkiMichigan.com/michigan-ski-areas-snow-conditions/downhill-ski-areas).

If you are not an avid skier or have never been skiing before, MacWilliams said most ski areas rent equipment. The team at Nub's Nob Ski Area of Harbor Springs, for example, spent time on the snow testing new rental boots and decided to purchase a new fleet of Nordica boots based on comfort and performance, according to the MSIA.

In addition, Treetops Resort in Gaylord purchased

a brand new Rossignol ski rental fleet that consists of the Rossignol Experience skis and Terrain Junior skis, both of which are the official "Terrain Based Learning" skis.

You'll also want to be prepared for the wind whipping in your face as you ski downhill, so MacWilliams said to dress for the weather with wind pants, a parka or jacket, hat or helmet, goggles and ski gloves or mitts.

"It's easy to get down in the winter months when daylight is at its shortest and you're spending the majority of your time indoors," said Jenness in an email. "Those who embrace the snow and frigid temps tend to lead the more joy-



ful lives in this region — and rightfully so! Combine the adrenaline rush of these fast-pace activities with the brisk air of Traverse City, the natural light glistening off the ground and you're on your way to happier, healthier winter."

### About snow making and grooming

With just a little cold weather, Michigan's ski slopes can be blanketed in white even if the ground is bare. To prove it, MSIA has created a page on its website that links to ski area webcams all across the state. "By visiting the webcam page on MSIA's website, [goskimichigan.com](http://goskimichigan.com), you can see what is happening on the slopes and trails across Michigan in real time," said Kershner.

Here are some facts about snow making courtesy of the Michigan Snowsports Industries Association (MSIA).

- Somewhere around 28° F. is the "magic number" for snowmaking, depending on humidity and wind. It can be a little higher if it is dry out and lower if it is very humid

- With the use of grooming equipment, ski areas can keep the snow on their slopes and withstand warm temperatures for a surprisingly long time. It is not uncommon for some ski areas to have patches of snow on the slopes well into June

- Ten inches of natural snow, when packed, usually adds only one inch of snow to the ski slope's base while 10 inches of man-made snow adds seven inches of base. Man-made snow is more dense and durable

- For every 10-degree temperature drop, snow-makers can double the output of machine-made snow

- The lower the humidity, the better for making snow. If you add the temperature plus the humidity, that sum should equal less than 100 for favorable snowmaking weather.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAVERSE CITY TOURISM

Go downhill skiing with some friends this winter season to avoid cabin fever.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHANTY CREEK RESORT

The top winter attraction in northern Michigan is definitely the Great Outdoors.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAVERSE CITY TOURISM

The views are amazing on Michigan's ski slopes.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAVERSE CITY TOURISM

Those who embrace the snow and frigid temperatures tend to have plenty of fun in the winter.



## GO &amp; DO: SNOWBOARDING

# Snowboarding brings plenty of fun, excitement to the slopes

**By Jane Peterson***For Digital First Media*

Escape to the slopes with some high-energy, family-friendly fun on a snowboard.

"Winter comes every year in Michigan, so why not embrace the cold," said Nathan Morse, founder and designer at Marhar Snowboards in Grandville. "It's too easy to hibernate when it's cold but if you get out and have a winter hobby it makes the cold season much more enjoyable. I also think a lot of people forget how much fun it can be to get into the snow. It kind of makes you feel like a kid again."

Michigan is well-known for its pristine slopes perfect for the twists, turns and jumps of snowboarding. Whether you travel Up North to an iconic resort, or head to a ski hill in your own backyard, there is plenty of fun to be found.

"Michiganders have two choices: Sit inside and complain about it or get outside and enjoy it," said Bonnie Streit, Schussmeisters' Ski Club president. "Skiing and snowboarding are the perfect way to enjoy it. In addition, some of the best views of our great state are seen standing at the top of the mountains. Did you know on a clear day you can see the Mackinac Bridge from the top of the mountains in Harbor Springs?"

Michigan has lots of great choices for snowboarders both Up North and closer to home. Streit said in the Detroit/Flint area, Mt. Holly, home to the Schussmeisters' Ski Club, is a popular choice because it is one of the larger ski areas in the area and it offers a variety of terrain and runs everyone can appreciate and enjoy.

For Up North fun with some backcountry and powder, Morse suggests Mount



PHOTO COURTESY OF TREETOPS

Michigan is well-known for its pristine slopes — perfect for the twists, turns and jumps of snowboarding.

Bohemia in the U.P. He also says places like Caberfae, Crystal Mountain and Boyne resorts are great for families and Cannonsburg is a great place for the children who like to ride park features.

Snowboarding is a fun sport for all ages. Morse shared that he received his first snowboard from his dad when he was 12.

"Every year he took us out there I felt the connection between the mountain and the board under my feet and have been passionate about the sport ever since, he said in an email. "It was a great

way to forget about everything and just enjoy the beautiful scenery and riding. When I was 15 my dad passed away and the mountains are a place where I still feel connected to him."

At Crystal Mountain, young snowboarders have access to the Burton Ridget Park, a flat course used as an introduction to the sport in which students are pulled through rollers and banks, according to a Michigan Snowsports Industries Association (MSIA) news release.

"Michigan is the perfect state to learn to ski or snow-

board in," said Steve Kershner, chairman of the Michigan Snowsports Industries Association (MSIA) and director of snow sports at Shanty Creek Resorts. "No matter where you live, there is a ski area within 2 ½ hours of your home, our slopes aren't as intimidating or expensive as the mountains in the West and you'll find trained, friendly instructors who know how to make it a really fun experience."

"I truly love the thrill and challenge snowboarding gives," said Morse. "Twenty years later and I am still

learning something new on my board each year and I still enjoy it as if it were my first time riding. It keeps the kid alive inside of me."

However, keep in mind, said Morse, learning how to snowboard can be frustrating at first. Don't give up.

"Expect to take falls while you're learning to turn. Try to let go of fear as that can slow the learning process. Once you get the turning down it's like riding a bike," he said.

It can also help to talk to someone with experience or stop into your local shop to chat about the sport, get tips

and be properly fitted with the right equipment.

"The right fitting equipment is so important. It can mean the difference between enjoying or hating your first time," said Morse.

Once you've mastered snowboarding basics and have your equipment, get out of the house with friends and family.

"What I enjoy most is the people, whether it is making memories with my kids, skiing with the club or chatting with complete strangers on the chair lift. When the last run is made, everyone heads inside to warm up with a cup of hot chocolate or their favorite beer. That's when adventures are shared, cheeks are rosy and laughter is heard. It's awesome!" said Streit.

## Benefits of snowboarding

While people are out on the slopes with their snowboards having fun, they may not even realize that they are getting quite a workout. Snowboarding is a terrific form of exercise," said Streit.

"It is a great way to increase your core strength and balance."

Morse agrees, saying that while it provides a great workout for your core and legs, there are other benefits to consider as well. An avid snowboarder for years, he said it's a great stress reliever.

"It's a great way to escape for a period of time and just have fun," he said. "It's also challenging."

If you like a challenge you can always progress your skills. I've been snowboarding for 20 years and still learn something new every year. It's a way to have fun in the cold, enjoy the company of friends and family, and you get exercise while doing it."





PHOTO COURTESY OF TREETOPS

Grab a few friends and head to the slopes for a day of fun.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TREETOPS

Snowboarding is a fun sport for all ages.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BLACKJACK SKI RESORT

It's always fun to learn something new when you're out on your snowboard.



## CALENDAR

# There is 'snow' much fun to be had this winter season

**By Jane Peterson**

*For Digital First Media*

When the air turns cold and the snow starts to fly, bundle up, hit the road and get ready for some fun that is uniquely Michigan. Remember that events and weather conditions change, so call ahead or check out the latest information online before heading out the door.

## JANUARY

### Jan. 31

■ A Full Moon Snowshoe Hike is 6-9 p.m. at The Summit Grill at The Ridge, 4815 South Old 27 in Gaylord. Details: [www.gaylordmichigan.net/event-detail/full-moon-snowshoe-hike/](http://www.gaylordmichigan.net/event-detail/full-moon-snowshoe-hike/).

## FEBRUARY

### Feb. 1

■ Join the Guinness World Record Snowmobile Parade attempt in downtown Sault Ste. Marie. At least 1,048 snowmobiles are needed. Registration fee \$5; \$10 day of event. Register/check-in from 9 a.m.-noon and event starts at 2 p.m. All snowmobile operators must have a valid driver's license and registered sled. Details: [www.saultstemarie.com](http://www.saultstemarie.com).

### Feb. 2

■ A Lantern Lit Ski and Snowshoe is scheduled from 7-9 p.m. at the Waterloo Recreation Area in Chelsea. There will be a half-mile loop lit for cross-country skiers and a half-mile lit loop for walking and snowshoeing. A campfire will be available to warm up. Information: [www.michigan.gov](http://www.michigan.gov).

■ A Full Moon Snowshoe Hike is 8-10 p.m. at Hartwick Pines State Park in Grayling. Take a 2-mile guided hike. Participants do not need to go the entire 2 miles. A limited number of snowshoes are available to borrow on a first-come, first-served basis starting at 7:30 p.m. Details: [www.michigan.gov](http://www.michigan.gov).



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUNISING VISITORS BUREAU ([WWW.MUNISING.ORG](http://WWW.MUNISING.ORG)).

Venture outside and try a new activity this winter.

### Feb. 2-3

■ Gaylord Alpenfrost takes place in downtown Gaylord from 6-11 p.m. Feb. 2 and 8:45 a.m.-10 p.m. Feb. 3. There will be horse carriage rides, a Frosty Plunge, Frosty 5K, Soup Cook Off, ice skating, warming tent and outside fire, Friday Night Beer Tent, live entertainment, Burning of the Boog, kids games and more. Schedule of events: [www.gaylordalpenfrost.com](http://www.gaylordalpenfrost.com).

### Feb. 2-4

■ The 14th Annual Magical Ice Fest will be held in downtown St. Joseph. The event includes certified ice competitions, fire & ice tower, fire & ice party, frozen fish toss, SnowBiz scavenger hunt and more. Visit [www.stjoetoday.com](http://www.stjoetoday.com) for details.

### Feb. 3

■ The North American Snow Festival is 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Feb. 3 at the Wexford Civic Center in Cadillac. Join in snowmobile races, a polar dip, an ice-fishing contest, chili cook-off, arm wrestling tournament and more. For a schedule of events, visit [www.nasfcadillac.com](http://www.nasfcadillac.com).

■ A Guided Snowshoe Hike is scheduled from 2-3:30 p.m. at Ludington State Park. The hike highlights the park's nature and history through the park's snow-covered sand dunes, starting at the Warming Shelter. The park has 40 pairs of snowshoes to loan for free on a first-come, first-served basis. Park staff can help novice trekkers get started. No reservations are needed. The event will

be held weather permitting and a Recreation Passport is required for entry. Details: [www.michigan.gov/ludington](http://www.michigan.gov/ludington).

■ The Winterlaufe 8K Race is 8 a.m.-noon Feb. 3 in downtown Frankenmuth. The course winds through historic Frankenmuth, across the Beyer Road bridge and then back to Frankenmuth. Awards will be presented to overall and masters male and female and top in each division for each race. Details: [www.facebook.com/Winterlaufe/](http://www.facebook.com/Winterlaufe/).

■ The 50th Annual International 500 Snowmobile Race is 10 a.m.-10 p.m. in Sault Ste. Marie. Details: [www.saultstemarie.com](http://www.saultstemarie.com).

■ A Guided Snowshoe Hike will be held from 2-3 p.m. at Tahquamenon Falls State Park in Paradise. Learn

snowshoeing tips and view nature during this one mile off-trail excursion. No pre-registration is necessary and there will be snowshoes available to borrow. Details: [www.michigan.gov/dnr/](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/).

■ The Traverse City Polar Plunge is set from 9:30 a.m.-1 p.m. at North Peak Brewery/Kilkenny's Irish Pub in downtown Traverse City. Watch as participants brave the cold and plunge into a pool located in front of North Peak's patio — Front Street side. Details: [www.traversecity.com](http://www.traversecity.com).

■ A Lantern-lit Skiing/Snowshoe Walk is scheduled from 6-8 p.m. at Ludington State Park. Visitors can bring cross-country skis and/or snowshoes to ski or walk an easy, one-mile groomed trail

lit by oil lanterns that begins at the Warming Shelter. Enjoy a campfire at either end to warm up and sip a hot beverage. The park has 40 pairs of snowshoes to loan for free on a first-come, first-served basis. Park staff can help novice trekkers get started. No reservations are needed. The event will be held weather permitting and a Recreation Passport is required for entry. Details: (231) 843-9261 or [www.michigan.gov/ludington](http://www.michigan.gov/ludington).

### Feb. 8-10

■ Michigan Tech Winter Carnival is set on the campus of Michigan Tech University in Houghton. The event features huge snow statues and activities like broomball, curling, sleigh rides and more. For more information, visit [www.mtu.edu/carnival/](http://www.mtu.edu/carnival/).





PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAVERSE CITY TOURISM

When the snow falls, the fun begins.

## Calendar

FROM PAGE 18

### Feb. 9-10

■ Join the Spring Lake Rotary Club for Rotary Snow Jam at Spring Lake Central Park. Activities include a Snow Jam Euchre Tournament and indoor cornhole tournament on Friday and activities for the entire family on Saturday including: Sledding, ice skating, kids activities, the Snow Jam Dart Tournament, food and beverages, live music and the Grand Haven vs. Spring Lake Old Boys Hockey Match. For a full list of events visit [rotarysnowjam.com](http://rotarysnowjam.com).

### Feb. 10

■ Frosty Fun: Kids Mini Camp, a kids-only event will be held from 1:30-4 p.m. Feb. 10 at Red Oaks Nature Center in Madison Heights. Kids will spend the afternoon learning about winter wonders as they play games, do a craft and have a winter-themed snack. During a snowshoe hike, discover which animals have been out and about this winter. Snowshoes are provided. Participants must wear boots. A winter walk will be substituted if there is not sufficient snow. Dress for the weather. This program is for ages 5-11 only. A signed waiver is required. Cost is \$15/child. Pre-registration with payment required. Call 248-858-0916 weekdays or Red Oaks Nature Center on Saturdays.

■ Go Sledding with the OAC from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Feb. 10 at the Outdoor Adventure Center, 1801 Atwater St. in Detroit. Head to Milliken State Park for sledding fun. A limited number of sleds will be available to borrow. This program is held weather permitting and is included with the price of OAC admission. Details: [www.michigan.gov/dnr/](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/).  
■ A Skiable Feast is 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Feb. 10 at Treetops Resort, 3962 Wilkinson Road in Gaylord. Enjoy a 6 km (3.8 mile) intermediate cross country ski excursion on Treetops' remote Project Nature property at your own pace with five gourmet food and beverage stations along the way. Cost is \$89. For more information, visit [www.treetops.com/general-information/event/skiable-feast](http://www.treetops.com/general-information/event/skiable-feast).

[treetops.com/general-information/event/skiable-feast](http://www.treetops.com/general-information/event/skiable-feast).

■ Snowshoes, Tracks and Tees is 2-4 p.m. at WInt Nature Center in Clarkston. Learn the basics of snowshoeing, how to identify animal tracks, and decorate a T-shirt with animal tracks. Put on snowshoes for a wintry walk to discover which animals have been active this winter. Snowshoes are provided. Participants must wear boots. A winter walk will be substituted if there is not sufficient snow. This program is appropriate for ages 5 and older. Bring a plain, light colored pre-washed T-shirt for crafting. Cost is \$5/person. Pre-registration with payment is required. Call 248-858-0916 weekdays or Wint

Nature Center on Saturdays. Details: [www.OaklandCountyParks.com](http://www.OaklandCountyParks.com).

### Feb. 11

■ Learn about two winter visitors — the Snowy Owl and Tundra Swan — at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. at Lake Erie Marshlands Museum in Brownstown. Cost is \$5/adult and \$3/child. Pre-register: (734) 379-5020.  
■ Winter Birding for Beginners is 10 a.m.-noon at Kensington Nature Center in Milford. The basics of birding, from choosing a field guide to identifying markings, will be covered in a two-hour session. Dress for the weather and bring binoculars. This program is suitable for ages 10 and up. Cost is \$5. A Metroparks ve-

hicle entry permit is required to enter any Metropark. Pre-register: (810) 227-8917.

### Feb. 14-18

■ Michigan Ice Fest will feature Ice Climbing at its best. Events for novices and experts. Many events are planned each day. Visit [www.downwindsports.com/ice-fest/](http://www.downwindsports.com/ice-fest/) for more information.

### Feb. 15-18

■ The U.S. Ski Cross Country SuperTour will come to downtown Ishpeming. Top U.S. cross country athletes will race in seven cities across North America in the 2017-18 iteration of the SuperTour. The tour is a series of International Ski Federation (FIS)-sanctioned cross country events across

**CALENDAR » PAGE 20**



# Calendar

## FROM PAGE 19

America produced by U.S. Ski & Snowboard together with its divisions and clubs. Details: [www.usskiandsnowboard.org](http://www.usskiandsnowboard.org).

- More than 200 teams are expected to take to the ice for the Labatt Blue UP Pond Hockey Tournament in St. Ignace. Thursday evening starts with a meet-and-greet event, followed by a Detroit Red Wings Alumni Team exhibition game on Friday evening. Pond hockey takes center stage Friday and Saturday, with the championship games and awards on Sunday. Information: [www.stignace.com/content/labatt-blue-up-pond-hockey-championship](http://www.stignace.com/content/labatt-blue-up-pond-hockey-championship).

### Feb. 16-17

- Top of the Lake Snowmobile Show & Ride will be held in Naubinway from 7:30 a.m.-8 p.m. Feb. 16 and 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Feb. 17. The featured sled will be the 1968 Ski Doo Olympique celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Plaisted North Pole Expedition. For more information: [www.snowmobilemuseum.com](http://www.snowmobilemuseum.com).

### Feb. 16-18

- Come out to the Petoskey Winter Carnival in downtown Petoskey and Winter Sports Park. There will be lots of cold weather fun and ice sculptures. Details: [www.petoskeydowntown.com/downtown-events/winter-carnival](http://www.petoskeydowntown.com/downtown-events/winter-carnival).

### Feb. 17

- A Lantern-lit Skiing/Snowshoe Walk is scheduled from 6-8 p.m. at Ludington State Park. Visitors can bring cross-country skis and/or snowshoes to ski or walk an easy, one-mile groomed trail lit by oil lanterns that begins at the Warming Shelter. Enjoy a campfire at either end to warm up and sip a hot beverage. The park has 40 pairs of snowshoes to loan for free on a first-come, first-served basis. Park staff can help novice trekkers get



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN DEE

Hit the road and get ready for some fun that is uniquely Michigan this winter.

started. No reservations are needed. The event will be held weather permitting and a Recreation Passport is required for entry. Details: (231) 843-9261 or [www.michigan.gov/ludington](http://www.michigan.gov/ludington).

- A Skiable Feast is 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Feb. 17 at Treetops Resort, 3962 Wilkinson Road in Gaylord. Enjoy a 6 km (3.8 mile) intermediate cross country ski excursion on Treetops' remote Project Nature property at your own pace with five gourmet food and beverage stations along the way. Cost is \$89. For more information, visit [www.treetops.com/general-information/event/skiable-feast](http://www.treetops.com/general-information/event/skiable-feast).

- Winterlochen, Interlochen's annual family-friendly outdoor festival celebrating all things winter, will begin at 10 a.m. at the Interlochen Center for the Arts. The annual event features a full day of hands-on, outdoor experiences geared toward families, like snow painting, a snow treasure hunt, s'mores, frozen fish toss and more. Details: [www.traversecity.com](http://www.traversecity.com).

- Groovy Glaciers is 1:30-3:30 p.m. at WInt Nature Center in Clarkston. As winter winds whip snow across fields, journey back 20,000 years to discover Michigan's glacial past. A goo-filled demonstration will show how glaciers flow, a process which slowly sculpted the state and Crooked Lake in Independence Oaks County Park. Learn to see the landscape differently after a short hike and a themed snack. Cost is \$5/person. Pre-registration with payment is required. Call 248-858-0916 weekdays or Wint Nature Center on Saturdays. Details: [www.OaklandCountyParks.com](http://www.OaklandCountyParks.com).

- A Guided Snowshoe Hike is scheduled from 2-3:30 p.m. at Ludington State Park. The hike highlights the park's nature and history through the park's snow-covered sand dunes, starting at the Warming Shelter. The park has 40 pairs of snowshoes to loan for free on a first-come, first-served basis. Park staff can help novice trekkers get started. No reservations are needed. The event will

be held weather permitting and a Recreation Passport is required for entry. Details: [www.michigan.gov/ludington](http://www.michigan.gov/ludington).

### Feb. 24

- A Skiable Feast is 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Feb. 24 at Treetops Resort, 3962 Wilkinson Road in Gaylord. Enjoy a 6 km (3.8 mile) intermediate cross country ski excursion on Treetops' remote Project Nature property at your own pace with five gourmet food and beverage stations along the way. Cost is \$89. For more information, visit [www.treetops.com/general-information/event/skiable-feast](http://www.treetops.com/general-information/event/skiable-feast).

- Manistee County will feature a moonlight cross-country skiing event from 7-9 p.m. at the Big M Trail. This event is free and open to the public. Skiers head out independently on the trails or can hang out by the bonfire or in the heated shelter and enjoy desserts and hot chocolate. While there aren't lights on the trails, the trails will be visible if the moon is out. If it is cloudy, you may want to bring a headlamp. Details: [VisitManisteeCounty.com](http://VisitManisteeCounty.com).

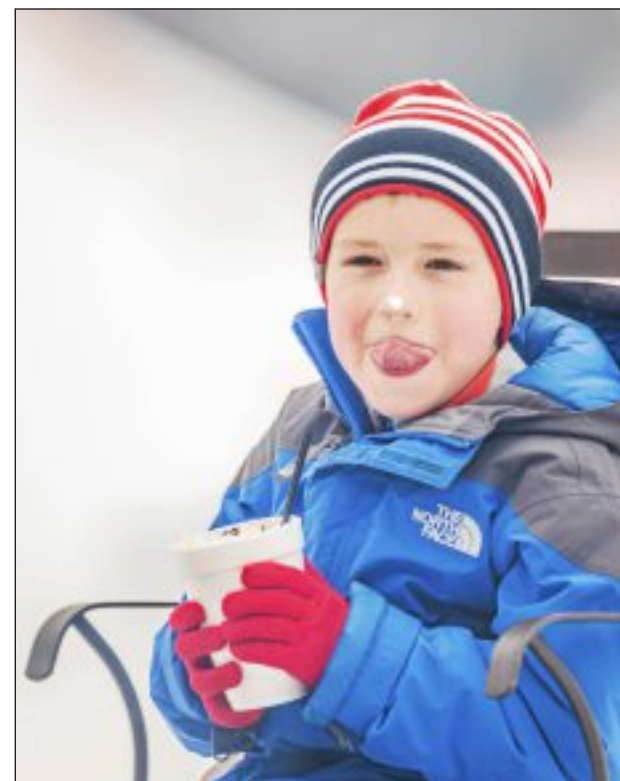


PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAVERSE CITY TOURISM

Bundle up and head outside for some fun during Michigan's winter season.

## MARCH

### March 1

- A Full Moon Snowshoe Hike is 6-9 p.m. at The Summit Grill at The Ridge, 4815 South Old 27 in Gaylord. Details: [www.gaylordmichigan.net/event-detail/full-moon-snowshoe-hike/](http://www.gaylordmichigan.net/event-detail/full-moon-snowshoe-hike/).

### March 3

- A Skiable Feast is 10 a.m.-3 p.m. March 3 at Treetops Resort, 3962 Wilkinson Road in Gaylord. Enjoy a 6 km (3.8 mile) intermediate cross country ski excursion on Treetops' remote Project Nature property at your own pace with five gourmet food and beverage stations along the way. Cost is \$89. For more information, visit [www.treetops.com/general-information/event/skiable-feast](http://www.treetops.com/general-information/event/skiable-feast).

- Shanty Creek Resorts Slush Cup is 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at Shanty Creek Resorts. Watch as skiers and riders attempt to cross an icy 40' pond. Other events include a frozen fish toss, snow shovel racing and a seal slide. Details: [www.traversecity.com](http://www.traversecity.com).

### March 10

- The Charlevoix Dogman Challenge: Fat Bike Race is noon-2 p.m. at Mt. McSaubia in Charlevoix. The Dogman Challenge is a 2-hour winter endurance event held entirely on the multi-use trails around Mt. McSaubia Recreation Area and North Point Nature Preserve in Charlevoix. Details: [www.wmta.org/events/charlevoix-dogman-challenge-fat-bike-race/](http://www.wmta.org/events/charlevoix-dogman-challenge-fat-bike-race/)

### March 16

- Astro Evening will be held from 8-10 p.m. at Red Oaks Nature Center in Madison Heights. Become a star at locating late winter constellations inside StarLab, a portable planetarium. Gaze at deep sky wonders through telescopes provided by the Oakland Astronomy Club (weather permitting). A star-studded craft and snack are included. This program is suitable for school-aged children and adults. Cost is \$4/person. Pre-registration with payment required. Call 248-858-0916 weekdays or Red Oaks Nature Center on Saturdays.



## Winter getaway

# Experience an elk-watching sleigh ride at Thunder Bay Resort

**By Jane Peterson**  
For Digital First Media

If you ask Michiganders about their favorite winter adventures and experiences, chances are snowmobiling, ice fishing, skiing and sledding would rank pretty high on the list. Watching elk roam in the woods probably wouldn't make the list at all.

But it should.

Elk are indigenous to Michigan, but they are rarely seen, mainly because there are approximately 1,000 wild elk spread out over close to 1,000 square miles of heavily forested land, mostly state-owned property or hunting camps, said Jack Matthias, owner of Thunder Bay Resort in Hillman.

"We are right on the edge of the range for wild elk," he said.

To provide guests with a unique experience, Thunder Bay Resort started offering elk tours 27 years ago. However, seeing elk wasn't always guaranteed, so 20 years ago the Matthias family created an elk preserve on wooded property that adjoins the resort and its popular golf course. Thunder Bay Resort's elk tour and gourmet dinner event is unlike any other east of the Rocky Mountains, he said.

Guests enjoy a four-hour experience that begins with a ride through the preserve on a carriage or sleigh, depending on snow conditions. The wooded preserve is home to 45 elk and numerous whitetail deer, so they are typically fairly easy to spot on



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THUNDER BAY RESORT

After viewing elk in a sleigh or carriage, guests arrive at Thunder Bay Resort's Elk Antler Cabin for a gourmet dinner.



Following the elk viewing tour, guests are treated to a delicious five-course gourmet dinner that features crown pork roast and roasted potatoes.

the tour. Along the way, a guide serves up a lot of interesting facts about elk. "Elk are fascinating animals. They are very majestic and their antlers are magnificent. Their antlers can grow an inch a day," said Matthias.

Following the tour, guests are treated to a delicious five-course gourmet dinner. It is prepared fresh on century-old wood stoves

upon their arrival at the cozy and welcoming Elk Antler Cabin. The menu consists of shrimp cocktail, a tartlet made with apples and pears, chicken noodle soup, sweet Napa salad, crown pork roast with roasted potatoes and pan gravy and Italian pizzelles filled with white chocolate mousse and finished with a refreshing raspberry sauce. The meal includes Michigan



An elk in the winter at Thunder Bay Resort.

### Thunder Bay Resort

Thunder Bay Resort is located east of I-75, about a half hour west of Alpena on the sunrise side of the state. It is home to the award-winning elk viewing ride and gourmet dinner, as well as a golf course, RV park, Clubhouse Grill and one-of-a-kind lodging in suites, villas and chalets with a fireplace.

Make reservations by calling 1-800-729-9375, or visit [ThunderBayResort.com](http://ThunderBayResort.com) for more information.

cherry coffee, tea, hot chocolate and a variety of local wines. A cash bar is available for cocktails.

The cabin was decorated in a warm rustic style with period antiques by Matthias' wife, Jan, who also crafted the menu. She passed away three years ago, but her spirit and hospitality live on through each tour. Their son, Spencer, prepares the food, and grandson Wyatt is a guide, making Thunder Bay Resort a true family

business.

"Our staff is friendly, attentive and treat our guests like family, too," said Matthias.

Theme events add to the fun. Upcoming events include Murder Mystery weekends March 16-18, May 4-6, Nov. 2-4 and Nov. 9-11. These weekends are chockful of fun and feature a crime that guest sleuths must solve by searching for clues, questioning suspects and reviewing evidence. Prizes

are awarded to winning teams.

Other events throughout the year include a New Year's Eve Party and Halloween Costume Party. Summer and fall elk tours are also available.

When it comes to winter, elk viewing is definitely a highlight, but other winter activities include hiking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing as well as a number of unique attractions in nearby Alpena.



## Winter getaway



PHOTO COURTESY OF BLAKE'S ORCHARD & CIDER MILL

The Tasting Room, home to Blake's Hard Cider, will also stay open this year — offering a full dinner menu, wine, craft beer and their popular Sunday brunches.

# *Blake's Orchard & Cider Mill to stay open year-round*

For the first time in the family-owned company's history, Blake's has announced that it will remain open year-round for its customers. "We're approaching 72 years in business and we couldn't have done it without our loyal customers and the surrounding communities; what better way to say thank you than to stay open for them" says owner Paul Blake.

Premium hot coffee, a hot chocolate bar, fresh pressed cider, and warm donuts are offered daily.

The orchard has expanded to over 800 acres and still offers the popular u-pick in the summer and fall months. "It didn't happen overnight," adds owner, Peter Blake, "There have been some tough years, but with hard work and some creativity, we adapted, whether it was weather related or economical. Our customers are the reason we have been able to grow, and we want to show them we were listening to their requests to stay open

throughout the year."

The Tasting Room, home to Blake's Hard Cider, will also stay open this year — offering a full dinner menu, wine, and craft beer, and their popular Sunday brunches.

The Cider Mill and Tasting Room continue to drum up unique ideas to bring customers in when it's not peak fall season and have had great success. "People want to get out and have experiences now more than ever, and we offer that with our Murder Mystery Dinners, Yoga and Pints, Paint and Pour, Sunday Brunch, and many others" says Chelsea Iadipaolo, Marketing and Events Manager.

Blake's Hard Cider has announced its expansion into 3 more states, totaling at 16 around the Midwest and beyond.

"Although you can find us at any Meijer, Kroger and 7-Eleven in Michigan, and 15 other states, people want to see where it all started. Our merchandise and to-go

sales room was the original production facility; it's almost unbelievable that we went from 200 sq. ft. to 40,000 in 4 years." The Cider Mill's foot-traffic played a key role in the early stages of the hard cider company's inception, but the two businesses support each other equally in this respect now, she adds.

The Blake companies include its seasonal Big Apple and Almont Garden Center locations, Farm Style Food line, Orchard and Cider Mill, and Hard Cider Company. The Cider Mill will be open Thursday-Sunday 9 a.m.-5 p.m. each week, and the Tasting Room is open Wednesday 2 p.m.-9 p.m. and Thursday-Saturday 11 a.m.-11 p.m. and Sundays 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Stop in for live music every Friday night and brunches on Sundays, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Find more information at [blakefarms.com](http://blakefarms.com) and [blakeshardcider.com](http://blakeshardcider.com).





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Experience a real-life fairy tale as you travel "Over the River and Through the Woods" to view majestic elk & journey to the beautiful Elk Antler Cabin where "Grandma" Jan's son Spencer has prepared a stunning, five-course gourmet dinner before your eyes in genuine century old wood cook stoves. Enjoy up to six of the region's delightful wines while you embrace the ambiance of antiques & trophy mounts in the Elk Antler Cabin. "Step Back In Time" for a fabulous four hour adventure. Your carriage returns you to spacious villas, suites, chalets. Available Summer, Fall and Winter & can be combined with golf in season.



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