

BEST CZECH SKIING

BY SUZY KOHOUT



The season for skiers' and snowboarders' mountain lust is just around the corner. Nature was generous with the Czech Republic when she shared out ski-able mountains among the nations of Europe. Enthusiasts of snowy slopes can place themselves in the winter splendor of the Czech mountains by traveling from Prague one to four hours in any direction. Some examples:

KRKONOŠE

One of the most popular areas in the country for downhill and cross-country skiing, the Krkonoše mountains lie less than two hours' travel north of Prague. The resorts in this area include Špindlerův Mlýn (Svatý Petr), Harrachov, Pec pod Sněžkou, Černá Hora - Janské Lázně, Prkenný Důl - Family Skipark, Rokytnice nad Jizerou and more.

The Krkonoše include the Czech Republic's highest mountain, Sněžka, 1600 meters high. It's a traditional favorite for tourists and locals.

The village of Pec pod Sněžkou is the gateway to Sněžka. From there visitors can take a cable car and capture memorable views of the Krkonoše region before reaching the picturesque peak. Ski services at Pec pod Sněžkou have merged with neighboring Černá Hora, together forming what is now known as the Skiarena Krkonoše. For skiers and snowboards this means a great deal; a single ski lift purchase is valid at both resorts.

Skiarena has three cable cars, 22 ski lifts and almost 19 km of downhill skiing adventure. The modern lift technology at Pec boasts its ability to transport up to 8,750 skiers per hour. Skiers can also purchase a magnetic day pass that extends evening skiing until 9 p. m.

Snowboarding enthusiasts at Pec can challenge themselves to the snowboard park at the Javor slope. The rela-

tively new park has cutting edge jumps, tricks and obstacles. Other snowboarding parks throughout the Krkonoše range are Svatý Petr, Medvědí, Harrachov and Horní Mísečky.

Špindlerův Mlýn is one of the most popular resort destinations in Krkonoše, so much so that at times it's referred to as the pearl of the Krkonoše. Here skiers can find more than 25 km of day and night downhill runs and cross country skiers have more than 100 km of trails available to them. Well-traveled skiers equally compare the quality of Špindlerův Mlýn to Alp ski resort services.

At Harrachov, skiers can sail over 200 meters from Harrachov's largest ski jump. The area is home to eight ski jumps. Each year Harrachov hosts international ski jumping competitions.

Špindlerův Mlýn and Harrachov also offer a year-round bobsled track.

JIZERSKÉ MOUNTAINS

An hour north of Prague by the town of Liberec rests the Jizerské mountain range. It features 115 km of marked cross-country trails. Locals and tourists favor the Jizerská route, the most visited of the cross-country trails. For competitive cross-country skiers there is an annual Jizerská padesátka race.

The most popular downhill winter center in the Jizerské Mountains is Ještěd. It's the tallest mountain at Jizerský at 1,012 meters and is followed by Bedřichov. These resorts cater to all levels of skiers. Unique to Ještěd is its ski jump center, which hosted the 2005 World Championship competition. Ještěd is also a favored stop where visitors can purchase a package deal that includes a ski-lift pass and entrance to the town's indoor aqua park.

Bedřichov is the gateway to 80 km of maintained cross-country trails, known as the Jizerská magistrála. It's also a downhill ski center for beginners and families. With Bedřichov's lighted slopes, skiers can continue well into the evening.

ŠUMAVA

The breathtaking mountain range of Šumava, or the lungs of Europe, covers western Czech Republic and reaches across the German and Austrian borders. This Bohemian Forest is a protected nature area that encompasses pristine woods, natural streams and countless land varia-



Czech Tourism Agency

tions suitable for winter sports. Cross country skiers flock to the Šumava region where 150-km trails are abundant.

Downhill skiers most appreciate the resorts of Zadov, Špičák and Kramolín where slopes challenge the beginner to intermediate skier. Other resorts include Churáňov, Kašperské Hory, Železná ruda, Nová Huť and Kvilda.

The most visited ski resort in Šumava is Špičák, which locals say is challenging even for the most experienced skiers. Here skiers and snowboards can purchase a two-to-seven-day Šumava pass valid for all Zadov, Špičák and Kramolín ski resorts.

Zadov is most known for its intermediate to challenging cross country trails. It also provides a ski jumping zone.

KRUŠNÉ MOUNTAINS AND ORLICKÉ MOUNTAINS

In northern Bohemia where the Czech Republic borders Germany, skiers find smaller crowds and lower prices in the Krušné Mountains. The mountain range's most popular resorts, Klínovec and Boží Dar, both provide terrains park for snowboarders and a snow-tubing slope for family fun. Klínovec includes a special area for children where the ski lift is free. Boží Dar is also popular for its 70 km of cross-country trails.

Orlické Mountains lie closer to the Czech-Polish border. Here skiers also find fewer crowds and prices comparable to those of the Krušné Mountain region. Deštná and Říčky are two of the more popular resorts in the area, with 80 km worth of cross-country and downhill skiing trails.

JESENÍKY AND BESKYDY MOUNTAINS

The Moravian mountains comprise Jeseníky and Beskydy. Downhill and cross-country seasons are known to start as early as October and last until May. Both the Bohemian and Moravian ranges ordinarily receive plentiful natural snow. Overcrowding in Moravia is rarely a problem due to the numerous resorts in this region. Jeseníky is a huge Moravian range with some of the best slopes after Krkonoše. It's a four-hour drive northeast of Prague.

Praděd at 1,491 meters is the highest mountain in the Jeseníky region. Praděd is known best for its cross-country trails. Other preferred downhill and cross-country ski areas in the regions include Červenohorské sedlo, Klepáčov, Hrubý, Nízký Jeseník, Kralické and Ramzová resorts.

Jeseníky's smaller sibling mountain range, the Beskydy Mountains, advertise ski runs for skiers with varied levels of ability. The drive is about three to four hours east of Prague. The most popular resorts for downhill skiers are Pustevny and Bělá. Some of the ski centers in this area also offer night skiing.

Czech skiers say that Pustevny is one of the best ski resorts in Moravia. The resort caters to all skiing abilities. The slopes range from difficult to easy terrain. However, this Moravian resort is also far more known for its 100 km scenic cross-country skiing trails and its slightly elevated close-loop trails for family cross-country ease. Cross-country enthusiasts flock to the 52 km trail, Lysohorska or the 29 km route around Pustevny. ■

More details are available at http://www.skiindex.com/world/show_next.php?association=0&selected=95&menu=81&set=20&layer=2