

Mt. Lemmon Ski Valley

Written by Christine Whitton

At last, winter has arrived. And for Tucsonans, that means counting down the days to many snow-filled weekends on Mt. Lemmon. So in preparation, unpack those furry hats, overstuffed coats, wool scarves and colorful mittens.



Located in the Coronado National Forest, Mt. Lemmon is an hour journey from the base of the Santa Catalina Mountains near the mountaintop village of Summerhaven. (It just so happens to be the southernmost ski destination in the continental United States. Who knew?) Opened seasonally from mid-December to early April (weather permitting), guests can enjoy several months of skiing, snowboarding or sledding on freshly blanketed snow. For those snow bunnies who don't own skis, no worries: Ski Valley's equipment rental shop will have you suited up and on the slopes in no time.



The mountain's 21 trails (20 percent beginner; 38 percent intermediate and 42 percent advanced/expert) cover 200 acres, while two chair lifts make reaching the slopes easier. (During the off season, Mt. Lemmon's chair lift stays operational offering guests a sky ride to the summit showcasing views of Tucson, the Santa Catalinas, San Pedro Valley, the Reef of Rocks and the mountains of Globe and Phoenix, seen off in the distance.) For those new to the sport, don't be shy. Individual or group step-by-step instructions are given to make your experience more pleasant. An hour and a half with these instructors will have you downhill skiing in a jiff.

While you're awaiting a lift back up the mountain, stop in Mt. Lemmon's General Store, located next to the chair lift. It's been said that it sells some of the best homemade fudge around; locals swear by the cookie-dough variety. Pair that with a cup of rich, piping hot chocolate for a quick warm up and a true taste of wintry paradise.



After an adventurous day on the slopes, swing by Ski Valley's Iron Door Restaurant, named after a lost mine with an iron door, for a little refueling. Choose from several hot paninis including its notoriously named Crash and Burn sandwich served with sliced beef, French crispy onions, Ortega chilies, pepperjack cheese and barbecue sauce on a Kaiser roll. Maybe dig in to the Coronado Quiche, a southwestern quiche with Ortega chilies and cheese or a filling bowl of chili and cornbread—always the crowd favorites on a cold day. The perfect warming end to the perfect chilly day. www.skithellemmon.com.