



Ski & Snowboard News From Around the World

Koreans prefer their skiing at Japan resorts

By Kim Hoo-ran

APPI KOGEN, Japan - Sashaying down a pristine white ski slope is one of the greatest pleasures of the winter season for ski enthusiasts.

The deafening silence, broken only by the swoosh of skis cutting through the powdery snow, and the uninterrupted view of a snow covered landscape, a skier feels humbled in the majesty of nature.

For Korean ski lovers looking for new challenges, Japanese ski resorts are quickly becoming an attractive alternative to the crowded slopes of most Korean venues.

Appi Kogen Ski Resort (www.appi.co.jp) in northeast Honshu, boasting 21 trails and three different hotels - Hotel Appi Grand, Appi Grand Villa, and Appi Grand Annex - with a total capacity of 4,100 guests, is one of Japan's premier ski resorts that is just now being discovered by Korean skiers.

Situated next to Towada Hachimantai National Park, Appi Kogen is a unique resort in a country where the vast majority of ski venues are modeled after the ski village concept.

In a typical ski village, skiers stay at individual lodgings some distance from the slopes.

At Appi the convenience of "ski-in and ski-out," - having direct access to the ski slopes from the hotel - is one of its major crowd pullers.

The trails at Appi Kogen are carved out of Mt. Maemori (1,305m) and Mt. Nishimori (1,328m).

With 21 slopes of varying difficulty and length to choose from, everyone from beginners to experts should be able to find something to their taste and ability.

About 30 percent of the slopes are classified as beginner trails, 40 percent for intermediate skiers and 30 percent for experts.

At Appi Kogen Ski Resort, even beginners can come down the slope from the very top of the mountain: The Yamabato Course for beginners, the longest slope at Appi at 5.5 km starts at the very top of Mt. Maemori.

A total of 18 lifts offers a wide choice of slopes and ensures there is very little waiting at the base of the runs.

Of course, as any avid skier will tell you, the quality of snow is all important.

The fake fluff stuff blown out by snow making machines just does not make the cut.

The average snow accumulation at Appi Kogen is about 200 cm per year, guaranteeing a first class skiing experience.

Resort officials boast that the quality of snow is on par

with that found in Hokkaido to the north, primarily because the mountain faces north.

The snow can pile up as high as 2-3 meters.

With abundant snow, the ski season here starts from the first Saturday of December and lasts all the way through May 5, depending on the weather.

The peak season is February to April. Also, you can expect more snow than usual this year, as Japan is right now experiencing heavier than usual snowfall.

While snowboarders are welcome at Appi, skiers make up some 70 percent of the visitors.

"Snowboarding is declining in popularity in Japan," said Hiroshi Joji, sales manager at Appi Kogen Ski Resort, explaining that many boarders are now returning to skiing as they get older.

Although Appi Kogen Ski Resort is one of the largest ski resorts in Japan, it has retained the natural beauty of the snow-capped mountains, some slopes left natural and ungroomed.

Since the ski resort opened 25 years ago, the top two-thirds of Mt. Maemori has been designated national park, making further developments impossible.

Appi Ski Resort is the largest ski resort operated by a single company, the Iwate Hotel and Resort Corp. After nearly going belly-up following the Asian financial crisis of late 1997, the resort has been slowly recovering.

In an attempt to boost business, it began developing the Korean market two years ago and now Koreans make up the largest contingent of foreign visitors, with about 1,000 Koreans visiting the resort last year, according to Joji.

For Korean skiers, Appi Kogen Resort is one of the more easily accessible foreign ski slopes.

There are daily flights from Incheon International Airport to Sendai International Airport, about three hours from the ski resort.

A typical four-day itinerary would yield approximately 27 hours of possible ski time, starting with three hours of nighttime skiing on the day of arrival.

If you are a novice skier, a stay at Appi is an excellent opportunity to get started on the right foot.

Appi Ski and Snowboard School, headed by Kowada, who has extensive experience as ski instructor in Austria and the United States, is staffed by Japanese and Austrian certified instructors.

English-speaking instructors are also available. A two-hour lesson costs 3,200 yen.

Non-skiers can enjoy other activities such as thrilling snow mobile rides and snow shoeing in the woods, discovering the beauty of the winter forest.



A skier and snowboarder enjoy a day at Appi Kogen Ski Resort located in Northern Japan.

For young children, there is Kid's Play Land where they can romp around, enjoy a tube ride down a gentle slope or simply make snow angels.

Some would say apres-ski is as important a part of a ski resort experience as the skiing itself.

There is a large indoor pool, a fitness club and a squash court at the hotel Appi Grand.

Also at the most luxurious of the resort's lodging facilities you will discover a hot spring bath house where you can soak away the tight muscles for the next day's skiing.

For an even more invigorating spa experience, a soak at the Appi Hot Spring Patio's outdoor tub under the falling snow is a must.

The resort has a total of 15 restaurants, including a yaki niku restaurant that serves beef, seafood and pork barbecue grilled on the table, very much like a Korean bulgogi restaurant.

This article was provided courtesy of the Korea Herald. You can find them online at www.koreaherald.co.kr.

Want to get chilly in August? Join in on Chile trip

If you want to extend your ski season well into the summer, why not join in on Alpine Adventures' trip to Valle Nevado, Chile, Aug. 4-13.

The Sacramento-based ski club will be taking a group of skiers and snowboarders (non-skiers/boarders are welcome too) to one of the premiere ski areas in the world.

Called "The most modern ski resort in Chile," Valle Nevado has been in a constant state of development since 1988.

Inspired by the modern-style European resorts, Valle Nevado was built by a French company at the foot of the imposing El Plomo Peak (elevation 5,430 meters).

Valle Nevado's lift system stretches 3,670 meters up the mountain and encompasses 23 miles of trails for all preferences and skill levels.

After its inauguration in 1988, it immediately became an absolute on all the itineraries of ski tourists in South America.

Valle Nevado is not only the newest winter resort in Chile, it is also the largest and most modern.

It's base, located at 3,025 meters (9,922 ft.) above sea level, 60 km. (37 miles) from Santiago, Valle Nevado boasts a skiable surface area of 9,000 hectares (21,600 acres) and an 810-meter (2,656-ft.) drop.

Together with La Parva and El Colorado-Farellones, these three ski centers form the largest skiing area in South America.

In addition, the center has the capacity to create snow and cover 30 percent of the surface area.

For snowboarding fanatics, Valle Nevado is concerned

with staying on top of modern technology and maintains its Snow Park and Half Pipe in perfect condition.

The Half Pipe provides an ultimate experience in the frequently-practiced Free Style method.

The Snow Park also has a special area reserved for jumps, tricks and spins (can also be used with skis).

The ski center also features programs specifically set aside for heliskiing and heliboarding.

There is a Bell 407 helicopter available in Valle Nevado that takes skiers and snowboarders to altitudes of 4,500 meters (14,760 ft.).

Accompanied by experienced guides, skiers and boarders can descend slopes of untouched snow and drop more than 2,000 meters (6,560 ft.), sliding down the steep hillsides of the majestic Andes Mountains.

For further information on the Valle Nevado resort, visit www.vallenevado.cl.

For information on the Aug. 4-13 trip, visit Alpine Adventures at www.HitTheSlopes.org, or call (916) 737-SNOW.



The Valle Nevado Ski Center in Valle Nevado, Chile.