

M TRAVELER: RIB MOUNTAIN STATE PARK

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF VISIT WAUSAU

No need to hibernate this winter. Pack up the skis and snowboards and the family and head north to Wausau in Marathon County, where playing in the snow is a way of life. Just southwest of Wausau is Rib Mountain State Park, featuring some of the oldest geologic formations on Earth. Both Rib Mountain and Wausau are hubs of Wisconsin winter sports and recreation.

WHERE TO STAY

Let it snow! Après ski, lounge in front of a wood-burning fireplace in your room at Rib Mountain Inn, located next to the Granite Peak ski area and steps away from Rib Mountain State Park. If the kids want to make a splash, check into the Grand Lodge Waterpark Resort, where adults can indulge in the whirlpool or enjoy a beverage at Lumber-Jack's Bar. Kids will love the log bunk beds. The luxurious Stewart Inn bed-and-breakfast in Wausau, on the National Register of Historic Places, features gourmet multicourse breakfasts, double steam showers and a nightly wine and cheese reception.

WHAT TO DO

Take an invigorating candle-light snowshoe hike at Rib Mountain State Park on Jan. 14, starting at 5:30 p.m. Admission is free, but be warned, these events fill up quickly. The park offers organized, fun activities for both kids and adults throughout the winter. Snowshoe or winter hike

on more than 13 miles of trails winding through towering forests. On the mountain's north face, high-speed lifts at Granite Peak will whisk you up to the top of prime ski hills for both beginners and seasoned skiers and snowboarders. Sylvan Hill Park in Wausau boasts a 1,200-foot tubing hill — the longest in the state. Don't miss the Badger State Winter Games in Wausau and surrounding areas every weekend from Jan. 6 through Feb. 25.

WHERE TO DINE

Start the day with a hearty breakfast at the retro Mint Café. Looking for the ultimate burger? The Redeye Brewing Company's Wisconsin Burger on a potato bun is locally sourced, with grass-fed beef, caramelized onion, Carr Valley six-year cheddar, Nueske's bacon and Stoney Acres Farm maple syrup aioli. Pair it with one of Redeye's signature craft beers. Find the "up north" Wisconsin supper club experience at Michael's in Wausau. Classics such as steak, lobster tail and beef Wellington

are on the menu, and regulars say the extensive wine list makes this a must-try.

WHAT'S NEXT

In spring, summer and fall, take in spectacular views at the 60-foot observation tower at Rib Mountain State Park. Get close to nature by hiking the park's many trails; bring your picnic basket and your dog (leashed, of course).

Learn the stories behind the quilts in the collection of the Marathon County Historical Society in Wausau, on exhibit through May. Locals gather every Wednesday for concerts at the "400 Block" in Wausau, 401 Third St. Two designated trout streams meander through Nine-Mile County Forest Recreation Area, and that park's cross-country ski trails are open for mountain biking from early May to mid-October. **M**

VAIL RESORTS, the new owner of Wilmot Mountain, is investing a reported \$13 million in renovations to reinvigorate the ski, snowboarding and tubing area. Improvements include upgrading lifts, modernizing snow-making equipment, and renovating the lodge's Iron Kettle restaurant's lounge and bar, reintroduced as Walt's Tavern. A new, dedicated children's area features ski lessons and a snowboard school. Visit wilmotmountain.com to plan a trip.

