

The stunningly beautiful Nozawa Onsen is among Japan's top ski resorts and draws winter sports enthusiasts between late November and early May. They've been skiing here since 1912, a few years before its first ski club was founded. When Austrian skier Hannes Schneider's modern methods made their way to the country in 1930, helping popularize a new and exciting sport, Nozawa Onsen was where he showed off his skills. The town is justly proud of its sporting pedigree, boasting no fewer than sixteen Olympians, and in 1998 Nozawa Onsen hosted the biathlon tournament of the Nagano Winter Olympics. The 297-hectare-wide ski area, blessed with plenty of natural powder snow, comprises thirty-six different slopes, perfect for both beginners and advanced skiers. If you are new to skiing and snowboarding, or are visiting with your family, then the wide, gentle slopes of the Uenotaira area, accessible via the Hikage and the Nagasaka gondola, is for you.

The Yamabiko area is home to the Skyline Course, a 3,500-meter long powder snow run stretching from the summit to the base area along the ridge of the mountain. Advanced skiers and snowboarders might want to take on the Schneider course, a steep and bumpy powder snow run that's not for the faint-hearted. If you're not quite at that level yet, take the moving walkway Yu Road to the Hikage Base, which houses a ski and snowboard school, as well as a children's park that has several playgrounds and fun activities. For a calmer winter adventure, the resort organizes a range of entertaining non-skiing activities. Board a snowcat and venture out to untouched areas—breathtaking views guaranteed—or put your snowshoes on and tramp through fairytale-like white forests. Whether you're into the serene scenery or the high-octane winter sports, after a day out in the ski resort, nothing beats heading down to the Nozawa Onsen village and unwinding in the hot springs.