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6 Winter Sports You've Never Tried but Should

Winter is short; try these unsung snow sports before it's over.

If you've ever watched the Winter Olympics, you know that athletes can do some pretty gnarly things in snow. Take snowboarder Shaun White, for instance. There's only one acceptable word for his signature move, the Double McTwist 1260: sick. Or how about skier Torrey Helgeland? He sheds black diamonds like they're bunny slopes. To pros like them, powder is power, and they wield it like knights with swords.

But you, Sir, are not a pro. For you, snow isn't an instrument. It's an impediment. It's something you have to shovel, wipe off, trudge through and drive in. It's cold. It's wet. And there's nothing you can do about it except grit your teeth behind a gear scarf and pray for summer.



And yet ...

Snow doesn't have to suck. Although you'll probably never dominate at the Winter Games, you can reclaim winter by embracing an Olympic misadventure instead of an obstacle, where athletes like White and Helgeland see snow as an opportunity — and so should you. Because snow isn't just freezing, it's also really fun. And not just for skiers and snowboarders. If the slopes aren't for you, try your hand at these lesser-known winter sports before your chances melt. (And remember: Safety first, fellow!

1. Skijoring

If you're looking for a romantic winter date idea, it's hard to beat a sleigh ride. But if you're looking for a winter adventure, instead, try skijoring — where harness pull your instead of a sleigh. Derived from the Norwegian word "skijoring," which means "ski driving," it's a popular pastime for cowboys, many of who trade cowboy boots for ski boots when the cables hangs up its hat for winter. The concept is simple but exhilarating: You don a pair of skis, then you tie yourself to a horse (or a dog, or even a snowmobile) that drags you at high speeds through the snow. Crazy? Maybe. Fun? Definitely.

2. Kite skiing

If being pulled by a horse is too much adrenaline for you, turn down the volume a skosh and try kite skiing. Instead, also known as snowkiting, kite skiing is winter's answer to kite surfing. Wearing a pair of skis and holding a power kite, you let the wind pull you across the snow. Although it's usually pretty tame, with enough wind you might be able to catch some modest air.

3. Snow kayaking

If you like to paddle in the summer, then you should try your hand at snow kayaking, wherein you grease the bottom of a traditional kayak and ride it down a snowy slope, using your paddles to guide and maneuver as if you were on a stream or lake. While regular kayaking is slow, however, snow kayaking is fast: Whereas kayakers on water typically go about 3 miles per hour, kayaks going downhill on snow can go up to 30 miles per hour or faster. It's like sledding, but on steroids.

4. Shovel racing

If you don't have a kayak, you can create a makeshift sled out of something much simpler: a shovel. That's the basis for shovel racing, wherein riders sit on the shovel end of a snow shovel, grip the handle, then ride down a snowy hill alongside fellow competitors in a race to the bottom. Another version of the sport is walk racing, where you ride a giant sled down the hillside instead of a shovel.

5. Yukigassen

Named for a Japanese word that means "snow battle," yukigassen is what you get when you combine snowball fighting with capture the flag. A team sport that's played on an icy court, players split the opposing team with snowballs while trying to avoid incoming fire by seeking shelter behind small barriers. If you're hit, you're out. Each team has a flag at opposite ends of the field, and the object of the game is to capture your opponent's flag. If you want to play, here's another Japanese word you should learn: "tanoshi," which means "fun."

6. Ice yachting

Just because it's frozen over doesn't mean you can't take a boat out on your favorite river or lake. Thanks to ice yachting, or ice sailing, you can. A favorite sport of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who used to do it on New York's Hudson River, ice yachting involves sailing across a frozen body of water in a modified boat that has steel runners on the bottom of it — like ice skates attached to the hull. As with traditional sailing, you have to harness the wind to do it, which takes patience and skill. No boat? No problem. A modified version of ice yachting involves wearing ice skates on skis and holding a "wing" that propels you with wind like a mini hang glider.

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