

Where to ski within one to two hours of Calgary

Skate skiing, groomed trails

Hawkrige Centre, groomed daily—one of the best places for beginners to develop their technique and an excellent season starting point for anyone to refresh their skills. For busy people, it is the closest place in Calgary to enjoy the views, do a quick ski, have a shower, and hop back to work in about two to three hours' time.

COP. Easily accessible, Canada Olympic Park is mainly for downhill skiers and it shows. The circuit for Nordic skiing is quite challenging and, quite frankly, a bit boring, the same way running indoors might be boring for some. However, the hardy bunch swear by it, and truly it is the closest place to ski in Calgary.

Canmore Nordic Centre. The Mecca of competitive Nordic skiing in this part of the country, it has its problems with snow early in the season, but artificial snow supplements whatever falls early. While the trails in full season are magnificent, with great views and a variety of difficulties, from moderate to advanced, the centre is run by the government and it shows. The attitude toward customer is less than welcoming, and the showering facilities require the customer to feed loonies into a slot while showering. However, it is worthwhile to go there, especially mid-week, as there are considerable crowds on the weekend and trails are frequently closed for competition. Check snow conditions and the schedule before you leave Calgary.

Mount Shark, Kananaskis. Nice and easy, most of it, but check with the Park office. The trails have snow, usually skiable early and late in the season; however, the trail grooming mid-week may be poor.

Moraine Lake, Lake Louise. Up and up you go. Come back the same way, thankfully. Tough for skaters, it is usually one of the first trails available for skiers early in the season, but only if Parks Canada decides to groom it, which is not obvious. The trail is usually left in poor shape and icy late in the season.

Nipika Lodge, Kooteneys. Great place for advanced and beginners alike. Skiing is from your lodge. Check ski conditions. Invite a crowd and rent a small lodge. Have fun around a fireplace, while your buddies are cooking the meal. A must, at least once in season.

Classic skiing, groomed trails

All of the above plus

Shaganappi Golf Course, if there is snow in town. Grooming by Calgary Ski Club.

Peter Lougheed Park. This is the Mecca of classic touring skier. For some reason, Provincial parks do not like skaters, at least so it seems, because it could be very easy to groom the trails for both, as they are very wide. With many, many trails of various difficulties, the deeper you drive into the park, the more snow you find at higher elevations. Grooming is always a problem, especially early and late in the season as well as mid-week, so check the conditions and even that information might not be adequate, as it is usually downloaded a day or so before you check it.

Lake Louise. Many, many trails departing from Chateau Lake Louise. Moderate difficulty, great views. It can hardly get better. Also, for an easy trail, try the divide.

Kananaskis Valley. When there is enough snow and grooming, excellent and easy for beginners and family.

Banff National Park, inquire with the park about the trails, usually beginners to moderate.

Backcountry trails, skier set trails

Most of the hiking trails with moderate elevation gain. Lake O'Hara, Skokie, Mount Assiniboine, etc. Check with the Parks.

Central and Northern Alberta, the Edmonton region has a wonderful Elk Lake Provincial Park trail system. Worth a weekend outing. The trails are easy to moderate.

In other regions, check with Cross-country ski clubs in the area. They usually groom the local trails and can provide info.