



Itinerary Overview

Backcountry Skiing and Snowboarding

Pre-Requisite: You must be an upper-level intermediate skier or snowboarder for this course. You should be able to safely and efficiently navigate trees, ungroomed terrain, and black diamond runs. Slow is okay, safe is essential.

Course Description

Welcome, you're in for the experience of a lifetime! Imagine hiking up pristine, snowy, alpine ridges and ripping back down through fresh, untouched powder. Imagine setting up snow camp high in a valley overlooking the Rocky Mountains, and settling down for the night under a thick blanket of shimmering stars. Each day you will be getting to better know your new environment, learning about the terrain, the snowpack and yourself, laughing with your expedition mates, and exploring America's most famous mountain range.

You don't need to have previous backcountry experience to fully embrace this extraordinary expedition. In the mountains, you will learn both the basics and the finer points of living and traveling in the winter backcountry, including an introduction to avalanche safety. You will scale peaks high above treeline and stop often to admire awe-inspiring vistas.

Your Instructors are dedicated educators and highly qualified backcountry skiers and snowboarders. They will serve as teachers, trainers, and mentors as you learn the skills required for backcountry winter travel. Through daily discussions, they will also help you and your group to discover the larger meaning to be found in these activities. You will discover much about yourself: how you deal with uncertainty, stress and challenge; your passions and frustrations; and how you can work better with others. You will learn how to find online Avalanche Bulletins, how to interpret what the experts are telling you, and how to apply that to your travel. You will also learn about the mechanics of avalanches, the basics of reading the snowpack, and how to make safe decisions in avalanche terrain through both time in the classroom and real world experience.

Nothing about winter travel is easy. This course may be the hardest thing you have ever done. You should be aware of what you're getting into and be excited about tackling the challenges. From steep mountain hiking with a heavy sled to bracing against an icy wind on an exposed ridge, wilderness travel in the winter is rugged and rewarding. Our theme on this course is "Work hard to play hard", because you'll earn every turn and stunning view. Past students and staff agree that arriving physically fit and mentally prepared to take on challenges will enhance your experience and allow you to take full advantage of your expedition.





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Basecamp and Training – Your course begins with a few days at our premier wilderness base camp, the Leadville Mountain Center. Here you will meet your instructors, get your gear and start working with your crew. The first three days of the course are spent focusing on riding Colorado snow, avalanche safety, backcountry camping and traveling skills, and how to thrive in the winter environment. Day 1 is all about ensuring you have the right gear and clothing for the week. Day 2 is spent riding at a nearby resort where your instructors will assess your abilities and help you improve your technique. This resort day helps you get your legs under you and acclimate to the altitude. Much of your course will be over 11,000'. Day 3 is spent touring in the backcountry. You'll focus on uphill travel techniques and avalanche rescue skills. This is also a time to test your gear, and make any replacements before the multi-day expedition. During the basecamp section you will be sleeping in a heated dorm with showers, and eating in a dining hall.

Backcountry Skiing and Snowboarding Expedition - For many students, the expedition experience is the course high point. This 4-day tour involves carrying your food and gear into the backcountry in packs and on snow sleds. You and your crew will carve a camp in the snow below beautiful, gladed slopes, and jagged peaks. Snow camping gives everyone permission to be a kid again – you can sculpt snow furniture, style out a kitchen and dining room, or build a snowman to guard camp while you're away. Once camp is established you'll head out for awesome turns. Depending on conditions you may attempt to summit a high peak, or you may focus on quality powder runs.

Traveling in the backcountry in winter is different from skiing or riding at the resort. Instead of spending time catching air or cruising groomers, you will spend your time learning how to travel and have fun in the backcountry. Your instructors will coach you in backcountry-specific riding techniques such as surviving tight trees, or staying afloat in bottomless powder. The turns are fewer, but sweeter.



Introduction to Avalanches Field Course – During this course you will complete an “Introduction to Avalanches Field Course” curriculum, as outlined by the American Avalanche Association. The primary focus will be on using a professional Avalanche Hazard Bulletin, and applying it to your decision making. Along the way you'll also learn:

- Why avalanches occur
 - How to identify avalanche terrain
 - How group dynamics can lead to or prevent avalanche accidents
- Basic rescue techniques using a beacon, probe and shovel



Sample Itinerary

The following is an example of what your itinerary may look like. Your actual course plan will vary according to weather, conditions, your group's skills and abilities, and your instructors' preferences.

Day 1 - Arrive at our mountain basecamp in Leadville, CO. Issue gear, begin course introduction.

Day 2 - Ride lifts at a local resort. Evening avalanche lessons and conversations.

Day 3 - Day tour – begin putting your new avalanche awareness to use in the backcountry. Prep for expedition.

Day 4 - Head into the backcountry, carrying your gear in sleds and backpacks. Set up basecamp.

Days 5-7 - Day tours from basecamp. See up close what a layered snowpack looks like and talk about appropriate travel routes. Take time to ride untouched snow.

Day 8 - Transportation home early in the morning.

