

Skiing

(Guidelines & Regulations)

**The Department of Tourism,
The Administration of Union Territory of
Ladakh**



SKIING IN LADAKH

One of the many wonderful activities that the landscape of Ladakh offers its guests is Skiing & Snow Boarding. It is one of the most appreciated and adventurous activities in the region. The snowy slopes and the Rocky Mountains, the chilly winds, the fresh aromas in the air, and the rugged landscapes are ideal for Skiing. The scope and potential for this adventure sport in Ladakh are immense. Skiing is not only an adventure sport but also part of the Winter Olympics and can generate employment through tourism. Indian skiing is so competently priced that if the desired infrastructure is developed, Ladakh could become a major ski destination.

The mystical lands of Ladakh are best for Skiing. The mesmerizing landscapes, colorful monasteries, the Himalayan range, and unrivaled thrill, all make skiing in Ladakh an experience that you do not forget easily.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh to streamline and promote adventure activities in Ladakh in a regulated manner is issuing the Guidelines & Regulations for carrying out Skiing. These guidelines shall extend to the whole of the Union Territory of Ladakh and come into force from the date of its notification.

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh recommends following the guidelines & regulations for Skiing, issued by the Adventure Tour Operators Associations of India (ATOAI) and endorsed by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

These guidelines will act as a defining force with respect to the procedures to be followed, mandatory trainings for guides/instructors, equipment to be used, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), necessary documentation, risk mitigation processes, addressing medical concerns, emergencies, rescue operations, safety briefing, etc. All Adventure Tour Operators (ATOs) shall follow these guidelines while conducting Skiing in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

VALIDITY

The 'Guidelines & Regulation for Skiing' will remain valid for five (5) years, from the date of its notification. All Adventure Tour Operators (ATOs) are advised to strictly adhere to the terms and conditions of these guidelines and follow its best implementation for the sustainable development of the adventure tourism ecosystem in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

ENCLOSURES

- Annexure 1 – Guidelines & Regulations for Skiing in the Union Territory of Ladakh
- Annexure 2 – Implementation Framework for the Union Territory of Ladakh

ANNEXURE 1

GUIDELINES & REGULATIONS FOR SKIING

1. INTRODUCTION

With 73 percent of the Himalayan range, India offers huge opportunities for Skiing. The scope and potential for this adventure sport in India are immense. Skiing is not only an adventure sport but also part of the Winter Olympics and can generate employment through tourism. Indian skiing is so competently priced that if the desired infrastructure is developed, India could become a major ski destination. Currently, Auli in Uttarakhand is the only ski slope registered with International Ski Federation. The infrastructure at Auli needs to be developed and connectivity improved. Gulmarg is the best that India has to offer but since its slopes are not homologized, it is not registered with IFS. This is followed by Solang and Narkanda in Himachal Pradesh which do not have proper ski infrastructure. Besides the regular ski and snowboarding activities, Heli Skiing in India offers some of the best powder conditions in the world, at high altitudes. This is a major attraction for advanced skiers/snowboarders from all over the world. Other than alpine skiing and snowboarding, India has a small but active Cross Country ski market. This is one area that has scope for development. Since snow skiing is limited to a few winter months, new ski disciplines such as grass skiing and roller skiing have been added to this sport, to ensure year-round activity. There is huge scope for profitable private investment in synthetic ski slopes, grass ski slopes, and roller ski runs since these events are part of international skiing competitions.

2. CHALLENGES

Access is the main issue today. Other than Gulmarg, all ski areas have an issue with connectivity, with no airports close by or irregular flight connections. In most cases, the drive can last anywhere between 5 to 12 hours to get to a ski area.

3. QUALIFIED INSTRUCTORS

Though one will find many guides and instructors to teach clients, most of them are not qualified or certified. There is an immediate need to set standards of coaching in India. Being injury-prone, skiing should not be permitted without qualified instructors unless tourists are qualified from a recognized institute. Instructors must be qualified in advanced ski courses from IISM (Indian Institute of Skiing and Mountaineering, Gulmarg), and JIM&WS Pahalgam. Army and ITBP have their training institutes and their instructors are at par with National or state ski instructors.

4. SAFETY ON AND OFF-PISTE

Ski Instructors/ Guides must be able to assess weather and mountain hazards (avalanches, snow conditions, and terrain) correctly, respond and behave appropriately and be able to take immediate action in the event of an accident. The candidate should be familiar with and able to implement local/FIS rules. The instructor must brief clients about the local culture and a strict 'leave no trace policy on the mountain.

5. EQUIPMENT

Equipment available for rent must be thoroughly inspected before use.

6. SKI PATROL AND EVACUATIONS

Gulmarg is the only ski area in India that has a formal Ski Patrol team that is well-trained and equipped. None of the other areas have a dedicated team to monitor slopes and skiers. This should be made into a minimum requirement for a state to operate a ski area. Evacuation remains a vexing issue since neither medical facilities nor evacuation systems are in a position in major ski areas. Gulmarg is perhaps the only area where the Indian Army and Air Force have a system to evacuate injured skiers.

7. GUIDES AND TRAINING

1. The instructor should be proficient in Hindi/local language and English as a medium of instruction.
2. The instructor should be able to grade up lessons in a step wise manner covering walking exercises, basic swings, parallel turns, etc.
3. All ski/snowboarding guides must have valid First Aid/CPR certification.
4. Must preserve local flora, fauna and environment.
5. Ski guides must have skiing certification from a national or international skiing or snowboarding Institute, approved by the Director of the local snow-sport school.
6. The instructor should be able to teach all guest categories and age groups, as a group or individual one-on-one lesson.
7. The instructor should be able to judge extreme weather conditions and other hazards like avalanches, snow conditions, and blizzards.

8. GROUP SIZES

The instructor/student ratio should be small and manageable. The ideal group strength should not be more than 10 persons per instructor. The group must be formed based on the participant's age, learning ability, and prior proficiency.

9. TOUR OPERATOR / AGENTS

The tour operator on the ground must be registered with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, OR State/UT Tourism body as an Adventure Tour Operator.

10. EQUIPMENT USE

The correct use and proper maintenance of equipment are essential for conducting safe skiing and snowboarding activities. Whenever equipment is hired the tour operator must ensure that:

1. Ski equipment is fully serviceable with all components and is routinely checked every time it is used.
2. Snow sport helmets are in good condition and certified by a recognized safety standards organization.
3. Ski boots and bindings are compatible with each other.
4. Ski helmets must be of the correct fitting and size.
5. Only fully qualified technicians to undertake the fitting of equipment.
6. The tension on bindings must be fitted with due consideration to the age, weight, height, and ability of the participant and the manufacturer's instructions.
7. The ski binding must be put at the correct tension level looking at the proficiency of the skier and their weight.
8. Boots must be dry and in full working order with no significant damage that could reduce performance. All fastenings must be fully functional.
9. Skis and boots should be numbered and easily identifiable.
10. The tour operator must regularly check that these conditions are being met and should be able to provide evidence of such checks upon request.

11. SKI LIFTS

1. The tour operator should have tested and used the lift system, particularly those parts dedicated to beginners.
2. The whole ski area and line of lifts must be under the watch of the operator who should be able to take immediate action in case of an accident.
3. Resorts must be assessed by the tour operator as suitable for the age group and activity.
4. Both lift system and runs, particularly nursery slopes, should be able to absorb the number of tourists in a group without causing dangerous overcrowding.
5. Lifts should be suitable for the age and experience of the group being handled.

12. INSPECTIONS & MAINTENANCE PROCEDURES

Whenever skiing equipment is owned by the operator, independent inspections and maintenance are to be carried out before the commencement of the season. This requires sound knowledge of equipment and therefore must be carried out by a qualified technician. As a minimum, the inspector must be a qualified instructor. Basic inspections must be carried out after every use by the guide/escort and records maintained. The edges and bindings must be in good working condition.

13. SOPs & OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS

All skiing activities must begin with a thorough safety briefing. Operators must ensure that clients are briefed about the appropriate dress code, medical concerns, and age limit before the skiing trip. The instructor as well as the Tourists Participating in these activities must get Physical Fitness Certificate from a Physician. The SOP should cover the following:

1. DOs and DON'Ts for the ski resort/area. Proper instructions are to be given on procedures.
2. Procedure for use of Ski Lift, timing, ticketing, and local customs.
3. Manufacturer's manual for the ski equipment in use.
4. Location and identification of slopes that require a minimum proficiency level.
5. Instruction procedures.
6. The outer limits of the skiing area and any known hazards.
7. Appropriate Personal clothing and protective gear.
8. Emergency and accident procedures, responsibilities, and reporting.
9. A fully equipped first aid kit is available on the slope.

14. RISK MITIGATION

1. The entire ski area must be mapped, and the ski runs graded in color codes for easy identification.

2. Extensive signage on and off the slopes to show run grading, off piste and groomed areas and area under ski patrol.
3. Must ensure that skiers on Black and Red runs are always accompanied by a qualified mountain ski guide.
4. Every Mountain Ski guide must carry Recco or similar systems for avalanche rescue, avalanche poles, first aid, walkie-talkies, and cell phones.
5. A first aid kit must be available in the ski area itself. In addition, a detailed Emergency Action Plan must be written that includes contact numbers of the available emergency services. Evacuation routes and emergency procedures must be included in the company's risk assessment.

15. SAFETY BRIEFING FOR BEGINNERS

1. Wear appropriate clothing in layers, that will protect you from wind and cold.
2. Carry /drink enough water, a minimum of 3-4 liters every day.
3. Always carry extra knee and ankle support with you.
4. Always unbuckle your ski boots while walking to reduce strain on your ankles. At the same time ensure that boots are re-buckled and fasten all loose clothing and gear before commencing your run.
5. Listen carefully to all instructions. Follow the defined line and do not hesitate to get clarifications from your instructor.
6. Maximum accidents happen while taking a ski lift, skiers should not be allowed to use ski lifts until they develop full confidence. to use their ski equipment properly. Read signage and listen to instructions carefully. Never disobey your instructors on the slopes.

16. SAFETY BRIEFING FOR INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED SKIERS

1. Be aware of prevailing weather conditions and predicted patterns. Wear and carry appropriate gear.
2. Always have a walkie-talkie or mobile phone (where applicable)/wireless set in your pack in case you get separated.
3. Always ski with the group and follow instructions, avoid skiing alone.
4. Understand clearly the location of avalanche zones and if a ski patrol is active in the area.
5. Read avalanche warnings before you get onto the Black or Red runs.
6. You must have a Recco system to trace you in case of an avalanche incident.
7. Plan to finish your last run of the day latest by 1600 hrs so that there is enough daylight time to initiate a rescue if needed.
8. If you and your buddy/instructor are going Off Piste, then ensure that you leave information behind outlining the area you plan to ski/snowboard in.
9. Carry emergency rations and an extensive medical kit in case you need to spend a night in the open.

17. MEDICAL CONCERNS

Clients must be physically fit before a ski holiday and highlight the following medical concerns before booking a ski package. Operators must get a medical opinion from a qualified doctor clearing the guest for skiing and snowboarding, in case any of the following concerns are highlighted the activity should not be undertaken:

1. Asthma (must carry inhalers)
2. High Blood Pressure
3. Heart disease or recent open-heart surgery
4. Diabetes
5. Knee-related problems
6. Severe spinal issues
7. Pregnancy
8. Severe allergies
9. Recent surgery/hospitalization
10. Any other ailments that you may deem life-threatening in outdoor conditions

18. BASIC MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR GRANT OF RECOGNITION TO OPERATORS

1. The operator must have a minimum of two instructors on full-time employment or long-term contract (minimum 12 months).
2. The instructors must have completed an advanced level skiing/snowboarding course from an International/ National or State Level ski institute. Instructors must have valid First Aid/CPR certification.
3. The Operator must have / or show proof of being able to hire a minimum of 20 serviceable sets of ski/snowboard equipment including clothing and gear.
4. The operator must have adequate and up-to-date knowledge of the ski areas and runs available.
5. The operator must be able to identify the slope and area of operation based on the qualification and experience of the ski instructor/tourists.
6. In case the operator is operating in Off Piste sections that are not in the purview of the local Ski Patrol, they must be able to clearly define and display a rescue and evacuation policy.

7. For running trips off-piste, Black and Red sections, the instructors leading the group must be able to prove that they have skied/boarded the runs at least once before taking any clients on the same section.
8. The operator must have a wireless/walkie-talkie/mobile phone set to use on the slopes.
9. The operator must carry a First Aid kit and water on each trip.
10. The operator must maintain live records of all guests on the slopes on any given day and time. These come in handy in case of any emergency/rescue.
11. The company must follow a strict 'leave no trace policy and conform to high sustainability standards.

Draft

ANNEXURE 2 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR THE UNION TERRITORY OF LADAKH

1. CONSTITUTION OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, by notification/ order will constitute a 'Technical Committee' for Skiing with the following members:

Composition of the Technical Committee	
Director (Tourism), UT Ladakh	Chairperson
Chief Wildlife Warden / Representative, Wildlife Department	Member
Principal ISM, Kargil Branch	Member
Principal FCI/ IHM, Leh	Member
Representative of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF)	Member
Representative of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) for Skiing	Member
Representative of the Ladakh Association for Skiing	Member
Assistant Director (Tourism), Concerned	Convening Member

2. FUNCTIONS OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Technical Committee shall meet once every year before the start of the tourist season in the Union Territory of Ladakh, and shall be responsible for the following:

- Inspect and certify the equipment with the operator from a safety point of view.
- Scrutinize the credential of the personnel responsible for conducting Skiing, the medical fitness of the guide, and conduct their physical test to ascertain their expertise.
- Ensure that the operator and the guide shall follow all safety procedures indicated in their rules.
- Identify new areas/ routes/ tracks for Skiing in the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- Notify the exact stretches on the identified areas/ routes/ tracks where the operation can be safely conducted, considering the area's environmental sensitivity, critical wildlife hotspots and fragile water systems.
- Formulate a plan for containing the environmental impact strictly inside the designated activity area.
- Forecast the potential ecological impacts and ensure a plan for eco-conditioning to minimize the impact and offsetting the potential environmental impact.
- Ensure preparation and implementation of a Risk Management Matrix, and Emergency & Evacuation plan.
- Ensure preparation of a plan for tourist awareness and education.
- Determine the capacity of each track every year before the start of any operation.

3. CONSTITUTION OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEE

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, by notification/ order will constitute a 'Regulatory Committee' for Skiing with the following members:

Composition of the Regulatory Committee	
Assistant Director (Tourism), Concerned	Chairperson
Wildlife Warden or Representative, Wildlife Department	Member
Representative of the District Disaster Response Force (DDRF)	Member
Representative of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO)	Member
SHO/Choki of the Concerned Area	Member
Representative of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) for Skiing	Member
Representative of the Ladakh Association for Skiing	Member
Officer in-charge of the Department of Tourism, UT Ladakh at Sub-Division and Tehsils	Convening Member

4. FUNCTIONS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEE

The Regulatory Committee shall meet once every year before the start of the tourist season in the Union Territory of Ladakh, and shall be responsible for the following:

- Overall control for regulating the Skiing operations, in coordination with the concerned stakeholders and associations.
- Surprise inspections during the Skiing operations to ascertain adherence of the guidelines, assess the quality & condition of equipment being used and assess the ecological impact, to help develop adaptive management strategies. The Regulatory Committee shall constitute a joint inspection or verification team with the Department of Youth Services & Sports, UT Ladakh and Adventure Sports Association, if any.
- Establish a mechanism for receiving and addressing complaints, concerns, and feedback from local communities, tourists, and stakeholders.

- Any other functions concerning Skiing operations in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

5. CLAIM ON ACCOUNT OF ANY MISHAP

The Department of Tourism, or any other Department/ Authority of the Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, in no way be responsible for any claims on account of any mishap.

6. SHOW CAUSE NOTICE

If any operator, guide, or personnel responsible for conducting ATV operations is found to be violating these Guidelines & Regulations for Skiing, appropriate action shall be taken by the Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh.

Draft