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# WINTER DAYS BRING FESTIVALS AND RECREATION

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## **BY HEATHER RULE**

The days are shorter and colder, but winter is not a time trails, fat-tire biking, sledding, skating, snowmobiles, and outdoor festivals call to get visitors moving and active to stay warm, and have a blast!

Fergus Falls, well-known for outdoor recreation year-round, has nearly 350 miles of groomed snowmobile trails connecting Fergus Falls to beautiful Maplewood State Park and the Central Lakes Trail. The countryside vistas are dotted with business including lodging, food, beverages and fuel, and beckon riders to fire up their sleds for an adventure. The North Country National Scenic Hiking Trail is a great spot for winter hiking. Look for the blue blazes on trees and posts. There's even a Christmas tree decorated en route! Find that treasure just south of the Red Sox park gateway.

Winter bicycling? Of course! The Ferber Mountain Bike Trail is fun year-round. Bring your fat-tire bike (or rent one at Central Lakes Cycle). Skaters will enjoy outdoor rinks (with night-lights and warming houses) or the indoor arena. And cross-country skiing is popular too. Spidahl's Ski Gaard has several degrees of difficulty within the trail system, spanning 350 acres in the beautiful Maplewood hills of Otter Tail County, just north of Fergus Falls. Equipment rental makes it a breeze for your next adventure.

## **Winter Events**

The first Saturday in December is reserved for the Over the River Festival. This full-day celebration is a fantastic kick-off to Christmas and the holiday season.

"It promotes our local arts community and brings people together," said NeTia Bauman, coordinator of the Over the River Festival. One of the most popular events of the day is when Santa Claus flies into the airport (in an airplane, not his sleigh) with families there to watch and participate in a meet-and-greet with Santa. Then the man in red heads downtown to set up his sleigh and take selfies in the afternoon. Some of Santa's reindeer join him.

Other activities include an art crawl, horse-drawn carriage rides, and events at the Fergus Falls Public Library, holiday sales at downtown retailers, photo booths, book readings, hot chocolate booths, and food trucks and brewery vendors at the River Market. Groups of carolers are around for the day, too.

The festivities wrap up around 5:30 p.m. with the ceremonial tree lighting and fireworks display at Wright Park. The streets nearby are shut down as people gather around to enjoy the fireworks. The Over the River Holiday Festival is free and open to the public, with free snacks and giveaways. Mark your 2022 calendar to join us December 3. Find more information at: [FFRiver.org/OTR](http://FFRiver.org/OTR).

Another day-long festival is the Lake Alice Winter Carnival. With the spotlight on ice skating and related activities, Lake Alice Winter Carnival highlights this activity, including music and lights, and provides fun for the entire family.

Hosted by Fergus Falls Noon Kiwanis, the 2022 event is on Jan. 30 from 2-4 p.m. More than 500 people are expected to join in the fun, according to Sarah Duffy, the Noon Kiwanis volunteer who chairs the event. "It's a great event that provides access for kids and families to do activities outside together," Duffy said.

Ice skating is only part of the festival. There's a groomed cross-country ski trail around the lake in addition to the skating trail. A par 3 golf course is set up on the lake with fluorescent golf balls and golf clubs. Relax with a trip around the lake in a horse-and-carriage ride. Or see the animals in a petting zoo from Trowbridge Zoo. Youngsters can paint snow using spray bottles and food coloring. For more information: [Facebook.com/FergusFallsNoonKiwanis](https://Facebook.com/FergusFallsNoonKiwanis).

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