The Snow Centre Hemel Hempstead

Thursday, 22 October 2009

Indoor snow sport centres are starting to appear up and down the country. They don't call them ski slopes anymore because they're just as much a hit with snowboarders as they are with skiers. That's one of the major differences between the real snow slopes indoors and the old artificial outdoor slopes - snowboarders get custom built features made from real snow - impossible on artificial surfaces.

{mosgoogle no}

There are six indoor snow centres in the UK now, with The Snow Centre in Hemel Hempstead being the latest to open and the nearest to London. It has two main slopes; a training slope of 100m and a main slope of 160m, both of which are 30m wide. There are 4 lifts servicing the slopes, including two POMA rides for fast ascents. There is also a safe and separate snowplay area for any smaller kids who are not skiing yet.

The centre cost Â£23million to develop and is a British Association of Snowsport Instructors (BASI) Centre of Excellence. They are able to call on a roster of 120 BASI instructors and run a comprehensive ski school programme for all ages. They even hold fast-track programmes to quickly take raw beginners through all the basics. These are perfect for anyone who has booked their first ski holiday abroad and doesn't to waste the first few days on the nursery slopes.Â

The main advantage of these types of slopes is their close similarity with outdoor alpine conditions. The latest snow generation technology is used to create fresh snow overnight. First they drop the temperature of the building by a few degrees to allow the new snow to form, then once the snow has bee made, it is allowed to rise back up to minus one for the public sessions. It's cool on the slope but not unpleasant; in fact it's quite refreshing and you get the chance to try out your latest gear.

For snowboarders, the highlights of the week are the dedicated freestyle sessions that are currently scheduled on Thursday and Friday evenings. These "Park and Ride" sessions get there own dedicated areas of the slopes, with the longer Friday night session using almost all the slope areas. This four hour session is the favourite amongst the experienced boarders and the centre staff built challenging layouts to suit - not appropriate for beginners though.Â

Equipment hire is part of the entry fee, which varies according to how long you want to stay on the slopes and whether you are a member or not. Helmets are a requirement for the Park and Ride sessions (and for all children) but they are provided.

For the Friday night session, usually once per month, the centre hires in a huge airbag that provides the perfect opportunity for trying out any new, risky moves.Â

The centre has its own cafÃ© and bar, with an "outdoor" balcony overlooking the slopes and there's also an on-site branch of Snow+Rock if you need a retail fix while you are there.

The Snow Centre is located in Hemel Hempstead just outside London. That's a 30 minute train journey from Euston. For drivers there's a large car park onsite with space for 280 cars.

http://www.thesnowcentre.com