



From the South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Trailing after kids is not so bad

Three Western resorts have just what the whole family needs.

By Anne Z. Cooke | Tribune Media Services
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"It's a whole different world," said Jason Willard, knocking the snow off his skis and pausing to reminisce about life back in the day.

Before Emily came along, he and his mates were as free as birds, hucking off wind-swept ridges and chasing each other through deep powder on slopes from Colorado to California.

Now this buff 6-footer from Chicago was sideslipping down a bunny trail with a pert, redheaded 7-year-old. He watched while she took her first lesson, he took her up on her first chairlift ride, and when she fell down in tears, he brushed off the snow and wiped her nose.

"I guess I'm getting rusty," he said. "But I wouldn't trade Emily for anything. My family's what matters now."

In fact, if Emily's a typical ski school student, she'll be catching up with her dad before he knows what's happened. After a week of lessons, most young beginners ride the chairlifts with aplomb, confidently following their instructors through the woods and down all sorts of intermediate slopes. After another season, they're staying up with their parents, and trying a few bump runs, too.

With demand up, especially during winter and spring break weeks, most ski resorts have revamped their ski schools to make lessons more fun and more effective.

"Eight- and 9-year-olds who start ski school on Monday and stay all week will be making parallel turns by Friday," said John Buhler, Ski School director at Breckenridge Ski Resort, in Colorado.

Where are our favorite family ski trails? Some of the best are at Winter Park Resort, Colo.; Keystone Resort, Colo.; and at Heavenly Resort, in California and Nevada (the resort straddles the state line).

Big Dipper

The "blue" intermediate runs at Heavenly Resort, overlooking Lake Tahoe's South Shore, are the kind of groomed slopes skiers dream about. At this resort, most of the best blue runs are on the upper mountain, where deep snow and long-range views of 22-mile-long Lake Tahoe are just part of the package.

To reach the Dipper Express chairlift, board the gondola up from Heavenly Village, on the California side, and ride it to the top. At the top, follow signs to the Sky Express, which takes you up to the Skyline Trail, an intermediate ridgeline trail to Dipper Knob, and the Big Dipper, our favorite group of intermediate trails, served by the high-speed quad chairlifts, the Dipper Express and the Comet Express.

For ski and lodging information: 800-432-8365, heavenlyresort.com or tahoechamber.com. Heavenly is at South Lake Tahoe, in Stateline, Calif.

Lonesome Whistle, Phipps

Plenty of great blue runs crisscross Winter Park's 1,848 groomed acres (another 1,212 acres are within bounds but off-piste), but Lonesome Whistle and Allan Phipps go on forever. Bear right at the top of the Zephyr Express, and follow signs to March Hare and Allan Phipps. Glide down Allan Phipps to the crest of a rounded hill, a good place to stop for views of the bowl below and Vista Dome in the distance.

A second great area is below the top of Mary Jane, on Lonesome Whistle, an easy green trail to the Olympia Express, where it becomes a super-cruising intermediate run. Call Winter Park Central Reservations at 800-979-0332 for lodging and packages. For skiing, call 970-726-5514; or go to winterparkresort.com. Winter Park is 67 miles northwest of Denver.

Schoolmarm

Keystone's three mountains and 3,148 acres are famous for family skiing, with two base areas and half of all trails rated for beginners and intermediates.

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Schoolmarm, 3.5 miles long from top to bottom, is always a family favorite. Starting from the River Run base area, ride up the River Run Gondola to the top of Dercum Mountain, and follow signs on the right for Schoolmarm.

The first time you ski it, follow it to the bottom, where Ina's Way forks to the right. Follow Ina's Way back to the gondola for a repeat trip.

Later, ski from the top of Dercum Mountain down Mozart, into the far valley. Don't turn on Diamond Back or Mine Shaft, but stay right at the bottom and ride back up on the Ruby Express.

Keystone is a destination resort with hundreds of rental condominiums; there's no real town at the base. For the ski area, ski school, dining and lodging, call 800-222-0188, or go to [keystone.snow.com](http://keystone.snow.com).

**IF YOU GO**

**Dates/information:** The most up-to-date information on snow levels, ticket prices and opening dates is available on ski resort Web sites. In general, most resorts open after [Thanksgiving](#) and close around April 10, depending on weather and snowfall.

**Rentals:** Skis, boots and poles are available at all nearby towns and resort base areas. Reserving in advance ensures that you'll get what you want.

**Prices:** Lodging is most expensive over Christmas and spring holidays. Early December and April are the most affordable. Before the season starts, look for value-priced package vacations listed in travel sections, skiing magazines or on the Internet. Starting in February, most resorts discount prices.

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