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Snowmass rolls out white carpet for families

SPECIAL SKI SECTION

By ANNE Z. COOKE
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SNOWMASS VILLAGE, Colo. — Unpack your boots and set the alarm clock. There's not much that rivets you on a frosty morning with the sun winking through the trees and your skis gliding over new powder like a spot

We paused on the slope below the Elk Camp summit (elevation 11,325 feet) for a moment, partly to rest and partly because the trail suddenly looked unfamiliar. We — six of us, all family — had the slopes to ourselves. We'd skied as many ski trips to the Roaring Fork Valley, in central Colorado. So why didn't we recognize the run ah through the trees?



STEVE HAGGERTY/Colorworld
[\(ENLARGE\)](#)

A favorite ski route for repeat visitors to Snowmass is Sneaky's, an intermediate run from Big Burn Summit, with Sam's Knob restaurant in the background.



STEVE HAGGERTY/Colorworld
[\(ENLARGE\)](#)

Two skiers catch their breath at the highest point of Snowmass, the Cirque — elevation 12,510 feet.

I thought I'd memorized all 3,100 acres. We'd skied most of the trails Whispering Jesse and Mick's Gully — and discovered by happy trial double-black diamond steeps, for experts only, in the Hanging Valley

But this one was new — or was it? And those ski chalets half-hidden Was Snowmass really so big we'd never see it all?

To be honest, Snowmass isn't the biggest ski resort in North America; in distance, it doesn't look especially spectacular. When first-timers turn they're inclined to crane their necks, wondering where the slopes are. In Aspen, the 12,510-foot Cirque doesn't immediately catch your eye.

Looks aren't the only difference, said Susan Darch, a spokeswoman for Snowmass, Aspen, Buttermilk and Aspen Highlands. Generations of skiers, with their parents, then bringing their own children.

"It's a mountain for a growing family," she said. "Kids start out in the school. There are cruisers for intermediates and incredible black-diamond runs. We've got groomers that can't be beat."

To be honest, part of it is dumb luck, an accident of geography. Snowmass has four snowcapped summits ranging from 11,000 to 12,500 feet. You can ski from High Alpine to Elk Camp and never retrace your tracks. There's no narrow valleys, rolling hills, above treeline descents, dogleg bump runs.




Your lodging, moreover, alters your impressions. Previously we rented a house across from the Snowmass Village Mall. Dozens of buildings crowd the area, chiefly residential.

Last year we moved over to the Village side, to the Snowmass Mountain Chalet. The Children's Ski School. The family-owned chalet runs like a B&B, served at tables for eight. We met new people each morning, and ac



STEVE HAGGERTY/Colorworld
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When ski school ends at 3 p.m., it's time to pick up the kids and head out for a family run.

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IF YOU GO

Getting there

- Expect to pay about \$500 round trip for airfare to Aspen, Colo. Packages that include air, lodging and ski-lift tickets likely will save you money.

About Snowmass

- Snowmass makes snow on trails that melt the soonest. The snow guns cover only 180 acres of trails, but that's plenty. One-day lift tickets purchased at the ticket window are \$74 for adults, \$67 for teens, \$45 for preteens and free for ages 6 and under. Tube

room with open beams, brick trim, a fireplace, leather sofas and stur

Since the rooms don't have kitchens, we ate out for dinner, usually at the Snowmass Village Mall, five minutes away. And it was a relief not to buy groceries or w swimming pool, ski storage and a self-serve coffee and cocoa stand

There were other changes afoot, as well. The new, advanced-level t challenge, and the Pipeline terrain park is also bigger. The pokey old replaced, but it has been speeded up, to an 8 1/2-minute ride, with a new, too. Our expert skiers, sons Paul and Steve, are in the target g black diamond screamers — in the Hanging Valley Wall.

Why do we keep planning multifamily vacations at Snowmass? It's h result of low humidity. And the huge stock of ski-in, ski-out lodging, c pot.

But comfort has something to do with it, too. Like chicken soup, a lot For the kids, the ski school is like day camp with small groups led by The atmosphere is easygoing, and learning is disguised as adventur Snow Cubs, where the toddlers make snowmen and get familiar with

After Snow Cubs, our kids moved into Big Burn Bears (3 1/2 to 4 year across Fanny Hill near the big kids. At age 7, they moved into the pr the teen lessons.

No wonder the school is so popular. The routine is familiar, the kids instructors every year. On a cold Monday morning with a little hand I "Well, hi there, Dillon (or Paul, Dagney, Diane, Will or Katie). I reme

Ski school ends at 3 p.m., so there's time to ski one last run with the intermediate run from the Big Burn Summit, and down to Banzai and even Grandma can be persuaded to do. We also spend a day at But shuttle back and forth and sending our skis and poles over courtesy

A tradition for the grown-ups is a night out in Aspen, with dinner in a afford that \$15,000 antique gong, the shops are open late and windc drawn carriages clip-clop past, offering rides around town, and thous parkway tree branches create a sense of magic.

The highlight of the week is dinner at the Lynn Britt Cabin, a log cabi one-price, family-style dinners with wine and a toe-tapping evening c Livingston and Kevin Glenn, the heart and soul of the Frying Pan Bl banjo and guitar.

You meet at Snowmass Village at 5:30 p.m., climb into big sleighs p blankets and chug uphill to the cabin, perched on a small meadow n return trip downhill.

People ask about the weather in Snowmass, but I've had no luck se there's always snow by Christmas, January is the coldest month and season) are primo. You can ski in shorts in April, but south-facing ru

That's the time to ski first tracks, when the air is cold, the runs are fr glint over the mountains and there's nobody out but you. For us, it's

Town tickets are \$15 per person. • To be fair, prices are soaring everywhere. It's always cheapest to buy a multiday pass from the resort Web site. Prices are cheapest during December and January (except the holidays) and higher during February and March. A five-day adult pass, good for any 10-day period, is \$345. Ages 70 and older can buy a pass good every day all season for \$199.

Snowmass Village, 1-800-525-6200 (the resort), 1-800-262-7736 (central reservations), 1-800-923-1227 (the ski school); [Web site](#).

- The other strategy is to buy a ski package with one price for lodging, lift tickets and airfare. Look for these in newspaper travel and sports sections, ski magazines, on the Internet and at Snowmass Central Reservations.

- Evenings at the Lynn Britt Cabin are \$75 for adults and \$45 for ages 3-11. Seating is limited. Make reservations at 970-923-0460.

Information

- Aspen Chamber Resort Association, 970-925-1940, [Web site](#).

