



Y CHILDREN ARE BLESSED with an ultra-active grandmother. On our family vacations, my mother-in-law, Bonnie, zip-lines with them in Hawaii, snorkels beside them in Mexico and hikes behind them in national parks out West. Wintertime brings snowmobiling and sledding in our Colorado backyard; since we live only 30 minutes from one of the country's family-friendliest ski resorts, we spend plenty of time on the slopes with Grandma.

Our picks for the best winter excursions for multigenerational snowbunnies

Indeed, Snowmass, with its whopping 91 trails, incredibly varied terrain, and multiple slopeside restaurants for warming up with a steaming bowl of chili or mug of hot cocoa, has just about everything a multigenerational family could ask for in a ski resort. While we tend to spend several winter Saturdays there, for many grand families Snowmass is a premier weeklong vacation destination. It has an excellent ski-school program, accommodations for all budgets and tons of fun for families off the slopes, including dogsled rides, campfire sing-alongs and teen parties at the new Treehouse Adventure Center. (Not to mention it's so much less pretentious than its neighbor, chic Aspen.)

"Never-ever" skiers are taken on the "magic carpet" ride



### Snowmass, Colorado

The Colorado Rockies' champagne powder is renowned. With 300 inches of snow falling annually at Snowmass, plus high-tech, environmentally friendly snowmaking equipment, visitors know they'll have plenty of white stuff to play in on the slopes.

Snowmass is the second-largest ski resort in the country—36 Disneylands could fit within the ski-area boundaries. It also has the highest vertical rise of any U.S. ski resort: 4,406 feet, higher than four Eiffel Towers. The resort also offers more than 3,000 acres of skiable terrain, 24 chair lifts, three terrain parks and nearly 100 trails that vary from ultra-easy learning hills to challenging steeps. Plus, a lift ticket is good at the three other Aspen/Snowmass ski areas: Aspen Mountain, Buttermilk and Aspen Highlands, all linked by free skier shuttles.

Snowmass is in the midst of a multi-year, billion-dollar "renaissance," bringing additions and improvements to its new Base Village and to the slopes. For visitors, this will mean more options for accommodations and dining, plus new chair lifts and trails.

Accommodations: While Base Village's 236-room Viceroy Snowmass hotel (with 7,000-squarefoot spa) is not set to open until winter 2009/10, overnight visitors can currently choose from convenient ski-in/ski-out, multi-bedroom condominiums or vacation home rentals in all price ranges. The slopeside Silvertree Hotel offers standard guest rooms, as well as one- or two-bedroom suites. Contact Stay Aspen/Snowmass: www.stayaspensnowmass.com, 888-649-5982.

Lessons: Families rent equipment and check in for ski school at the brand-new Treehouse Adventure Center with themed rooms for different age groups. "Never-ever" skiers are taken on the "magic carpet" ride (surface conveyor belt) up Fanny Hill or to the new, mid-mountain Elk Camp Meadows learning area, which brings beginners into the high alpine with a dedicated quad chair. Preschoolers can take group ski lessons in the morning and then hang out after lunch at the Adventure Center's "Bear Den," with a puppet show theater, napping loft and age-appropriate interactive games. Half-day, full-day and weeklong ski and snowboard lessons for every ability and age are offered at Snowmass, as well as specialty programs such as women-only seminars or "learn to ride the rails" camps.

Dining: Nine on-mountain restaurants suit every palate and budget—from a quick slice at Up for Pizza or elegant table service at Gwyn's (think elk medallions in cranberry port sauce and warm "chocolate gateau"). Then there's the new-this-season, \$9 million Sneaky's Tavern at the base of Fanny Hill. And you may not be able to tear your grandchildren from The Sweet Life, a two-story candy shop and family diner featuring more than 250 flavors of ice cream and a s'mores table where the goods are delivered by train!

Beyond the slopes: On a dogsled ride provided by Krabloonik Restaurant & Kennel, you'll take on hairpin turns and thrilling straight shots through open fields with spectacular views of the surrounding peaks—all in the capable hands of an experienced musher. The per-person price of a ride combined with a gourmet lunch or dinner is hefty—\$195 and up. But you may consider the once-in-a-lifetime experience worth the cost!

Après-ski family fun can be found weekday afternoons at the Treehouse Adventure Center, with scheduled programming that includes sing-alongs or storytelling at the plaza fireplace, kids' crafts or classic ski films,

Getting there: Snowmass Village is nine miles from downtown Aspen and about six miles from the Aspen/Pitkin County Airport (ASE). Other airport options are the Vail-Eagle County Airport (EGE), 70 miles away, or Denver International Airport (DIA), 220 miles from Snowmass; from either of these airports, rent a car or take a scheduled Colorado Mountain Express shuttle to Snowmass.

Learn more: www.snowmassvillage.com, www.aspensnowmass.com.

reunions



Setuggies: Notch condo, coordery: Smoggies: Notch Resort; Bornie & Ben Williams (personal photo): Jan & Ina Dlouby (grandparents), Jenna & Jack Currow (kids) at Smownass (personal photo): Iranning to ski at Northstar-at-Taboe courtesy Northstar-at-Taboe courtesy Northstar-at-Taboe

#### Bottom, left to right:

On a green trail at Crystal Mountain: all ages love the crusters at Crystal Mountain: the whole family has fun at Crystal Mountain; all courters Crystal Mountain.





#### Northstar-at-Tahoe, California

Skiers and snowboarders can choose among seven different mountain resorts around Lake Tahoe, in the Sierra Nevada mountain range and straddling the Nevada-California border. But Northstar-at-Tahoe is the family friendliest with its convenient lodging and fun non-skiing options: a 9,000-square-foot ice rink, recreation center and year-round bungee trampoline.

Intermediate-to-advanced skiers have one brand-new and three extended trails to explore this season, bringing the resort's skiable acreage to 2,655 acres with 84 trails. The mountain's vertical drop has increased from 1,247 to 1,722 feet.

Accommodations: More than 230 on-site lodging units range from hotel-style accommodations to multi-bedroom condominiums to luxurious vacation homes. All rentals are serviced by a complimentary resort shuttle system; and all resort guests have free access to the recreation center, with lap pool, hot tubs (including one designated for families), game room, sauna and fitness center. Call 800-go-north or visit www. northstarattahoe.com.

Lessons: If you're interested in trying snowboarding for the first time, Northstar is the place to do it with its Burton Learn-to-Ride program featuring beginner-specific equipment and small class sizes. Adults and children can choose from group or private ski or snowboard (kids start at age 7) lessons for all abilities; cross-country and telemark ski lessons are offered for grownups, too. A free 45-minute lesson is offered every afternoon except Saturday for 3- and 4-year-olds and their parents (or grandparents!); this program is designed for adults who would like hints on teaching their preschoolers on the slopes and tips for encouraging a love of the sport.

Dining: Of the 13 food and beverage options at the Village of Northstar, the most appropriate for grandkids is Rubicon Pizza Company, with its pizzas, pastas and sandwiches, as well as Big Wave Burritos and Wraps, which also offers burgers and fries. Opening this December are two sophisticated spots geared for grownups: Baxter's Bistro & Lounge, with live jazz music and an expansive wine list; and The Chocolate Bar, featuring every chocolate dessert item under the sun—fondue, mousse, cheesecake, tiramisu and warm lava cake.

Beyond the slopes: The centerpiece of the Village, Northstar's 9,000-squarefoot skating rink, is the place for après-ski fun. Surrounding the rink are outdoor fire pits, where you can roast marshmallows and make s'mores or warm up with a hot toddy or mulled cider from one of the nearby restaurants. Live music is performed on the rink stage most weekend afternoons; skate rentals are \$5, and access to the rink is free.

Shopping at the Village at Northstar includes two kid magnets: Ambassador Toys carries educational, crafty and just-plain-fun products that promote the understanding of cultures around the world; Mine children's store has a Ms. Pac-Man game that will entertain kids while grandparents shop for cute clothing, accessories, games, books and toys.

Getting there: Northstar-at-Tahoe is six miles south of downtown Truckee, California, 40 miles west of Reno, Nevada, 100 miles east of Sacramento, and 200 miles east of San Francisco. Shuttle service is available from the Reno-Tahoe International Airport (RNO), about 45 minutes away.

Learn more: www.northstarattahoe.com.

Themed private programs at Crystal Mountain include mastering moguls, slalom racing and telemark skiing.

# Crystal Mountain, Michigan

The Midwest isn't known for its alpine sports, but family-owned Crystal Mountain in Northern Michigan is beloved among area skiers and riders for its laid-back vibe and variety of terrain (26 percent beginner, 47 percent intermediate, 27 percent advanced). With no double-backs, extreme skiers and riders aren't entertained here, but nearly every other ability level is.

While its size can't compare to the mega resorts out West—Crystal has nine chairlifts on 45 trails with a vertical rise of just 375 feet—this small ski area does offer night skiing on 27 illuminated trails, plus a brand-new, comprehensive spa.

Accommodations: Choose from simple, budget-friendly hotel rooms, two-to three-bedroom cottages or large four- to five-bedroom townhomes that sleep up to 12—most within walking distance of the chairlifts. MountainTop Townhomes are ski-in/ski-out, and the multi-bedroom Bungalows at Crystal Glen are new this season. Check for online lodging options and packages at <a href="https://www.crystabnountain.com">www.crystabnountain.com</a> or call 800-968-7686, ext, 5100.

Lessons: Camp Totem is Crystal's location for all kids' programs. It's steps away from the two-acre Totem Park learning area, with two Wonder Carpet surface lifts—conveyor belts built into the snow that beginners stand on as they're gently transported uphill. Group and private lessons are for skiers and riders of all skill levels; some themed private programs include mastering moguls, slalom racing and telemark skiing.

Dining: Up to two kids under 8 eat breakfast free (per paying adult) at the Wild Tomato; evenings bring Mexican, Italian and "Gringo Fare" entrees at the casual eatery. It's a seasonal menu at the most elegant (yet still appropriate for kids) Crystal Mountain restaurant, the Thistle Pub & Grille, which also has a children's menu. At both restaurants you can order "peak performance" selections: smaller-portioned menu items created with natural ingredients, limited saturated fats and balanced nutrients.

Beyond the slopes: Set to open just after Christmas, the Crystal Spa is a 13,000-square-foot expansion of the existing indoor pool and fitness center. Twelve treatment rooms, spa locker rooms, manicure and pedicure area and outdoor hot tub will complement the fitness center, which also has been enlarged by 1,800 square feet. While the spa does not offer kids' treatments, this might be just the spot for a grand to chill out. After a day of outdoor fun, a relaxing Swedish massage or more vigorous deep-tissue treatment is often the perfect antidote for sore muscles.

Otherwise, kids of all ages can go on horse-drawn surrey (carriage) rides throughout the resort, whirl around on the central ice skating rink, and participate in daily activities at the Mountain Adventure Center, such as bingo, story time, face painting, scavenger hunts, geocaching or snow disc golf.

Getting there: Crystal Mountain is 28 miles southwest of Traverse City and its Cherry Capital Airport (TVC); shuttle transfer service from the airport to the resort is available for a nominal charge. It's a half-day's drive from several major Midwest cities: Detroit (230 miles), Chicago (280 miles), Indianapolis (370 miles).

Learn more: www.crystalmountain.com.

NOVEMBER DECEMBER 2008 GRAND 63



# reunion



# Smugglers' Notch, Vermont

In the heart of Vermont's Green Mountains, about 30 miles from Burlington, is Smugglers' Notch (aka "Smuggs"), which readers of SKI magazine consistently rank as one of the East Coast's best resorts when it comes to entertaining families with stellar service, lodging options and off-hill activities.

Three mountains, Morse, Madonna and Sterling, all interconnected by lifts and trails, keep skiers and boarders busy on 78 trails and more than 1,000 acres of terrain.

Accommodations: Condominium options at Smugglers' run the gamut from cozy one-bedroom homes nestled in the woods to two-level, five-bedroom townhomes within walking distance of the Village Core and all the resort action. Value-wise, the way to go is to book a Club Smugglers' Advantage Package, which includes not only lodging but also lift tickets, lessons, entrance to the FunZone Family Entertainment Center and more. Visit www.smuggs.com or call 800-451-8752.

If your group contains multiple families as well as multiple generations, consider customizing a Family Group Package with the help of dedicated groupreservations staff: call 800-521-0536 or e-mail gvacations@smuggs.com.

Lessons: You're (almost) never too young to learn at Smugglers' Notch: Kids can get instruction on skis at age 2 1/2, on a snowboard at age 4. The resort's Snow Sport University offers group and private lessons for all ages, including all-day camps for kids that combine two hours of morning on-slope instruction, lunch and age-appropriate indoor entertainment in the afternoon.

Smugglers' Notch guarantees that each member of the family will learn to ski or snowboard or will improve technique, regardless of ability level, or the resort will refund the entire lesson portion of that person's vacation package.

Dining: Resort dining options are decidedly casual and family friendly. Choose from Riga Bello's for pizza, calzones and pasta dishes, or the comfortable Hearth & Candle, where the dinner menu includes seafood, lamb and filet mignon. Further afield in the towns of Jefferson, Cambridge and Essex are still more pizzerias, as well as Mexican, American and Chinese food.

Beyond the slopes: The FunZone Family Entertainment Center houses a handful of giant, inflatable bounce houses, slides and obstacle course, plus mini golf, an arcade and ping-pong tables. Teens have their own supervised centers with Xbox and Wii, Internet access, pool tables, DVDs, music, popcorn, and special events like Nightspiker Volleyball and a Glowbal Dance Party.

For more non-skiing thrills, take some spins on the outdoor skating rink. Warm up every afternoon with free hot chocolate around the bonfire at the Gazebo, and by night go tubing on Sir Henry's Hill. Scheduled weekly family events include airboarding, sled making, bingo, karaoke, and a torchlight parade down the mountain.

Strap on some skinny skis or snowshoes and explore the 34 kilometers of cross-county trails or 24 kilometers of dedicated snowshoe trails that wind through pretty forests and wide-open fields.

Getting there: Smugglers' Notch is a 45-minute drive from Burlington International Airport (BTV); shuttle service is available to the resort. Another fun option: arrive via Amtrak train from other points on the East Coast; the nearest depot is Essex Junction, Vermont, about 25 miles from the resort.

Learn more: www.smuggs.com.

