MOUNTAIN *life*

THAT'S KID-TASTIC

Beaver Creek offers many opportunities for kids to push themselves safely while having fun and improving their skiing

THE TRUE MAGIC OF BEAVER CREEK happens on the mountain, where world-class snowmaking keeps groomed runs in top shape all day long and where light, Rocky Mountain powder blankets off-piste steeps. But unlocking that magic on a family vacation with skiers of various ages and abilities can be more challenging than the most challenging of ski runs. There's nothing fun about a family ski day that ends in tears or tantrums.

TOM COHEN

While family meltdowns can happen even in the most stunning locations, a few tricks can help keep kids happy on the slopes. And when kids are happy, adults stay happy, too. That vision you may have of your family skiing an end-of-day run back to the village together, arriving all smiles and high-fives, isn't too far away when you approach your time on the mountain with these key tips on terrain and itinerary selection in mind.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Choosing kid-friendly skiing areas for your family is critical to success, as terrain selection is an important part of keeping skiing with kids both safe and fun. Luckily, Beaver Creek has pioneered the development of family-friendly terrain and kids-specific ski zones. In the mid-1980s, Beaver Creek began constructing trails with themes that are attractive to young skiers, including areas that connect with local history, mountain culture, ecology and the amazing ski dog, Ripperoo, who even makes live, on-mountain appearances as the Beaver Creek Ski & Snowboard School mascot.

Kids' Adventure Zones on the mountain have continued to develop over the past three decades with ongoing improvements and additions, such as this season's new areas devoted to terrain-based learning. "The concept behind Beaver Creek's terrain-based learning features is to provide a seamless, natural transition while developing confidence and skills," explains Fred Rumford, director of ski school for Beaver Creek. "Both skiers and riders will be able to learn on gentle, beginner terrain that includes subtly-sculpted snow features which help to guide them into the correct technique." While guests of all ages are invited to explore these areas through the ski school's adult and children's programs, proper terrain selection remains an important part of skiing together as a family when a ski instructor is not present as a guide.

Mike Blakslee, general manager of the children's ski school, cautions parents about over-terraining kids, or taking them on terrain that's too steep, too soon. "Over-terraining is one of the most common mistakes that parents make," he says. "It's exciting to watch kids progress, but their bodies and minds work much harder when trying to keep up in areas that are above their ability levels. And when kids get tired, they don't flicker out — they flame out." At that point, all of the fun has been zapped out of skiing, and skills can actually regress. Over-terrained skiers often get stuck relying on a counterproductive wedge-skiing strategy to make it through areas that are above their skiing level, and then it becomes even more difficult to progress to a parallel skiing stance.

It's also more important to manage pacing and attention to physical needs when skiing with kids, who may not be able to express or understand their own needs. In order to maintain a comfortable body temperature, kids will need to take more frequent water and snack breaks, and they'll also need extra time to add or shed layers of clothing. All of these seemingly little things require ongoing diligence and a lot of patience. But the reward is big when the whole family is out there enjoying the process together.

Finally, before considering what to do on the mountain or where to go, keep this most basic rule in mind: Have fun. "As long as kids are having a good time, they'll keep improving, and a fun experience is better for adults, too," says Blakslee. Taking a hot chocolate break to warm up in a new location or telling jokes on gondola rides adds to the enjoyment. Keeping skiing fun sometimes involves making the most out of the whole mountain experience, including off-slope opportunities for play, rest and exploration.

With the importance of terrain selection in mind, consider exploring these kid-tastic areas on Beaver Creek Resort that also have a lot of adult appeal:

BEGINNER ZONE

Sweet Destination: The Candy Cabin

Located at the top of the Strawberry Park Express and Upper Beaver Creek Mountain Express lifts, Beaver Creek's Candy Cabin opened its doors in the 2014-2015 season. This rustic cabin takes on a vintage candy store design and offers barrels full of candies that can be purchased by weight. Even if kids are not yet skilled enough to ski there, they can still practice loading and unloading the chairlift and walking across ski-area terrain while learning ski safety essentials along the way. Depending on the age, ability, and stamina of skiers, it is possible to ski green runs from the Candy Cabin back to Beaver Creek Village via the Beaver Creek Mountain Expressway and Dally runs or down to Bachelor Gulch via Primrose and Stirrup. From

THE CANDY CABIN

TOM COHEN

Bachelor Gulch, skiers can enjoy their candy stash on a shuttle ride back to Beaver Creek. Allow plenty of time for this journey, and add the Candy Cabin into a daylong itinerary instead of considering it a last-minute stop.

Kid-tastic: Sugary treats of all colors, shapes, and sizes are bound to make kids smile. The location of this place and its contents spark the imagination and create memories that will have young skiers begging to return day after day, year after year.

Adult appeal: The mere mention of a trip to the Candy Cabin will cheer up any unhappy skier, and this place will connect with any sweets-loving adult. Beyond having sugary candies from days of yore, the Candy Cabin features artisan chocolates crafted locally by fifth-generation chocolatier Michael Mootz, Jr. Each dark or milk chocolate bar is presented in a custom Beaver Creek gold box, which adds a little something extra to an already sweet treat.

INTERMEDIATE ZONE

Jumpin' Good: Jack Rabbit Alley

Accessible from the top of the Cinch Express Lift, Jack Rabbit Alley is an intermediate-level gladed area that's full of surprises kids love. Tight trees and ski-through tepees challenge skiers to control speed and turn on command while wagons and other structures along the trail invite exploration.

Kid-tastic: Young skiers love the chance to explore in the trees, and this area's twists and turns present a natural experiential learning opportunity. Foot steering and foot-to-foot skiing skills are critical to success in Jack Rabbit Alley, where skiers will get immediate feedback when they make mistakes and corrections.

Adult appeal: Skiing in this area at the very top of Beaver Creek offers a big-mountain skiing feel with stunning views of the surrounding peaks. Tight trees, obstacles, and varying terrain may make skiing Jack Rabbit Alley as an adult even more challenging than it is for youngsters, who have a lower center of gravity and a smaller size in their favor. Be prepared for the challenge, or bail out at any time on one of the groomed ski runs that flank Jack Rabbit Alley to keep your eye on the kids in action.

JACKRABBIT ALLEY

ADVANCED ZONE

Powder Stash: Via Vito

Offering advanced, gladed skiing in the Bachelor Gulch area, Via Vito is a great place to hone off-piste skiing skills among the silvery trunks of aspen trees Accessed from the Primrose trail, Via Vito is known for its light powder stashes and trees spaced at a friendly distance. The steepness of the slope is just challenging enough to keep skiers focused, but not too steep to be scary for those already skiing at an advanced level.

Kid-tastic: Young skiers who can comfortably ski advanced terrain will love skiing in these trees where they can also learn more about wildlife along the way, as Via Vito is one of Beaver Creek's ske-cology environmental education areas. Parents need to make ski safety and staying together a priority in this area, and fun tactics such as giving each person a specific animal noise to call out in response to a locator call can help kids gain group awareness while skiing safely in the trees.

Adult appeal: Keeping up with kids skiing at an advanced level in the trees can be a proud moment for any parent. The terrain and snow conditions in this area are memorable, but there's nothing better than sniffing out a powder stash and then giggling along with the kids when you reach the bottom together.

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These three areas at Beaver Creek offer a sampling of ability-appropriate terrain to explore with kids. Find more by looking at a mountain trail map and locating areas marked as Kids' Adventure ski zones, including Tombstone Territory, Ripperoo's Retreat, Aspen Alley, and the beginner area surrounding the Buckaroo Express Gondola. Choose itineraries based on the ages, abilities, and interests of those in your group, and get ready for the mountain's magic to unfold for kids of all ages, including every grown up kid-at-heart. – **TRACI J. MACNAMARA**