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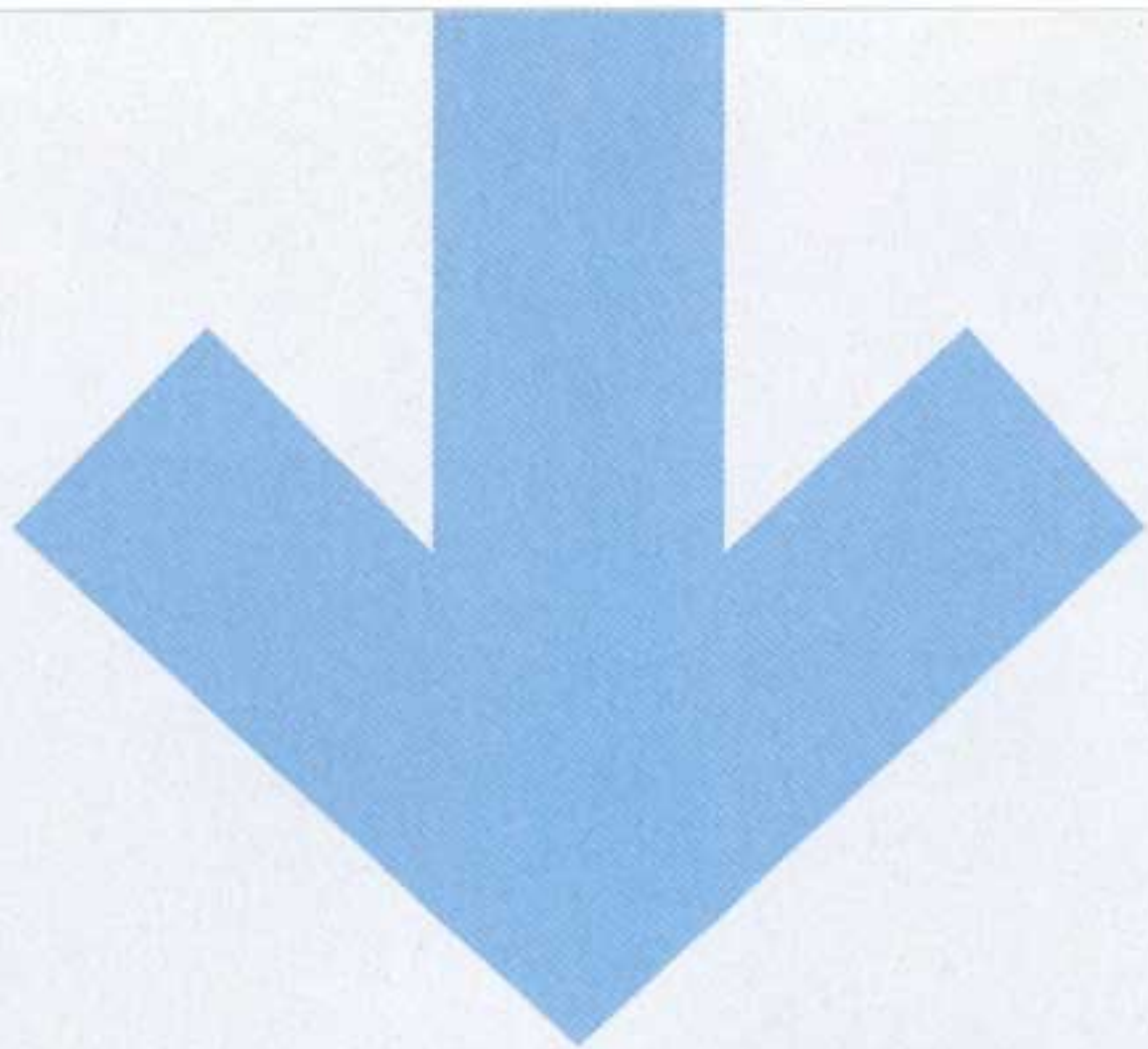
THE FIRST SNOW

GET INTO GEAR FOR
THE COOLEST SEASON

 **PLUS****EAT THE KASBAH**MARRAKECH'S CULINARY
TREASURES**ON A ROLL**ROLLER DISCO FEVER
HITS LONDON**SNOW ANGELS**

COPING WITH KIDS ON THE SLOPES





If heading for
the snow with
kids in tow
sounds like
your idea of hell,
then read on.
A few simple
toddler tips
will transform
your trip.

Snow Angels

WORDS BY CAROLINE DEACON
ILLUSTRATION BY MATT MIGNANELLI



Whether you're a committed winter ski enthusiast, or new to the sport, don't let having kids in tow cramp your style. With

a little planning all the family can enjoy the snow. Your first consideration is whether your bundles of joy are old enough to ski; children under four are definitely not ready. Also, don't be tempted to carry babies in a rucksack—they will quickly become hypothermic! Many resorts have childcare facilities from the age of six months, usually in convenient locations pre-bookable online. Be sure your accommodation is near though, you don't want to trail for miles with baby paraphernalia.

It's worth considering getting some help with looking after the little angels. There are plenty of independent chalet operators

in the resorts that specialise in providing live-in nannies that are fluent in your language. And don't rule out bringing your own childcare with you. Cheap flights make bringing a nanny or even a Granny an affordable option. If you do decide to bring an extra pair of hands then be sure to pick a place with plenty to do; even the best of babysitters will be climbing the walls in a purpose-built resort with limited facilities. Try Wengen, Zell am Zee, St Anton or Chamonix for resorts that offer an excellent variety of activities on and off the slopes. If the cost ends up being a limiting factor, one budget option is to consider taking turns to ski. This is not as bad as it sounds if you choose a resort with quick access to the slopes so that swapping ski-time is easy. The resorts of Valmorel, Arc 2000 or

Val Thorens have slopes that start virtually at the front door of the chalets.

Once you've decided who's coming on the holiday, remember there's no real hard-and-fast rule about the ideal age to get kids on the slopes but you do have to consider if they are fit, adventurous and outgoing. The minimum age children can cope realistically with skis is about five, but even then they will quickly get tired or bored and will probably need a fun, dedicated ski kindergarten area, with lots of little rope tows. Good toilet facilities loom large in a small person's mind—think about how they'll cope with this sort of thing on their own with salopettes and ski boots on. Try Avoriaz, La Tania, Valmorel, Les Menuires, for great child-friendly facilities.

Seven or eight year olds are more likely to cope with standard ski school. But even they will get bored if teaching is not geared towards them, will tire easily and probably need regular hot chocolate stops. Kids basically get cold much quicker, and they are much less likely to put up with it than adults. So you'll need a dedicated children's class with a considerate and enthusiastic instructor. It's not enough that they know how to say "up", "down" and "bend your knees" in your own language—they need to know stuff like "I need the loo" and "my hands are cold".

Boarding is an excellent option for children, and boarding instructors are often young, hip guys who are great at motivating kiddies. Falling over on a board is cool, whereas on skis it is a real trial, and you have to walk back up slopes to pick up discarded skis. Also, with boarding it's acceptable to sit around on your bottom for hours. Make sure boarding kids have really top quality gloves because they will have their hands in the snow all the time.

What to take

You might be tempted to take everything you possess with you, but you'll have to carry it at some point. Bulky pushchairs will get in the way in a small apartment and will be useless in snow anyway so take a good sling or rucksack instead. All resorts hire sledges that makes carrying everything and everyone easier, but for very little angels, it's worth taking your own travel cot and getting junior to sleep in it for at least a week before you go—so that it's less strange to get used to.

Despite rumours to the contrary, ski resorts do sell nappies, and other supplies. You are advised to take your usual formula as changing this might be the last straw for your baby's tummy. For exotic après ski options to tempt the young palate try Frankfurters in Austria and Raclette in France and Switzerland.



What you do need is warm clothing for your kids, whether they're skiing or not, and this will be cheaper from your home country. One-piece ski suits look good, but are pretty impractical—try getting to a toilet quickly in one. And when they are wet, they won't want to ski. It's better to invest in a good quality ski jacket, which you can use throughout the winter, and a couple of pairs of padded ski trousers so there is always one pair drying. You could swap clothes with a family with similar age children or shop second-hand on the likes of www.ebay.com and do a quick re-waterproofing with a spray such as Nikwax. www.nikwax.com.

Tights or long johns are good if you go from December to February, but by March and April they'll probably be too hot. Buy thick ski socks to avoid cold feet and blisters. All children should wear a helmet but these can always be hired and fitted in your resort. Try to take enough clothes to last; resort launderettes are few and far between, and expensive.

“Boarding is an excellent option for children and the instructors are often young, hip and great at motivating kiddies”



Top tips

- If you are using resort childcare, they may want to see a certificate of immunization—ask your GP for requirements in the country you are visiting.
- To most kids, all adults look the same, especially wearing identical ski clothes! Make sure your kids will remember their instructor's name and know what to do if they get separated (tell another instructor).
- Make sure junior has, in a safe pocket, lipsalve, money for hot chocolate stops, chocolate bars for energy and for cheering themselves up, tissues for runny noses and mountainside toilets with no paper. Tie sunglasses and goggles on—they'll lose them otherwise.

Choosing your resort

High altitude is good for snow but not so good for young children; they will have problems sleeping and dehydrate easily. French, purpose-built resorts are good for ski access but not so good for non-skiers, whereas others have more for non-skiers, but might involve long walks to the slopes along busy roads or using infrequent bus services.



Top five resorts

AVORIAZ

A short transfer from Geneva on good roads, this huge ski area is suitable for all standards, with a kids' south-facing kindergarten right in the middle of the car-free village. However, it can be boring for non-skiers and if your kids won't be left all day, you'll miss out on this spectacular skiing area.

VALMOREL

Fly to Lyon or Geneva. This small, car-free, pretty village has childcare facilities right next to the lifts so drop-off and pick-up are really easy. Most lifts come back to the centre of the resort so it's easy to gear your skiing around being flexible. There are also excellent nursery slopes and a ski school, but non-skiers may get bored.

ZELL AM ZEE

Fly to Munich. This beautiful medieval village has lots of shops selling everything from cuckoo clocks to fast food. There are lots of opportunities for swimming, skating and visiting art galleries—in short, it's great for non-skiers. There's also an excellent kids' ski kindergarten at Sonnealm (avoid the one in Zell, which is halfway up the mountain). Also, the resort's linked to Kaprun so there's lots of skiing.

ST ANTON

Fly to Munich. The best resort in Austria—some would say the world, yet if you can cope without visiting Lech and Zurs you can pop back regularly to

check on your offspring. Having said that, most instructors take the kids off all day and you never get to see them! There are great non-skiing facilities including a fabulous swimming pool with an enthralling heated outdoor area. It is a sprawling village, but you can leave all your gear in secure storage areas next to the slopes and the free shuttle bus is extremely efficient and reliable.



WENGEN

Fly to Basel or Geneva. This fairytale, southwest facing traffic-free village, half way up the Eiger, is reached by rack railway, and has been popular with independent British travellers for decades now. Kids will love travelling on the cog railway to Interlaken on the valley floor and up the other side to Murren, home of the Piz Gloria restaurant, which was blown up by James Bond in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. There's also a spectacular open-air icerink and horse drawn carriages. Your kids won't want to go home...



easyJet
flies to these and
many other ski
destinations.
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for details.