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## Travel

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### Some slopes are perfect for family runs

By ANNE Z. COOKE  
Special to The Star

LAKE TAHOE, Calif. | "Skiing isn't quite the same," Rob Baker said with a sigh, spreading sunscreen on an already-burned nose and pausing to reminisce about life before Emily.

Back in the day, he and his buddies were "cool dudes," he said, hucking off windswept ridges and chasing one another through deep powder from Colorado to California. On sunny March afternoons, they stripped to their shorts and raced down the bump runs, the loser buying a round of beer. "We were liberated," he said, smiling at the thought.

Now this buff 6-footer from Chicago was side-slipping down a bunny trail with a pert, red-headed 7-year-old. He was there when she took her first group 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 know I'm getting rusty," he said. "But I wouldn't trade Emily for anything. My family's what matters now."

Baker, 45, doesn't know it yet, but if Emily is a typical grade-schooler, it won't be long before she's keeping up with her dad on those groomed intermediate cruisers. She's snowplowing around the corners now. But after a week of lessons, most beginners are riding the chairlifts in perfect confidence and skiing — if a bit more slowly — the same intermediate cruisers their parents have skied for years.

For a host of reasons Baker, too, is typical, just another dad skiing with the little nippers. Couples are starting their families later in life, school schedules often include handy winter breaks and leaving the kids at home isn't an option. Anticipating the demographics, ski resorts have revamped their children's ski programs to make them more like camp.

"Eight and 9-year-olds who spend five days in ski school will be making parallel turns by Friday," said John Buhler, ski school director at Breckinridge Ski Resort in Colorado. "The kids aren't afraid, and their learning curve is shorter. When you show them something new, they're quicker to try it."

"Kids learn fast," said Mary Nichols, a former instructor with the Children's Center at Winter Park Resort, west of Denver. "When you're 6 you're not thinking about how breaking a leg can hurt. You're only worrying about whether you're having fun."

Where are some of our favorite ski-together runs, perfect for parents and kids? At Winter Park and Keystone Resort in Colorado; and at South Lake Tahoe, in California and Nevada (the ski area straddles the state line).

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### Resort

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.

From the top of the Zephyr Express, bear right and follow signs to March Hare and Allan Phipps. Stay on Allan Phipps, gliding down until you reach the crest of a rounded hill. Stop here to admire the treeless bowl below and a small mound in the distance named Vista Dome.

From here you can sail straight down, or double your ski time by carving big round C-turns. Continue down on Allan Phipps or Cranmer Cutoff to Snoasis, an on-mountain lodge. To go up again, board the Eskimo Express, below Snoasis. Or take the Prospector Express to the top of Vista Dome and ski down Butch's Breezeway.

If the kids are up for more, ride to the top of Mary Jane and ski down Lonesome Whistle, an easy Green trail until it reaches the top of the Olympia Express and becomes a super-cruising intermediate run. A half-dozen easy "Alice in Wonderland" runs offer lots of variety here. Both the High Lonesome Express and Olympia open up all kinds of interesting but easy terrain.



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**Anne Z. Cooke is a freelance writer in Marina del Rey, Calif.**

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