

Skiing for Children

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www.skischool.co.uk



Skiing holidays are a great way for the whole family to share the thrills (and spills) in a fantastic winter wonderland. What better way for everyone to get out into the fresh air and burn up some energy! Children love the sense of freedom as they snake down the *pistes* – reward for the initial physical challenge of learning to ski.

Making informed decisions about the many aspects of winter family holidays can be a bit tricky, so I've compiled this information sheet to try and answer some commonly asked questions related to skiing with children. These 'guidelines' are based on my sixteen years experience working as a ski teacher in Les Gets.

Before the holiday

For beginners, an introductory session or two at an indoor snow slope can be really beneficial. It will help to familiarize your children with the equipment and give them an idea of just how slippery skis on snow are, however, if they progress beyond these initial exciting steps bear in mind they won't be true 'debutants' and may qualify for non-beginner ski lessons in resort.

Young children may be nervous about their first ski experience, so a trip to the local slope to watch older siblings may help to remove the concerns and increase the excitement!

What's the best age for children to start ski school?

Generally, four is a good age to start and most children this age are happy to be left with an instructor and get to grips with their new activity.

How should their time be spent on the slopes?

Whilst ski lessons are vital during the first few holidays it is also important for children to have time to practice and consolidate what they have learned. Daily ski lessons of between one and three hours (depending on age and level) will leave plenty of time for some 'quality' practice in between. Make sure you discuss with the instructor what they should practice and which lifts and slopes to use.

Try and allow your children to practice what they have learned without bombarding them with new information or instructions. Remember, skiing should be fun and children will really enjoy their new challenges and freedom.

What should you expect in terms of progress?

Not surprisingly, different children progress at different rates - according to their age, sense of balance, physical/mental strength, confidence levels and, of course, how they are taught.

Generally, older children progress quicker than little ones (although sudden growth spurts can affect older children and teenager's coordination) and will normally be comfortably snowplough turning down green and easy blue runs by the end of the first week.

With some assistance from Mum or Dad, under four's may learn to balance on a pair of little plastic skis (which attach to their outdoor boots) and slide for a short distance on a very gentle slope.

During the first week, four and five year olds (with some daily tuition) will normally learn to walk with their skis on, step up the hill a little, use a 'moving carpet' lift and control their speed with a snowplough (on a beginners slope). 'Edgy-wedgy' plastic clips which hold the ski tips together are a useful tool to help small children develop a feel for the plough 'v' shape between their skis.



Should adults and children have shared lessons?

The simple answer to this is NO. Adults and children learn in very different ways and young children in particular tend to be far more 'self-sufficient' when their parents aren't around.

Shared lessons between parents and older children/teenagers can be successful but it's important that Mum and Dad focus on their own skiing whilst giving their offspring the freedom to learn and enjoy the ski lessons in their own way.

Group lessons v Private lessons?

There is no quick and easy answer regarding the best types of lessons for your children, but the information below may help you to decide.

Group lessons

Group size. Check how many children can join a course - the more there are the less individual attention they will receive.

Levels/ages. It's important for your children to be skiing with others of similar levels and ages to maximize the benefits of group lessons.

Language. Some schools may teach in multiple languages (i.e. French, English, Dutch) so if the class is mixed nationalities the instructor may spend valuable time repeating the same instructions in different languages.

Under 6s. Beginners under six years old require a lot of attention to keep them safe, so two instructors should be present unless the group size is very small.

Private lessons

Progress. Private instruction can be tailored specifically to your children so progress is normally quicker than in group lessons.

Under 6s. Beginners under six years old can achieve a lot with a daily one hour 'one-to-one' private lesson.

Cost. Private tuition shouldn't be ruled out on price alone. You may find that shared private lessons for three or more children are no more expensive than booking courses.

Levels/ages. It's important to group children of similar ages and levels to maximize the benefits of shared private lessons.

What should we do with our child under four?

If they have showed an interest in skiing (perhaps because of an older sibling's enthusiasm) one or two short, introductory private lessons (maximum one hour per session) will give them a fun and stress-free introduction to the sport. Children are too young for group lessons at this age.

To give under four's a taste for skiing rent or borrow a pair of little plastic skis which fit directly on to their outdoor shoes/boots. You will need to hold your child but the skis will allow them to experience the sensation of sliding over a flat or very gentle gradient.

Some French ski schools offer a 'Ski Garden' facility for this age group, however, in my experience most British children find this 'foreign' environment too daunting and overwhelming.

What about equipment and clothing?

Children get cold and overheat far quicker than adults. Learning to ski can be very strenuous and it's common for youngsters to get hot, tired and floppy on a sunny day. Conversely, they can get cold rapidly whilst sitting on a chairlift or standing still on a sub-zero temperature day. Fingers and toes are usually the first to get cold.

Helmets – whilst the wearing of helmets is not yet obligatory in France, there are very few children not using them on the slopes. They are available to rent or buy in all ski hire shops.

Goggles/sunglasses – eye protection is essential at all times as snow reflects dangerous UV rays, even on a cloudy day. Goggles generally stay in place better (with helmets) than glasses, and the double lens types are less likely to steam up.



Gloves/mittens – gloves are best for children aged six and over and they should fit properly to make ski poles and rope tows easier to hold on to. Mittens are recommended for younger children.

General ski clothing – it can be really tricky to kit your kids out with just the right amount of clothing. If they are beginners they will be expending a lot of energy on the nursery slopes and more likely to overheat. Of course, the weather will make a difference but don't assume that because it's sunny, it will be hot. It's usually best to go for a layering approach so that a fleece say can be removed when your child starts to get too warm. Outer layers should be water resistant and windproof.

Equipment – a good ski hire shop will make sure that your children have correct fitting boots, skis and poles. Boots should be snug and the child should be able to flex the boot slightly at the ankle – if they are too stiff this will hinder their progress. Skis should have an obvious 'hourglass' shape. Beginners under 9yrs will generally not require poles for the first few days, but it is best to check with your instructor.

Sun cream/lip protection – ensure all children wear a high factor sun cream and lip protection. The snow reflects the harmful rays and it is possible for skin to burn even on a cloudy day.

Other considerations

Food/drink – skiing burns up a lot of calories especially when the weather is cold. It's important to have regular snacks or hot chocolate stops. Depending on their ages and length of the ski lessons, it may be a good idea to put a snack and some Euros in your child's pocket. Remember at altitude you will also dehydrate quickly so it's also vital to drink plenty of water.

Toilet stops – make sure your children have been to the toilet before the lesson starts as it will not always be easy to stop at a café during the lesson – especially at short notice!



A skiing holiday should be fun and exciting for the whole family, but remember, you will all probably ski at different speeds and abilities. Here's a few suggested activities to keep your family ski sessions more enjoyable:

Stick to the slopes that everyone can enjoy.

Take turns leading each other down the slopes.

Let the children show you the 'bear runs' through the trees, or the jumps and bumps their instructor has shown them.

Stop for hot chocolate!

Video everyone and have a laugh watching the footage later, back at the chalet.

A parent's perspective

Written by Sheila Standen, Ski Famille

We first took our daughter skiing just before she was 4 years old, and it was very much a case of introducing her to the environment and the equipment, mixed with some fun in the snow. We had a few little slides on the nursery slopes, holding her between our legs, then we'd stop for a hot chocolate / build a snowman / gentle sledging etc.

One year on she was old enough to have some lessons, and in order to build on our previous holiday we chose a private British instructor for a few one to one sessions. She really enjoyed the experience and benefitted greatly as they were able to communicate to each other in plain English; we were amazed at the progress she had made each time.

As parents, we underestimated the rate at which she got tired. The fresh air and physical activity involved had quite an effect on her, but frequent stops for snacks and drinks usually remedied the situation. On a nice day, a packed lunch and drinks in a backpack made for an exciting picnic 'adventure', making sure at all times that the slopes we were heading for were confidence builders.

Now, at the grand old age of 10 she absolutely loves skiing, and even races at her local artificial slope. The tables have turned, and we are the ones now being left behind or coaxed along! I can feel some private lessons of our own coming on....