

Practical Tips for Planning Your Spiritual Adventures in the Snow

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Throughout our book, *Spiritual Adventures in the Snow: Skiing and Snowboarding as Renewal for Your Soul* (published by Skylight Paths Publishing, 2009), we explored many ideas about transforming recreational activities into spiritual adventures. Setting such an intention while in the early planning stages will help turn the desire into reality. Often, it comes down to making the space and time to incorporate a new dimension into something that is already well-loved. These considerations are especially important if you are new to adventuring in the snow. This article offers **practical ideas that may help you plan a trip that leaves more room for spiritual adventures rather than feeling as if you are spending all your time dealing with logistics.**

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOU IN SELECTING A DESTINATION FOR YOUR ADVENTURE

A key to creating spiritual adventure for your group, your family, or yourself begins with making a few well-thought-out choices regarding venue and activities. The choices can be made simply by prioritizing which issues seem to be the most important for you or your group. Then, information that is not always readily available can be obtained by asking the right questions of websites, travel agents, and resort officials. Do not be bashful about asking questions. You should have a wealth of information before making a final decision on where to spend your time and money on adventures. Consider the following and dream of your ideal spiritual adventure.

- Which sports and activities do you want to include in your spiritual adventure? Skiing? Snowboarding? Cross country skiing? Tubing? Snowshoeing? Sledding?
- Will you and your group or family feel more at home in a large resort bustling with activity, or a smaller resort, easy to get around in?
- What are the ability levels of your group? Any first-timers? If so, seek out a resort with plenty of beginner terrain, or least a good mix.
- Do you want to consider the green/sustainable practices of your venue? Are these important to your family or group?
- Do you *really* need a car? Is there a grocery store within walking distance or on the resort shuttle line? (Also check to see if it is a real grocery store or just a glorified convenience store where a loaf of bread is six bucks.)
- Is space available for group gatherings/meetings/activities?
- If you are vacationing with children, do kids' lesson times fit your typical family vacation schedule? (If lesson times are in the middle of nap time, you might be setting yourself up

for an unpleasant round of vacation meltdowns!) What are the ski school's ages and parameters for lessons? (If your kid is three and not potty trained, you may be disappointed to arrive at your chosen resort only to discover that kids must be potty trained to take lessons.)

A NOTE ABOUT LOGISTICS

Know the logistics-level tolerance of your group. Can your group be flexible with long flights, followed by long shuttle rides to the resort, followed by having to shop for groceries, all before getting oriented to a new location and time zone? High logistics travel with small kids is not recommended. For less logistics, consider a resort destination within driving distance so you can travel at your own pace, or one where commercial flights fly directly into the resort town. Also, consider how complicated day-to-day logistics are, such as getting from lodging to the ski area or your selected activity venue and back again.

PLANNING TIPS FOR PARENTS WITH CHILDREN (FROM KAREN)

- Keep it simple. Don't over plan activities. You know your kid(s) better than anyone, so plan accordingly. Most kids need a balance of structured and non-structured activities. Take care not to busy them right into hating snow and any activity connected to it.
- Don't push. Let them play in snow! Especially if your kids are small and haven't had much exposure to snow, honor their pace. You may have dreams of them whizzing down the bunny hill after a few lessons, while they may be content to sit in the snow for hours and marvel at it (or even want to be inside!). Allow them some time to watch other kids ski. Then let them think learning is their idea. It doesn't all have to happen on the first day. Their acclimation and excitement will be the key to their enjoyment. The unhappiest folks to be found on the mountain are the unhappy parents of unhappy children.
- When your children are ready, and only then, put them in lessons at a high quality ski school. Don't kid yourself into thinking you can teach them. Unless you and your kids are of an extraordinary ilk, it will eventually lead to frustration. They are more likely to make more progress with a trained professional who can make it fun. The added bonus is that the experienced instructor is more likely to instill in them a love for the sport just by being not at all invested, a little relaxed, and plenty goofy.
- Don't miss the opportunity to have spiritual moments with your kids. Take time to be in awe-filled wonder with them over snow, stars, the moon, the mountains, anything the experience offers. Relish the moments and be present with them in their world, instead of always trying to get them into yours.
- Talk to your kids well in advance. Help them understand what to expect and get excited about it. Have any pictures of you skiing before the kids came along? Share them! Access some kids books on snow adventuring. Fun ones are *First Tracks* by Johnny Boyd and *I Can Ski!* by Melanie Davis Jones. There are surprisingly many; ask your local library for help.

PLANNING TIPS FOR GROUPS (FROM MARCIA)

- Let's face it; adults are not so different from kids. A balance of structured and unstructured time is also a good intention for adult groups. Time for people to do their own thing is essential if you want to honor the spiritual dimensions of the trip. My pet peeve for so many spiritual retreats is a schedule that looks nothing like a "retreat" from the frenzied pace so many of us live at home. At the same time, some structured conversation can open up opportunities for sharing at a deeper level. Visit our website, spiritualadventuresinthesnow.com, for downloadable companion workbooks to help you with group ideas.
- Find out if the place you are staying has meeting space that you can occupy for the duration of your trip. If so, create a space that encourages community, discussion, and room for informal "mixing." Avoid lining up chairs like a classroom or typical church pews. A horseshoe pattern around a low table that can serve as a focal point for objects of discussion (or if you are a church group, creating an altar) works well. Also having smaller groupings of chairs at the outskirts of the space can help facilitate more intimate conversation opportunities.
- The open end of the horseshoe is a great place for a screen and projector for showing fun clips of Warren Miller ski films (available at most video stores in ski towns), or better yet, video clips or pictures of your group from that day on the mountain. You could use a TV and DVD/VCR player, but using your own computer hooked to a projector will offer a bigger image for the group to watch. LCD projectors can be expensive if rented from a hotel or conference center. Consider bringing your own, if you have access to a portable one, or investigate renting from an outside source in town. Remember, if you show movies, you will need a set of portable speakers to hook into the computer or projector.
- As you schedule group time, remember that many people will be moving slowly after a day of skiing, and all that extra expenditure of energy and breathing clean mountain air makes for early bedtimes and great sleeping.
- Energy is also a consideration as you plan meals. A good breakfast with protein is essential for a good start to the day, a light lunch is best if you want to keep going on the slopes in the afternoon without feeling like a ton of bricks, and after a full day on the slopes, folks are usually ravenous for a good and early dinner!

PLAN FOR SAFETY ON THE MOUNTAIN (FROM KAREN)

Being safe is best accomplished when thought about in advance. In addition to the Skiers/Riders' Responsibility Code found in multiple locations at most resorts, here are a few recommendations to heed:

- Wear a helmet. While you may be quite certain that you are not likely to slam into a tree, you cannot be certain that someone will not careen into you, causing serious bodily injury. Not that many years ago, helmets were a rare site on the slopes. Perhaps fueled by the tragic fatalities of Sonny Bono and Michael Kennedy (who both skied into trees *sans* helmets) just five days apart in the late 1990s, though no hard statistics are available,

resorts estimate that now about half of skiers and riders on the slopes wear helmets, a very positive trend. Even as I write this, news comes of the death of Natasha Richardson, British actress and wife of actor Liam Nieson. Richardson suffered a brain injury after a seemingly harmless fall during a beginning ski lesson while vacationing with her family in Canada. Sadly, she was not wearing a helmet. You've only got one head; it's just common sense to protect it. A little thoughtful prevention can go a long way toward allowing you to continue your earthly spiritual trek.

- Do not stop to rest or wait in the middle of a run; stop at the edges. Do not stop where there is a blind spot and you cannot see skiers if you look uphill. If you cannot see them as they approach, they cannot see you.
- Often, ski areas will post large caution banners across congested areas. These banners form "gates" that force the skiers to slow down as they pass through. NEVER stop in these gates, but keep moving to allow others to pass through.
- Never carry a small child or baby in a backpack while skiing or boarding. While you may be confident that you can accomplish this without falling, you cannot be sure that someone will not run into you, and the results could be disastrous. Years ago, a fire-fighter friend was the first responder to such a tragic occurrence, and he still has difficulty talking about it.
- If you see skiers and boarders skiing too fast in a congested area where there are lots of beginners and kids, ask ski patrol to put more safety personnel in the area to slow folks down.
- On a narrow run, if you are passing someone, call out "On your left!" or "On your right!" as you approach, so the slower rider can clear a path for you. If you are skiing slowly down a narrow trail, hug a side to make it easier and safer for others to pass.
- When boarding or skiing down a run, "pick a line" and stick with it. Don't ski or board from side to side all over the entire run in an erratic fashion. You are much safer if you pick a line on one side or the other so faster riders coming up from behind can predict your movement and avoid you.
- Never leave your skis or board lying out on the snow in a congested area. Doing so endangers anyone who might be approaching the area, not to mention your (formerly) spiffy equipment. Use the ski and board racks for equipment not in use.
- Stay within your own limits. Don't go hit the biggest feature in the terrain park to impress your buddies when you haven't perfected the smallest ones. Don't go ski the trees until you can execute fast tight turns in very narrow spaces and react quickly to the unexpected.
- If you are a fast boarder or skier, take extra precautions on crowded runs that are major thoroughfares. Stay aware that there are folks of all ability levels on these runs, and you

cannot predict their path. A fast boarder or skier coming up behind a cautious beginner can be a terrifying experience. Slow down and let the newbies enjoy their snail's pace.

- When riding or skiing at a resort, have ski patrol's phone number accessible. Key it into your cell phone, memorize it, or know where to find it on the trail map in your pocket. Just the other day, I was riding a steep run in a somewhat remote area at a resort, and out of the corner of my eye, I saw someone take a nasty tumble. As I slowed to a stop a few yards below, I was aware that the fallen skier was just lying there in a small heap. Then I realized the small heap was not just any small heap, but a child apparently skiing alone. As I made my way back up the hill to her, I realized she was crying. I was actually relieved to hear her cry. Darcy was nine years old and quite frightened that she might be seriously hurt. So was I. I sent someone for ski patrol and began talking with her and trying to assess the situation. A few folks gathered and collected her gear. Someone else who stopped knew the phone number for ski patrol. We called them on a cell phone to access them more quickly. We also called her mom who was skiing on a run not far away. Being able to make direct contact with ski patrol in that moment was a great comfort and an important lesson. They are the designated professional first-responders and absolutely amazing in emergency situations. But we have to be able to reach them when something unfortunate happens.
- If you ski/ride in the backcountry, or if you intend to someday ski/ride in the backcountry or off-piste at resorts, take an avalanche safety class, and carry and know how to use avalanche safety equipment so that you can be sure to "stay found."

A FINAL NOTE

You may be asking, what is particularly spiritual about any of this?

If you are unsafe or stressed out, you may not have the opportunity to engage in soulful renewal because you will have embarked on an adventure of another kind. Setting up the intention of being able to enjoy and be fully present to every minute will open the doorway to allowing adventures of a spiritual nature to emerge. **Many blessings for an optimal experience for you, your family, or your group!**

Contact us for more information about our book or the companion workbooks:

www.spiritualadventuresinthesnow.com