

SNOW  
EAST!

Janet Franz

Janet Essman Franz is an award winning writer, television producer and fitness instructor in Vermont. She enjoys cross-country and alpine skiing with her husband and son at resorts throughout the East.

# Vacation Planning

## Making the Family Getaway Easy

Getting away with your family provides a chance to share new adventures. Traveling with children is best when you prepare ahead of time. Winter destination resorts that offer a variety of activities for all ages and interests are good choices for family vacations. Here are some tips to get the most out of your time together and avoid those vacation hassles.

### Do Your Homework

The Guide to Planning the Perfect Winter Family Vacation, a primer produced by Smugglers' Notch Resort, provides plenty of planning tips for a stress-free winter vacation with children. First, before choosing your destination, find out what the kids and the adults would like to do. Then prioritize activities so you know what the group wants to accomplish first and what you can save for last or live without.

Research several resorts on the Internet, order brochures and call their customer service centers. Ask for advice about accommodations, dining and special package pricing. Check on equipment rental and lockers. Find out about childcare, lessons programs and après ski activities for all age groups in your family. Ask about cribs and highchairs. It's a good idea to pre-arrange these details in advance.

### Know Your Options

When choosing family lodging, remember that as the kids get older, both you and they will need more space. "Parents of infants don't mind having the baby in the room but older children want their own space," said Karen Boushie, Public Relations Assistant Director for Smugglers' Notch Resort. Make your lodging choice based on how much space will suit your family, rather than only on price."

For families with an infant, a studio with a kitchenette generally provides enough room and amenities. With older children it is convenient to have a gathering place for breakfasts, lunches and dinners. A condominium, house or hotel suite with a kitchen may save money compared to eating out every day. For vacations lasting longer than a few days, a clothes washer and dryer are blessings.

To save money, ask the resort if there are certain periods when rates are lower. You can usually save on weekdays, non-holiday periods, early and late season. Make sure you understand the resort's deposit and refund policy.

Some resorts offer special lift ticket pricing for families with children. As examples: Catamount allows fourth and fifth graders to ski for free when skiing with an adult. Sugarloaf hosts a week in February when all kids and teens ski free with three or more nights' lodging. At Killington and Pico, kids 12 and younger ski and ride free the same number of days as their parents when parents pre-purchase a five-day lift ticket. At Jiminy Peak, kids under 12 ski free with a ticketed adult when staying midweek at the slope side hotel. Lift tickets are complimentary for children under 6 at many resorts,

When making plans, ask about local dining options. Even if you will be eating in, it helps to know about cafeterias, delis and pizza delivery. Are there children's menus? Are they walking distance or on the shuttle bus line? Do children receive lunch as



part of day care and lesson programs? Knowing these facts in advance helps.

Packaged vacations make planning simple. With everything included for one price, you won't have to drag out your wallet every time you turn around. You know the costs up front and understand what you are entitled to in advance.



## GRADE "A" B & B's

*These Inn Owners Know Why a Bed & Breakfast is a Cozy and Tasty Option*

He's a former telecommunications worker who happens to be a pretty decent skier.

Oh yes, he likes hockey.

She's a lover of the outdoors who has made a career of massage therapy.

Together, these 34-year-olds have found a neat niche for themselves in a quiet, but very popular bastion of snowsports land in the East.

Meet the St.-Jacques, Luc and Vicky. As the owners of A Tout Venant in Magog, Quebec, since 2003, they are not shy about unfurling the welcome mat and preaching the glory of the bed & breakfast. After all, it was quite a journey for them to settle in the Eastern Townships, located between Montreal and Quebec City.

Flash back to the late 1980s. Luc was living near Calgary and developed a fondness for the mountains of the Canadian Rockies. It was here that he met Vicky and they immediately realized they both loved the outdoors and cozy travel accommodations.

"We always stayed away from the big places," Luc says. "We were never big fans of the commercial resorts."

That mindset pointed the compass to their native Quebec and a trip to France and Ireland convinced them what to do.

"We did a little camping and stayed at B&Bs," Luc says. "We wanted to live closer to our families (and Luc's beloved Montreal Canadians hockey team) so we decided that operating a B&B would fit the bill."

But first, Luc secured a temporary U.S. visa and began working on train and aircraft communications systems for Bombardier in Plattsburg, N.Y. Meanwhile Vicky went to Montreal to become a licensed massage therapist. Then they began looking at bed & breakfasts in Magog. Luc had discovered this charming town near the ski areas of Mount Orford and Owl's Head while having his visa documents processed.

Their B & B, A Tout Venant, is an 1895 Victorian home. The name loosely translates into English as "all are welcome," says Luc. The St.-Jacques's B&B specializes in Luc's wonderful crêpes for breakfast and Vicky's massages after a rough day of skiing and riding. The inn is one of 22 in the Magog B&B Association. As president of the association, Luc preaches two things: The coziness of the first "B", and the specialized menu of the second.

"And we will adjust our menu to anyone's dietary needs," he says, "and so will most of the B&Bs in Magog."

"A Tout Venant is private - most rooms have private baths, and it is NOT just a continental breakfast," says Luc. And maybe most important, he reminds us that, "In a B&B, you do not feel like you are sleeping in an impersonal wall of cement."

— Chris Dehnel



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## Plan Group Activities

Some resorts offer innovative programs for family togetherness. For instance, Mount Sunapee offers Families First, which allows families to learn to ski and snowboard together in the same class. Children 8 years old and up take beginner ski or snowboard lessons with their parents in a beginners' area. Everyone receives a two-hour lesson, an all-day lift ticket and rental equipment for \$72 per person for the first day and \$70 for days two and three combined.

Your vacation plans may include grandparents, cousins and close friends. Consider choosing a resort with plenty for all ages to do, plan meals around dietary restrictions and solicit everyone's input for activities.

## Find Alternatives for Everyone

Family members often wish to go separate ways. Choose a resort that offers alternative activities for your group, including the youngest family members. You don't want to discover too late that your children are too young for the childcare center, or that kids' programs do not coincide with your pre-arranged plans. Look into off-mountain activities, regional tours and special events. A true family resort has something for everyone.

Don't forget to ask about evening childcare and après ski entertainment like hot chocolate warm ups, bonfires or sledding. Many resorts are youth-focused. As examples: Cranmore hosts a "Cranapalooza" festival on Saturday nights, with kid-friendly activities, skiing and tubing under the lights. Killington's new Snowshed Adventure Center offers indoor rock climbing, billiards, golf simulators and outdoor snow skating and tubing until 8:30 p.m. Saturdays and holidays. On Saturdays at Bretton Woods Resort, après ski parties for 4-12 year olds include live entertainment, refreshments and games. At The Mount Washington Resort at Bretton Woods, weekend and holiday dinner parties for kids include movies and games with childcare. These activities are fully supervised. "Parents can enjoy a beverage in the lounge or go moonlight snowshoeing without the kids," said Mount Washington Resort Public Relations Manager Martha Wilson.

Smugglers' Notch has two supervised youth centers for kids aged 13-15 and 16 and older at no extra charge to resort guests. The centers provide a safe venue to socialize, shoot pool, play video games, access the Internet, and enjoy a juice bar with no adults allowed. Evening activities include ice-skating, swimming and DJ dance parties. An on-call shuttle service allows teens to enjoy independence getting to and from events. These options give parents a chance to enjoy their vacation evenings, too.

For a free copy of The Guide to Planning the Perfect Winter Family Vacation, call Smugglers' Notch, 1-800-451-8752 or go to [www.smuggers.com](http://www.smuggers.com). It's full of good ideas. ❄️

Photo courtesy of Smugglers' Notch Resort