

HELICOPTER PARENTING

“How am I going to go back to skiing laps off a chairlift?”

I found a whole new way to rationalize a heli-ski holiday: use one of your kids! “It’s tough to tell your wife you’re off to Wiegele World for another week with the guys,” admitted my new American friend Ted to me sheepishly while slurping down a steaming bowl of hearty beef-barley soup. “She was never a strong skier and prefers beach vacations anyway.”

We’re sharing today’s lunch spot, another stunning alpine setting, with two other groups of heli-skiers, Ted’s being a more typical make-up than mine: a lead and tail guide along with 10 guests, 100 per cent of whom are male.

Taking a longer look at my troop, Ted stops his soup spoon mid-air. “You’re in with a young crowd, aren’t you?” he says slowly, the wheels clicking in his head almost audible. “Next year maybe I should bring my daughter...yeah...that’s a great excuse!”

I thought my 19-year-old daughter Heather would be out of place in the helicopter, but those attentive types in customer service at Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing teamed her up with two others just a year or two older. Joining us in the week’s lightest-weight helicopter were Canadian-British daughter and mum Kayla and Tracy, as well as Austrian son and dad Moritz and Peter. Along with one of our guides, Linda (who was also the week’s resident MD), the four remaining Ted-types almost looked out of place.

Whether or not the three young people were brought last winter as justification, it was the kids’ first time ever heli-skiing and to the parents, the biggest worry seemed to be that the luxury of heli-skiing was being introduced so early in life. “How am I going to go back to skiing laps off a chairlift?” was repeated by each of them at some point during our visit. The rewards of introducing a child to the magic of heli-ski powder were obvious before boarding the great noisy beast the first morning.

Beautiful skier Moritz and his family are from Vienna, but they’re weekend warriors at Kitzbühel where they have a family place. Kayla is at UBC in part because of its proximity to Whistler, but with her mother in the U.K. and

a granny in Verbier, she’s a regular in the Alps. Heather’s exposure to powder is playing in the trees after a storm at our little home hill in the East, plus grabbing the opportunity on an annual family ski trip somewhere big to ski under the ropes. Not surprisingly, none of the three found heli-skiing tough. Only the girls admitted to being intimidated beforehand (which is common, particularly among self-deprecating Canadian skiers), but they relaxed quickly.

“It was pretty easy actually—surprisingly easy,” said Kayla. “I was really worried beforehand because my mum told me that I had to start training for it and working out more, which I told her I was doing. But the guides and helicopters made it almost easier than resort skiing, where you often have to walk or hike or traverse to find the good snow. The guides loaded our skis and the helicopter dropped us off at the good snow—all we had to do was ski.”

Another unique offer at Wiegele’s is the cat-ski option on nearby Saddle Mountain. If a partner wants a slower pace, she or he can do a few laps or spend all day skiing from a private cat with a guide and take advantage of the fact that all guides at Wiegele’s are also instructors with a minimum Level III CSIA standard.

Kayla had reminded me how often I have to counter myths about heli-skiing to potential skiers. “No, you never jump from the helicopter.” “No, it’s not ‘extreme’ skiing; even if you’re a strong intermediate, you can do it—and, most important, you won’t be alone.” “Yes, there are always some women heli-skiing; they’re just well-outnumbered.” “No, just because you’ve been heli-skiing for a day from a resort, doesn’t mean you’ve already experienced it—a week-long heli-holiday is truly unique.”

When I asked Kayla what she would compare Wiegele’s with, her response made me smile: “It’s incomparable!” and then added, “I think one week of heli-skiing beats an entire season at a resort.”

Heather went one step further: “Why don’t we spend next Christmas at Wiegele’s with the whole family?”

Uh, oh. ❄️



JAIN MACMILLAN
EDITOR



Photos: JOHN SCHWIRTLICH

Take Your Kid to Work Day at Wiegele's.