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Ski Sunday
Sunday 5.50pm BBC Two

IT'S NOT THE first snowfall. It's not the adverts in the newspaper travel sections. It's not even the smug conversation of those who've already booked their trip. No, the tell-tale giveaway that the ski season has started is the familiar jaunty brass of the *Ski Sunday* theme on BBC Two.

That clarion call rings out again this week (pleasantly or painfully, depending on the levels of your fitness and finances), but for me it's now accompanied by an insistent baritone refrain: the voice of my teenager excitedly asking where we're going this year – because I made the mistake of spoiling him so utterly on his first ever ski trip last winter.

Theo, 14, is a sporty type and blessed with the sort of breezy confidence that I enjoy watching evaporate instantly when confronted with "those long, thin, bendy things" strapped to his feet. But high-altitude French resort Les Deux Alpes (les2alpes.com) has a knack for making beginners feel as if the sport is something designed for

them rather than against them.

This is a resort that multitasks brilliantly: extensive beginner zones, long cruisey blue and red runs for the intermediates, some challenging terrain for the experts – and enough sunshine on the lower slopes to keep legs warm and morale intact for the young (or old!) ones.

In between whooping like a teenager myself as I whizzed down slopes thick with the white stuff even in November, I marvelled at how well the resort worked as a multi-generational base. It starts with the layout: "L2A" sits astride a long, sunny balcony above the Vénéon valley, so you're never far from a lift, a gentle piste or – this being France – an excellent pastry. And when you do venture higher, the runs fan out in ways that allow beginners, intermediates and experts to ride the same lift but peel off onto terrain that suits them.

In the mornings, Theo and I would ride the gleamingly new (and delightfully speedy) Jandri Express lift together, then I'd zip off with a guide for a blast across the glacier's snowy motorways

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while Junior stayed in the infinitely-more-patient-than-mine hands of his ESF instructor. Then we'd regroup over *chocolat chaud*, swapping tales of triumph and near-misses.

It was all so effortless, too. Long-established and family-friendly operator Ski France (skifrance.co.uk) had found us Hotel Ibiza – a bright, buzzy base perched perfectly above the resort centre, and particularly suited to multi-gen groups (ibiza-les2alpes.com). It's close enough to the après action but without feeling stuck in the middle of it, and also one of those rare hotels where parents, grandparents, teenagers and younger kids can all find corners to call their own.

After a day on the slopes, the grown-ups gravitated towards the decadently-upholstered bar and lounge (complete with tipsy sing-songs around the piano), while the kids hit the games room to self-administer hours of entertainment at the pool table and pinball machine. (And everyone enjoyed the hot tub, sauna and swimming pool.)

Being in the older generation has its advantages, too. While everyone under 30 lay in,

I joined my silver-haired peers on the resort's "First Tracks" package – a sort of Alpine backstage pass in which you join the pisteurs as they prepare the slopes. While Theo was whisked off for the introduction to skiing I wasn't competent to give him myself ("These bits are called bindings, son; I have no idea how they work"), I glided down corduroy snow so perfect it felt sacrilegious to ski on it.

LES DEUX ALPES has recently sharpened up its offering of non-ski activities, which is crucial for children, teenagers and, ahem, adults whose legs have remembered they're not 25. The village has a cute little ice rink, sighingly peaceful toboggan area and a giant airbag (picture a big ski jump but you descend in an inflatable donut and land on a...

'It was proper family skiing, and we both grinned like idiots'

giant airbag).

Our favourite, though, was the snooc – which may sound like a *Star Wars* creature, but is actually a kind of micro-sledge, like a small stool with a single short ski stuck on the bottom, so you can skim (or, just as often, tumble) down the slopes just mere inches above ground. It's silly, brilliant fun, and – crucially – levelled the playing field. Theo, who by that stage still had more snow-plough than parallel turn in his pocket, adored a sport in which he could suddenly outpace me.

Evenings were a satisfying mix of Alpine comfort and easy strolling. One afternoon we took the gondola down to the historic village of Vénosc, where narrow lanes house artisans selling the most delectable local cheeses (agreeably unpasteurised), cured meats (deliciously garlicked) and honeys (delicately wildflowered).

Another evening we bowled – of course we bowled; is it even a family ski holiday if someone doesn't sulk because their ball keeps going down the side? – before wandering back to Hotel Ibiza for multiple trips to the dinner buffet.

By the final morning, Theo was linking turns confidently enough to follow me down a long, sun-soaked blue to the village. It wasn't fast, it wasn't stylish, and it certainly wasn't going to trouble the *Ski Sunday* producers – but it was skiing, proper family skiing, and we both grinned like idiots. **ED GRENBY**

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