



AROUND THE NATION

# < Resorts Cater To Older Skiers Who Want To Improve

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STEVE INSKEEP, HOST:

The median age of Americans has been creeping up, and so apparently is the age of the average skier. Ski resorts are now catering to an older crowd, teaching baby boomers how to slalom safely. Aspen Public Radio's Luke Runyon reports.

LUKE RUNYON, BYLINE: Sandy and Howie Hammer are standing atop Aspen Mountain, wearing matching robin's egg blue ski jackets. It's the first day of class.

SANDY HAMMER: I want to be able to keep learning, and not to be at a point where I could say, oh, I used to do that. I'm not ready for that.

RUNYON: The New York couple is taking part in a course called Bumps for Boomers. The Boomers part is self-explanatory. Only people aged 50 and up can take the course. The Hammers fit the demographic. Both are in their 70s. The bumps refer to the terrain. Think of videos where a skier's flying down the hill and their knees almost hit their chin. The Hammers are just about to click into their training skis.

HOWIE HAMMER: I mean, standing here I feel like a king. The minute I have to move three feet, you might be seeing me as, you know, a peasant on the floor. I mean, it'll be all over. I'll let you know.

HAMMER: They're very light.

HAMMER: Yeah, they are very light. And we expect to have great results. I hope these instructors know what the hell they're talking about, though, because so far, I haven't learned a thing from them.

RUNYON: That's after a whopping 20 minutes on the mountain top and less than one minute on the skis.

BOB MATTICE: So it clicks, and it's on. Then I give it a little shake to make sure it's tightly centered on there.

RUNYON: Bumps instructor Bob Mattice says the tougher terrain and older students demand a unique teaching style that wouldn't necessarily work for a group of twenty-somethings.

MATTICE: When we're younger, we rely upon things that dissipate - speed, strength, reflexes, aggressiveness. They tend to diminish as we age.

RUNYON: Bumps for Boomer's goal is to help skiers to ski for life. And that's a big economic advantage to Aspen's ski resort. The price tag for the four-day course alone totals \$1,600. Spokesman Jeff Hanle says older skiers are loyal. In fact, 70 percent come back after their first visit. Opening up more terrain and catering to their needs is good business.

JEFF HANLE: When they retire, they'll hopefully come back for longer periods. They'll stay here in their second home for a month instead of two weeks. And what they do is they bring their families with them. So it's that multi-generational ripple effect that is really beneficial.

RUNYON: Over the last decade and half, resort visits by the boomer crowd have doubled, which makes sense. This generation is responsible for building the modern ski industry.

JEREMIAH MORA: That saying if you rest, you rust is so true. And it resonates not just for the boomer population, but for anyone who's aging.

RUNYON: AARP Colorado's Jeremiah Mora says retirees are living longer and have greater access to medicine.

MORA: Having knees replaced or having surgery that can keep someone mobile has actually helped encourage people to continue living a healthy lifestyle and continue doing the sports that they love, such as skiing.

RUNYON: Back on Aspen Mountain, New York couple Howie and Sandy Hammer are now on day four of their bumps lesson. They're knocking the snow off the bottoms of their boots to click in for the final class.

So is that intimidation factor gone now? Do you...

HAMMER: No. No.

HAMMER: I think it's gone. I think that I was comfortable. I wasn't in over my head. I was able to do all the things. And so I wasn't out of my league.

RUNYON: A league that now includes the bumps on Aspen Mountain.

For NPR News, I'm Luke Runyon in Aspen, Colorado.

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