



> Locals sometimes use the volcanic mineral water of Nozawa Onsen for cooking.

Same slopes, different adventure

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NOZAWA ONSEN LETS YOU ENJOY THE SNOW WITH OR WITHOUT THE KIDS

➤ As the sun set on our last day of skiing Nozawa Onsen as a couple, I thought we'd had our last skiing and après-ski sessions for a long time. Now, I know that becoming a parent doesn't mean our adventures have to stop – they simply take a different turn, on the same slopes.

Nozawa Onsen is fantastic for families. You fly into Tokyo, jump on the Shinkansen (bullet train) and then take a local train to arrive four hours later. When you have kids in tow, train travel is great. They can move around, enjoy the quirky Japanese snack trolley and watch the scenery change frame by frame.

As a small resort, Nozawa is easy to navigate. In the traditional village you'll see steam rising from cobblestone paths outside temples and shrines, *onsens* soothing locals everywhere, and street vendors selling plenty of tasty local delicacies. Of course, this area also offers kids special sights, including the opportunity to meet the region's native 'snow monkeys', so it's perfect for a day trip.

We checked into Villa Nozawa, which an Australian, Mark, runs with his Japanese wife, Yoshiko. Ideal for couples and

families, the villa has spacious areas where everyone can gear up, comfortable rooms with *tatami* mats, and shared bathrooms. Most Japanese still bathe the traditional way: in gender-segregated *onsen*. Be sure to enjoy a soak, but just remember that these pools have rules – not to mention naked oldies – so be respectful.

Many of Nozawa's cosy restaurants double as bars. (Who says parents can't enjoy an après-ski drink?) Snag one of the limited seats at Hamacho, where sushi master Maru turns the daily catch into well-priced and artfully presented sushi and sashimi. Alternatively, head to Yoshimi Soba, where sumo-wrestler-size owner Yamazaki-san talked me through the finer points of eating soba noodles like a pro.

And now to the snow. Beginner courses are long, wide and oh-so pretty; intermediate tracks are powder packed; and advanced runs are difficult enough to challenge even the most experienced skier. The best part? You'll find a nursery for littlies and English-speaking skiing instructors, so you can race down the runs as fast as you like. ➤