

Learning how to ski (and have fun) from a real pro

By Kari Bodnarchuk
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CRESTED BUTTE, Colo. — New England native and former pro ski racer Kim Reichhelm thrives on adventure and pushing herself to the extreme. She doesn’t expect you to mirror her. She just wants to help you ski better and have fun — connect with other women, explore the local ski culture, and maybe enjoy a margarita or two with new friends.

“I know it sounds corny, but I love to share the love — of skiing and some of my favorite places in the world,” says Reichhelm, 59, who has spent the past 30 years running ski clinics and guided adventure tours. “This isn’t boot camp. I want you to learn and have fun.”

Reichhelm grew up in Connecticut and, later, Vermont. Her parents cofounded Stratton Mountain School, a ski academy, when she was 12, enabling her to spend winters skiing at Stratton while getting tutored at the family’s second home. Reichhelm went on to join the US Ski Team, race professionally, and earn two World Extreme Skiing championships. She now spends more than 200 days a year on skis and, since 1989, has run women’s and coed ski adventures all over the world — in Japan, Chile, Greenland, and across the United States.

Last January, I took a Mom’s Time Out to visit friends in Crested Butte and then join eight other women for a four-day Ski With Kim clinic. Reichhelm and her all-female team — top instructors from Vail Resort and Crested Butte — gathered to help us boost our skills and confidence.

The women in our group ranged from rusty intermediate to expert skiers. They included a woman from Bermuda who, for obvious reasons, only skis occasionally; a New Jersey mom who had left her 3-year-old at home so she could “ski all day without interruptions”; a financial expert from Toronto who appreciated the après ski elements as much as the slopes; three women — all cousins — from Boston who were celebrating one’s 60th birthday with this mini adventure; and a woman from New Canaan, Conn., who wanted to improve her skills for keeping up with



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her adult son on their annual 10-day ski trip.

The group also included Tonya Drayden from Portland, Ore., who told us: “I love skiing because when you let everything go, it’s like dancing. I got injured and couldn’t ski, but now I want to bring some of the joy back.” I, in turn, wanted to learn to ski steep pitches — truly ski and enjoy them, not just survive to the bottom.

Each day we broke into small groups, with anywhere from two to four people per instructor, and spent the morning working on skills. Then, after a catered or “fine-dining” lunch — Reichhelm embraces local cuisine wherever she goes — we continued practicing our skills while instructors videotaped us. Reichhelm floated between each group throughout the day offering positive input on our form and techniques — “good pole plant,” “nice bend,” and “excellent transitions,” she said — while also keeping it real: “You’re just being a chicken,” Reichhelm lightheartedly but honestly told one woman. “Just commit. It’s a timing thing. You just need to initiate your turns a little sooner.”

And to Drayden she said, “For you to get back your dance, you need to smooth it out. That means flexing and extending —

and be light on the rise. Remember, if you’re over the center of your skis, you’re in control.”

At the end of every day, we gathered for hor d’oeuvres and wine while Reichhelm offered one-on-one analysis of our ski videos and provided useful gear info.

“Men blame their gear” if they aren’t skiing well, whereas “women blame themselves,” said Reichhelm, who helps design and develop women’s skis as a tech adviser for K2. “For women, incorrect or ill-fitted gear is often the problem.” In fact, throughout the clinic, she encouraged several of us to get different, more suitable skis and to go see Peter, a master boot-fitter at Flatiron Sports, to alleviate issues.

Reichhelm liked to mix it up and give us a new instructor each day because, she explained, “We all teach the same things in a different way, so one instructor’s explanation may resonate with you.”

That proved true. Wendy Crosby, a Crested Butte instructor, drew a picture of a doughnut in the snow one day with a diagonal line through it and told me, “Don’t go through the hole!” That was her way of explaining that when you make a turn, you need to weight the

Tonya Drayden (on left in purple) of Portland, Ore., practices her turns while following Wendy Crosby, an instructor for a Ski With Kim women’s clinic at Crested Butte Mountain Resort in Colorado.

Ski With Kim clinics, adventures

Niseko, Japan, guided skiing, Jan. 27-Feb. 1 and Feb. 2-7
Alta, Utah, coed steep camp, Feb. 10-13
Sun Valley, Idaho, women’s ski clinic, Feb. 25-28, and coed heli and resort skiing, March 2-6
Big Sky, Mont., women’s ski clinic, March 9-12
Kicking Horse, British Columbia, coed steep camp, March 16-20
Aspen, Colo., open private, March 23-26
Greenland, heli-skiing, April 16-23
Alaska, heli-skiing, March 29-April 4 and June (date TBA)
Portillo, Chile, Aug. 8-15
Custom and private tours available

outside ski to remain more stable, rather than weight the inside (or downhill) ski and fall

ent themselves according to the 4-Way Stop, as it’s referred to, in the center of town.

“You don’t just stumble upon Crested Butte,” one local told me. “You have to work to get here, and once you do, it’s slower, it’s wild, and there’s space to be free.”

When you’re not out skiing, check out the gallery in the beautiful Old Town Hall (owned and operated by about a dozen local artists); Tony’s Conoco, an old hardware store-turned-museum and gift shop with its century-old coal stove and modern-day knickknacks; and the female-owned and operated Montanya Distillers, which makes award-winning American rum (ask for a free tour and tasting). Then grab a bite to eat at Secret Stash Pizza (look for the old rotary phone outside with the “Free calls to Buddha” sign), Sherpa Café (serving Nepalese, Tibetan, and Indian cuisine, and run by a Sherpa who has summited Everest multiple times), or Soupçon, a bistro serving delightful French cuisine in American-size portions in a cozy wood cabin just off the main street (reservations a must).

The final day of our camp, Crosby held me back from joining the more advanced group so I could work more on my skills, practicing weighting both skis and picking my lines. The extra work paid off. That afternoon, Sarah Jones, an instructor on Crested Butte’s ski patrol for 27 years, took me down steep glades and open bowls in deep snow — everything I’d asked for — on the mountain’s double-black North Face slope. Not only did I survive to the bottom, but I had so much fun.

As for Drayden, “I have gotten my dance back!” she told me. She went on to end her ski season with a trip to Japan. “I’ll always remember Kim’s voice in my head to ski my own path — the warnings not to get stuck in a particular way of skiing the route, but to choose a path that nobody else has yet taken. These were not her exact words, but it’s the feeling I carry with me as I dance down the slopes.”

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Shining a light on women

►WOMEN
Continued from Page M1

sortium and co-director of gender and women’s studies at Villanova University.

Museum Hack is even offering consulting services now to the museums through which it brings its renegade tours.

This formidable group of mobile women “is looking for empowering narratives about women that elevate their history and themselves,” said Rebecca Fisher, cofounder of Beyond the Bell Tours, which runs the Badass Women tour.

Such narratives have been surprisingly absent, Fisher found when she was an undergraduate helping a professor catalog historical monuments in Philadelphia. Of 300 public statues there, she said, 10 were of women, and six of those depicted figures such as Joan of Arc, who didn’t have any local relevance.

“That was the thing that pushed me over the edge,” said Fisher.

Proposed since 1996, a National Women’s History Museum has been stalled for more than 20 years, though a congressional commission set up in 2014 recommended a 10-year plan to slowly inch it forward. Even that was opposed by some conservatives, including then-congresswoman Michele Bachmann, who said it would “enshrine the radical feminist movement.”

And while the National Park Service preserved the Seneca Falls, N.Y., site of America’s first women’s rights commission, which occurred in 1848, the Women’s Rights National His-



INTREPID TRAVEL



torical Park that was finally created there took until 1980 to establish.

Both of these things are “a really big indicator of how far we have to go,” said Jennifer Taylor, an assistant professor of

public history at Duquesne who specializes in both historical tours and women’s studies.

“The history’s there,” said Taylor. “It’s just hard to find. Why we’re only now beginning to see it on the landscape has to

Intrepid Travel last year launched its Women’s Expeditions, led by women for women travelers to learn about women and their history and cultures worldwide. Participants met Becky (above), the only female truck driver in Kenya.

do with the way that women’s history has been covered.”

Namely, she and others said, by men.

“The most simple answer is that we live in a patriarchal society and women’s accomplishments are not seen,” MacDonald said.

Mary Evins, a historian at Middle Tennessee State University and a member of the Tennessee Woman Suffrage Centennial Collaborative, recalled a

recent series of lectures about that state’s role in the passage of the 19th Amendment, at the end of which a male emeritus professor said “how nice it was that the ladies were starting to speak up about their story.”

“Cringe-worthy,” Evins said of this comment. “We’re glad folks who’ve apparently missed all this are now beginning to notice it themselves. Excellent. The centennial of the Nineteenth hopefully is awakening people’s peripheral vision. It’s a teaching moment we’re glad to utilize to our advantage. There’s money being funneled our way for this, atypically. So that’s why you’re seeing, or perhaps just now noticing, the women’s history sites, the walking tours, driving tours, and such.”

Many of these things are decidedly new, however.

Kentucky has also estab-

lished a Votes for Women Trail to commemorate the 19th Amendment’s centennial, and there’s an online inventory of more than 1,000 sites related to this anniversary called the National Votes for Women Trail.

Intrepid Travel last year launched its Women’s Expeditions, led by women for women travelers to learn about women and their history and cultures worldwide; it added four new destinations this year, and now visits Jordan, Kenya, Nepal, Iran, Morocco, India, and Turkey. The company’s day-tour division, Urban Adventures, has a tour called Unsung Stories of Women in New York. Another tourism provider, STA Travel, offers excursions including Strong Women of the South and Mavens of Denver. A monthly Feminist Cambridge Walking Tour debuted in August and was almost immediately fully booked.

“I think you’re going to see more of these,” MacDonald said. “We’re at this nexus where everything is coming together.”

Still, she said, “We’re only beginning to tell those stories.”

Added Evins: “Do people pay enough attention? No. Is that changing? Maybe. Hopefully. It takes these bump-up moments. That’s what’s happening here.”

Back in San Francisco, where only two of the city’s 87 public statues represent real-life women, planning has begun on a monument to the poet Maya Angelou. In Pittsburgh, a statue of the composer Stephen Foster with a banjo-playing slave at his knee, which was removed last year, is to be replaced by a monument to a still-undetermined black woman.

Today, Fisher, in Philadelphia, said wryly, “People are looking to go a little bit further than just the forefathers.”

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