



Summer Ski Bunny

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It's 92 degrees outside, too hot and humid to run, so I'm at the mall—not to shop or hit the 14-screen movie theatre, but to ski. Yes, ski. I'm headed up the escalator in the Mall of the Emirates, a 2,400,352-square-foot behemoth that houses the first indoor ski resort in the Middle East. Ski Dubai. The huge dome, which makes new snow year

round, offers five runs from beginner to the world's first indoor Black Diamond run (steep with a 200-foot drop).

I haven't skied in 15 years, but this seems to be an ideal way to get back into it, because no one I know will see me make a fool of myself. At Ski Dubai, you can buy a slope pass for the equivalent of \$40 for two hours or \$70 for all day. The pass includes a ski jacket, snow pants, boots, new socks (yours to keep), skis and poles or a snowboard. You need only buy a hat and gloves because the dome is kept at 34 degrees. I pick up a fleece hat and gloves which say, Ski Dubai.

There are no other women inside the ski dome or for that matter, any other tourists. Is it because it's a weekday morning? I'm given a bright blue ski outfit which I pull over my cotton pants and T-shirt. Nearby, two men are stuffing the skirts of their long white djellabas into their snow pants. Oh for a camera! Three Arab teenagers, already dressed and in their boots, carry snowboards to the escalator which leads to the bottom of the run. We are all dressed in the same electric blue outfit. I feel as though I'm part of the Dubai ski team.

At the top of the escalator, I grab poles from a rack and enter through a revolving door into the ski dome. The place is huge. And cold. Good thing I bought the hat and gloves. There's a bunny slope in front of me where an instructor teaches five beginners, dressed the same as me. I look up to the high slope but can't see the top.

There's no one else in line at the ski lift. I snap into my bindings and approach, praying to the chair-lift gods that I won't fall off. As I ascend, I look around. Except for the blueish light that makes me feel as though I'm inside a refrigerator, this has every appearance of a normal ski slope minus the pine trees or wind or icy conditions. Two snowboarders weave down the mountain below me, then one skier, then another snowboarder. They all ski beautifully.

I'm approaching the first of two stops, that's how big this place is. The attendant yells at me. Does he want me to get off the lift? He calls out loudly in Arabic, but I don't understand him. Then he pantomimes that I should put the safety bar down. I do and continue up to the top of the 1,300-foot run, lift the bar and dismount without falling. I look down the steep slope and panic. It's been such a long time. I barely remember how to turn. I want to get right back on the chairlift and forget this idea, but it's not possible and I'm stuck getting down on my own, even if that means sliding on my butt.

Two Arab boys start down on snowboards, picking up speed fast. What if someone plows into me? What if I break a leg? What if they don't speak English in the hospital? Thirty-five years ago, when I was young, fearless and cocky, there wasn't a run too steep or a bump too big. Now, I'm terrified. I take a deep breath and push off, traverse across and within what feels like seconds, am at the fence. I have to turn. I panic. My legs splay out in a snowplow, and I slide around to the opposite direction. Two large Arab men on skis fly past. Everyone looks like an expert except me.

I do a few more snowplow turns before I have enough confidence to plant my pole and turn parallel. I gain speed and make it down to the first chairlift, stop to catch my breath, and look out at the restaurants overlooking the dome. People wave to me through the enormous plate glass windows. Oh my God! I'm being watched! I start out again, and after a little while, finally feel smoother, almost fluid, and I remember why I used to love to ski.

I get to the bottom of the slope, now grinning, realizing I've been waiting all winter for it to finally become summer so I can bike and run outdoors. Now suddenly, I can hardly wait for winter to return because as soon as there's snow on the ground, I'm going to tear off to the slopes—outdoors and much closer to home.