

Your First Set at Shalom Park

What to wear, what to bring, and what it actually feels like. 3,000 people have stood where you're standing right now, wondering if they could do this. They could. So can you.

What to bring

Just a towel and a bathing suit. Sunscreen is a good idea too.

Everything else is included: skis chosen for your size, a fitted life jacket, a wetsuit if it's early or late season, gloves for grip, and a coached driver.

What to wear

You're wearing a life jacket over everything, so wear whatever you're comfortable in: board shorts, a rash guard, a full wetsuit. The coach is looking at your ski position, not your body. The lake is private.

Your day, minute by minute

Arrival

You drive down a gravel road and see a lake you didn't know existed.

Shalom Park is 20 minutes from Edmonton International Airport, tucked into the North Saskatchewan River valley. You'll park by the clubhouse. Take a breath. The lake is bigger than you expected.

First 10 to 15 minutes, on the dock

No surprises. Your coach puts the skis on your feet and the rope in your hands. You'll feel the weight of the handle, practice the body position you'll hold in the water, and hear exactly what's going to happen: how the boat will pull, how to stand up, what not to do. No jargon. No rushing. By the time you get in the water, you've already rehearsed it.

Getting geared up

Your coach fits your gear. Life jacket (fitted, not the floppy kind). Skis chosen for your size. Wetsuit if it's early or late season. Gloves for grip.

Minutes 10 to 15

You get on the boom. The boom is a rigid arm extending from the boat. It's the safest way to learn. You're close to the coach, the speed is low, and the hardest part of waterskiing, the deep-water start, is eliminated completely. You just hold on and stand up. The boat does the work.

Minutes 15 to 17

You're standing on the water. Most people are up within two minutes. Some take five. It doesn't matter. The moment you feel the glide, the moment the

spray starts and the trees start moving past you, every fear you had in the parking lot is gone.

Minutes 17 to 25

You ski. You fall. You get back up. Your coach adjusts. You try crossing the wake. You lean a little more. Maybe you fall, and you discover it doesn't hurt. The life jacket bobs you back up, the boat circles around, and you go again. Each run is a little better. Each run is a little braver.

What it actually feels like

"My first waterski experience was at age 15 and I got up on my first try. I was instantly hooked. It gave me a feeling of accomplishment."

Ken Nelson, who built this lake because of that feeling

"I'll embarrass myself."

You're on a private lake, not a public beach. The only people watching are your coach, who has seen 3,000 beginners, and maybe a couple of ducks. Everyone falls. The five-year-olds fall. Falling in warm water with a life jacket on is the least dramatic thing that will happen to you this week.

"I'm not fit enough."

You don't waterski with your muscles. You waterski with your balance. The boat does the work; you just stand there and let it pull you. We've taught five-year-olds, seventy-five-year-olds, people who haven't exercised in a decade, and people who told us they "have no coordination." If you can stand on solid ground, you can stand on water.

"It's going to hurt when I fall."

At beginner speed (15 to 20 km/h), falling off a waterski feels like stepping off a slow-moving sidewalk into a warm pool. You're wearing a life jacket. The water is freshwater, no salt sting. You bob back up in two seconds. The most common post-fall reaction we see is laughing. The second most common is "can I go again?"

"The water's probably freezing."

It's Alberta, so fair concern. Our season runs mid-May to mid-September. By June, the lake is 18 to 22°C. By July and August, it's 22 to 25°C. We have wetsuits for early and late season. And once you're skiing, you're on top of the water, not in it.

Questions first-timers ask

Will I face-plant?

Probably at least once. But at beginner speed, a face-plant is more like a gentle belly flop. The life jacket keeps you floating, the water is warm, and your coach will be right there. The five-year-olds face-plant. They think it's hilarious. You will too.

How sore will I be tomorrow?

Your forearms will feel it. Maybe your shoulders. It's the same soreness you'd get from a good gym session, nothing debilitating. By day two, you're fine. If you book multiple sets in one visit, you'll notice the fatigue by set three.

Do I need to be able to swim?

You need to be comfortable in water. You don't need to be a strong swimmer; the life jacket does the floating for you. If the idea of being in a lake causes genuine anxiety, this might not be the right activity for you, and that's completely okay.

What if my kids want to try?

Bring them. We've been teaching kids since 1985. The New Kids on the Water program is designed for children as young as five. They start on the boom at very low speed with a coach who has seen thousands of first-timers.

Can I bring my own beer?

Not on the water. Waterskiing requires focus and coordination; alcohol and tow ropes don't mix. After your set, the clubhouse deck, a cold drink and a view of the lake is about as good as a summer afternoon gets in Alberta.

Am I too old for this?

Our oldest first-timer was in their seventies. The boom eliminates the physical strain of the deep-water start. The speed is adjustable. The coach meets you exactly where you are.

What it costs

One set is 15 minutes. Sets run \$57 to \$95, with volume discounts to \$57 per set. No hidden fees. No membership required. Most first-timers book 3 sets for \$237 to \$285: that's an hour on the water, with coaching, on a private lake. The difference between set one and set three is usually dramatic.

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Book online: shalompark.com/first-time · Season: mid-May to mid-September