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time to EXPLORE



Edited by NIGEL THOMPSON



BLUEBIRD JAYS skiing heaven in pristine powder

British Columbia has all that's needed for a perfect skiing trip, says **Claire Hewitt**

Whistler top tour



PERFECTION Claire on the Peak 2 Peak gondola

There are a few things that really make a great skiing holiday. One is hired ski boots that are close to comfortable. Another is a perfectly positioned slopeside hotel, avoiding that exhausting trek back, lugging gear designed for gliding down a mountain. But best of all is fresh powder. The first two can be easily

sorted with good planning, but the last is in the hands of Mother Nature.

And she was clearly in a good mood the day we arrived in Canadian ski resort Whistler because she had laid on a welcome present of an overnight fall of nearly 2ft of new snow.

At more than 6,562ft high, the

Whistler and Blackcomb mountains that form this British Columbia ski destination get plenty of fresh powder, but not usually in April. It was pretty unprecedented and the locals were overjoyed.

On Blackcomb's Excalibur gondola lift the next day excitement levels were high as we watched the joy of the skiers below seeming to

float over the fresh snow. There were also many helpful shouts of "just up the slope on your left, mate" to those whose glide down had been ended by a freshly formed mogul and were hunting a lost ski or pole.

I have skied in fresh powder before, but this was on another level. The nerves kicked in and at first I didn't know how to handle it. I

actually felt like a beginner again.

Thankfully, I had ski guide Peter from Extremely Canadian to, metaphorically, hold my hand. With patient explanation, he helped me adapt my style to the conditions and reminded me that I actually do know how to ski.

We made our way down Jersey Cream Road, a green run and by the

TURN TO PAGE 50

Jet2holidays have expanded their range of popular cycling getaways for the autumn and winter season to destinations including Albufeira, Lake Garda, Majorca and Paphos. Seven nights' B&B at four-star Pogliena Park And Spa in Majorca departing Stansted on March 13 starts at £429pp. jet2holidays.com

Cruise news

BY NIGEL THOMPSON IN MARRAKECH, MOROCCO

Cruises are riding a wave of success with more young families discovering holidays at sea. Delegates at ABTA's annual convention in Marrakech, Morocco, heard that once the 16-month Covid ban on international cruises lifted in August 2021, Brits flocked to the

gangways in ever-increasing numbers. ABTA's Holiday Habits 2022 report found that more than a third of people (35%) have now been on a cruise, a 10% jump compared with 2018. The biggest growth area over the last five years is among young families, with half (49%) having now been on a cruise, compared with less than a third (29%) in 2018. Many of these were introduced to cruises by last summer's popular domestic sailings - nicknamed

"seacations" - which boomed when the industry was limited to UK waters by government virus restrictions. Almost two-thirds (64%) of families also say they're interested in going on a cruise in the future - the highest of any group in the ABTA study. Of those who would like to go on a cruise, 17% are interested in a no-fly voyage. ABTA's Graeme Buck said: "Having everything in one place - great food, entertainment and new places is a big draw for families." abta.com

London's Chamber of Horrors returns to Madame Tussauds on October 22 bringing back dark historic artefacts including the glasses worn by the infamous Dr Crippen and John Haigh's suit and shoes which the Acid Bath Murderer bequeathed Madame Tussauds in 1955. madametussauds.com London

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 49

end my confidence had returned. Extremely Canadian is a ski school with a difference. It's all about adventurous big mountain skiing and teaches pupils how to attack some of the highest and steepest areas of Whistler's twin peaks.

As we moved on to the Green Line, a run twisting and turning through snow-covered trees, I began to remember how much I enjoy spending time in the mountains.

Continuing our exploration of Blackcomb, I even managed a few carving turns, so I was content to make my way down to a late lunch at the GLC (Garibaldi Lift Company), one of Whistler's favourite apres-ski options, where I ate a chicken burger of epic proportions with waffle fries.

Whistler's accommodation is arranged in three villages, Whistler Creek and Upper and Lower Whistler. My hotel, The Westin Resort & Spa, was in the lower village – an easy walk to the gondolas – so I was able to roll

TWEETIE
Whiskey
Jack are
curious and
will eat your
lunch



out of bed, pick up equipment from the onsite CAN-SKI hire shop and be ready when the lifts opened.

I was especially grateful for "bluebird days", when the sun shines in a clear blue sky and the "hero snow" (fresh powder) combine to make perfect conditions.

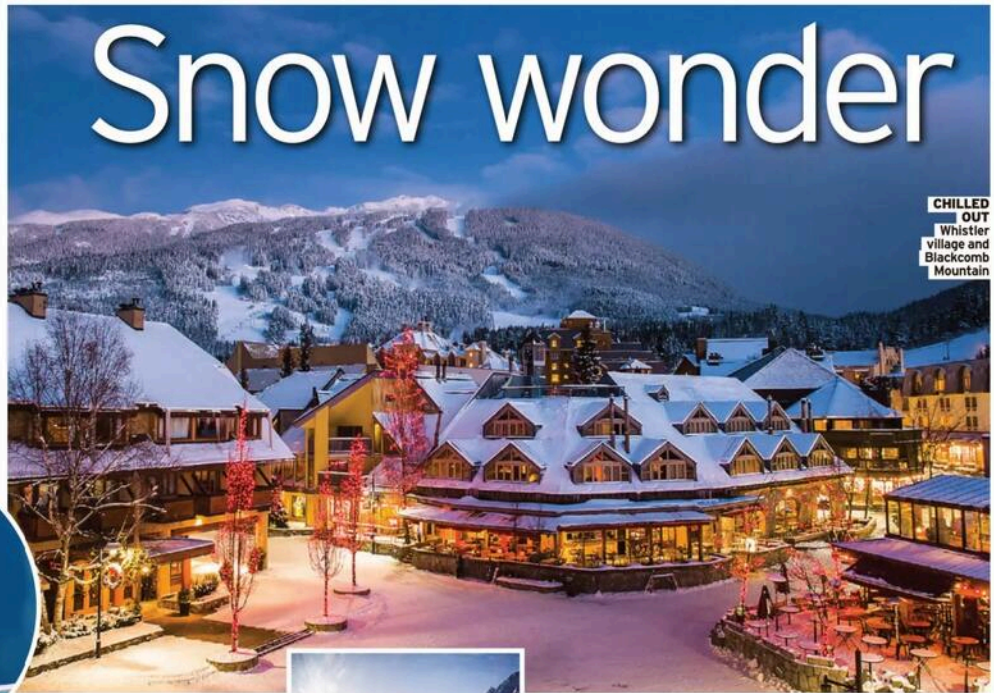
Long, long before the first ski runs were carved into the mountains here, this was home to the Squamish and Lil'wat people, who still trade and live in the area. At the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre you can learn about their cultures, history and legends. Ambassadors from each of these two First Nations – as the Canadians call them – are on hand to share more about their experiences.

And speaking of legends, I had the chance to enjoy another one on a multimedia night walk through the forest of nearby Cougar Mountain. The story goes that years ago two hikers vanished seeking Vallea Lumina, a mythical place of great beauty.

We followed their trail, guided by radio transmissions, talking trees and campfire folk songs, culminating in a spectacular ending. It's a fun night out. Back on the slopes, it was time to enjoy Whistler Mountain, which, together with Blackcomb, has more than 200 runs, three glaciers and 16 alpine bowls.

Cruising down the wide tree-lined blues of Cougar and Enchanted Forest, I was loving the chance to get some

Snow wonder



CHILLED OUT
Whistler village and Blackcomb Mountain

nice wide turns in. Next up were the greens of Papoose, Pony Trail and Upper Whiskey Jacks, which give the illusion you're skiing through dense forest. Even the names of the ski runs make you feel like you're exploring a wild frontier.

Whiskey Jacks are birds also known as the Canada jay. It likely comes from Cree wisikejak or wisakedjak, thought to be a clever trickster of a bird in First Nations lore. It's a curious bird that won't say no to lunchtime leftovers.

Hanging around mountain lunch spots like The Rendezvous is where you are likely to find them. Talking of names, Whistler itself is so called for the high-pitched whistling call of the resident marmots.

Another popular restaurant is Christine's, which for many years has been feeding a mountaintop fine-dining experience to the adventurous. Diners used to be able to swap ski boots for slippers at the door, and while I lamented missing out on that, I did appreciate the grilled halloumi with watermelon and chorizo jam, followed by Kerala paneer curry with coconut rice.

It was accompanied by amazing mountain views and a Caesar – a Canadian cocktail similar to a Bloody Mary but with more spice, clam juice and over-the-top accompaniments ranging from



TOP TIP
Serratus Mountain in British Columbia



ALL MAIL
Caesar cocktails at GLC

“
The names of the runs make you feel like you're exploring a wild frontier
”

sausage, to peppers, to crispy bacon.

The Whistler bars and restaurants compete to produce the best Caesar each season and the one at Christine's was rated by my guide as right up there.

So I appreciated a digestive interlude on the Peak 2 Peak gondola that spans the valley, connecting the two mountains almost at their peaks. When constructed it was the longest and highest gondola in the world, and the views are stunning. After all

that skiing, the resort's spa proved the perfect retreat. Set outdoors in the snowy, forested landscape, it uses a Scandinavian hydrotherapy philosophy to "energise and rest the body, improving blood circulation and promoting the release of endorphins"... and everyone loves those.

You follow a prescribed route through hot pools, cold dips, saunas, eucalyptus steam rooms and relaxing spaces.

Whistler offers a wide range of apres and dinner options but I decided on a last-night treat of Bearfoot Bistro's tasting menu with wine pairings. My favourite was the Te Mana pomegranate-glazed lamb belly with apricot, pine nuts, lentils and butternut squash with McWatters Collection Heritage red from the Okanagan wine region of British Columbia.

The meal was topped off with Tahitian vanilla bean nitro ice cream made at the table.

Sticking with the ice theme I ended the night bundled into a super-warm jacket to try out the Ketel One Vodka ice room. At

minus 29C it's on the chilly side, but apparently that makes the vodka much smoother to drink. I tried four, with the locally distilled Montis North coming out top.

I took a bottle of their Alpine Gin home with me, distilled using water from the Rainbow mountains – the peaks I saw from my bedroom window each morning – and botanicals foraged from around Whistler.

So every time I relax with a glass I am transported back to the snowy slopes, skiing in the fresh mountain air.



GET THERE
Air Canada flies from Heathrow to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, starting at £618 return in January. aircanada.com

BOOK IT
Rooms at The Westin Resort & Spa in Whistler, British Columbia, start at £216 in winter. marriott.com
Lift pass from £69 adult/£35 child daily; equipment hire from £37 per person daily.

MORE INFO
whistler.com/uk

ON ICE
Bearfoot Bistro's Ketel One room



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Rooms

