

Travel

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Make this the year to think off-piste and try all things summer

in the town of Whistler, British Columbia.

After all, the mountain resort receives more visitors during the warm and sunny months than when the snow flies in winter.

For me, transplanted from the forests of North Vancouver to London over a dozen years ago, skiing was never something that required much thought or effort.

It had been over seven years since I'd been back on the slopes at Whistler-Blackcomb, 2,000ft up in the glacier-clad Coast Mountains, and even longer since I'd popped over in summer – and never during the biggest mountain bike festival in the world, Crankworx.

I couldn't believe the difference a few years have made in the transformation of this Winter Olympics host resort into a sun-drenched, alfresco heaven packed with thousands of mountain bikers and over 300,000 visitors through the end of July.



Your room with a view

In fact Whistler, around 90 minutes north through rugged scenery from Canada's jewel on the Pacific, Vancouver, can pride itself on being what PRs love to call an all-seasons resort, and I was here to experience everything summer had to offer, both on and off the mountains.

At the foot of two mile-high peaks connected by a vast network of lifts, the pedestrianised village is the hub of everything fun.

All this shares space within the traditional territories of the Squamish Nation and Lil'wat Nation peoples, and Whistler-Blackcomb (as the mountain operations are named) is ranked as the number one mountain resort in North America year after year.

It's no secret that Whistler also shares space with bears when they wake from their winter slumber, and if you're like me, you'll be determined to see some.

Whistler in summer



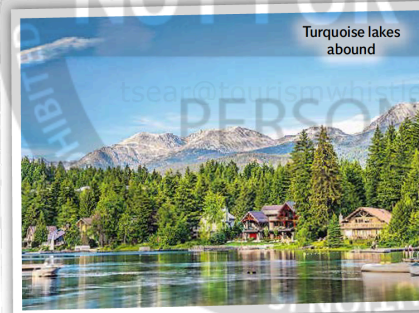
Matt Hryciw finds there's loads to enjoy in the Canadian mountain resort when snow has gone

So, join me for a rethink of that ski trip – and consider joining the more than 1.5 million visitors who make Whistler their centre of adventure every summer.

On the mountains
Let's start with what brought us back here in the first place: Whistler's status as a mountain-bike Mecca.

While the season runs roughly from May to October, it's late July when things really hot up for the 10-day Crankworx festival, which has been celebrating all things mountain bike for 20 years in Whistler.

Imagine more than 1,000 top-level athletes hurtling down Whistler Mountain, launching off 30-foot jumps, making it all look easy until the sound of bursting inner tubes are a reminder that



Turquoise lakes abound

these riders aren't as invincible as they look.

I even heard it called the "Super Bowl of mountainbiking".

We had to give the Whistler Mountain Bike Park a go, and had no second thoughts when

eight-passenger gondola, we set off into alpine meadows and down to the entrance of the first trail.

With gravity constantly tugging you down around every hairpin corner, this is a whole other experience – and one that quickly matches the thrill of skiing.

It's cycling, but through unspoilt alpine forests on shock absorbers while hardly touching the pedals.

While I found my biking legs after my first shot down the trails and was pumped for a second round, my partner Fabio thought sampling Canadian craft beers on a sunny roof terrace overlooking the action at the Garibaldi Lift Co bar was a better idea.

Let's be honest – this kind of biking isn't for everyone, but in a place like this, you're spoilt for choice for other

outdoor pursuits. If apres ski is half the fun, just imagine apres in the summer sun.

After the beers, we walked back through forest paths to the Four Seasons Resort, where we were lucky enough to spend two nights.

There we picked up our feast for a trip up Whistler Peak: a big box of goodies from local deli Picnic Whistler packed with more than we could handle.

Local cheeses, spicy deli meats, fresh berries, crackers and dips would more than keep us going. We even got asked where the party was on the way up.

Hopping back on Whistler Gondola, we rode all the way to the high alpine.

This is where the mountain magic really kicks in – soaring peaks, thawing glaciers and turquoise lakes provided the