

Go For The Snow

Friday May 11, 2007

Written For: UP! Magazine, WestJet's inflight magazine. Text by Lori Knowles

By Lori Knowles

Jetting your way toward endless winter? Snow takes its time melting at Canada's ski resorts. Spring skiing—and partying—is at its best through March and April. Here's where you'll find the snow and the on-snow celebrations.

Whistler-Blackcomb, BC

For a decade April's annual Telus World Ski & Snowboard Festival has been the place to make the scene and be seen. This season's launch of the Symphony Express—running from Flute Bowl to Piccolo Peak—makes skiing Whistler in spring that much sweeter.

The Proof: Are you ready for this? An average of 168 cm of new snow blankets Whistler in March, and another 98 cm in April.

The Stash: “The key to spring skiing at Whistler is a late start, once the morning snow has softened,” says local G.D. Maxwell. He recommends heading straight for Blackcomb's 7th Heaven—it softens the earliest. The south side's Sunbowl is the place to start your spring day on Whistler.

The Deals: Sample Whistler's Spring Package March 1-31—five nights and a four-day lift pass from \$135. www.whistlerblackcomb.com

The Parties: Whistler's 12th Annual Telus World Ski and Snowboard Festival fires up April 13-22. Don't miss the free Whistler Concert Series, the Big Air, the Stompede, or the Pro Photographer Showdown.

Sun Peaks, BC

In a former life, Sun Peaks was known as Tod Mountain. You'll still find some retro folks—Todies—sunning themselves in spring in their secret Sun Pit—ask around to find it. The locals are taking advantage of Sun Peaks' average 2,000 hours of sunshine per year.

The Proof: An average 102 cm of snow has been accumulating at Sun Peaks each March since first tracked in 1944.

The Stash: “A huge hit for the spring crowds is skiing down the FIS World Cup Speed Skiing track on the double black diamond Headwalls,” says Adam Earle, who's been skiing Sun Peaks for 18 years. “I have heard many comment it is the steepest groomed run they have ever skied, and it usually stays firm till closing day in April.”

The Deals: Sun Peaks' nightly accommodation dips to \$68 per person from March 6-26, 2007. www.sunpeaksresort.com

The Parties: Insane speedsters in rubber suits rip the Headwalls in the Velocity Challenge—a World Cup speed skiing event—March 1-4. A grassroots slopestyle jam starts at high noon March 24.

Big White, BC

It's massive and it's very, very white, hence the name: Big White. But the resort is also well situated—mostly east and south facing—to take advantage of the warm spring sun.

The Proof: March came to a close in 2006 after 86 cm of new snow had fallen and a whopping 307 cm base had built up at Big White.

The Stash: Look for soft spring bumps under the Black Forest Chair or at Gem Lake, says Kelowna local Steve Threndyle. Big White's signature snow ghosts are fun too. “By April they've grown to gargantuan proportion. If they were any bigger they'd start to move, like in some B-Grade horror movie!”

The Deals: WestJet ski-and-stay packages—including accommodation and lift passes—are priced from \$107 from March 25 to April 8, 2007. www.bigwhite.com

The Parties: If you're feelin' blue, Cruz the Blues at Big White March 20-21. If you're fired up, try the Interior Savings Ski2Sea Race April 8.

Panorama Mountain Village, BC

Adrenaline-seekers who love to carve can really let 'er rip on Panorama's slopes. The BC ski area is so fast, two new World Cup ski races have been added for November '07. For something more relaxing, try soaking in the nearby hot springs.

The Proof: March's average snowfall at Panorama is 87 cm, plus another 34 cm in April.

The Stash: "Let the sun do some work before you get out on the mountain," says Ryan Stimming, a local. "Stick to the front side. Take Top of the World to Roller Coaster to Old Timer. Next, ski Champagne and Mile One Quads. Skyline to Cow's Face to Powder Trail (the new terrain park location), is a sure thing."

The Deals: Panorama's Ski & Stay package starting March 18 offers three days' slopeside accommodation, plus three days' skiing and free access to the Panorama Springs Hot Pools from \$323 per person. www.panoramaresort.com

The Parties: For freestylers and spectators, the slopestyle competition March 24 and the rail jam March 29 make life more than interesting. Race groupies get a rush from Panorama's Spring Series FIS races, March 30-April 2.

Mount Washington Alpine Resort, BC

More glades (tree lines) have graced Mount Washington's Outback region in 2007—purr-fect for spring skiing. The Vancouver Island resort's proximity to golf and surf make for two-in-one—or three-in-one—spring adventure vacations.

The Proof: More than 200 cm of fresh snow fell last March. An average 100 cm falls in April.

The area closed last year with a 450 cm base!

The Stash: "The frontside is mostly south facing so the spring corn is unbelievable," says Island boy Brent Curtain. True spring doesn't hit 'til April. For late-season powder, head into the Outback.

The Deals: Mount Washington's Ski & Surf Packages include two nights and two days of skiing, followed by two days' surfing in Tofino—all from \$279. www.mountwashington.ca

The Parties: Spirit of the West performs March 15. The CH Spring SnoJam runs March 19-23. And the OSB After Dark Invitational promises cool beats and outrageous entertainment March 24.

Sunshine Village, AB

Sunshine Village is the highest elevated ski resort in Canada... so in spring Sunshine boasts awesome all-natural snow. Bonus: Sunshine is the only ski stop in Banff National Park where you can sleep—and hot tub—directly on the mountain.

The Proof: A 10-year average of 128 cm of snow has graced Sunshine's slopes in the month of March. Another 81 cm falls in April, and 43 cm in May... yes, you can ski Sunshine in May!

The Stash: Sunshine's freeride zones—Wild West, Delirium Dive and Silver City—are best in spring, says Banff-area bootfitter, Dave Williams.

With warm temperatures "you can find corn snow on the south facing slopes and still winter powder on runs facing north."

The Deals: Sunshine Inn's springtime special offers two days' skiing and one night's accommodation for \$149, down from \$289 in regular season. www.skibanff.com

The Parties: Skiers join snowboarders in the annual, charitable Dash for Cash, March 17 at Sunshine. Win a prize for the craziest costume, or for finishing first... or last!

Lake Louise Mountain Resort, AB

From the easy deck life at Temple Lodge—a.k.a. Temple Beach—to the expert terrain at Whitehorn 2 Gullies, Lake Louise is lovely to ski in springtime.

The Proof: With an average of 80 cm of new snow falling in March, and another 61 cm in April, spring skiing at Lake Louise just keeps going... and going.

The Stash: There's sun, sun and more sun in spring on Boomerang. Says longtime Lake Louise patroller Chris Moseley: "It's a great way to get an alpine/back bowl skiing experience without the black diamonds."

The Deals: \$104 buys you accommodation and a day's skiing at The Lake in March. That deal drops to \$99 in April. www.skircr.com

The Parties: Lake Louise gets just plain crazy March 17 with its Cardboard Box Downhill

Derby. The real party, Spring Episode '07, epic-ally closes The Lake with concerts, beer gardens and showdowns April 28-29.

Le Massif, QC

Le Massif is known for its bumps, steeps and on-slope, springtime cuisine... Chefs serve up fresh delicacies slopeside March 17 for Charlevoix's annual Great Horned Owl Event.

The Proof: Snow continues to fall on Le Massif in March and April—44 cm on average for March and another 37 cm the following month.

The Stash: The ski area's new training centre, Le Charlevoix, is for racers only all season, but finally opens for public consumption in spring. For soft spring bumps, local Vincent Lajoie says: "Head for La Cabaret and La 42!"

The Deals: Season-end pricing drops by 25% in March for two-day stays, including lodging and lift tickets. www.lemassif.com

The Parties: Le Massif's Reggae Bash, March 24, is a mix of Bob Marley and moguls. Reggae band La loi des Cactus plays the base at noon. Kaliroots rocks the summit during lively après.

Tremblant, QC

Tremblant knows how to throw a spring party. From the live daily action in its village square, Place St. Bernard, to après at Le Shack and the late nighters at Le P'tit Caribou, there's truly no rest for the wicked.

The Proof: Snow continues to fall on Tremblant in March, with an average accumulation of 52 cm. April's average tapers to 23 cm.

The Stash: Eric Gagne grew up skiing Tremblant—his uncle has a trail named after him! "Spring is mogul time," says Gagne. "The north side's Expo is the place to go." For fast, spring cruising, Gagne recommends Haut Ryan. "Its all-natural snow feels different than the man-made stuff!"

The Deals: Tremblant's spring lift pass—The Spin Pass—is only \$99. Ski and stay packages from March 24-April 15 start at \$99. Or ski two days from April 2-15 and ski the third day free. www.tremblant.ca

The Parties: Skiercross, boardercross, an urban jib, plus free outdoor concerts in Place St. Bernard—it's all part of Tremblant's Telus Spin '07, March 30-April 8.

Sutton, My Mountain Resort!, QC

Well-spaced glades and mostly natural snow make Quebec's Sutton a groovy, retro spot to ski. An unprecedented 40% of its terrain is sous-bois (treed runs)—Nirvana for any spring-loving, tree-hugging skier.

The Proof: 93.5 cm of snow falls on the Eastern Townships' Sutton in March, followed by 12.5 in April.

The Stash: Sutton skier Pierre-Yves (PY) Leblanc, past winner of the Canadian Free Skiing Championship, prefers Sutton trail Bou-Bou. "In spring it gets bumpy," he says, "but the snow is slow and sticky—very forgiving."

The Deals: A night's stay plus a 1.5-day ski pass starts at just \$69 in springtime. www.montsutton.com

The Parties: Big air, slopestyle and best trick competitions liven up Sutton during the rowdy Rodeo Fest, March 16-18, 2007. The Rodeo gets even more rowdy at the after-party.