

**BRITISH COLUMBIA**

# High on luxury in Whistler

## Whistler the place to play hard and be pampered



BY LORI KNOWLES ,SPECIAL TO QMI AGENCY

FIRST POSTED: SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2012 12:00 AM EST



**Steam rises from the outdoor swimming pool at the Four Seasons Whistler. Heated year-round, it's a steamy oasis – even the pool deck is heated! (Courtesy JOHN SUTTON/Four Seasons Resort Whistler)**

If you've ever dreamed about blasting off to Whistler, B.C., for a three-day blow-out winter visit complete with hard skiing, sumptuous lodging, arts, culture, tasty food and a spa experience that will soothe your screaming muscles, here's how to do it:

Fly after work. After a day in the office, fly from Toronto direct to Vancouver via Air Canada or WestJet on a 6 p.m. flight. By 8 p.m. PST you'll be landing at YVR. Prebook a shuttle (\$62) through RideBooker.com -- your driver will meet you at the baggage carousel, load your bags and do all that twisty-road driving while you stretch out and enjoy the scenic ride up the Sea To Sky highway. He'll even stop at Tim Horton's in Squamish if you request a hit of java. You'll be tucked into bed by 10:30 p.m.

Splurge on a three-night package at the Four Seasons Resort Whistler, a hotel that easily owns its billing as the ski town's top spot in lodging. Packages are pricey but oh-so-splurge-worthy.

Four Seasons Whistler is tucked so quietly into a corner of Blackcomb Mountain, most people hardly notice it. Yet there it is, with its stone and wood decor, roaring lobby fire, washrooms the size of a downtown studio apartment, a spa offering deep apres-ski massages, and a pack of valets willing to turn down your covers and slog all your ski stuff. The resort's Ski Whistler package includes lift passes; its Family Package through March and April includes four ski passes and daily breakfast.

**Pre-purchase an Edge Card:** This discount lift pass card, exclusive to Canadian residents, is sold by Whistler Blackcomb and can be bought online for one-, three-, five-, or 10-days of skiing at the lowest rate available. Perks include up to 20% off rentals, lodging and retail purchases. You must purchase the Edge Card in advance of your vacation.

**Rent skis:** High performance ski and snowboard rentals -- including the latest in wide, powder-friendly boards -- are available for rent on the lower level of Four Seasons Whistler. If packaged with the Edge Card, they're rentable for an unheard of \$24 per day -- not a bad deal considering hauling your Eastern-style carving skis on Air Canada costs about \$25 extra each way without Elite status.

**Let the Ski Concierge take care of you:** Four Seasons Whistler has a swank little set-up at the bottom of Blackcomb -- a warm and friendly room with leather chairs, hot chocolate and freshly baked cookies. Hotel guests use it to store their skis and change their boots. Valets will buckle you up at the start and pry boots off your achy feet at the finish of each day.

**Ski as hard as you can for three straight days:** Whistler has two dynamic mountains: Whistler and Blackcomb; both are skiable on the same lift ticket.

Head up Blackcomb on Day 1 and warm up on some of the cruisy rollers under Solar Coaster chairlift. Increase your level of difficulty slowly by graduating to the steeper stuff off the Jersey Cream or Crystal chairs, then go for broke up the Glacier Express for blasts down the Blackcomb Glacier and 7th Heaven.

On Day 2, roll up to the top of Blackcomb and board the Peak 2 Peak wonder gondola -- holding world records for highest lift (436 metres) and longest freespan between two towers (3.03 km) -- that glides you over to the top of Whistler Mountain. There, discover Harmony and Symphony bowls, or ride the Peak Chair and find your way over to Bagel Bowl.

On Day 3, head back to whichever mountain treated you better. With 3,307 skiable hectares and 1,609-metres of total vertical, there's an incredibly wide range of terrain to choose from.

**Apres-ski Whistler style:** There are two apres-ski paths to choose from after skiing.

**One is traditional:** Park yourself at either Merlin's (Blackcomb), the Longhorn or the Garibaldi Lift Company (Whistler Village), order refreshments and spend some quality time people watching.

**Reserve at least one apres-ski, however, for a different kind of cultural experience:** Whistler has at least eight fabulous art galleries that include everything from First Nations designs to jewelry, photography, pottery and painting. Four Seasons Whistler has its own Art Experience -- a walking tour of its eclectic collection featuring West Coast artists. And the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre is a beautiful building that showcases the history, art and culture of the local First Nations people.

**Eat well:** Sidecut at Four Seasons Whistler has a fire-and-ice theme, with backlit onyx panelling that makes the atmosphere glow. Steaks cooked on Sidecut's 1,800-degree infrared grill are chef Edison Mays' specialty, as are his signature sauces and rubs, including Caribbean Jerk, Lemon Buddha and the restaurant favourite, Edison's Medicine. Do not miss sampling the restaurant's free cheese popovers.

**Locals are abuzz about two alternate restaurants:** Alta Bistro in Pinnacle Hotel and Aura at Nita Lake Lodge. Both work with local producers to create comfort-food style dishes, and both have "mixologists" on staff to craft cocktails -- think bacon infused vodka, and rye infused with cedar.

**Fly home on your fourth night:** After your third day skiing, save a hotel charge and catch the red-eye back to Toronto -- you'll be back at your desk in time for that 8:30 a.m. meeting.

For more information on lodging or dining at Four Seasons Whistler, see [FourSeasons.com/Whistler](http://FourSeasons.com/Whistler). To learn more about travel to Whistler, see [whistler.com](http://whistler.com). For information on rental skis, lift passes and the Edge Card, see [whistlerblackcomb.com](http://whistlerblackcomb.com). The Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre can be explored online at [slcc.com](http://slcc.com).

*lori@loriknowles.com*