

It's rad, gnarly and shred worthy

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There likely isn't a teenager on earth who wouldn't be wowed by the cool stuff that goes on in Whistler, B.C. during the Telus World Ski & Snowboard Festival (WSSF).

The 10-day fest, taking place April 17-26, is a giant rock concert, computer game, art show and snow-and-skate competition rolled into one. It's like spending your vacation inside a music video.

"There are so many families who plan their annual vacations around this festival," says Lisa Richardson, a WSSF organizer who likens the annual festival to the CNE -- on steroids. "The concerts, the tents, the competitions, the free stuff -- there's such a huge degree of animation for a teenager. There's always something to look at."

New and teen-friendly at WSSF this season is the Park 'n' Fly Skate Jam, taking place in a Whistler underground garage on opening day, April 17. Skaters from up and down the West Coast are coming together to compete. Kids can bring along their own skateboards and jam with their idols.

A Skate of the Art party that night -- open to all ages -- will feature skate art and photos. It's open until midnight, and like many WSSF events, admission is free.

Also new to the fest and kid-friendly this year are the Grenade Games, April 20-26. This snowboarding event includes a superpipe competition, a poker run, skate sessions, a dual slalom moguls event and a slopestyle and monster air competition.

Says Richardson: "The Grenade Games redefines the snowboard contest in a way that will leave the International Olympic Committee shaking its head."

Returning to Whistler for the festival is the annual Orage Masters, April 19. Known in the ski world as the "Anti Comp," it combines a slopestyle contest with a team-based free-for-all approach, and features top freeride athletes skiing in biker outfits, Viking drag and Star Wars costumes.

This is an on-hill daytime event that's free -- all teens need is a lift ticket. Kids can spend some time watching the athletes compete, then head out to practice new moves in a nearby terrain park. A Jib Zone has been specially crafted at Whistler for the event; athletes are competing for \$25,000 in prizes.

The free Zune Concert Series runs outdoors on Whistler's mainstage throughout the festival. Big name acts have just been announced, including Ozomatli, Ten Second Epic, Thornley, Lotus, The Arkells, The Stills, Metric, DJ Z Trip and 54-40.

The series is also attempting to establish itself as a springboard for emerging Canadian bands. There's a search on now for undiscovered talent with the Zune Concert Series Competition. Undiscovered bands can upload an original music track at zune.ca. The winner will play live at Whistler.

Zune is Microsoft's new alternative to Apple's iPod, and will be featured everywhere at the Whistler festival. Kids can try them out in tents that line Whistler's walkways. Also on hand for free trials: Cellphones, cameras and computer games. Expect a huge presence from PlayStation.

For more information on the Telus World Ski and Snowboard Festival, including deals on accommodation and lift passes starting at \$74 per person, visit wssf.com.

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