

Family Fare: Ready... Set... Test!

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By mid-February of this year, the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games sighed with relief as it achieved one of its biggest milestones: completing construction and upgrades on all sport competition venues.

Considerable controversy and the estimated \$580 million cost aside, from the bobsleigh and luge sliding centre in Whistler, to the freestyle skiing venues and Olympic Oval in Vancouver, the complexes are ready to go—not just for athletes, but for family-friendly testing.

“Today is a proud moment,” said VANOC CEO John Furlong the day the final venue opened its doors for business. “It’s wonderful to see athletes now competing and testing these venues while youngsters and adults alike experience the legacies far in advance of the Games.”

Indeed, in the next 11 months leading up to the Games, average people can explore, sample and test many of these sites, which will be the world’s focus from February 12-28, 2010. If you’re planning a pre-Olympic family trip to either Vancouver or Whistler, here’s what you can see and do:

First there’s Richmond’s Olympic Oval, an awesome 33,750-square-metre facility that will host the Olympic Winter Games’ speed skating events. Located 14km south of downtown Vancouver, the Oval’s flooring, paneling and furnishing have been constructed with the trees cut down to make way for the project, giving the mammoth building a West Coast, all-natural feel. Adding to the building’s sustainable aspects is the roof, made from BC trees destroyed in the recent pine beetle infestation.

Until mid-March, the Oval is being used for Olympic test events, including the Essent ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships. The ice will then come out temporarily for technical modifications. But the Oval will re-open June 1, 2009 for drop-in public skating, plus speed skating lessons for adults and kids. <http://richmondoval.ca/>

Next, there’s the Vancouver Olympic/Paralympic Centre. Located on one of the highest points of land in the centre of Vancouver, the curling venue has a pretty view of Vancouver’s North Shore. Perhaps more interesting is its eco-friendly aspects: rainwater is used to flush its toilets and the building is powered by a mix of electricity, natural gas and solar energy. Post Games the building will be modified into a community centre, with a rink, indoor pool, and outdoor aquatic centre. It’s not open for public curling... yet. But it is open for spectating, including the World Wheelchair Curling Championships, and the world Junior Curling Championships that run at the Centre until mid-March. www.Vancouver.ca/parks/info/2010olympics

Cypress Mountain in West Vancouver gets to host some of the most exiting Olympic events, including snowboarding’s racing and halfpipe competitions, freestyle moguls and rock ‘em, sock ‘em ski cross. Cypress has built a beautiful new lodge in honour of the Olympic events, and its mogul, ski cross and freestyle courses have been designated. While the public doesn’t get to sample them yet, until the end of this ski season and at the start of next riders can ski the slopes next to them and gain some pretty good views. Riders can also drop into the Olympic superpipe — yes it’s Olympic-sized, and it definitely is super. www.cypressmountain.com

Approaching Whistler, the Callaghan Valley’s Whistler Olympic Park is now open for public business. This massive outdoor venue for 2010’s nordic events — cross-country skiing, biathlon and ski jumping — has two of its 5km XC courses open to the public. You can also ski some of the Park’s 45 other kilometres of trails. Or, if you’ve got the guts, the Callaghan Winter Sports club is hosting ski jumping clinics in March. Next to the ski jump, there’s a gigantic tobogganing hill that’s open to the public — it’s not the Olympic luge track, but for amateurs it’s

close enough to it. www.callaghanwintersportsclub.com

And while the real luge and bobsleigh courses at the Whistler Sliding Centre won't open for public rides until after the Games, spectators can take tours of this steep and winding track that zig-zags down Fitzsimmons Creek between the mountains of Blackcomb and Whistler.

www.whistlerslidingcentre.com

Finally, for the cost of a Whistler Mountain lift pass, you can always ski the Dave Murray Downhill or Franz's Run, which will host the men's and women's alpine downhill skiing Olympic events. The courses lead you down into Whistler Creekside, where the stadiums filled with spectators and newscasters will be situated in February 2010. Once there, imagine the roar of the crowds on race days, especially with our own Canadian racer, John Kucera now the reigning World Champion of Downhill. it'll be a preview your family won't soon forget.

www.whistlerblackcomb.com

For more information on 2010 Games venues at Vancouver and Whistler, visit

www.vancouver2010.com

www.loriknowles.com