



B.C.'S GREATEST *Ski Road Trips*

Whether it's the crème de la crème of ski resort experiences or an off the radar mom-and-pop style adventure, these four B.C. ski road trips are sure to satisfy any slope-side craving

BY RYAN STUART



Winter ROAD TRIPS

THE POWDER HIGHWAY

WHERE:

Highway 3 from Rossland to Fernie.

WHY GO:

Skiing culture as deep as the snow.

When skiers from around the world dream of coming to B.C. what they imagine is often the Kootenays: deep, dry and consistent snow that falls on friendly ski hills littered with perfectly spaced trees, open alpine and lots of secret stashes. That pretty much sums up skiing at **Red Mountain Resort, Whitewater Ski Resort, Kimberley Alpine Resort** and **Fernie Alpine Resort**, four hills spread along Highway 3, part of the Powder Highway, between the Okanagan and the Alberta border. These community-focused hills lack the glamour of bigger resorts, but make up

DIRECTIONS:

Driving to Red Mountain is straightforward from just about anywhere in the province. Head towards the U.S. border and merge onto Highway 3, the Crowsnest Highway. East beyond the Okanagan the highway splits in two. Follow the southern branch, 3B, toward Rossland, Red is just before town. Whitewater is further east off Highway 3, 22 kilometres from Nelson. Highway 3 eventually spills into Cranbrook. From here head north on Highway 95A to reach Kimberley. To continue on to Fernie, backtrack to Cranbrook and continue on Highway 3 for another hour.



Fernie is about as classic as it gets for a ski town vibe, with a great laid-back, outdoorsy feel.



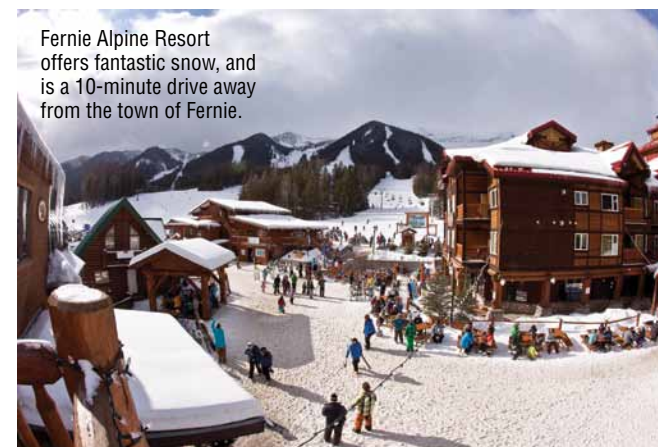
for it in hard-core skiing, a friendly vibe, great snow and plenty of personality.

For instance, **Red Mountain** is the first ski resort in North America to use crowdfunding to raise capital for improvements. Supporters will own part of the mountain. Actually, mountains. The ski hill sprawls over three summits with a fourth devoted to the resort's own cat-skiing. Grey

Mountain is the newest addition and the best place for intermediate skiers with lots of room to roam. Granite is the main summit, with runs pitching off in all directions, providing access to the steep tree skiing Red is famous for.

Meanwhile, **Whitewater Ski Resort** may be the only ski hill as well known with foodies as powder aficionados. The Whitewater Fresh Tracks Cafe's four cook-

books told the world what locals already knew: the hill owns the best on-slope eats. The skiing's not bad either. Twenty minutes from Nelson, this is the hill at the heart of the Kootenays' ski scene. It's known for amazing tree skiing and 12 metres of snow per winter. Find the deepest shots on the Glory Ridge chair. The newest lift, it accesses the mountain's backside, a playground of



Fernie Alpine Resort offers fantastic snow, and is a 10-minute drive away from the town of Fernie.

tree skiing and fall line runs.

Kimberley Alpine Resort's Bavarian theme sets the hill apart from any resort outside of Germany. Stick a coin in the world's largest cuckoo clock, a fixture of the walking promenade through the centre of town. Ski

beyond Vimy Ridge to the Black Forest for the steepest runs on the mountain. Also of note: Kimberley basks in some of the sunniest weather in B.C., adding to its family friendly vibe.

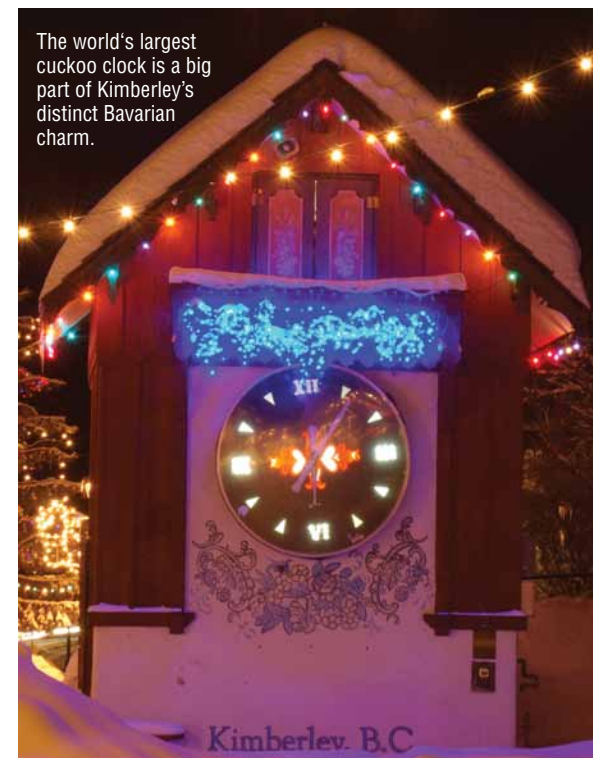
Pop over into the Elk Valley and the weather changes

fast. The mountain ridge that makes up **Fernie Alpine Resort** creates its own weather, a persistent cloud that stalls over the ski hill's five bowls to dump way more snow than in the town of Fernie, just a 10 minute drive away. The terrain is a playful mix: open bowls, ridge lines, faces, runs through the trees, natural jumps and gullies and wide open cruisers. It's an easy ski hill to like. And so is the town. It's a funky examining village, with a happy outdoorsy community that

loves where they live. The same holds true for the whole Kootenay region. People live here for the lifestyle and in the winter that means skiing.

Websites: redresort.com; skiwhitewater.com; skikimberley.com; skifernie.com

Where to Eat: The obvious can't-miss spot is The Whitewater Fresh Tracks Cafe, in the ski resort's day lodge. Wonderfully



The world's largest cuckoo clock is a big part of Kimberley's distinct Bavarian charm.



Fernie's Lizard Creek Lodge is just 80 metres away from the Elk Quad ski lift.



Winter ROAD TRIPS



The Whitewater Fresh Tracks Cafe Express is one of the region's most famous places to grab a slope-side lunch.



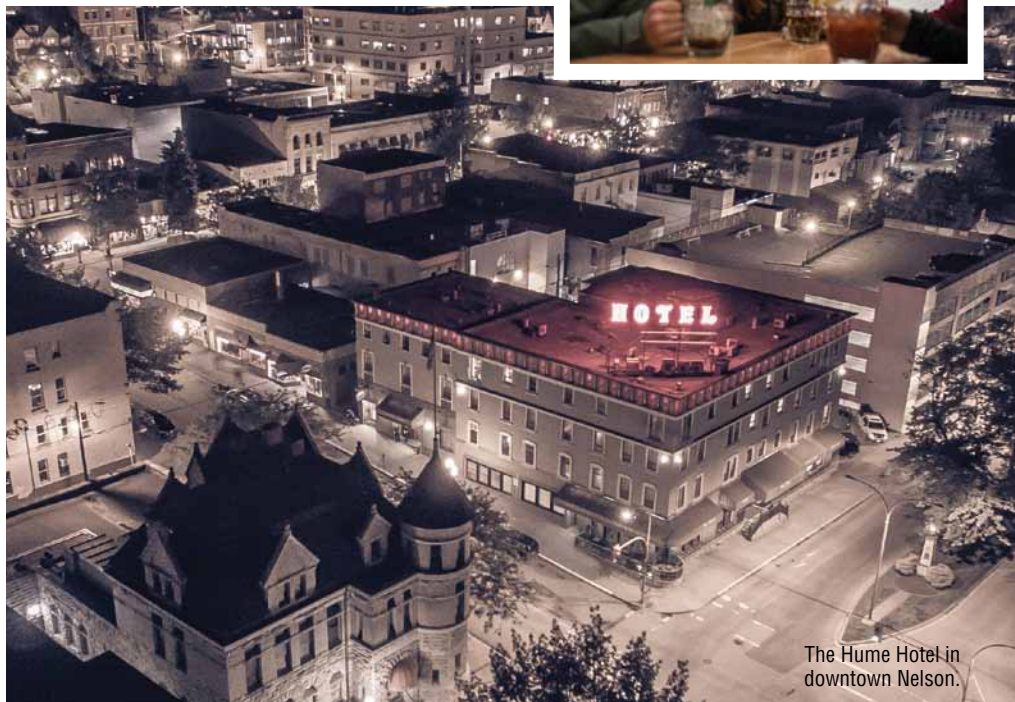
Celebratory shots at Lizard Creek Lodge's ice bar.



Whitewater.

named, The Flying Steam Shovel in Rossland serves excellent tacos and rosemary herb crust pizzas, but the real attraction is playing neglin, a Kootenay bar game that every visitor should try. skiwhitewater.com; theflyingsteamshovel.com.

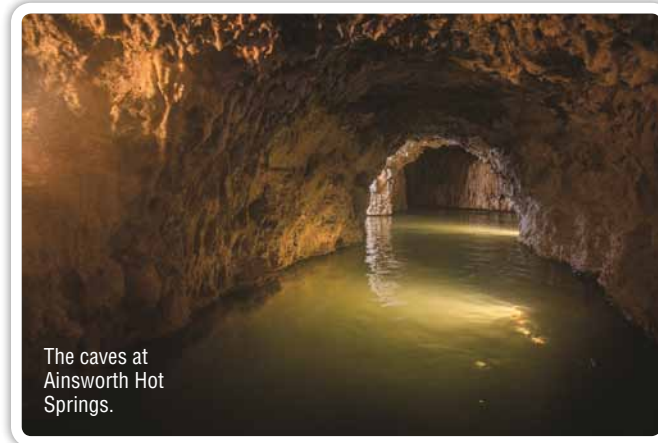
Where to Stay: Take advantage of the on-site ice bar and still stumble out of bed in time for first chair by staying at the deluxe Lizard Creek Lodge right the base of Fernie Alpine Resort. Built in 1898 and recently restored, the Hume Hotel is the heart of Nelson. Enjoy jazz in its Library Lounge all week. lizardcreek.com; humehotel.com



The Hume Hotel in downtown Nelson.



Kimberley Alpine Resort offers winter fun for the whole family.



The caves at Ainsworth Hot Springs.

OFF THE SLOPES: HOT SPRINGS SOAKING

Spread through the Kootenays like oases for tired legs are three natural hot springs. Halcyon Hot Springs, Ainsworth Hot Springs and Lussier Hot Springs are each a detour off the route linking the ski hills. Halcyon warrants a day trip after a stop at Red. The scenic drive up the Slocan Valley leads to the town of Nakusp, full of artists, and the toasty pools, overlooking the lake and fed by mineral rich waters pouring out of the hills. Ainsworth is a short detour off Highway 3 near Nelson. Like at Halcyon, the water flows out of the mountain and into a spa, this one with two pools, the 42°C indoor cave and a slightly cooler outdoor, horseshoe-shaped pool. Lussier is undeveloped. The rock pools sit on the banks of the Lussier River in White Swan Provincial Park. halcyon-hotspots.com; ainsworthhotsprings.com; bcparks.ca

Where to Ski: Get a local to show the way to Cambodia, maybe the gnarliest of Red Mountain's many super steep runs. Kimberley's Geneva is tamer, but still an adventure through the perfect glades of the Black Forest. And you can't miss The Blast, under the Summit Chair at Whitewater.

Avoid the Crowds: Ski against the flow: head out to Kimberley's Easter First Tracks at Fernie. This guided program grants pre-opening access to the mountain for small groups.

Keep it on Budget: Kimberley and Fernie are both owned by the Resorts of the Canadian Rockies. An RCR Rockies discount card pays for itself, with three free days of skiing and discounts every other visit.

The Main Event: The Kootenay Coldsmoke Powder Fest encapsulates everything skiing in the Kootenays is about: powder, mountain culture, backcountry know how, gear demos, 30 clinics and evening socials. The annual event takes over the Whitewater ski area February 24 to 26. coldsmokepowderfest.com



ROADSIDE ATTRACTION:

Continue beyond Fernie to Sparwood, home to one of the world's largest dump trucks. The box on the Terex Titan could fit two Greyhound buses and two pickup trucks.



Cross-country is just as important as downhill at Silver Star, with more than 100 kilometres of groomed trails.



DIRECTIONS:
Sun Peaks is about an hour north of Kamloops off Highway 5. To reach Silver Star, back track to Kamloops and follow Highway 1 west to Highway 97 and Vernon. In Vernon follow signs to the resort access road, just south of town. Big White is two hours south, first on Highway 97 to Kelowna and then on Highway 33 to the Big White access road. Finally, to reach Apex continue south on Highway 97 to Penticton and then follow Apex Mountain Road to the resort.



Apex Mountain has a charming skating loop.

Apex Mountain's small size gives it a more intimate feel and smaller crowds.



Sun Peaks is the second largest ski resort in Canada.

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE WINTER VACATION

WHERE:

The length of the Okanagan.

WHY GO:

Where skiing is only half the fun.

Heading to the Okanagan for a holiday is a summer tradition in B.C. for good

reason: hot, sunny weather is almost guaranteed, the lake offers a perfect place to cool off, there's tons to do and the plethora of local wine and food doesn't hurt. The lakes may not hold the same allure come winter, but everything else remains in place with the added benefit of four of the province's most exciting ski resorts for families. Beyond the diverse terrain that makes progressing easy, the Okanagan resorts—**Sun Peaks Resort, Silver Star Mountain Resort, Big White Ski Resort and Apex Mountain Resort**—are more like all-inclusive resorts than traditional ski hills. With

everything from ice climbing to skating, hundreds of kilometres of cross-country trails to Segway tours, even non-skiers will find plenty to do. The furthest north of the four, **Sun Peaks**, is not technically in the Okanagan—but it's close, tucked into the

Monashee Mountains an hour north of Kamloops. The second largest ski resort in Canada sprawls over three mountains surrounding the compact village. Each mountain has its own character. Expect a mix of weaving runs through trees, fall line ridge

lines, gullies and open faces, a lot of it groomed to perfection, one of Sun Peak's best attributes. There's also an endless list of things to do off the slopes, including a ride in a groomer, dogsledding and a Segway tour of the village, which is a vaguely Austrian looking collection of hotels, restaurants and shops connected by snow-covered lanes.

At **Silver Star**, the cross-country skiing competes with downhill for attention. Combined with the connected provincial park trail network there's more than 100 kilometres of groomed trails

to explore. Spider webbing through them are even more snowshoe trails. Some packed routes are open to snow biking. Up on the mountain, the terrain lends itself to improving and the excellent snow school programs help.

"Big and friendly" **Big White** may embody the Okanagan style of skiing the best. Like its neighbours, it basks in plenty of sunny days but also lands 760 centimetres of snow a winter. The terrain ranges from long, easy runs to steep alpine bowls, and Big White is famous for its excellent tree skiing for skiers of just about every ability. Off the slopes there's just as much variety. Tykes and adults can play around on snowmobiles. There's an ice-climbing tour. Two spas soothe sore muscles. And there are horse-drawn sleighs, dogsleds and more.

Apex, the smallest and most southern resort on this road trip, doesn't have as much going on, but its small size has advantages. On powder days everyone gets their share. The village is intimate. And it doesn't take long to gain the confidence to



Winter ROAD TRIPS



Unique touring options at Sun Peaks Resort.

explore beyond the runs into the glades and chutes. Once the lifts stop spinning, skate on a one-kilometre-long skating loop that's lit after dark or play shinny on a full-size hockey rink.

Websites: sunpeaksresort.com; skisilverstar.com; big-white.com; apexresort.com

Where to Eat: Near the top of the village lifts, right in the centre of the Big White village, The Woods is a good bet for a mid-ski fuel up or a cozy dinner apres. Ignore Eatology's location, attached to the bus depot in Vernon, and trust your gut for healthy, satisfying and delicious breakfasts and



ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS:

The Myra Canyon section of the Kettle Valley Railway is just as worthy in winter. Bring snowshoes and tromp the 12-kilometre rail-to-trail across 18 trestles and two tunnels high on the side of a narrow canyon. bcparks.ca

lunches. Everyone loves pizza and beer and few do it better than Bad Tattoo Brewing in Penticton. thewoodsbw.com; badtattoobrewing.com

Where to Stay: Backing onto the runs at Sun Peaks, the Cahilty Hotel and Suites caters to families of all sizes. Shining after a summer renovation, Apex Lodge sits at the entrance to the resort's village with easy access to the runs and restaurants. cahiltylodge.com; apexmountainlodging.com

Where to Ski: The fall line

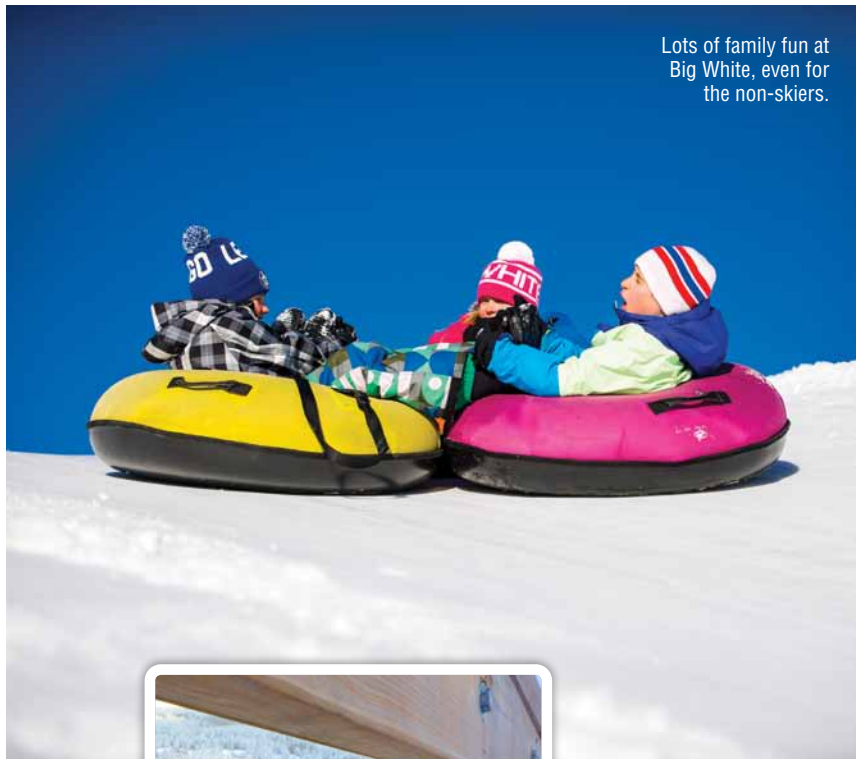
steps of Headwalls at Sun Peaks is the venue for the Canadian Speed Skiing Championships. At Big White the Cliff Chair is where people go to push themselves, but the best powder skiing is in the snow ghosts (iced-up trees) of the Falcon Glades. Exploring the Putnam Creek area of Silver Star requires guts and the skills to match. It's steep back there.

Avoid the Crowds: Head further from the village and the crowds fall away. At Sun Peaks, try the Morrisey Express and at Big White wander over to Sun Rype Bowl off the Gem Lake Express.

Keep it on Budget: Feeling spontaneous? Silver Star Stays, a vacation rental manager, offers discounts for bookings made within three days of a visit. silverstarstays.com

The Main Event: Snow-bombing makes its North American debut April 6 to 10 at Sun Peaks Resort. The festivities combine DJs and live bands with mountain venues. snowbombingcanada.com

Lots of family fun at Big White, even for the non-skiers.



Mission Hill Winery.

OFF THE SLOPES: WINE TASTING

Once snow settles on the vineyards the hustle of the wine tasting tours and sample rooms quiets down, but the wines still taste good. Tasting rooms at some wineries stay open throughout the winter, but with reduced hours. Others will open by request. If figuring out which is which sounds like too much work, sign up for a wine tour with a company like Toast the Okanagan Wine Tours. They'll pick you up from Big White or in Kelowna for a tour of four local wineries over three hours. The driver ensures you can take full advantage of all the tasting opportunities and provides insight into the Okanagan's wine producers and their wines. toasttheokanagan.com



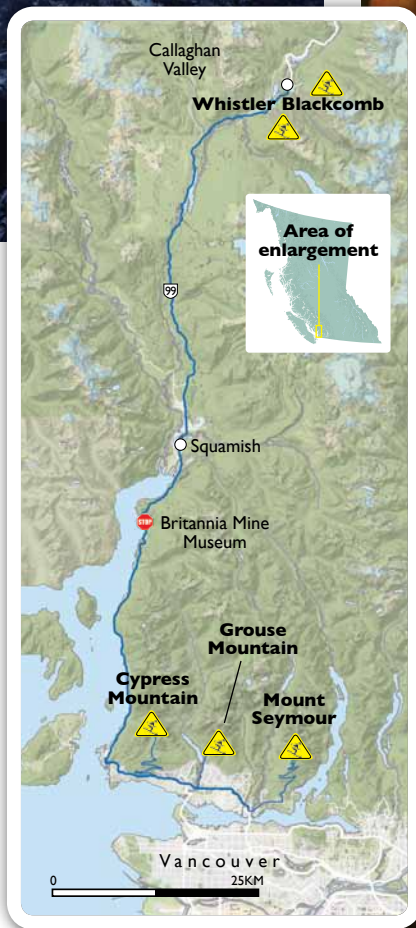
Sun Peaks offers many unique options for getting out in the snow, including dogsledding.



Winter ROAD TRIPS



Whistler Blackcomb is one of the best and most famous ski resorts in the world.



DIRECTIONS:

Beginning in Vancouver, the first step is to cross to the North Shore. From there the three ski hills are easy to find, all accessed off the Trans Canada Highway. To reach Whistler, continue onto Highway 99, the Sea to Sky Highway, at Horseshoe Bay. Whistler Blackcomb is a little more than an hour north from here.

FROM CITY TO SKY

WHERE:

From the ocean in Vancouver to the summit of Whistler.

WHY GO:

The best of the best—the food, the views, the terrain and the city too.

The list of reasons why **Whistler Blackcomb** consistently ranks as the number-one ski destination in North America is as long and expansive as the resort. It's the largest ski resort by area. The vertical drop is the second longest on the continent. Ranging from high alpine faces to winding tree runs, the terrain is world class. Guest experience rules. But one thing few mention when talking about WB's excellence is everything that lies on the road to the resort. In less than two hours, one travels from Vancouver's

cosmopolitan streets to the snowy cobbles of Whistler Village. It's one of the few places on Earth where it's easy to ski powder in the morning and sail into the sunset. Or ski all day and then catch an NHL game. Or check out a world-class rock climbing area, fly with a kite board, mountain bike in one of the sport's meccas or SCUBA dive. The list is long and few places can match the possibilities.

Maybe the most overlooked opportunity is skiing on the North Shore ski hills, **Mount Seymour, Grouse Mountain** and **Cypress Mountain Resort**. Few cities can brag three ski resorts within a 30-minute drive of downtown. The ski hills are a good place to warm up for the main event, with run progression from super easy to challenging. They're an ideal destination for an afternoon. Plus, the view is one of the most beautiful in skiing: city, ocean, mountains and, once the sun sets, the city lights. The newest and steepest terrain—including three



The off-mountain offerings at Whistler Village easily rival anything on the slopes.

fall-line double black diamonds—is off Cypress's Raven Ridge Quad Chair.

Down the mountain from the ski hills, and often free of snow all winter, are the mountain bike trails that helped push the sport to its fast and flowy present state.

Squamish too brags a world-class mountain bike trail network to go with its rock climbing and kiteboarding venues. The town is midway between Vancouver and Whistler and makes a good pit stop. And like around Vancouver, the mild coastal

weather means both trail and rock are often dry in the middle of winter. That's part of the reason this is a popular wintering area for bald eagles.

From here, the Sea to Sky Highway earns its name, climbing quickly away from

Howe Sound's tidal waters and up into the Coast Range. Leave time to pull over and take in the mountain views along the way, especially Tantalus Mountain's glacier-covered flanks.

By the time Whistler rolls into view, expect a scenic

overload, which can carry over to the resort and village. But experience the resort in bite-sized chunks and it becomes manageable. Figure out one lift and then move onto the next. Learn the neighbourhood around your hotel and then expand ▶



Winter ROAD TRIPS



Cypress Mountain is the largest of Vancouver's North Shore ski hills, and offers night skiing.



STOP

ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS:

Kids of all ages love the Britannia Mine Museum, a heavy metal mine turned hands-on mining lesson.

The highlight: the train ride right into the old mine shaft.

britanniaminemuseum.ca

out. And don't just ski. One of the greatest things about Whistler is all the off-mountain stuff: museums, spas, shopping, bouncing on trampolines, one of the province's best playgrounds, snowmobile tours, cross-country skiing and eating. Just about everything around here is world class.

Websites: whistlerblackcomb.com; mountseymour.com; cypressmountain.com; grousemountain.com

Where to Eat: In Vancouver, check out Forage on Robson Street. The menu emphasizes local ingredients, highlighted by monthly dinners with wine pairings focusing on specific B.C. watersheds.

At the top of Blackcomb Mountain, Christine's not only has a killer view, but a menu to match. foragevancouver.com; whistlerblackcomb.com

Where to Stay: Right on Nita Lake, a ski-boot walk to the Creekside Gondola, Nita Lake Lodge is a great base in Whistler. nitalakelodge.com

Where to Ski: Anyone from experts to intermediates will love Glissando Glades, a labyrinth of single lane groomed runs through a wide open forest ending at Whistler's Symphony Chair. The short hike up Spanky's Ladder leads to some of Blackcomb's steepest and gnarliest terrain and the long run out from the Blackcomb Glacier.

Avoid the Crowds: Night skiing on Vancouver's North

Shore hills is not only a quieter time, typically devoid of crowds, but also uniquely scenic, with the city lights twinkling below. At Whistler Blackcomb, start at Whistler Creekside, where the early morning lines are always shorter, and then session quieter lifts like Sympho-

ny and Crystal Ridge.

Keep it on Budget: Don't buy your WB lift ticket at the hill—you'll pay more and probably stand in line. Shop online or stop on route at a 7-Eleven in Vancouver or Squamish for discounted lift tickets.

OFF THE SLOPES: OLYMPIC LEGACY

The 2010 Olympic games may be history but the venues continue to inspire. Just a few minutes from the Vancouver airport, speed skaters rocked the Richmond Oval, now a multi-sport playground home to The ROX, interactive experiences that simulate Olympic and other sporting events. For the real thing, head to the Whistler Sliding Centre, near Blackcomb's Base II. After basic training whip down the icy track via bobsled or skeleton. Two more Olympic sports are on tap at the Callaghan Valley, host of the cross-country skiing and biathlon events. Rent skis and explore the 90-kilometre trail network or give biathlon, a combination of marksmanship and cross-country skiing, a shot. therox.ca; whistlersportlegacies.com



Earning turns at the Hankin-Evelyn Backcountry Skiing Recreation Area.

GREAT NORTHERN ADVENTURE

WHERE:

The northern Coast Range from Terrace to Smithers.

WHY GO:

Big, wild and deep—adventure skiing at its best.

Depending on your tastes, Northern British Columbia's ski destination charms could just as easily sound like reasons not to go. No high-speed lifts, no valet parking,

no on-slope shopping, no zip-lines. However, special rewards await the skier who wanders off the beaten path to cavort with the friendly locals, sample deep snow and adventure in the backcountry. Go north and play.

Just getting to the Skeena Valley is a trip. Plane, train, ferry or automobile, all modes lead north to Terrace, the best place to start a ski-

ing fling in the north. From the bustling town, it's about half-an-hour to **Shames Mountain**, one of the snowiest ski resorts on the planet. In an average winter, more than 12 metres of snow falls on the three-lift hill. Also

know the lifts only turn Friday through Monday. While that may be inconvenient, it also has a silver lining—three days worth of snow piled up every Friday morning. The 28 ski runs and perfectly spaced trees in between are playful and varied: fall-line steeps to mellow groomed rollers. When that gets tracked, ride the top T-bar and then start skinning or hiking into the backcountry. Easy access runs fall away within a few minutes and feed back into the ski area. Longer tours climb high into the alpine ▶

STOP

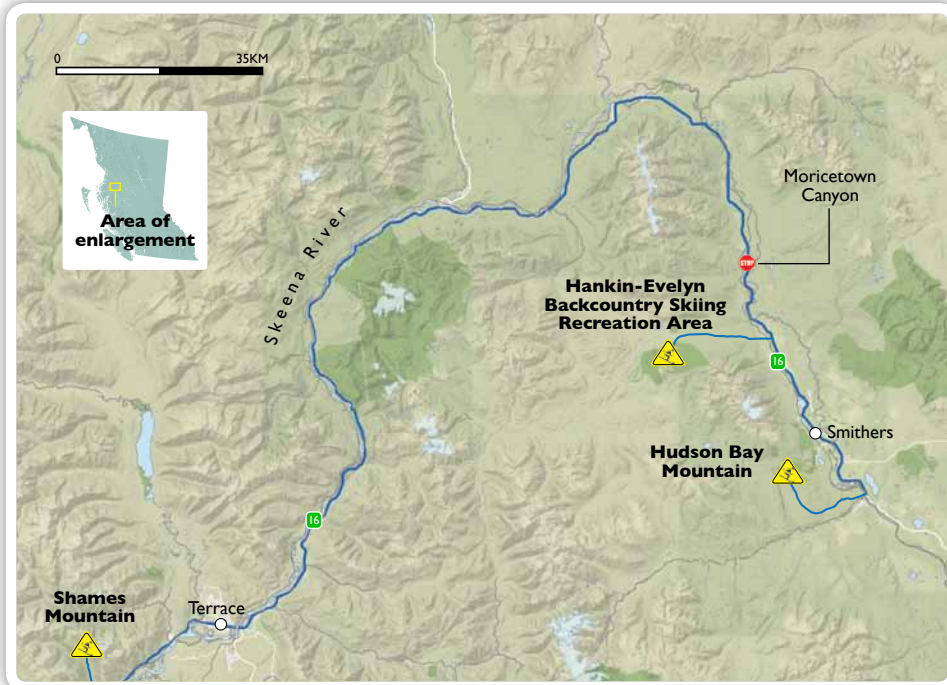
Roadside Attractions:

Just before reaching Smithers from Terrace, stop at Moricetown Canyon. Here rock outcrops force the Bulkley River into a narrow cascade that freezes the rocks white during cold snaps.

BRIAN HALL



Winter ROAD TRIPS

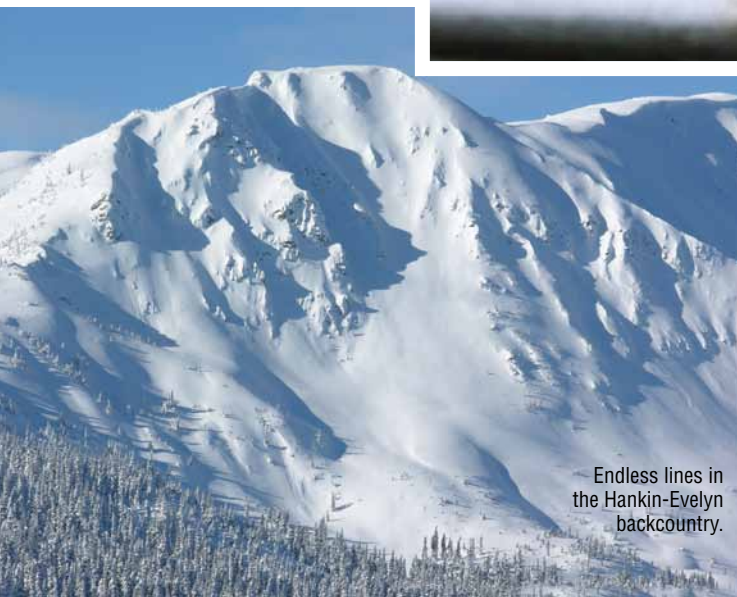


DIRECTIONS:

Regular flights service airports in Terrace and Smithers. Or drive Highway 16; Smithers is four hours from Prince George; Terrace is two hours further. Shames Mountain is 35 kilometres west of Terrace. Hudson Bay Mountain is immediately above town. And Hankin Evelyn Recreation Area is 20 minutes north of Smithers.



The eulachon run on the Skeena River.



Endless lines in the Hankin-Evelyn backcountry.

nearby and access bowls, faces and chutes, with the avalanche danger that goes hand-in-hand with travelling beyond any ski area boundary. Unsure where to go? Wait a minute and a local will likely wander by. Ask for directions and they're just as likely to lead the way. That's just the way things are at a ski hill owned by the locals and run as a co-op.

The skiing at **Hudson Bay Mountain** is just as friendly, not quite as deep, but at least it's open seven days a week. The runs sit

on the flank of the hulk of a peak overlooking the town of Smithers, two hours east of Terrace on Highway 16. The ski hill has two sides: The South Face and The North Face. Blues and greens abound on the south side, served by two T-bars. The Skyline Triple Chair services The North Face's steeper runs.

Shames and Hudson Bay are the only traditional ski hills in this part of B.C., but there are other options. Numerous heli- and cat-ski operations harvest powder in the nearby mountains, there's a backcountry lodge and the province's first dedicated backcountry ski park. The latter, **Hankin-Evelyn**

Backcountry Skiing Recreation Area, resembles a ski area in a lot of ways, just without the lifts. It is just outside Smithers at the end of a ploughed logging road. Locals spearheaded the project to mark a climbing track and cut runs through the forest. There's an overnight cabin, a warming hut, outhouses and three distinct areas to explore.

It's a unique community project that speaks to the way of the north. Things are a little rougher around the edges up here, but that's all part of the charm.

Websites: mymountain-coop.ca; hudsonbaymountain.com; bbss.ca

Where to Eat: Choose from six distinct takes on poutine at Hudson Bay Mountain's Whisky Jack Lounge. After a day at Shames head to Don Diego's in Terrace. The constantly changing menu mixes locally grown ingredients with southwest flavours.

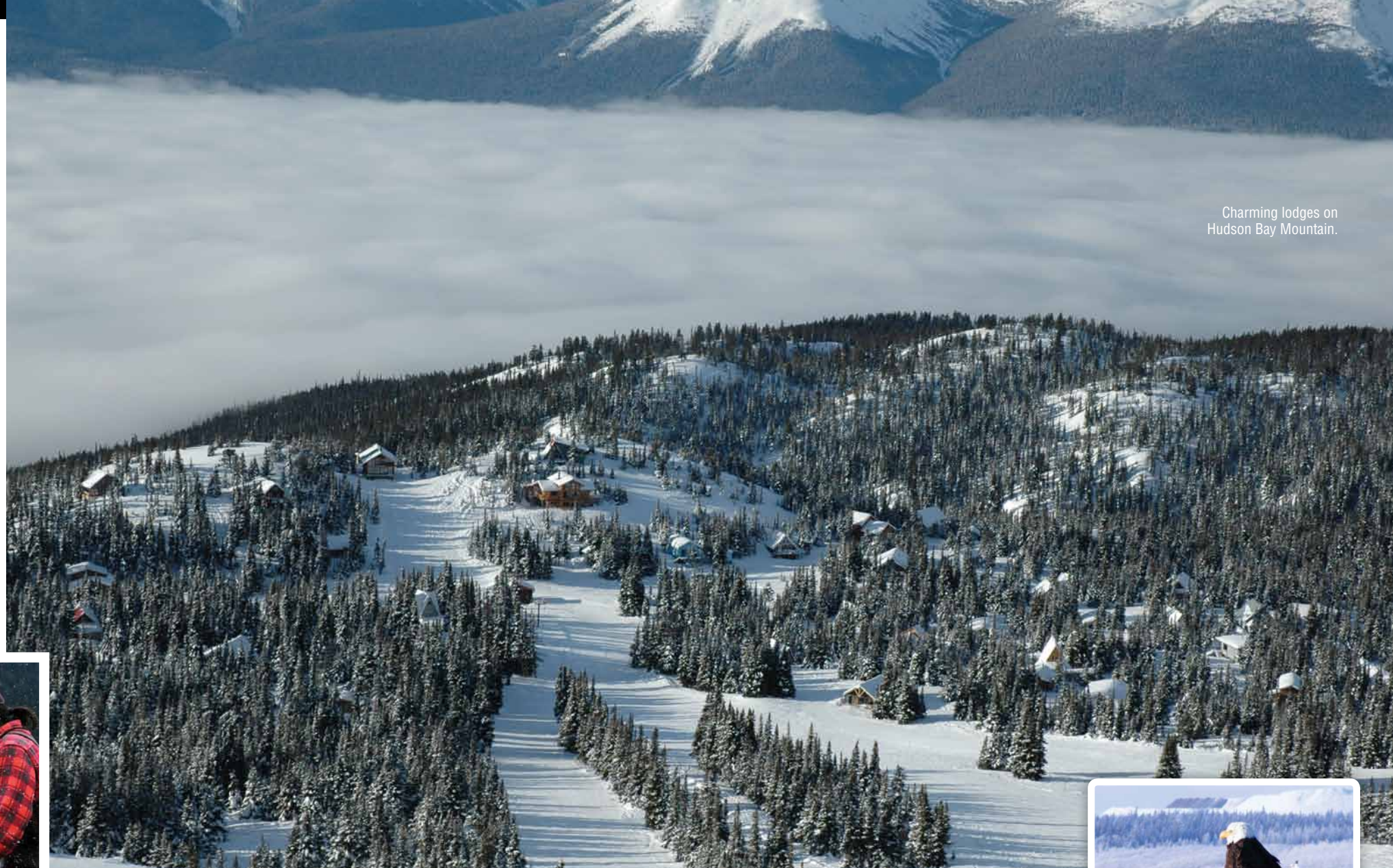
Where to Stay: Guarantee first tracks by spending the night in the Hankin Lookout Cabin, a refurbished fire lookout now part of the backcountry skiing area near Smithers. Just outside of Terrace stay in another unique abode: Hidden Acres Treehouse Resort, cabins on stilts near the Skeena River. bbss.ca; hiddenacrestreehousesort.com

Where to Ski: Test your control and stamina by skiing the fall line of Shames' Galloway's top to bottom. Find powder days after a storm in Seven Sisters Glades at Hudson Bay.

Avoid the Crowds: Pretty easy to do here—waiting in a lift line is rare at either resort.

Keep it on Budget: Buying a three-day lift card at Hudson Bay Mountain will save you \$20 compared to buying day tickets.

The Main Event: Climb Everest without leaving Hudson Bay Mountain during the Everest Challenge, a 24-hour ski touring marathon. 🏔️



Charming lodges on Hudson Bay Mountain.



OFF THE SLOPES: WILDLIFE VIEWING ALONG THE SKEENA

Every March, eulachon migrate up the Skeena River marking the beginning of spring and the season of abundance in the Coast Mountains. The oil-rich silver fish migrate in the millions in the river, attracting seals, sea lions, bald eagles and five species of gull far up river. It's a feeding spectacle easily enjoyed wherever river meets blacktop along Highway 16 between Terrace and Prince Rupert. First Nations used to prize the fish—dried properly it literally burns like a candle—and they continue to harvest small numbers.