



Park City
Mountain
Resort, Utah



SKIING,
THE AMERICAS

WILD WINTER

NEXT YEAR'S WINTER
OLYMPICS IN VANCOUVER
OPEN THE DOOR TO A HOST
OF FANTASTIC SKIING
OPTIONS ACROSS NORTH
AND SOUTH AMERICA,
FROM THE EXOTIC TO
THE TRIED AND TRUE

NORTH AMERICA: Could there be a better setting for what experts are tipping will be the highest profile Winter Olympic Games ever than the harbour city of Vancouver and one of the world's best ski resorts, Whistler-Blackcomb?

Hundreds of thousands of spectators will converge on British Columbia during the 2010 Games, to be held from February 12 to 28, 2010 (the Paralympics will be at the same venues from March 12 to 21).

Eighty per cent of Whistler Ski Resort will be open for skiers and snowboarders, which means you can watch the best snow athletes on earth, then try to imitate their feats. The opening ceremony will be at the 55,000-capacity BC Place in downtown Vancouver, on February 12. For the next 16 days, events will be held across various venues: speed skating at Richmond's Olympic Oval (14 kilometres south of Vancouver), ice hockey in downtown Vancouver and freestyle skiing, men's and women's moguls and the

STORY BY CRAIG TANSLEY

PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE TITTEL

VANCOUVER'S FEBRUARY WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES ARE TIPPED TO BE THE MOST HIGH PROFILE YET.



prestigious half-pipe events for snowboarders at Cypress Mountain, with its stunning views of Vancouver. The remainder of the 2010 events are to be held at Whistler-Blackcomb.

While you're there, take in one of the world's great engineering feats, the newly constructed Peak 2 Peak gondola, which takes skiers from Whistler Mountain to Blackcomb Mountain – 4.4 kilometres in just 11 minutes – and itself holds three world records: it has the longest unsupported span (3.024 kilometres), is the highest lift of its kind (436 metres) and completes the longest continuous lift system in the world.

While you're in Vancouver for the Winter Games, it's also worth checking out the 2010 Cultural Olympiad, which runs in venues throughout Vancouver from January 22 to March 21 and includes theatre, jazz, dance and contemporary music.

For more information go to www.vancouver2010.com

The drinks are on Utah

It's official: prohibition is over. On July 1, 2009, the US state of Utah abolished its private club laws, allowing restaurants and bars to serve "normal" amounts of alcohol (nips were previously smaller than standard) without visitors having to fill out membership forms and pay annual fees. The archaic legislation had often kept international skiers away from the Mormon state.

To celebrate, Utah's Park City Mountain Resort set about establishing the world's first ski-in, ski-out distillery, located at the base of the Town lift, which takes skiers from the resort right into Park City's historic Main Street. It's quite a novelty to drink hard liquor in America's driest state. And this isn't just any old liquor. High West Distillery, which occupies a Western-themed historic building known as the National Garage, makes some of the country's finest, including the traditional Rendezvous rye, voted one of America's 10 finest whiskeys, or the Vodka 7000, made from free-range snowmelt in the mountains behind you.

The popular Three Resort International Pass is also to be continued this year, which means you can ski Utah's best mountains – Deer Valley Resort, the Canyons and Park City Mountain Resort – all on one ticket that costs \$US72 (\$87) a day.

For more information on Park City Mountain Resort and its attractions go to www.parkcityinfo.com

Biggest little town in Canada

It may be North America's next big thing, but the joy of Revelstoke is that it still feels like a tiny Canadian town, best known previously (if it was known at all) as a stop on the Canadian Pacific Railway.

More than \$C1 billion has been pumped into its mountain resort over recent years and it is now regarded as having some of the best vertical terrain in all of North America. It also boasts the highest rise of any ski resort on the continent and, from this December, it will be the only place on earth where you can experience three very different types of skiing from the one resort base: lift, cat (hauled to the top of a mountain by a snowcat vehicle) and heli-skiing (with the completion of the Nelsen Lodge

you can now walk from your hotel room to a helicopter).

This December, Revelstoke Mountain Resort turns three, but it has already become the ski industry's most credible destination; pros gather here each winter to film footage for their sponsors, while in-the-know Australians are just beginning to arrive in town. The best bit is that you're still among only a select few antipodeans in town, a relief for anyone who's ever skied Big White or Whistler.

That sleepy-Canadian-hamlet feel is all the more remarkable given that Revelstoke Mountain Resort experienced a 52 per cent increase in skier visits in 2008-09. Should you wish to stay a while, passes are an affordable \$C559 (\$614) for a whole season.

For more information, check out www.revelstokemountainresort.com

Mass appeal

Related WestPac, part of US real estate firm Related Companies, is spending \$US2 billion on an 32-hectare redevelopment of the Snowmass resort base in Colorado, which will make it one of the most sophisticated ski resorts in the world. It will also render it practically unrecognisable to previous visitors. The redevelopment is in addition to



Small-town charm with plenty of room to ski: Revelstoke in Canada.



Vail, above. Snowboarders, right, can get their fill of the slopes as well as uplifting spirits at Park City, now that Utah has abolished its restrictive alcohol laws.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ABOVE LEFT, JACK AFFLECK; LEFT, DAN CAMPBELL

THERE'S FAR LESS CHANCE OF AN AVALANCHE IN ALASKA'S CHUGACH THAN IN OTHER HELI-SKI AREAS



the \$US35 million Aspen-Snowmass spent last season on a high-speed quad chairlift, additional terrain, two restaurants and a nine-metre-high half-pipe.

The new 650-square-metre, 173-room Viceroy Snowmass Hotel is scheduled for a November opening. There's also two new gondolas, three more restaurants and the best children's activity centre in North America, giving Aspen-Snowmass more than 2100 hectares of terrain, with more than 100 bars and restaurants from which to choose.

If you can't make the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, you could perhaps consider travelling to Aspen-Snowmass for the ESPN Winter X Games, to be held from January 28 to 31. More than 200 of the world's best snow athletes will gather there for one of the world's most prestigious on-snow events.

For more information go to www.aspensnowmass.com

Wilderness without the wildness

Go heli-skiing in Alaska and you'll probably die, right? We've seen the Warren Miller movies – guys and gals risking life and limb riding through Alaskan avalanches and down near-90 degree slopes.

Sure, that terrain exists, but it's actually safer to heli-ski in the Chugach Mountains that surround the Alaskan fishing town of Valdez than elsewhere because of a combination of weather patterns. We'll spare you all the scientific detail, but in essence the mountains have a strong coastal maritime snow pack, which clings uniquely to the steep, geologically young slopes, meaning there's far less chance of an avalanche than in other heli-ski areas around the world.

H2O Guides has the best safety record of any heli-ski operation in the world and can access more terrain than its competitors (does one million hectares give you enough options?). You're also guaranteed more powder snow than anywhere else in North America, with over 18 metres falling a year. Alaska also has a resort, Alyeska Ski Resort, just 45 minutes drive from Anchorage.

Alyeska has the highest snowfall of any North American ski resort. It also offers heli-skiing, should you want to try it while the family skis on the mountain, or samples the day spa. And of course, bragging rights are guaranteed after any trip to Alaska.

For more information on heli-skiing go to www.alaskahelicopterskiing.com, for information on Alyeska Resort go to www.alyeskaresort.com

See the stars

Almost entirely disregarded by Australian skiers in favour of its better known neighbours to the south in Colorado, Sun Valley is where the folk who pay the actors' salaries come to ski. The place where Hollywood royalty from Gary Cooper to John Wayne to Marilyn Monroe skied (the likes of Bruce Willis still have homes here), it also has the most illustrious history of any ski village. Nor was it only Hollywood royalty; Ernest Hemingway polished off *For Whom the Bell Tolls* at Sun Valley Lodge, where some say ghosts still roam the exquisite old wood-panelled corridors.

More a plaything of US billionaire Earl Holding (his photo adorns walls, resplendent in a patterned cardigan) than a commercial proposition, Sun Valley may be the most beautiful ski resort anywhere. No expense has been spared on the buildings, which all have towering ceilings and huge stone fireplaces. Even bathrooms are immaculate.

December will mark the opening of North America's largest-ever Doppelmayr ski lift project – an eight-passenger gondola that will travel 600 vertical metres in just eight minutes. A word of warning however: Sun Valley is steep, its green runs are as difficult as Australia's black runs, but the powder is legendary and untrammelled.

For more on Sun Valley go to www.sunvalley.com



Alaska's Alyeska offers heli-skiing and has the highest snowfall of all the North American resorts.



Beaver Creek, above. Right and far right, winter daredevils now have more room to roam at Colorado's expanded Telluride Ski Resort.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY: TOP, LEFT, STEPHEN WILKES; OPPOSITE, CHRIS BREWSTER; LEFT, COURTESY TELLURIDE SKI RESORT

Best & less

There's never been a cheaper time to ski Vail, one of the world's premier resorts, and its five neighbours. For just \$US599, you can buy a season pass for unlimited skiing, provided you buy it before the end of September, at six resorts – Vail, Breckenridge, Keystone, Beaver Creek, Heavenly and Arapahoe Basin – with no blackout dates, even over Christmas.

The Epic Pass, as it is known, gives Australian skiers access to some of the finest ski terrain in all of North America for a fraction of what it would normally cost. It also allows you to offer discounted lift passes to friends and family. For anyone wanting to spend more than a week skiing on holiday this season, it offers the lowest price available in North America. Vail is one of the world's largest ski resorts, with more than 2140 hectares of terrain; even on the busiest day, there's still only 10 skiers for every hectare. **For more information, go to www.vail.com**

Beautiful beast

Think you're a good skier? Keen to sample a little bit of France somewhere you don't necessarily have to speak the language? Why not test your mettle on North America's newest double-black diamond run, which also gives you the chance to ski on the eastern side of Canada, in Quebec? Dubbed the Beast, it's one of Canada's most demanding runs.

If you dare, you'll find it 30 minutes outside the city of Quebec, at Mont-Sainte-Anne Resort, where you should also take time to check out the 18th-century cobbled streets and wonderful French cuisine.

The Québécois call this run *la Belle et la Bête* – Beauty and the Beast – and its steep terrain and tricky contours certainly justify the name. Mont-Sainte-Anne Resort also has Canada's largest floodlit night skiing area.

For more information on Mont-Sainte-Anne Resort and the Beast go to www.mont-sainte-anne.com

Rise and fall

An ambitious hotel project has recently been completed at the Colorado ski town of Telluride, a town that was built on gold. It was the site of Butch Cassidy's first successful bank robbery, and now home to such stars as Tom Cruise and Jerry Seinfeld.

Telluride marks the US debut of Capella hotels. The brainchild of hotelier Horst Schulze, founding president of the Ritz-Carlton, Capella features personal assistants on every five-star floor, as well as three new restaurants. Another five-star hotel, lumière (rated one of the world's sexiest lodges), has also opened in Telluride, with 30 luxury suites and ski-in, ski-out concierge service.

The hotels have been built just in time to capitalise on Telluride Ski Resort's expanded 160 hectares of ski terrain. The Revelation Bowl was the biggest news in US skiing last November, and now makes Telluride one of North America's premier resorts.

For more information on Telluride go to www.tellurideskiresort.com. For information on Capella go to www.capellatelluride.com. Information on lumière can be found at www.lumierehotels.com/telluride/



THE BEAST IS ONE OF CANADA'S MOST DEMANDING RUNS. IT'S 30 MINUTES OUTSIDE QUEBEC, AT MONT-SAINTE-ANNE RESORT, WHERE YOU SHOULD ALSO TAKE TIME TO SAMPLE THE WONDERFUL FRENCH CUISINE.



Top, Telluride is one of North America's premier resorts. Above, Mont-Sainte-Anne Resort features one Beast of a run, and also a floodlit night skiing area.



ANDEAN ADVENTURES

WITH ITS HIGH-ALTITUDE SLOPES, SNOW-CAPPED VOLCANOES AND RAINFORESTS, SOUTH AMERICA OFFERS SKI HOLIDAYS WITH A DIFFERENCE AT HALF THE PRICE AND WITH TWICE THE FLAIR

CHILE

Portillo

Flying to South America from Australia, the first major resort you'll find is the breathtaking Portillo, Chile's largest and one of the world's true high-altitude resorts, with a base at 2880 metres.

It's tempting to stop at Valle Nevado, La Parva or El Colorado, all within 50 kilometres of Santiago, but continue to Portillo where you'll find empty slopes and the Hotel Portillo. The resort restricts the number of lift tickets it issues to 450, creating an exclusive on-snow experience for you and 449 new friends, all staying at the Hotel Portillo and nearby lodges, which sit marooned like a cruise ship high in the Andes, complete with Jacuzzi and nightclub.

The slopes have everything. Gentler terrain leads down to Inca Lake, where legend says Princess Kora-Illé lies, the green waters mirroring her emerald eyes. Keen skiers will be drawn to the Juncalillo, where the US, Italian and Austrian Olympic ski teams practice every August, and the Kilometro Lanzado, where the 200 kilometre speed barrier was first broken. To be truly alone, however, grab your skis and head for the skies. Request details of the resort's new heli-skiing offering through heliski@skiportillo.com.

For more information go to www.skiportillo.com

Antillanca

There are other resorts in Chile, but Antillanca should be next on your list if your skiing fantasies include heading down a snow-capped volcano above temperate rainforest. Located in Patagonia, Antillanca is *Jurassic Park* meets Perisher. T-bars run over the resort, perched on the flanks of the Casablanca Volcano in the Puyehue National Park. Below is the second-largest Valdivian rainforest in the world. Look down and you'll catch sight of ferns, Antarctic flora and woody plants. Look up and the panorama is all snow-capped volcanoes. The juxtaposition is surreal, the only drawback a base elevation of 1015 metres, meaning no Andean powder. But the volcanic topography has resulted in quirky natural terrain to play on, making this a free-rider's paradise.

More information at www.chileanski.com/eng/antillanca



Left: El Colorado, near Santiago, Chile. Right: Cerro Catedral, Argentina, lures skiers with more than 100 kilometres of runs, newly upgraded lift capacity and a thriving nightlife.



ARGENTINA

This country boasts the southernmost ski resort in the world (Cerro Castor), one of the flashiest (Cerro Catedral), and one that tests even the most crazily brave, Las Leñas.

Best of all for visitors, Argentina is on sale – permanently – since the peso crashed in 2002. Prices are rising, but you still get plenty of bang for your buck skiing by day and tangoing by night (see page 22).

Cerro Catedral

For South Americans, Cerro Catedral (also called Bariloche after the nearby town) is the only place to ski. Nicknamed "Brazil-oché" for the Brazilians who come to be seen, the streets are dotted with fur coats, nightclubs hum and there

are so many chocolate vendors it's the Switzerland of the south. Serious skiers come for the mountain with its 103 kilometres of runs accessed via 40 lifts spread over 600 hectares of terrain. A recent upgrade means Catedral has more lift capacity than the rest of Argentina combined. Stay in Bariloche and soak up the lakeside ambience, or try the Pire-Hue Lodge for a luxurious ski-in, ski-out experience, with rabbit skin duvets and an outdoor spa.

For more information visit www.interpatagonia.com/catedral or www.pire-hue.com.ar

Las Leñas

This resort doesn't have the glitz and polish of some others, but it is fast gaining a reputation as the extreme ski

capital of the south. Thanks to the El Marte lift, bold skiers have access to some seriously high-altitude terrain – above 3000 metres. This remote resort has become a Mecca for off-season, northern hemisphere free-ride pros. Frequent high winds and fickle weather, however, mean extreme riders may find themselves spending more time in the bars than clocking slope time. For families, the ski school operates from 9:30am to 12pm and from 2:30pm to 5pm, allowing a midday siesta or family ski time. Very Argentinian. Plus the terrain within easy reach is enough to keep you busy, particularly when combined with a visit to the nearby wine capital of Mendoza.

For more go to www.laslenas.com/english/index.php

Cerro Castor

For pure bragging rights, Cerro Castro makes any "Ski before you die" list. It is one of the lowest altitude ski resorts in the world, with a base of 192 metres. It is also the most southern, perched at Tierra del Fuego, and one of Argentina's newest (less than 10 years old). The 772-metre vertical is fair, but it is the resort's latitude, at the 54th parallel, that explains the good snow. Seasons are long. And dark (the latitude means short winter days). Thank goodness for Ushuaia, just 26 kilometres away, a charming hub of coloured houses and an excellent base from which to watch ships as they leave for the Antarctic Peninsula across the Drake Passage.

For more go to www.welcomeargentina.com/castor/