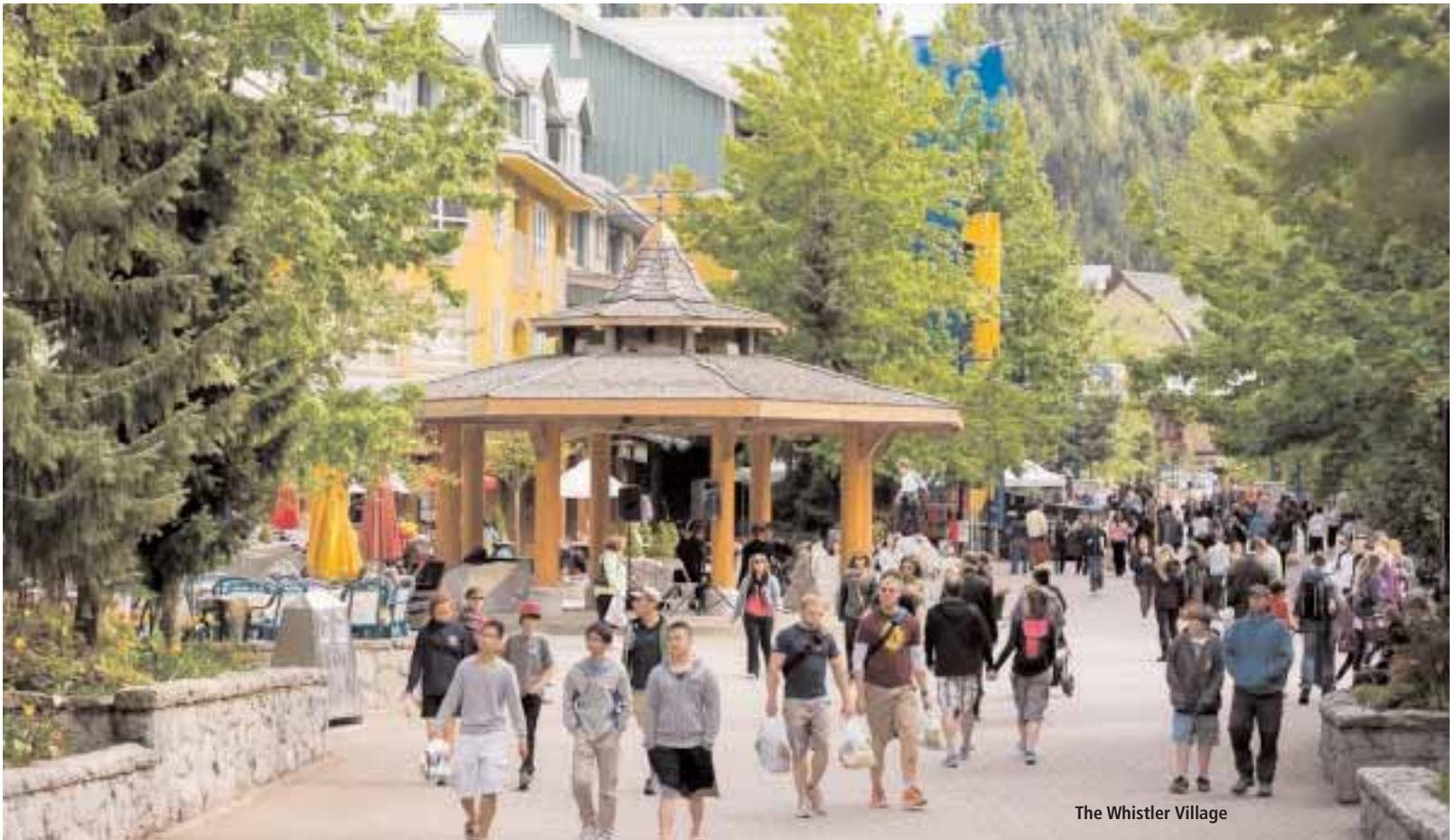


A first-time visit to gorgeous Whistler, B.C. won't be my last



The Whistler Village



The Peak 2 Peak

MIKE CRANE PHOTO

By Mike Cohen
The Suburban

WHISTLER — My family and I recently made our first visit to Whistler, BC, less than a two hour drive from Vancouver and one of the host cities of the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Located in the Coast Mountain Range of British Columbia, Whistler consistently offers the most reliable snow conditions, receiving an average annual snowfall of 11.9 metres (39.1 feet) based on the past 10 years.

The Village

There are many things to do in the Village, the heart of Whistler. You can stay in a centrally located hotel, walk the Village Stroll, indulge yourself at one of many places to eat and browse the unique shops. The Village is located at the base of the lifts, making access to Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains convenient for skiing, snowboarding and sightseeing. Whistler Village is big enough to have all the amenities expected of a world-class resort, yet small enough for you to feel its unique mountain culture and distinctive hospitality.

The year-round population of Whistler Resort is almost 10,000 permanent residents. The elevation of the Village is 675 metres / 2,214 feet; Whistler Mountain's elevation is 2,182 metres/7,160 feet and Blackcomb Mountain's. As the host Mountain resort for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, Whistler has recently improved accessibility through-

out the Village, parks and accommodation.

Ski Season

The ski season in Whistler typically begins around the third weekend in November, coinciding with American Thanksgiving. From there, both mountains are open daily for winter operations until late April. Blackcomb Mountain stays open for spring skiing and snowboarding until mid-May. Summer glacier skiing and riding on Blackcomb Mountain starts the third week of June. In summer Whistler Mountain Bike Park opens as a haven for riders of all levels and the Village Gondola, Peak 2 Peak Gondola and Peak Chair are open for sightseeing.

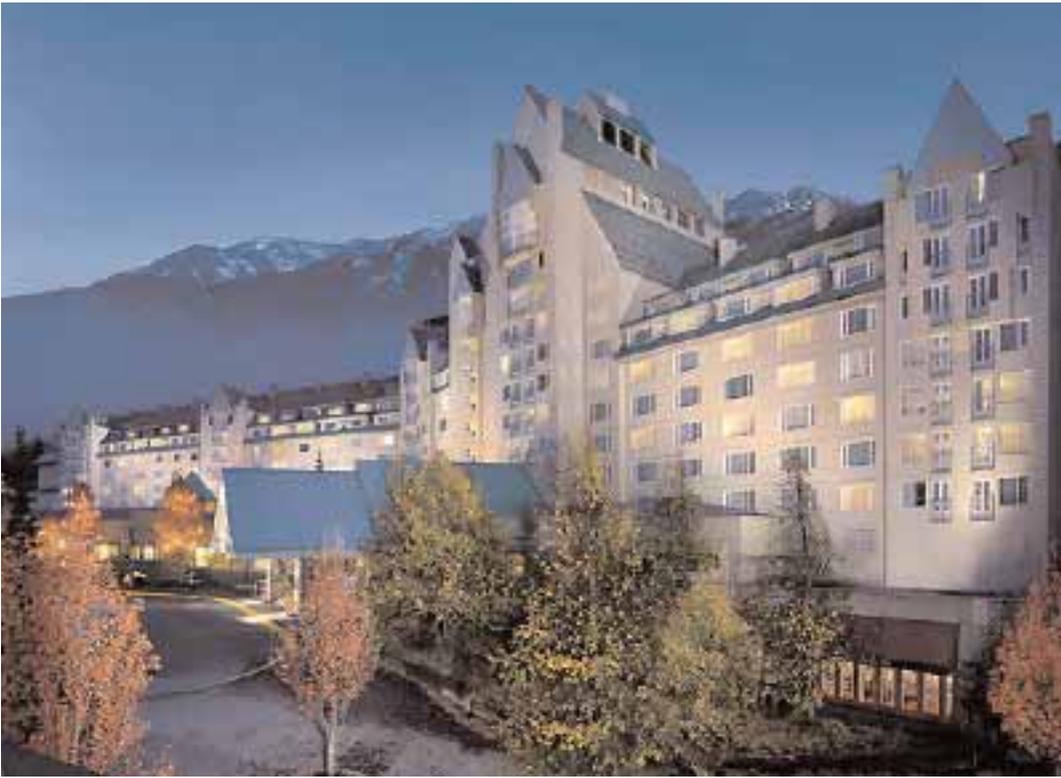
Peak 2 Peak

There is no better experience than the Peak 2 Peak Gondola. You first take the Whistler Express Gondola from the Village, which takes 25 minutes. You'll arrive at the Roundhouse, a lodge where you can have lunch or a snack, and take in the spectacular view of the mountains on the opposite side of the valley. From here, hop on the Peak 2 Peak Gondola for a thrilling 11-minute ride over to Blackcomb Mountain. For a more exciting experience we opted for the silver Peak 2 Peak Gondola, which has a glass bottom. Both mountains offer a variety of hiking trails for your enjoyment. We then took a short bus ride to the 7th Heaven open air chairlift way up to the top of the mountain, enabling us to view glaciers and whole lot of summer skiing.

I was told to budget at least 90 minutes to enjoy Peak



Ziplining in Whistler



The Fairmont Chateau Whistler

2 Peak. Well we devoted three and a half hours to the experience and that was with bringing our own lunch to eat while we waited in line. This experience is not to be missed. The Peak 2 Peak is wheelchair accessible in the summer while a sled is used in the winter to transport those in need to the Blackcomb Lodge.

The Ziptrek Experience

Prior to this trip members of my family and I had never gone zip lining. However, upon discovering Ziptrek Ecotours (www.ziptrek.com) we felt secure enough to give it a try.

Ziptrek Ecotours is the pioneer of zipline tours in North America! With an award winning ecological curriculum and the highest, longest, and most ziplines around, Ziptrek offers an entertaining combination of education and adventure. On the Ziptrek Bear Tour, one gets to experience stunning aerial vistas over Fitzsimmons Creek. This tour is perfect for families, groups and those who have never ziplined before. There are five incredible ziplines, joined by a network of suspension bridges, boardwalks and trails. I was quite nervous in the weeks leading up to this experience, but because the first zipline was really one for beginners it removed all of my jitters. Our two guides, Catie and Niall were fantastic and really made us all feel at ease.

Ziptrek Ecotours covers over 33 acres of diverse terrain (old growth rain forest, second growth rain forest, steep cliff faces and lush forest floor) spanning between Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains and over the Fitzsimmons Creek.

Tours run throughout the day, every day of the year. Guests are encouraged to wear suitable outdoor clothing. Closed toe shoes are required. Heated and sheltered platforms minimize exposure to the elements. Tours include light stair climbing and trail walking guests must be able to walk unassisted

Guests are met by their tour guides and fitted with their harnesses and helmets before taking a complimentary 10 minute shuttle from Whistler Village to the base on Blackcomb Mountain. Guests will zipline between the two mountains directly over the river. The ziplines are gravity fed, so guests do not have to worry about controlling their own speed. The guides accompany guests on the tour, one to connect (launch platform) and one to disconnect (landing platform). The educational component provides a unique insight into the surrounding environment on both a local and glob-

al scale. Meanwhile, the ziplines provide an adrenaline rush like no other!

Pricing is \$109 for adults, \$89 for youth (six to 14) and \$89 for seniors (65 plus). There are some other options as well.

Ziptrek is an outdoor adventure activity and operates in all weather conditions. Reservations are strongly recommended. There is a 24 hour cancellation policy, a 275 pound upper weight limit. Guest must be a minimum of 15 years old to zip without a guardian. Ziptrek will be setting up shop in Mont Tremblant, Quebec next spring.

Where to Stay

I have always appreciated exploring Fairmont hotels. We had a great experience at The Fairmont Chateau Whistler Resort Hotel (www.fairmont.com/whistler), which does indeed define mountain luxury.

An all season resort destination, The Fairmont Chateau Whistler hotel offers a seamless blend of year-round adventure and unsurpassed guest service for business or pleasure. With mountainside ski out the door convenience and an on-site Whistler golf course, the classic elegance of this award-winning hotel offers a modern alpine setting featuring exceptional dining, full resort amenities, a Vida Spa and Fairmont Gold - Fairmont's exclusive lifestyle hotel experience. There are an incredible 550 rooms here (15 of which are fully handicapped accessible), an in-house reservation centre for all Whistler activities and a rental station for bikes and ski gear. A small and pretty shopping plaza is part of the facility as well, featuring an art gallery and some boutiques. This hotel is a popular locale for Jewish weddings and bar and bat mitzvahs.

Not only is this hotel delighted to host your entire family, four-legged friends are welcome as well. Their dog-friendly program includes pet bed, bowls, special treats and menus. This also happens to be Whistler's largest conference resort hotel, with 32,000 square feet of conference space.

We just loved the two outdoor pools, one for lap swimming and the other which connects to an indoor one. There are three whirlpools, sauna and steam rooms and two outdoor plexipave surface tennis courts. As I looked out at the mountains from my lounge chair, I thought I was in paradise.

High Speed internet connectivity is available in all guest rooms, an Ethernet network in meeting rooms



The popular Brewhouse Restaurant

and wireless internet access in public areas.

There is a spa and health club.

For dinner, the Wildflower and the Grill Room are particularly popular. At the former, their culinary team invites diners to enjoy a tantalizing showcase of locally inspired dishes and innovative classics in a warm and relaxed setting. The latter is Whistler's newest destination for exceptional chops, steak and seafood. Our group had the pleasure of experiencing the latter. Reservations are highly recommended and they can be made online or by telephone. This is fine dining at its best, with delicious appetizers such as the heirloom tomato salad. Their eight and 10 ounce tenderloins, rack of lamb and seared halibut are recommended. For the table, there is a selection of side dishes you can share. We opted for the truffled Yukon gold mashed potatoes and the sautéed BC mushrooms. For dessert, the chocolate mousse cake went over well.

Both restaurants even have a special lifestyle cuisine plus menu with very specific nutritious meals designed around select dietary needs such as diabetes, gluten free and vegan.

For a lighter bite, check out the Portobello Market & Fresh Bakery. You can also take advantage of poolside dining and order a sandwich, burger, drinks and more right from the comforts of your chair.

The Brewhouse Experience

We heard some very good things about the Brewhouse Restaurant (<http://www.markjamesgroup.com/brewhouse.html>) and our party of five was not disappointed. This is one of the busiest spots in the Whistler Village all year round. With a separate restaurant, bar and mezzanine, the Whistler Brewhouse is capable of accommodating groups large and small. The pub has a cozy two-sided fireplace and lots of TVs, making it the perfect place to watch the game when you're tired from playing all day. The restaurant is warm and family friendly with a great kids' menu and a huge patio for Whistler's long, hot summers. The cuisine is an inspired and appetizing mix of barbeque and rotisserie classics, with exceptional pizza and pasta options. These flavours are complemented by their range of handcrafted ales and lagers, brewed onsite. There are even four kinds of poutine. Our party of five shared some starters, the fish tacos and tuna maki roll and decided upon a few different main courses: the wild mushroom pizza, mac & cheese, a 12 ounce angus strip steak and chicken & ribs. The food and atmosphere was great. We particularly liked the cute model train which made its way through the restaurant on miniature tracks above us.

This is part of the Mark James Group Brewery Restaurant, with others in Vancouver (Yaletown), Richmond (Flying Beaver) and Surrey (Big Ridge). James is a member of the Jewish community and has been supportive of a number of charitable events. This includes the annual Sports Celebrity Dinner. It is no surprise then that one of his main appetizers is a gigantic bowl of matzah ball soup. This not only contains a large matzah ball, but plenty of pieces of chicken and vegetables.