

## TRAVEL

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A refuelling station for skiers and boarders by day, rustic Paradise Camp becomes a fine dining restaurant Friday and Saturday evenings during ski season. — SILVER STAR RESORT

# Savour one night in Paradise

**REVEL IN DARKSIDE:** Unique gourmet dinner tour offers a finer taste of Silver Star Resort

MARK SISSONS  
SPECIAL TO THE PROVINCE

As the falling snow swirls outside the snowcat window, ghostly shapes emerge from the pitch darkness of the steep mountainside — trees with their branches sagging under heavy loads of fresh fluffy powder. Riding in this converted 12-passenger snow cat groomer to the so-called Darkside of Silver Star Resort, I feel like an astronaut just descended from the mother ship to reconnoitre a frozen alien planet.

Tonight I'm among the first visitors of the season to enjoy Silver

Star's most intimate and out there experience — the Snow Cat Dinner Tour to Paradise Camp. Located on the Putnam Creek backside of the mountain at the top of the Powder Gulch lift, this rustic mid-mountain ski-in, ski-out dining room serves up breakfast and gastro pub-style fare to thaw chilly skiers.

Then every Friday and Saturday night from mid-December until the end of ski season it morphs into an intimate, candlelit fine dining room offering gourmet four-course meals prepared by a Red Seal chef. All you have to do is catch the snowcat to get there.

## Into the void

At 5:30 p.m. we set off for the half-hour trek along Main Street Skyway to the camp. I get to sit up in the cab alongside our driver, Andrew, as he expertly plots our route across the pitch black mountain amid near zero visibility. The heated enclosed cabin behind us contains three rows of comfortable padded seats, occupied on this inaugural voyage by a cheerful group of locals up from nearby Armstrong to celebrate a birthday in high alpine style.

"It's a pretty spectacular experience under moonlit skies," notes

Andrew as he steers us through the forest, scanning the trail for lynx and coyotes that occasionally make a nocturnal appearance. "But when it's stormy like tonight, it really feels like an out-of-this-world adventure," he adds.

Tonight's arctic odyssey has a decidedly delicious destination. As the lights of Paradise Camp first pierce the darkness, glowing like hurricane lamps to guide us home through this wintry white gale, my thoughts turn to dinner and I'm suddenly very hungry. I half expect Santa's sleigh to be double-parked outside the rustic wooden hut. Instead,

the welcoming smiles of camp staff usher us into one of the most unique dining experiences I've ever had.

"There's a real sense of camaraderie as you head up the dark mountain through a swirling snowstorm," says Silver Star's Director of Sales and Marketing, Marke Dickson, my host and dinner companion. "You embark as a bunch of strangers and by halfway up the mountain everyone's sitting, chatting together and listening to Fleetwood Mac while a snowstorm rages outside your window."

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It starts here.

# Haute cuisine at high altitude

From Page A21

A popular snack shack by day, Paradise Camp undergoes a radical nocturnal transformation into a fine dining room replete with candles, fresh linen tablecloths and a cozy fire in the corner. The service is precise and welcoming but far from pretentious. A good thing, because we've all arrived clad casually in snow boots, jeans, parkas and tuques.

Our lantern-lit dinner features an impressive menu of Canadian mountain cuisine and an extensive sommelier-inspired B.C. wine list. Cocktails and specialty martinis are also available.

I choose the signature Paradise Camp cocktail, a home-spun variation on Irish coffee and a perfect warm-up for what's to come. The starter menu features savoury temptations like roasted butternut bisque, rosemary ricotta crostini, creole crab cakes and Mexican cream, tequila and chipotle drunken shrimp. Lured by the promise of instant warmth, Marke and I both opt for the roasted butternut bisque.

How this talented crew manages to extract haute cuisine from this archaic, bare-bones open kitchen is beyond me. But I'm immensely happy that they can. For the main course, I'm spoiled for choice with options like pecan-crusted bourbon-glazed chicken

supreme, pan-seared Pacific salmon, spinach and gruyere gnocchi and warm roasted butternut squash salad.

Top for the herb-encrusted beef tenderloin served with creamy potato mash, jewelled veggies and red onion marmalade. And it doesn't disappoint.

Marke tells me that chef Aaron Sherman imported many of his culinary secrets from his native New Zealand. By the taste of things, he's done the Kivis proud.

On a clear moonlit mountain evening I'm told there are superb views of the Monashees from this high-altitude bistro. Tonight, the champagne fluffly stuff is still falling hard enough outside to make any powder hound salivate with first tracks anticipation.

That's just fine with me. By the time my decadently large slice of chocolate cheesecake arrives, I'm already wondering how I'm going to fit into my ski pants. Good thing I didn't succumb to calorie-heavy plan B, the turtle-pecan cheesecake topped with pecans and caramel.

On the way back to Snowbird Lodge aboard the Paradise Express through Silver Star's woods, lovely, dark and deep, I think of the adage that it's the journey, not the destination that really matters. When it comes to the Snow Cat Dinner Tour to Paradise Camp, I'd say it's just about even.

## BC Ferries

January 19 - March 13, 2013

Schedules are subject to change without notice.

### LOWER MAINLAND - VANCOUVER ISLAND

#### TSAWWASSEN - SWARTZ BAY

Leave Tsawwassen		
7:00 am	1:00 pm	@ 6:00 pm
9:00 am	4:20 pm	7:00 pm
11:00 am	3:00 pm	9:00 pm
	5:00 pm	

#### Leave Swartz Bay

7:30 am	12:20 pm	5:00 pm
8:00 am	1:00 pm	7:00 pm
9:00 am	3:00 pm	9:00 pm
11:00 am	4:40 pm	

◆ Feb 9 only.

↓ Fri, Sun & Feb 11 only.

◆ Fri, Sun, Jan 24 & Feb 11 only.

### TSAWWASSEN - NANAIMO (DUKE POINT)

Leave Tsawwassen		
5:15 am	12:45 pm	@ 8:15 pm
7:45 am	3:15 pm	@ 10:45 pm
10:15 am	5:45 pm	

#### Leave Duke Point

5:15 am	12:45 pm	@ 8:15 pm
7:45 am	3:15 pm	@ 10:45 pm
10:15 am	5:45 pm	

◆ Except Sun.

② Except Sat.

■ Except Sat & Sun.

### HORSESHOE BAY - NANAIMO (DEPARTURE BAY)

#### Leave Horseshoe Bay

6:30 am	12:30 pm	7:00 pm
8:30 am	3:00 pm	▲ 9:00 pm
10:30 am	5:00 pm	

#### Leave Departure Bay

6:30 am	12:30 pm	▲ 7:00 pm
8:30 am	3:00 pm	9:00 pm
10:30 am	5:00 pm	

▲ Fri, Sat, Sun & Feb 11 only.

### LOWER MAINLAND - SUNSHINE COAST

#### HORSESHOE BAY - LANGDALE

#### Leave Horseshoe Bay

7:20 am	1:20 pm	7:25 pm
9:20 am	3:30 pm	9:15 pm
11:20 am	5:30 pm	

#### Leave Langdale

6:20 am	12:20 pm	6:30 pm
8:20 am	2:30 pm	8:20 pm
10:20 am	4:30 pm	

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