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Amazing vistas never fail to thrill at Whistler-Blackcomb, writes Andrew McCredie, who says after years skiing at the resort he still discovers new runs. JUSTA JESKOVA PHOTOGRAPHY

INSIDER TIPS TO SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE SKI RESORTS

From Whistler and Kicking Horse to fantastic sites in Colorado and Utah, here are some top spots for powder lovers, write **Mark Sissons & Andrew McCredie**

WHISTLER-BLACOMB: TRULY WORLD CLASS

I've been skiing at this resort 90-minutes from my home up the Sea-to-Sky highway for three decades, and every time I unload from the Symphony Express Chair and catch sight of one of the greatest vistas in the world of skiing I remember why I love this place.

When I first started skiing here I preferred Blackcomb's runs, particularly in good weather, but the past few

years I've explored Whistler and now find myself splitting time between the two, in large part thanks to the incredible Peak2Peak gondola that connects the two.

What I find most amazing about this resort is that I still stumble — sometimes tumble — across runs I've never been on. It truly is a ski experience for the ages.

Andrew's insider tip: Avoid the sometimes single-lane traffic congestion heading into the village by parking at Creekside and catch the first

gondolas up when Whistler opens at 8:30 a.m.

When lunchtime beckons, skip the massive cafeteria-style on-mountain restaurants and head to the Horstman Hut at the top of 7th Heaven chair on Blackcomb.

This European-style hut offers simple and hearty fare, and if it's a sunny day and you score a table on the patio, it's difficult to tear yourself away from the views and ambience.

GO STEEP AND DEEP AT KICKING HORSE

Legendary for its extreme terrain and champagne powder, this B.C. ski resort in the Purcell Mountains near Golden boasts some of North America's most vertiginous vertical. Many daring powder hounds have been "kicked by the horse" — humbled by Kicking Horse Mountain Resort's daunting double black diamond chutes and bowls.

A single high-speed gondola whisks you from the base

to the summit. From here, experts-only bowls and super steep ridges and chutes fan out from the face.

Intermediate skiers can descend to mid-mountain, where the terrain begins to flatten out, and ski right past the 20-acre (eight-hectare) winter lair of the resort's longtime resident grizzly named Boo.

Try Reudi's Ridge South, a backcountry skiing slope accessible just outside the resort's boundary, for a seriously strenuous challenge.

Don't venture into this unpatrolled ski touring area without avalanche survival training. Follow all safety precautions and preferably hire an ACMG certified guide trained to show you how to read often treacherous snow conditions.

Mark's insider tip: Head to Eagles Eye mountain top restaurant, Canada's highest eatery at a lofty 7,700 feet, for panoramic views and hearty cuisine.

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These resorts offer cool vibes, challenging runs

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FOLLOW THE POWDER HIGHWAY TO RED MOUNTAIN

Deep in the Monashee Rockies, near the West Kootenays town of Rossland, is one of Canada's oldest and most stubbornly authentic ski resorts.

Part of B.C.'s world-renowned ski bum pilgrimage route called the Powder Highway, Red is the antithesis of ritzy resorts. Expect plenty of fresh pow and a tight-knit community of fun-loving mountain folk who know how to power through it, on-piste and off.

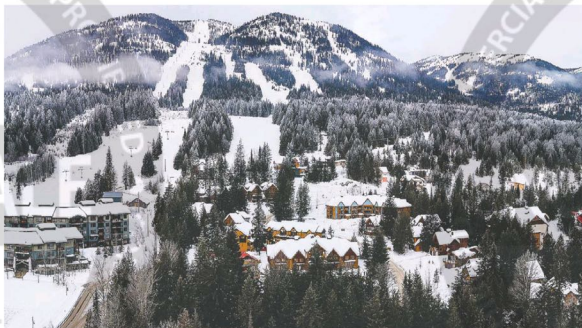
Advanced skiers and

boarders will love the expansive terrain and advanced and expert runs featuring gnarly off-piste tree skiing, big mogul runs and cliff drops.

Olympic downhill champion Nancy Greene, who grew up skiing here, once said that "everything else seemed easy and not very steep after Red."

For the ultimate Monashee experience, spend a day back-country skiing with Big Red Cats. With 8,000 hectares of terrain to play in encompassing eight mountains, you'll enjoy some of the world's most pristine tree and glades skiing.

Mark's insider tip: Stay at the upscale Josie Hotel for ski-in-ski-out luxury at the mountain base and head to the infamous Rafter's bar for après-ski drinks and dancing.



Advanced skiers and boarders will love the expansive terrain and advanced and expert runs at Red Mountain near Rossland. DAVE HEATH/TOURISM ROSSLAND

MT. BAKER: OVER THE LINE AND BACK IN TIME

A day at this Washington State resort, located just 70 kilometres from Abbotsford, is like skiing back in time. It's a hyper local crowd, a mix of rural shredders and British Columbians who know the secrets of the place, and the dress code is decidedly functional, not look-at-me fashionable.

The quality of the skiers and

boarders is a giveaway that this mountain has great conditions and challenging terrain, yet the vibe is glacier cool.

I like to park at Heather Meadows, the last parking lot at the end of the road. This gives you direct access to Panorama Dome and some sweet black diamond runs, including Canucks Delight and North Face.

After getting beaten up here, it's time to jump on the long Canyon run that takes

you all the way to the White Salmon Day Lodge and access to the top of the other ski area called Shuksan. This is primarily blue runs, great for wide-open cruising and the odd detour into nicely spaced-out tree skiing.

A full adult day pass is US\$71.30. Go on a weekday and you'll have many runs all to yourself.

Andrew's insider tip: The best après-ski establishment is back down Mt. Baker high-



A sure sign of a good day on the slopes at Mt. Baker resort in Washington State. GRACE MCCREDIE

way to the village of Deming and the North Fork Brewery, Pizzeria and Beer Shrine. Highway 542 has several unique and locals-only restaurants, but this one ticks all the boxes.

The beer is brewed on-site in small, 100-gallon batches, the hand-tossed pizza crust is made daily with specialty flour, olive oil and beer, and the ambience and service have that small town, mountain community charm.

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GET A HEAD START TO THE SEASON

KICK OFF WINTER EARLY

Whistler Blackcomb is set to open on November 25. Get your season started early and take advantage of quieter slopes.

LIGHT UP THE VILLAGE

Find unique holiday gifts for anyone on your list, take yourself on a tour of Whistler's best lighting displays, and go for a glide on the outdoor ice rink.

EVENTS TO ENTERTAIN

As winter begins to ramp up, so do the events. Enjoy Cornucopia from Thursdays to Sundays in November, and the Whistler Film Festival throughout December.

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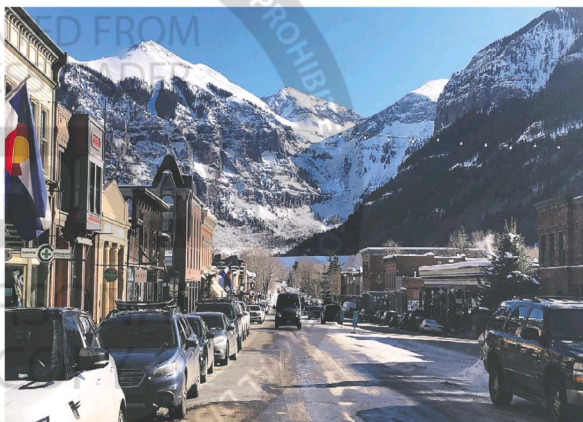
According to local lore, Telluride's name came from the foreboding frontier-era farewell "To-Hell-You-Ride" shouted by relatives to silver miners headed there in the 1800s.

Today, this former outpost at the end of a Colorado box canyon is arguably America's most picturesque ski town. And because Telluride is far from the congested interstate highway that links many of Colorado's other major ski resorts, it sees comparatively fewer visitors, except during the Telluride Film Festival.

Surrounded by the highest concentration of 14,000-foot-high peaks in the United States, the resort offers more than 800 hectares of vertical — all accessible with your Vail Resorts Epic Pass.

Whether you're gliding down its corduroy cruisers, dipping into glades of aspen trees, experiencing bumps or descending epic chutes, the resort's high altitude runs (reaching nearly 4,000 metres at the summit of Palmyra Peak) will leave you gasping, as will the 360-degree views of the surrounding San Juan Mountains.

Mark's insider tip: Take a guided walking tour of downtown Telluride, designated a National Historic Landmark District in 1964, and see where Butch Cassidy robbed his first bank.



Telluride, Colo., is a National Historic Landmark District. MARK SISSONS

EXPERIENCE RUGGED CRESTED BUTTE, COLORADO'S LAST REAL SKI TOWN

While not huge in terms of skiable hectares or vertical, this legendary Colorado resort is part of the Epic Pass family and boasts some of the gnarliest lift-served downhill terrain in the country.

Experts will love Crested Butte's infamous double black rocky upper runs. Called the Extremes, they're full of steep chutes, bowls and cliffs — some only accessible by boot packing up beyond the highest lifts. There's also plenty for

mere mortals to love. Twenty-seven per cent of the mountain's 121 trails are designated beginner and 57 per cent intermediate, including groomed and spacious rollers and gently-gladed runs that seem to flow forever.

Mark's insider tip: The town of Crested Butte is half the fun. Part Swiss Alps, part Wild West, it's as welcoming as it is laid-back and full of colourful Victorian-era homes, funky wooden shops and eccentric restaurants and bars.

Spend a day playing in powder in the nearby Elk Mountains with Irwin Snowcat skiing.

SASQUATCH MOUNTAIN RESORT: A BEAST OF A FAMILY MOUNTAIN

This Fraser Valley mountain is a hidden gem, though with season passes sold out for the coming season, the secret seems to be out. Located between Mission and Agassiz, what Sasquatch lacks in vertical it makes up for in variety and its family-oriented appeal.

In addition to the runs — serviced by three chairs, a quad, a triple and a double, and two magic carpets for the wee ones and beginners — there is an eight-lane tube



Tubing is among many family-friendly activities at Sasquatch Mountain Resort. SASQUATCH RESORT

park and cross-country and snowshoe trails.

The epitome of a local mountain, Sasquatch is a great place to learn how to ski and board — there are three terrain parks — and is ideal for a multi-generational family day on the slopes. That said, there are also a handful of steep black diamonds, particularly at the top of the Yeti Cruiser quad chair.

Head right when you unload along Ridgeview — itself rated as a black diamond — and drop into any of the five black diamonds for some spirited descents.

Dining options range from

Molly Hogan's Bar & Grill, Scoops takeout and finer dining at The Chalet. And in true family-style spirit, there's a big cafeteria for the brown baggers.

Andrew's insider tip: Hemlock Valley Road leading up to the Sasquatch base is paved for the first half, and unpaved the second half. Meaning, come prepared with good snow tires and fitted snow chains, which all vehicles using the road must be carrying by order of the B.C. Ministry of Transportation.

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GET PAMPERED LIKE A CELEBRITY AT CHIC BEAVER CREEK

Beaver Creek is North America's first computer-designed resort, with state-of-the-art lifts and gondolas, a world-class ski school and guest treatment that includes escalators that move skiers from hillside to fireside and ski valets to warm your boots and store your skis and boards.

The Colorado resort promises a premier ski holiday with plenty of upscale dining, shopping, and nightlife options as pricey and posh as nearby Vail but less crowded.

Beaver Creek is also a regular World Cup host mountain, and you'll find plenty of challenging terrain here, including the ultra-steep and intimidating Birds of Prey race-course built for the 1999 World Alpine Ski Championships that is an absolute downhill thrill ride.

You'll also find everything from perfectly groomed corduroy and finely sculpted moguls to sweet pockets of powdery glades. Your Epic Pass is good here, and no car is needed since most hotels are located within walking distance of the lifts, amenities and restaurants. **Mark's insider tip:** Don't miss the free freshly baked cookies handed out by white-gloved waiters at the base every afternoon.

GO FOR THE SNOW AT SNOWBASIN, UTAH'S MOUNT OLYMPICS

One of the oldest ski resorts in the U.S., Snowbasin is still relatively unknown, even after hosting two of the world's

most challenging downhill races at the 2002 Olympics. That's a shame because its high alpine bowls, steep chutes, perfectly groomed cruisers and powdery glades are a joy to ski.

The resort's three mountains offer a vast range of terrain, including wide-open superhighways that provide a length and a pitch seldom found. And because Snowbasin is set apart from any of the other Utah ski areas, it remains that mysterious Valhalla that many have heard about, but few have skied.

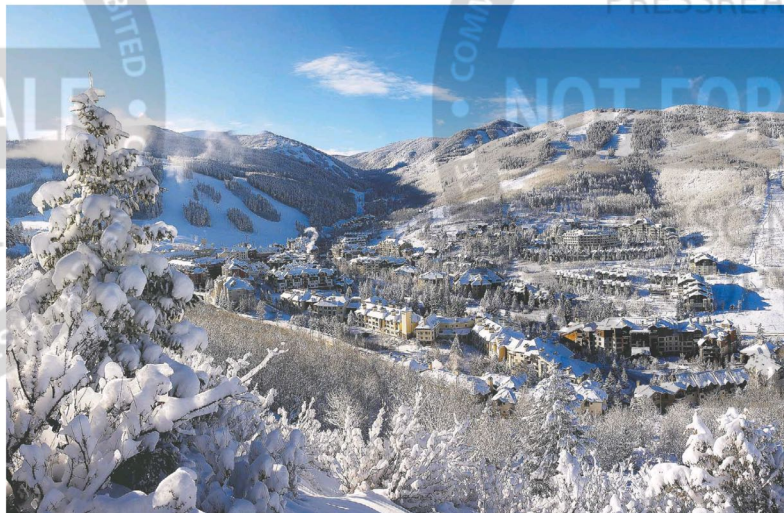
Rather than build hotels at the resort, Snowbasin's late owner Earl Holding constructed several ultra-luxurious day lodges fitted with giant chandeliers, posh overstuffed furniture and massive fireplaces. They feel almost too fancy to enter wearing your ski boots. And their first-class daycare and kids' programs, Learning Center and superb First Tracks program set this hill apart.

Mark's insider tip: Snowbasin offers no on-mountain lodging, but affordable accommodation and dining options are available nearby Ogden Valley.

DISCOVER UTAH'S ORIGINAL DOWNHILL SPIRIT AT ALTA-SNOWBIRD

Utah's advertising slogan — 'The Greatest snow on Earth' — isn't just marketing hype. Winter storms suck up moisture as they pass over the Great Salt Lake, dumping super dry powder every season on the Wasatch Mountains and creating some of the best snow conditions in the world in resorts like Snowbird and Alta.

Opened in 1938 at the end of Little Cottonwood Canyon, Alta is the second oldest ski



Colorado's Beaver Creek, which opens for winter Nov. 24, offers plenty of challenging terrain. VAIL RESORTS

area in the American West after Idaho's Sun Valley. Proudly old-school, it remains among the few U.S. hills that still prohibit snowboarding.

In 2002, it was connected to steeper and more technical Snowbird, making their combined 26 lifts and 1,900 hectares of prime alpine terrain one of the largest ski areas in the U.S. Here, you'll find the soul of Utah skiing, especially on one of this iconic downhill doubleheader's storied runs piled high with that legendary Utah snow.

Mark's insider tip: While each resort requires its own ticket, visitors can ski both mountains in one day with an AltaBird ticket.

The days are getting shorter, so we added an extra one.

Photo Credit: Destination BC / Jordan Dyc

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Crested Butte accepts Vail Resorts' Epic pass. VAIL RESORTS