

LOTS OF OPEN SPACES TO ENJOY AT WHISTLER BLACKCOMB

As the resort welcomes visitors, new measures are in place to protect guests and locals

MARK SISSONS

At a time when a safe vacation in the outdoors has never been more important, Whistler Blackcomb is welcoming visitors to its wide open spaces, strolling through its fields of wildflowers, hurtling down its mountain bike trails, ziplining across its forest valleys, or hiking the spectacular trails.

"We are lucky this environment lends itself to physical distancing, so we can enjoy a safe, healthy space to recreate, but we also know we must proceed with caution," says Geoff Buchheister, Whistler Blackcomb chief operating officer. "We ask our guests to continue to be vigilant and to ensure the experience is safe for every guest and employee by following all of our new guidelines."

Those rules include physical distancing protocols, face-covering requirements, enhanced cleaning measures, daily employee health screenings and safety training, cashless transactions, and significant revisions to regularly offered programs and services.

"Don't expect it to be a normal summer up at Whistler Blackcomb," resort communications director Marc Riddell says. "We are looking for opportunities to build on the operations as we progress through the summer, but our overall offering is going to be fairly simple."

The Whistler Village, Peak 2 Peak and Blackcomb gondolas all will be operating to bring hikers and sightseers up the mountains. The Whistler Mountain Bike Park will open only within the Fitz and Garbanzo zones.

Grab 'n' go food options will be available at the Rendezvous, Garbanzo Bike and Bean and the Roundhouse Lodge.

SAFETY FIRST

This summer, Whistler Blackcomb visitors won't see any of the usual snow walls to climb nor the sky bridge to cross. Nor will the resort's popular mountain bike school be open, at least not initially.

"If you're new to mountain biking, it may not be the best time to enter the bike park because we won't be offering lessons to beginners," Riddell says. "We may reintroduce the bike school as summer progresses. But for the time being, our goal is really to get Whistler Blackcomb back up and running while remaining mindful that we are living through a different time. We have to enforce health precautions to ensure that folks are staying safe."

Riddell says that, among other restrictions, all guests will be asked to wear masks — or at least some form of face-covering such as a buff — when standing in line, loading and unloading chairlifts, riding the gondolas, or while in one of the on-mountain restaurants. And groups of friends or family members will not be allowed to ride the gondolas or lifts with other groups. The exception will be the Peak 2 Peak gondola, which will allow up to 12 people aboard with Plexiglas screens in place to separate groups.

While he stresses that the resort will not be placing quotas on visitors to popular places such as bike parks, Riddell says staff will monitor numbers on an hourly basis.

"Where we find that we get into areas that we strongly feel that we



Mountain bike trails are open but Whistler Blackcomb's popular bike school is closed for now. TOURISM WHISTLER

can't enforce physical distancing, we'll cap the number of people allowed on the resort."

What you won't see at Whistler Blackcomb this summer are many, if any, foreign visitors — at least not until international and U.S. travel restrictions are lifted. Nor will you hear the usually ubiquitous Aussie or Kiwi accents among staff, since most seasonal foreign workers won't be there.

SLEEPING SOUNDLY

For many visitors, spending time at Whistler Blackcomb this summer will also mean staying at a lodge or hotel. Responding to COVID-19 has been an enormous challenge for the resort's accommodations providers. Most have risen to the challenge of ensuring that guests enjoy added peace of mind.

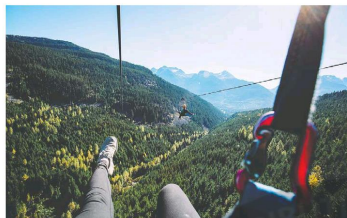
Among Whistler properties with enhanced safety protocols now accepting guest reservations is Nita Lake Lodge, a luxurious retreat in the village of Creekside, along the shores of its eponymous glacier-fed lake 500 metres from the base of Whistler Mountain and the Creekside gondola.

New measures include limiting spa access, pausing "stay over" housekeeping services, offering flexible cancellations, and installing digital guest communication and check-in procedures.

PRIVATE OPERATORS BACK

Many private local adventure companies are also welcoming guests back for summer. Among those operating under new safety procedures are Canadian Wilderness Adventures, which books activities like canoeing, ATV and eXt tours, and forest bathing, and the Adventure Group, which is popular for white water rafting, ziplining, an aerial treetops course, and Vallea Lumina, their nocturnal multi-sensory journey through the forests of Cougar Mountain.

"We are beyond thrilled to be back outdoors doing what we love, creating lasting and impactful moments in nature," says the Adventure Group's founder, Joey Houssian.



Superfly Ziplines is a several-hour, multi-line guided tour through the treetops and canyons of the Whistler forest. THE ADVENTURE GROUP

IF YOU GO

For the most up-to-date information on what's open in Whistler and what you can expect at local businesses operating within new guidelines for health and safety, visit Whistler's Doors Open Directory. (www.whistler.com/doors-open) The Whistler Visitor Centre has suspended operations until further notice. However, guests can call 1-800-944-7853 or use the Ask Whistler mobile chat service to speak with a Whistler.com agent who can answer questions and provide resort information. (www.whistler.com/chat)

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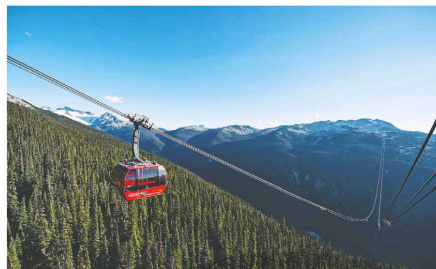


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