

Sunny Colorado offers Epic skiing



Whistler Blackcomb season pass holders can sample the best of the U.S. Rockies

MARK SISSONS

One resort averages over 300 days of sunshine annually. Its neighbour is synonymous with alpine luxury. Another has the highest chairlift in North America.

Collectively, Vail, Beaver Creek and Breckenridge make for a memorable Colorado ski vacation. And since all are operated by Vail Resorts, that Epic Pass you bought for Whistler Blackcomb this season gives you unfettered access to all three.

When Vail Resorts purchased Whistler Blackcomb back in 2016, the continent's largest ski resort joined a family of 15 resorts in three countries, including Vail, Beaver Creek, and Breckenridge, in Colorado.

Now, with the purchase of an Epic Pass, Whistler Blackcomb skiers and snowboarders enjoy

unlimited, unrestricted access to all of them, as well as limited access to 30 European ski resorts.

UPSCALE VAIL AND CHIC BEAVER CREEK

Home to Olympic champion ski racers Mikaela Shiffrin and Lindsey Vonn, who train here with the U.S. Ski Team, Vail's massive amount of vertical is where affluent East Coasters have long flocked in search of John Denver's elusive Rocky Mountain high.

Neighbouring Beaver Creek, a regular host of World Cup events, is the epitome of American alpine posh. The former boasts one of the largest and most varied ski areas in the world, including seven legendary backbowls spanning seven miles.

The latter, America's first ever computer designed resort, offers immaculate terrain that extends from exquisite corduroy and sculpted moguls to steep race courses with intimidating names like Birds of Prey. Plus, state of the art lifts and gondolas, a world class ski school and pampering guest treatment (escalators move skiers from hillside to fireside).

Both sprawling, master planned base areas are packed with all manner of eateries, high-end shopping outlets and nightlife options.

Longtime Vail ski instructor Mike Diver, who volunteered to show me round the mountain, arrived in Vail 22 years ago on a ski bum grand tour and never left.

"It's the size and variety of the terrain that keeps me here," he says as we explore a fraction of the resort's more than 2,000 hectares.

Breaking for lunch, we duck into a popular mid-mountain ski-in, ski-out eatery called The 10th, overlooking the majestic Gore mountain range. Named in honour of veterans of the 10th Mountain Division who founded the ski industry here after returning from Second World War, its claim to fame (besides the stupendous views and hearty food) are the plush slippers guests can wear to lunch instead of stiff ski boots.

Après cocktails at the Four Sea-

TRAVEL

GETTING THERE

Air Canada and United both offer non-stop service from Vancouver to Denver. From there, the Colorado Mountain Express shuttle services Vail, Beaver Creek and Breckenridge ski resorts. coloradomountainexpress.com

WHERE TO STAY

Located in the heart of Lion-

head village, the luxurious Arrabelle at Vail Square is reminiscent of grand resorts in the European Alps and was inspired by the architecture that graces such European cities as Innsbruck, Prague and Salzburg. It features 62 spacious rooms, as well as several five-bedroom private residences. arrabelle.rockresorts.com

At Breckenridge, One Ski Hill Place offers comfortable four-star ski-in, ski-out studio and 1-4-bedroom condo style lodging at the base of Peak 8. A gondola connects it with the town, as does a regular shuttle service. oneskihill.rockresorts.com For more about the Vail Resorts Epic Pass, visit epicpass.com.

sons' Remedy Bar followed by dinner at Matshuhisa are even more delectable. One of celebrity Japanese chef Nobuyuki Matsuhisa's Nobu branded restaurants, it serves up his signature dishes like Yellowtail Sashimi with Jalapeño, Black Cod Miso and White fish Tiradito in a rustic urban setting complete with a stone fireplace, outdoor fire pits and panoramic mountain views.

On subsequent evenings, I opt for steaks and strikes at bōl, a full-service dining room that also features 10 lanes of bowling action, and a sunset gondola and snowcat ride up to luxurious Game Creek Restaurant, perched in a rarefied mountain top setting that takes fine dining to new heights.

MACHINE GUN FUN AND SKY-HIGH RUNS

Any winter visit to Vail should include Nova Guides' Top of the Rockies snowmobile tour in the White River National Forest.

Departing from historic Camp Hale, we pilot our powerful sleds up a winding snowmobile trail toward 12,500-foot-high Machine Gun Ridge, a windswept plateau overlooking the Continental Divide. It's a morning of high octane thrill

Breckenridge's highest run reaches a dizzying 3,961 metres, making it the loftiest in North America. With five peaks and the highest chairlift in North America, Breckenridge presents a challenge to all skiers. **VAIL RESORTS**



Shops in historic buildings line the Main Street in Breckenridge. They sell everything from Navajo weavings to high-end ski gear. **VAIL RESORTS**

riding as we race Skidoos single file past aspen and evergreen forests. And it's the perfect transition from lavish Vail and Beaver Creek to historic Breckenridge, with its rich frontier history full of gold mining, exploration and adventure.

With more than 200 structures on the National Register of Historic Places, Breckenridge has one of Colorado's largest historic districts, with plenty of pioneer tales to tell. And shops housed in historic buildings lining its Victorian-era Main Street sell everything from handmade soaps and authentic Navajo weavings to high-end ski gear.

Strolling through Breck's Blue River Plaza, I'm rewarded with spectacular sunset views of the resort's pearl string of peaks. Glimmering above them all, Breckenridge's highest run reaches a dizzying 3,961 metres, making it the loftiest in North America. High winds prevent me from reaching it the next day, but even on lower altitude runs, I still resort to occasionally sucking from a mini-oxygen bottle supplied by my hotel.

The parts I do ski involve some serious steep tree skiing, a wild ride through a double black roller coaster aptly called The Devil's Croch.

A half-hour hike up and long traverse across rocky terrain brings me to deep powder stashes hidden among the resort's alpine back bowls — a crowning point to my week of Rocky Mountain high.



Every afternoon, chefs serve skiers trays of freshly-baked chocolate chip cookies at the base of Beaver Creek. **MARK SISSONS**

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