

Whistler turns up adrenaline in the summer

By Margo Pfeiff Updated 1:34 pm, Friday, July 24, 2015






The view over Nita Lake from the Nita Lake Lodge, Whistler's only lakeside hotel. It's located in a laid-back area popular among locals.

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Clusters of baby geese flee across Nita Lake's mirror surface at sunrise as I teeter toward them on my virgin stand-up paddleboard voyage. Then I grab a bike and cruise the 37-mile-long Valley Trail — spotting a bear in the underbrush — en route to a first-time cliff-climbing escapade via a Via Ferrata. By the time the hot and sunny day comes to a close, I've also hiked a mountaintop trail between two towering walls of snow in a T-shirt and canoed Alta Lake, attempting to outwit rainbow and cutthroat trout with a fly fishing rod I just learned to cast.

In all, it tallies up to a six-sport/three-bear summer day, celebrated with the downing of a frosty pint of local Big Wolf Bitter.

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It's late June and I've come to Whistler, 90 minutes north of Vancouver, for a long weekend of tackling experiences I've never tried before. I was surprised by the impressive lineup of summer things to do in a part of British Columbia that most folks equate with snowy winter landscapes and dramatic downhill ski slopes. But the truth is that 56 percent of Whistler/Blackcomb's annual visitors arrive in summertime, when the mountains and valleys have morphed into a giant green outdoor playground with an astounding repertoire of activities from serene to extreme and everything in between.

I check in at Nita Lake Lodge at Creekside, site of Whistler's original ski runs south of the present village. Creekside is a mellow area popular with locals, quieter than Whistler Village, which can be noisy on summer nights. The lodge is Whistler's only lakeside hotel, and I really liked the idea of free use of their paddleboards, kayaks, canoes and bikes so I didn't have to race around for rentals for a short paddle or ride. Then I pick up a Peak 2 Peak 360 Experience Pass that allows me unlimited access to all chairlifts and gondolas on both Whistler and Blackcomb to more cheaply access the on-mountain

activities I'm about to take on.

If you go

GETTING THERE

Several airlines offer direct flights from San Francisco to Vancouver. From there it's a one-hour, 40-minute drive to Whistler Village.

There is also a train day trip available along the Sea to Sky route from Vancouver to Whistler on the **Rocky Mountaineer**: (877) 460-3200, www.rockymountaineer.com. From \$230 (U.S.) per person.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Nita Lake Lodge: 2131 Lake Placid Road, Creekside, (604) 966-5700, www.nitalakelodge.com. The only lakeside lodging at Whistler in mellow Creekside. Free paddle boards, canoes, kayaks, bikes. The Rocky Mountaineer train stops at the lodge, and there are free shuttles to Whistler Village. On-site spa and excellent cafe Fix with on-site bakery. From \$145 double.

Fairmont Château Whistler: 4599 Château Boulevard, Whistler, (800) 606-8244, www.fairmont.com/whistler. Iconic castle-esque hotel slightly away from the village bustle alongside the Wizard Express chair up Blackcomb, golf, mini-golf and an adventure zone for kids. Their Mallard Lounge is a popular local hangout for cocktails during Friday night happy hour. Rooms from \$209 double.

WHERE TO EAT

Aura Restaurant: 2131 Lake Placid Road, Creekside, (604) 966-5700, www.nitalakelodge.com. Casual fine dining overlooking Nita Lake. Emphasis on locally sourced produce from nearby Pemberton and throughout B.C. Main courses from \$14.