



Hitting the slopes in Whistler



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Try a dip in the hot tub at Nita Lake Lodge after a tough day on the slopes. Or in the shops. JIM BYERS/Special to Postmedia Network

WHISTLER, B.C. - I'm approaching my sixth decade on this planet. I haven't been on skis in 10 years. And I've never skied in the west, let alone on a mountain that was part of the Olympics. But, I'm determined to get out there, so I find myself in a lesson with Leanne Bartlett, a young Scottish woman who tells me she learned to ski on the driveway of her home in Glasgow when she was three. An unusual resume, for sure.

"Keep your hands in front of you and keep your knees bent," she tells us. "You want to feel your boots against your ankles, like they're getting a kiss."

"What kind of kiss," I ask. "Like a big smooch?"

"More like a little peck," she says with a grin.

I manage three green runs (the easiest they have, excluding the bunny hills) partway up Whistler Mountain and a fourth she insists could be a harder blue run and manage not to fall. The snow is thick in [Whistler-Blackcomb](#) this year, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary, and the skiing is gloriously unlike anything I've experienced in the east.

I somehow thought skiing in a place that holds big-time races would be difficult. In fact, Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains are so massive and varied, there are dozens of easy runs, some of them at higher elevations with wonderful views of

distant peaks and frozen lakes. The skiing is spectacular, but I also find time for other snow activities at the Whistler Olympic Park.

New is the fatbikes – bikes equipped with big, knobby tires. I only have time for a few kilometres and find the slight uphill bits a good deal harder than a regular bike. Another cool activity at the Olympic Park is the biathlon, which combines cross-country ski racing and shooting. Guide Bill Moore takes me out for my first time shooting a gun in 40 years. He starts off by demonstrating proper loading, safety and firing techniques, then gives me a rifle equipped with five .22 calibre bullets. I fire at targets located 50 metres away and hit all five. The block the barrel is resting on is then taken away, forcing me to prop up the rifle with my arms. I nail the first four.

"You're going to be 10 for 10," Moore shouts. Of course I miss the final shot.

SPA TIME

I also surrender to a couple of spa treatments at Scandinave Spa Whistler, just so I can see what it's like to get a quiet massage with soothing music and all that stuff skiing and shooting guys like me don't normally go for. I don a bathrobe and wander outside from hot tub to sauna to cold tub to steam room to sauna, padding past steaming pools surrounded by mounds of brilliant white snow. At nearby [Nita Lake Lodge](#) I get a 75-minute treatment with gentle muscle stimulation, a foot scrub and a hand/arm massage. I briefly hit the steam room, then take the plunge in one of the outdoor hot tubs.

EAT UP

In Whistler Village, [Bar Orso](#) makes some of the best drinks around, while [Basalt](#) serves excellent charcuterie and fine seafood. On Blackcomb Mountain, [Christine's](#) (located at the Rendezvous Restaurant) makes fabulous scallops, while the melt in your mouth short rib comes with Asian-spiced King Oyster mushrooms that might be the tastiest fungi on the planet. [Nita Lake Lodge](#) has a great bar and a fine restaurant, Aura, which serves lovely salads and a terrific venison with perfect pillows of sage gnocchi.