

TRAVEL NEAR

PLAYTIME IN WHISTLER

AT AN ELEVATION OF 1,000 METRES, WE STEPPED CONFIDENTLY FROM A TREETOP PERCH AND PLUNGED ONTO THE TOUR'S 300-METRE-LONG ZIPLINE.

→ BY SUSAN LUNDY

↑ Dual zipline: first zip on the Eagle Tour at Whistler's Ziptrek Ecotour.

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T'S EARLY JUNE AND worlds appear to be colliding in Whistler Village.

Mountain bikers decked out in helmets and riding gear, carrying bikes on their shoulders, head to the Whistler Village Gondola to access world-renowned alpine and forest bike trails. Also wandering about the village are goggled snowboarders, boards in hand, and likewise heading to the mountain, ready in their case to play in the last few days of snow.

While the two sports seem incongruent in the same place at the same time, Whistler — known by most as a top-notch winter ski destination — appears to be the perfect summer playground as well.

Just ask me. I'm walking jauntily through the village with four other women as part of the "Eat. Play. Love. Ultimate Girls' Getaway" at the beautiful Nita Lake Lodge. While the word "spa" initially caught my eye, I'm feeling pretty exuberant (and darn proud of myself), having just completed two hours of ziplining with Ziptrek Ecotour. Initial trepidation overcome, the five of us flew over valleys, through treetops and above winding rivers. At an elevation of 1,000 metres, we stepped confidently from a treetop perch and plunged onto one of the tour's newest, 300-metre-long zipline.

Between ziplines, we crossed treetop suspension bridges and stared out at the views from towering

wooden platforms

(Wondering initially if, at 50, I'm too old for such frivolity, I asked one of our two charming Aussie guides the age of their oldest ziptrekker. "Eighty-eight," I was informed. Heck! I'm a ziplining spring chicken.)

But ziptrekking (which also includes educational chitchat on local flora, fauna and sustainability efforts) is just one of many summertime activities at Whistler. There are numerous hiking trails — chose winding paths along forest floors or lakeside walkways and even mountain glaciers — white-water rafting, bungee jumping, horseback riding, mountain climbing and ATV excursions. And, of course, the Peak 2 Peak gondola experience is an exhilarating must-do for everyone.

Access to Whistler is a cinch. I float-planed into Vancouver Harbour and walked a few blocks to the Fairmont Vancouver Hotel, where a Pacific Coach Lines bus picked me up, offered me stunning visuals out the window on the Sea-to-Sky Highway (the book I brought remained in my bag) and deposited me right at the doors of Nita Lake Lodge. Another woman in our group took a PCL bus directly from the airport (a two-hour trip), while the others drove up from Vancouver — also easy.

The entrance side of the grand, chalet-style Nita Lake Lodge was a hub of activity, making my lakeside room a surprising contrast with its tranquil views over the



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↑ Dock and view over the lake at Nita Lake Lodge in Whistler.

still, sun-sparkling water. Lodge visitors can choose from spacious studio rooms and luxurious one or two bedroom suites, or go all out and rent the 1,415-square-foot Rainbow Suite, featuring a private elevator, double soaker tub and a full-size dining room.

There's complimentary equipment for water activities — canoes, kayaks, paddleboards — plus bikes and daily on-site yoga classes. We drank lavender-inspired cocktails on the sunny, edge-of-the-lake patio at Cure Lounge, and feasted at Aura Restaurant, which lived up to its promise of a serving a seasonal menu that is "locally focused and globally artistic."

Turns out, fabulous food is the concession stand of the Whistler playground. A definite highlight of our stay was a five-course, wine paired dinner at Araxi, Whistler's "culinary cornerstone," recognized internationally for its gourmet deliciousness. I believe I ate some of the finest seafood ever to caress my palate, and I left clutching Chef James Walt's popular Araxi cookbook (but don't expect too many miracles emerging from my kitchen).

Also memorable was the signature drink at Stonesedge Kitchen. There, the swinish Caesar, which features bacon-infused Finlandia Vodka and a meaty bacon straw, drew round-the-table accolades from our group.

Our next adventure involved roaring up the side of Blackcomb Mountain on ATVs with Canadian Wilderness Adventures. Great views and loads of dusty, dirty fun. (A particularly satisfying moment occurred as we zoomed by a sweating cyclist. I figured I'd probably hit peak terrain, breathe in the view and be lying prone in the spa by the time he crested the summit.) Some of our group met what they called an "empowering" challenge of mastering the ATVs themselves, others like me, rode tandem with a guide.

And then finally — the spa!

The Girls' Getaway comes with a four-hour Nita Spa Day, including Swedish massage, facial and mani/pedi. Post ziptrekking, ATVing and gorging on bacony Caesars, this was one of the best massages I've ever had, and adding to the experience was use of the rooftop hot tubs and a



↑ The spa lounge at the luxurious Nita Lake Lodge in Whistler.

eucalyptus steam room.

Whistler is home to any number of trendy restaurants, shopping options, upscale accommodations and summer and winter play. Adventures abound; worlds collide.

And move over, ziptrekkers: there's a new girl on the block. **B**

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