



After two long years of planning and building, the **Peak 2 Peak Gondola** (www.peak2peakgondola.com) opens Dec. 12. Whooshing between Whistler and Blackcomb mountains, each of 28 Sky Cabins covers the 4.4-km (2.73-mi) span in just 11 minutes, moving a total of 4,100 people per hour. Those who aren't afraid of heights should request to ride in the two Sky Cabins with glass floors.

It's probably no surprise that Santa and Mrs. Claus, who live at the North Pole, enjoy skiing.

What may be a surprise is that one weekend each Dec., the first 100 people who arrive at the base of Whistler Mountain outfitted like either of the jolly couple can ski for free on **Dress Like Santa Day** (call toll-free 1-800-766-0449 to confirm date). Ho ho ho!

What do you get when you remove all the alcohol from New Year's Eve celebrations? No hangovers—and family-friendly celebrations such as Whistler's **First Night 2008** (Dec. 31; www.whistlerfirstnight.com). Entertainment

WHISTLER FILM FESTIVAL

Each year, film-makers and movie stars descend on the Village for four days of parties, film screenings (both indoors and out), galas and frolicking in the snow. The most agile celebs compete in a ski race, while the rest gravitate to Whistler's vibrant dining scene. More than 90 films from around the world are screened. No one has been able to keep track of how much champagne is consumed (Dec. 4 to 7; 604-935-8035; www.whistlerfilmfestival.com).



(Opposite) Crowds gather at the Telus World Ski and Snowboard Festival. (R) Testing out the Peak 2 Peak Gondola. (Below) Ho ho ho, it's Dress Like Santa Day

ment includes live music, dancing and art workshops. A 9:30 p.m. countdown for the littlest revellers ensures no cranky tots up long past their bedtimes. No cranky parents, either.

Brackendale bills itself as the world's eagle capital. From Nov. to Feb., thousands of bald eagles spend their winter vacations here. For the entire month of Jan., the **Brackendale Winter Eagle Festival & Count** (604-898-3333; www.brackendaleartgallery.com) celebrates this majestic bird with walking tours, concerts and art shows.

Gay pride is strong in Whistler, and nowhere is that more evident than at **WinterPride** (Feb. 1 to 8; www.gaywhistler.com). Highlights of the 17th annual Gay Ski Week include a fashion show, comedy night, winemaker dinners and, of course, skiing.

Marking the one-year countdown to the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, the **Whistler Winter Arts Festival** (Feb. 1 to Mar. 23; www.whistlerartscouncil.com) showcases the performing arts with literary readings, film screenings, art exhibitions, street performances, snow sculpting and concerts by acts such as The Paperboys and Wide Mouth Mason. Who needs Olympic sports when the live entertainment is this delightful?

Tiny Pemberton is filled with revelry and merriment during the **Pemberton Winterfest Street Party** (Feb. 14 to 15; www.pembertonwinterfest.com), a family-friendly weekend bursting with concerts, sports, West Coast cuisine, local art and hands-on workshops.



Squamish's annual **Wild at Art Festival** (Mar. 6 to 15; www.wildatart.ca) brings a splash of colour to the area. Appropriately enough, this year's theme is "Local Colour," which is sure to be provided by local musicians, dancers, artists and chefs.

The ski season may be winding down in Apr., but the **Telus World Ski and Snowboard Festival** (Apr. 17 to 26; www.whistler.com/wssf) is just gearing up. Ski bunnies flock to this annual 10-day event for the competitions, concerts and—most of all—the rockin' nightlife.

Whistler's sporting venues are being put through their paces before the 2010 Winter Games by hosting some **big sports competitions** this season. Check out the FIS Nordic Combined World Cup (Jan. 16 to 17), FIS Cross-Country Skiing World Cup (Jan. 16 to 18), FIS Ski Jumping World Cup (Jan. 24 to 25), IPC Cross-Country Skiing and Biathlon World Cup Final (Mar. 4 to 7) and IBU Biathlon World Cup (Mar. 11 to 15), all in Whistler Olympic Park; FIBT Bobsleigh & Skeleton World Cup (Feb. 2 to 7) and FIL Luge World Cup (Feb. 16 to 21) at The Whistler Sliding Centre; and IPC Alpine Skiing World Cup Finals (Mar. 9 to 14) at Whistler Creekside.

PHOTOS: (TOP) BY DAVID MCCOLM; (L) BY ANDY DITTRICH

PHOTOS: (ABOVE R) BY PAUL MORRISON; (R) © MASSIMO PETRANZAN/FOTOLIA.COM