



» Going to Extremes

For high-fliers and health nuts, Whistler fills the bill **BY SHERI RADFORD**

Whistler has always attracted high-fliers who like to push their limits. Skiers and snowboarders from around the world understand why *Skiing Magazine* consistently names it the best ski resort in North America. Thrill seekers go ziplining, bungee jumping, extreme mountain biking and touring on all-terrain vehicles — but the picture-postcard slopes aren't just for daredevils. Whistler goes to extremes even for armchair adventurers who prefer a hefty dose of safety with their excitement. Take the Peak 2 Peak, for example.

An engineering marvel, it goes to green extremes, using only four towers and 2.5 hectares (6.2 acres) of cleared land for the glass-enclosed gondolas that whoosh back and forth between Whistler and Blackcomb mountains, offering an unparalleled view of the two peaks that garnered so much attention during the 2010 Winter Games. Yes, the scenery is every bit as spectacular as it looked on television: lush green trees, sparkling turquoise lakes, the silvery line of Fitzsimmons Creek and even the occasional black bear. The Peak 2 Peak covers the 4.4-kilometre (2.75-mile) span in just 11 minutes, breaking several world records along the way: longest unsupported span, at 3.024 kilometres (1.9 miles); highest lift of its kind, at 436 metres (1,430 feet); and longest continuous lift system, at 4,999 metres (16,401 feet). Safety comes first. The system includes a backup diesel engine and has been designed to function in winds of up to 80 kilometres (50 miles) per hour — safety features to calm even the most nervous of nellyies.

Visitors with acrophobia (fear of heights), however, should avoid the two Sky Cabins with glass floors and instead choose one of the 26 other cabins that, all together, move 4,100 people per hour.

If peering down almost half a kilometre through glass sounds about as appealing as attempting a double McTwist 1260 on the snowboard halfpipe, maybe a hydrotherapy spa is more tempting. Whistler overflows with spas, and one of the newest — and by far the most radical — is Scandinave Spa. It pushes the body to the extremes of hot and cold, all in the pursuit of resting, re-energizing, detoxifying and cleansing. The eucalyptus steam bath, wood-burning Finnish sauna and thermal waterfalls heat the body, which opens pores and claims to improve circulation and release toxins. The Nordic waterfalls, cold baths and cold showers then cool everything down, to close pores and help strengthen the immune system. Following each cycle of heating and cooling is a period of relaxation, spent on a deck chair by an outdoor fireplace, on a terrace or dozing in a hammock. Upping the aaahhh factor: Swedish, deep-tissue and hot-stone massages. To refuel, visit the health bar for juice, fruit smoothies and salads, all from Bearfoot Bistro. Talking is discouraged and cell phones are forbidden, because this eco-friendly spa aims to relax the mind as much as the body.

Emerging from a sauna to plunge into an ice-cold waterfall is as exhilarating as watching scenery fly by from a gondola high in the air. Whichever you choose, you'll be pushing yourself to extremes. **RM**