

Play



Back to Ski School
Master off-piste with a First Tracks class at Fernie Alpine Resort.



TRAVEL

OFFBEAT, ON-MOUNTAIN

They may not be the first three ski spots you think of, but with mountain resorts on their doorstep, these small-yet-sophisticated towns are sweet backdrops for bluebird days with fresh tracks and serious après.

BY **Barb Sligl**

COURTESY TOURISMFERNIE.COM

SMITHERS THE UNDERDOG

Smithers is part European mountain village ("Alpine Al" and his alpenhorn loom large on Main Street as town talisman) and part northern hipster outpost. It has new craft breweries, a young mayor (who bikes and skis like everyone else), a diverse artistic community (including Grammy-winning singer Alex Cuba) and a growing contingent of expats from southern ski towns who've discovered the untouched dry-powder terrain of the Babine and Telkwa ranges (overheard: "Whistler is for wimps"). Here, skiing **Hudson Bay Mountain** is the backyard milk run.

OFF-PISTE

The **Hankin-Evelyn Backcountry Recreation Area** is a 3,770-hectare mountain mecca just an hour away, for those willing to earn their turns. That means no snowmobiles, no lifts: skin up, ski down. Trek up to the 1,700-metre Ridge Trail, where a sweet warming hut sits just below alpine bowls and chutes, then let 'er rip down one of 13 cut runs.

APRÈS-SKI

Ski out from Hudson Bay Mountain into town (a 1,151-metre descent from peak to street), where you'll find the tasting room of **Smithers Brewing Company** (opening this spring, complete with bike and ski racks outside) and the **Alpenhorn Bistro and Bar**. Sip on **Seven Sisters Stout**, courtesy of **Sherwood Mountain Brewery** in the neighbouring town of Terrace (another powderhound's Valhalla, two hours away).

REFUEL

Stick around the **Alpenhorn** for some Swiss onion soup, Bavarian beer brats or, as you might expect, wiener schnitzel—hearty European fare tempered with West Coast kale salad and tuna poke. And get your millennial-friendly avocado and smoothie quotient filled at **Two Sisters Café**, amid Scandi-chic lambskin throws.

RECHARGE

Stay in town at the **Stork Nest Inn**, run in part by Brian Hall, who also happens to know everything about skiing the Smithers area. He's a local legend, the visionary behind the pristine playground of Hankin-Evelyn, and happy to share stories over the inn's renowned breakfast... and maybe a few tips on those powder stashes.

VITAL STATS

Smithers / Hudson Bay Mountain (since 1969)

ELEVATION: 1,676 metres

VERTICAL DROP: 533 metres

RUNS: 36 (25% easy, 55% intermediate, 20% advanced)

LONGEST RUN: 8 kilometres (finishing with Trail to Town)

AVERAGE SNOWFALL: 6.35 metres

TERRAIN: 118 hectares

POPULATION: 5,351



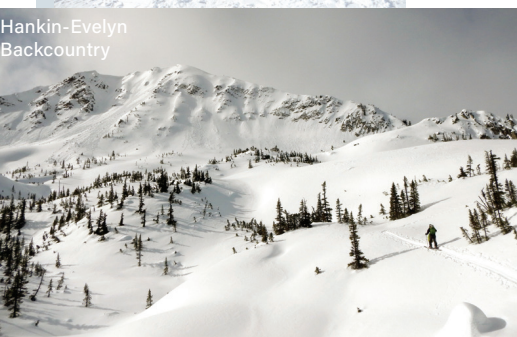
Hudson Bay Mountain



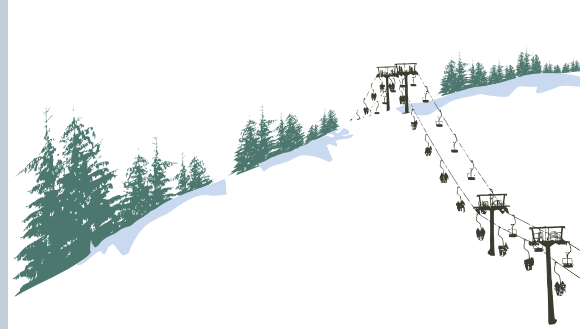
Wild rice with spinach, goat cheese and hazelnuts at the Two Sisters Café



A warming hut at the top of Hudson Bay Mountain



Hankin-Evelyn Backcountry



FERNIE THE CLASSIC

A historic mountain town founded in 1898 and built on mining, Fernie has turn-of-the-century charm infused with a modern sensibility (hello, kombucha and sashimi), all wrapped in the tight embrace of the Rockies. Towering high above the main street is the Headwall, a snowy swath of a rock face. Just below, between multiple ridges, are the five steep-and-deep bowls of **Fernie Alpine Resort**. Reign over it all by skiing (if you dare) from the top-of-this-world 2,000-plus-metre Polar Peak.

OFF-PISTE

Learn to navigate those tree runs between bowls and hone your shredden' skills in **First Tracks' Steep and Deep** camp (with stellar instructor Johnny Krasny). Nearby, there's also the swish base of **Island Lake Lodge's** cat-skiing operation (with a standby/day-ski list).

APRÈS-SKI

The first must-stop is right at the bottom of the ski hill: the **Griz**. The name stems from a legend about a mountain man and embodies his rough-and-tumble spirit (a local is crowned honorary Griz each year). Stay awhile and after a few **Lone Wolf IPAs** by **Fernie Brewing Co.** you might join in the naked table slide: a late-night tradition in which people slip 'n' slide down the lacquered surface of a 25-foot-long communal table made from a single felled tree—in the buff.



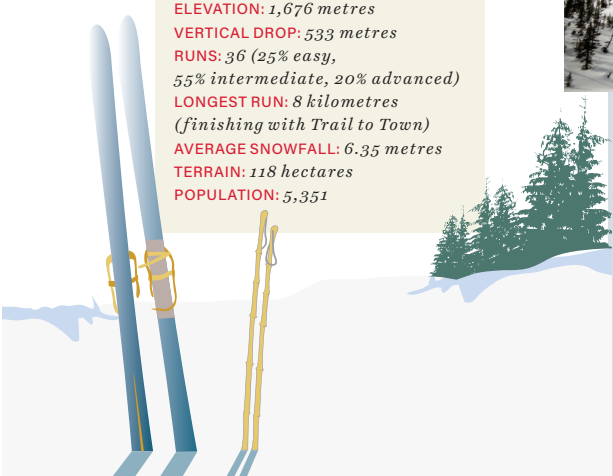
A fresh squad of mountain shredders hits the Fernie slopes



Fernie Alpine Resort

WARMING HUT: BARB SLIGL; HANKIN-EVELYN: BARB SLIGL; FERNIE ALPINE RESORT SKI LIFTS: HENRY GEORGI

HUDSON BAY MOUNTAIN: ANDREW STRAIN; TWO SISTERS: ROSE MATIS;





Fernie

REFUEL
In the town's heritage buildings, within blocks of each other, are the **Valley Social** (for a flat white or kombucha), the **Brickhouse** (for a post-side Buck Naked burger) and the **Loaf** (for wood-fired pizza), but there's also sushi in these mountains. Line up with locals for Yamagoya's coast-worthy sashimi and famous Fernie roll.

RECHARGE
Stay at the base of **Fernie Alpine Resort** at the all-in-one **Lizard Creek Lodge**, where you can gear up, ski in/out and partake in another round of après at the **Clique Restaurant** and **Ice Bar**. Or settle in at the log-cabin-luxe **Island Lake Lodge**, nestled in another valley with its own all-in-one set-up—from spa to cat-ski.

VITAL STATS
Fernie Alpine Resort (since 1965)
ELEVATION: 2,419 metres
VERTICAL DROP: 1,065 metres
RUNS: 144 (92% easy, 47.5% advanced)
AVERAGE SNOWFALL: 11 metres
TEMPERATURE: 3,093 heaters
POPULATION: 5,749



Island Lake Lodge



Valley Social Coffee



The author at Lizard Creek's Ice Bar



Revelstoke's Snowcat Skiing



Chubby Funsters



Explorers Society Hotel

REVELSTOKE NEW-ISH PLAYER

It's said that people come to Revel for the skiing and stay for the community—the "real stake" (home to both a microbrewery and distillery). While it's long been a heli-ski go-to in the Columbia Mountains, lift-accessed skiing opened just 10 years ago, making **Revelstoke Mountain Resort** the only ski resort in the world to offer lift, heli-, cat- and backcountry skiing from one village base. It also has the longest vertical in North America (1,713 metres; you'll have to go to the Alps to top that). Consider yourself stoked.

OFF-PISTE

Besides four bowls to explore—South, North, Powder Assault, Greely—as well as boot-packing into some serious "backcountry" (best tackled with an in-the-know guide; sign up for Inside Tracks), Revel now offers single-day cat-skiing with **Great Northern Snowcat Skiing**. And that means you could possibly do more than one mountain range in a weekend: from the Monashies to the Selkicks.

APRÈS-SKI

You don't have to get far... **Mackenzie Common Tavern** at the base offers a shot ski or signature Ugly Sweater cocktail to get started, but continue further down the mountain into town for the **Village Pub** in a rustic log-beamed body kit, or the **High Country Kettle**—a pine log-top bar by local Mt. Begbie Brewing Co.

REFUEL

Long-time local fave **Chubby Funsters** has cute-and-casual cocktails and dishes that range from **Who Brased Roger Rabbit to Angry Vegas salad**. But the recently opened **Quartermaster Eatery**, in the Explorers Society Hotel, has stro-style provisions like cheese- and-charcuterie boards (with a house-made vegetarian sausage option) and steak frites.

RECHARGE

The **Sutton Place Hotel** may be the easy choice at the ski base, but Revel has a new batch of happening hotels, like the boutique **Explorers Society**, with its cabin-chic revamp of a 1911 tobacco and pool shop in the historic town centre. Start with in-room Stumptown French press and end with a nightcap in the **Boiler Room** (yes, there's an actual 100-year-old boiler).

VITAL STATS
Revel / Revelstoke Mountain Resort (since 2007)
ELEVATION: 2,292 metres
VERTICAL DROP: 719 metres
RUNS: 69 (7% cat, 16.5% intermediate, 47.5% advanced)
LONGEST RUN: 15.2 kilometres (the Last Spike)
AVERAGE SNOWFALL: 14 metres
TEMPERATURE: 1,366 heaters
POPULATION: 6,719



FERNIE MOUNTAINS: ISLAND LAKE LODGE; MCPHÉE; CAT-SKIING: AGATHÉ BERNARD; ISLAND LAKE LODGE: MATT KUHN; CHUBBY FUNSTERS AND LIZARD CREEK LODGE ICE BAR: BARB SLIGL



Revelstoke's North Bowl

WHISTLER EATS

Whistler's crazy new 130-metre suspension bridge (from Peak Chair to West Ridge) is delayed until spring, but that doesn't mean the **Greatest Resort in the World** doesn't have a lot to get excited about... like eating.

THE CHANGE-UP

Topable Group (West, Cirq'n, Blue Water Cafe) is remaking Umberto's classic **Il Caminetto**, with Araxi's legendary James Walt taking the reins (and handing over Araxi to West's Quang Dang). Opening date is early 2018.



HAUTE LUNCHEON

Wants to stay on-mountain? David Hawksworth will be hosting a series of **luxe lunch pop-ups at Steps** (January 13, February 10, March 10), where for \$63 you can imagine you're in Gstaad but with more Arcteryx and fewer barons.



FRESH STAFF

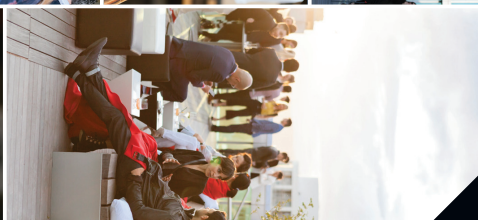
For those who would prefer to skip the bustle of the village altogether, **Nina Lake Lodge's Auna** has just overhauled itself with new decoo courtesy of Scott and Scott architects and a new menu. **7/17**

PAIRS BEST WITH

Culina Unicus 2016 // \$27
Because if you're into elevation, you'll dig this high-altitude grüner veltliner, which schusses down your throat with electric elegance.



REVELSTOKE NORTH BOWL: IAN HOUGHTON; IL CAMINETTO: LEILA KWOK; STEEPS: ABBY COOPER



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