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Whistler vs. Blackcomb: which is better?

By Henry Schlee

Whistler-Blackcomb is renowned as North America's leading ski resort; vote after vote in leading ski

magazines testifies to this. The two mountains rise up majestically from the valley, with over a vertical mile up to the peak. It would take a dedicated skier a whole season to ski every run. However, imagine you only have a single day to ski. Which mountain should you choose? Each has their advocates. Some people will always head for the Whistler Village Gondola or the Creekside gondola, both of which head up Whistler Mountain, and others head unerringly for the Excalibur gondola or the Wizard chair, the main routes up Blackcomb. So what are the differences? What kind of skiers choose one over the other? Is there any real difference between the two mountains? Which conditions favour Whistler over Blackcomb, and vice-versa?

Powder days (for experts)

If the weather gods have blessed the day with fresh powder, there is little question that Whistler is the mountain of choice for expert skiers. Two words explain why: Peak Chair. The Peak Chair on Whistler gives access to an immense variety of off-piste runs to cater for all levels of powder skier. (If you are at the very high end, you can head for Air Jordan, a terrifying leap off a cliff which involves a 50 foot descent to a intermediate landing point only 60 foot square, after which you have to take off again and descend another 40 feet to the soft snow below. Fail to stick your first landing and you are looking at several months in hospital...if you are lucky.) There is no lift on Blackcomb to compare to the powder terrain opened up by the Peak Chair.

Powder days (for the rest of us)

Less accomplished skiers in the powder head for the Blackcomb Glacier on powder days. This is an enormous bowl where you can still find fresh tracks two or three hours after the lift has opened. Whilst the over-ambitious can easily do themselves a lot of damage in the many couloirs and cliffs off the Peak Chair, they can't come to too much harm on the Blackcomb Glacier.

Stormy days

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When the weather is stormy and winds of 60km/hour or more are sweeping the high alpine, it is likely that the highest lifts will be closed. Almost certainly the Glacier Chair and Seventh Heaven on Blackcomb will be shut, as well as the T-bars on the Horstmann Glacier. You'll probably find that Crystal Chair is also closed. This leaves most of the interesting terrain in Blackcomb inaccessible. However on Whistler, even if the Peak Chair and the Harmony Chair are closed, you still have the Village gondola (which has the added bonus in a storm of offering a sheltered ride all the way to the top), the Garbanzo Chair, Big Red and the Emerald Express. These lifts will remain open in any conditions that you want to be up on the mountain at all in. Garbanzo in particular gives access to many tree-sheltered runs which can be great in a storm.

Sunny days

Most of both Whistler and Blackcomb is faces north or west, and receives the sun only obliquely. This is one reason why the snow lasts a long time. However, on a chilly but sunny day (and most sunny

days are chilly in the Whistler winter), you want the sun full on to soften up the snow and to keep you warmer as well. At these times you want to be on Seventh Heaven, the only major south-facing slope in Whistler.

Tree skiing

Both Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains are well-covered with trees in the bottom two-thirds of the skiable terrain. However only a small portion of this treed area has been sufficiently thinned-out to be skiable. Relatively speaking, Whistler has the edge in terms of this area: Club 21 and Sidecut on Whistler are similar to Bark Sandwich and Arthur's Choice on Blackcomb, but the tree runs off the Peak Chair are incomparable.

Lunch days

If you are one of the people for whom ski runs are unfortunate intervals between long shots of café cognac, and for whom lunch is the central part of the day, Whistler has little to offer, and you will probably spend more time on Blackcomb. None of the restaurants in Whistler has much atmosphere, whereas Blackcomb has a couple that are passable: Christine's in the Rendezvous and the Crystal Hut.

So each mountain has its supporters, and each mountain is better for certain conditions and certain types of skier. Just make sure you try them both when you come.

Whistler

is generally ranked as North America's #1 ski resort, and Henry operates the leading vacation rental company there. Try this link if you are looking for

Whistler accommodation resort info

What Is The Best Location In Whistler?

By Henry Schlee

When you rent a vacation home in a resort you don't know, it is very important to find out as much as possible about the pros and cons of different locations within the resort. Take Whistler, BC, as an example. Whistler is one of the top ski resorts in the world, repeatedly voted #1 in North America. Some of the rental homes in it are spectacular, extremely convenient and desirable in every way. Others are less so. Before you book, educate yourself about the features of each possible location.

Village Many people want to be right in the Village in Whistler. This is understandable, since the Village is the center of shopping and restaurants, and the gondolas up both mountains leave from the top of the Village. It is also an attractive location, since it is car-free and nicely-designed, with colorful low-rise buildings and an array of cafes and shops. The downside is that the Village is predominantly one and two-bedroom apartments, built fairly cheaply and generally small. They are very convenient, but with a few exceptions they are not spacious or luxurious and will not give you the feeling of being in a mountain cabin or a ski lodge. The same applies to most of the developments in Village North: convenient, but very small and generally built to a low budget. The major exception is Montebello, which are 3 and 4-bedroom townhomes built and decorated to a high standard, all with large private hot tubs and many with nice views over the mountains. Try Montebello for a quality modern home within a few minutes walk of the Village. However, don't expect log construction and a mountain cabin feeling.

Upper Village The Upper Village is an area on the lower slopes of Blackcomb Mountain on the upper side of Blackcomb Way. Some of these properties are true ski-in, ski-out (look for the Aspens, Cedar Creek, Cedar Hollow, Cedar Ridge, Pinnacle Ridge, Woodrun Lodge and Snowy Creek; others involve a short or short-ish walk to the slopes. At the north end of the Upper Village are several developments where you can ski back but have to take the shuttle bus to get to the lifts in the morning. These include The Woods, Treeline and Forest Creek. If you want true ski-in, ski-out make sure you understand exactly how far it is to the slopes. If you want to be near the Village as well as having true ski-in, ski-out then Snowy Creek is almost your only option, but its popularity means that you will pay a hefty premium for one of the 3-5 bedroom townhomes in this sought-after development.

Blueberry Hill This is an area of many very exclusive multi-\$m homes half-way between the Village and Creekside. Most of the homes have great views over both Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains. You can get good value here if you don't mind driving to both the Village and the lifts.

Taluswood This is an area on the lower slopes of Whistler Mountain, consisting of several different sub-developments, namely Taluswood Phase 1, The Ridge, The Bluffs, The Heights and The Lookout. These are all high-quality properties, with some of the best being the original Taluswood Phase 1, where the homes have peeled log interiors, custom-built doors and everything is comfortably heavy-duty. Go for the Bluffs for the best views and the Ridge if you want to be right on the slopes. Try the Heights and the Lookout for larger homes, some of which have great views. The only

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drawback here is that the ski-out now involves taking your skis off to cross the road.

Whistler Creekside Although the commercial area near the gondola is brand new, this is largely an older area for vacation properties, with a lot of cheap and fairly run-down units (avoid Gondola Village at all costs). However, there are some very upscale homes amid the dross, and some of the older

properties have been nicely renovated. Caution is the watchword here.

The bottom line, if you don't know the resort well, is to take advice from an expert. Try Holiday Whistler where you will get not only a great choice of

Whistler accommodation

, but also an

unvarnished and knowledgeable perspective on the advantages and disadvantages of each location.

Henry Schlee is a regular skier in Whistler and always consults the experts at Holiday Whistler for advice on great

Whistler rental accommodation

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