

“Stay and Play in BC this winter: Get a mountain high on family-friendly Interior resorts”

by Steven Threndyle © The Vancouver Province 2007

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Excerpt: Before I had kids, going to a "family-oriented resort" like Big White (www.bigwhite.com; www.bigwhite.com; 1-800-663-2772) was not high on my list. Taking a Christmas vacation to Big White six years ago turned both of my kids into skiers, with the help of the resort's renowned Kid's Centre; where you can get your kid's lift ticket, gear rentals and lessons all in one convenient place.

An insider's tip -- spring for the all-day lessons so that the kids can enjoy lunch inside the mini-cafeteria in the ski school. They serve up a delicious assortment of kid's-size wraps, soups, sandwiches and pizza.

The beauty of Big White is that you don't need to be a double black-diamond skier to enjoy open powder bowls, gladed tree runs or other off-piste adventure skiing.

Even expert terrain such as The Cliff strokes the ego with smooth, mogul-free descents; while under the Gem Lake Express you can carve and rip around the frost encrusted snow ghosts, Big White's signature feature. The snow ghosts are formed due to water droplets from low-lying clouds that roll in off Okanagan Lake. As the season progresses, snow and frost accumulate to the trees to the point where they look like creatures from a B-Grade horror flick.

For après-ski or other family activities, Happy Valley is where you'll find the outdoor skating rink, the Mega Snow Coaster tubing park, two Magic Carpet lifts for first-timers, and the headquarters for both snowmobile and dogsled tours.

Visible from Big White (but almost two hours by road) and 20 minutes east of Vernon, Silver Star Mountain Resort (www.skisilverstar.com, 1-800-663-4431) offers an almost unbelievable number of family activities. Brewer's Pond freezes over in the winter, so break out the sticks and pucks for some old-fashioned pond shinny. The resort even hosts a three-on-three hockey tournament each February. Nordic skiers flock to the resort to take advantage of more than a hundred kilometres of cross-country trails, including those found at adjacent Sovereign Lakes.

Silver Star even has a resident naturalist who leads snowshoe tours to explore the winter flora and fauna around the resort.

Parents and kids alike love the vivid pastel colours of the Silver Star village that is modeled on a historic Klondike-era mining town.

The Star Kids Centre is one of the few daycare/ski schools that is licensed to look after newborns. The guest services staff at Silver Star organize activities for every night of the week -- some nights it's rock climbing on an artificial climbing wall, other nights it's Kids' Craft Night or Dinner and Movie Night.

Skiing and snowboarding is spread out on five separate areas -- Vance Creek, Powder Gulch -- also known as Putnam Creek -- Silver Woods, Silver Queen, and the new Attridge chairlift. After a big dump, advanced and expert skiers should head directly for the backside runs serviced by the Powder Gulch chair for steep, thigh-burning challenge. Silver Star also offers extensive night skiing for kids with excess energy to burn. The rest of the mountain is perfect for novices and intermediates.