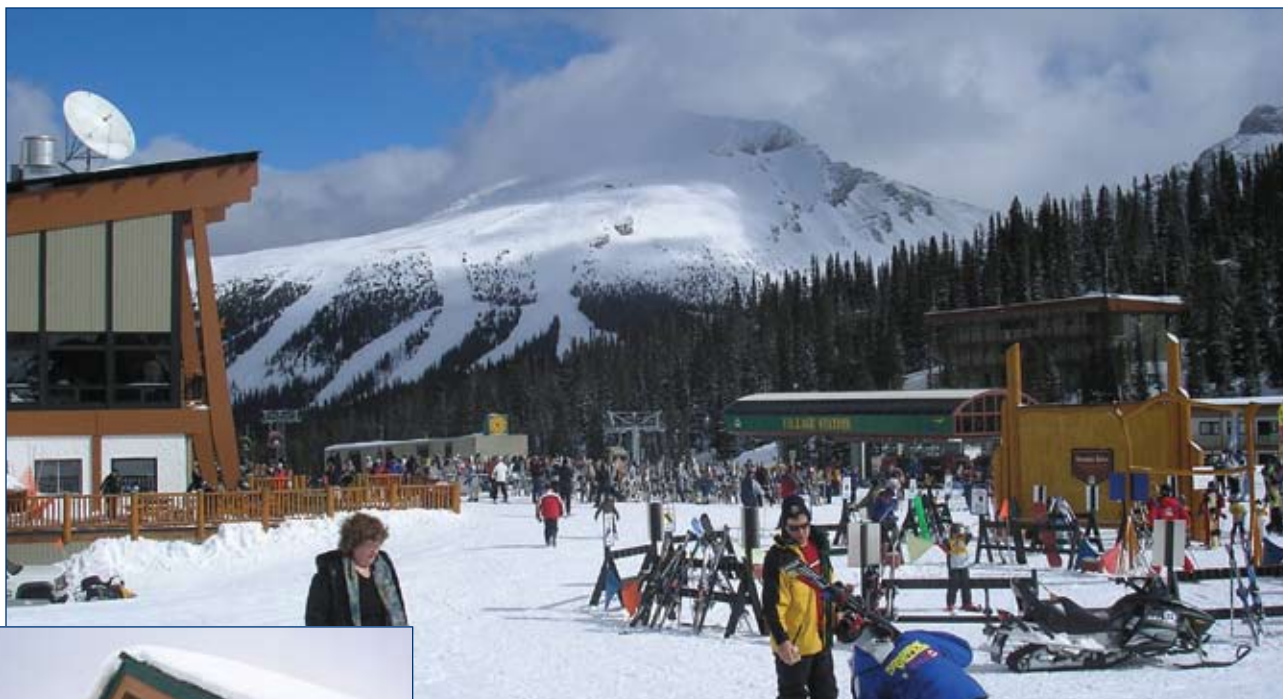


MOUNTAIN HIGH *SKIING IN THE CANADIAN ROCKIES*

BY DAVID GAWKOWSKI

AS ENJOYABLE AS IT IS, ONE OF THE PROBLEMS WITH SKIING IS THAT IT'S NOT LIKE RIDING A BIKE. FOR MANY SKIERS, IT'S DIFFICULT TO JUMP ON THE SLOPES AFTER A LONG HIATUS AND SPEED DOWN THE MOUNTAIN LIKE JEAN-CLAUDE KILLY. BUT, ONCE YOU GET PAST THOSE FIRST FEW HARROWING RUNS, AND START CARVING THROUGH POWDER AS YOU BREATHE IN THE INVIGORATING ROCKY MOUNTAIN AIR, IT'S LITERALLY ALL DOWNHILL FROM THERE.



Sunshine Village



The Banff Gondola



The lodge at Lake Louise Mountain

Photos: Carolyn McDonald



Lake Louise Inn

Last March, I traveled to Lake Louise in Alberta, Canada with my fiancé for three days of skiing at Lake Louise Mountain Resort and Sunshine Village. With 139 trails and over 4,200 skiable acres on four mountain faces, Lake Louise Mountain offers breathtaking scenery and is one of the largest and top-rated ski areas in North America. Known as the birthplace of skiing in the Canadian Rockies, it was also recently ranked one of the top places to ski by *Condé Nast Traveler*.

The nice thing about Lake Louise Mountain is that it offers a little something for every skill level. For the experts, there's a 2,500-acre bowl area with steeps, gullies and deep powder. For the intermediate-level,

there are the fun, glazed slopes and lots of long runs. And for the beginner, there are ample green trails with easy access from the bottom of the mountain. The resort also features the Minute Maid Wilderness Adventure Park for kids and the Telus Terrain Park, which is usable for all ski levels. My second day on the hill I was brazen enough to try diamond trails with ominous names like "Outer Limits," "Grizzly Bowl" and "Headwall." But I was not brave (or crazy) enough to conquer the aptly named double-diamond run, "Elevator Shaft."

Our accommodations for the trip were the Lake Louise Inn and the Buffalo Mountain Lodge. Both were everything a mountain resort should be: rustic, relaxing, and the staff accommodating. Buffalo Mountain Lodge is a secluded jewel, just a short walk from downtown Banff. Virtually all of the spacious guest rooms offer a balcony with stunning views and a cozy fireplace.

The Lake Louise Inn has 232 rooms in six different styles. There are three restaurants, including the rollicking Explorers Lounge, which was serving green beer for St. Patrick's Day during our visit. A variety of ski

packages are offered, including a two-night package that includes lift tickets, four hearty Canadian breakfasts, a 30-minute massage and the powerful "Ski Naked" martini in the Explorers Lounge (perfect for après ski relaxation).

SUNSHINE VILLAGE

Located in Banff National Park, Sunshine Village is another magnificent mountain boasting 3,300 acres of terrain on three mountains, and over 30-feet of annual snowfall. Renowned for its lengthy season (mid-November to May) and sunshine (of course), one of the best features of this mountain is that it's so big it never seems crowded. Though we only had one day here, I rode on six of the eight express lifts and the high-speed gondola.

We even had time to try snowbiking. Still a new sport, snowbiking is exactly what it sounds like: sitting on a bike and riding down the mountain. The only difference is you have no pedals or brakes and you steer with skis attached to the bike. Sounds fun, right? The hardest part was getting on the chairlift, but once that's mastered, it's easy. Maybe skiing is like riding a bike, after all.

HOW TO SEE IT ALL

There are many great ways to see the Canadian Rockies. Tauck World Discovery features a seven-day "Best of the Canadian Rockies" itinerary, touring Banff and Jasper. Be sure to ride along the Icefields Parkway and visit the Columbia Icefield where you can cross the Athabasca Glacier on an *Ice Explorer*, a specially designed vehicle.

Mountain Park Canada offers a seven-day "Castles of the Rockies" self-drive tour featuring visits to Lake Louise, Jasper and Banff. You'll stay at the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge and the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel. Rail travel is also an option on this tour. Call your travel counselor for more information.



Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel