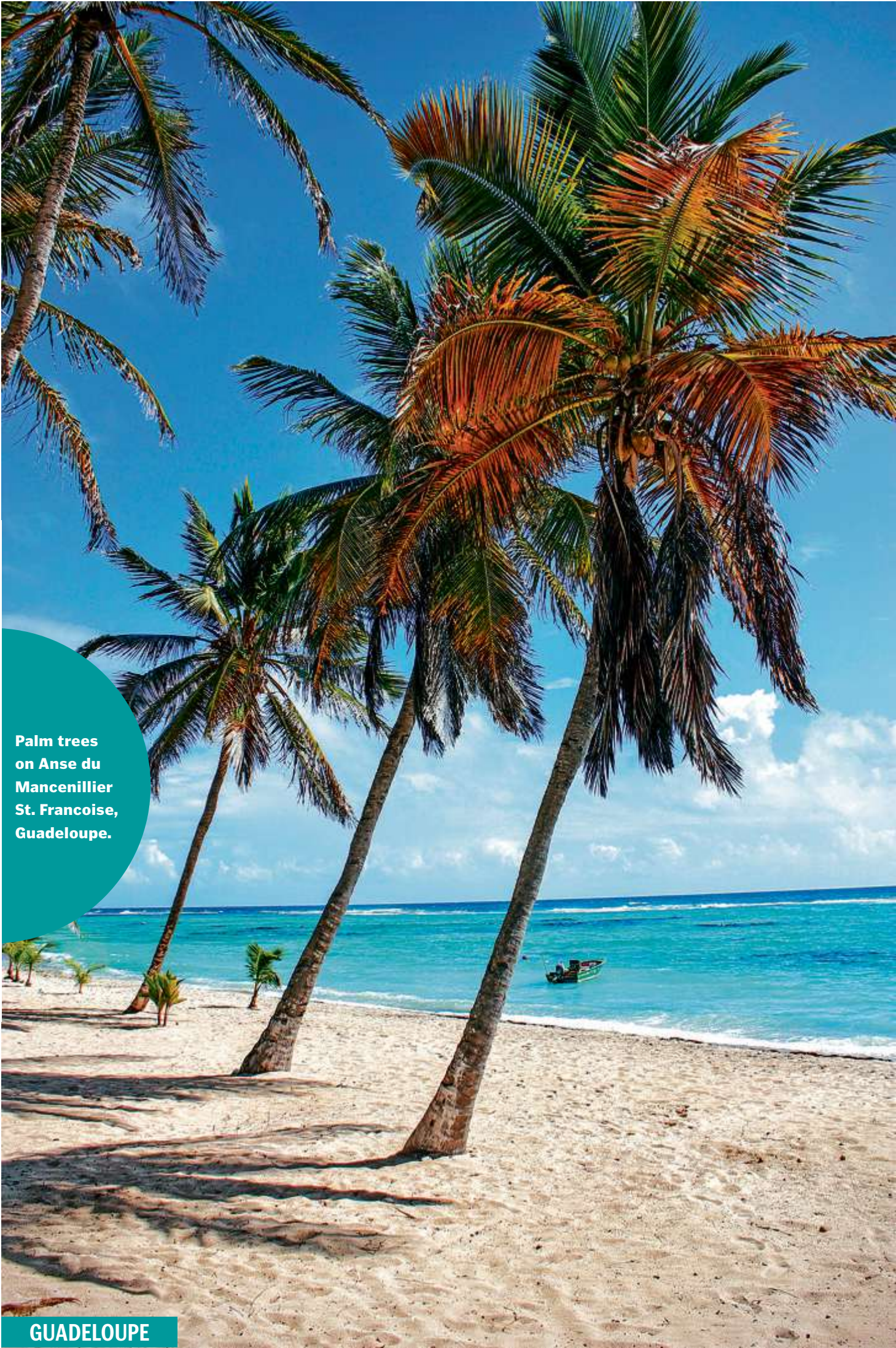




Palm trees on Anse du Mancenillier St. Francoise, Guadeloupe.

GUADELOUPE

CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF

Beaches with an irresistible French accent

A quiet Caribbean escape now within reach

BY CHRISTOPHER MUTHER | GLOBE STAFF



TERRE-DE-HAUT, Guadeloupe — My normal sport of choice at the beach is people watching. It's less tiring than Frisbee and does not require the pesky hand-eye coordination of paddle ball. But on a hot December morning in the Caribbean I was lying in the sand gazing at goats, not people. Their little hooves pranced down to the surf. A dog chased them up a nearby hill, and when the dog disappeared, the goats reappeared. This went on for quite some time and was oddly captivating.

While I was enjoying the bovid parade, my husband-to-be was not. "Look at their eyes, they're evil," he said, wincing as they trotted to and fro.

"How could an animal that produces such an incredible cheese possess a dark soul?" I countered while shoohing away a stray chicken.

I'm rambling about the beach goats not only because I'm obsessed with viral Internet goat videos (who isn't?) but because there were more goats than people on this beach. In fact, most of the dozen or so beaches that we visited in Guadeloupe were blissfully quiet.

On the island of 400,000, we took a week and traveled from east to west with the objective of testing the beaches. The only time we spent in the capital city of Point-à-Pitre was at the airport. I suggest you do the same. If you go to Guadeloupe, you should be in a bathing suit the majority of

GUADELOUPE, Page M2

CANADA

Big White wonderland

Ski, climb, sled — it's all here

By Kari Bodnarchuk
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

BIG WHITE, British Columbia — Doug Bullock skied into a stand of snow-covered spruce trees and threaded his way through the forest, knee deep in feather-light powder. He shot back onto the groomed run, a big grin rising above his neck gaiter, and said, "It just never gets old!"

That was an impressive claim coming from someone who started skiing at Big White Ski Resort 52 years ago — a few months after the resort opened — and hasn't missed a season since. Bullock, 67, has watched Big White grow from a tiny, off-the-grid ski area with just a T-bar to the summit (it's still there) to the third-largest resort in British Columbia, behind Whistler-Blackcomb and Sun Peaks.

"It's definitely the snow," he said, about what keeps him coming back. "And there's such a great variety of terrain from the snow bowls to the glades and the long groomers. The cliff is a lot of fun, too," added Bullock, who now volunteers as a Snow Host, giving visitors like us free

tours of the mountain.

We had heard that Big White considers itself one of Canada's top family resorts, so my husband and I took our 4- and 6-year-old kids there just before the holidays. Even with mild temperatures this year, the resort opened with plenty of powder on Nov. 13, its earliest opening in 14 years, and had a base of nearly 78 inches when we visited.

The resort, located in the heart of Okanagan wine country in British Columbia's southern interior, overlooks the Monashee Mountains and is just a 45-minute drive from the city of Kelowna. Its wild and windswept summit, at 7,600 feet, is typically covered with snow ghosts — trees blanketed in snow and ice that are sculpted by the wind. The main village, at 5,700 feet, includes the Village Centre Mall — affectionately called the VCM by locals — which has a ticket office, a rental shop, and a few stores and eateries, the Kids Centre (a ski

BIG WHITE, Page M3

Climbers can scale a 60-foot ice tower.



KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



Inside
DIVE INTO IT
A snorkeling trip with twins. **M6**
SNOW DAYS
Notchview will help you like winter. **M8**

Big White is snow much fun for family

►BIG WHITE

Continued from Page M1

and snowboard school), two dozen family-friendly restaurants, and a ski shop with professional boot fitters. We didn't need our car once during the stay, but got around this ski-in/ski-out resort by foot, skis, shuttle, or gondola.

Big White attracts families because of the snow (the fluffy, dry powder is unbeatable), terrain (18 percent of the runs suit beginners, and 54 percent are geared to intermediates), and accessibility (every lift has a green run down, so beginners will never get in over their heads). Off the mountain, it offers plenty of programs and unique activities geared to families: tubing, kids snowmobiling, family snowshoe tours, ice climbing on a man-made tower, sleigh rides, dog sledding, and ice skating (it is Canada, after all). The ski rental shop has gear that fits children as young as 2, and all restaurants not only welcome kids, but many have special toys or activities to entertain them.

Our kids, Grace and Sam, took lessons through the ski and snowboard school, a well-run program that includes a good mix of crafts, healthy food, and on-snow instruction. The resort even offers a Door-to-Ski Shuttle program, when instructors come and pick up your children at your lodge and take them to the ski school (well worth the \$10 per child, and a service we will definitely try next time).

While the kids learned to ski, my husband and I took advantage of the free guided mountain tours each morning. With 15 lifts, 65 miles of marked runs, and 7,355 acres of skiable terrain, we knew we would spend way too much time studying the trail map and trying to find our way around without a guide. Our snow hosts knew all the best places to go, based on the weather and visibility, and catered the tours to our abilities and interests.

We took a break from skiing one af-



KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

ternoon to climb a 60-foot ice tower that looms over the adventure park. No pressure, said the guide, but climbers as young as 4 and as old as 78 have scaled the icefall. My husband and I both made it to the top, from which we could see Sam learning to ski on the beginner's slope nearby.

One of our favorite spots to hang out with the kids was Happy Valley, a short gondola ride from the village. This area has a day lodge, the beginner's ski and snowboard area with magic carpets, and the Happy Valley Adventure Park, the hub for all non-ski and snowboard activities. Here, families can go ice skating, sip hot chocolate, and make s'mores over a fire pit, all for free. One night we went tubing in the park, where we zipped, spun, and screamed our way down the 600-foot-long undulating runs.

Another night, we hopped on a

sleigh ride that took us (at a snail's pace) through a peaceful forest lit up by moonlight. I worried that the kids might have been bored with that experience, but when I asked Grace if she enjoyed it, she said, "It was awesome!" Then she added, "I even got to drive the horses," reminding me that it's a thrill for a little girl to steer two 1,800-pound plow horses through a magical forest in the dark.

Moose Lounge in the Happy Valley Lodge hosts an après-ski happy hour each night. Here, the kids ate free popcorn and made crafts out of pipe cleaners and other materials under the guidance of a staff person, while we kicked back. Sundance Lodge, where we stayed, also had a daily children's program. We could drop off the kids from 3 to 5 p.m. for special games and activities, or for the daily children's movie in the lodge's 24-person theater.

Sundance also had an outdoor heated pool with an enclosed waterslide (we loved shooting down the dark tunnel into the 90-degree saltwater pool), and two outdoor hot tubs for guests 6 and older.

Our final day, we did a family snowshoe tour from the adventure park through a peaceful wooded area, wandering over little streams, across the Nordic tracks, and into dense woods. Randy Rosenblat, our guide, pointed out Old Man's Beard and moss clinging to the trees, the tracks of a snowshoe hare, and tree wells, which our kids found intriguing.

On our way back to the lodge, we stopped to let our daughter try snowmobiling on a real children's-size snowmobile. She loved the whole experience as she steered the pink-and-black machine around a snowy track, singing Katy Perry songs into her fro-

The Big White resort has lots of family-friendly trails for skiing and snowshoeing.

zen neck gaiter. Sam, who's 4, was too small to give it a shot, but we'll go back when he's a bit bigger.

Next time, we'll also take a ski lesson from Olympic silver medalist Kelsey Serwa, whose grandfather founded the resort, book the Door-to-Ski shuttle service, take the kids night skiing (just \$10 on Friday nights), and do all of the other activities we missed. And we'll leave plenty of time to swoosh around the snow ghosts and deep powder near the summit because, as Bullock said, that just never gets old.

Kari Bodnarchuk can be reached at travelwriter@karib.us.