



SELINA KOK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE (TOP AND BELOW LEFT); BRADY CLARKE (TOP RIGHT); KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE (BELOW RIGHT)

The beach at Tamarind Reef Resort and a rooster at Fort Christiansvaern, on St. Croix. Typical snow pack on Mount Washington, and the author’s daughter, Grace, in ski school.

SUN AND SKI

Slipping into our tropical skins

BY DIANE DANIEL | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT



CHRISTIANSTED — Even before I was able to see daylight’s gift — a sea shimmering in a crayon box of blues from turquoise to midnight — my hands told me I’d made it to the Caribbean the night before, their rough, wrinkled winter skin showing just a hint of the smoothness to come.

My partner, Lina, and I decided to visit the largest of the US Virgin Islands (84 square miles) because it offered a little bit of everything: plentiful beaches, green hills, lively town centers, and historic sites. St. Croix has the reputation of being the poor relation to glitzier St. Thomas and lush St. John, but we found a rich culture here, born of the island’s Danish past, its once-mighty sugar trade, and its cordial Cruzans, as the native islanders are called. Add to that pristine islands to visit, water sports, and even a rain forest to explore and you can see why we were hard-pressed to squeeze everything into a week’s stay last month.

We based ourselves in a centrally located, budget-friendly waterfront apartment along “condo row” in Christiansted, the larger and more tourist-driven of the island’s two towns. With hens and roosters wandering all over, the countryside never felt out

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Riding on a sea of snow

BY KARI BODNARCHUK | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT



VANCOUVER ISLAND — Standing at the top of the Eagle Express chairlift, 5,200 feet above sea level on the island’s east coast, we had peekaboo views of the ocean, a hanging glacier, and layers of forested mountains that unfolded across the interior.

On a clear day, according to my ski instructor, you can actually see sailboats on the Strait of Georgia — also known as the Inside Passage, that salty waterway that stretches up the coast to Alaska — and all the way to the Coast Mountain Range on the British Columbia mainland. You can also look down into the Comox Valley, home to the region’s three main towns, Comox, Courtenay, and Cumberland, all located within a 30-minute drive from Mount Washington.

“You can ski and golf or sail in the same day here,” said Paul Laperriere, my telemark instructor. “I don’t know how many people actually do that, but that’s what sets us apart.”

What also sets the ski resort apart is the staggering amount of snow it receives. The mountain has averaged 53 feet of snow a year over the past three years and, as of Christmas, had a 15-foot snow base. It plays leapfrog with Mount Baker in neighbor-

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MORE WINTER GETAWAYS

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DAVID LYON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

NEW ENGLAND

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Family fun in snow by the ton

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ing Washington state for having the deepest snow pack of any ski resort on the planet.

“We get that moist front coming in across the Pacific and this is the first mountain range it hits,” says Brent Curtain, the resort’s marketing manager. “It’s this ‘perfect storm’ for getting tons of snow.”

The epic snow conditions, along with the mountain’s tucked-away location, drew a handful of teams here to train right before the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games.

“Mount Washington was insane,” recalls Sudbury native Tyler Jewell, a member of the 2010 US Snowboarding Team. “It was raining at Cypress,” the Vancouver ski area that hosted the Olympic snowboarding competitions, “but it had just dumped at Mount Washington. It had more snow than any [other resort] in the world.”

The prodigious amount of snow also drew my family of four to Mount Washington for four days last March. We knew the resort would be less crowded than other local ski areas, so my 3-year-old daughter could have her first ski experience without being swarmed by other skiers, I could take a telemark lesson and practice day or night, and my snowboarding husband could challenge himself on the expert terrain.

Additionally, we had heard the resort had new covered magic carpets in the beginner area (these are airport-style movable walkways for whisking skiers up the hill), a real laid-back, no-frills vibe, and surprisingly affordable tickets. It costs \$68 for a full-day lift ticket, and just \$29 from 3:30 to 10 p.m.

The location may have that end-of-the-world feel, but you can actually drive from Vancouver to Mount Washington and back on just one tank of gas.

To get there, we hopped a two-hour ferry from Tsawwassen, just south of Vancouver, to Nanaimo, a small but charming city on Vancouver Island’s southeastern coast (keep an eye out for orcas during the crossing). From there, we drove for about an hour and a half north along a well-maintained but relatively deserted two-lane highway, called Route 19, where we saw few cars, lots of signs for deer and elk, an impressive mountain range to the northwest, and virtually no de-



GALYN FRANKLIN

On a clear day, skiers at Mount Washington on Vancouver Island can see the Strait of Georgia (the Inside Passage that stretches up the coast to Alaska) and beyond, all the way to the Coast Range on the British Columbia mainland.

velopment. Then we hung a left just after the town of Courtenay and followed a steep, windy mountain road 10 miles up to a snowy paradise, passing three chain-up areas for when snow levels really drop. As we drove up about 2,000 feet, we watched the outside temperatures plunge from 46 to 33 degrees, and the totally dry ground transform to a 13-foot snow base.

We stayed at Bear Lodge, one of only two slope-side lodges at the mountain, so we had easy access to the restaurants, base lodge, and lifts. This worked well when Sam, our 1-year-old, got sick and we took turns staying with him.

The resort has 81 named ski runs on 1,700 acres that take you from an exposed summit down through gladed bowls and wide-open trails, and then through lightly forested areas to open run-outs at the bottom. More than 50 percent of the terrain targets advanced skiers, while 35 percent suits intermediates and 14 percent is geared to beginners.

The resort invested \$3 million in its beginner area last year, regrading trails, adding two runs, and installing four covered magic carpets. Easy Acres, as the beginner area is called, now has seven runs, all of which are lighted at night.

My daughter Grace’s beginner group ski lesson ended up being a one-on-one since no

one else had signed up that morning. The instructor, Jim Van Tine, showed Grace how to shuffle and slide along on one ski, using a boot to push off the snow. Then he put her on two skis and introduced her to the “bunny hill,” a new wide-open run called The Big Easy that has padded elephants and other animals near the bottom for entertainment and perhaps enticement, and a 300-foot-long covered teaching carpet.

“You wouldn’t believe how much the snow piles up on the side,” said Van Tine.

Even when we were there, during a moderately snowy period, large snowdrifts leaned against the northwest-facing outer wall of these giant tinted “snow tubes.” We felt totally protected from the wind and the blowing snow, which helped Grace fully enjoy and last through her first ski lesson.

After the lesson we slid and shuffled our way down to the bottom of this run and another new run called Easy Street, to practice, but mostly to try out all the different moving carpets, which are up to 650 feet long. Occasionally, we walked instead of skied, and sometimes we simply lay down on a bed of freshly fallen snow.

We celebrated Grace’s first ski adventure with a Sticky Bun, a legendary and mind-numbingly sweet pastry from Fresh, an eatery in the main lodge. These 10-napkin treats

come from head chef James Loiselle’s famous recipe, which is the perfect mix of milk, butter, cinnamon, walnuts, and white and brown sugar.

“I combined cinnamon bun recipes from Oprah Winfrey and Emeril [Lagasse] and then came up with my own creation,” said Loiselle.

While you’re at Fresh, grab an espresso made with coffee from a local island producer, Level Ground, or refuel with a noodle bowl, fresh sushi rolls, gourmet pizza, or traditional comfort food.

Many visitors roll down the hill to the town of Courtenay, a 30-minute drive away, to grab dinner and explore. However, with a slope-side condo with a full kitchen and several terrific base lodge restaurants just a five-minute walk away, we opted to stay on the mountain each night. Our favorite spot was Fat Teddy’s, a casual family-friendly restaurant that offers everything from standard pub fare to grilled entrees and Asian-style noodle and rice dishes.

The mountain hosts a big-air competition each March. We wandered outside to watch the event, and then the others stayed for the fireworks show while I walked over to a lighted hill near Easy Acres to try out snow tubing. The Ozone Snow-tubing Park has several lanes from which to choose, ranging from totally straight to windy, bumpy ones. I laughed and

screamed all the way down the straight run at about 36 miles per hour, according to my GPS-enabled ski goggles.

Another night, we hired a local baby sitter whom we had met through the resort’s day care center, The Bear’s Den, where Grace happily spent part of a day. Tristin, a delightful and energetic young woman, came to our condo and watched the kids while we went skiing and then grabbed a pint of locally made Piper’s Pale Ale at Fat Teddy’s.

With more time, we would have gone to the Vancouver Island Mountain Centre, an Olympic legacy building just down the hill from the alpine lodge. Here, visitors can get a massage, take a yoga class, and use the fitness center, or just sit in the lobby overlooking forested Strathcona Provincial Park and enjoy a hot chocolate.

We spent our final day down at the Nordic center, skiing along gentle trails and checking out all the cool grooming equipment as the snow fell. In fact, it snowed much of the time we were there. We may not have had clear views of the ocean during our stay or a clear shot of the mountain range that catches all that Pacific moisture, but the snow was, as Jewell said, “insane.”

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

If you go . . .

How to get there
Mount Washington
British Columbia, Canada
888-231-1499
www.mountwashington.ca

By boat: Take a BC Ferries boat from either Horseshoe Bay (West Vancouver) or Tsawwassen (south of Vancouver) to Nanaimo for about \$65 each way; add \$15 to reserve in advance.

By plane: Fly from Boston to nearby Comox Valley International Airport (YQQ) on West Jet with a stop in Toronto, or from Vancouver to Comox with Pacific Coastal Airlines.

Where to stay
Bear Lodge and Deer Lodge
877-845-4499

Ski-in, ski-out accommodations start at \$159 per night for a one-bedroom suite with full kitchen, and \$209 for a two-bedroom suite with kitchen. Five-day alpine (\$499) and Nordic (\$398) ski packages with 5 nights’ accommodations (Sun-Thu), 5 full-day lift tickets or trail passes (Mon-Fri), 8 (alpine) or 4 (Nordic) hours of lessons, a 3-hour pass to the Ozone Snow-tubing Park, and other goodies.

What to do
Night skiing: Thu-Sun, 3:30-10 p.m., \$16-\$30; 7-10 p.m., \$11.50-\$23.25.

Ozone Snow-tubing Park: \$15.50 per person for two hours to \$72 per family of four for a full day.

Nordic skiing trail passes: Per person \$12-\$23 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m., or \$5-\$9.50, 3-8 p.m.

Snowshoe fondue: Fri-Sat, 5 p.m., from Raven Lodge; \$38.50 for ages 12 and under; \$57.75 for 13 and older.

Bear’s Den Daycare: Fun, secure play area for children 18 months to 5 years. Half-day \$43-\$49, full day \$52-\$59, based on age.

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