



Whistler in fall offers fabulous scenery and hiking, along with a family-friendly plethora of cultural and culinary pleasures. *JUSTA JESKOVA/TOURISM WHISTLER*

FAMILY TRAVEL

SNOW-FREE FUN

During the off-season, Whistler offers an abundance of activities and amenities to keep the family happy

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

Grasping my 10-year-old daughter Brooklyn's hand, we venture into Cougar Mountain's eerily moonlit old-growth forest. Darkness envelops the undulating trail, heightening our senses to the sounds in the wild beyond. In search of the sacred Hidden Valley, we spend an hour following clues from a fictional pair of missing hikers, marveling at the ancient talking trees, iridescent salmon and brilliant firefly light-show that appears along the one-kilometre loop. The grand finale is a joy-filled musical hologram celebrating the valley's beauty, magic and mystery.

Dreamed up by Montreal-based Moment Factory, Whistler's enchanted Vallea Lumina is an immersive multimedia wonder, displaying a spectacular fusion of technology and nature. Fall is ideal for families to partake in the year-round, nighttime adventure, thanks to the earlier sunset, snow-free trail and relatively temperate weather. The route is steep and rocky in parts and includes wooden staircases, so it isn't stroller friendly. However, we did see families with preschoolers enjoying the trek; it just took them longer to finish. Hot chocolate from the Cougar Cafe and cosying up by the campfire was a lovely way to end our evening before our 15-minute drive back to the Village.

Fall is a fantastic time to visit Whistler, as the world-class resort town offers many family-friendly outdoor and indoor activities. No matter the season, one of Brooklyn's favourite pastimes is wandering and window-shopping along the Village Stroll, eagerly hunting for souvenirs worth spending her laundry-folding earnings on. After visiting countless gift stores, she settled on plush black-and-white bovine slippers and a scoop of coconut cream pie in a waffle cone from COWS. Brooklyn was equally enamoured with the Sunday Farmers' Market, which runs 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. from spring through early fall. Located at the base of Blackcomb in the Upper Village, the lively outdoor event features 60 vendors, comprised of local farms and artisan bakers and makers, appealing to adults and kids of all ages. Live music, face painting and the Scot-

tish shortbread from Sugarplum scored high.

Riding the gondola up Whistler-Blackcomb is also superb during the snow-free seasons. Like ski runs, hiking trails are assigned a green, blue or black diamond rating for difficulty level, and Whistler-Blackcomb has options for every interest and ability. The scenery and sweeping views of the Coastal Mountain peaks are stunning and well worth a visit, even if you don't want to hike.

Whistler's breathtaking indoor adventure also abounds, and with in moments of entering Escape! Whistler, it was game on. I was in it to win it, and my ridiculously competitive games-night mentality took over. Brooklyn's determination and enthusiasm mirrored my own, and thanks to her ingenuity, we quickly found a key to unlock our shackles — the first clue needed to break out of the pirate ship's jail. For the remaining 45 minutes, we challenged our problem-solving and collaboration skills and, finally, with some help from Escape! Whistler's team, escaped our captors, jumped ship and found the buried treasure. The Pirate Ship escape room is the easiest of the six themes, making it perfect for first-time escapees and families. We had an absolute riot and can't wait to challenge ourselves with another adventure.

The Audain Art Museum is another excellent indoor outing for families. We spent about an hour touring the permanent collections showcasing contemporary and Indigenous B.C. artists. The highlight for us was viewing Haida Chief 7idansuu's (James Hart) The Dance Screen — a 4.5-metre by 3.6-metre intricately carved red cedar screen depicting traditional Haida characters and the importance of the salmon run. Ancient First Nations masks, and historical works from renowned Canadian artists, including Emily Carr, are also part of the museum's permanent collection.

The dining scene in Whistler is phenomenal year-round, with hallmark eateries like Bearfoot Bistro, Araxi and Quattro raising the culinary bar. Having Brooklyn in tow, we indulged in more casual palate-pleasing fare. On our first night, we opted to order from Caramba

rather than dine out. The wood-fire pizzas stole the show, particularly the Funghi Bianco 23 with roasted mushrooms, Gorgonzola and truffle honey. Coming in second was the house-made ricotta drizzled with Lillooet honey. For our second night, we reserved at 21 Steps Kitchen and Bar — a cosy and bustling eatery in the heart of Whistler Village, where Brooklyn's classic Bolognese took centre stage. Buttermilk fried chicken and Rubin's cheesecake were close runners-up.

Our accommodation for the weekend was the modern-moun-



Whistler's evening adventure, Vallea Lumina, is a spectacular fusion of technology and nature enjoyed by all ages. *VALLEA LUMINA*

tain all-suite Evolution hotel, a family-friendly property in Whistler Creekside. We liked having the extra space, fully-equipped kitchen dining table for breakfasts, and the outdoor pool and hot tub that are open year-round. Although removed from the Village centre, pet-friendly Evolution provides a quiet, relaxed atmosphere, moments from the Lost Lake trail we

walked daily with our dog. The property also neighbours Coastal Culture Sports for renting bikes to explore the multi-use, 46-km Valley Trail system. Visiting the Village from Evolution does require a short drive, but the ample paid parking is free after 5 p.m., so we found it relatively easy.

For more destination information, visit @arrivals_travel.



Pet-friendly Evolution is an all-suite hotel in Whistler Creekside offering a quiet, relaxed atmosphere and kitchens in units. *VAL RESORTS*

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