



The village at Fernie Alpine Resort beckons when it's time to take off the boards and enjoy some off-hill entertainment. *RESORTS OF THE CANADIAN ROCKIES*

FAMILY TRAVEL

FUN ON AND OFF THE HILL AT FERNIE

Village offers plenty of diversions and historic downtown is only a 10-minute drive away

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

Ascending Fernie's White Pass quad chairlift reveals a brilliant frosted landscape. Above us, Elephant Head Peak is draped in a thick layer of snow, care of last night's storm. Below are three of the mountain's five bowls, all caked in mounds of soft marshmallow powder. My thrill-seeking husband and his buddy immediately dip into Currie to tackle its steep Double Diamond glades. Craving something mellow, my girlfriend and I head to Falling Star, a picturesque five-kilometre groomed Blue run that hugs the mountain's west border.

While the adults play on the upper slopes, the kids hone their skills in the Childcare Centre's Ski & Play preschool program. The instruction is excellent and, as we visited mid-week, the standard three-to-one student/instructor ratio has turned into private lessons, due to lower enrolment. Over the course of two days, our five-year-old has advanced from being unable to stop herself on the

IF YOU GO

Fernie, B.C., is less than a three-and-a-half-hour drive from Calgary, west of Crowsnest Pass. Consider a mid-week trip for lower-priced accommodation and crowd-free runs. Pick up discounted adult lift tickets from Costco, which also include a 10 per cent savings on Fernie Alpine Resort dining, and equipment rentals and purchases. Kids five and under ski for free. FernieSkiShuttle.com operates a bus service between downtown Fernie and the ski resort. One-way fares are \$4 per person.

tiny Mighty Moose beginner hill to skiing a green run off of the lower mountain's Deer chairlift. We are shocked by her progress.

In addition to an outstanding ski school, the variety of terrain, accessible from every chair, makes Fernie Alpine Resort an excellent

choice for families. Of the 2,500 skiable acres, you'll find an almost even split between novice, intermediate and advanced runs. Another bonus is that the average temperature is a balmy -5 degrees Celsius, which is pretty palatable — even for little ones.

Fernie offers just as much fun off the slopes. Within the village, my top child-free pick is the restorative massage at the King Fir Spa & Wellness in Timberline Lodges. As kids' lessons run until 4 p.m., it's easy to slip away for a mid-afternoon post-ski treatment. Cirque restaurant in the Lizard Creek Lodge is another must-try indulgence.

A large floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace and chalet-chic Restoration Hardware-style decor create an upscale, relaxed feel. Creative hand-crafted cocktails and a sophisticated menu complete the experience. We dined early and brought the kids, who preferred to devour huge servings of P.E.I. mussels over ordering from the children's menu. The highlight

of the night was visiting Cirque's Ice Bar — or as the girls' called it, Princess Elsa's Ice Castle. Dressed in oversized Helly Hansen jackets, the kids sipped Sprite from glasses made of ice, while the adults enjoyed a vodka tasting. The real fun? Smashing the ice glasses on the floor after we finished.

Historic downtown Fernie is just a 10-minute drive from the resort village, and definitely worth a visit. The town's charming brick and stone buildings were constructed after two devastating fires destroyed Fernie's wooden commercial district in 1904 and again in 1908. We spent an afternoon exploring the shops and restaurants along 2nd Avenue. Anyone with a sweet tooth will love visiting the Beanpod for its traditionally (and ethically) made bean-to-bar chocolate. Buyer beware: you will overspend in this store. Insider tip: try the Fernie Bear Bar — a delicious combination of creamy milk chocolate and honeycomb (also available in dark chocolate). Pick up ingredients for your après

ski raclette or fondue at Le Grand Fromage — a boutique cheesemonger that stocks more than 200 varieties of artisanal cheeses. For cost-free fun spend an hour playing with the toys in the basement of the Fernie Public Library, or enjoy an evening skate beneath fairy lights on the outdoor rink outside the B.C. Courthouse.

Accommodation options also play a significant role on a ski trip, and Fernie wins in this category, as well. For family-style dinners and game nights with our gang of four adults and three young kids, a large ski-in/ski-out unit with at least three bedrooms, a full kitchen and outdoor hot tub access is a must. The Grizz Inn, in the heart of the village, is perfect for two families sharing. We booked one of the three-bedroom and loft suites, which sleeps upwards of 10 people and has a spacious living and dining area. Other handy amenities include ski lockers, an indoor pool and large outdoor hot tub.

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