



Middle-School Style

Why grown men find freedom in dressing like tweens **D3**

OFF DUTY

Hog, No Warts

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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One-day passes at **Banff Sunshine Village** cost \$105 (a person), at least 35% less than what you'd pay in Aspen, Vail and Jackson Hole.

Under the radar just north of the Montana border, **Fernie** lacks glitzy resorts but offers outstanding expert, intermediate and beginner runs.

Sun Peaks, some 300 miles east of Vancouver, is Canada's second largest ski area, yet its fairly remote location attracts few outsiders.

Passes at Quebec's **Mt. Sutton** cost just \$65 a day. Sutton village has a boggling number of patisseries, cafes and bars.

"Last one down to the bottom buys the beer and pickle fries!"

THE GREATER NORTH

Canada's lesser-known ski towns—and their adjacent resorts—are far more affordable than Aspen, Vail and the other usual U.S. suspects but have just as much wintry charm, both on and off the slopes. A snow-season aficionado zeros in on four of the country's top finds.

By **BERT ARCHER**

I'VE SPENT the last 15 winters, on and off, flitting around the world's great ski towns, from the Swiss Alps to the Colorado Rockies to the Chilean Andes. With this winter's flurries of Covid travel restrictions and surging lift prices across the U.S., I stayed in my native Canada this season. And I realized that the covetable combination of first-rate skiing, fabulous scenery and small-town coziness that I'd sought in ski spots around the world exists in my own backyard, and for much friendlier prices.

For my first trip of the season in mid-December, I set out for a place I'd never been: Canmore, Alberta. From Toronto, it's about a four-hour flight to Calgary International Airport, the closest major hub. Cradled in the Rocky



Mountains, Canmore is within a half-hour's drive of Banff and less than an hour from Lake Louise. My cousin Kent, a ski pro who lives in Calgary, insists that Canmore, which is largely free of touristy kerfuffle, beats those more famous spots as a place to stay. The closest slopes, about a 35-minute drive, are at Banff Sunshine Village, with its 3,300 acres of skiable area, 3,500-foot drop, eight lifts, including an eight-person gondola and what the resort claims is Canada's only heated chair lift. Sunshine Village averages about 30 feet of snow per season. My favorite selling point: At the Mad Trappers Saloon, a two-story bar built out of the mountain's original 1928 log cabin, you can get a pre-run summit beer and a basket of pickle fries. One-day passes cost \$105 a person, at least 35% less than what Aspen, Vail, Jackson Hole and Breckenridge are charging this month.

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Canada's Top Insider Ski Spots

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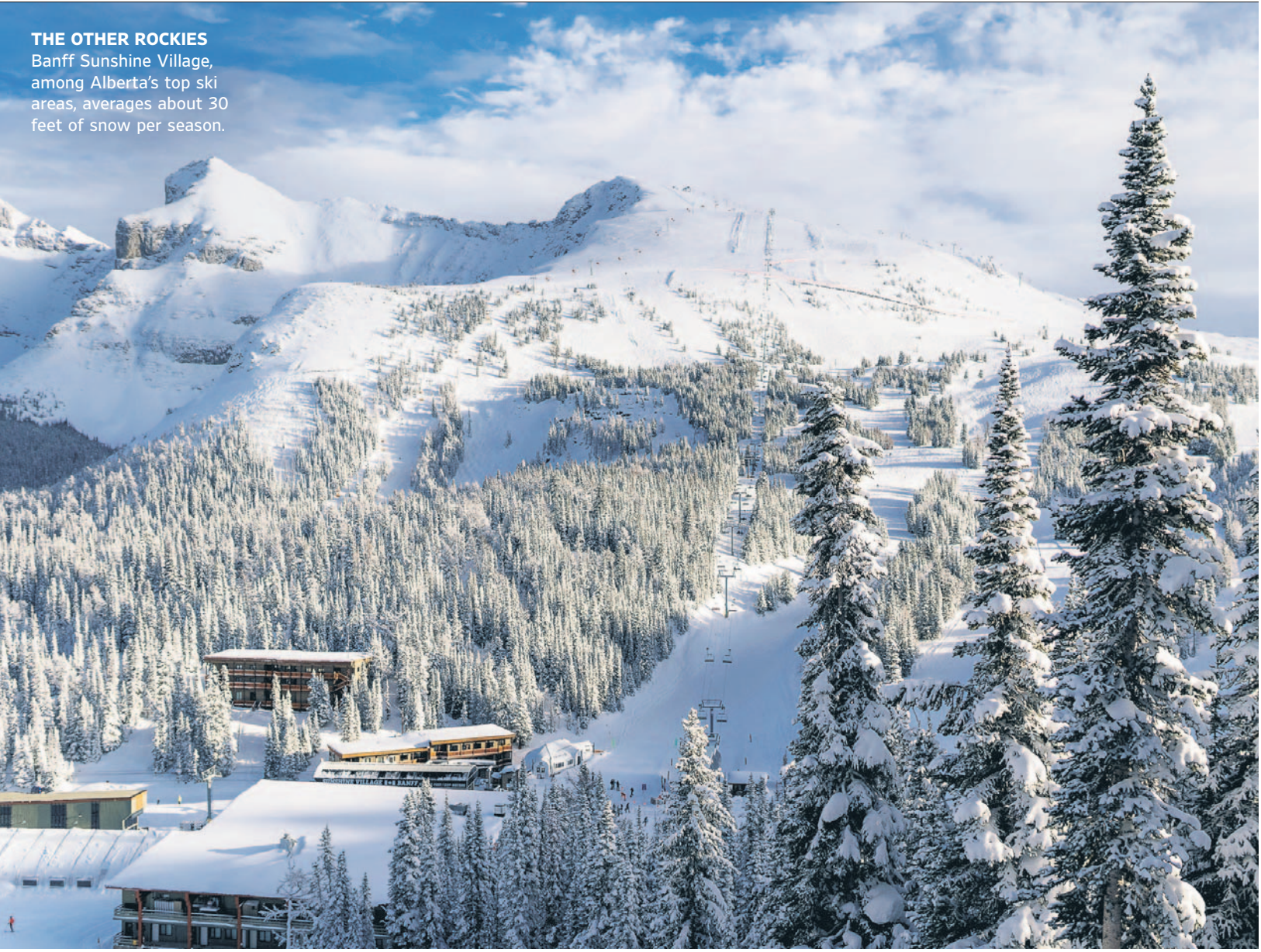
Canmore is home, according to its local paper, to more Olympians per capita than anywhere else on earth. It's small enough—about 15,000 people—that after spending three days there, I had already started recognizing faces and nodding to them as I walked up the aptly named Main Street. Though tourists rent houses on one of downtown Canmore's 17 streets and 17 avenues, or stay in its dozen or so hotels, they're not the defining presence. The town is also upscale enough to offer a remarkable variety of good restaurants and bars. I only ate at two of the five restaurants locals recommended, and both were far better than they had to be. Sauvage, tucked away almost invisibly on a cul-de-sac, served a venison tartare and a deeply flavorful bison loin. At Ankor, in the newer part of town, Quebecois chef Danny Beaulieu serves squash with Dungeness crab, adds buttermilk to beets he's fermented and braises his celeriac with red wine.

Fernie's annual Griz Days festival includes oddball skiing competitions and a lumberjack show.

You'll also find a nearly excessive number of fine and friendly cafes (Eclipse is among the finest, Beamer's among the friendliest), and anyone who's partial to Pernet in Gstaad will want to seek out Rusticana Grocery, which similarly stocks things like fleur de sel, excellent olives and a choice collection of cheeses. All that's missing are the nebuchadnezzars of Champagne, but I expect that's coming, if the town's newest hotel, the Malcolm, is any indication.

Hotels are a big part of any ski trip, and this large boutique hotel, which opened in 2018, is a lovely one, with its heated outdoor pool overlooking the mountains, large rooms with balconies that do the same, a restaurant whose lounge menu appears to offer bar food (actually cleverly disguised haute cuisine). About 650 yards away, the Drake Inn still resembles the '70s-style motel it once was, but the third-floor mountain-view suites have been so elegantly renovated that, at \$95 a night—about a third what my Malcolm room cost—mine seemed a veritable steal.

Anyone who, like me, is fond of snug, affable little towns in the Alps—places like Verbier, Zermatt or Scuol—should find Canmore delightfully familiar, but it's also unmistakably Canadian.



THE OTHER ROCKIES
Banff Sunshine Village, among Alberta's top ski areas, averages about 30 feet of snow per season.



COLD PLAY Clockwise from left: The many beginner runs at Fernie Alpine Resort in British Columbia make it suitable for families, but its expert runs also attract a more seasoned ski crowd; the base area village at Fernie; the elk short rib at Sauvage in Canmore, Alberta.



Take, for example, the Yamnaska Wolfdog Sanctuary about 45 minutes east of town. Visitors can make an appointment to meet the canines, rescued from all over the continent. Southern Alberta is home to many indigenous people and, in addition to an excellent Chiniki Nation museum, just outside of town, Mahikan Trails' indigenous guides lead tours of Canmore's Grotto Canyon.

Canmore is hardly the only underappreciated ski destination in the country. Here are three more towns where you can supplement days on the slopes with other winter diversions. All are well priced and possess abundant charm, among the many good reasons to venture north.

A SHANGRI-LA FOR SKI BUMS Fernie, B.C.

Just north of the Montana border, about four hours south of Canmore, Fernie has some of the best skiing in the Canadian Rockies, though I've met very few people out-

side of Canada who have even heard of Fernie. With 2,500 acres of skiable slope, a vertical drop of 3,550 feet, and an average snowfall of almost 30 feet, it offers good expert, intermediate and beginner runs, making it an ideal spot for families. It's also said to have some of the best tree-skiing (expert-level runs among the trees) on the continent. The village caters to locals and devout ski-bums, which is to say that it offers few luxuries but exudes a low-key cool. At the relatively upscale Lizard Creek Lodge, rooms sleep as many as 12 (*doubles from \$300 a night*). Lizard Creek is also home to Cirque restaurant, a longtime favorite with locals, and an ice bar, rebuilt every year, though the bar is unlikely to open this season.

A cheap-and-cheerful alternative to Lizard Creek is Raging Elk Adventure Lodging, a log-cabin-style establishment with private double rooms, larger family rooms and bunk-like pods, which have a chic dorm-room vibe, fit a single size bed and not much else (*from about \$40 for a pod and from \$95 for a room*). Raging Elk's Kodiak Lounge epitomizes après-ski, Canadian style, with \$11.50 pint-and-ticket specials when the local hockey team, the Ghostriders, are playing across the street.

But the season's main event, and the most compelling reason to come other than the skiing, is the Griz Days festival (this year scheduled for March 4-6). Based on a local legend about a boy who battles a bear (a tale with echoes of both Hercules and Paul Bunyan), the festival is in its 45th year. It involves oddball skiing competitions, live music, a Dummy Downhill (an alpine version of a go-kart race) and a lumberjack show.

It'd be tough to find anything more Canadian than Fernie in the winter.

THE BIG CHILL Sun Peaks, B.C.

Considerably more remote than Canmore, Sun Peaks is Canada's second largest ski area after Whistler Blackcomb. To reach the mountain, you can take an 80-minute flight from Calgary or drive an hour from the city of Kamloops, which is itself about an hour's flight from Vancouver. That seclusion has kept it off the radar for most jet-set skiers but it's a favorite among the in-the-know crowd. Olympian Nancy Greene Raine—gold and silver medalist at the 1968 Grenoble Olympics—has worked at Sun Peaks for almost 30 years, and is currently director of skiing, overseeing the mountain's 4,200 skiable acres with 13 lifts and a 2,900-foot skiable vertical. Among the other winter sports on offer—including dog sledding and snowmobiling—you can opt for an ice-fishing excursion with Elevated Fishing Adventures. Beyond the basics (hot drinks in tents on the ice and all gear provided), you'll be equipped with an underwater GoPro mount so you can see and record the action as it happens beneath the ice.

The village of Sun Peaks is still relatively small, but in recent years, several cafes have popped up, including Tod Mountain Cafe—which whips up crêpes either traditional (lemon and sugar) or whimsical (like the Green Eggs and Ham with spinach and hollandaise)—and Vertical Cafe, which simmers different homemade soups daily (try to get there on a turmeric and wild rice day). For accommodations, the Sun Peaks Grand Hotel is the luxe option. While

the décor skews somewhat sterile, views from the heated outdoor pool don't disappoint (*from \$250 a night*).

A FRENCH CANADIAN TWIST Sutton, Quebec

Canada's other major ski region, in the province of Quebec, unfolds across the Laurentian mountains, which become the Adirondacks stateside. Sutton, just 10 minutes north of the Vermont border (and 90 minutes from Montreal), attracts skiers who'd rather not spend their entire vacation skiing. Just over 4,000 people live there, but Sutton can feed a much bigger crowd thanks to its boggling number of cafes, patisseries, gourmet groceries and bars—though keep in mind that Quebec has Canada's strictest Covid restrictions in place at the moment, including a 10 p.m. curfew. Restaurants are closed for sit-down service, but most remain open for takeout, which means you can still try the

baguettes from La Valse des Pains (the Waltz of the Breads) and the chocolates at Muriel's. And pick up bottles of local beer—like the Saison Nordique, flavored with local herbs—at Auberge Brouërie Sutton, a micro-brewery and charming inn (*from \$95 a night*). Within a 20-minute drive is Cabane du Pic-Bois, a sugar shack, with a shop open by appointment starting in February. On weekends, mid-March to mid-April, you can take part in the time-honored Quebec tradition of sugaring off, which includes pouring hot, just-boiled syrup onto the snow and rolling it up on a stick into a maple taffy.


Mt. Sutton, with its 60 runs and nine lifts across 175 acres, is a seven-minute drive due east from town. Day passes are just \$65 and you can go alpine, Telemark or glade skiing on slopes that are gentle by Rockies standards, but still challenging enough to work off your sugar shack binge.



Fernie, B.C., with 2,500 acres of slopes and a dedicated fan base of devout ski bums is a refreshing, no-glitz alternative.

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