

# The Australian

---

## Travel & Indulgence

Search for:

## Down under in British Columbia

- by: **Suzanne Morphet**
- From: **The Australian**
- June 18, 2011 12:00AM



Big White provides dedicated runs for seniors and children. Picture: Big White Ski Resort

Source: Supplied

**WELCOME to Big White. The young man greeting me is wearing a lapel pin that identifies him as Chris from Melbourne. I have to smile as I'm Canadian and he's clearly Australian, but I'm the one who's the visitor at Big White Ski Resort in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley.**

During dinner at Globe Cafe and Tapas Bar, I hear the Australian accent again. Steven from Perth is elaborating on the menu - tapas and (something non-Australians surely have never heard of) lamingtons.

"Canada has the most lenient visa rules for Australians who want to work overseas," explains Steven. He arrived last November for the start of the northern ski season and plans to return again. Canada's ski resorts are a magnet for young people wanting to work and play, but Big White is special because it's owned by Australia's Schumann family.

When Queensland was devastated by flooding earlier this year, Big White donated a proportion of profits to relief appeals and staff put on a barbecue fundraiser.

"All of us working at Big White feel deeply tied to Australia in one way or another," says senior vice-president Michael Ballingall. So it's not surprising so many Australians venture here every winter. Last northern season, Big White employed almost 1000 staff from down under and seven times that number of Australians arrived on ski holidays.

"It's the snow" is Big White's motto and both times I've skied here I've found this to be true. It's dry, powdery and plentiful. An average winter brings 7.5m of what the locals call "champagne powder". You might think any ski resort in Canada would have reliably good snow. After all, Canada likes to think it owns winter. But on the west coast the snow is often wet and heavy, while in eastern Canada there's never enough, and it gets so icy you feel like you're on skates.

Big White is also true to its name. With 1118ha of skiable terrain, it's one of the biggest resorts in Canada. And when I look at the map of the mountain after picking up some high-performance rentals, I'm impressed with the variety of terrain. Green, blue and black runs crisscross the slopes between 16 lifts. Even from the highest point on the mountain, you can ski down an easy green run.

Each day, three different runs are gated and controlled for skiers wanting to take it easy, such as parents with young children, or seniors who don't want snowboarders brushing past at breakneck speed.

According to the resort's management, "If someone's going too fast or going too close, we'll pull their ticket." Of course, not all seniors are slow. "Follow me," commands Roselyn Walker, one of the mountain's volunteer ski hosts, as she leads me down my first run. It's a mild minus 5C and snowing lightly. Walker and her husband are retired farmers and spend each winter here.

After a day of skiing, and being pressed hard to keep up with Walker, who's a grandmother, I'm won over. We ski big open bowls, zigzag between trees ("snow ghosts") and carve tracks through untouched powder.

Late in the afternoon I ski back to my room (Big White is known for its ski-in, ski-out accommodation) and exchange my ski boots for climbing boots at the resort's newest attraction: an 18m ice tower. With an ice-axe in each hand, this is fat-burning, heart-thumping work, but a lot of fun. (Moonlit snowshoeing, skating, snowmobiling and dog-sledding are also on offer.)

After a well-earned massage at Beyond Wraiture Spa, we splurge on Atlantic lobster and British Columbian wine at Kettle Valley Steak House, then ride the gondola up to Snowshoe Sam's for its feted "gun barrel coffee".

Now I understand why Aussies like the place so much (as does everyone else). It's not just the snow but a whole lot more.

*Suzanne Morphet was a guest of Big White.*

### **Checklist**

There are connecting flights from Vancouver to Kelowna and connecting shuttle vans to the mountain. Big White is British Columbia's second-largest ski resort and features ski-in, ski-out accommodation for 17,000 guests, 16 lifts and 118 trails for all abilities. More: [bigwhite.com](http://bigwhite.com).

---