

# Make the most of your slope time

**Guides offer tips on when and where to find the best conditions.**

By ANNE Z. COOKE  
Special to The Star

**WHISTLER, British Columbia** | “A little tip to remember,” says John at Whistler Ski Resort here, gathering our group and trotting out the bit of wisdom I’ve come to think of as the Law of Inverse Timing.

“In early season start late, and in late season start early.”

John is a guide for Mountain Host tours, offering two-hour introductions to Whistler’s best snow, least-crowded slopes and favorite restaurants. “You’ll ski and feel better if you set your clock to match the calendar,” he tells us.

What he means is that if you’re skiing in December, when the days are shortest and coldest, sleep later, hit the slopes later (after the icy patches melt) and ski until the lifts close. However, if you’re skiing in spring, say late February or March, rise early and be the first one up on the chairlift. When the sun turns the snow to slush, quit early.

That’s all very well if you live in a ski town. When dark clouds roil overhead, you can stay home or catch up on errands. But show me a typical recreational skier and I’ll show you somebody desperate enough to try to cram a year’s worth of skiing into a single week, no matter what falls from the sky.

Still, those mountain hosts know of what they speak, tips based on years of experience.

Such as these.

## Read the daily grooming map

Most ski resorts can’t groom every slope every night. There’s just too much terrain to cover. So the Sno-Cat drivers



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**Sunshine often means softer snow and fewer icy patches but snow lasts longest on slopes where the sun shines least.**

groom selectively, often leaving bump runs to develop giant moguls before they plow them flat again.

To find out which runs are freshly groomed (or if you’re a crazy-as-a-loon bumps skier, when they’re not), get a copy of the daily Grooming Map, usually available at ticket windows and information kiosks by early morning. If you’re an intermediate, ski the groomed runs in the morning and try the

bump runs later, after the snow has softened up.

## Don’t quit when it snows

OK, quit if you want to. Skip the blizzard, head back to the lodge and relax with a cup of cocoa. But if you refuse to miss a single minute of skiing, swap those sun-burn fashions — lightweight jackets, sunglasses and baseball caps — for

warmer clothes.

Layering with fleece, adding a neck-gaiter with a pull-up face mask and ditching sunglasses for goggles makes all the difference. Most experts like amber lenses not just because they keep the snow out of your eyes, but because they sharpen the shadows, too.

## Follow the sun

Most ski slopes at most North American ski resorts face north, northeast or northwest. Why? Because that’s where the sun shines the least, and the snow lasts longest. If you like your snow a little softer, with fewer icy patches, follow the sun as it moves across the resort. Ski each run as the sun hits it, then move on to the next. Do it right, and you catch peak conditions.

## Ski the top

When spring breezes blow and crocuses push up next to the gondola, head for the clouds, where the snow isn’t melting. Once upon a time, the easy runs were on the lower slopes and the double-black-diamond mind-benders were above timberline. Never-ever skiers took lessons on the bunny slopes beside the lodge and the hot shots pumped air off the cornice. But all that has changed. To accommodate today’s recreational skiers, resorts are creating intermediate (blue) runs off the highest peaks. And what a treat that is.

## Go indoors

At your wit’s end? Ride up the lifts and eat at the summit. Find a sports bar and watch a ball game. Shop on main street. Tour the local microbrewery. Visit the history museum. Go to a movie. And wait for the sun to shine.

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