

World's Biggest Potlatch

and—zipa-di-do-dah—flew upside down with arms spread through the trees past shocked skiers.

Whistler's distinctly European-feeling village is a jigsaw puzzle of cobblestone walkways that lead to shops, restaurants, galleries, condos, hotels, B&Bs, and hostels.

Among the village's newest addition is the Squamish Lil-wat Cultural Centre, a three-story, environmentally built complex designed to mimic the mountain and forest landscape and feature local First Nations people.

New, too, is the Peak 2 Peak Gondola, a \$52 million-plus ride that connects the upper reaches of Whistler and Blackcomb for skiers and tourists year-round. It takes 11 minutes to travel 2.7 miles, rising up more than a quarter-mile above the valley floor. For a true thrill, ride the glass-bottomed gondola.

Maybe it was the upside-down ziplining, another great dinner, or possibly the extra brew at the Irish pub, but by my third day the skiing seemed ultra-spectacular. The runs were groomed, the sun was shining, and my rental boots fit like a well-worn pair of slippers. Like a yo-yo, I rode lifts up, then zip-zoomed back down.

I'm no Olympian, but I found my own gold at Whistler. □

when you go

TRANSPORTATION

Whistler Blackcomb is located in the Coast Mountains north of Vancouver, British Columbia, about a two-hour drive on the visually spectacular Sea to Sky Highway. Scheduled bus service runs from Vancouver and Vancouver Airport.

WINTER OLYMPICS

Vancouver and Whistler are the host cities for the **2010 Olympics**, which run February 12–28, followed by the **Paralympics** March 12–21 (vancouver2010.com). Tickets are limited. For information in the United States contact CoSport (877-457-4647; cosport.com).

SKI PARADISE

For information contact **Tourism Whistler** (800-WHISTLER; whistler.com) or **Whistler Blackcomb** (866-218-9684; whistlerblackcomb.com).



▲ Wolf pendant by Bill Reid.

STORY BY GARY SINGH

SINCE THE 2010 WINTER Games will occur within the traditional and shared territories of four First Nations, those nations—the Lil'Wat, the Musqueam, the Squamish and the Tsleil-Waututh—have been involved since the very beginning of the bid process. As a result, the preservation and promotion of aboriginal art and culture are integral parts of the Games, adding a unique twist for any visitor in search of extra pursuits during the Olympics in Vancouver.

The 8,000-square-foot Aboriginal Pavilion at Queen Elizabeth Theatre Plaza in downtown Vancouver is just about finished. It will feature a 65-foot-high multimedia sphere surrounded by a horseshoe-shaped Coast Salish Longhouse made of cedar and Douglas fir. During the Games, the venue will serve as the focal point for aboriginal art, cuisine, culture, and

sport from across Canada. Theme days will showcase different Aboriginal groups, and live events will include Inuit throat singing, Métis jigging, and hoop dancing, as well as contemporary Aboriginal performances.

On Robson Street, Vancouver's trendy shopping drag, the boutique Listel Hotel seems designed for the aboriginal art-seeking tourist. Northwest Coast art features in every aspect of the hotel's design and many of the rooms include original or limited-edition First Nations works.

The Listel's art-centric theme exists due to its collaboration with the illustrious Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia, which just reopened last year after extensive renovations. MOA contains a huge variety of original indigenous artifacts, everything from large totem poles to handcrafted boxes,

The Haida pole fragments. ▲

masks, pottery, fabrics, and sculptures. Perhaps the museum's most famous holding is Bill Reid's monumental sculpture, *The Raven and the First Men*, which also appears on the Canadian 20-dollar bill. Reid (1920-1998) was a native Pacific Northwest Coast artist of Haida heritage and one of Canada's most celebrated cultural icons of the 20th century.

Although Reid is the subject of numerous books, exhibitions, documentaries and online portals, it was not until last year that a specific facility devoted to his creations emerged: The Bill Reid Gallery in Vancouver. Reid was also a jeweler, metalsmith, illustrator, printmaker, storyteller, radio broadcaster, and canoe-builder, and the gallery features an overarching encapsulation of his life's work, including *Mythic Messengers*, a 25-foot-long bronze frieze. The gallery also boasts a

full-scale totem pole, carved by contemporary Haida artist James Hart.

Even the Vancouver International Airport (YVR) now immerses visitors in a swath of First Nations art. Every section of the facility features aboriginal sculptures and environments, including streams, masks, totem poles, and huge mythical discs. Bill Reid's critically acclaimed sculpture *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii: The Jade Canoe*, holds a commanding presence right smack in the center of the International Departures Terminal, Level 3, and serves as a perennial photo-op for visitors. ■

If you're in Vancouver for the Winter Olympics, don't miss this celebration of Aboriginal peoples from all across Canada.



James and Carl Hart carving Raven. ▲

fyi:

- **Aboriginal Pavilion** (fourhostfirstnations.com)
- **Listel Hotel** (800-663-5491; thelistelhotel.com)
- **Museum of Anthropology at UBC** (604-822-5087; moa.ubc.ca)
- **Bill Reid Gallery** (604-682-3455; billreidgallery.ca)
- **Art at YVR** (yvr.af.com/art.html)