

FESTIVAL BACKGROUNDER



Every April, the TELUS World Ski & Snowboard Festival (TWSSF) takes Whistler by storm as thousands of fans witness North America's largest annual snowsport and music celebration.

For 10 days and 10 nights, the Festival creates a unique vibe with a high-energy combination of world class ski & snowboard competitions, the largest free concert series in Canada, visual arts mega-productions, film premieres, community events and endless parties.

The Festival was created 13 years ago to increase the appeal of Whistler Resort during the then-quiet April shoulder season.

Today, the Festival has brought the month of April well into the folds of Whistler's peak winter season, and has made Whistler by all accounts the busiest resort in the world during this month.

The TELUS World Ski & Snowboard Festival was founded in 1996 by Doug Perry, president of W1, Whistler's largest sports & entertainment marketing company. Perry first conceived the idea of the springtime festival during his days as a professional skier in Japan. While competing in the 1993 Japan Technical Skiing Championships, he saw potential in building a truly international decathlon-format competition in his home resort of Whistler. He spent a year building alliances with top athletes, sponsors and media, and staged the first World Technical Skiing Championships on Blackcomb Mountain in April, 1994.

The World Technical Skiing Championships brought together ski champions from various disciplines and attracted a large number of ski media who up until that time had never been to Whistler. Perry recognized the potential of developing an annual event attracting top athletes and media to the resort at a time when Whistler was beginning to emerge as an international destination.

The World Ski & Snowboard Festival was born in April, 1996. During its first two years, the TELUS World Ski & Snowboard Festival underwent various transformations as it strove to fulfil a "bigger vision" but still remain an industry-focussed event. Its impact on skier visits and hotel occupancy during the 10-day period won endorsements from Whistler's stakeholders, securing their marketing support. The Festival, held in Whistler Village and on independently owned Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains, signified the first joint event marketing initiative between the two rival mountains and the Whistler Resort Association (now Whistler/Blackcomb and Tourism Whistler).

The third year (1998) was a breakthrough year for the Festival. A free outdoor concert series, an action-sport photography showdown and various community events were added to the athletic event line-up providing a broader range of content and widening the appeal beyond the industry to the general public. A major increase in resort visits and several Whistler businesses setting all-time records during the 10-day event in 1998 firmly established the Festival as a Whistler icon celebrating the end of the season. That year, W1 president Doug Perry was awarded Businessperson of the Year by the Whistler Chamber of Commerce.

Today, the TELUS World Ski & Snowboard Festival continues to grow and evolve around three major pillars of content: music, arts and sports. Not a single event from its inaugural year remains today, illustrating the Festival's responsiveness to the changes in the snowsport and resort industry. It has evolved from a specialised sporting event into the foremost lifestyle event in Canada.

The Festival's concert series has also grown to become the largest free outdoor concert series in Canada. More than 50 concerts are staged in Whistler over ten days, contributing to the high-energy atmosphere that flows through pedestrian walkways and nightclubs of the resort.

Ironically given its foundations, the Festival's signature events have become the fashion, film and photo trifecta. These unique visual arts productions are now recognized as the most prestigious events of their kind in the world. The Pro Photographer Showdown invites the best action-sport and lifestyle photographers in the world to show the greatest work of their careers in choreographed mega-productions for an audience of 2000. Following in its footsteps is the acclaimed Filmmaker Showdown, inviting teams and individuals to shoot edit and produce short films in just 72 hours in Whistler during the Festival. The best films are screened for 2000 people at a gala evening. In 2006, organizers unveiled a new dimension to the Festival, Fashion Exposed, a major production for the innovators of the action-sport and lifestyle apparel industry, which completely transforms the runway and demonstrates the way in which fashion has become completely integrated street and snow culture. Street art exhibits, theatre, storytelling, and collectively-scribed and illustrated novels round out the cultural showcase.

Never losing sight of its roots, the foundation of professional athletic competition remains at the heart of the Festival. In 2006, the pro skiers and riders decided to join forces to compete in the same venues for the first time. Also new for 2006 was the inclusion of the World Backcountry Freeride Jam, a multi-disciplined celebration of the new backcountry skiing movement.

In 2007, the Festival played host to the If Ullr Was a Girl contest, a showcase of the best women skiers and riders, and continues to support girlpower with the Ullrgirl redux in 2008. In addition, the Orage Masters event resurrects after a one year hiatus, bringing its anti-comp, industry cred to the Festival for a team-based free-for-all approach to slopestyle contests.

An Economic Impact Assessment conducted during the 2006 event found that the Festival had more than met its founding goal. In just over a decade, the event's significance in the local and provincial economy had the quantifiable impact of generating \$37.7 million in economic activity for the province, with visitor spending and operational expenditure injecting more than \$15.7 million into the Whistler economy. Over 28,000 hotel room nights were sold during the Festival, with 86% being directly driven by the Festival.

In 2007, Festival management passed to Watermark Communications, under the leadership of Doug Perry's long-time wingman, Sue Eckersley, and a record 275,000 visitors took part, enjoying sold-out shows, 2 Big Airs, and the annual gathering of the mountain tribes.

Now in its thirteenth year, the TELUS World Ski & Snowboard Festival continues to grow in scope and popularity with thousands of attendees and an international television audience in 122 countries. The community is of one voice when it comes to pointing to something that defines Whistler – the TELUS World Ski & Snowboard Festival is voted Whistler's "Event of the Year" every year. It is the perfect showcase of the resort's diverse personality and energy.

The snowsport season isn't over until you've been to the TELUS World Ski & Snowboard Festival.

For more information, visit whistler2008.com