

# BRITISH COLUMBIA<sup>®</sup>

M A G A Z I N E

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**OUTDOOR  
ADVISOR**  
CAMPING  
WITHOUT  
A TENT

## *The Super 7* B.C.'s TOP TOURS

- \* EXPLORE CODY CAVE \* CLIMB VIA FERRATA
- \* CRUISE ON A FREIGHTER \* VIEW GRIZZLY BEARS
- \* SWIM WITH SALMON \* JET BOAT THE SKEENA
- \* FLY TO A GLACIER

## WILD ABOUT FERNIE

A MOUNTAIN  
CITY WITH  
YEAR-ROUND  
APPEAL

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WEST COAST  
WILDERNESS

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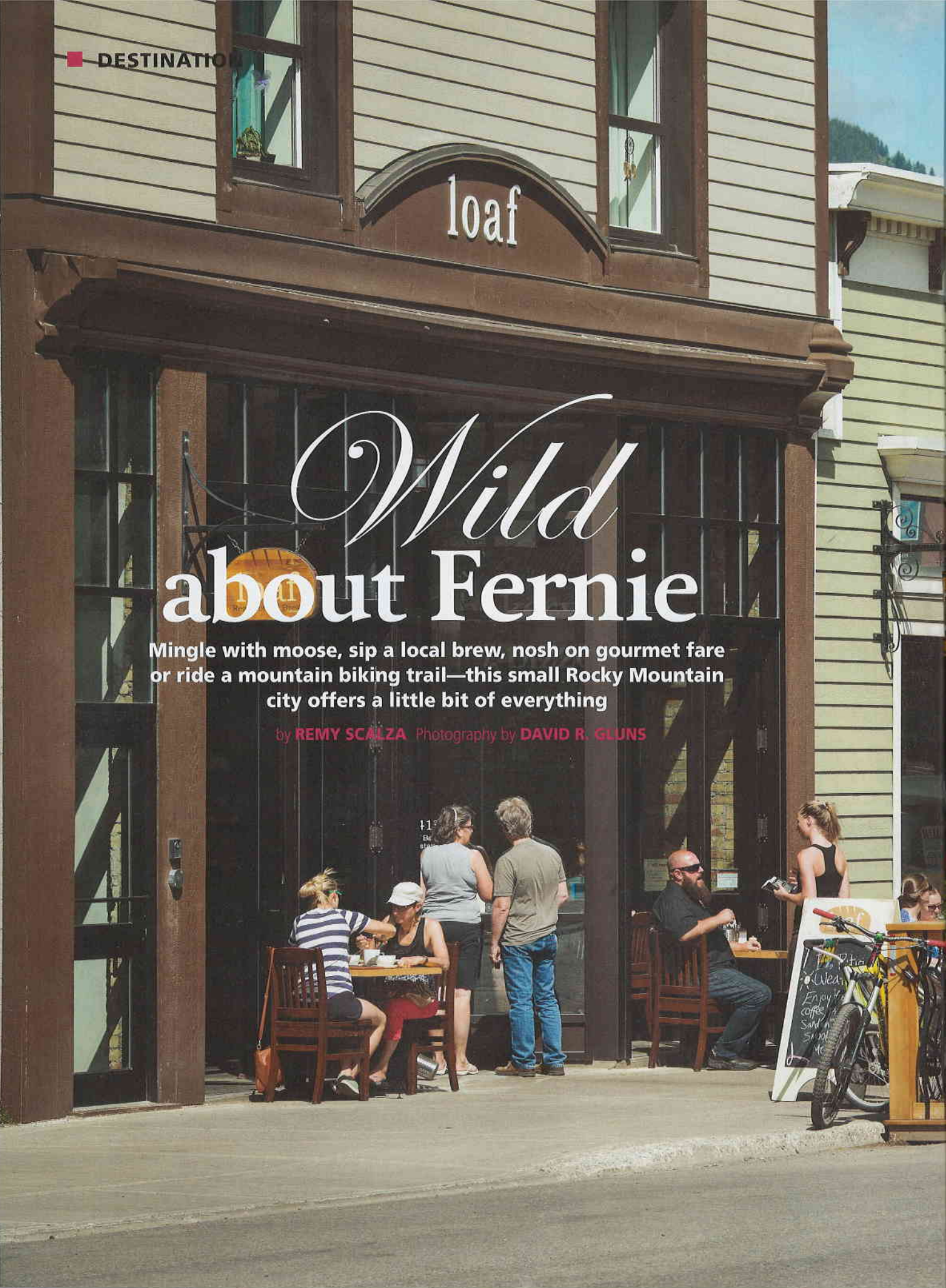
■ DESTINATION

loaf

# Wild about Fernie

Mingle with moose, sip a local brew, nosh on gourmet fare or ride a mountain biking trail—this small Rocky Mountain city offers a little bit of everything

by REMY SCALZA Photography by DAVID R. GLUNS







• Patio lunch at Loaf Bakery located on the main street of historic downtown Fernie.



## DESTINATION

In late spring at the start of Lake Trail, 10 kilometres outside of Fernie, I'm greeted by an unusual, hand-scrawled warning: "Mama Moose and her two calves are hanging around the Lake Trail. Use caution." Undeterred, I push on into a thick grove of western red cedars. The trail soon opens to a small, shimmering mountain lake with a green jewel of an island in the middle, snowcapped peaks of the Rockies rising dramatically behind like a painted stage prop. All-in-all, it's well worth the moose risk.

Then, I see something.

More accurately, something sees me. Its head is the size of a horse's. And it's staring down from a steep rise on the lake shore, hardly 10 metres from where I'm standing, with an expression somewhere between annoyance and curiosity. I take a slow step backward and continue in the opposite direction along the two-kilometre loop around the lake.

Situated in the southeastern corner of the province, along a bend in the Elk River, Fernie claims to be the only Canadian city completely encircled by the Rocky Mountains—with the wildlife to prove it. After my close call at the lake (turns out it was an elk), I follow the Crowsnest Highway along the river, dotted with fly fishermen, and roll into town. A neat grid of residential streets leads to a main drag straight out of an old Western movie set, heritage brick buildings dating back a century laid out in two neat rows.

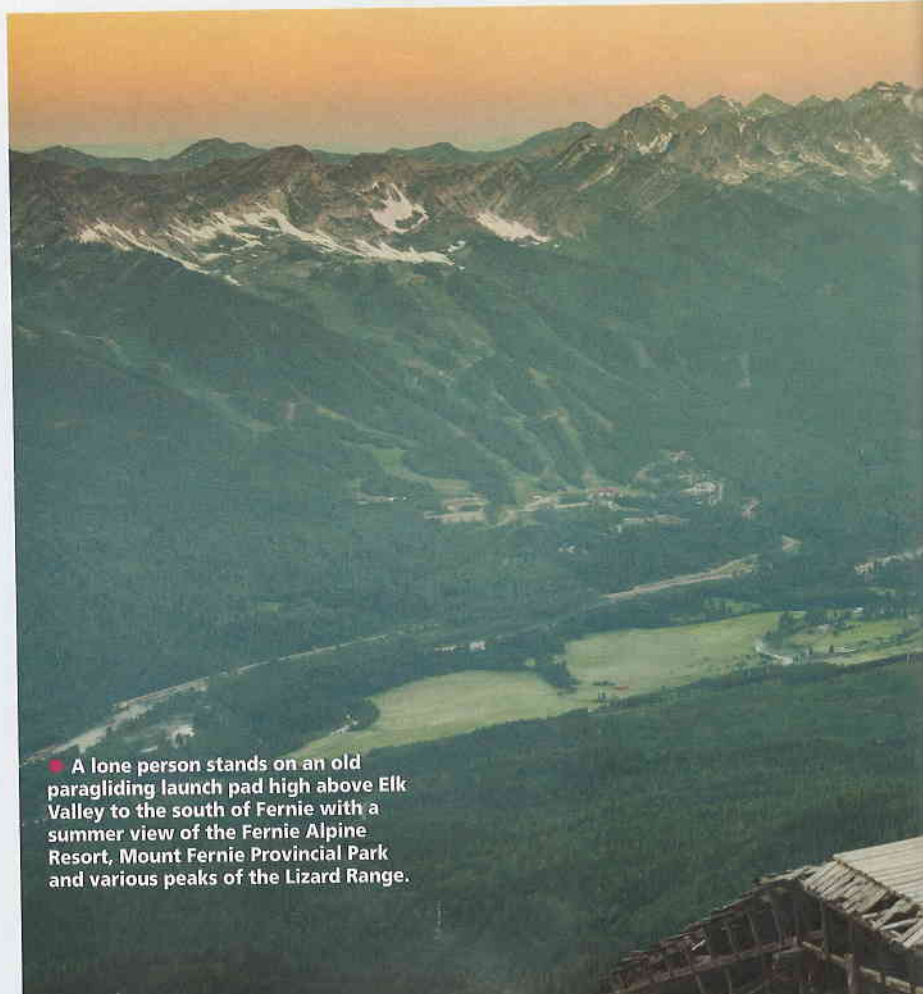
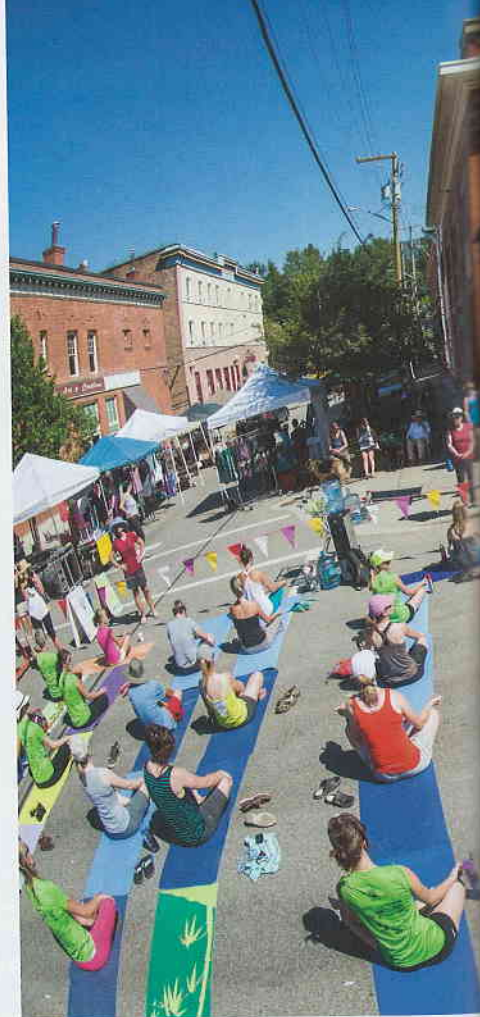
"William Fernie came through prospecting for coal in the late 1800s," explains Mike Pennock, a retired geologist and the former director of the Fernie Museum, which now occupies a 1910 bank building. "He found what he was looking for, and then some." Sooty black beads—spotted around the neck of the daughter of a Ktunaxa First Nations chief, or so the legend goes—led Fernie to one of the richest coal seams in Canada. More than 125 years after his discovery, coal is still an important part of Fernie's economy, with five open-pit mines in the Elk Valley, near Sparwood.

But it's the Rockies, in particular the Lizard Range just to the southwest, that have put the city on the map. Fernie Alpine Resort and Island Lake Lodge draw powder fanatics from around the world in winter, while the rugged terrain is proving increasingly popular with mountain bikers



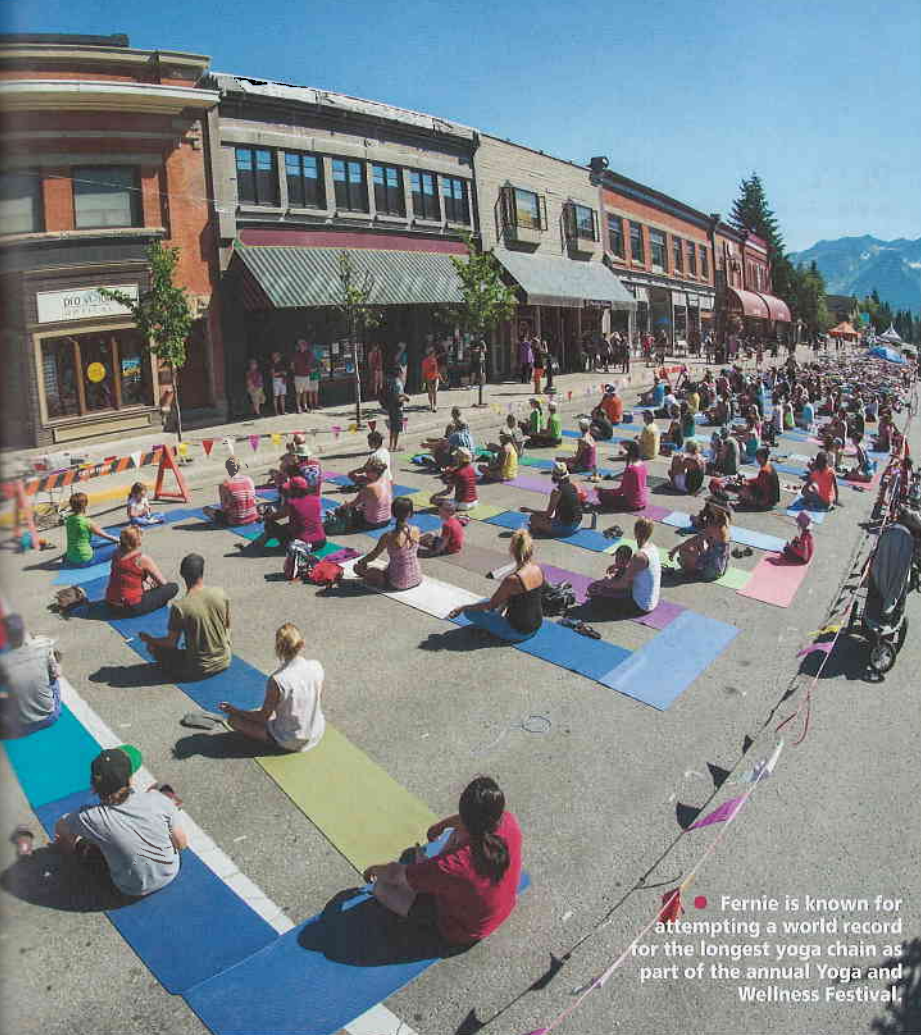
### Getting There

The city of Fernie is situated in the Elk River valley, within the Rocky Mountains, in the southeast corner of the province. It is roughly an hour east of Cranbrook on Highway 3 and three and a half hours southwest of Calgary, Alberta.



● A lone person stands on an old paragliding launch pad high above Elk Valley to the south of Fernie with a summer view of the Fernie Alpine Resort, Mount Fernie Provincial Park and various peaks of the Lizard Range.





once the snow melts. “We’ve got more than one game in town, which is rare for Interior B.C.,” Pennock says.

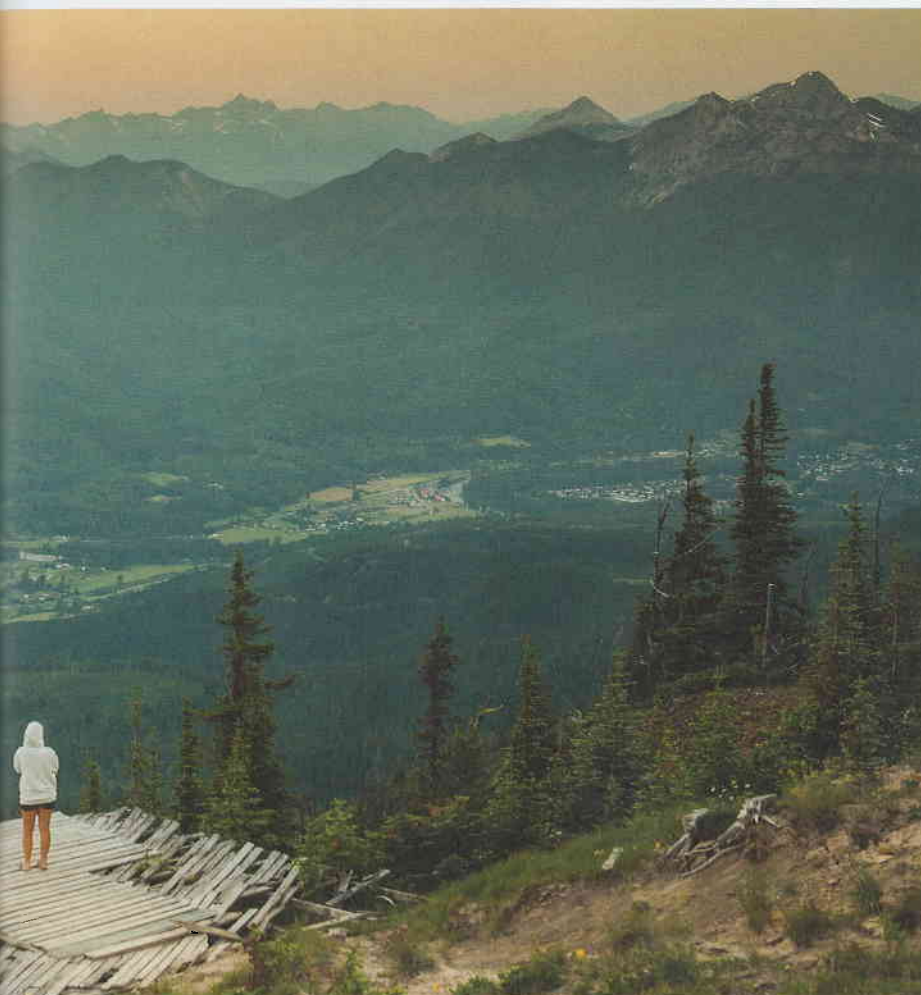
Back out around the main street (technically, 2nd Avenue), storefronts are a mix of old and new. A 1926 butcher shop and two-screen movie theatre share space with skate and snowboard shops, a boutique selling hemp clothes, and an upscale tapas restaurant.

“For a city of 4,500 people, we’ve got a little of everything,” James Heavey, a recent transplant from Ireland tells me when I stop in his chocolate-making shop, Beanpod, on Fernie’s “gourmet corner.” (Other nearby residents include a cheese shop and artisan bagel maker).

While antique machines from Italy grind direct-trade cocoa beans from Ecuador, Heavey breaks me off a piece of his signature Espresso Bar (700 coffee beans per bar, approximately). I take a little bite and instantly feel the caffeine buzz spread to my tongue. Heavey explains the allure of his adopted home: “I can literally walk out this door and in three minutes be in the Rocky Mountains. You’ve got the skiing and the hiking and some of the best mountain biking trails anywhere.”

Among single-track enthusiasts, Fernie’s more than 60 mountain biking trails—with such inviting names as Swine Flu, Phat Bastard and Hyperextension—are indeed the stuff of highlight reels. To explore something a little more my speed, I pedal with mountain bike guide Mark Gallup to a new trail on the edge of Mount Fernie Provincial Park called Lazy Lizard. “It’s a great family trail, which is nice because everything else around here is pretty much straight up and straight down,” explains Gallup, a local ski and snowboard photographer who runs Fernie Bike Guides. For the past quarter-century, Gallup has been bringing extreme skiers and boarders to Fernie for photo shoots, putting the tiny town firmly on the international adventure circuit. Today he’ll be joining me on an easy beginner’s ride into the mountains.

“You want to ride these bikes like a pony—keep your weight on your toes,” he says as we climb through a stretch of Douglas fir and western red cedar forest. Every few hundred metres, our bikes rumble across narrow wooden bridges set high over stream beds. Experienced riders in fancy gear zip by on their way to more





## ■ DESTINATION

challenging terrain. “Californians,” Gallup explains, using the local term for Calgarians who spend weekends here in Fernie, roughly a three-hour drive away.

Up top, after a gentle 2.9-kilometre ascent that nonetheless leaves me heaving for air, we pause to admire a view of the Three Bears, three imposing limestone monoliths. Then the mosquitos find us and we turn around for the descent, whipping through banked turns and rolling hills on the way back to town.

The Fernie name has spread far and wide for another good reason: the city’s beer. Fernie Brewing Company, in an industrial park outside downtown, opened in 2003 and now ships across much of Western Canada. “We’re probably best known for our What the Huck, made with local huckleberries,” says brewmaster Gord Demaniuk, as he leads me past giant aluminum tanks and over a tangle of hoses during a weekly brewery tour. Like much of Fernie, the brewery is expanding. “It’s an exciting time to be here. Everything is growing so fast,” he says.

My near miss with the moose has left me hungry to see more of Fernie’s wildlife. Luckily, the town’s mountain setting means bighorn sheep, mountain goats, elk, black bears, and even grizzlies are never far. To increase my odds of spotting something, I call in the services of Kim Sedrovic, a burly bear of a man with a friendly disposition who operates Fernie Wilderness Adventures. “There’s a reasonable chance we’ll catch a griz on the slide,” Sedrovic says, “If you know where the good huckleberry patches are, it’s easy to find them.” As we speed up old logging roads in his Ford F150, which smells like wood smoke and has a high-powered scope resting on the console, he estimates that he has seen hundreds—if not thousands—of grizzlies here over his long career as a wildlife guide.

Sedrovic brakes suddenly, rolls down the window and sticks out his head. “That’s bear crap there,” he says, clearly excited by the discovery. “Probably this morning.” We accelerate on, spooking a mother elk and a pair of white-tailed bucks that are grazing in a clear cut, before stopping at an overlook high above the Wigwam River. With the light fading, Sedrovic scans the mountainside with a pair of binoculars. Apart from a distant murmur from the river, the scene is silent. He pauses to wipe his eyes. “There’s some critters out there somewhere, I’m sure,” he says. “Fernie’s so much wilder than people think.”

## PLAY

● **Bike** Fernie’s mountain bike trails through the Rockies with an expert from Fernie Bike Guides ([ferniebikeguides.ca](http://ferniebikeguides.ca)).

● **Hike** through old-growth forest to dizzying summits in the “Cedar Valley,” 28 protected square kilometres accessed through a network of trails around Island Lake Lodge ([islandlakecatskiing.com/summer/hiking/](http://islandlakecatskiing.com/summer/hiking/)).

● **Fly fish** for cutthroat and bull trout in the Elk, Bull and Wigwam rivers,

considered among the purest and most productive waters in the Canadian Rockies ([tourismfernie.com/activities/fly-fishing](http://tourismfernie.com/activities/fly-fishing)).

● **Spot** Rocky Mountain wildlife ranging from elk and moose to mountain goats, bighorn sheep and even grizzlies on a wildlife viewing tour ([fernieadventures.com](http://fernieadventures.com)).

● **Tour** the Fernie Museum to view a collection showcasing how mining tools have evolved over the past century and a large ammonite fossil, housed in a

restored 1910 bank building ([ferniemuseum.com](http://ferniemuseum.com)).

● **Shop** for handset prints made on a pair of authentic printing presses from the early 1900s (using essentially the same technology as in Gutenberg’s day) at retro-chic Clawhammer Letterpress & Gallery ([clawhammer.ca](http://clawhammer.ca)).

● **Snack** on dark, white and milk chocolate at Beanpod, one of Canada’s only traditional chocolate makers, where raw cocoa beans are transformed into a range of bonbons, truffles, bars and other treats ([beanpod.ca](http://beanpod.ca)).





● **Sip** organic tea and tea-inspired cocktails while listening to acoustic jam sessions in modern-day teahouse, Infinita T-Bar and Boutique. (facebook.com/InfinitaTBarBoutique).

● **Rock on** inside the Royal, an atmospheric dive bar in the century-old Royal Hotel, with raucous live music and a happy hour that goes until 11 p.m. (facebook.com/RoyalFernie).

## STAY

● **The Old Nurses Residence Bed and Breakfast** (250-423-3091; oldnurse.com), 802 4th Ave. Built in 1908, this stately home housed Fernie's health care

workers until 1988, and has since been painstakingly restored as a B&B, complete with wrap-around veranda and period furnishings.

● **Island Lake Lodge** (250-423-3700; islandlakecatskiing.com), Cedar Valley Road. Situated 12 kilometres outside town on 28 square kilometres, this high-end lodge caters to cat-skiers in winter and pampered hikers and nature buffs in summer and also has a fine-dining restaurant (below) and spa.

## EAT

● **Nevados** (250-423-5566), 531 2nd Ave. This new Latin-fusion restaurant on vibrant 2nd

Avenue offers Colombian arepas, Peruvian ceviches, Mexican tacos and Argentine empanadas, updated with 100-mile ingredients like B.C. trout and local beef and pork (creative margaritas and international cocktails, too).

● **The Curry Bowl** (250-423-2695; currybowlfernienie.com), 931 7th Ave. This small cottage off the Crowsnest Highway serves a selection of improbably authentic Asian favourites, from noodles, stir fries, and donburis to a mean Bombay chicken curry with coconut milk and apricots.

● **Ancient Timbers Dining Room at Island Lake Lodge**

(250-423-3700; islandlakecatskiing.com), Cedar Valley Road. Enjoy fine cuisine—with an emphasis on local fish and meat, including signature bison short ribs—in a spectacularly remote setting with views of the Rockies at the lodge's formal dining room.

● **Big Bang Bagels** (250-423-7778; bigbangbagels.com), 502 2nd Ave. This unlikely outpost offers dozens of varieties of scratch-made bagels—from poppy to pesto spinach—and inventive sandwiches like the Avo-Launcher (avocado, Monterey jack, red onion and herb and garlic cream cheese). ☎



1 A father and son flyfishing from a drift boat with a professional guide on the Elk River south of Fernie.

2 Local musician Linden Gigliotti playing to an audience at the Infinita T-bar and Boutique in historic downtown Fernie.

3 Kayla DeMartini of the Fernie Brewing Company serves up a sample paddle of their beers during a brewery tour.

4 Owner James Heavey at the Beanpod Chocolate store displays some of the chocolate made directly from imported cacao beans.

5 The "Thibodeau" family (l to r: Kris, Jennifer, Emma, Brent and golden retriever, Maggie) on a local bike ride near the Elk River in Annex Park. Biking is a popular form of transportation around the town of Fernie.

