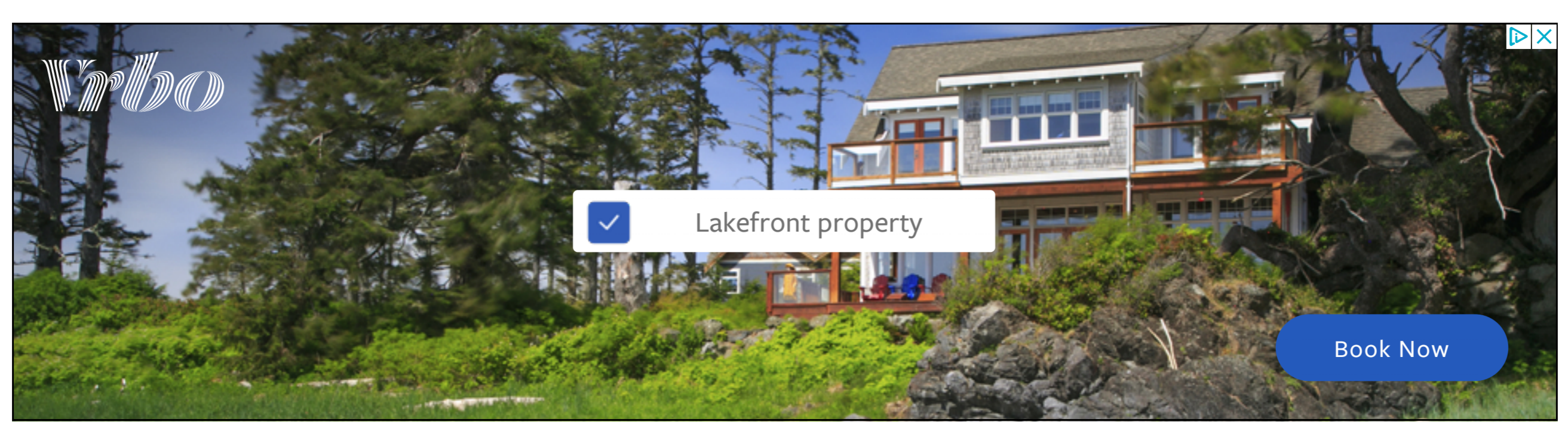


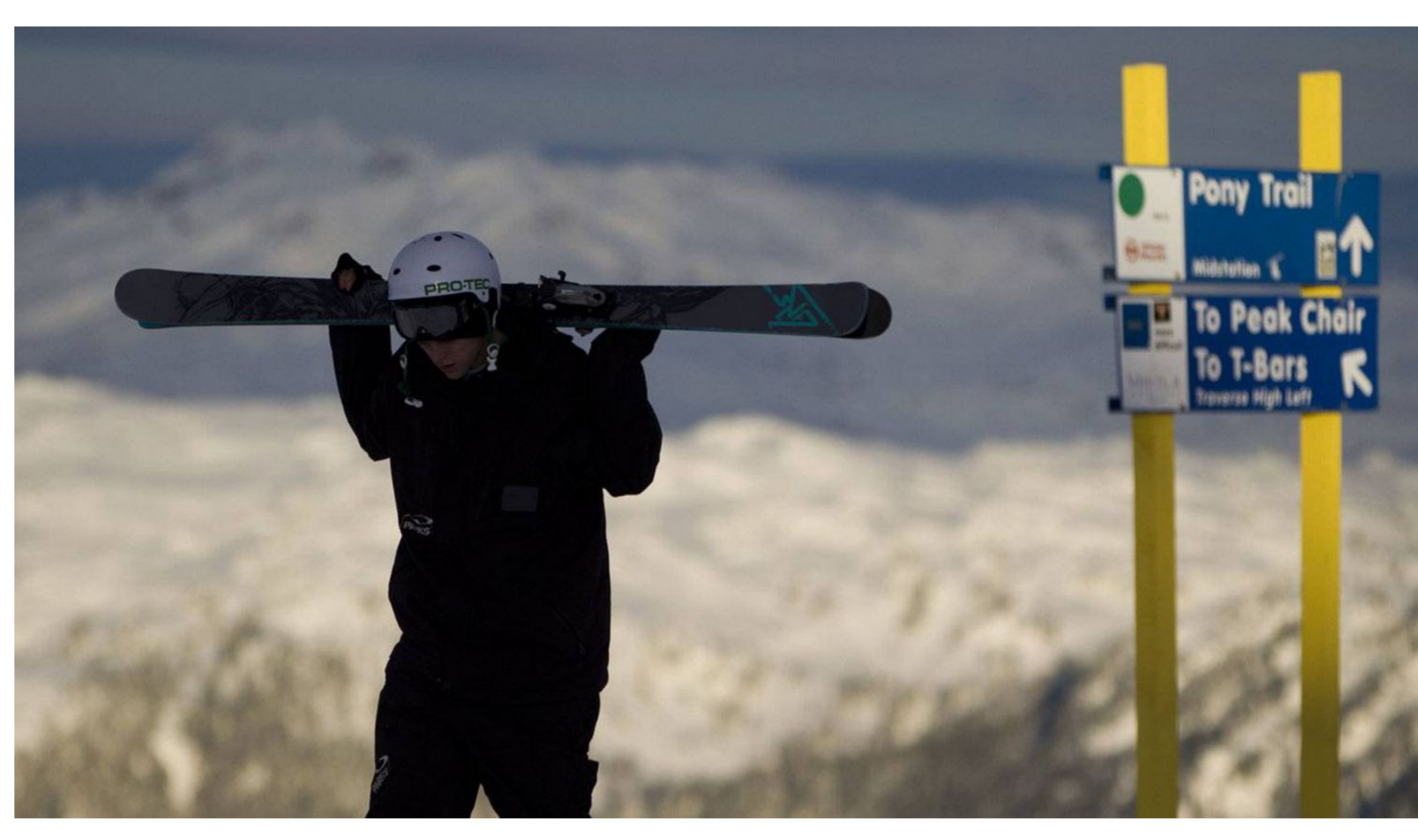
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X Games not coming to Whistler

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A Whistler Blackcomb employee makes his way to work atop Whistler mountain Feb. 1, 2011.

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Despite putting forth a "strong bid," Whistler will not be playing host to the winter X Games anytime soon.

The scenic B.C., resort town was in the running to become one of three new host cities in ESPN's effort to expand the extreme sports event. But the bid from the former Olympic co-host lost out to pitches from Barcelona, Munich and Foz do Iguacu, Brazil.

Whistler was the only winter city included on the nine-bid shortlist. The new cities selected will stage summer competitions through 2015.

The news came as a surprise to Whistler's bid committee.

"We are disappointed for sure," said Barrett Fisher, Tourism Whistler's president and CEO. "We had strong hopes that we would have a successful winter bid but it wasn't meant to be. The feedback we received from ESPN indicated that we had a strong bid and that Whistler is a great winter destination."

ESPN will not add a new winter event to the global calendar right now, instead expanding the summer program with three new events to complement the two existing summer X Games in Los Angeles.

"Whistler put in a very strong bid, and their venues and team are world class," said Scott Guglielmino, ESPN's senior vice-president, of programming and X Games. "An X Games event at Whistler would be a special experience. Ultimately, the decision to not be at Whistler next year was based on the opportunities in other markets versus any shortcomings with Whistler."

Whistler would have become a third North American stop for the winter X Games. With other cities bidding for summer X Games within the same April timeslot as Whistler, and prospective global sponsors looking to reach markets beyond the U.S. and Canada, ESPN ultimately decided to award the April games to a summer host outside North America.

"ESPN felt that a summer focus would be more appropriate for the April timeslot," said Fisher. "That said, Whistler has a history of producing high profile events and we will be open to any future opportunities with the X Games."

Ashleigh McIvor, Whistler's 2010 Olympic ski cross gold medalist, was surprised and disappointed by the news.

"Being part of the X Games has fuelled the progression of our sport, just as growing up with Whistler Blackcomb has facilitated my rise to the top in my ski career," she said. "It's too bad that Canadian athletes aren't going to have the opportunity to host our international competitors on our home turf."

Whistler's bid proposed combining the X Games with the current Telus World Ski and Snowboard Festival in April. The 10-day event, a combination of extreme sport and visual and performing arts, is already the largest spring event of its kind in the world.

"The Telus festival is already an internationally renowned event and well respected within the industry," said Sue Eckersley, an organizer of the festival and a member of the X Games bid committee. "Whistler is still going to have a massive event in April and we have to hit the ground running now that we know what banner we are under."

Whistler support was strong for the X Games, which cost between \$16-million and \$18-million to stage. The community also put up funds for the \$750,000 bid, which was split equally between the municipality, Whistler Blackcomb and Tourism Whistler.

"The funding portion of the bid was in order and we received support from all of our partners and all levels of government," Barrett said. "We congratulate the host cities and wish them much success."

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