

GREAT *holiday* escapes

BY DOUGLAS LONG AND MORRI MOSTOW

LOOKING FOR A GREAT GIFT IDEA? WHY NOT TREAT YOUR LOVED ONES TO A HOLIDAY DURING THE HOLIDAYS, TO EXPERIENCE ONE OF THE THINGS CANADA DOES BEST ... WINTER! VALUE-PACKED VACATION PACKAGES LET YOU REDISCOVER THE DELIGHTS OF A CANADIAN WINTER WITH YOUR FAMILY OR MATE. HERE, FROM EAST TO WEST, ARE SOME SEASONAL SUGGESTIONS.

SKI QUÉBEC'S LAURENTIANS

Your kids will have a blast, and so will you, at **Gray Rocks**, one of North America's top 10 ski schools. Skiers ski, dine and play with their own peer group, so wave to your kids across the dining room or as they whiz by on the slopes. Parents can ski and attend evening festivities, while their children (up to age five) enjoy professional daycare and supervised evening play groups.

ALL-INCLUSIVE HOLIDAY SKI WEEK,

from \$5,300 for a family of four (\$3,930 during a non-holiday week): six nights' accommodation, seven days of skiing, 18 hours of lessons, all meals and a packed social program for adults and kids. (Children five and under stay and eat for free when sharing room with parents.)

SPRING FLING

(Mar. 30 – Apr. 3), from \$1,091 per person: a five-night, six-day all-inclusive ski package.

GRAY ROCKS RESORT: Mont-Tremblant, Québec:
1-800-567-6767; www.grayrocks.com



©Gray Rocks

HEAD FOR THE ONTARIO HILLS

Perched on the Niagara escarpment, **Blue Mountain** boasts the best skiing in Ontario, with 34 groomed trails, 12 lifts (four high-speed) plus a Badlands Terrain Park and Hell's Half Acre, complete with boxes, rails, wave walls, quarter pipes and hips. Novice skiers and snowboarders can rent equipment, take lessons and practice in two beginner areas. There are also five indoor tennis courts and a spa.

SNOW ESCAPE

(Mon. – Thurs.), from \$497 per person: four nights' accommodation, three personalized ski lessons, unlimited skiing, snowboarding and snow-tubing.

BLUE MOUNTAIN RESORT, Collingwood, Ont.
(705) 445-0231, www.bluemountain.ca



©Blue Mountain Resort

HAVE A MERRY, MAGICAL MUSKOKA CHRISTMAS

Celebrate an old-fashioned Christmas in the luxury and comfort of **Deerhurst Resort**, in Ontario's Muskoka cottage country. Christmas carollers, complimentary hot chocolate and fireside stories with Santa set the festive tone. Enjoy ice skating, dog-sledding, and sleigh and wagon rides, snow-tubing, snow-shoeing and cross-country skiing. Nearby, Hidden Valley offers downhill skiing. Indoor activities include: movies, games, gym sports, dance lessons, art classes, water aerobics, boxercise and yoga, tennis clinics and a special children's program. An Aveda spa offers a full range of treatments.

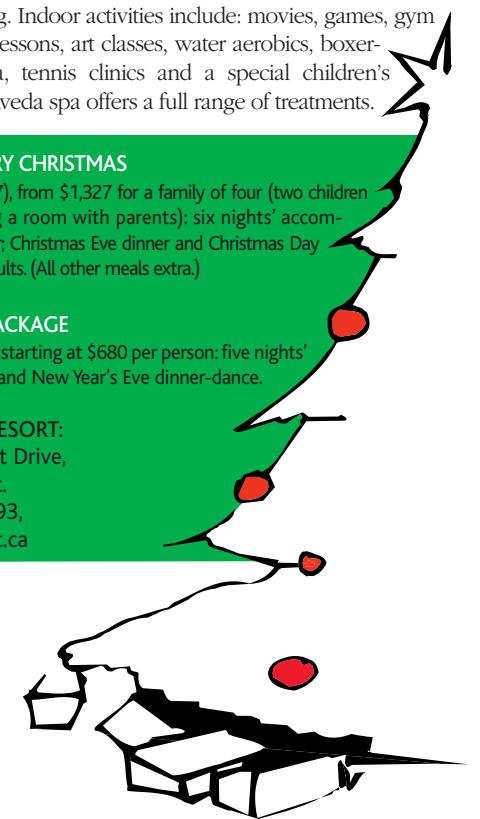
MUSKOKA COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

(Dec. 23 – Dec. 27), from \$1,327 for a family of four (two children under 18 sharing a room with parents): six nights' accommodation for four; Christmas Eve dinner and Christmas Day brunch for two adults. (All other meals extra.)

NEW YEAR'S EVE PACKAGE

(Dec. 27 – Jan. 1), starting at \$680 per person: five nights' accommodation and New Year's Eve dinner-dance.

DEERHURST RESORT:
1235 Deerhurst Drive,
Huntsville, Ont.
1-800-461-4393,
www.deerhurst.ca



RENEW YOUR SPIRITS ON A WORKING RANCH IN THE CARIBOO

East meets West at the luxurious, intimate Echo Valley Ranch & Spa, a 160-acre cattle ranch and Thai spa, set amid the breathtaking mountains of British Columbia's Cariboo region. Pamper yourself with Thai treatments; enjoy gourmet meals, an optional diet plan, ranch-grown organic produce and cleansing spring water. Take a sleigh ride, snowshoe on mapped trails, horseback ride with a guide, watch falconers train falcons, or become a ranch hand – collect eggs, feed the animals, brush the horses or play with the border collies. This perfectly romantic retreat hosts up to 28 guests, no children under 13 allowed!

CHRISTMAS PACKAGE

(Dec. 24 – 30), \$1,400 per person: six nights' deluxe accommodation, all meals (including a traditional Christmas dinner of ranch-raised organic turkey), hot cider, caroling and dancing; use of large outdoor hot tubs, indoor pool, sauna, fitness and game rooms; all outdoor activities (guided horseback tours extra). From Jan. 2 to Mar. 3, this all-inclusive package drops to \$1,300 per person.

ECHO VALLEY RANCH & SPA,
near Clinton, British Columbia:
1-800-253-8831, www.evranch.com

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Please call us toll free at 1-800-268-8304 or simply present this voucher upon check in.
Ask about our Hockey night in Toronto packages, and "Toronto Best Value Package".
Rates are subject to availability and taxes.



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Heat wave forecast this winter from February 13 to March 2

THE MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS FESTIVAL transforms the heart of North America's Francophone capital into a lively, fascinating domain of light, warmth and welcome.



Great internationally renowned chefs are invited to concoct gourmet menus for fifty of Montréal's finest tables.

Special events showcase the city's outstanding cultural productions. An international program stars shining creative talents from Montréal and around the world.



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EXPERIENCE PRAIRIE DIVERSITY

Explore the rolling hills, boreal forest, grasslands and marshlands of Manitoba's Riding Mountain National Park, a 3,000-sq.-km wilderness next door to the four-star **Elkhorn Resort**. Look for deer, elk, moose, wolves, coyotes and bison as you cross-country ski or snowshoe around the property or on hundreds of kilometres of Park trails. Skate on the resort's rink or go ice fishing on nearby Clear Lake. A half-day guided Adventure Quest (www.earthrhythms.ca) will teach you and your family how to track animals and navigate with a GPS receiver.

CHRISTMAS PACKAGE

(Dec. 20 – 27) \$799 for a family of four: seven nights' accommodation in main lodge (children sharing with parents), breakfasts, hot chocolate/coffee in lobby, Santa Claus and children's gifts. À la carte: Christmas Eve and Christmas Day buffets, sleigh rides and hayrides. Spring Break Package (Mar. 22 – 28) \$560 for a family of four: seven nights in main lodge (children sharing with parents); meals not included.

ELKHORN RESORT HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTRE:
Onanole, Manitoba: 1 866-ELKHORN, www.elkhornresort.mb.ca

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WINTER PACKAGES

From \$145 per person, per night/dbl. occ.
Including gourmet dinners, full breakfasts,
all on-site facilities and service.

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700, rue Ripplecove, Ayer's Cliff, Québec, Canada, J0B 1C0
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STMT

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WELCOME WINTER ON THE WET AND WILD WEST COAST

Bad weather makes a great storm-watch vacation! Enjoy the thrill of spectacular winter storms at **Pacific Sands Beach Resort**, overlooking the pounding surf on Vancouver Island's west coast. Outfitted in complimentary rain gear, you and your family can beach-comb, hike secluded beaches, explore trails in Pacific Rim National Park – or don a wetsuit and learn to surf! Pacific Sands is a kid friendly!TM resort (www.kidfriendly.org).

WILD WINTER WEEK,

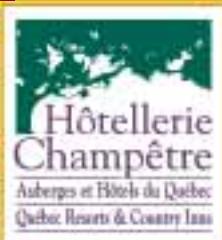
\$623 for a family of four: seven nights' accommodation in a suite or beachfront cottage, with kitchen, fireplace and ocean views. (No restaurant at resort.) Winter & Spring Break Surf Package, \$625 per person: four nights' accommodation; three two-hour surf lessons with Surf Sister professional instructors (www.surfsister.com), wetsuit and surfboard; two lunches, pre- and post-lesson coffee/hot chocolate around a warming fire in the Pacific Sands Gazebo.

PACIFIC SANDS BEACH RESORT :

Tofino, British Columbia;
1-800-565-2322, www.pacificsands.com. ■



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