



Great Canadians WINTER *warm ups*

by Heather Greenwood Davis

No matter how hot it gets in the middle of July, there's always that nagging voice in the back of your mind. It's the one that reminds you – as beads of sweat are dripping off your brow – that no matter how steamy it is now, winter will return. As hard as it is to imagine when the sun is beaming down and the patios are open, there will come a day, you remind yourself, when both of those things disappear. That day is here. And despite the fact that you knew it would come, chances are you're no more prepared for its arrival than you were last year.

I was born in this country and more than 40 true North winters later I'm still not a fan. Each fall, as I watch the last of the leaves fall from the trees, I'm filled with dreaded thoughts:

"Will it snow tomorrow? The day after?"

"When will they start to talk in terms of wind-chill?"

"How soon until the kids' have lost their first set of gloves and are smothered in tubs of Vick's Vapo Rub while they hack out a lung in their room?"

This fall has been even worse. The farmer's almanac predictions that this winter will be "worse than last year" – which by my recollection lasted about eight months and threatened the opening of summer camp – is only adding to my pending blues.

"What's a warm-blooded Canadian girl with no booked ticket to international sunshine to do?" I wondered, and so I found out.

Now I'm sharing my travel solutions for kindred winter weather-hating spirits with you. Don't thank me now! Sip on that mint tea, cuddle in that blanket by the fire, stock up on warm socks and get to planning your Canadian winter escape. We'll catch up when (if?) the sun comes back.

The Okanagan, BC



Come for: *Warmer Temperatures*

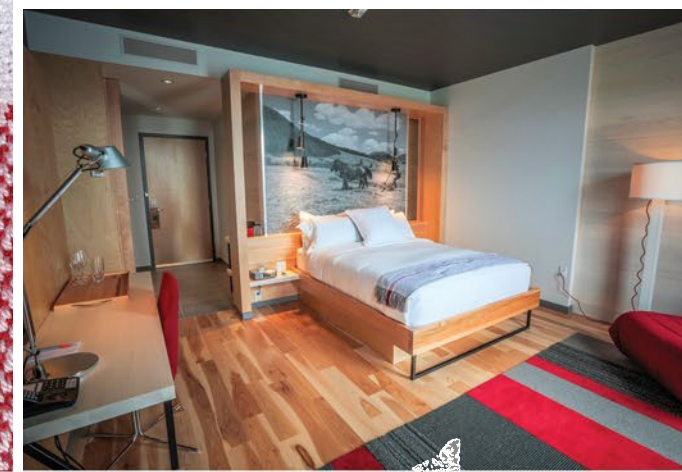
What you need to know: The Okanagan region is Canada's Napa Valley equivalent. Think fruit trees, local gourmet cuisine and acres upon acres of some of the best vineyards in the world. The result is a gourmand's bliss. But what makes it a must-visit winter destination? Osoyoos. Located in the South Okanagan (think close to the American border), Osoyoos is home to Canada's only desert. When most of us are suffering with -20 temperatures and wind chills to boot, they'll be sitting pretty at a relatively balmy plus 1 and sunshine.

Where you need to go: Stay in one of the one-, two- or three-bedroom suites at *the Watermark Beach Resort* (watermarkbeachresort.com) for lakefront views and the space to stretch out and enjoy them. Lower two-level villas offer up barbecues to grill on too (What? We're Canadian!). Prefer to stay in to eat? No problem. A fully outfitted kitchen is better than home. Love to dine out? Local produce is highlighted at the on-site wine bar and restaurant. Fill your days with scenic drives, long leisurely walks or absolutely nothing at all.

How to get there: Fly to Kelowna (WestJet, Air Canada) and take your time driving south to Osoyoos, a less than two hour ride.



Images courtesy Hotel La Ferme, photography by Valerte Busque and André Olivier Lyrat (opposite page)



Charlevoix, Quebec

Come For: *The Food*

What you need to know: You know what happens when you pair small-town charm, passionate farmers, chefs who appreciate where they are and a millionaire who loves his hometown? *Hôtel La Ferme*. The award-winning property created with the vision of Cirque du Soleil founder Daniel Gauthier is the ultimate in über-local, Canadiana-luxe. The property is only one part of the Le Massif group of attractions that are a labour of love for the hometown that gave him his start. His innovation is your reward. At Les Labours, renowned chef David Forbes spins the gold in the fields you can see from your hotel room into dream-inducing dishes (Poutine with pan-seared foie gras?!?! Mais oui!) on your plate. In the winter, when the space comes alive with ski buffs who take the local train to the highest vertical drops east of the Rockies, the green lawns out front are transformed into ice rinks

where a shared appreciation of creative thinking and art allow a mix of locals, uber-riche and student populations to mingle easily.

Where you need to go: Don't expect to move much. Dishes are rich and you won't want to move beyond the comfy artisanal offerings and lounges placed strategically throughout the property. Keep it simple and shuffle down to the Spa du Verger where you can sit or lie and be pampered with a host of massage or body treatments. The thermal experience is also worth a try. A walk out to the main street will reveal art galleries that will wow and views that remind you why Quebec remains one of the most beautiful parts of this country.

How to get there: Fly Porter to Quebec City from downtown Toronto (WestJet and Air Canada also fly here) and then either rent a car for the one-hour drive north or book onto the gourmet Le Massif train (lemassif.com) and start your indulgence early.



Images (this page): courtesy Watermark Beach Resort;



Banff, Alberta

Come for: *The Views*

What you need to know: If there is anything at all that winter has going for it, it has to be the beauty of fresh white snow on jagged mountain peaks. There is no better place to appreciate that than from inside a room with big windows and a roaring fireplace. But a very close second would have to be Banff's hot springs (hotsprings.ca). The hot springs, located high above Banff National Park and just close enough to the kitschy-cool town of Banff, offer the perfect respite from a day of snowshoeing or shopping. From your vantage point you can take in the ridiculous surrounding panorama of the UNESCO World Heritage site, celebrate the centuries-old ties of the area to Canada's First Nation ancestors and laugh while thinking of the suckers making do with a backyard hot tub and view of their neighbours back home.

Where you need to go: The area is stunning. Majestic mountains, Glacier peaks and incredible forested trails make up Canada's oldest national park (est. 1885). Make the most of the visit with a trip up to nearby Lake Louise. The drive through the park will awe and a stay at the fabulous **Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise** (fairmont.com/LakeLouise) seals the deal, located inside Banff National Park on the shores of the gorgeous emerald lake. Take it all in from horseback, on a guided mountain exploration hike or from the comfort of your room where newly renovated one and two-bedroom suites offer the height of luxury.

How to get there: Fly to Calgary International Airport on WestJet or Air Canada and make the picturesque 1.5-hour drive (120 km) out to Jasper. Or spread out the luxe feel with a two-day trip on the Rocky Mountaineer that includes BC (rockymountaineer.com).



Images courtesy of Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, courtesy of Ten Spa (opposite page)



Winnipeg, Manitoba



Come for: *The Pampering*

What you need to know: The Prairies likely aren't the first place you'd rush off to when trying to avoid the cold, but think about it: Who better to know how to keep warm than the communities of people who often have the roughest winters in the country? Case in point: **Ten Spa** (tenspa.ca). The award-winning spa is home to one of the country's best Hamam experiences and has been described as "the hottest, steamiest, most exotic place in Canada." Set inside the Fort Garry hotel (it takes up the entire 10th floor – hence its name) the hamam is a throwback to the Ottoman Empire when being "clean" involved a series of steps that ranged from toxin removal to increased blood circulation. After some warm mint tea you will be guided by an attendant through a series of treatments – self applied or with the assistant's help – depending on the package you choose. The entire process takes place inside an ambient steam and heated marble room. The end result is skin that feels soft and supple.

Where you need to go: No further. But when they politely ask you to leave at closing consider grabbing some fresh air and heading over to the city's newest offering: the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (museumforhumanrights.ca). Opened this summer, it combines breathtaking architecture and galleries that aim to offer the visitor the perspectives of various persecuted groups from around the world. It will remind you of all we have to be grateful for in this country and highlight the miles we still have to go.

How to get there: Both Air Canada and WestJet fly to Winnipeg.