



ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN HESHKA

If it's Tuesday, *it must* be snowing in Saskatchewan

From Whistler's vast expanses of pristine powder to the modern cityscapes of Montreal and Quebec, expert outfitter **CARI GRAY** reveals her top picks for winter in Canada. Pack a warm coat, a pair of snow boots and a sense of adventure

Winter is Canada's longest season, and growing up on the Canadian prairie gave me plenty of time to perfect all outdoor activities. Skating rinks froze naturally. Ice forts and cross-country ski tracks stayed in place for months. Toboggans launched like rocket ships down frozen riverbanks. Sleigh rides took place right on the streets. One of my first jobs was with Travel Manitoba. After that, I spent my career as a tour operator for Canadian-based Butterfield & Robinson until I left a few years ago to start my own private tour business, Gray & Co.

Through my work in active travel I've winter surfed near Tofino, gone ice canyoning near Banff, even snow golfed at Sun Peaks. What follows is my carefully curated list of favourites culled from more than 80 noteworthy Canadian winter destinations, crossing the continent from west to east.





They'll fly a small group by
helicopter to an uncharted virginal
slope of bottomless powder

Heli-skiing above
the clouds at Whistler

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Whistler and Blackcomb

North of Vancouver

The new and panoramic PEAK 2 PEAK Gondola, a mind-blowing 4.4km-long, 11-minute ride, connects Whistler, where this year's Winter Olympic Games were held, to Blackcomb. Whistler is the largest ski area in North America, with more than 3,275 hectares of tree and glacier skiing, 200-plus marked trails and 37 chair lifts. The runs off the Crystal chair are not to be missed. For snowboarders, any of the four terrain parks are a must. Blackcomb's

Whistler Sliding Centre

(whistlerslidingcentre.com)

offers bobsled and skeleton rides on the world's fastest and most technical course. Outside town,

Whistler Olympic Park

(whistlerolympicpark.com)

grooms 69 kilometres for classic and skate skiing as well as snowshoeing. The

guides to get, who know the mountains inside out, are at

Extremely Canadian

(extremelycanadian.com).

For personal instruction, world ski champion Lauralee Bowie has opened a ski school

(lessons, from \$240; +1 888 263 6666; skiadventures.net), and expert instructors Suzie Black and Matt Mohr can be booked through WhistlerBlackcomb.com.

Après-ski, the very well planned pedestrian village has fun shops, among them Canadian-based Roots, lululemon athletica and local Rogers chocolates. CAN-SKI carries all the best gear as well as luxe brands such as Prada. Restaurants worth a visit include Araxi, Barefoot Bistro, Sushi Village and the Rim Rock Café, which is in nearby Creekside.

The **Fairmont Château Whistler** (rooms, from \$215; 4599 Chateau Blvd; +1 800 606 8244; fairmont.com), at the base of Blackcomb,

is a favourite among families. Nearby lies the sophisticated yet low-key **Four Seasons Whistler** (from \$255; 4591 Blackcomb Way; +1 604 935 3400; fourseasons.com), where ski

concierges gather at the bottom of the runs to store your equipment. Concierge Hana Lynn can make anything happen, from reserving the best table to booking excursions like zip-line trekking and snowcat touring.

Tofino

Vancouver Island

Located on the west coast of Vancouver Island and part of the Pacific Rim National Park (a UNESCO biosphere), Tofino redefines the traditional notion of Canada in winter with temperate old-growth rain forests, horizontal rain showers and no snow. Windswept beaches stretching over two kilometres, with towering ocean waves, enable it to host the O'Neill Coldwater Classic professional surfing

unique ranch experience on a 100-year-old homestead. **Echo Valley Ranch and Spa** (from \$225; 10635 Jesmond Rd; +1 800 253 8831; evranch.com) is near the Fraser River Canyon in the heart of the Cariboo Region, known for its giant fir and pine forests, beautiful grasslands and the Marble Mountain range. Comprised of two log lodges and four private ranch cabins, the resort features a heated indoor pool and a fitness centre. The spa's signature treatment is a traditional Thai massage. Other indoor pursuits include cooking demonstrations for those wanting a break from snowmobiling, cross-country skiing or ice fishing for rainbow trout.

Revelstoke

Selkirk and Monashee Mountain Range

Opened in December 2007,

Revelstoke Mountain Resort

(rooms, from \$95; revelstokemountainresort.com)

is Canada's newest

It place to stay and ski.

Nestled among the

Selkirk and Monashee

mountain ranges,

Revelstoke Mountain

offers the highest

vertical drop in North

America and the

chance to experience

heli-, snowcat-, lift-

and backcountry skiing

all from the same base.

A helicopter can land

outside your room and

take you to deep but

fluffy virgin powder

on steep terrain. The

Stoke chairlift accesses a

run called

Snow Rodeo for intermediate

fall-line

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Revelstoke

Outdoors Centre (ROC)

books day

heli- or cat-skiing,

mountain awareness

courses, tandem

paragliding, plus hard-

to-come-by gear

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also hook you up with

Dan Skolnick,

the best guide on the

mountain. For

the deepest powder,

Erik Suchovs at

Selkirk Tangiers Helicopter Skiing (rooms,

from \$690; +1 800 663 7080; selkirk-tangiers.com)

is the guide to get. **The Nelsen Lodge** (rooms, from \$115; 2950 Camozzi Rd; +1 250 814 5000; sandmansignature.com), just



Dogsledding near Whistler

championship, which takes place right

in front of the romantic **Wickaninnish**

Inn (from \$325; Osprey Ln at Chesterman Beach;

+1 800 333 4604; wickinn.com). The Wick, as

it's often called, offers rooms with

fireplaces and double soaking tubs with

a view. It's also where the Ancient

Cedars Spa and Pointe restaurant are

located. Director Charles McDiarmid

recommends "chocolate croissants with

a large latte in front of a roaring fire

in the Driftwood Lounge, which looks

down Chesterman Beach".

Echo Valley, Cariboo Region

Marble Mountain Range

Two and a half hours from Kamloops, near Clinton, British Columbia, Norm and Nan Dove have created a

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+1 250 814 5000; sandmansignature.com), just

steps from the Revelation gondola,

offers a range of accommodations, from

studios to luxury four-bedroom homes.



Snowshoeing near Lake Louise

You can snowshoe with a mountain heritage guide or hike through an ice canyon

Kicking Horse

Purcell Mountain Range

Located in the heart of the Purcell Mountains near Golden, British Columbia, Kicking Horse Mountain Resort validly boasts “champagne powder” as well as Canada’s highest elevation restaurant at the **Eagle’s Eye Lodge** (rooms, from \$1,150; 1500 Kicking Horse Trail; +1 866 754 5425; kickinghorseresort.com). Situated atop the mountain, its two luxury suites come with a butler and guaranteed morning-fresh trails. This mountain is best suited for expert skiers and boarders, and top guide Andy Walton offers unique programs in avalanche awareness, route finding in big mountain terrain and how to challenge ski lines aggressively yet safely.

Nipika, Radium Hot Springs

Kootenay National Park

Close to Radium Hot Springs lies a hidden jewel, proving that off the grid can still be luxurious. **Nipika Mountain Resort** (from \$225; 9200 Settlers Rd; +1 877 647 4525; nipika.com) borders Kootenay National Park and features eight log-crafted lodges and cabins spread across a meadow. Each one is solar- and micro-hydropowered. Private chefs will pack a lunch for those making a day of snowshoeing along wooded glades and rushing streams, or skiing the more than 55 kilometres of groomed Nordic trails. The woodburning sauna and hot tub offer respite for tired limbs. Director Lyle Wilson, a former Canadian Olympic and world championships coach, offers instructional cross-country ski weeks for novice to advanced skiers.

Fernie

Near Calgary

There are many excellent winter options for savvy families in the interior of British Columbia, including Big White, near Kelowna, and Sun Peaks Resort, near Kamloops. But my family’s favourite is **Fernie Alpine Resort** (from \$85; +1 877 333 2339; skifernie.com), near Calgary, for its small, low-key ski village and wide, varied terrain. All runs here lead to the same base, which is handy for keeping track of little ones. The slopeside **Lizard Creek Lodge** (from \$140; 5346 Highline Dr; +1 877 228 1948; lizardcreek.com) has breathtaking mountain views and a lively outdoor pool. Nearby is **Island Lake Cat Skiing** (rooms, from \$159; 602A Second Ave; +1 888 422 8754; islandlakecatskiing.com), which has been in operation for more than 20

Ice climbing in Banff



years and features over 2,800 hectares of backcountry skiing in and around the Lizard Range. The property features 800-year-old cedar trees and high alpine bowls with deep, dry snowpacks. In addition to a spa and outdoor hot tubs, the resort features a 3,000-bottle wine selection.

Monashee and Bugaboo

Part of the Purcell Mountain Range

Hans Gmoser invented heli-skiing back in 1965, flying a small group by helicopter to an uncharted virginal slope of bottomless powder snow, then picking them up thousands of vertical feet later. With that he started **Canadian Mountain Holidays Heli-Skiing** (from \$2,000; 217 Bear St; +1 800 661 0252; canadianmountainholidays.com), now the most experienced heli-ski company in the business, with 11 lodges and access to the Bugaboo Range, the Selkirk Range and the Monashee Mountains – the greatest amount of ski terrain available anywhere in the world. Although heli-skiing remains a dream for most recreational skiers, top guide and instructor Roko Koell

makes powder skiing easy for beginners. CMH's Valemount Lodge hosts only ten skiers per week and has a private helicopter available for unlimited skiing. The CMH Nomads tour flies four skiers to six heli-skiing areas that span the Monashee and Selkirk ranges.

fairmont.com), which overlooks the massive Victoria Glacier. From the hotel you can arrange numerous activities, like snowshoeing with a mountain heritage guide, dogsledding on an Inuit sled, skating through an ice castle on Lake Louise, hiking through an ice canyon or ice-creating along the Great Divide. It's also worth trying out traditional wooden skis on the Hickory Skee tour. Among the other top places to stay near the lake are the **Deer Lodge** (from \$95; 109 Lake Louise Dr, Banff; +1 403 522 3991; crmr.com) and the very chic **Post Hotel** (from \$260; 200 Pipestone Rd; +1 800 661 1586; posthotel.com), home to one of the finest restaurants in all of Canada, with 27,000-plus bottles of wine in the cellar.

ALBERTA

Banff

In Canada's Rocky Mountains

Celebrating 125 years, Banff National Park is Canada's first national park and a UNESCO World Heritage site. About 130 kilometres from Calgary in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, it offers every winter activity

imaginable, including skiing at nearby Mount Norquay. The lively town of Banff features natural hot springs, unique shops, art galleries and the occasional elk wandering in from the nearby forest. Modelled after a Scottish castle, the magnificent **Fairmont Banff Springs** (from \$250; 405 Spray Ave; +1 866 540 4406; fairmont.com) dominates the skyline. Concierge Rory Zolob can arrange everything from sleigh rides to dinner reservations at the excellent Bison Mountain Bistro. Also in town is the top-notch **Buffalo Mountain Lodge** (from \$260; 700 Tunnel Mountain Dr; +1 403 762 2400; crmr.com) and its delicious Sleeping Buffalo restaurant.

Lake Louise

Near Banff, in Canada's Rockies

Only 45 minutes past Banff is Lake Louise, one of the largest ski areas in North America, with more than 1,700 hectares of land, four mountain faces and famed back bowls. Just minutes away, in the heart of Banff National Park, is the **Fairmont Château Lake Louise** (from \$310; 111 Lake Louise Dr, Banff; +1 866 540 4413;

Jasper

In the northernmost part of the Rockies

Located at the end of the Icefields Parkway, a three-hour stretch of highway that starts in Banff and is known as one of the most scenic drives in the world, is Jasper National Park. The place to stay here is the iconic **Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge** (from \$195; Old Lodge Rd; +1 866 540 4454; fairmont.com). Spread across 280 hectares, each cabin has between one and eight bedrooms and features woodburning fireplaces. With its new \$6.7 million spa and the Moose's Nook Northern Grill, which specialises in bison, the Fairmont makes a great base from which to explore.

MANITOBA

Churchill, Hudson Bay

North of Winnipeg

In November polar bears congregate in large numbers along the shores of Hudson Bay, waiting for ice to form so they can begin their annual hunt. North of Winnipeg lie the very exclusive **Churchill Wild lodges** (+1 866 846 9453; churchillwild.com). Guests fly from Winnipeg to Churchill, then board a chartered flight over the tundra to the lodges. At the **Seal River Heritage and Dymond Lake Lodges** (from \$5,405; north of Churchill on Hudson Bay, Kleefeld; +1 866 846 9453), owners Mike and Jeanne Reimer insulate guests from the arctic cold with fluffy duvets and warm fireplaces. Wildlife photographer Dennis Fast leads photo safaris among caribou, Arctic foxes, wolves, moose and snowy owls. The aurora borealis puts



The Fairmont Banff Spring's Willow Stream Spa

(from \$190; 355 McGill; +1 866 380 2202; hotelstpaul.com) and the elegant **St James Hotel** (from \$380; 355 St-Jacques St; +1 514 841 3111; hotellestjames.com) are excellent places to warm up and settle in. Top wine bars for unwinding are Les Cavistes and Bouchonné Comptoir à Vin. For dining, it's the romantic Club Chasse Et Pêche or the more lively Chez L'Epicier in the heart of the old city. Just outside Montreal are the Laurentian Mountains. Mont Saint Saveur is home to Canada's only Alpine coasting experience, where sliders ride on toboggans for over a kilometre along steel rails at speeds of more than 30 kilometres per hour. Nearby Mont Tremblant is one of eastern North America's biggest ski resorts. Based around a colourful pedestrian village and Lake Tremblant, it features great skiing, snowboarding, sleigh rides and skating. Both slopeside and by the lakeshore, the **Quintessence Resort** (from \$335; 3004 Chemin de la Chapelle; +1 866 425 3400; hotelquintessence.com) offers 30 high-end suites, each with woodburning fireplaces.

Québec City

St Lawrence River Valley

More than 400 years old, Québec City's unique architecture and winding streets make it the most romantic place to celebrate winter in Canada. The **Fairmont Chateau Frontenac** (from \$195; 1 Rue de Carrières; +1 866 540 4460; fairmont.com) overlooks the St Lawrence River and features a miniature maple "sugar shack" near the 80m Glissade de la Terrasse toboggan ride. In the heart of the old city, the **Auberge Saint-Antoine** (from \$145; 8 St-Antoine St; +1 888 692 2211; saint-antoine.com) is Québec's finest hotel, perfectly integrating modern style with historic accents. Its restaurant, Panache, is a treat, as are gourmet hot spots St-Amour, L'Echaudé, La Fenouillère and Ristorante il Matto. Every January a new rendition of the popular Hôtel de Glace, or Ice Hotel, made from chunks of ice but containing fireplaces and fur-lined beds, is unveiled. Cross-country skiing can be done in the heart of Québec City for more than 12 kilometres along the historic Plains of Abraham, the battleground of the French and the English in the 1700s. Nearby Mont-Ste-Anne is for downhill skiing. At Place d'Youville an ice-skating rink is ringed by the old walls. And from the end of January through mid-February, Québec City celebrates Carnival (carnaval.qc.ca) with special emphasis on an international ice sculpture competition, canoe races, dogsledding and music. ■

on a nightly northern lights show; in March dogsled racing takes centre stage with the 402km Hudson Bay Quest competition.

ONTARIO & QUEBEC

Ottawa and Gatineau Park
Near the border of Québec

At just under eight kilometres, the Rideau Canal Skateway in Ottawa, Canada's capital, is the largest naturally frozen rink in the world. Skaters glide past ice sculptures, Canadian parliament buildings and the National Arts Centre all the way to the Dows Lake Pavilion. (Bring your own skates or rent a pair from on-ice kiosks.) For post-skate cocktails, the place to be is Zoe's Lounge, overlooking the canal at the **Fairmont Château Laurier** (rooms, from \$150; 1 Rideau St; +1 866 540 4410; fairmont.com).

The newly renovated Westin also offers great city views. The National Gallery of Canada is famous for Inuit art and its Group of Seven artists. The ByWard Market offers four square blocks of more than 120 places to eat, drink and shop. Great places to dine are Restaurant e18hteen, housed in a 19th-century limestone building, and Le Café at the National Arts Centre.

Just minutes outside Ottawa, across the Québec border, Gatineau Park offers 200 kilometres of trails for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. An hour from Ottawa, the magnificent thirties red cedar log-built **Fairmont Le Château Montebello** (from \$210; 392 Notre Dame; +1 866 540 4462; fairmont.com) is arguably the most impressive resort in eastern Canada.

Montreal

The Laurentian Mountains

From January through April the charming cobblestoned streets of Old Montreal are best explored with snow boots. The stylish **Hotel St Paul**