

WINTER WANDERS

If you're feeling the need for a change of scenery, these city and country escapes will help shake off the pandemic blahs



Clockwise from top left: ScandinaVe Spa in Whistler, Extremely Canadian leads guided skiing, Lighthouse Park is a nature escape within sight of downtown Vancouver, the Spozex Winter Feast, a hearty burger at Pourhouse, Chinatown Storytelling Centre, CHAD CHODLACK, MIKE CRANE, ALASDAIR DOUGLAS, CATHERINE DAWSON MARCH/THE GLOBE AND MAIL, MARK YAMMINE

Enjoy salmon, stories and savoury bites in Vancouver, or get knee-deep in snow and culture in Whistler

VANCOUVER

Winter fans often head straight to nearby mountains for snow-based activities, but the city, and its seasonally mild weather (particularly when compared with the rest of the country), offers plenty to explore – and eat. Just when you think you've recovered from an indulgent December, Dine Out Vancouver pops up, running for the second half of January (Jan. 14-31) and enticing the culinarily curious with exclusive meals and food-focused experiences such as gelato making classes. This year, the event toasts its 20th year (dineoutvancouver.com). Has that whet your appetite? Read on for more to explore in town.

DO Local tour company Rockwood Adventures' Rainforest Bathing, Wellness and Salmon Adventure is a mindful way to beat the winter blahs. A guide leads guests through Lighthouse Park, on undulating trails that wind past towering Douglas firs and cedar trees, stopping to explain the Japanese art of forest bathing, or Shirin Yoku. You'll be asked to explore the forest through your senses – even taking off your shoes to explore touch through your feet, if you're inclined. When open (visits are temporarily paused because of the pandemic), there's also a stop at the Capilano Salmon Hatchery to learn about the work being done to sustain the species. Afterwards, to get you looking as good outside as you feel inside, head to Chi, the spa at the Shangri-La, for the Sangle de Fruta treatment, a massage using products from the Bowen Island, B.C., skin care company. rockwoodadventures.com; shangri-la.com

SEE In the heart of Vancouver's Chinatown, the recently opened Chinatown Storytelling Centre is a chance to learn diverse stories about this community – not just of hardships but of resilience and victories. Through anecdotes and histories of community members – from the head tax to iconic store fronts – the centre also tells the story of the city. Several interactive exhibits are on site, including a recreation of the photo studio of Yachow Chow, a celebrated photographer who first opened up shop in 1906 and was known for his props, such as pocket watches and books, which helped portrait sitters look successful in the photos that were sent back home. chinatownstorytellingcentre.org

EAT AND DRINK There's no shortage of options for comfort meals in the city, whether it's Gastown's Pourhouse, which specializes in burgers, or the Chikadee Room in Juke, a cocktail-focused snack bar adjacent to Juke Fried Chicken. For drinks, the Keefer Yard offers playful and creative cocktails – mini-putt too – across the street from Juke. For something sweet, don't miss Kouign Café, which fuses French and Asian flavours to create baked goods out of this world. pourhousevancouver.com; chikadeerom.com; jukefriedchicken.com; thekeeferyard.com; kouign.com

STAY The Fairmont Pacific Rim offers stunning views of Vancouver Harbour and lots to do on site should the weather be too dreary to head outdoors. Relax at the heated rooftop pool and jacuzzi, get inspired at the on-site Pacific Gallery, exhibiting Green Light Red Light, a collection of works by Douglas Coupland, or give your taste buds a trip to Italy with a meal at Giovane Bacaro, at the hotel on street level. The menu is inspired by Venice's basic neighbourhood joints that specialize in snacks, small bites and stellar wine options. fairmont.com; giovanebacaro.com

—MALINIA SIDDIQI

The writer was a guest of Destination Vancouver. The organization did not review or approve the story before publication.

WHISTLER

Snowfall is a magical thing in this mountain town. It's like living in a postcard. Every bough of every fir tree sags under the weight of a perfect pillow of snow. When the clouds lift and the sun shines, the surrounding glaciated mountains take your breath away – you will never tire of this view. Sure, the skiing at Whistler Blackcomb is legendary with more than 200 marked trails and 3,307 hectares of skiable terrain. Even who've been coming here for decades haven't hit every corner. But the mountains are open to everyone who makes the effort to enjoy them.

DO Upgrade your ski day substantially with an Extremely Canadian guide. Their clout – they've been here 28 years – is as cool as the company name, and they are keen to share their big-mountain skiing secrets. Plus, these guides can short-cut lift lines for clients (and that's an unbeatable bonus). Got kids? Hop in a taxi for a 10-minute drive to Coogach Mountain where you'll find the enchanted forest of Vallea Lumina. The dazzling light show and mythic storytelling as you climb up and down forest trails and over rushing creeks will blow their minds (and probably yours). extremelycanadian.com; vallealumina.com

SEE Before heading to the thermal wonders of ScandinaVe Spa to soak your aches and pains, spend a couple of hours at the Audain Art Museum. It holds a treasure trove of B.C. art (and until Feb. 2) features the touring Jean-Paul Riopelle exhibit that explores how Northern Canada and its people influenced his work. The museum is hidden amid a pine grove but you won't miss the striking piece of public art recently erected outside: Haida carver James Hart's red-tinged bronze, the Three Watchmen, sits atop an aluminum wrap designed by Xwaxlactan of the Squamish Nation and Levi Nelson (Svyyan) of the Lil'wat Nation. Bring the kids: Children under 18 are free. scandinave.com; audainartmuseum.com

EAT AND DRINK In February, plan your visit around a Friday night Spozex Winter Feast at the Squamish and Lil'wat Cultural Centre. Guests are welcomed with traditional songs (and taught an animal dance as an ice breaker). After a short film and guided tour of the art and exhibits, you'll dine on cedar-plank salmon and venison stew (amongst other yummy dishes) while watching Squamish Nation and Lil'wat Nation performers in a grand circular hall with enormous windows and cedar beams that's based on an Isten dwelling. On Whistler mountain, raise a glass or two at 1,825 metres at Umbrella Bar. Skiers and foot traffic (take the Blackcomb Gondola to Roundhouse Lodge) enjoy a nearly 360-degree view of the ranges. slcc.ca/feast; whistler-blackcomb.com

STAY Two options depending on your escape plans: Powderhounds can book newly renovated Gold-level rooms at Fairmont Chateau Whistler. Blackcomb's new Winter Den restaurant is a cozy spot with a creative menu, everything from duck doughnuts to vegan cheese plates (the latter will change your mind on the tastiness of vegan cheese seriously). fairmont.com; nitakelodge.com —CATHERINE DAWSON MARCH

The writer was a guest of Tourism Whistler. It did not review or approve the story before publication.



Clockwise from top left:

The Loop skate trail at Bannerman Park, the dining room at Terre, St. John's Farmers' Market, the view across Trinity Bay toward Dildo, The Doctor's House Inn and Spa, speakeasy Underbelly located in the basement of the Yellow Bally Pub, NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR TOURISM, ISTOCK

Eat, drink and be merry in Canada's easternmost capital, and enjoy picturesque views and multiple ski trails in Dildo

ST JOHN'S

Even if rain, sleet or snow is blowing in off the harbour, St. John's always heats up in the winter. Along Water and George streets in the heart of the city, light and music spill onto the sidewalk, and you'll never have to walk more than a block to find steaming seafood or an upscale take on favourites such as fish and chips or jiggs dinner. And wherever you go, you'll find some of the warmest people in the world.

DO At Bannerman Park, a five-hectare urban oasis just uphill from the busy streets of the city's downtown, you can skate The Loop, a serpentine route purpose-built for city skaters when the park was recently revitalized. Glide through the afternoon, or come at night, when vintage street lamps cast a cozy glow and keep things going till 10 p.m. If you'd rather stay planted on the ground, hit the 300-plus kilometres of the East Coast Trail. Linked together via a network of paths, the trail traverses sheer cliffs, fjords and resettled communities, and visits lighthouses and fishing villages, as well as Signal Hill. It's a perfect place for a winter hike or snowshoe. stjohns.ca; eastcoasttrail.com

SEE Open through the winter, town and country come together every Saturday at the St. John's Farmers' Market. Come for lunch – you'll find everything from traditional salt cod to a steaming bowl of Vietnamese pho – browse handmade soap, pottery and knits, plus produce and other fresh food, and stay for the tunes. In true Newfoundland style, musicians play their favourites here for free. stjohns.ca

EAT AND DRINK At Terre, recently added to a prestigious national list of best restaurants, you'll find a menu inspired by the surrounding land and sea, prepared using traditional cooking methods. For something more casual, with the most bars per capita in Canada, you'll have your choice of pubs. Grab a pint at local favourite Shamrock City, which promises live music every night of the week. Or descend the steps down to the Underbelly, which claims to be the city's only speakeasy, and one of its oldest rooms, where they whip up a cocktail that matches your mood (or the weather). terrerestaurant.com; shamrockcity.ca; yellowbellybrewery.com the underbelly

STAY Cool, without being too cool, JAG is a music-themed hotel where hallways and guest rooms are decorated with concert posters, and public spaces play a carefully curated soundtrack. Service is friendly, rooms are comfortable, many with cushy couches and, best of all, you can park your car in their garage, out of the snow and walk everywhere downtown. steelhotels.com

DILDO

Yes, there's definitely a joke here. A historic village scattered along the shores of Trinity Bay, about an hour's drive west of St. John's, Dildo had a moment in the spotlight a few years back on Jimmy Kimmel's late-night show. For his efforts, including building a Hollywood-style sign overlooking the town, Kimmel was made honorary mayor. Anyone here will be happy to tell you that story as you walk along the waterfront, from the marina to the shops in town. Then, venture out to the winter wonderland in the surrounding hills.

DO Sled, ski or snowshoe on a local network of trails north of town. Or simply bring your own sled and glide to the bottom of the broad hill in front of the stately George House. From the top, you'll have some of the best views in town – village, town and that famous sign up on the hill – followed by a long, leisurely slide to the bottom. newfoundlandandlabrador.com/top-destinations/dildo

SEE Drive up the "cardiac coast," through the picturesque seaside villages of Heart's Delight, Heart's Desire and Heart's Content. Finish at Grates Cove, which feels a little like the end of the world, at the tip of a bald, treeless peninsula. Visit the studio there to dine on authentic Louisiana cuisine, take an art workshop, or take a frigid al fresco seaweed bath, overlooking the sea ice out on the bay. gratescovestudios.ca

EAT AND DRINK Order a Blue Eyed Buoy or Ice Da Bye PA, two of the favourite craft beers at the Dildo Brewing Company, which you should pair with upscale pub grub. And while, officially, the museum downstairs is closed in winter, if you call ahead, someone may just open it up for you to take a trip back hundreds of years of local fishing history – including some speculation on the curious name of the town. dildobrewingco.com

STAY Sprawling across 300 acres of oceanfront property just to the north in Green's Harbour, The Doctor's House is the perfect place to hole up for a wintry weekend. Sure, there's a nearby network of trails, but you're probably better off just enjoying a spa treatment before ordering room service and sinking deep in your suite's deep-soaker tub. doctorshouseinn.ca

—TIM JOHNSON

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