



Welcome to Hot Spots!

Make Winter Wonderful

Celebrate the season and take the family on a wild ride to some of the world's best cold-weather destinations



Adults often think about winter with a mixture of dread and resignation, focused as they are on such mundane concerns as shoveling snow out of the driveways and scraping ice off windshields. In contrast, their kids rush to the window at the first sign of a snowflake, delighted at the prospect of toboggan rides and snowball fights. Perhaps many of us could learn a lesson from our kids, and celebrate the season instead of huddling under the blankets from December to March. There is certainly no shortage of appealing winter vacation possibilities.

Ski resorts are among the most child-friendly destinations, not least because most of them offer a range of amusements for those family members who are terrified by the very idea of strapping two narrow planks to their feet and hurtling down a mountain. The Lake Tahoe region on the California/Nevada border, for instance, offers a huge range of resorts for every taste. Teens will be keen to ride the gondola to Adventure Park, where they can indulge in snowshoeing and snow tubing, while younger children may find ice skating on one of several rinks in the valley more to their taste. For easy access to 4,000 acres of open-bowl skiing, reserve a room at the Resort at Squaw Creek, where floor-to-ceiling windows provide unparalleled mountain views.



Another good pick for families is Whistler, British Columbia, a two-hour drive from Vancouver. The bustling village offers just about everything an adventurous kid could wish for, from a teen-focused ski school to snowmobiling trails.





For an adventure they'll remember for years, try ziplining, where participants in harnesses glide from treetop to treetop along sturdy wires. For après-ski entertainment, there's an eight-screen movie theatre and a spacious youth drop-in center with ping-pong tables, video games and a big-screen TV. And during the Whistler Christmas festival (December 16, 2006 to January 2, 2007), families can enjoy a tree-lighting ceremony, carolers, dog sled races and other kid-friendly activities.

Lake Placid, New York, draws families from across the Eastern Seaboard. Visitors can watch ski jumpers and bobsledders, hurtle down the toboggan slide and, of course, ski. When outdoor sports lovers have had their fill of the slopes, there are lots of shopping and dining options to choose from. Those staying at the exclusive Lake Placid Lodge can curl up in front of the stone fireplace in their room with mugs of hot chocolate – the perfect place to share stories of the day's adventures as the long winter night closes in.



For something a little more exotic, families can head to the storied ski slopes of Switzerland.



Badrutts's Palace Hotel, in the sophisticated resort of St. Moritz, will charm the whole family. Perched high above a mountain lake, with the snowy Alps for a backdrop, it looks like a fanciful blend of a Swiss chalet and a fairy-tale castle. As well as providing lessons through its own ski school, Badrutts's gives guests the chance to watch or try some more unusual winter sports, including ice polo and curling.

Skiing is one of the most exciting ways to enjoy winter, but it is far from the only one. Around the world, festivals of every description give visitors and locals alike an excellent excuse to get outdoors.

The Winter Carnival in St. Paul, Minnesota (mid January to early February), is America's oldest winter festival – it will celebrate its 120th anniversary in 2007. Over the years, organizers have come up with countless ideas to amuse visitors of all ages, from ice sculpture competitions to treasure hunts through the snow.

Another state that really understands winter fun is Alaska, where the Anchorage Fur Rendezvous (mid-February to early March) gives visitors a glimpse of this state's adventurous spirit. There's a snowy foot race, sled-dog races and softball games on snowshoes, among many other activities. To sound like a local, don't call the festival by its full name – just ask people for directions to "Fur Rondy."

Another place that has come up with any number of ways to get through the winter in style is Canada. Carnival in Quebec City claims to be the world's largest winter festival, and it has



become decidedly more

family-friendly in recent years. Bonhomme Carnaval, a big mascot, presides over attractions that include canoe races across the ice-choked St. Lawrence River, parades, fireworks and an extensive children's village. For the best view of the festivities, stay at the Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac, a landmark hotel on a cliff overlooking the river.



In Ottawa, Canada's capital, the Winterlude festival gives visitors the chance to glide on the world's largest skating rink – a five-mile portion of the Rideau Canal that stretches from the foot of the gothic Parliament Buildings to the frozen expanse of Dows Lake. In between, skaters can see ice sculptors at work or eat a Beavertail (a flat, deep-fried pastry sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar).

For winter fun with a Scottish accent, head to Edinburgh for a series of winter festivals that run from late November to early January. The highlight is a giant street party on Hogmanay, or New Year's Eve, but there are all sorts of other amusements, from a reindeer garden to a German-themed toy market. The Balmoral hotel on Princes Street puts visitors in the thick of the action.



And for something completely different, check out the Arctic Light Film Festival in Kiruna, the northernmost city in Sweden (early December). Since there is only about an hour of real daylight in Kiruna in early December, locals decided to make the best of the darkness by screening Hollywood and independent movies in a range of unusual venues, including an ice theater (where warmly bundled patrons sit on reindeer-fur-padded ice chairs) and an old iron mine. It may not be the most traditional way to cope with temperatures that can drop to -20°F, but it will certainly give your kids something unusual and exciting to tell their friends about.

Cancun: Paradise Renewed



Just a year after Hurricane Wilma hit Cancun, the Mexican resort is very much alive, well and open for tourism. The Cancun region accounted for 28 percent of Mexico's tourism before Wilma hit, and the country has poured astonishing energy and resources into restoring the resort to its former glory.

About 85 percent of Cancun's restaurants have re-opened their doors, many popular nightclubs are once more spinning tunes for crowds of late-night revelers, and at least 17,000 hotel rooms are available.

"As the hotels are re-opening, they are filled with customers, and this demonstrates to us that

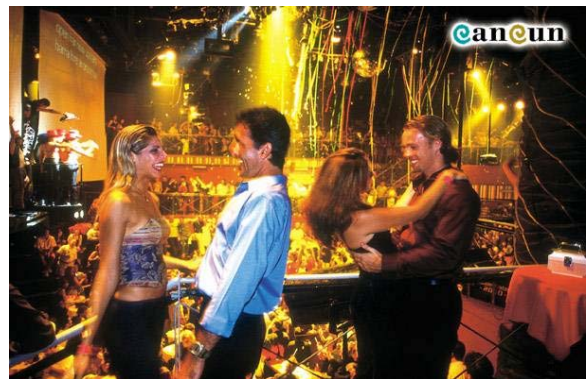


Cancun continues to be a destination in demand," says Artemio Santos Santos, CEO of the Cancun Convention and Visitors Bureau. In many cases, he adds, hotels have been upgraded to be even more luxurious than they were before the storm hit.

Cancun's international airport is Mexico's second busiest airport, after Mexico City's, and plans are in the works to build a third terminal to accommodate renewed demand from a wide range of North American and

European carriers.

Other aspects of Cancun's infrastructure – including water, electricity, streetlights and lawns in the hotel zone – have been brought back to their pre-hurricane state. Pools glisten with shining tiles, hotel rooms are bright with fresh paint and deck chairs have barely been used. The city bubbles with energy and enthusiasm.



In addition, much of what has always attracted visitors to the scenic region just beyond Cancun escaped Wilma largely unscathed. A short ferry ride from the city's hotel zone brings visitors to laid-back Isla Mujeres (Island of Women) where the white sand beaches are as beautiful as ever.



The Maya ruins at Tulum, 75 miles south of Cancun, continue to exert their mystical pull on visitors. Off the untouched beaches of Playa del Carmen, an hour from Cancun, travelers can still swim with dolphins or take a

ferry to the popular island of Cozumel for a relaxing day of scuba diving or shopping.

Of course, in Cancun itself, some work remains to be done. The hurricane washed away much of the sand from the resort's famous beaches into the ocean, and a \$19 million effort is underway to rebuild a 7.5 mile section of waterfront from Punta Nizuc to Punta Cancun.

Cancun's backers aren't content to simply restore damaged sites, however. Showing confidence in the city's revival, several developers are moving ahead with exciting new projects. The latest addition to the region's attractions is an 18-hole golf course designed by Greg Norman, which opened in spring 2006. It's part of a larger development, Playa Mujeres, that will eventually include at least four luxury hotels, two more golf courses, shopping and holiday villas.



Just a year after Wilma's onslaught, it seems clear that Cancun is back in business.

CultureCraze

The not-to-be-missed top culture destinations



Viewing an ancient ruin at dawn, as wisps of mist still cling to the old stones. Wielding a paintbrush or needle to try your hand at an unfamiliar art form. Finding yourself face to face with a world-famous painting in an elegant museum. Reliving a moment in history in the actual spot where it happened. Sampling a dish made with ingredients you have never heard of, and discovering it to be delicious. Listening to the haunting chords of an unfamiliar song drifting on the night air during an outdoor concert.

For many people, these are the reasons they travel: to escape the familiar patterns of their day-to-day lives and immerse themselves, if only briefly, in the sights and sounds and tastes of another place.

From the cobblestones of Boston to the temples of Kyoto, and from the lively streets of South America to the deserts of Egypt, the world is full of once-in-a-lifetime cultural experiences.

Paris: The City of Light

The city that captivated Hemingway and Toulouse-Lautrec has so much to offer cultural tourists that it's hard to know where to begin. There's the Louvre, of course, home to the *Mona Lisa* and the *Venus de Milo*. But for a somewhat less overwhelming experience, try one of the city's scores of specialist museums: the medieval Cluny Museum with its lovely tapestries portraying the story of the Lady and the Unicorn; the Rodin Museum, repository of famous sculptures such as *The Thinker* and *The Kiss*; or the National Picasso Museum, where the collection of the master's works spans six decades.



Ancient Treasure of the Middle East



For more than 40 centuries, the Great Pyramid at Giza – now part of Cairo, Egypt – was the tallest structure on earth. Countless people have been inspired to unravel its central mystery; just how did people in 2560BC move the two-ton blocks of stone that make up the pyramid, and how did they learn to place them in such precise formation that, more than four millennia later, it is still impossible to slide a knife between the stones.? Captivating ancient sites like this abound throughout the Middle East, from the Valley of the Kings in Egypt to the lost city of Petra in Jordan, carved into stone cliffs in the middle of a desert. At each one, questions arise that historians and archaeologists have spent lifetimes trying to answer. Few travelers visit these compelling site without coming away changed – without realizing that, despite all our modern technologies, we still have things to learn from long-ago peoples.

A Taste of Tango in Buenos Aires

There are few dances more romantic than the tango, and few places more romantic to learn the steps than Buenos Aires, Argentina, where the sultry dance was born. Visitors can take a “tango tour” through elegant neighborhoods such as Palermo and Recoleta, admiring streets of stately apartment blocks as well as visiting bars and restaurants where patrons still regularly dance the tango. Travelers who are fleet of foot can take tango lessons in one of the city's many schools, then round out the night with drinks on a starry terrace, watching the passing parade of fashionable residents. For a total immersion in the fabled dance, plan a trip during the Buenos Aires Tango Festival (late February – early March).



Finding Serenity in Japan

Buddhism has flourished in Japan since the sixth century, leading to the construction of many beautiful religious buildings and influencing almost everything in the culture from gardening to calligraphy. Visitors to modern Japan can follow the course of this evolution by visiting temples, gardens and art galleries.

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A good base for such explorations is the ancient city of Kyoto, where remarkable sites include the Moss Temple garden (founded in the sixth century) and the Sanjusangen-do Temple, with its stunning collection of 12th-century Buddhist statues. Visitors to Kyoto can also learn about Zen meditation gardens, take a calligraphy lesson and participate in a tea ceremony – all arts that Buddhism has profoundly shaped.

East Coast Cruising

From the thicket of 17th century spires overlooking the St. Lawrence River at Quebec City to the opulent mansions built two centuries later on the rocky shores of the Atlantic Ocean at Newport, Rhode Island, the historic architecture of eastern North America is a window into this region's wildly varied history. These days, one of the most relaxing and convenient ways to visit these evocative sites is by cruise ship. Depending on the itinerary, passengers will have the chance to follow the Freedom Trail to the Old South Meeting House and other famous Revolutionary War sites in Boston, or relive life in a British Colonial garrison with a visit to the Citadel in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Many sailings start or end in Montreal, where the cruise ship terminal lies just a stone's throw from domed stone buildings in Old Montreal that have been transformed into atmospheric restaurants and charming boutiques.

