

NATIONAL POST

Saturday, February 09, 2008

Darling, let's get away

Ten romantic spots to rekindle passion's fire

Presented by

NP Network
Blogs

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Published: Saturday, February 09, 2008



In the romantic life of every couple, a change of venue can have a highly salutary effect on a relationship. Herewith, 10 excellent spots to shake things up:

1. Wickaninnish Inn, Tofino, Vancouver Island Every room overlooks the Pacific, so couples can cling together as waves crash and gales howl during winter-storm season. The West Coast Romance package includes a hot breakfast delivered to your room. All you need to do is stoke the fire then return to bed for your own perfect storm.

Hot tip: The corner rooms have a double soaker tub with an inspiring view of the surging surf.

If you go: Fly to Victoria or take the ferry from Horseshoe Bay north of Vancouver to Nanaimo, then drive to Tofino or fly from Vancouver to Tofino on Orca Airways. flyorcair.com; wickinn.com; 1-800-333-4604; \$260 to \$975 (for the Romance Suite).

2. Auberge Saint-Antoine, Quebec City This 94-room boutique hotel in the Old Port area blends four historic buildings and four centuries (including artifacts from the 1600s on that were unearthed during renovations) with up-to-the-minute luxury. Start with Champagne in an alcove of Cafe Artefact, a cozy lobby bar with a fireplace, then move to a table (again, by the fire) in Panache, the rustic dining room in a 1700s-era building to dine on fine regional food.

Hot tip: Try to get Room 610, which has a terrace view of Chateau Frontenac, a bedroom fireplace and a shower big enough to accommodate all manner of shenanigans. Who needs to go outside for Winter Carnival?

If you go: saint-antoine.com; \$279 to \$459.

3. Whistler, B.C. There's more than slopes here during the winter. Adara Hotel, in the heart of the Village (its slogan is "Whistler style unzipped"), is a sassy abode, where bi-level loft suites include a faux mink throw to collapse on in front of the fireplace for some snuggling before ascending to the loft bedroom. Then freshen up in tandem in the shower and head across the road to Barefoot Bistro, where you can sabre open a bottle of bubbly and down some oysters. Buffalo Bill's Bar, below the hotel, cranks up the volume into the wee hours. Hot tip: For same-sex couples, the Big Pride Package includes tighty-whities made by Canada's own Ginch Gonch and, if that wasn't enough, chocolate body paint (really!).

If you go: \$299 to \$399; adarahotel.com; 1-866-502-3272.

4. The Claddagh Oyster House in Charlottetown Oyster shucker Patrick McMurray in his book, *Consider the Oyster*, reminds us that these bivalves are loaded with zinc, which supposedly helps to release testosterone and drive libido. The best place to avail yourself of the tasty mollusc is P.E.I., home of the Malpeque oyster. At Claddagh Oyster House, \$40 gets you 25 oysters and enough zinc to make you toss those little blue pills. Hot tip: A good place to stay is the Inn at Bay Fortune, where the North Tower suites have balconies overlooking the bay, whirlpool tubs and fireplaces. The dining room has an excellent tasting menu.

If you go: thecladdaghoysterhouse.com; innatbayfortune.com; \$150-\$315.

5. The Northern Lights It's said that the Japanese believe a torrid night under this gorgeous electrical light storm, best seen in clear dark Arctic skies, increases fertility, and that infants so conceived are lucky. Alas, it's not true. The real reason thousands of Japanese travel to the Far North each year on aurora-viewing tours is the natural beauty of the place. But that in itself can spark romance, which could in turn spawn lucky children. Aurora Village, half an hour north of Yellowknife, provides Arctic parkas, heated seats and blankets, thus enhancing one's staying power under the Aurora Oval (considered one of the best places to view the lights).

Hot tip: Return transport to town is at 1 a.m. but diehards opt for the 2:30 a.m. trip. There you'll see them embracing in temperatures that can reach -35C or lower. Last winter, a local boy organized flowers and Champagne in one of the resorts's teepees to propose to his lady. (She said yes.) If you go: First Air and Canada North have direct flights from Edmonton and Calgary to Yellowknife; firstair.ca; canadiannorth.ca. Aurora Village is \$95 a person per night; auroravillage.com. The Explorer Hotel is also a prominent landmark: rooms go for \$208 to \$220; explorerhotel.ca.

6. Fairmont Royal York Chocolate and Valentine's Day are so synonymous that many hotels offer packages featuring chocolate, but none does it better than the Fairmont. Begin your indulgence at the Library Bar with a chocolate martini and tuxedo-dipped strawberries (so-called because it involves the dipping of dark and white chocolate). Then enjoy a four-course meal at Epic Restaurant, where oysters, foie gras and beef tenderloin play starring roles. Finish off in the Epic Lounge with some chocolates by Michel Cluizel paired with tasting portions of spirits.

Hot tip: Don't want the calories? Sign up for the Chocolate Dream package, a chocolate massage and chocolate-truffle pedicure at the Elizabeth Milan spa on the Avenue level. You'll be toe-sucking delicious.

If you go: Martini, \$14; chocolate and spirits flight, \$20; dinner, \$75; Chocolate Dream (with overnight), from \$575; fairmont.com/royalyork; 1-800-257-7544.

7. The 5 Drive-In, Oakville, Ont. If you're a Boomer who married your high-school sweetheart, check into the 5 Drive-In (or any other drive-in, for that matter) for a trip down memory lane (or into the back seat). Oakville's 5 Drive-in reopens on Feb. 29 and offers such attractions as Triple Play Movie Nights and Dusk to Dawn marathons of four movies.

Hot tip: Booze is still forbidden but a milkshake from the snack bar should get you at least to second base. If you go: 5drivein.com; other Canadian drive-ins at driveinmovie.com.

8. Elkhorn Resort, Riding Mountain National Park, Man. If being in love makes you want to howl, do it with the wolves in this Manitoba highland forest, where three ecological zones converge more than 300 metres above the flatland. With its diverse flora and fauna, this 2,973-square-km biosphere reserve offers snowshoe adventures led by local guides from Earth Rhythms. A good one is the Night Lantern Snowshoe and Wolf Howl: You head into the forest wearing headlamps and learn to imitate grey wolves. While awaiting their answering calls, you can gaze at the starry sky, and maybe see the northern lights.

Hot tip: Later, soak in the mineral pool or the mineral hot tub at the inn's Solstice Spa. You'll be ready for some in-room howling.

If you go: The resort is a three-hour drive northwest of Winnipeg; travelmanitoba.com. Elkhorn Resort, 1-866-355-4676; elkhornresort.mb.ca; Riding Mountain Infusions package (with wolf howl), \$545 for two nights; nightly rates are \$110 to \$185.

9. Voyageur Quest's Algonquin Cottage Outpost adventure for two It's true that the more active you are, the more action you get. Snowmobile through a winter forest, snowshoe to a hidden camp for a fine lunch and skate by torch light. Later, snuggle by the fire in your solar-powered chalet suite on Lake Kawawaymog at the northwest corner of Algonquin Park. And then ... unleash your inner animal. No one will hear.

Hot tip: The three-night Winter Adventure for Two package is March 6 to 9 and includes all activities for \$1,294 a couple.

If you go: voyageurquest.com; 1-800-794-9660; from Toronto, take the Ontario Northland Train (1-800-953-3343) or highway coach.

10. Make love on top of a mountain at Sunshine Inn in Banff, Alta. The recently renovated 84-room mountain lodge, Banff's only ski-in, ski-out hotel, is 2,100 metres in the sky, in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. Once the gondola closes at 5:30 p.m., that's it for the night. Enjoy the hot tub, treatments at the Mountain Spa and dinner at Eagles Nest.

Hot tip: The best suite, the Assiniboine, has an oversized bathroom with steam room, rain-forest glassed-in shower, jetted tub and heated floors.

If you go: Rooms are from \$249 to \$409; skibanff.com; 1-877-542-2633.

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