

Reasons for **SEASONS**

Those who Visit Canada in the 'off-season' will see a completely different side to this vast and beautiful country, says **Alex Wright**

There are few sights as impressive as the frozen surrounds of Niagara Falls in the dead of winter, or activities more serene than exploring the beauty of the Canadian Rockies during springtime, or wandering through the maple-leaf lined streets of Vancouver in the fall.

And there is no more spectacular time to see Niagara Falls than during the Winter Festival of Lights, a time when they are lit up by a fantastic show of more than two million illuminations strung along the Niagara Parkway and a weekly firework display. The festival runs from November 3, 2018 to January 31, 2019.

During the daytime it's impressive enough: the mist and spray

from the falls and sub-zero winds combine to form amazing ice sculptures in this winter wonderland. For an even better view, take a helicopter ride, or if fauna is more your bag head to the butterfly conservatory where more than 2,000 tropical butterflies are on show.

Have an ice wine time

Wine connoisseurs will be drawn to the Niagara Icewine Festival, staged over the last three weekends in January. There are regular tastings of this specialty sweet dessert wine and cocktail competitions as well as winery tours and ice-skating for the more active.

Tim Greathead, Canada Product Manager at Premier Holidays, recommends taking the memorable Journey Behind the Falls or visiting





Experience hot springs in Banff during winter



Striding out...cross-country trails are found across the country

the winter paradise of Niagara-on-the-Lake's Queen Street. "Although some of the great attractions at Niagara Falls are available year round, these can appear much more magical in winter and are generally less busy," he said.

"Journey Behind the Falls will give you the most stunning views, which are particularly breathtaking when the falls are coated in thick layers of snow and ice.

"Niagara-on-the-Lake's Queen Street turns into a winter wonderland, and attending the pop-up Icewine Village is great for sampling plenty of warming food and wine," he added.

Winter wonders

Ottawa is another city that thrives in winter. Activities include the world's largest ice-skating rink on the Rideau Canal.

The canal, which attracts skaters of all ages and skill levels, stretches over 7.8 kilometres, from Ottawa's downtown area to Dow's Lake. Along the way are heated change huts and vendors selling Ottawa's famous Beavertails pastries, poutine, hot soup, hot chocolate and more.

Elsewhere in the city, visitors will find snow-

sculpture contests, a snow maze and sleigh rides – there's even an igloo-building workshop.

Winter activities in Québec City include a horse-drawn carriage ride through its quaint old streets, exploring the Château Frontenac, the Citadel and the Plains of Abraham, before heading to the Observatoire de la Capitale for wonderful views of the snow-covered city.

Wander through the enchanting Petit-Champlain and Place-Royale neighbourhoods, taking in the historical architecture before tucking into some hearty Québec fare.

Then make a beeline for Montmorency Falls Park to wonder at the ice-bound cliffs before thawing off in the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, home to the world's most pre-eminent collection of art from the region, or the interactive Musée de la civilisation.

Feed your adrenalin by tobogganing down the slide at Dufferin Terrace before hitting one of the city's numerous microbreweries for a taste of the local tippie.

No trip would be complete without a visit to North America's only Ice Hotel just outside of the city. This ephemeral architectural masterpiece is redesigned every year.

Whatever time of the year your clients visit, Canada is really 'in season' in all seasons.

Springtime in the Rockies

Spring is the best time to visit the Rockies, after the skiers and snowboarders have departed and before the summer visitors arrive.

Explore this spellbinding mountain range by hiring a pair of snowshoes for an ice walk around Banff National Park or Kananaskis Country, or sign up for a guided tour.

For the more adventurous, try a fat bike experience, Canada's latest extreme sport craze – take a late-season cross-country ski lesson or go whitewater rafting. Alternatively, learn how to drive a dog sled or try a combination of the two where you are pulled along by a pack of huskies on your skis. ▶



Niagara Falls in winter



walking among the spring flowers



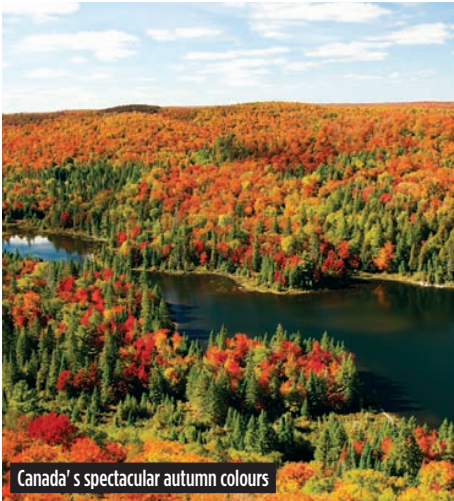
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New for 2019, the five-night Experience the Falls in Winter trip takes in Toronto and the magnificent Niagara Falls. Prices start from £998pp. The deal includes accommodation, transfers and return flights, and runs from December 1.

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Canada's spectacular autumn colours



Spring to the tracks....The Rocky Mountaineer starts its season in April

► Nature lovers will enjoy spotting bighorn sheep, elk and deer in the wildflower meadows. There are also plenty of walking trails and vineyards to explore in the Thompson Okanagan region, as well as Berg Lake in Mount Robson Provincial Park and the Lake O'Hara alpine circuit in Yoho National Park.

But for those who prefer their home comforts, Premier's Greathead suggests letting the train take the strain.

"The Rocky Mountaineer starts in April so spring is the ideal time to experience this attraction," he says.

"Clients can discover three stunning routes through the Rockies; spring is a good time of year to enjoy the experience as some of the winter snow is still on the ground so the views are even more dramatic, plus the major centres of Jasper, Lake Louise and Banff are noticeably quieter and prices are cheaper all round."

If stunning geological formations appeal, suggest the descent into Rat's Nest Cave near Canmore or walk along the frozen creek in Grotto Canyon and marvel at the various icefalls, hoodoos and Aboriginal pictographs on display.



Bighorn sheep



DON'T MISS

- 1 Get a hit of maple syrup at one of Québec's many sugar shacks (February-mid-April)
- 2 Go grey whale watching off Vancouver's coast in April or May
- 3 See the northern lights from Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories, Whitehorse in Yukon or Iqaluit in Nunavut from December to March
- 4 Wrap up for the Northern Manitoba Trappers' Festival in February. Temps fall to -16.1 degrees Celsius
- 5 Combine oyster shucking with music at the Prince Edward Island Fall Flavours festival in September

Then hike the trail up Tunnel Mountain for panoramic views of Banff and finish the day with a glass of whisky in front of a roaring fire at the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise Hotel.

Laura Kirton, Assistant Product Manager at First Class Holidays recommends soaking in the steamy hot mineral waters of Banff Hot Springs "Incredible views of the surrounding mountain ranges and pool temperatures of around 40 degrees makes for a relaxing spring afternoon," she said.

Out west

On Canada's west coast, Vancouver's Stanley Park comes to life in the autumn with a kaleidoscope of burnt orange, yellow and brown leaves neatly clustered around the shores of Beaver Lake. Its fabulous, family-friendly network of trails, including around the park's seawall, are best explored by bike, as are the iconic totem poles at Brockton Point.

Then scale Grouse Mountain for stunning views of downtown Vancouver and the harbour. For a different perspective, head to Capilano Suspension Bridge for a treetop adventure before hitting Granville Island Market to sample some of the region's finest seasonal produce.

Julie Thompson, Product and Marketing Manager at Frontier Travel, suggests taking in a foodie tour of the city or an ice hockey game.

"As the season changes, so does the food, and the autumn is one of the very best times to take a foodie tour in Vancouver," she says.

"There are some great tours on offer, highlighting the different areas and different foods and/drinks, all of which can be built into an itinerary and be commissionable to agents.

"The ice hockey season starts in late September, so take in a Vancouver Canucks game at the Rogers Arena. There are some beautiful gardens in Vancouver too, none more so than the VanDusen Botanical Garden, which is fabulous in the autumn, as the Japanese maples turn crimson and gold." •