

New York, New Hampshire slopes close to home

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE NOVEMBER 16, 2012



The Omni Mount Washington Hotel offers guests horse-drawn sleigh rides.

Photograph by: Omni Mount Washington Hotel

The White Mountain region of New Hampshire is a terrific snow-sports destination and an easy three-to three-and-a-half-hour drive from Montreal. Best of all, there is a lot to do on and off the mountain, and relatively moderate prices.

At broad, pillowy Bretton Woods, the views of awesome Mount Washington are a bonus. Bretton has expanded its backcountry terrain and added a lift serving a new gladed area that has both steep expert cliffs and easy-flow rides for intermediates. A new warm-up cabin at the scenic summit of Mont Stickley has an outdoor fireplace and a terrace for catching rays.

Off the slopes, Bretton Woods's shoppers have a new Bogner virtual store where clients can electronically order customized clothing, gear and accessories. No one will ever be bored here. New activities include a canopy Tour, a racing zip-line course and an indoor climbing wall. And the affiliated Omni Mount Washington Hotel is a grand destination resort with a stunning spa and a large outdoor heated pool that is guaranteed to please the kids.

Loon, the consummate destination for children, has re-made itself in recent years with lots of glades, expanded trails and more lifts. Already a park rat's dream, Loon has added two exciting, unique new terrain playgrounds, especially for youngsters ages three and up. The Paul Bunyan-themed course will feature rolls, a mini-pipe and a ground-level box.

In addition to downhill thrills, the new Loon Mountain Adventure Center packages ice skating, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, zip-lining, snow tubing and indoor rock climbing.

Cannon Mountain is a bit of a loner. It has a sharp edge and challenging pitches for serious trail busters, but the scenic summit ride on a 75-person tramway is an exhilarating tourist attraction in itself, and no snow skills are required.

NEW YORK STATE:

Whiteface Mountain in Wilmington, N.Y., always makes me stop and think of how lucky Montrealers are to have so much downhill action so close. We are a 90-minute drive to the highest vertical in the east, an awe-inspiring 1,045 metres if you dare to slide all that in one breathless shot.

Whiteface has worked hard to stay up to date with lifts, trails and children's areas, even though it is smack dab in the middle of the vast and beautiful land preserve known as the Adirondack State Park. This year we can expect rockin' après-ski at the renovated Base Camp Market and Cloudspin Lounge.

Off slope, there is almost infinite shopping and après-ski in Lake Placid. The delectable and delightfully Italian Caffé Rustica, co-owned by former Montrealer Chantal Vinette Gregg and her husband, Kevin, is my pick of the town's nearly 50 restaurants. The town is home to scores of B&Bs and hotels, from the basic inn, The Pines, to the sumptuous Lake Placid Lodge and the deluxe Whiteface Lodge, which has an outdoor pool and a major spa.

For total winter sport immersion, consider skating or dogsledding on Mirror Lake or tobogganing down a former ski jump. If you are a Nordic fan, the superb 50-kilometre trail system of the Olympic Sports Complex is not to be missed.

IF YOU GO

Ski New Hampshire: 800-88-SKI-NH/800-887-5464, www.SkiNH.com; more than 35 Alpine and Nordic areas and more than 200 lodging properties. Bretton Woods & Omni Mount Washington Resort, 800-314-1752, www.brettonwoods.com. Loon Mountain, Lincoln, N.H., 800-229-LOON (5666), www.loonmtn.com. Cannon Mountain, 603- 823-08800, www.cannonmt.com.

N.Y. State: Whiteface Mountain: Wilmington, N.Y., 518-946-2223, conditions: 877- SkiFace, www.whiteface.com.

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