

CHECKING IN

Après-ski is worth the cold at these two New Hampshire inns

Comfort, sports facilities, fine dining found in shadow of Mt. Washington



ROCHELLE LASH

New Hampshire has been a popular vacation destination for Montrealers for more than 100 years.

Drawn by the splendour of the White Mountains, my grandparents and parents summered near Mt. Washington. Later, my big brother Steve Lash was one of the super downhill skiers at rugged Cannon Mountain in Franconia, which also spawned champion Bode Miller.

Me? I still love the winters in this scenic, sporty region. New Hampshire is home to 36 ski resorts and cross-country centres, 13 of them in Mt. Washington Valley, which is a three- to four-hour drive southeast of Montreal.

The cross-country skiing is superlative at several places, including Bretton Woods, a full-service centre that is part of the landmark Omni Mount Washington Resort; and Bear Notch Ski Touring, dog-friendly and rustic. If you are a downhiller, you can conquer Attitash/Bear Peak, Bretton Woods, Black Mountain, Cranmore, King Pine and Wildcat.

Spring and summer feature fly-fishing, hiking, golf, kayaking and canoeing.

Culture abounds, too, especially at Stone Mountain Arts Center in Brownfield.

The coming lineup includes Texan blues guitarist Jimmy Vaughan, March 10; Grammy-nominated Joan Armatrading, April 8; singer Jonathan Edwards, May 15; and singer Lee Ann Womack, June 26 (866-227-6523, www.stonemountain-artscenter.com).

Here is a peek at two exceptional inns in Mt. Washington Valley, both outstanding for

après-sports warmth and cuisine. You don't even have to ski.

Innkeepers Kevin Flynn and Jennifer Kovach have updated the 17-room Snowvillage Inn with new decor, but have kept its cottage charm.

"We swept away the granny look of Victoriana and doilies, and we made the interiors crisp and clutter-free," Kovach said.

She chose rich, red leathers for the living room and lots of whites and pastels in the bedrooms. The Ralph Lauren Classic Collection fabrics give the inn a country style, but the look isn't fussy.

Snowvillage is a grey clapboard Colonial house on a hilltop with a woodsy setting and views of the south face of Mt. Washington. It's on the outskirts of a community named Snowville, near the Maine border.

"The Snow family actually made sleighs," Kovach said, "so we know it's a great place to come for winter sports."

It's also a great place to relax after a day in the cold mountain air. Guests lounge by the fireplace in the library, nibbling on fondue, chick pea fries and crispy Brussels sprouts, and fuelled by Flynn's creative cocktails such as the Fig Sidecar, an infusion of brandy, brown sugar and lemon.

The cuisine is strongly farm-to-table. Max's has two sections, depending on your mood: the pub is darling and intimate, with five stools and six tables and a casual menu of oysters, cheese soufflé, steak bruschetta, burgers, flatbread, beef stew, cheese and charcuterie. In the more formal dining room, chef Ben Frieden spreads his wings with beef Wellington, pistachio-crust lamb, roast duck, squash and chèvre ravioli and yummy desserts such as chocolate torte.

Notchland Inn is hot — in more ways than one. Fireplaces — the real wood-burning kind — are essential ingredients for après-ski, and this charming getaway near Mt. Washington has an impressive 18 of them, in the dining room, in the parlours and in



Notchland Inn in New Hampshire's Mt. Washington Valley has 18 fireplaces glowing with warmth. *NOTCHLAND INN*



Snowvillage Inn is a charming getaway in New Hampshire's Mt. Washington Valley. *SNOWVILLAGE INN*

every guest room.

Notchland Inn is built around a Tudor-style manor house on a forested estate overlooking Route 302, the White Mountains' main thoroughfare. It is a diverse collection of vintage guest rooms and modern cottages filled with colourful fabrics, country antiques and collectibles of all shapes and sizes.

Owners Les Schoof and Ed Butler (he also is a N.H. state legislator) start the après-ski experience with hot chocolate and Notchland's signature coco-loco cookies. Later, it's on to drinks, perhaps around the piano in the neo-Gothic music room, or in the plant-filled conservatory, or over puzzles and cribbage in the distinctive Stickley Room, named for a founder of the Arts and Crafts style.

Dinner is served at one seating — when the grandfather clock chimes 7 p.m. It's a two-hour, romantic event in a section of the inn that was a tavern during the late 1700s.

The menu changes nightly,

but specialties include sesame-crusted tuna, grilled beef, rack of lamb, baked salmon, roast pork with peach chutney or seared duck with peppercorn cream. Depending on the season, dessert might be rhubarb upside-down cake, triple chocolate brownies, caramel-pecan tart or other fab sweets with ice cream, maple and apples.

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IF YOU GO

Mt. Washington Valley is about a four-hour drive from Montreal via Vermont Interstate 91 to New Hampshire Interstate 93, Exit 40 and Route 302 E. Ski New Hampshire, 800-887-5464, www.skinh.com. Mt. Washington Valley: 800-DO-SEE-NH /800-367-3364, www.mtwashingtonvalley.org.

Snowvillage Inn: 603-447-2818, snowvillageinn.com; Snowville/Eaton Center, N.H.; rooms (four with fireplaces) \$99-\$179 U.S., includes full breakfast, Wi-Fi and snowshoes. The suite costs \$229. Max's Restaurant: closed Tuesday and Wednesday. Stone Mountain Arts Center package includes transportation. Caribbean Island Weekend, March 5-9; Maple Sugar Weekend, March 20; N.H. Restaurant Week (three-course dinners at \$35, March 20-27). Two-night ski package includes lift tickets.

Notchland Inn: 800-866-6131, www.notchland.com; Route 302, Hart's Location, N.H.; 15 rooms and suites, \$199-\$350 U.S. for two people, per night, including breakfast; cottages for two, \$325-\$390 (pet-friendly, \$20 per night); dinner served Wed.-Sun., five courses, \$42 for inn guests or \$45-\$50 for non-guests.

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