

## Skiers get the travel fever

To a skier, far hills look snowier. That's the way it is in the jet age, and the way it's been since the Norwegians convinced us to switch from snowshoes to the average weekend, says today's turned on skier, but for real excitement there's always a better place beckoning.

Fifty years ago it was that way too. Montreal skiers, accustomed to piling aboard the special ski trains that stopped at every resort from Shawbridge to Tremblant, were being enticed to head for the Canadian Rockies by rail: a complete package for less than 100 depression dollars.

A few Toronto skiers, a little long in the tooth now, recall the days when a train carrying boisterous skiers used to stop at the station called Craigleith, a short walk from the 'mountains'.

In Calgary they'll tell you that not so long ago the train was the only way to get to a great little ski area known as Lake Louise. Vancouver skiers reply to this by pointing out that even more recently, rail was the only route to Whistler's downhill delights.

Nowadays skiers get about a bit differently. On winter weekends the four-lane highways leading from the big centres to the snowy slopes are jammed with ski-topped cars - carrying both the slender cross-country type and the sturdier kind for blasting downhill. And for that increasingly popular sojourn in the snow known as the ski vacation you can use all the modern conveniences: jet to the Rockies and then get lifted to the mountain tops by helicopter.

A few other differences have been creeping into Canadian ski travel recently. A decade ago, Canadian skiers flocked to the bargain-priced European Alps; now it's a lot less expensive to stay nearer home and discover the long runs of the western mountains where the experts say there's some of the best skiing in the world, thanks to our colder, drier snow. Five years ago Canadians were flocking to the ski stores to outfit themselves with inexpensive cross-country skis, that booming, hassle-free family sport; now those same enthusiasts are buying better skis and travelling hundreds of miles to try out new terrain.

There's just one problem in all this ski excitement: crowding. With an unprecedented number of Canadian skiers - plus a bigger-than-ever influx from the U.S., Japan and Europe - expected to share in our bountiful seasonal snow resource this winter, facilities will be busy. So it's not too soon to pinpoint some winter dates and destinations if you are thinking about renting a chalet, holidaying at a lodge, or winging a distance at low-cost charter rates.

The choice in skiing is bewilderingly big: all the way from Mont Ste Anne, the second highest mountain in the east and a mere 25 miles from fascinating Quebec City, to remote Sunshine Village (near Banff) where cars can't get in. Both these areas are noted as downhill resorts, yet Mont Ste Anne boasts excellent cross-country skiing in this provincial park, and Sunshine is the gateway to ski touring in Assiniboine Valley, Canada's majestic Matterhorn. In fact, almost anywhere skiers go in Canada these days they'll find cross-country ski trails starting close-by the downhill lifts, which is handy for families with dual skiing interests.

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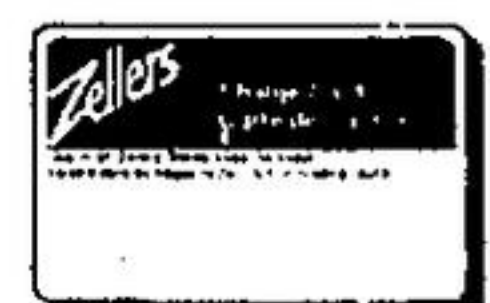
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