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Where To Get Away To in the Winter Months

Don't Get Snowed Under – Packing Tips For Your Winter Vacation

Vacationing in the winter can be one of the best ideas of all. You can take a snowmobile tour. It can offer you a chance to see the countryside in a different manner. You can take a tour of a city most tourists enjoy in the summer months, which might give you the opportunity to see it alone. You can even take a trip to a summery location, which can help you combat those winter blues. Wherever you decide to go, there are a number of packing precautions you should take when you get ready to leave on a winter vacation.

First, be sure your car is prepared for the season you'll be traveling in. For example, if you intend to visit a snowy region in the winter you may need snow chains and extra anti-freeze in your car. Snow chains can help you get traction in a rough area. If you don't have a set of snow chains, in most cases a set of snow tires should do the trick.

You need to be careful, though. If you plan to be in a mountainous area, snow chains may be the only thing that can get you out of a mess. Winterizing your car with antifreeze is also essential. Be sure to check with your mechanic for other car winterization tips.

Another thing to consider is packing an emergency kit for your car. Getting stranded in the winter is much different from being stranded in the summer, and a car emergency kit can become essential. You want to include food and water for a day for every member of your party.

That may be how long it takes a road crew to find you. You will also need to include blankets for each member of your party. You will need at least one flashlight as well. Finally, you want to be sure to include things like motion sickness pills, pain relievers, and bandages. It might even be a good idea to include those new instant ice and cold packs. These chemically activated products can be really helpful when you're nowhere near an emergency clinic.

The final thing to consider is your actual suitcase. The first rule to consider is to avoid wearing clothes made of cotton at your cold destination. If your cotton clothing should get wet, it can take a very long period of time to dry. If you are doing some sort of activity that requires your body to sweat, the cotton will soak up the sweat. This means the moisture will be touching your body. This means that your chances of contracting the dangerous condition called hypothermia are increased.

Most clothing companies make a number of products, including t-shirts, tank tops, and thermal underwear products out of synthetics, so it should not be difficult to find some non-cotton oriented clothes for your winter vacation. You also want to be sure to include a pair of long johns.

Shopping in your blue jeans is just fine, but if you are in a cold, windy environment, the cold will cut right through you. Wearing a pair of long johns under each of your outfits, where

appropriate, is not a bad idea, as it can prevent frostbite and other cold related medical conditions. You should also consider buying socks made of a synthetic or wool blend. This will wick moisture away from your feet and keep them warmer.

Another thing to consider is to dress in layers. A single winter coat is fine for basic activities, but for more serious winter vacation activities like skiing, snowshoeing, or snowmobiling, layers are the key to staying warm. This can give you the opportunity to control your body temperature in a most efficient manner. If you get hot, you can simply shed a layer. If you get cold again, you can re-add that layer to your ensemble.

Remember, though, you need to have some free movement, and fifty of your warmest wool sweaters will not provide that for you. You should start with a base layer that consists of your long johns. Silk is a good choice for this layer because it is lightweight and it clings to your skin. Your next layer should be a layer of insulation.

A good choice for this layer is fleece. It will keep you very warm, and if it gets wet, it has the ability to wick moisture away from the skin. Your outer layer should be a ski jacket and pants, even if you are not going skiing. These can help to protect your body from the fierce winds you might encounter. Your final layer should be a down jacket. This can provide you one more little bit of insulation to face to cold winter weather.

Packing for your winter vacation can be a tough thing to do, but pack well, and you will enjoy it more than any other vacation you have ever experienced.

Experience the Ice Hotel Quebec Canada on Your Next Vacation

Tired of the same vacation trips? Would you like to try a different and adventuresome vacation? Why not try the Ice Hotel in Quebec? It's modeled after the Ice Hotel made famous in Sweden. If you have an adventurous spirit and are wanting something unusual in your vacation this might be the vacation of a lifetime for you.

Not only is this a popular hotel but is also an increasingly popular tourist attraction. Some come just to see what the fuss is all about. In the Ice Hotel, you will be sleeping in a structure made of the purest of materials, ice and snow. Each year the hotel is unique and different as talented artists create intriguing designs, ice sculptures and paintings. The Ice Hotel will be open from January to April 2006. It hosts corporate activities, parties, and even weddings.

The wedding chapel gives a fairy tale feel for an unusual and different wedding. Guided tours are available in both French and English alternating every half hour. The tour relates interesting facts and information about the Ice Hotel and takes about 30 minutes. The tours cost but after you finish, you can have the run of the Hotel until 8PM, and then it is strictly overnight guests only.

The Ice Hotel is made from ice and snow with some ceilings as high as 18 feet high and with walls covered with original artwork. It covers roughly 30000 square feet and it takes five weeks to build. It uses 12,000 tons of snow, and 400 tons of ice. It includes two art galleries, a

relaxation area with hot tubs and saunas, and the famous ABSOLUT Ice Bar. In the Ice Bar, you can drink out of glasses made of ice. The Ice Hotel is a popular attraction for both day visitors and overnight guests. Reservations are taken at least a year in advance for overnight visits, special events and public tours.

The temperature outside can be minus 18 degrees Fahrenheit but on the inside, it stays at a temperature of 25 degrees. Construction starts in mid-December and reservations are taken through the first week of April. That is providing Nature keeps the climate just right.

The Ice Hotel offers both indoor and outdoor activities that include riding snowmobiles, ice fishing, dog sledding, cross-country skiing, and skating. Indoors the hotel offers a movie theater, bar, indoor skating rink, spa, Jacuzzi, two art galleries, and a wedding chapel. Note for those of us that are cold blooded, they do have regular toilet facilities that are warm!

It's interesting how the Ice Hotel is built. Stainless steel molds are used and then wooden walls set at certain distances between these molds. Snow is blown between the molds and the wooden walls, completely covering them. After the snow has frozen into place, the metal frames are removed.

Ice blocks are used for furniture, sculptures, the bar counter and columns. The walls are about four feet thick at the base and about two feet thick at the ceiling. It takes about 20 workers to actually make the hotel and another 10 – 15 to do all the final changes involving the statues and ice sculptures. They will be polishing and carving and making sure, they are complete and intact when guests begin to arrive.

Ice beds are covered with animal skins and special sleeping bags. Thinking of sleeping in subzero temperatures on an ice bed with just sleeping bags and animal skins make me shudder. I would probably be hiding in the heated bathroom facilities the whole time!

Recently they have added an additional attraction called the N'ice Club and it will feature special programming, dance nights, and comedy shows.

Where is the Ice Hotel found and how do you get there? It is found 20 minutes west of Quebec City in Duchesnay. Take Highway 40 west to exit 295 at Ste-Catherine-de-la-Jacques-Cartier, and then take 367 going north until you see the hotel.

For more information or to inquire about reservations call toll-free 1-877-505-4522. You may receive more information by going to their website at:

www.icehotel-canada.com/en/index.en.php.

Holiday Home Exchange - What Exactly is it?

Anyone who has a home can participate in the holiday home exchange. You don't have to compare values of the house, or find a swapping partner with a home just likes yours; you just need to find a home that you and your family would be most comfortable in and in the area you

are looking to visit. You just have to find an individual or family that you feel comfortable working with to exchange your home with their home for a short period of time. It's basically like house sitting for each other. While you are taking care of the other family's home and enjoying another country, the other family is caring for your home and enjoying your country.

Anyone that has ever gone on vacation can testify that the most expensive part of traveling is paying for hotels and other accommodations. Some vacations may even last longer if the expenses were not so high. The solution is simple: exchange your home. Most people are not aware of home exchanges and how they can benefit from them.

If you wanted to travel to the United Kingdom, but have found the hotels and accommodation to be quite expensive, now you can. You can find a British family who would swap homes with you, rent free. An equal trade on both sides for both families to enjoy the benefits of a home while traveling.

Home exchanges are becoming increasingly popular in major cities in the United Kingdom. The participants in home exchanging often have their friends and neighbors take a part in entertaining their visitors by providing the home exchange visitors with information on local sightseeing and attractions. The home exchange is an attractive idea to many families and individual travelers.

The families with children can arrange to swap houses with another family with children of similar ages. This way there is no need to cart around a lot of child toys and equipment. The individual traveler finds swapping houses as a great way to relax in the comforts of a home after a day of sightseeing and to have more time to get to know an area better.

Some retired travelers make a great home exchanger because they can be more flexible with dates and the length of the home exchange period. The only major expense on a vacation, when swapping homes, is basically the airfare. An arrangement can also be made to exchange the use of vehicles as well; this can save in renting a car and other traveling expenses, so all you have to pay for is gas. If pets are involved, you may be able to make an arrangement to keep the pet at home and save on boarding fees, if your home exchange partner is willing to take the responsibility.

Even more home insurance companies are more in favor of home exchanges because it's much safer than leaving your home unoccupied for an extended amount of time and therefore vulnerable to thieves and vandalism. When agreeing to a home exchange, it's important to make sure that your insurance policy will cover your visitors during their stay in your home. If you're worried about letting strangers into your home, get to know them before hand.

You can exchange pictures, phone or email your intended partners and share information of area attractions with each other. Be sure to ask questions and clarify any agreements in your communication, so all things are clear. If you need further reassurance, ask for references. You will need to feel comfortable in exchanging homes so that you can enjoy your vacation and not have to worry about leaving your home and all its possessions in the hands of total strangers.

Numerous families have had wonderful experiences with home exchanges, but sometimes problems to arise by a swapping partner who have not met with the others expectations or a

family is unhappy with how the swapping partner had treated their house. Although home exchanges are a great chance to enjoy an entire house with the benefits of a full kitchen and laundry facilities for free, you need to be comfortable to those you do the swapping with. Get to know your swapping partner before any permanent arrangements are made.

Let Loose in London - Ten Must See Things to Do

If you're planning a vacation to London, be sure to take advantage of this wonderful city with so much to offer. London is brimming with an array of exciting things to do and things to see for all ages and tastes. As one of the culture capitals of the world, London holds sight seeing and tourist adventures that you can't experience anywhere else. Get the most out of your London vacation and let it loose by visiting these ten must see things to do in London!

1. The British Museum. Sir Hans Sloane had contributed his mass collection of over 71,000 interesting items when the British Museum was founded in 1753. In the nineteenth century, the museum began to flourish, increasing its inventory of interesting items to over seven million; many of these items are over 10,000 years old. The British Museum's charter had insisted that the museum remain open free of charge to all those curious and studious persons who wish to enter. Spend an astounding afternoon wandering the eternal corridors and discover some of mankind's greatest cultural achievements and explore the great relics of the Greek and Egyptian empires.

2. British Airways London Eye. Welcoming nearly four millions guests each year, the London Eye has become one of the most popular attractions in London. This observation wheel stands 135 meters over the city of London and is currently the tallest observation wheel in the world. This exploitation of modern engineering allows visitors to view London with a new perspective, revealing sections of the city that are not visible from the ground. Described as an inspiring and enchanting experience, the London Eye has become an essential to visitors to complete the London experience.

3. Saint Paul's Cathedral. A fascinating depot of British history and an inspirational centerpiece of reconstruction after the great London fire of 1666, Sir Christopher Wren's cathedral still remains a spiritual focus of Great Britain. Famous for hosting royal weddings, birthdays, celebrations and even funerals of Great Britain leaders under the great dome of Saint Paul's Cathedral and a beautiful piece of history.

4. The National Gallery. Located in the heart of Trafalgar Square it houses some of the world's finest art dating back to the 13th century. Construction of the National Gallery began in 1832 and since then had collected the fine arts of da Vinci, Monet, Renoir, Van Gogh and many more. A visitor can spend days inside the National Gallery trying to view all its contents.

5. London Zoo. Regents Park contains one of the world's most famous zoo's that is home to over 12,000 animals. Animal shows are held daily to allow zoo visitors to learn more about a species through the animals' handler. The London Zoo is considered a must see among visitors and residents and is suggested to be visited at least twice in order to complete the London Zoo experience.

6. Tate Modern. Viewed as London's most innovative gallery, it includes an array of exhibitions and grand collections of modern art. Appealing to children and adults, amateurs and experts, with the collections of artists like Andy Warhol, Matisse and Bacon. Tate Modern is considered one of the top must see galleries of London.

7. Tower of London. Built with imported white stone from France, the Tower of London has been known to protect, imprison, and execute the people of London. The Tower of London was dubbed the "bloody tower" where Richard III had allegedly murdered his nephews.

8. The Natural History Museum. An attractive gothic building that houses one of the world's largest collections of dinosaurs with exhibitions dominating the great halls and towering above awe stricken visitors.

9. The Madame Tussaud's Experience. A museum of abhorrent waxworks and animatronics displays demonstrating the darkest parts of British history with beheading, torture, murder and plague completed with grisly sound effects. Staff would often dress up in costume and jump out at unsuspecting visitors to add excitement to the mix.

10. Westminster Abbey. A medieval masterpiece and the burial ground for kings, scientists, statesmen, poets and musicians since 1066. Visitors can enjoy the intriguing literary history, the artistic talent that went into the paintings, tombs and murals and be taken aback by the gothic architecture. The Westminster Abbey has become one of London's most stunning churches.

Six Ski Vacations Sure To Please the Family

Looking for a great way to please the family? Consider a ski vacation. Everyone loves to ski, and there are many great locations to take the family to for a good time. Take a look at these locations.

Sugarloaf, in the great state of Maine, is a ski resort sure to please your family. Located on a mountain named, appropriately, Sugarloaf Mountain, it has a grand history. In 1951 the first trail was cut by a group known as a The Bigelow Boys. It is today a premier ski area of the Northeast United States, second in elevation onto to the highest mountain in Main, Mount Katahdin. At the summit of Sugarloaf is a life to take the skier above treeline.

New Hampshire offers fine skiing at Cannon Mountain, home of the New England Ski Museum, which contains the most extensive collection of historical ski equipment, literature, film, clothing, photographs, and artwork on the East Coast. The extensive archive is renowned by scholars and historians across the U.S., and the Museum is officially recognized by the United States Ski Association as a Regional Museum, one of only four in the country, and sure to please a ski enthusiast.

On the south shore of Georgian Bay in Ontario, Canada, Blue Mountain prides itself on being the largest ski area in the province. The resort offers several six man chair lifts and a pedestrian village is under construction. Enjoy your visit to Blue Mountain for a fantastic and unique experience.

In upstate New York, Whiteface Mountain reigns king among ski resorts. The fifth highest mountain in New York State and one of the High Peaks of the Adirondack range Whiteface Mountain offers a 360-degree view of the mountains and on a clear day a visitor can see both Vermont and Canada. Near Lake Placid, Whiteface Mountain has a ski area with the greatest vertical drop in the eastern part of the country. In 1980 Whiteface hosted the alpine skiing competition of the Winter Olympics.

Aspen Mountain in Colorado is world famous for fine skiing. Still called by the old name of Ajax by the locals, Aspen is a skier's delight, as are most Colorado resorts, including Vail. Another world famous western state resort is in **Park City, Utah**, home of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games. All of the resorts listed provide great skiing.

Modern skiing evolved gradually from snow shoeing, and a Norwegian, Sondre Norheim, is thought of as the father of modern skiing. In the 1800's he invented the form of skiing he called Slalom, but which we know today as Telemark skiing. While skiing has practical transportation value in many colder climate countries, and many militaries train troops in skiing, most people think of the sport involving taking a ski lift to the top of a mountain for a fast and fun downhill ride.

When engaged in this activity most people prefer to wear warm clothing and follow runs, trails or slopes—patrolled ski routes that are checked for safety. Skiers also enjoy cross-country skiing, but for safety sake most stay within the boundaries of the resort. In fact, most European countries have laws against cross-country skiing outside of the resort's boundaries due to the danger of avalanche and the high cost of search and rescue operations.

Skiing enthusiasts report a euphoria that comes from skiing, a feeling they liken to flying and many more people are engaged in the sport today than ever before, with many fine ski schools teaching the basics. Even if you've never skied before, the basic skills can be acquired quickly and you'll be on the slopes enjoying yourself in a way you've never experienced before.

Skiing is a great way to get in good physical shape, and at the end of the day, sitting around a fireplace in the lodge, bundled up with a warm blanket, and your spouse sitting next to you, holding a cup of hot cocoa in hand for sipping. This is the perfect ending to a wonderful day, which you'll experience at any of the six great ski vacation resorts listed. So give a ski vacation a try, and be very glad you did.

Tailor Your Travel Tour for Your Vacation Holiday

From mountain climbing in the Rockies to volunteering with Children in Nicaragua to going on a wine tasting tour of Italy, travel tours exist for every imaginable vocation, avocation, and mild interest. Deciding which tour to take for your next holiday vacation can be an overwhelming and stressful task.

Some simple advice and tools for preparation, however, can help you find a tour to fit what you want to do, what you have to do, and the amount of money you have at your disposal.

First, decide on your preferred destination. Where, in the whole, wide world, do you want to go? Don't allow fear or a lack of preparation limit you to places close to home. Also, do you want to explore a specific locale in depth or travel from place to place though one or more regions? Deciding where and how you want to travel will help you limit the number of tours available.

After you decide where you want to go, decide what you want to do on your tour. Whether you have a love of ancient cave art or a passion for underwater photography, tours most likely exist that will allow you to explore your interests. If you have a number of different interests, other tours will offer you the variety you crave.

Next, figure out when you want to go and how much time you have at your disposal to spend on a tour. Some tours only operate in the summer, or some countries are unpleasant to visit in the winter. Seasonal variations can ruin your perfect vacation if you don't do your research. Also, decide how long you want your tour to be—a few days, a week, or more—and what portion of your vacation you want to devote to touring.

After you decide on your timeline, try to determine what pace you would prefer for your tour. Perhaps time is of the essence, and you would rather move from location to location as quickly as possible. Other people may enjoy a more leisurely visit in every locale. Fast or slow, each has its own benefits and drawbacks.

Next, consider who you will bring with you on tour. Are you hoofing it alone or do you want to bring your five young children with you? Take into consideration the additional fees single travelers must pay, and remember the needs and interests of your travel partner(s). You will have a happier family vacation if the tour is child friendly.

Once you know who is going on your little adventure, you can figure out how large your budget is and what sort of tours you can afford. Prices depend on the length of your tour and what is included. Consider the price of airfare, food, ground transportation, accommodations, and tour guides and find out whether these are included in the price of your tour. Don't forget to consider extra expenses, such as gratuities and shopping.

Decide whether you want to tour with a group or on your own. If you decide to go with a group, consider how large you would prefer the group to be and the age range of the fellow group members. Some tours cater specifically to singles, women, families or seniors. If the thought of strangers does not appeal to you, you can create a tour for your own family or small group, or you can even arrange for a self-guided tour.

Next, search your soul, and figure out what level of comfort you require. Does the thought of staying in a cabin or hut terrify you? Some rural destinations or adventure tours will require a sacrifice of certain creature comforts. Are you a picky eater? Some places won't have a McDonald's down the road or allow for a vegetarian, kosher, etc. diet. Finally, how fit are you and your traveling companions? Your eighty-year-old grandmother may not appreciate a yoga tour of India (unless she's unique and enjoys that sort of activity).

Or, if you plan to use a hiking tour of the Alps as motivation to get fit, your vacation could be ruined before it even begins, and you will have wasted time, money and energy.

Once you decide on the “who, what, when, where, why and how” of your desired tour, it’s time to do your research. Consult the Internet, travel publications, and periodicals, and don’t forget to network. You never know who will have a friend who knows someone who just went on the best surfing tour in Australia.

Finally, once you’ve gathered all the information you need, compare tours and ask questions. Don’t be afraid to request references. It’s your money and your vacation, and, hopefully, with all of your soul searching, planning and foresight, it will be the best journey you’ve ever taken.

Themed Holiday Vacations—Four Family Fun Options

Themed holiday vacations are a fun idea to plan for your family. One of our most memorable vacations was our “Cowboy and Indian” vacation. We took our sons through the West, stopping at tourist sites along the way. We stopped at Dodge City to explore the cowboy side of life, and then made our way to Southern Colorado to explore the ancient ruins of the cliff dwelling Pueblo Indians. It is hard to choose only four family fun options, but I chose those I thought my grandkids would enjoy the most.

Of course, the first one should be the Disney themed holiday vacation. Who can resist the thought of being in Florida during the cold days of winter and enjoying the sites and sounds of Disney World? This is a constant favorite of children and adults alike. There are so many attractions and sites; it will be hard to decide which one to visit first.

You have the Magic Kingdom, Epcot Center, Universal Studios, MGM studios and Disney even has its own cruise line. The cruise liner has all the Disney characters on board so it will be a themed vacation. Disney World is not the only attraction in the area; the Kennedy Space Center is nearby as is Sea World. Sea World is a wonderful attraction with special shows. Inside Disney World, you can stay in a hotel that has a monorail train to take you to all the attractions.

Are you thinking of a winter holiday vacation in sunny Southern California? You will find many attractions and they are easily worked in around your available time. The San Diego Zoo is a popular attraction with adults and children as well as Sea World. LegoLand is also found in the San Diego area and is a big hit with the little ones. If you’re looking for theme parks, go north just up the road to the Anaheim and Los Angeles area. There you will find Disneyland, Six Flags Magic Mountain, Universal Studio, and California Adventure Theme Park.

After taking in what sites and attractions you wanted to see, take a day or two to just relax and soak up the sun on the many beautiful beaches on the coast of Southern California. Drive a little further north up the coast and visit historic San Simeon and the beautiful city of Carmel. Take a tour around the area on the 17-mile drive in Monterey California and stop for a moment just to see the beauty of Pebble Beach Golf Course.

There is something for everyone in the sunny state of California.

One of the best themed family vacations we had was our historical trip to the East Coast. We wanted our sons to be immersed in the colorful history of our Country. We had some fun times, stopping in Hershey Pennsylvania. We visited Hershey Town and stood amazed at the light poles in the shape of candy kisses. We visited historic sites in Virginia, visited George Washington's home, and sat on the same veranda he sat on to watch the river go by. It was awesome, and in Virginia, southern hospitality shines through.

It's a pleasure to visit there. Then on to our most important goal, Washington D.C. We took the time to picnic on the mall, went up the Washington Monument, visited all the Presidential Memorials, and even took a tour of the White House. Being a history buff and patriotic, the highlight of my son's trip was our visit to the sacred land of Arlington Cemetery. It is fitting that he grew up and is serving in the military.

The Smithsonian is an experience that no one should miss. There are so many different buildings and sections in the buildings that it is hard to take it all in. We spent one whole day in just one building and then found out we had missed the hall of the First Ladies. This was something I was interested in, so we went back the next day and found the section that we missed before we went on to other areas. It's a memorable family vacation and can instill in your child a real love and patriotism for their country.

National Parks and Monuments is another wonderful themed vacation the whole family will enjoy. Those "must see" attractions could include Yellowstone National Park to see Old Faithful go off, or a trip to the Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona. The Grand Canyon is a natural wonder that everyone should see at least once in his or her lifetime. Believe me, your children don't have to be teenagers to enjoy their themed vacations and have their memories to last for a lifetime.

Warm up in Winter - Five Top Holiday Destinations

During the Winter Season

When your toes turn purple and your eyelashes sprout icicles, you know it's time to head south for the winter. The birds do it, so why shouldn't you? Stop, now, before you break your back from shoveling one more pile of snow, and consider some exotic locales for winter getaways where the only mounds of white you'll be seeing are of the hot, dry, and sandy variety.

Speaking of white, sandy beaches, a trip to Antigua, or its neighboring island Barbuda may be just what you need in order to restore feeling to your toes. Every water sport lover's dream, the Caribbean nation boasts of at least 365 beaches surrounded by clear blue waters with an average temperature of 80 degrees. Trade your snow boots for fins, and snorkel through spectacular coral reefs, maybe even catching a glimpse of the wreck of the merchant ship Andes, which has rested on the bottom of Deep Bay since 1905.

If you'd rather not get your feet wet, you can enjoy all that the charming capital St. John's in the northern part of the island of Antigua has to offer. Purchase colorful local artwork while strolling down Market Street or fortify yourself with sweet black pineapple (which isn't really black) and some local rum. Watch a spectacular sunset over English Harbour on the summit of Shirley Heights while tapping your feet to the rhythms of a steel band.

If you would prefer to watch birds instead of people, then head north to the tiny island of Barbuda, which has only a single village of 1100 people but is famed for its frigate birds and huge rookery.

If Antigua's cricket-playing and English-speaking ways bring up unpleasant memories of Britain's colonial imperialism, perhaps its time to head to Rio de Janeiro for a little taste of the party-loving legacy of Portuguese imperialism in Brazil, the largest country in South America. Lying on the Bay of Guanabara, the city, which is most well-known for its pre-Lenten festival of wantonness, "Carnaval," also prides itself on 75 miles of coastline.

Do words like Ipanema or Copacabana ring a bell? Yep, they're both in Rio de Janeiro. Brazilians in the city party hard and pray hard. After dancing all night at a samba club, look into the sky and enjoy the slightly surreal sight a 128 foot, 1,000 ton statue of Christ the Redeemer hovering over the city proudly at the top of Corcovado Peak.

If Rio's religious version of the Statue of Liberty has you feeling faintly guilty for deserting your home country in the midst of winter, perhaps Perth, Australia will provide the English-speaking taste of home (with an exotic flair) that you need. Kick back and ride the waves in the Western Australia's isolated capital, nestled between a blue, blue ocean and a dry, sandy desert.

Getting there is half the adventure, consisting of a 4000 km car ride from Sydney or a long and winding train ride on the Indian Pacific. Explore the Swan River and the 400-hectare King's Park in the south, magnificent nineteenth-century buildings constructed using convict labor in the city center, or perhaps travel north to swim with the dolphins at Monkey Mia.

If Perth leaves you feeling a little isolated, perhaps a trip to the modern island city of Singapore, with a population of approximately 4.5 million, will help alleviate your winter doldrums. With not one but four official languages—Chinese, Malay, Tamil, and English—the country offers a delightful blend of ethnic influences.

Enjoy a bowl of hot noodles followed by your favorite curry. Buy a sari in Little India on a Sunday evening or sip on herbal tea in Chinatown. Or perhaps enjoy the sights on a cable-car ride to Sentosa Island, the sight of a thrilling amusement park.

If Sentosa Island puts you in mind of childhood yearnings for the Magic Kingdom, perhaps a trip to the sub-tropical Sunshine State may be just the cold remedy you are looking for. The Magic Kingdom isn't the only amusement park in central Florida. Choose from the likes of Universal Studios, Epcot, Disney's Animal Kingdom, Disney-MGM Studios, Sea World, Busch Gardens, or Cypress Gardens, all within a short drive of each other.

Florida is all about the tourist industry, and travelers can find some great winter travel deals if they shop around. Wherever you decide to go this winter, don't forget to pack sunscreen, a

bathing suit, and your favorite book. Warmth and relaxation wait just a few thousand miles away.

Work During Your Holiday—Choosing the Right Venue

Volunteer Vacation Experience for You

You have a vacation coming up, but you've been everywhere and seen everything that you wanted to see. Maybe you have a lot of vacation time amassed and you know you've been blessed with material assets that others don't have. If so, maybe you should consider going on a Volunteer Vacation.

There are many opportunities available to take an interesting vacation and still make a difference in your world. You can work in a partner program where you will work side by side with local people to improve their community. You might work in the area you are most interested in. Do you have building skills? Are you a medical professional? You can be used in various communities both here and abroad to help the disadvantaged get the medical care they need.

Other opportunities are offered all over the world. You could volunteer in an orphanage, a school, caring for the elderly, or working with people with disabilities. What ever your interests, there are opportunities for you to make your vacation a volunteer experience. It will inspire you and make you thankful for all you have been blessed with.

With the natural disasters we have experienced in the past year, many places could use help in rebuilding and cleaning up. The tsunami relief is still far from being completed. Many miles of beaches still need to be cleaned and many are still without shelter. Put your building skills to work to help the unfortunate countries that were affected.

Do you lean more toward ecological projects? Those can be found as well. In the past 12 months, a volunteer group has spent many hours rehabilitating sick penguins so they can be released into the wild in South Africa. Released turtle hatchlings in Costa Rica and cleaning vast amounts of beach area in Sri Lanka. Other projects include, erecting a fence to protect wildlife in Australia, replanting over 2000 saplings to restore a forest in Kenya and helped preserve Griffon Vultures in Croatia.

If you prefer to work with people, you may be able to help with teaching English as a second language. One organization has organized a camp to help children fight drug addiction. Another has taught basic sports skills and helped with educational development for children in underprivileged countries.

Meaningful volunteer vacations can be a worthwhile project for anyone wanting to help the world become a better place. To promote goodwill and let other countries know that we as Americans care.

The Church I belong to takes a missionary trip every year. They have fund-raising events, and those that go work to raise the money for their travel. They may go and finish a project started by another church, or start a new project. The Church that is sending the group often supplies building supplies. Teens have gone on mission trips to conduct one-week Bible Schools. My son had the opportunity to go on one of these mission trips and that one trip changed his life forever. He learned that volunteer work could be rewarding and unforgettable.

There was time for him to visit the local sites and work with the locals on something that was important to them. He used his experience on that trip to go to a large city here in the States to minister to inner city youths during one of his summer college breaks.

I found many different sites on the Internet that gives you the choice of where you want to volunteer. Is there an area you have never thought of visiting? Maybe a news story has made you curious about an area, or stirred your heart, making you want to make a difference. Can one person make a difference? The answer is a resounding YES. You can take projects for as short as one week to as long as 12 weeks. You choose what will interest you and where you would like to go.

Why not take advantage to see a part of the world you would not have the occasion to visit and change the lives of people in that area. You can have a life changing experience, a vacation to remember and do your part in working for peace and understanding around the world.

Don't Cave In! – Five US Destinations for Wanna-be Cave Dwellers

If you enjoy caving there are some great destinations in the US for cave lovers. One of the best locations in fact, is an entire state. The state of Missouri is well known for caves and caverns, many of which are rumored to have been used as outlaw hideouts during the days of the Wild West and later the depression era. Several Missouri caves are, according to legend, former hideouts of Jesse and Frank James, and many people believe that bank robbery gold is still buried in the hills.

Pretty Boy Floyd during the depression did most of his hiding out in the Ozarks near Bolivar, Missouri, and often hid in Fantastic Caverns, a popular tourist attraction today for the beauty of the rock walls. A little south of Bolivar is the town of Branson, a well known tourist destination today which had its early start in tourism because of Marvel Cave, a great place full of natural rock formations that reminds one of the cave in Tom Sawyer, where Tom and Becky were lost.

In the 1800's Marvel Cave was the scene of meetings of the Baldknobbers, a vigilante group, but by the 1920's it was a tourist attraction and has been one ever since. Surrounded today by music shows and other attractions, it is still popular for its beauty and wonder.

Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico is another cave dweller destination. More than a thousand years ago the prehistoric people of America went into the caverns for shelter and their cave drawings are still near the entrance. Later in the 1800's settlers found the caverns after seeing hundreds of thousands of bats coming up out of the entrance. Some began to mine the bat guano to sell as fertilizer.

One of these men was a cowboy named Jim White who was fascinated by the caves and began to explore. He began to take photographs to convince skeptics, and when interest arose he began to take people on tours which included being lowered 170 feet in a bucket that had previously been used to haul bat guano.

When the US department of the Interior heard of the cave in 1923 they sent an inspector named Robert Holley, who wrote of the caverns "...I am wholly conscious of the feebleness of my efforts to convey in the deep conflicting emotions, the feeling of fear and awe, and the desire for an inspired understanding of the Divine Creator's work which presents to the human eye such a complex aggregate of natural wonders..." It wasn't long before Carlsbad Caverns became a national monument, with White named the first ranger of the park. Thousands of visitors go to Carlsbad every year, and are amazed at the beauty of this natural resource.

Caving as a sport has gained in popularity. Many people enjoy the physical exertion and the challenge. Many others are interested in exportation for the advancement of science. Some of the last unexplored portions of the earth are caves. If you are thinking of taking up the hobby of caving, remember that safety is paramount. Cavers wear helmets to protect their head from falls and falling rocks as well as the bumps that are common.

Most cavers mount a source of light on the helmet to keep hands free, and really safe cavers will wear two sources of light on the helmet. Halogen lamps and white LEDs are both popular and carbide based systems are often used on expeditions. Clothes worn in caves need to be warm and many prefer wetsuits or polypropylene underwear for protection from moisture. Boots, warm neoprene socks and kneepads are also common.

Visiting caves, whether it is those that are fully explored with tours for tourists, or those that have yet to be explored by the more daring adventurer, is a hobby that makes a wonderful vacation. For thousands of years man used caves as shelter. Even today our tall buildings made of concrete are in many ways man made caves. Humans have a natural inclination to gravitate towards caves and caverns that are fulfilled by exploring, so if you are interested in caving, try a caving vacation, enjoy yourself, but don't cave in.

Five Basics to Choosing Your Bed and Breakfast Vacation

The first thing to keep in mind when choosing a bed and breakfast vacation spot is, what type of country side do you and your spouse enjoy? A bed and breakfast vacation is relaxed and informal and gives the happy vacationer a chance to really see another part of the country, or even another country. Some of the best B and B's are located in the old country for instance, in England, Ireland, Wales, and Scotland.

If you are able to travel to the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland then you are in for a treat. The people tend to be very friendly, and there are no language barriers other than a few little quirks in the spelling of some words. If you do decide to make the UK or the Irish Republic your bed and breakfast destination, make sure that you are close enough to sites you want to see to make day trips.

Also, pick up a guidebook. Years ago the guidebooks told you how to see Europe on five dollars a day. These days it costs a bit more, but a B and B still will offer an inexpensive way to see a new country. Whether your ancestors came from England, Wales, Scotland, or Ireland or from somewhere else, the people of these countries offer hospitality that is unmatched and a wonderful visit that you won't soon forget.

Thinking of staying closer to home while you try a bed and breakfast vacation? How about New England? The northeast United States is full of lovely bed and breakfast inns that are quaint and charming, and offer New England hospitality that is second to none. Vermont in the autumn is a popular destination.

Remember the old TV show *Newhart*, with Bob Newhart playing the owner of a Vermont inn, and the three local yokels Larry Darrel and the other brother Darrel? Well, the beautiful scenery you saw in the background of that show is waiting for you, as is a very nice little B and B. New Hampshire is also available with a good variety of bed and breakfast locations, and of course Massachusetts.

Just minutes from the Boston metroplex by car is the town of Walden, made famous by Henry David Thorough. Also close by are the towns of Lexington and Concord, made famous during the American war of independence, and the little village of Salem, site of the witch trials during the 1600's. All of these locations include bed and breakfast locations with history at your fingertips.

If you live in the Midwest and don't have the time or budget to go to the East Coast or across the big pond, you can find a good bed and breakfast close to home. If you live in any of the middle states you're only a few hours drive from the Ozarks Mountains of Missouri and Arkansas. Bed and breakfast locations abound in these towns. Take Springfield, known as the Queen City of the Ozarks.

This third largest city in Missouri is the hometown of movie stars Brad Pitt and Kathleen Turner, as well as former attorney general John Ashcroft. But you've come here for a bed and breakfast, and the Walnut Street Historic District is the best place to go for that. Quaint little inns with friendly proprietors and good food will make your stay.

Close by is the resort town of Branson, Missouri. Made famous as an alternative to Nashville years ago, Branson is the home of the Silver Dollar City theme park, the Shepherd of the Hills outdoor play and music shows and theatres featuring Bobby Vinton, the Osmond Brothers, Loretta Lynn, Roy Clark, Jim Stafford, Ray Stevens, and many others.

Branson is full of bed and breakfast inns that will warm the heart and fill the stomach, and all are in walking distance of wonderful entertainment venues and tourist attractions. And if that wasn't enough, some of the world's best trout fishing is had in Lake Taneycomo just by sitting on the bank of Branson City Park. It is easy to see that between the Ozarks, New England, Ireland and the United Kingdom; there are more than five basics to choosing a bed and breakfast vacation. In fact, the choices seem almost limitless.