

Winter wonderland

From polar bears and northern lights to ice skating through the capital, Canada is even more magical in winter, writes **India-Jayne Trainor**

Canada has plenty to draw visitors during its peak summer season, when outdoor activities are abundant and the country's foliage is in full bloom – but more clients are discovering the quieter, quintessential charms of winter.

Amid the snowy wilds of the Yukon and Alberta, urban spots such as Quebec City and a host of other provinces in between, visitors can wander through pretty Christmas markets, spot polar bears roaming across the tundra or search for the elusive northern lights.

With direct winter flights from the UK to many major Canadian destinations, including Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and now Ottawa, the country is more accessible than ever.

Whether clients are happy to get their snow tyres

on and take a self-drive or prefer to sit back and enjoy the view on an escorted tour or a scenic train journey, Canada is set up for all types of traveller in the winter.

BEST FOR... ACTIVE CLIENTS

Canada's snow-sure slopes promise world-class skiing and snowboarding for clients who love to get active on holiday. They can choose from runs and resorts to suit all levels, but even those who can't ski will find other thrilling activities to enjoy, such as dog-sledding and snowshoeing.

Lorna Curry, product manager at First Class Holidays, says: "While European slopes are loved for their charm and accessibility, a Canadian winter offers uncrowded runs framed by the Rockies and terrain to suit every skier. The SkiBig3 resorts of Banff Sunshine, Lake Louise ➤

PICTURE: YUJHI TAKASAKI

DESTINATIONS

CANADA | WINTER

5 winter FESTIVALS

Quebec Winter Carnival:

Running from late January to mid-February, this annual event transforms the city into a winter wonderland complete with an ice palace, parades, fairground games and live music.

Festival du Voyageur

Winnipeg: This Manitoban festival celebrates the region's French heritage with historical re-enactments and stories of First Nations people, traditional music, cuisine and winter activities for all ages.

Ottawa Winterlude:

Over three weekends in Ottawa-Gatineau, visitors can see intricate ice sculptures, discover a snow playground and skate along the famous Rideau Canal.

Niagara Icewine Festival:

Surrounded by snow-dusted vines, wine lovers can enjoy delicious food, an ice gala and sample local icewine, a dessert wine made from frozen grapes.

Whistler Pride and Ski

Festival: This annual ski gathering has become one of the largest LGBTQ+ ski events in the world, featuring skiing and snowboarding for all levels along with plenty of après and live entertainment.



Quebec



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Polar bear sighting; horse-drawn sleigh ride, Métis Crossing; Lake Louise Ski Resort

PICTURES: Travel Manitoba; Travel Alberta



Ski Resort and Mount Norquay provide more than 8,000 acres of ski fields and slopes alone."

Book it: First Class Holidays offers eight days in Banff from £1,845, including direct from Heathrow to Calgary, accommodation, transfers, ski rental and a six-day ski pass. Departing February 3, 2026. fcholidays.com

BEST FOR... SLOW TRAVEL

Meandering along the magical Icefields Parkway, a 143-mile stretch of road linking Lake Louise and Jasper, is the perfect way to take in the region's best sights. It's open year-round, but for those who'd prefer not to tackle winter roads, an escorted coach tour provides plentiful photo stops, an informative guide and time to concentrate on the view rather than on the road, plus it often means the chance to combine this highway with other top sights in Alberta. Meg McBroom, senior product executive for Canada at Audley Travel, says: "Travelling on the Icefields Parkway by coach allows clients to sit back, relax and enjoy views of the glaciers, frozen waterfalls and snow-capped mountains. In winter, it's safer to travel with a driver who knows these roads inside out."

Book it: Audley Travel has a 14-night itinerary to Vancouver, Whistler and Jasper, from £4,300 including return flights from Heathrow, accommodation, transfers and a coach journey along the Icefields Parkway. Departing January 24, 2026. audleytravel.com

“In November, Churchill sees large numbers of polar bears gathering along Hudson Bay

BEST FOR... WILDLIFE

October and November are the best times to spot polar bears in the 'polar bear capital of the world', aka Churchill in Manitoba, and many companies offer tundra buggies and tours. Jordan Fry, product manager at Wildlife Worldwide, says: "In November, Churchill sees large numbers of bears gathering along the shores of Hudson Bay. There are few places in the world that enable encounters with polar bears in their natural habitat as reliably as here and travelling by the region's unique Polar Rovers is a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Book it: Wildlife Worldwide's seven-day Classic Polar Bears tour starts from £8,995, including return flights from Heathrow, domestic flights between Winnipeg and Churchill, five nights' accommodation and transfers. Departures throughout November 2026. wildlifeworldwide.com

BEST FOR... CULTURE

To explore how Indigenous communities have adapted to the cold Canadian winters, suggest clients include an experience with an Indigenous-led or owned company ➤

DESTINATIONS

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Métis people share stories and traditions; skating on the Rideau Canal, Ottawa; Quebec City

PICTURES: Jay R McDonald; Shutterstock/Iryna Tolmachova; Bonjour Quebec



on their trip. At Métis Crossing in Alberta, visitors can learn about the Métis people through their traditional crafts, stories and food, made using locally foraged ingredients. Carrie Grant, Intrepid Travel's head of industry partnerships for the UK and Europe, says: "Métis Crossing is a place of cultural significance for the Indigenous community. Travellers will be guided by a Métis interpreter as they learn how to build a shelter and a fire, explore traditions passed down through generations and craft their own souvenir to take home – it's perfect for adventurous travellers seeking an authentic experience of the Canadian wilderness."

Book it: Intrepid Travel's 11-day Canadian Rockies & Northern Lights tour starts from £3,775 for a February 1, 2026, departure from Edmonton, including B&B accommodation, activities, transport and a local guide. intrepidtravel.com

BEST FOR... CITY SIGHTS

Canada's cities are at their picturesque best in winter, too. The likes of Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec City promise fun activities such as ice-skating on the Rideau Canal in the capital, strolling through historic, snow-dusted Old Quebec and shopping at Christmas markets. Phil Shipman, UK sales director at Globus Journeys, says: "With a tour to Canada, not only is there no stress in terms of transport or accommodation, but [on this itinerary], guests can also explore Montreal's Basilique Notre-Dame and Grand Marché de Noël de Montréal (Great Christmas Market) and stroll the narrow streets amid old-world houses in Quebec."

Travellers will learn how to build a shelter and a fire, and explore traditions passed down through generations

Book it: Globus Journeys has a six-day Winter in Montreal & Quebec tour starting from £3,749, including flights from Heathrow, accommodation and select excursions, departing December 9, 2026. globusjourneys.co.uk

BEST FOR... SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Seeing the northern lights is on many clients' bucket lists, and in Canada's remote north, winter is the best time to view them. Denise Hunn, Canada and US programme manager at Prestige Travel, says: "Canada is a perfect place to see the northern lights due to its prime positioning beneath the auroral oval, its wide-open skies and minimal light pollution. I'd recommend clients consider Canada as you get a real feel for what it's like in the northern regions, but can also link it with city stays in Toronto, Niagara Falls, Vancouver, Edmonton or Calgary."

Book it: Prestige Travel's seven-night Toronto and Yellowknife Adventure starts from £3,444 based on two sharing, including flights from Heathrow to Toronto and connections to Yellowknife, transfers, accommodation and excursions. Departing February 12, 2026. prestigetrip.co.uk **TW**

ASK THE expert



Nim Singh,
media and
PR manager,
Destination
Canada

"Winter is

growing as a time to visit as people increasingly seek off-season travel. For agents with clients keen to ski, there's great infrastructure, consistent snow and a long season. But make sure clients are flexible; Canada is geared up for snow, but that doesn't mean that there aren't occasional delays. Some of my favourite winter experiences in Canada include cross-country skiing or snowshoeing – you don't have to be a skier. I also love winter train journeys across Canada. It's cheaper than in other seasons and the scenery looks beautiful in its white cloak. Everywhere in Canada offers something different in winter. Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec have downhill skiing that is accessible from the UK, the Yukon is great for the northern lights and while Prince Edward Island might not be an obvious choice, it has quirky experiences such as ice fishing."

Snowshoeing
in Quebec



PICTURE: Shutterstock/Moridav